





The Cambridge Edition of the Poets

EDITED BY

HORACE E. SCUDDER

MRS. BROWNING

BY HARRIET WATERS PRESTON



Elizabeth Barrett Browning

THE COMPLETE
POETICAL WORKS OF
ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING
Cambridge Edition



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EDITOR'S NOTE

THE text followed in this edition is that of the latest comprehensive English edition, and as Mrs. Browning sought to give more than ordinary weight to certain words and phrases, her italicizing and capitalization have been followed. A few of her early and merely experimental essays in versification have been omitted from the *Appendix*, but it has been thought advisable to reprint there certain prose studies which disclose, quite as surely as the poetry written at the same time, the intellectual tastes of the writer, and give an interesting illustration of the development of her mind.

In accordance with the general plan of the Cambridge editions, the headnotes to poems and groups of poems are restricted for the most part to biographical and bibliographical detail, but in the Notes and Illustrations in the *Appendix*, the editor of the volume has taken the opportunity to make some survey of those characteristics of Mrs. Browning's poetry and those qualities of her mind which especially distinguish her. For this she has had recourse in some particulars to the recently published *Letters*. Her own notes are marked by brackets. The explanatory notes of passages are mainly those contributed by Mrs. Browning herself to the successive volumes of her published work.

H. E. S.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

‘ELIZABETH BARRETT MOULTON BARRETT, daughter and first child of Edward Barrett Moulton Barrett, of Coxhoe Hall, native of St. James’s Jamaica, by Mary, late Clarke, native of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, was borne March 6th 1806, and baptized 10th of February 1808.’

Such is the entry in the register of the parish church of Kelloe, a small village in the county of Durham, England, about five miles south of the Cathedral town of the same name. The event thus recorded took place at the seat of the child’s paternal uncle, Samuel Barrett Moulton, M. P., and her unusual wealth of *cognomina* was due to the fact that her father, Edward Barrett Moulton, assumed again his mother’s maiden name of Barrett, on inheriting from her father a large estate in Jamaica, where the families of both his parents had been established for two or three generations. It was, however, as plain Elizabeth Barrett that the most remarkably gifted woman of the Victorian era who came ‘before the swallow dares’ upon the bleak Scottish border in the first decade of her century was destined to become known to the world.

The child herself had no early recollections of the north, for while she was still an infant, her father purchased the beautiful estate of Hope End in Herefordshire, among the Malvern Hills, and continued to reside there until Elizabeth was past twenty. She was the eldest of eleven children, three girls and eight boys, who came in rapid succession, and one, at least, of her brothers, Mr. Charles Moulton Barrett, about four years younger than herself, is yet living in Jamaica.

It does not appear that any other member of this numerous family showed marked literary aptitude or distinguished talent of any kind. The father had the sort of early training and associations which are implied in his having been, for a little while, at Harrow School, — which he left for the very un-English reason of not liking to be flogged, as fag, for burning his elder’s toast, — and for a short time also at Cambridge, where, however, he took no degree, having left the University to be married while still an undergraduate.

Mr. Moulton Barrett was proud of the precocious talent which he soon detected in his eldest child, and ‘did his best,’ as she herself confessed, ‘to spoil’ her, by printing, at his own expense, fifty copies of her epic, in four books, on the *Battle of Marathon*, which was completed at the ripe age of thirteen! This complacent father was, by all accounts, a peculiarly despotic ruler of his own household, but his clever child was dutifully and even devotedly fond of him, and remained the most submissive of his subjects up to the memorable moment when the strong will which she had inherited from himself clashed once for all with his, and she revolted successfully from what seems to-day a simply incredible stretch of his paternal power.

There is no ground for regarding Elizabeth Barrett’s poetic genius as an inheritance either from this formidable father, or from the meek and shadowy mother, who died soon after giving birth to her eighth son; and in trying to trace the genesis of her signal endowment, we find ourselves driven back upon fanciful speculations concerning the large general influx of ‘intellectual day,’ which appears to have visited our planet in

the first years of the century now ending. More persons predestined to great eminence in their various lines were born between 1800 and 1810 than in all the next six or seven decades.

Miss Barrett was almost entirely self-educated. Naturally she did not go to school, because girls of her condition never did go to school at the era of her early maidenhood; and naturally, too, we hear nothing about her governesses. What, indeed, could the regulation governess of 1815, who for twenty pounds a year taught her pupils to work samplers and make curtseys, beside Miss Austen's delightful curriculum of 'the metals, semi-metals, planets, and distinguished philosophers,' have done with a child who says of herself, at that period: 'I wrote verses, as I dare say many have done who never wrote poems, very early, — at eight years old and earlier. . . . The Greeks were my demigods, and haunted me out of Pope's Homer, until I dreamed more of Agamemnon than of Moses, the black pony.' And further on, in the same résumé of early recollections, furnished to Mr. Richard Horne when he was compiling 'A New Spirit of the Age:' 'The love of Pope's Homer threw me into Pope on the one side, and into Greek, on the other, and into Latin as a help to Greek; and the influence of all these tendencies is manifest so long after as in my *Essay on Mind*, a didactic poem written when I was seventeen or eighteen, and early repented of, as worthy of all repentance.' The ambitious maiden learned the elements of Greek from her brother Edward's tutor, Mr. Mac-Swiney, and she kept up that language to excellent purpose by readings with the blind scholar, Hugh Stuart Boyd, then living at Malvern, not far from Hope End. Latin she understood much less thoroughly than Greek; and how she acquired the modern European tongues, most of which she could soon read with fluency, she probably knew no better than the rest of us remember how we learned to read our own. The history of Elizabeth Barrett's mental development during the first twenty years of her life may be summed up in a very few words, — Astonishing avidity and aptitude for learning, omnivorous reading, and no regular training whatsoever.

For fifteen of these years she was an active child, roaming, riding, and dreaming at her own sweet will over the fair acres of a large estate in a singularly noble country. But at that critical age she got an injury to the spine, through attempting, in her impatience for a gallop, to saddle her pony unaided; and the long ensuing confinement to her couch developed the seeds of that organic malady which kept her a prisoner for twenty years more, and an invalid always, until she died at fifty-five.

Her love of nature and her love of books had hitherto kept healthful pace with one another. Now books became her world, and she also began, systematically, and with a quaintly conscientious assiduity, to *practice* verse-making. 'Poetry' — to quote once more from her own *Recollections* — 'became a distinct object with me; an object to read, think and live for.' Her compositions remained, for what seems an unusually long time, purely imitative, — as conventional, almost, as arpeggios and five-finger exercises to the student of the piano. The *Essay on Mind*, already mentioned, in two books comprising six hundred and thirty heroic couplets, was merely, as she herself was not slow to perceive, a presumptuous girl's quavering echo of Pope's *Essay on Man*. In 1826, when Elizabeth was twenty, Mr. Moulton Barrett found, in Paternoster Row, a publisher who was willing to bring out this curious production on condition of the fond father's defraying something more than half the expense. But neither in the essay itself, nor in the fourteen 'occasional' pieces that were printed along with it, was there any very clearly marked originality either of thought or expression. Seven years later, in 1833, the patient scholar made another diffident appeal to the public, with her frigid and otherwise faulty first

translation of the *Prometheus* of Æschylus, and another score or so of lesser pieces, all of them, excepting one short and simple devotional hymn, still singularly colorless and tame. It was in the interval between this timid venture and the appearance, in 1838, of *The Seraphim and Other Poems* that Elizabeth Barrett found her true voice, in stanzas like the following from 'The Poet's Vow,' where thought and expression are at last fused in a form as integral and inevitable as that of a native crystal:—

Hear me forswear man's sympathies,
His pleasant yea and no,
His riot on the piteous earth
Whereon his thistles grow;—
His changing love — with stars above;
His pride — with graves below!

The author of these condensed lines had long cherished a trembling hope that she was a poet by the grace of God. She was henceforth established as such by the verdict of man.

Her very best work was yet to be done, but the broad scope of her talent had been fully manifested, as well as her genuine distinction of mind, fertility of invention, and rare moral fibre. A true child of the romantic period, she was, from first to last, an intrepid idealist. Hers was, above all things, a religious nature, and she had already passed through a deep spiritual experience. All her life long, she continued to confess the tenets and even to employ the phraseology of the rather strict school of evangelical piety in which she had been born and bred, to dislike ritual and all artificial aids to the conscience, and implicitly to believe in the direct message of God to every human soul. She became a prophet and a guide to her generation in her poetry, as Charles Dickens was in his prose romances, through her intense and unaffected humanitarianism, and her fiery advocacy of the cause of all earth's poor and neglected. Her poetical ear was far from perfect, and when once she had outgrown her imitative period, she indulged in experiments and freaks of versification which might never have been attempted if her early studies had been less purely voluntary, and if she had enjoyed the advantage, during her growing years, of the society of living purists. But as an offset to this defect in her organization, she had one supreme gift — one which has never been bestowed on any other woman in anything like the same degree: she had what the French call *la longue haleine*, the power of indefinitely sustained creation, accompanied by only too great an affluence of illustrative imagery.

We have also, happily, the private letters of Miss Barrett written to familiar friends at this period — long, discursive, unstudied letters which testify unconsciously to the perfect sweetness of her womanly character, the warmth of her filial and sisterly affection, her modesty concerning her own powers, and ever generous appreciation of those of others, her cheerful constancy in suffering, and the high courage with which she faced what appeared, for long, to be an all but certain fatality. Word and deed were remarkably consistent in her case. She had, in the fullest sense of the phrase, a beautiful soul.

In 1832 Mr. Moulton Barrett had been forced by the pressure of pecuniary embarrassments, consequent on the abolition of slavery in the British colonies, to sell Hope End and remove his family, first to Sidmouth in Devonshire, and subsequently to Wimpole Street in London. The climate of the metropolis was as bad as possible for the pulmonary trouble from which Miss Barrett suffered; and any benefit that might have been derived from a temporary removal to Torquay in 1835, was worse than nullified by the effects of a terrible shock which the invalid received in that place. Her favorite brother

Edward, the one nearest to herself in age, was drowned while boating, almost within sight of her window, and it seemed, for a time, as though she could not long survive him. But her brave spirit rose, in the end, above even this cruel bereavement; and though closely confined to her chamber after her sad return to London, and often for many days together to her bed, her mind seemed more active and lucid than ever and more productive. She became a frequent contributor to *Blackwood's Magazine* and the *Athenæum* newspaper, as well as to various periodicals which no longer exist: and living in the great centre of English thought, even with all the disadvantages of her fragile health, she ended by making the personal acquaintance of certain men and women of light and leading: of Miss Mitford and Mrs. Jameson; of the poet Wordsworth, who was then Laureate; of Richard Horne and Henry Chorley, and her own accomplished and even generous relative John Kenyon; and finally, of the great poet and valiant knight, who was to rescue his delicate princess from her long captivity, and add his already famous name to her own.

In 1844 appeared the two volumes of Poems which have formed the basis of all the later editions of Mrs. Browning's miscellaneous works. They were dedicated, in an eloquent preface, to her father, who had been, as she said, 'both public and critic' to her immature attempts; and beginning with the 'Drama of Exile,' they included, beside most of the pieces which had appeared in the small volume of 1838, several more of those by which she will be best and longest remembered, such as 'The Dead Pan,' 'The Vision of Poets,' 'Cowper's Grave,' and that wildly romantic ballad of contemporary manners, 'Lady Geraldine's Courtship,' which brought Robert Browning to her feet.

It was John Kenyon, a kinsman, as has been said, of the Barrett family, and also the son of a schoolmate of Robert Browning's father, who encouraged the brilliant young author of 'Paracelsus,' 'Sordello,' 'Pippa Passes,' the 'Cavalier Lyrics,' and 'A Blot in the 'Scutcheon,' to write to the invalid lady (six years his senior), and tell her how much he had admired 'Lady Geraldine's Courtship,' and other pieces in the *Poems of 1844*. Nothing could have been more unworldly and unconventional than the opening, upon either side, of this famous correspondence which, after having been kept in a small cabinet by itself for fifty years, and treasured as a most precious and sacred family possession, was given to the world in 1899. 'I love your verses with all my heart, dear Miss Barrett,' . . . wrote Robert Browning in his first letter, . . . 'the fresh, strange music, the affluent language, the exquisite pathos, and true, new, brave thought; but in thus addressing myself to you, your own self and for the first time, my feeling rises altogether. I do, as I say, love these books with all my heart, and I love you too.'

This letter is dated January 10, 1845, and on the next day Miss Barrett replied:—

'I thank you, dear Mr. Browning, from the bottom of my heart. You meant to give me pleasure by your letter, and even if the object had not been answered I ought still to thank you. But it is thoroughly answered. Such a letter from such a hand! Sympathy is dear, very dear to me; but the sympathy of a poet, and of such a poet, is the quintessence of sympathy to me.' From this time until their marriage, a year and a half later, the two poets wrote to each other almost daily; becoming constantly more enamored, as they discovered ever deeper and deeper sources of intellectual and spiritual sympathy. There was naturally more of mutual admiration in the letters thus exchanged than of mutual criticism; but the admiration is of a peculiarly ingenuous and noble kind, and there are some very interesting discussions, notably one, by the two Greek enthusiasts, of the symbolism of the Prometheus, apropos of Miss Barrett's first translation;

beside many a luminous comment made, in passing, on the early efforts, especially of Robert Browning. The lady, on the other hand, whose experience had hitherto been so painfully restricted, gained greatly in her knowledge of real life and living men, by daily association with one of the most distinguished analysts of human character and motive that the world has ever seen. On May 21, 1845, he visited her for the first time, and, not long after, made his first formal offer of marriage, which was decisively though sorrowfully refused. But these two could no longer live apart; and Miss Barrett's health improved so rapidly during the summer of 1845, under the tonic of her new happiness, that when her lover's proposal was repeated for the third time, near the end of January, 1846, she yielded a conditional assent.

'Let it be this way, ever dearest,' she wrote. 'If, in the time of fine weather, I am not ill, *then, not now*, you shall decide, and your decision shall be duty and desire to me both. I will make no difficulties.'

The 'difficulties,' as the event proved, were to be made by the lady's autocratic father, who, when asked to sanction his daughter's engagement, instantly and peremptorily refused. The abundantly ripe respective ages of the suppliants for his blessing — forty and thirty-four — give this action of Mr. Moulton Barrett's a sufficiently absurd air; but it would be more respectable, or, at least, more comprehensible, could we suppose the sole motive of his opposition to have been his daughter's condition of seemingly hopeless invalidism. When, however, we find him a few years later prohibiting, with equal sternness, the marriage of his younger daughter Henrietta, whose health was admirable, with Captain Surtees Cook, we are forced to seek in some morbid idiosyncrasy of the father's own the motive for his extraordinary conduct. In the latter, as in the former and more famous case, the betrothed pair were driven to the undignified expedient of private marriage and clandestine evasion.

Although both Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett had been born and educated nonconformists, they were united by the English marriage service, in the parish church of Saint Marylebone, London. Ever after they had resolved to dispense with Mr. Moulton Barrett's consent, the lady had been trying her slender strength by short walks about the northern squares, — Cavendish, Manchester, Portman, — in the neighborhood of her home. She went accompanied by her faithful maid Wilson, and her equally faithful dog Flush, the gift of Miss Mitford, and the subject of a well-known poem. On the memorable day of the marriage, she went out, ostensibly for her constitutional, and returned as usual, passed one week more under her father's roof, then left it with the same escort as before, was joined by Robert Browning at the railway station, and the wedded pair left quietly for France that night, by the Southampton packet. Change of climate confirmed the late improvement in the health of the bride, and she who had stood face to face with death so long, had fifteen more years granted her, of a comparatively active and varied, and always busy life.

Those years were passed, for the most part, in Italy, in the permanent home which the married pair presently made for themselves at Casa Guidi on the Piazza Pitti, then the Piazza del Gran Duca in Florence. Their apartment was on the *piano nobile* of the palace — the floor which had formerly been occupied by the proprietor. It was furnished largely out of the antiquity-shops of Florence; a far happier hunting-ground then than now, when the remotest nooks of Tuscany have been thoroughly explored for '*roba vecch'*,' — and the general aspect of the Browning interior became, in the course of a few years, exceedingly curious and picturesque. On the outer wall of Casa Guidi may

be seen to-day the memorial tablet which the affectionate Italians asked the privilege of inserting there after Mrs. Browning's death. It bears the following inscription:¹—

QUI SCRISSE E MORI
ELIZABETTA BARRETT BROWNING
CHE IN CUORE DI DONNA CONCILIAVA
SCIENZA DI DOTTO E SPIRITO DI POETA
E FECE DEL SUO VERSO AUREO ANELLO
FRA ITALIA E INGHILTERRA
PONE QUESTA LAPIDE
FIRENZE GRATA
1861

During the dubious period of her courtship and betrothal, Miss Barrett had written and inscribed to her lover those sonnets entitled 'From the Portuguese,' which would have given her a place among the first of England's minstrels, if she had never written anything else. In the years immediately succeeding her marriage, her dawning sympathy with the cause of Italian independence, which later she was to embrace with so consuming a passion, found voice in the two-part poem entitled *Casa Guidi Windows*, published in England in 1851. The only child of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Robert Wiedeman Barrett Browning, was born in Florence on the 9th of March, 1849, and Mrs. Browning immediately revealed herself as the most natural, tender, absorbed, and admiring of mothers. A new edition of her collected poems, which appeared in 1850, contained a complete re-translation of the *Prometheus*, beside the beautiful Portuguese sonnets, and several others not included in the edition of 1844. The summer of 1851 was passed by the Brownings in England, and the winter of 1851-52 in Paris. They were thus present in the French capital at the time of Louis Napoleon's *coup d'état*, and, incredible as it seems at this distance of time, and inconsistent with the wonted tenor of her opinions and sympathies, Mrs. Browning at least warmly applauded that act of high-handed usurpation. The Emperor Napoleon III., for such in the course of a few months he became, was always a hero to the enthusiastic Englishwoman, and to him she came confidently to look, in later days, as the only possible savior of her beloved Italy. The winter of 1855-56 was again passed in Paris; and in London, during the following autumn, Mrs. Browning finished, in the house of her cousin and friend, John Kenyon, and dedicated to him only a few weeks before his death, her most considerable work, *Aurora Leigh*, a modern society novel in blank verse, with a distinctly socialistic purpose.

But the strength stored up in the more genial climate of Italy always ebbed with alarming rapidity during Mrs. Browning's visits to England, and these were yet further embittered to her loving heart by the stubborn hostility of her father, who could never be induced to forgive the disobedient marriage, and actually left his daughter's name out of his last will and testament, when he died, in 1859.

During the last five years of her life Mrs. Browning did not leave Italy. The time was passed between Florence and Rome, with long summer sojourns in the fine old hill-city of Siena. She was all this while becoming more deeply absorbed in the gallant struggle of the Italian nation for independence, which had entered a new phase in 1855, when the participation of Piedmont in the Crimean war was resolved and effected; and

¹ Here wrote and died Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who united to a woman's heart the learning of a savant and the inspiration of a poet, and made her verse a golden link between Italy and England. This tablet was set by grateful Florence in 1861.

The author of the inscription was the poet Tommaseo.

she, in common with almost all good Italian patriots, built high hopes on the alliance with France, and on Louis Napoleon's intervention when hostilities were declared against Austria by Victor Emanuel in 1859. The heart-sickening disappointment of these hopes, just as victory and emancipation seemed in sight, by the summary conclusion of the Peace of Villafranca, found sharp, not to say fierce and distempered utterance in the *Poems before Congress*, which appeared in the spring of 1860, and were the last of Mrs. Browning's works to be published in her lifetime.

There is another subject also on which it will seem to many that the originally fine judgment of Mrs. Browning was strangely clouded in her latter days, and the balance of her faculties disturbed. She became engrossingly interested in the so-called 'spiritual manifestations' which were rife between 1850 and 1860, and was very credulous concerning them. Her strong native bias toward mysticism, which is very apparent in the more deeply religious of her early poems, had found but slight support in the form of Protestant faith which she inherited and accepted; and the idea of free and authorized intercourse between living beings and departed souls laid strong hold of her imagination, and was welcomed as promising to fill a great void in her spiritual life. She was making few new acquaintances at this period, but a stranger who came recommended as a 'powerful medium,' could rely upon a welcome, and the most palpable charlatanism in the way of spiritual communications and manifestations could win her grave attention and completely mystify her subtle mind. Robert Browning was far from sharing his wife's views upon this matter, but he revered her too deeply to differ from her before the world, and it may safely be said that neither this nor any other speculative difference ever did make or could have made a serious division between them. From 1859 to 1861, moreover, the question of the fate of Italy seems almost wholly to have displaced the cause of the too voluble 'spirits' in the eager mind of the poetess. A score or more of short pieces written in her last year, together with a few belonging to a much earlier period which had been withheld for private reasons, were collected by Robert Browning and given to the world under the title of *Last Poems* during the winter following his wife's death.

Although Mrs. Browning's health had seemed so wonderfully restored in the early part of her wedded life, the organic trouble was always there, and she was at no time strong enough to go into general society. But the married pair had gathered about them in their Florentine and Roman homes a small circle of congenial friends, mostly English and Americans, residing like themselves in Italy. The number of our own countrymen and women admitted into this favored group seems large in proportion to the whole, including as it does such names as Margaret Fuller Ossoli, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Harriet Hosmer, Kate Field, Hiram Powers, the sculptor, and his family in Florence; William Story, the all-accomplished, and his family in Rome. The most intimate of Mrs. Browning's English friends and neighbors in Florence was Miss Isa Blagden, a lady of fortune and distinction, to whom some of the most interesting letters of both poets are addressed, and who lived in the Villa Brichion¹ upon Bellosguardo, where was laid the highly wrought last scene of *Aurora Leigh*; and it so happened that this lady was the only member of their innermost circle who had lingered in Florence until the hot June of 1861, when the Brownings returned from passing their winter in Rome.

¹ The American lady to whom Miss Blagden told the story, to follow, of Mrs. Browning's last night on earth, assures me that the villa on Bellosguardo, which that lady rented and adorned, was habitually known in Florence, both before and after her occupancy, as the *Villa Bricchieri*. This seems a much more probable name for an Italian villa than *Brichion*; but I adopt the form used by both ladies in their letters, and can only suggest that it may have been some private jest or little pedantic freak of theirs which led them to give the name a quasi-Greek form.

Mrs. Browning had never completely rallied from the severe illness which followed the shocks and agitations of 1859 ; and now, both to her husband and her friend, she seemed so unnaturally debilitated, that an attack of bronchitis quite similar, apparently, to many she had had before, occasioned them an alarm which they could not conceal. With her own indomitable spirit, the patient herself made light of her case, and of what she called the exaggerated precautions of her two devoted nurses; and after a few days of acute suffering, she did indeed seem to have passed the crisis of her disorder, and to be doing well; so that Miss Blagden, who had been for some days at Casa Guidi, went back, at the earnest entreaty of both her friends, to her villa on the hilltop, for a night's much needed rest. It was to a young American lady lately come as a bride to Florence, Mrs. J. A. Jackson, that she told, not long after, the rather singular story of her own experience on the night of June 29.

By the time Miss Blagden reached home every sensation of fatigue had vanished; her faculties were all curiously alert, and, unable even to think of sleeping, she sat down at her desk under a pretence of writing letters. But the current of her thoughts refused to turn. She sat with pen suspended, unconscious of the passage of time, thinking only of the solitary pair in the shadowy valley beneath her (*in media umbrâ mortis*), cut off by their very greatness from the close touch of common humanity, but so marvellously bound up in one another, from whom the dread stroke of uttermost calamity, so often threatened, had seemingly been turned aside once more. So the brief hours of the midsummer night went by until dawn began to whiten behind the matchless horizon of Fiesole, and the trees to rustle in all the surrounding gardens, when, stepping out upon her balcony for a breath of dewy air, the watcher caught, far down in the sleeping city, still at that time surrounded by its beautiful old walls, the rattle of a single pair of wheels between high houses over a stony pavement.

With an instantaneous conviction that the cab was coming for her, and that she was needed once more at Casa Guidi, Miss Blagden waited only to hear the vehicle pass the Porta Romana, and begin the steep and devious ascent to Bellosguardo; and long before it stopped at her own gate, as she had so surely known it would, she was dressed to go back, and awaiting it there. But the message which the cabman brought her was, '*La signora della Casa Guidi è morta.*'

H. W. P.

THE SERAPHIM AND OTHER POEMS

In 1833, Miss Barrett's first translation of the *Prometheus Bound* of Æschylus was published in London, — along with a score or so of miscellaneous pieces, but without her name, — by A. J. Valpy, Red Lion Court, Fleet Street. The little volume fell dead from the press — receiving only a few lines of scathing criticism in the *Athenæum*. The translator herself confessed a decade later that her version of the great Greek drama had been made in twelve days and 'should have been thrown into the fire afterward; — the only means of giving it a little warmth.' She did her best, in fact, to suppress the volume, and subsequently executed an entire new translation of the *Prometheus*, which was included in the edition of her poems that appeared in 1850, and has ever since kept its place in the standard editions of

her works. Meanwhile her studies in Æschylus had suggested to the young poetess the subject of the Seraphim — the first original work of hers destined to obtain anything like general recognition. 'I thought,' she says, in her own preface to *The Seraphim and other Poems* (London, Saunders J. Otley, Conduit Street, 1838), 'that, had Æschylus lived after the incarnation and crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ, he might have turned, if not in moral and intellectual, yet in poetic faith, from the solitudes of Caucasus to the deeper desertness of that crowded Jerusalem where none had any pity . . . to the rent rocks and darkened sun . . . to the victim whose sustaining thought beneath an unexampled agony, was not the Titanic, "I can revenge," but the celestial "I can forgive."'

THE SERAPHIM

Σὺ δὲ θρόνῳ πυροέντι παρεστᾶσιν πολύμοχοι Ἄγγελοι. — *Orpheus*.

'I look for Angels' songs, and hear Him cry.'
— *Giles Fletcher*.

PART THE FIRST

[*It is the time of the Crucifixion; and the Angels of Heaven have departed towards the Earth, except the two Seraphim, ADOR the Strong and ZERAH the Bright One. The place is the outer side of the shut Heavenly Gate.*]

Ador. O Seraph, pause no more!
Beside this gate of heaven we stand alone.

Zerah. Of heaven!

Ador. Our brother hosts are gone —

Zerah. Are gone before.

Ador. And the golden harps the angels bore

To help the songs of their desire,
Still burning from their hands of fire,
Lie without touch or tone

Upon the glass-sea shore. 9

Zerah. Silent upon the glass-sea shore!

Ador. There the Shadow from the throne

Formless with infinity

Hovers o'er the crystal sea

Awfuller than light derived,

And red with those primæval heats

Whereby all life has lived.

Zerah. Our visible God, our heavenly seats!

Ador. Beneath us sinks the pomp angelical,

Cherub and seraph, powers and virtues, all, —

The roar of whose descent has died 20
To a still sound, as thunder into rain.

Immeasurable space spreads magnified

With that thick life, along the plane

The worlds slid out on. What a fall

And eddy of wings innumerable, crossed

By trailing curls that have not lost

The glitter of the God-smile shed

On every prostrate angel's head!

What gleaming up of hands that fling

Their homage in retorted rays, 30

From high instinct of worshipping,

And habitude of praise!

Zerah. Rapidly they drop below us:

Pointed palm and wing and hair

Indistinguishable show us

Only pulses in the air

Throbbing with a fiery beat,

As if a new creation heard

Some divine and plastic word, 39

And trembling at its new-found being,

Awakened at our feet.

Ador. Zerah, do not wait for seeing !

His voice, his, that thrills us so

As we our harpstrings, uttered *Go*,

Behold the Holy in his woe !

And all are gone, save thee and —

Zerah. Thee !

Ador. I stood the nearest to the throne

In hierarchical degree,

What time the Voice said *Go !*

And whether I was moved alone 50

By the storm-pathos of the tone

Which swept through heaven the alien
name of *woe*,

Or whether the subtle glory broke

Through my strong and shielding
wings,

Bearing to my finite essence

Incapacious of their presence,

Infinite imaginings

None knoweth save the Throned who
spoke;

But I who at creation stood upright

And heard the God-breath move 60

Shaping the words that lightened, 'Be
there light,'

Nor trembled but with love,

Now fell down shudderingly,

My face upon the pavement whence I had
towered,

As if in mine immortal overpowered

By God's eternity.

Zerah. Let me wait ! — let me wait ! —

Ador. Nay, gaze not backward through
the gate !

God fills our heaven with God's own soli-
tude

Till all the pavements glow: 70

His Godhead being no more subdued,

By itself, to glories low

Which seraphs can sustain.

What if thou, in gazing so,

Shouldst behold but only one

Attribute, the veil undone —

Even that to which we dare to press

Nearest, for its gentleness —

Ay, his love !

How the deep ecstatic pain

80

Thy being's strength would capture !

Without language for the rapture,

Without music strong to come

And set the adoration free,

For ever, ever, wouldst thou be

Amid the general chorus dumb,

God-stricken to seraphic agony.

Or, brother, what if on thine eyes

In vision bare should rise

The life-fount whence his hand did
gather 90

With solitary force

Our immortalities !

Straightway how thine own would wither,

Falter like a human breath,

And shrink into a point like death,

By gazing on its source ! —

My words have imaged dread.

Meekly hast thou bent thine head,

And dropt thy wings in languishment:

Overclouding foot and face, 100

As if God's throne were eminent

Before thee, in the place.

Yet not — not so,

O loving spirit and meek, dost thou fulfil

The supreme Will.

Not for obeisance but obedience,

Give motion to thy wings ! Depart from
hence !

The voice said 'Go !'

Zerah. Belovèd, I depart,

His will is as a spirit within my spirit, 110

A portion of the being I inherit.

His will is mine obedience. I resemble

A flame all undefiled though it tremble;

I go and tremble. Love me, O beloved !

O thou, who stronger art,

And standest ever near the Infinite,

Pale with the light of Light,

Love me, beloved ! me, more newly made,

More feeble, more afraid;

And let me hear with mine thy pinions
moved, 120

As close and gentle as the loving are,

That love being near, heaven may not seem
so far.

Ador. I am near thee and I love thee.

Were I loveless, from thee gone,

Love is round, beneath, above thee,

God, the omnipresent one.

Spread the wing and lift the brow

Well-beloved, what fearest thou ?

Zerah. I fear, I fear —

Ador. What fear ?

Zerah. The fear of earth.

Ador. Of earth, the God-created and
God-praised 130

In the hour of birth ?

Where every night the moon in light
Doth lead the waters silver-faced ?

Where every day the sun doth lay

A rapture to the heart of all

The leafy and reeded pastoral,

As if the joyous shout which burst

From angel lips to see him first,

Had left a silent echo in his ray ?

Zerah. Of earth — the God-created and
God-curst, 140

Where man is, and the thorn

Where sun and moon have borne

No light to souls forlorn :

Where Eden's tree of life no more uprears

Its spiral leaves and fruitage, but instead

The yew-tree bows its melancholy head

And all the undergrasses kills and seres.

Ador. Of earth the weak,

Made and unmade ?

Where men, that faint, do strive for crowns
that fade ? 150

Where, having won the profit which they
seek,

They lie beside the sceptre and the gold

With fleshless hands that cannot wield or
hold,

And the stars shine in their unwinking
eyes ?

Zerah. Of earth the bold,

Where the blind matter wrings

An awful potency out of impotence,

Bowing the spiritual things

To the things of sense.

Where the human will replies 160

With ay and no,

Because the human pulse is quick or slow.

Where Love succumbs to Change,

With only his own memories, for revenge.

And the fearful mystery —

Ador. Called Death ?

Zerah. Nay, death is fearful, — but who
saith

'To die,' is comprehensible.

What's fearfuller, thou knowest well,

Though the utterance be not for thee,

Lest it blanch thy lips from glory — 170

Ay ! the cursed thing that moved

A shadow of ill, long time ago,

Across our heaven's own shining floor,

And when it vanished, some who were

On thrones of holy empire there,

Did reign — were seen — were — never
more.

Come nearer, O beloved !

Ador. I am near thee. Didst thou bear
thee

Ever to this earth ?

Zerah. Before.

When thrilling from his hand along

Its lustrous path with spheric song 181

The earth was deathless, sorrowless.

Unfearing, then, pure feet might press

The grasses brightening with their
feet,

For God's own voice did mix its sound

In a solemn confluence oft

With the rivers' flowing round,

And the life-tree's waving soft.

Beautiful new earth and strange !

Ador. Hast thou seen it since — the
change ? 190

Zerah. Nay, or wherefore should I fear

To look upon it now ?

I have beheld the ruined things

Only in depicting

Of angels from an earthly mission, —

Strong one, even upon thy brow,

When, with task completed, given

Back to us in that transition,

I have beheld thee silent stand,

Abstracted in the seraph band, 200

Without a smile in heaven.

Ador. Then thou wast not one of those

Whom the loving Father chose

In visionary pomp to sweep

O'er Judæa's grassy places,

O'er the shepherds and the sheep,

Though thou art so tender ? — dim-
ming

All the stars except one star

With their brighter kinder faces,

And using heaven's own tune in hymn-
ing, 210

While deep response from earth's own
mountains ran,

'Peace upon earth, goodwill to man.'

Zerah. 'Glory to God.' I said amen
afar.

And those who from that earthly mission
are,

Within mine ears have told

That the seven everlasting Spirits did hold

With such a sweet and prodigal constraint

The meaning yet the mystery of the song

What time they sang it, on their natures
strong,

That, gazing down on earth's dark steadfastness 220

And speaking the new peace in promises,
The love and pity made their voices faint
Into the low and tender music, keeping
The place in heaven of what on earth is weeping.

Ador. 'Peace upon earth.' Come down to it.

Zerah. Ah me !

I hear thereof uncomprehendingly.
Peace where the tempest, where the sighing is,

And worship of the idol, 'stead of his ?

Ador. Yea, peace, where He is.

Zerah. He !

Say it again.

Ador. Where He is.

Zerah. Can it be 230

That earth retains a tree

Whose leaves, like Eden foliage, can be swayed

By the breathing of his voice, nor shrink and fade ?

Ador. There is a tree ! — it hath no leaf nor root ;

Upon it hangs a curse for all its fruit :

Its shadow on his head is laid.

For he, the crowned Son,

Has left his crown and throne,

Walks earth in Adam's clay,

Eve's snake to bruise and slay — 240

Zerah. Walks earth in clay ?

Ador. And walking in the clay which he created,

He through it shall touch death.

What do I utter ? what conceive ? did breath

Of demon howl it in a blasphemy ?

Or was it mine own voice, informed, dilated

By the seven confluent Spirits ? — Speak — answer me !

Who said man's victim was his deity ?

Zerah. Beloved, beloved, the word came forth from thee. 249

Thine eyes are rolling a tempestuous light
Above, below, around,

As putting thunder-questions without cloud,
Reverberate without sound,

To universal nature's depth and height.

The tremor of an inexpressive thought

Too self-amazed to shape itself aloud,

O'erruns the awful curving of thy lips ;

And while thine hands are stretched above,

As newly they had caught
Some lightning from the Throne, or showed the Lord 260

Some retributive sword,
Thy brows do alternate with wild eclipse
And radiance, with contrasted wrath and love,

As God had called thee to a seraph's part,
With a man's qualling heart.

Ador. O heart — O heart of man !

O ta'en from human clay

To be no seraph's but Jehovah's own !

Made holy in the taking,

And yet unseparate 270

From death's perpetual ban,
And human feelings sad and passionate :
Still subject to the treacherous forsaking

Of other hearts, and its own steadfast pain.
O heart of man — of God ! which God has ta'en

From out the dust, with its humanity
Mournful and weak yet innocent around it,

And bade its many pulses beating lie
Beside that incommunicable stir
Of Deity wherewith He interwound it. 280

O man ! and is thy nature so defiled

That all that holy Heart's devout law-keeping,

And low pathetic beat in deserts wild,
And gushings pitiful of tender weeping

For traitors who consigned it to such woe —

That all could cleanse thee not, without the flow

Of blood, the life — blood — *his* — and streaming *so* ?

O earth the thundercleft, windshaken, where

The louder voice of 'blood and blood' doth rise,

Hast thou an altar for this sacrifice ? 290

O heaven ! O vacant throne !

O crowned hierarchies that wear your crown

When his is put away !

Are ye unshamed that ye cannot dim
Your alien brightness to be liker him,
Assume a human passion, and down-lay
Your sweet securenness for congenial fears,
And teach your cloudless ever-burning eyes

The mystery of his tears ?

Zerah. I am strong, I am strong. 300
Were I never to see my heaven again,

I would wheel to earth like the tempest
rain

Which sweeps there with an exultant sound
To lose its life as it reaches the ground.

I am strong, I am strong.

Away from mine inward vision swim
The shining seats of my heavenly birth,
I see but his, I see but Him —

The Maker's steps on his cruel earth. 309

Will the bitter herbs of earth grow sweet
To me, as trodden by his feet ?

Will the vexed, accurst humanity,

As worn by Him, begin to be

A blessed, yea, a sacred thing

For love and awe and ministering ?

I am strong, I am strong.

By our angel ken shall we survey

His loving smile through his woeful clay ?

I am swift, I am strong,

The love is bearing me along. 320

Ador. One love is bearing us along.

PART THE SECOND

*Mid-air, above Judæa. ADOR and ZERAH
are a little apart from the visible Angelic
Hosts.*

Ador. Belovèd ! dost thou see ? —

Zerah. Thee, — thee.

Thy burning eyes already are

Grown wild and mournful as a star

Whose occupation is for aye

To look upon the place of clay

Whereon thou lookest now.

The crown is fainting on thy brow

To the likeness of a cloud, 330

The forehead's self a little bowed

From its aspect high and holy,

As it would in meekness meet

Some seraphic melancholy:

Thy very wings that lately flung

An outline clear, do flicker here

And wear to each a shadow hung,

Dropped across thy feet.

In these strange contrasting glooms

Stagnant with the scent of tombs, 340

Seraph faces, O my brother,

Show awfully to one another.

Ador. Dost thou see ?

Zerah. Even so ; I see

Our empyreal company,

Alone the memory of their brightness

Left in them, as in thee.

The circle upon circle, tier on tier,

Piling earth's hemisphere

With heavenly infiniteness,

Above us and around, 350

Straining the whole horizon like a bow:

Their songful lips divorcèd from all sound,

A darkness gliding down their silvery

glances, —

Bowing their steadfast solemn countenances

As if they heard God speak, and could not
glow.

Ador. Look downward ! dost thou see ?

Zerah. And wouldst thou press *that*

vision on my words ?

Doth not earth speak enough

Of change and of undoing,

Without a seraph's witness ? Oceans rough

With tempest, pastoral swords 361

Displaced by fiery deserts, mountains ru-

ing

The bolt fallen yesterday,

That shake their piny heads, as who would
say

'We are too beautiful for our decay' —

Shall seraphs speak of these things ? Let
alone

Earth to her earthly moan !

Voice of all things. Is there no moan but
hers ?

Ador. Hearest thou the attestation

Of the roused universe 370

Like a desert-lion shaking

Dews of silence from its mane ?

With an irrepressive passion

Uprising at once,

Rising up and forsaking

Its solemn state in the circle of suns,

To attest the pain

Of him who stands (O patience sweet !)

In his own hand-prints of creation,

With human feet ? 380

Voice of all things. Is there no moan but
ours ?

Zerah. Forms, Spaces, Motions wide,

O meek, insensate things,

O congregated matters ! who inherit,

Instead of vital powers,

Impulsions God-supplied ;

Instead of influent spirit,

A clear informing beauty ;

Instead of creature-duty,

Submission calm as rest. 390

Lights, without feet or wings,

In golden courses sliding !

Glooms, stagnantly subsiding,
Whose lustrous heart away was prest
 Into the argent stars !
Ye crystal firmamental bars
That hold the skyey waters free
From tide or tempest's ecstacy !
Airs universal ! thunders lorn 399
That wait your lightnings in cloud-cave
Hewn out by the winds ! O brave
And subtle elements ! the Holy
Hath charged me by your voice with
 folly.¹

Enough, the mystic arrow leaves its wound.
Return ye to your silences inborn,
Or to your inarticulated sound !

Ador. Zerah !

Zerah. Wilt thou rebuke ?
God hath rebuked me, brother. I am
 weak.

Ador. Zerah, my brother Zerah ! could
 I speak 409

Of thee, 't would be of love to thee.

Zerah. Thy look
Is fixed on earth, as mine upon thy face.
Where shall I seek his ?

 I have thrown

One look upon earth, but one,
Over the blue mountain-lines,
Over the forests of palms and pines,
Over the harvest-lands golden,
Over the valleys that fold in
The gardens and vines —

 He is not there.

All these are unworthy 420
Those footsteps to bear,
Before which, bowing down

I would fain quench the stars of my crown
In the dark of the earthy.
Where shall I seek Him ?

 No reply ?

Hath language left thy lips, to place
Its vocal in thine eye ?

Ador. Ador ! are we come
To a double portent, that
Dumb matter grows articulate 430
And songful seraphs dumb ?
Ador. Ador !

Ador. I constrain
The passion of my silence. None
Of those places gazed upon
Are gloomy enow to fit his pain.
Unto Him, whose forming word
Gave to Nature flower and sward,

¹ 'His angels he charged with folly.' — *Job* iv. 18.

She hath given back again,
For the myrtle — the thorn,
For the sylvan calm — the human scorn. 440
Still, still, reluctant seraph, gaze beneath !
There is a city —

Zerah. Temple and tower,
Palace and purple would droop like a
 flower,

(Or a cloud at our breath)
If He neared in his state
The outermost gate.

Ador. Ah me, not so
In the state of a king did the victim go !
And THOU who hangest mute of speech

'Twixt heaven and earth, with forehead
 yet

Stained by the bloody sweat, 450
God ! man ! Thou hast forgone thy throne
 in each.

Zerah. Thine eyes behold Him ?

Ador. Yea, below.

Track the gazing of mine eyes,
Naming God within thine heart
That its weakness may depart
And the vision rise !

Seest thou yet, beloved ?

Zerah. I see

Beyond the city, crosses three
And mortals three that hang thereon
'Ghast and silent to the sun. 460

Round them blacken and welter and press
Staring multitudes whose father
Adam was, whose brows are dark
With his Cain's corroded mark, —
Who curse with looks. Nay — let me
 rather

Turn unto the wilderness !

Ador. Turn not ! God dwells with men.

Zerah. Above

He dwells with angels, and they love.
Can these love ? With the living's pride
They stare at those who die, who hang 470
In their sight and die. They bear the
 streak

Of the crosses' shadow, black not wide,
To fall on their heads, as it swerves aside
When the victims' pang
Makes the dry wood creak.

Ador. The cross — the cross !

Zerah. A woman kneels

The mid cross under,
With white lips asunder,
And motion on each.
They throb, as she feels, 480

With a spasm, not a speech;
And her lids, close as sleep,
Are less calm, for the eyes
Have made room there to weep
Drop on drop —

Ador. Weep? Weep blood,

All women, all men!
He sweated it, He,
For your pale womanhood
And base manhood. Agree
That these water-tears, then, ⁴⁹⁰
Are vain, mocking like laughter:
Weep blood! Shall the flood

Of salt curses, whose foam is the darkness,
on roll

Forward, on from the strand of the storm-
beaten years,

And back from the rocks of the horrid
hereafter,

And up, in a coil, from the present's wrath-
spring,

Yea, down from the windows of heaven
opening,

Deep calling to deep as they meet on his
soul —

And men weep only tears?

Zerah. Little drops in the lapse! ⁵⁰⁰

And yet, Ador, perhaps

It is all that they can.

Tears! the lovingest man

Has no better bestowed

Upon man.

Ador. Nor on God.

Zerah. Do all-givers need gifts?

If the Giver said 'Give,' the first motion
would slay

Our Immortals, the echo would ruin away
The same worlds which he made. Why,

what angel uplifts

Such a music, so clear,

It may seem in God's ear ⁵¹⁰

Worth more than a woman's hoarse weep-
ing? And thus,

Pity tender as tears, I above thee would
speak,

Thou woman that weepest! weep un-
scorned of us!

I, the tearless and pure, am but loving
and weak.

Ador. Speak low, my brother, low, —
and not of love

Or human or angelic! Rather stand
Before the throne of that Supreme above,
In whose infinitude the secrecies

Of thine own being lie hid, and lift thine
hand

Exultant, saying, 'Lord God, I am wise!' ⁵²⁰
Than utter *here*, 'I love.'

Zerah. And yet thine eyes
Do utter it. They melt in tender light,
The tears of heaven.

Ador. Of heaven. Ah me!

Zerah. Ador!

Ador. Say on!

Zerah. The crucified are three.

Beloved, they are unlike.

Ador. Unlike.

Zerah. For one
Is as a man who has sinned and still

Doth wear the wicked will,

The hard malign life-energy,

Tossed outward, in the parting soul's dis-
dain,

On brow and lip that cannot change again.

Ador. And one —

Zerah. Has also sinned. ⁵³¹
And yet (O marvel!) doth the Spirit-wind
Blow white those waters? Death upon
his face

Is rather shine than shade,

A tender shine by looks beloved made:

He seemeth dying in a quiet place,

And less by iron wounds in hands and feet

Than heart-broke by new joy too sudden
and sweet.

Ador. And ONE! —

Zerah. And ONE! —

Ador. Why dost thou pause?

Zerah. God! God!

Spirit of my spirit! who movest ⁵⁴⁰

Through seraph veins in burning deity

To light the quenchless pulses! —

Ador. But hast trod

The depths of love in thy peculiar nature,

And not in any thou hast made and lovest

In narrow seraph hearts! —

Zerah. Above, Creator!

Within, Upholder!

Ador. And below, below,
The creature's and the upholden's sacri-
fice!

Zerah. Why do I pause? —

Ador. There is a silentness

That answers thee enow,

That, like a brazen sound ⁵⁵⁰

Excluding others, doth ensheathe us
round, —

Hear it. It is not from the visible skies

Though they are still,
Unconscious that their own dropped dews
express
The light of heaven on every earthly hill.
It is not from the hills, though calm and
bare

They, since their first creation,
Through midnight cloud or morning's glit-
tering air
Or the deep deluge blindness, toward the
place
Whence thrilled the mystic word's creative
grace, 560

And whence again shall come
The word that uncreates,
Have lift their brows in voiceless expecta-
tion.
It is not from the places that entomb
Man's dead, though common Silence there
dilates

Her soul to grand proportions, worthily
To fill life's vacant room.
Not there: not there.

Not yet within those chambers lieth He,
A dead one in his living world; his
south 570

And west winds blowing over earth and
sea,

And not a breath on that creating mouth.
But now, — a silence keeps
(Not death's, nor sleep's)

The lips whose whispered word
Might roll the thunders round reverberated.
Silent art thou, O my Lord,
Bowing down thy stricken head!

Fearest thou, a groan of thine
Would make the pulse of thy creation
fail 580

As thine own pulse? — would rend the
veil

Of visible things and let the flood
Of the unseen Light, the essential God,
Rush in to whelm the undivine?
Thy silence, to my thinking, is as dread.

Zerah. O silence!
Ador. Doth it say to thee — the NAME,
Slow-learning seraph?

Zerah. I have learnt.
Ador. The flame
Perishes in thine eyes.

Zerah. He opened his,
And looked. I cannot bear —

Ador. Their agony?
Zerah. Their love. God's depth is in
them. From his brows 590

White, terrible in meekness, didst thou see
The lifted eyes uncloset?

He is God, seraph! Look no more on
me,
O God — I am not God.

Ador. The loving is
Sublimed within them by the sorrowful.
In heaven we could sustain them.

Zerah. Heaven is dull,
Mine Ador, to man's earth. The light
that burns

In fluent, reflux motion
Along the crystal ocean;
The springing of the golden harps be-
tween 600

The bowery wings, in fountains of sweet
sound,

The winding, wandering music that returns
Upon itself, exultingly self-bound

In the great spheric round
Of everlasting praises;
The God-thoughts in our midst that inter-
vene,

Visibly flashing from the supreme throne
Full in seraphic faces

Till each astonishes the other, grown
More beautiful with worship and de-
light — 610

My heaven! my home of heaven! my in-
finite

Heaven-choirs! what are ye to this dust
and death,

This cloud, this cold, these tears, this fail-
ing breath,

Where God's immortal love now issueth
In this MAN's woe?

Ador. His eyes are very deep yet calm.
Zerah. No more

On me, Jehovah-man —
Ador. Calm-deep. They show

A passion which is tranquil. They are
seeing

No earth, no heaven, no men that slay and
curse,

No seraphs that adore; 620
Their gaze is on the invisible, the dread,
The things we cannot view or think or
speak,

Because we are too happy, or too weak, —
The sea of ill, for which the universe,

With all its piled space, can find no shore,
With all its life, no living foot to tread.

But he, accomplished in Jehovah-being,
Sustains the gaze adown,

Conceives the vast despair,

And feels the billowy griefs come up to
drown, ⁶³⁰
Nor fears, nor faints, nor fails, till all be
finished.

Zerah. Thus, do I find thee thus? My
undiminished

And undiminishable God! — my God!
The echoes are still tremulous along
The heavenly mountains, of the latest
song

Thy manifested glory swept abroad
In rushing past our lips: they echo aye
'Creator, thou art strong!'

Creator, thou art blessed over all.
By what new utterance shall I now re-
call, ⁶⁴⁰

Unteaching the heaven-echoes? Dare I
say,

'Creator, thou art feeble than thy work!
Creator, thou art sadder than thy crea-
ture!'

A worm, and not a man,
Yea, no worm, but a curse?'

I dare not so mine heavenly phrase re-
verse.

Albeit the piercing thorn and thistle-fork
(Whose seed disordered ran
From Eve's hand trembling when the curse
did reach her)

Be garnered darklier in thy soul, the
rod ⁶⁵⁰

That smites thee never blossoming, and
thou

Grief-bearer for thy world, with unkinged
brow —

I leave to men their song of Ichabod:

I have an angel-tongue — I know but
praise.

Ador. Hereafter shall the blood-bought
captives raise

The passion-song of blood.

Zerah. And we, extend
Our holy vacant hands towards the Throne,
Crying 'We have no music.'

Ador. Rather, blend
Both musics into one.

The sanctities and sanctified above ⁶⁶⁰
Shall each to each, with lifted looks serene,

Their shining faces lean,
And mix the adoring breath

And breathe the full thanksgiving.
Zerah. But the love —

The love, mine Ador!

Ador. Do we love not?

Zerah. Yea,

But not as man shall! not with life for
death,

New-throbbing through the startled being;
not

With strange astonished smiles, that ever
may

Gush passionate like tears and fill their
place:

Nor yet with speechless memories of
what ⁶⁷⁰

Earth's winters were, enverduring the green
Of every heavenly palm

Whose windless, shadeless calm

Moves only at the breath of the Unseen.

Oh, not with this blood on us — and this
face, —

Still, haply, pale with sorrow that it bore
In our behalf, and tender evermore

With nature all our own, upon us gazing —
Nor yet with these forgiving hands up-
raising

Their unreproachful wounds, alone to
bless! ⁶⁸⁰

Alas, Creator! shall we love thee less

Than mortals shall?

Ador. Amen! so let it be.

We love in our proportion, to the bound

Thine infinite our finite set around,

And that is finitely, — thou, infinite

And worthy infinite love! And our delight

Is, watching the dear love poured out to
thee

From ever fuller chalice. Blessed they,
Who love thee more than we do: blessed

we,
Viewing that love which shall exceed even
this, ⁶⁹⁰

And winning in the sight a double bliss

For all so lost in love's supremacy.

The bliss is better. Only on the sad

Cold earth there are who say

It seemeth better to be great than glad.

The bliss is better. Love him more, O
man,

Than sinless seraphs can!

Zerah. Yea, love him more!

Voices of the Angelic Multitude. Yea,
more!

Ador. The loving word

Is caught by those from whom we stand
apart. ⁷⁰⁰

For silence hath no deepness in her heart
Where love's low name low breathed would

not be heard

By angels, clear as thunder.

Angelic Voices. Love him more !

Ador. Sweet voices, swooning o'er

The music which ye make !

Albeit to love there were not ever given

A mournful sound when uttered out of
heaven,

That angel-sadness ye would fitly take.

Of love be silent now ! we gaze adown
Upon the incarnate Love who wears no
crown. 710

Zerah. No crown ! the woe instead

Is heavy on his head,

Pressing inward on his brain

With a hot and clinging pain

Till all tears are prest away,

And clear and calm his vision may

Peruse the black abyss.

No rod, no sceptre is

Holden in his fingers pale ;

They close instead upon the nail, 720

Concealing the sharp dole,

Never stirring to put by

The fair hair peaked with blood,

Drifting forward from the rood

Helplessly, heavily

On the cheek that waxeth colder,

Whiter ever, and the shoulder

Where the government was laid.

His glory made the heavens afraid ;

Will he not unearth this cross from its
hole ? 730

His pity makes his piteous state ;

Will he be uncompassionate

Alone to his proper soul ?

Yea, will he not lift up

His lips from the bitter cup,

His brows from the dreary weight,

His hand from the clenching cross,

Crying, ' My Father, give to me

Again the joy I had with thee

Or ere this earth was made for loss ? '

No stir : no sound. 741

The love and woe being interwound

He cleaveth to the woe ;

And putteth forth heaven's strength
below,

To bear.

Ador. And that creates his anguish now,

Which made his glory there.

Zerah. Shall it need be so ?

Awake, thou Earth ! behold.

Thou, uttered forth of old 750

In all thy life-emotion,

In all thy vernal noises,

In the rollings of thine ocean,

Leaping founts, and rivers running, —

In thy woods' prophetic heaving

Ere the rains a stroke have given,

In thy winds' exultant voices

When they feel the hills anear, —

In the firmamental sunning, 759

And the tempest which rejoices

Thy full heart with an awful cheer.

Thou, uttered forth of old

And with all thy music rolled

In a breath abroad

By the breathing God, —

Awake ! he is here ! behold !

Even thou —

Beseems it good

To thy vacant vision dim,

That the deadly ruin should,

For thy sake, encompass him ? 770

That the Master-word should lie

A mere silence, while his own

Processive harmony,

The faintest echo of his lightest tone,

Is sweeping in a choral triumph by ?

Awake ! emit a cry !

And say, albeit used

From Adam's ancient years

To falls of acrid tears,

To frequent sighs unloosed, 780

Caught back to press again

On bosoms zoned with pain —

To corpses still and sullen

The shine and music dulling

With closed eyes and ears

That nothing sweet can enter,

Commoving thee no less

With that forced quietness

Than the earthquake in thy centre —

Thou hast not learnt to bear 790

This new divine despair !

These tears that sink into thee,

These dying eyes that view thee,

This dropping blood from lifted rood,

They darken and undo thee.

Thou canst not presently sustain this
corse —

Cry, cry, thou hast not force !

Cry, thou wouldst fainer keep

Thy hopeless charnels deep,

Thyself a general tomb 800

Where the first and the second Death

Sit gazing face to face

And mar each other's breath,

While silent bones through all the place

'Neath sun and moon do faintly glisten

And seem to lie and listen

For the tramp of the coming Doom.

Is it not meet

That they who erst the Eden fruit did eat,

Should champ the ashes? 810

That they who wrap them in the thunder-cloud

Should wear it as a shroud,

Perishing by its flashes?

That they who vexed the lion should be rent?

Cry, cry, 'I will sustain my punishment,

The sin being mine; but take away from me

This visioned Dread — this man — this Deity!

The Earth. I have groaned; I have travailed: I am weary.

I am blind with my own grief, and cannot see,

As clear-eyed angels can, his agony, 820

And what I see I also can sustain, Because his power protects me from his pain.

I have groaned; I have travailed: I am dreary,

Hearkening the thick sobs of my children's heart:

How can I say 'Depart'

To that Atoner making calm and free?

Am I a God as he,

To lay down peace and power as willingly?

Ador. He looked for some to pity. There is none.

All pity is within him and not for him, 830

His earth is iron under him, and o'er him His skies are brass.

His seraphs cry 'Alas!'

With hallelujah voices that cannot weep. And man, for whom the dreadful work is done . . .

Scornful Voices from the Earth. If verily this be the Eternal's son —

Ador. Thou hearest. Man is grateful.

Zerah. Can I hear

Nor darken into man and cease for ever My seraph-smile to wear?

Was it for such, 840

It pleased him to overleap

His glory with his love and sever

From the God-light and the throne

And all angels bowing down,

For whom his every look did touch

New notes of joy on the unworn string

Of an eternal worshipping?

For such, he left his heaven?

There, though never bought by blood And tears, we gave him gratitude:

We loved him there, though unfor- given. 851

Ador. The light is risen

Above, around,

And down in lurid fragments flung, That catch the mountain-peak and stream

With momentary gleam, Then perish in the water and the ground.

River and waterfall,

Forest and wilderness,

Mountain and city, are together wrung Into one shape, and that is shapelessness; 861

The darkness stands for all.

Zerah. The pathos hath the day undone:

The death-look of his eyes

Hath overcome the sun

And made it sicken in its narrow skies.

Ador. Is it to death? He dieth.

Zerah. Through the dark

He still, he only, is discernible —

The naked hands and feet transfigured stark, The countenance of patient anguish white,

Do make themselves a light 871

More dreadful than the glooms which round them dwell,

And therein do they shine.

Ador. God! Father-God!

Perpetual Radiance on the radiant throne!

Uplift the lids of inward deity,

Flashing abroad

Thy burning Infinite!

Light up this dark where there is nought to see

Except the unimagined agony

Upon the sinless forehead of the Son! 880

Zerah. God, tarry not! Behold, enow

Hath he wandered as a stranger,

Sorrowed as a victim. Thou

Appear for him, O Father!

Appear for him, Avenger!

Appear for him, just One and holy One,

For he is holy and just!

At once the darkness and dishonor rather

To the ragged jaws of hungry chaos rake, And hurl aback to ancient dust 890

These mortals that make blasphemies

With their made breath, this earth and skies

That only grow a little dim,
 Seeing their curse on him.
 But him, of all forsaken,
 Of creature and of brother,
 Never wilt thou forsake !

Thy living and thy loving cannot slacken
 Their firm essential hold upon each other,
 And well thou dost remember how his part
 Was still to lie upon thy breast and be ⁹⁰¹
 Partaker of the light that dwelt in thee

Ere sun or seraph shone;

And how while silence trembled round the
 throne

Thou countedst by the beatings of his heart
 The moments of thine own eternity.

Awaken,

O right hand with the lightnings ! Again
 gather

His glory to thy glory ! What stranger,
 What ill supreme in evil, can be thrust ⁹¹⁰
 Between the faithful Father and the Son ?

Appear for him, O Father !

Appear for him, Avenger !

Appear for him, just One and holy One,
 For he is holy and just !

Ador. Thy face upturned toward the
 throne is dark;

Thou hast no answer, Zerah.

Zerah. No reply,

O unforsaking Father ?

Ador. Hark !

Instead of downward voice, a cry

Is uttered from beneath. ⁹²⁰

Zerah. And by a sharper sound than
 death,

Mine immortality is riven.

The heavy darkness which doth tent the
 sky

Floats backward as by a sudden wind:

But I see no light behind,

But I feel the farthest stars are all

Stricken and shaken,

And I know a shadow sad and broad

Doth fall — doth fall

On our vacant thrones in heaven. ⁹³⁰

Voice from the Cross. MY GOD, MY GOD,

WHY HAST THOU ME FORSAKEN ?

The Earth. Ah me, ah me, ah me ! the
 dreadful Why !

My sin is on thee, sinless one ! Thou art.

God-orphaned, for my burden on thy head.

Dark sin, white innocence, endurance
 dread !

Be still, within your shrouds, my buried
 dead ;

Nor work with this quick horror round
 mine heart.

Zerah. He hath forsaken him. I perish.

Ador. Hold

Upon his name ! we perish not. Of old ⁹⁴⁰
 His will —

Zerah. I seek his will. Seek, seraphim !
 My God, my God ! where is it ? Doth that
 curse

Reverberate spare us, seraph or universe ?

He hath forsaken him.

Ador. He cannot fail.

Angel Voices. We faint, we droop,

Our love doth tremble like fear.

Voices of Fallen Angels from the Earth.

Do we prevail ?

Or are we lost ? Hath not the ill we did
 Been heretofore our good ? ⁹⁵⁰

Is it not ill that one, all sinless, should
 Hang heavy with all curses on a cross ?

Nathless, that cry ! With huddled faces
 hid

Within the empty graves which men did
 scoop

To hold more damnèd dead, we shudder
 through

What shall exalt us or undo,

Our triumph, or our loss.

Voice from the Cross. IT IS FINISHED.

Zerah. Hark, again !

Like a victor speaks the slain.

Angel Voices. Finished be the trembling
 vain ! ⁹⁶⁰

Ador. Upward, like a well-loved son,

Looketh he, the orphaned one.

Angel Voices. Finished is the mystic
 pain.

Voices of Fallen Angels. His deathly
 forehead at the word,

Gleameth like a seraph sword.

Angel Voices. Finished is the demon
 reign.

Ador. His breath, as living God, creat-
 eth,

His breath, as dying man, completeth.

Angel Voices. Finished work his hands
 sustain. ⁹⁶⁹

The Earth. In mine ancient sepulchres

Where my kings and prophets freeze,

Adam dead four thousand years,

Unwakened by the universe's

Everlasting moan,

Aye his ghastly silence mocking —

Unwakened by his children's knocking

At his old sepulchral stone,

'Adam, Adam, all this curse is
Thine and on us yet!' —
Unwakened by the ceaseless tears 980
Wherewith they made his cerement
wet,
'Adam, must thy curse remain?' —
Starts with sudden life and hears
Through the slow dripping of the caverned
eaves, —
Angel Voices. Finished is his bane.
Voice from the Cross. FATHER! MY
SPIRIT TO THINE HANDS IS GIVEN.
Ador. Hear the wailing winds that be
By wings of unclean spirits made!
They, in that last look, surveyed
The love they lost in losing heaven, 990
And passionately flee

With a desolate cry that cleaves
The natural storms — though *they* are lift-
ing
God's strong cedar-roots like leaves,
And the earthquake and the thunder,
Neither keeping either under,
Roar and hurtle through the glooms —
And a few pale stars are drifting
Past the dark, to disappear,
What time, from the splitting tombs 1000
Gleamingly the dead arise,
Viewing with their death-calmed eyes
The elemental strategies,
To witness, victory is the Lord's.
Hear the wail o' the spirits! hear!
Zerah. I hear alone the memory of his
words.

EPILOGUE

I

My song is done.
My voice that long hath faltered shall be
still.
The mystic darkness drops from Calvary's
hill 1009
Into the common light of this day's sun.

II

I see no more thy cross, O holy Slain!
I hear no more the horror and the coil
Of the great world's turmoil
Feeling thy countenance *too still*, — nor yell
Of demons sweeping past it to their prison.
The skies that turned to darkness with thy
pain
Make now a summer's day;

And on my changed ear that sabbath bell
Records how CHRIST IS RISEN.

III

And I — ah! what am I 1020
To counterfeit, with faculty earth-dark-
ened,
Seraphic brows of light
And seraph language never used nor
hearkened?
Ah me! what word that seraphs say,
could come
From mouth so used to sighs, so soon to
lie
Sighless, because then breathless, in the
tomb?

IV

Bright ministers of God and grace — of
grace
Because of God! whether ye bow adown
In your own heaven, before the living face
Of him who died and deathless wears the
crown, 1030
Or whether at this hour ye haply are
Anear, around me, hiding in the night
Of this permitted ignorance your light,
This feebleness to spare, —
Forgive me, that mine earthly heart
should dare
Shape images of unincarnate spirits
And lay upon their burning lips a thought
Cold with the weeping which mine earth
inherits.
And though ye find in such hoarse music,
wrought
To copy yours, a cadence all the while 1040
Of sin and sorrow — only pitying smile!
Ye know to pity, well.

V

I too may haply smile another day
At the far recollection of this lay,
When God may call me in your midst to
dwell,
To hear your most sweet music's miracle
And see your wondrous faces. May it be!
For his remembered sake, the Slain on
road,
Who rolled his earthly garment red in
blood
(Treading the wine-press) that the weak,
like me, 1050
Before his heavenly throne should walk in
white.

THE POET'S VOW

'O be wiser thou,
Instructed that true knowledge leads to love.'
—Wordsworth.

First printed in the *New Monthly Magazine* October, 1836. The author says in her preface to *The Seraphim and other Poems* that 'The Poet's Vow' was written to enforce the truth that the creature cannot be isolated from the creature.

PART THE FIRST

SHOWING WHEREFORE THE VOW WAS
MADE

I

Eve is a twofold mystery;
The stillness Earth doth keep,
The motion wherewith human hearts
Do each to either leap
As if all souls between the poles
Felt 'Parting comes in sleep.'

II

The rowers lift their oars to view
Each other in the sea;
The landsmen watch the rocking boats
In a pleasant company;
While up the hill go gladlier still
Dear friends by two and three.

III

The peasant's wife hath looked without
Her cottage door and smiled,
For there the peasant drops his spade
To clasp his youngest child
Which hath no speech, but its hand can
reach
And stroke his forehead mild.

IV

A poet sate that eventide
Within his hall alone,
As silent as its ancient lords
In the confined place of stone,
When the bat hath shrunk from the pray-
ing monk,
And the praying monk is gone.

V

Nor wore the dead a stiller face
Beneath the cerement's roll:
His lips refusing out in words

Their mystic thoughts to dole,
His steadfast eye burnt inwardly,
As burning out his soul.

VI

You would not think that brow could
e'er
Ungentle moods express,
Yet seemed it, in this troubled world,
Too calm for gentleness,
When the very star that shines from far
Shines trembling ne'ertheless.

VII

It lacked, all need, the softening light
Which other brows supply:
We should conjoin the scathed trunks
Of our humanity,
That each leafless spray entwining may
Look softer 'gainst the sky.

VIII

None gazed within the poet's face,
The poet gazed in none;
He threw a lonely shadow straight
Before the moon and sun,
Affronting nature's heaven-dwelling crea-
tures
With wrong to nature done:

IX

Because this poet daringly,
— The nature at his heart,
And that quick tune along his veins
He could not change by art, —
Had vowed his blood of brotherhood
To a stagnant place apart.

X

He did not vow in fear, or wrath,
Or grief's fantastic whim,
But, weights and shows of sensual things
Too closely crossing him,
On his soul's eyelid the pressure slid
And made its vision dim.

XI

And darkening in the dark he strove
'Twixt earth and sea and sky
To lose in shadow, wave and cloud,
His brother's haunting cry:
The winds were welcome as they swept,
God's five-day work he would accept,
But let the rest go by.

XII

He cried, 'O touching, patient Earth
That weepst in thy glee,
Whom God created very good,
And very mournful, we!
Thy voice of moan doth reach his throne,
As Abel's rose from thee.

XIII

'Poor crystal sky with stars astray!
Mad winds that howling go
From east to west! perplexèd seas
That stagger from their blow!
O motion wild! O wave defiled!
Our curse hath made you so.

XIV

'We! and our curse! do I partake
The desiccating sin?
Have I the apple at my lips?
The money-lust within?
Do I human stand with the wounding
hand,
To the blasting heart akin?

XV

'Thou solemn pathos of all things
For solemn joy designed!
Behold, submissive to your cause,
A holy wrath I find,
And, for your sake, the bondage break
That knits me to my kind.

XVI

'Hear me forswear man's sympathies,
His pleasant yea and no,
His riot on the piteous earth
Whereon his thistles grow,
His changing love — with stars above,
His pride — with graves below.

XVII

'Hear me forswear his roof by night,
His bread and salt by day,
His talkings at the wood-fire hearth,
His greetings by the way,
His answering looks, his systemed books,
All man, for aye and aye.

XVIII

'That so my purged, once human heart,
From all the human rent,
May gather strength to pledge and drink
Your wine of wonderment,

While you pardon me all blessingly
The woe mine Adam sent.

XIX

'And I shall feel your unseen looks
Innumerable, constant, deep
And soft as haunted Adam once,
Though sadder, round me creep, —
As slumbering men have mystic ken
Of watchers on their sleep.

XX

'And ever, when I lift my brow
At evening to the sun,
No voice of woman or of child
Recording "Day is done" —
Your silences shall a love express,
More deep than such an one.'

PART THE SECOND

SHOWING TO WHOM THE VOW WAS
DECLARED

I

The poet's vow was inly sworn,
The poet's vow was told.
He shared among his crowding friends
The silver and the gold,
They clasping bland his gift, — his hand
In a somewhat slacker hold.

II

They wended forth, the crowding friends,
With farewells smooth and kind.
They wended forth, the solaced friends,
And left but twain behind:
One loved him true as brothers do,
And one was Rosalind.

III

He said, 'My friends have wended forth
With farewells smooth and kind;
Mine oldest friend, my plighted bride,
Ye need not stay behind:
Friend, wed my fair bride for my sake,
And let my lands ancestral make
A dower for Rosalind.

IV

'And when beside your wassail board
Ye bless your social lot,
I charge you that the giver be

In all his gifts forgot,
Or alone of all his words recall
The last, — Lament me not.'

V

She looked upon him silently
With her large, doubting eyes,
Like a child that never knew but love
Whom words of wrath surprise,
Till the rose did break from either cheek
And the sudden tears did rise.

VI

She looked upon him mournfully,
While her large eyes were grown
Yet larger with the steady tears,
Till, all his purpose known,
She turned slow, as she would go —
The tears were shaken down.

VII

She turned slow, as she would go,
Then quickly turned again,
And gazing in his face to seek
Some little touch of pain,
'I thought,' she said, — but shook her
head, —
Like she tried that speech in vain.

VIII

'I thought — but I am half a child
And very sage art thou —
The teachings of the heaven and earth
Should keep us soft and low:
They have drawn *my* tears in early years,
Or ere I wept — as now.

IX

'But now that in thy face I read
Their cruel homily,
Before their beauty I would fain
Untouched, unsoftened be, —
If I indeed could look on even
The senseless, loveless earth and heaven
As thou canst look on me!

X

'And couldst thou as coldly view
Thy childhood's far abode,
Where little feet kept time with thine
Along the dewy sod,
And thy mother's look from holy book
Rose like a thought of God?

XI

'O brother, — called so, ere her last
Betrothing words were said!
O fellow-watcher in her room,
With hushed voice and tread!
Rememberest thou how, hand in hand
O friend, O lover, we did stand,
And knew that she was dead?

XII

'I will not live Sir Roland's bride,
That dower I will not hold;
I tread below my feet that go,
These parchments bought and sold:
The tears I weep are mine to keep,
And worthier than thy gold.'

XIII

The poet and Sir Roland stood
Alone, each turned to each,
Till Roland brake the silence left
By that soft-throbbing speech —
'Poor heart!' he cried, 'it vainly tried
The distant heart to reach.

XIV

'And thou, O distant, sinful heart
That climbest up so high
To wrap and blind thee with the snows
That cause to dream and die,
What blessing can, from lips of man,
Approach thee with his sigh?

XV

'Ay, what from earth — create for man
And moaning in his moan?
Ay, what from stars — revealed to man
And man-named one by one?
Ay, more! what blessing can be given
Where the Spirits seven do show in
heaven
A MAN upon the throne?

XVI

'A man on earth HE wandered once,
All meek and undefiled,
And those who loved Him said 'He
wept' —
None ever said He smiled;
Yet there might have been a smile un-
seen,
When He bowed his holy face, I ween,
To bless that happy child.

XVII

'And now He pleadeth up in heaven
For our humanities,
Till the ruddy light on seraphs' wings
In pale emotion dies.
They can better bear their Godhead's glare
Than the pathos of his eyes.

XVIII

'I will go pray our God to-day
To teach thee how to scan
His work divine, for human use
Since earth on axle ran, —
To teach thee to discern as plain
His grief divine, the blood-drop's stain
He left there, MAN for man.

XIX

'So, for the blood's sake shed by Him
Whom angels God declare,
Tears like it, moist and warm with love,
Thy reverent eyes shall wear
To see i' the face of Adam's race
The nature God doth share.'

XX

'I heard,' the poet said, 'thy voice
As dimly as thy breath:
The sound was like the noise of life
To one anear his death, —
Or of waves that fail to stir the pale
Sere leaf they roll beneath.

XXI

'And still between the sound and me
White creatures like a mist
Did interfloat confusedly,
Mysterious shapes unwist:
Across my heart and across my brow
I felt them droop like wreaths of snow,
To still the pulse they kist.

XXII

'The castle and its lands are thine —
The poor's — it shall be done.
Go, *man*, to love! I go to live
In Courland hall, alone:
The bats along the ceilings cling,
The lizards in the floors do run,
And storms and years have worn and reft
The stain by human builders left
In working at the stone.'

PART THE THIRD

SHOWING HOW THE VOW WAS KEPT

I

He dwelt alone, and sun and moon
Were witness that he made
Rejection of his humanness
Until they seemed to fade;
His face did so, for he did grow
Of his own soul afraid.

II

The self-poised God may dwell alone
With inward glorying,
But God's chief angel waiteth for
A brother's voice, to sing;
And a lonely creature of sinful nature
It is an awful thing.

III

An awful thing that feared itself;
While many years did roll,
A lonely man, a feeble man,
A part beneath the whole,
He bore by day, he bore by night
That pressure of God's infinite
Upon his finite soul.

IV

The poet at his lattice sate,
And downward looked he.
Three Christians wended by to prayers,
With mute ones in their ee;
Each turned above a face of love
And called him to the far chapelle
With voice more tuneful than its bell:
But still they wended three.

V

There journeyed by a bridal pomp,
A bridegroom and his dame;
He speaketh low for happiness,
She bluseth red for shame:
But never a tone of benison
From out the lattice came.

VI

A little child with inward song,
No louder noise to dare,
Stood near the wall to see at play
The lizards green and rare —
Unblessed the while for his childish smile
Which cometh unaware.

PART THE FOURTH

SHOWING HOW ROSALIND FARED BY
THE KEEPING OF THE VOW

I

In death-sheets lieth Rosalind
As white and still as they;
And the old nurse that watched her bed
Rose up with 'Well-a-day!'
And oped the casement to let in
The sun, and that sweet doubtful din
Which droppeth from the grass and bough
Sans wind and bird, none knoweth how —
To cheer her as she lay.

II

The old nurse started when she saw
Her sudden look of woe:
But the quick wan tremblings round her
mouth
In a meek smile did go,
And calm she said, 'When I am dead,
Dear nurse, it shall be so.'

III

'Till then, shut out those sights and sounds,
And pray God pardon me
That I without this pain no more
His blessed works can see!
And lean beside me, loving nurse,
That thou mayst hear, ere I am worse,
What thy last love should be.'

IV

The loving nurse leant over her,
As white she lay beneath;
The old eyes searching, dim with life,
The young ones dim with death,
To read their look if sound forsook
The trying, trembling breath.

V

'When all this feeble breath is done,
And I on bier am laid,
My tresses smoothed for never a feast,
My body in shroud arrayed,
Uplift each palm in a saintly calm,
As if that still I prayed.

VI

'And heap beneath mine head the flowers
You stoop so low to pull,
The little white flowers from the wood

Which grow there in the cool,
Which *he* and I, in childhood's games,
Went plucking, knowing not their names,
And filled thine apron full.

VII

'Weep not! I weep not. Death is strong,
The eyes of Death are dry!
But lay this scroll upon my breast
When hushed its heavings lie,
And wait awhile for the corpse's smile
Which shineth presently.

VIII

'And when it shineth, straightway call
Thy youngest children dear,
And bid them gently carry me
All barefaced on the bier;
But bid them pass my kirkyard grass
That waveth long anear.

IX

'And up the bank where I used to sit
And dream what life would be,
Along the brook with its sunny look
Akin to living glee, —
O'er the windy hill, through the forest still,
Let them gently carry me.

X

'And through the piny forest still,
And down the open moorland
Round where the sea beats mistily
And blindly on the foreland;
And let them chant that hymn I know,
Bearing me soft, bearing me slow,
To the ancient hall of Courland.

XI

'And when withal they near the hall,
In silence let them lay
My bier before the bolted door,
And leave it for a day:
For I have vowed, though I am proud,
To go there as a guest in shroud,
And not be turned away.'

XII

The old nurse looked within her eyes
Whose mutual look was gone;
The old nurse stooped upon her mouth,
Whose answering voice was done;
And nought she heard, till a little bird

Upon the casement's woodbine swinging
 Broke out into a loud sweet singing
 For joy o' the summer sun;
 'Alack! alack!' — she watched no more,
 With head on knee she wailed sore,
 And the little bird sang o'er and o'er
 For joy o' the summer sun.

PART THE FIFTH

SHOWING HOW THE VOW WAS BROKEN

I

The poet oped his bolted door
 The midnight sky to view;
 A spirit-feel was in the air
 Which seemed to touch his spirit bare
 Whenever his breath he drew;
 And the stars a liquid softness had,
 As alone their holiness forbade
 Their falling with the dew.

II

They shine upon the steadfast hills,
 Upon the swinging tide,
 Upon the narrow track of beach
 And the murmuring pebbles pied:
 They shine on every lovely place,
 They shine upon the corpse's face,
 As *it* were fair beside.

III

It lay before him, humanlike,
 Yet so unlike a thing!
 More awful in its shrouded pomp
 Than any crownèd king:
 All calm and cold, as it did hold
 Some secret, glorying.

IV

A heavier weight than of its clay
 Clung to his heart and knee:
 As if those folded palms could strike
 He staggered groaningly,
 And then o'erhung, without a groan,
 The meek close mouth that smiled alone,
 Whose speech the scroll must be.

THE WORDS OF ROSALIND'S SCROLL

'I left thee last, a child at heart,
 A woman scarce in years.

I come to thee, a solemn corpse
 Which neither feels nor fears.
 I have no breath to use in sighs;
 They laid the dead-weights on mine eyes
 To seal them safe from tears.

'Look on me with thine own calm look:
 I meet it calm as thou.
 No look of thine can change *this* smile,
 Or break thy sinful vow:
 I tell thee that my poor scorned heart
 Is of thine earth — thine earth, a part:
 It cannot vex thee now.

'But out, alas! these words are writ
 By a living, loving one,
 Adown whose cheeks, the proofs of life,
 The warm quick tears do run:
 Ah, let the unloving corpse control
 Thy scorn back from the loving soul
 Whose place of rest is won.

'I have prayed for thee with bursting sob
 When passion's course was free;
 I have prayed for thee with silent lips,
 In the anguish none could see:
 They whispered oft, "She sleepeth soft" —
 But I only prayed for thee.

'Go to! I pray for thee no more:
 The corpse's tongue is still,
 Its folded fingers point to heaven,
 But point there stiff and chill:
 No farther wrong, no farther woe
 Hath license from the sin below
 Its tranquil heart to thrill.

'I charge thee, by the living's prayer,
 And the dead's silentness,
 To wring from out thy soul a cry
 Which God shall hear and bless!
 Lest Heaven's own palm droop in my hand,
 And pale among the saints I stand,
 A saint companionless.'

V

Bow lower down before the throne,
 Triumphant Rosalind!
 He boweth on thy corpse his face,
 And weepeth as the blind:
 'T was a dread sight to see them so,
 For the senseless corpse rocked to and fro
 With the wail of his living mind.

VI

But dreader sight, could such be seen,
 His inward mind did lie,
 Whose long-subjected humanness
 Gave out its lion-cry,
 And fiercely rent its tenement
 In a mortal agony.

VII

I tell you, friends, had you heard his wail,
 'T would haunt you in court and mart,
 And in merry feast until you set
 Your cup down to depart —
 That weeping wild of a reckless child
 From a proud man's broken heart.

VIII

O broken heart, O broken vow,
 That wore so proud a feature !
 God, grasping as a thunderbolt
 The man's rejected nature,
 Smote him therewith i' the presence high
 Of his so worshipped earth and sky
 That looked on all indifferently —
 A wailing human creature.

IX

A human creature found too weak
 To bear his human pain —
 (May Heaven's dear grace have spoken
 peace
 To his dying heart and brain !)
 For when they came at dawn of day
 To lift the lady's corpse away,
 Her bier was holding twain.

X

They dug beneath the kirkyard grass,
 For both one dwelling deep;
 To which, when years had mossed the stone,
 Sir Roland brought his little son
 To watch the funeral heap:
 And when the happy boy would rather
 Turn upward his blithe eyes to see
 The wood-doves nodding from the tree,
 'Nay, boy, look downward,' said his father,
 'Upon this human dust asleep.
 And hold it in thy constant ken
 That God's own unity compresses
 (One into one) the human many,
 And that his everlastingness is
 The bond which is not loosed by any:
 That thou and I this law must keep,
 If not in love, in sorrow then, —

Though smiling not like other men,
 Still, like them we must weep.'

THE ROMAUNT OF MARGRET

'Can my affections find out nothing best,
 But still and still remove?' — *Quarles.*

First printed in the *New Monthly Magazine*,
 July, 1836. For this poem, as for the preced-
 ing, a distinct moral purpose was claimed by
 the author, to show, namely, 'that the creature
 cannot be *sustained* by the creature.'

I

I PLANT a tree whose leaf
 The yew-tree leaf will suit:
 But when its shade is o'er you laid,
 Turn round and pluck the fruit.
 Now reach my harp from off the wall
 Where shines the sun aslant;
 The sun may shine and we be cold !
 O hearken, loving hearts and bold,
 Unto my wild romaunt.
 Margret, Margret.

II

Sitteth the fair ladye
 Close to the river side
 Which runneth on with a merry tone
 Her merry thoughts to guide:
 It runneth through the trees,
 It runneth by the hill,
 Nathless the lady's thoughts have found
 A way more pleasant still.
 Margret, Margret.

III

The night is in her hair
 And giveth shade to shade,
 And the pale moonlight on her forehead
 white
 Like a spirit's hand is laid;
 Her lips part with a smile
 Instead of speakings done:
 I ween, she thinketh of a voice,
 Albeit uttering none.
 Margret, Margret.

IV

All little birds do sit
 With heads beneath their wings:
 Nature doth seem in a mystic dream,
 Absorbed from her living things:

That dream by that ladye
 Is certes unpartook,
 For she looketh to the high cold stars
 With a tender human look.
 Margret, Margret.

v

The lady's shadow lies
 Upon the running river;
 It lieth no less in its quietness,
 For that which resteth never:
 Most like a trusting heart
 Upon a passing faith,
 Or as upon the course of life
 The steadfast doom of death.
 Margret, Margret.

vi

The lady doth not move,
 The lady doth not dream,
 Yet she seeth her shade no longer laid
 In rest upon the stream:
 It shaketh without wind,
 It parteth from the tide,
 It standeth upright in the cleft moonlight,
 It sitteth at her side.
 Margret, Margret.

vii

Look in its face, ladye,
 And keep thee from thy swoond;
 With a spirit bold thy pulses hold
 And hear its voice's sound:
 For so will sound thy voice
 When thy face is to the wall,
 And such will be thy face, ladye,
 When the maidens work thy pall.
 Margret, Margret.

viii

'Am I not like to thee?'
 The voice was calm and low,
 And between each word you might have
 heard
 The silent forests grow;
 '*The like may sway the like;*'
 By which mysterious law
 Mine eyes from thine and my lips from
 thine
 The light and breath may draw.
 Margret, Margret.

ix

'My lips do need thy breath,
 My lips do need thy smile,

And my pallid eyne, that light in thine
 Which met the stars erewhile:
 Yet go with light and life
 If that thou lovest one
 In all the earth who loveth thee
 As truly as the sun,
 Margret, Margret.'

x

Her cheek had waxed white
 Like cloud at fall of snow;
 Then like to one at set of sun,
 It waxed red also;
 For love's name maketh bold
 As if the loved were near:
 And then she sighed the deep long sigh
 Which cometh after fear.
 Margret, Margret.

xi

'Now, sooth, I fear thee not —
 Shall never fear thee now!' —
 (And a noble sight was the sudden light
 Which lit her lifted brow.)
 'Can earth be dry of streams,
 Or hearts of love?' she said;
 'Who doubteth love, can know not love:
 He is already dead.'
 Margret, Margret.

xii

'I have' . . . and here her lips
 Some word in pause did keep,
 And gave the while a quiet smile
 As if they paused in sleep, —
 'I have' . . . a brother dear,
 A knight of knightly fame!
 I broidered him a knightly scarf
 With letters of my name
 Margret, Margret.

xiii

'I fed his gray goshawk,
 I kissed his fierce bloodhound,
 I sate at home when he might come
 And caught his horn's far sound:
 I sang him hunter's songs,
 I poured him the red wine,
 He looked across the cup and said,
I love thee, sister mine.'
 Margret, Margret

xiv

IT trembled on the grass
 With a low, shadowy laughter;

The sounding river which rolled, for ever
 Stood dumb and stagnant after:
 'Brave knight thy brother is !
 But better loveth he
 Thy chalice wine than thy chaunted song,
 And better both than thee,
 Margret, Margret.'

XV

The lady did not heed
 The river's silence while
 Her own thoughts still ran at their will,
 And calm was still her smile.
 'My little sister wears
 The look our mother wore:
 I smooth her locks with a golden comb,
 I bless her evermore.'
 Margret, Margret.

XVI

'I gave her my first bird
 When first my voice it knew;
 I made her share my posies rare
 And told her where they grew:
 I taught her God's dear name
 With prayer and praise to tell,
 She looked from heaven into my face
 And said, *I love thee well.*'
 Margret, Margret.

XVII

IT trembled on the grass
 With a low, shadowy laughter;
 You could see each bird as it woke and
 stared
 Through the shrivelled foliage after.
 'Fair child thy sister is !
 But better loveth she
 Thy golden comb than thy gathered flow-
 ers,
 And better both than thee,
 Margret, Margret.'

XVIII

Thy lady did not heed
 The withering on the bough;
 Still calm her smile, albeit the while
 A little pale her brow:
 'I have a father old,
 The lord of ancient halls;

An hundred friends are in his court
 Yet only me he calls.
 Margret, Margret.

XIX

'An hundred knights are in his court
 Yet read I by his knee;
 And when forth they go to the tourney-
 show
 I rise not up to see:
 'T is a weary book to read,
 My tryst's at set of sun,
 But loving and dear beneath the stars
 Is his blessing when I've done.'
 Margret, Margret.

XX

IT trembled on the grass
 With a low, shadowy laughter;
 And moon and stars though bright and far
 Did shrink and darken after.
 'High lord thy father is !
 But better loveth he
 His ancient halls than his hundred friends,
 His ancient halls, than thee,
 Margret, Margret.'

XXI

The lady did not heed
 That the far stars did fail;
 Still calm her smile, albeit the while . . .
 Nay, but she is not pale !
 'I have more than a friend
 Across the mountains dim:
 No other's voice is soft to me,
 Unless it nameth *him.*'
 Margret, Margret.

XXII

'Though louder beats my heart,
 I know his tread again,
 And his fair plume aye, unless turned
 away,
 For the tears do blind me then:
 We brake no gold, a sign
 Of stronger faith to be,
 But I wear his last look in my soul,
 Which said, *I love but thee !*'
 Margret, Margret.

XXIII

IT trembled on the grass
 With a low, shadowy laughter;

And the wind did toll, as a passing soul
 Were sped by church-bell after;
 And shadows, 'stead of light,
 Fell from the stars above,
 In flakes of darkness on her face
 Still bright with trusting love.
 Margret, Margret.

XXIV

'He loved but only thee !
 That love is transient too.
 The wild hawk's bill doth dabble still
 I' the mouth that vowed thee true:
 Will he open his dull eyes
 When tears fall on his brow ?
 Behold, the death-worm to his heart
 Is a nearer thing than *thou*,
 Margret, Margret.'

XXV

Her face was on the ground —
 None saw the agony;
 But the men at sea did that night agree
 They heard a drowning cry:
 And when the morning brake,
 Fast rolled the river's tide,
 With the green trees waving overhead
 And a white corse laid beside.
 Margret, Margret.

XXVI

A knight's bloodhound and he
 The funeral watch did keep;
 With a thought o' the chase he stroked its
 face
 As it howled to see him weep.
 A fair child kissed the dead,
 But shrank before its cold.
 And alone yet proudly in his hall
 Did stand a baron old.
 Margret, Margret.

XXVII

Hang up my harp again !
 I have no voice for song.
 Not song but wail, and mourners pale,
 Not bards, to love belong.
 O failing human love !
 O light, by darkness known !
 O false, the while thou treadest earth !
 O deaf beneath the stone !
 Margret, Margret.

ISOBEL'S CHILD

— 'so find we profit,
 By losing of our prayers.'
 — *Shakespeare.*

I

To rest the weary nurse has gone:
 An eight-day watch had watchèd she,
 Still rocking beneath sun and moon
 The baby on her knee,
 Till Isobel its mother said
 'The fever waneth — wend to bed,
 For now the watch comes round to me.'

II

Then wearily the nurse did throw
 Her pallet in the darkest place
 Of that sick room, and slept and dreamed:
 For, as the gusty wind did blow¹¹
 The night-lamp's flare across her face,
 She saw or seemed to see, but dreamed,
 That the poplars tall on the opposite hill,
 The seven tall poplars on the hill,
 Did clasp the setting sun until
 His rays dropped from him, pined and still
 As blossoms in frost,
 Till he waned and paled, so weirdly
 crossed,
 To the color of moonlight which doth pass
 Over the dank ridged churchyard grass.²¹
 The poplars held the sun, and he
 The eyes of the nurse that they should not
 see
 — Not for a moment, the babe on her
 knee,
 Though she shuddered to feel that it grew
 to be
 Too chill, and lay too heavily.

III

She only dreamed; for all the while
 'T was Lady Isobel that kept
 The little baby: and it slept³⁰
 Fast, warm, as if its mother's smile,
 Laden with love's dewy weight,
 And red as rose of Harpocrate
 Dropt upon its eyelids, pressed
 Lashes to cheek in a sealèd rest.

IV

And more and more smiled Isobel
 To see the baby sleep so well —
 She knew not that she smiled.
 Against the lattice, dull and wild
 Drive the heavy droning drops,

Drop by drop, the sound being one; 40
As momentarily time's segments fall
On the ear of God, who hears through all
Eternity's unbroken monotone:

And more and more smiled Isobel
To see the baby sleep so well —
She knew not that she smiled.
The wind in intermission stops
Down in the beechen forest,
Then cries aloud

As one at the sorest, 50
Self-stung, self-driven,

And rises up to its very tops,
Stiffening erect the branches bowed,
Dilating with a tempest-soul
The trees that with their dark hands
break

Through their own outline, and heavy roll
Shadows as massive as clouds in heaven
Across the castle lake.

And more and more smiled Isobel
To see the baby sleep so well; 60
She knew not that she smiled;
She knew not that the storm was wild;
Through the uproar drear she could not
hear

The castle clock which struck anear —
She heard the low, light breathing of her
child.

V

O sight for wondering look !
While the external nature broke
Into such abandonment,
While the very mist, heart-rent
By the lightning, seemed to eddy 70
Against nature, with a din, —
A sense of silence and of steady
Natural calm appeared to come
From things without, and enter in
The human creature's room.

VI

So motionless she sate,
The babe asleep upon her knees,
You might have dreamed their souls had
gone

Away to things inanimate,
In such to live, in such to moan; 80
And that their bodies had ta'en back,

In mystic change, all silences
That cross the sky in cloudy rack,
Or dwell beneath the reedy ground
In waters safe from their own sound:
Only she wore

The deepening smile I named before,
And *that* a deepening love expressed;
And who at once can love and rest ?

VII

In sooth the smile that then was keeping 90
Watch upon the baby sleeping,
Floated with its tender light
Downward, from the drooping eyes,
Upward, from the lips apart,
Over cheeks which had grown white
With an eight-day weeping:
All smiles come in such a wise
Where tears shall fall or have of old —
Like northern lights that fill the heart
Of heaven in sign of cold. 100

VIII

Motionless she sate.
Her hair had fallen by its weight
On each side of her smile, and lay
Very blackly on the arm
Where the baby nestled warm,
Pale as baby carved in stone
Seen by glimpses of the moon
Up a dark cathedral aisle:
But, through the storm, no moonbeam fell
Upon the child of Isobel — 110
Perhaps you saw it by the ray
Alone of her still smile.

IX

A solemn thing it is to me
To look upon a babe that sleeps
Wearing in its spirit-deeps
The undeveloped mystery
Of our Adam's taint and woe,
Which, when they developed be,
Will not let it slumber so;
Lying new in life beneath 120
The shadow of the coming death,
With that soft, low, quiet breath,
As if it felt the sun;
Knowing all things by their blooms,
Not their roots, yea, sun and sky
Only by the warmth that comes
Out of each, earth only by
The pleasant hues that o'er it run,
And human love by drops of sweet
White nourishment still hanging round
The little mouth so slumber-bound: 131
All which broken sentience
And conclusion incomplete,
Will gather and unite and climb
To an immortality

Good or evil, each sublime,
Through life and death to life again.

O little lids, now folded fast,
Must ye learn to drop at last
Our large and burning tears ? 140

O warm quick body, must thou lie,
When the time comes round to die,

Still from all the whirl of years,
Bare of all the joy and pain ?

O small frail being, wilt thou stand
At God's right hand,

Lifting up those sleeping eyes
Dilated by great destinies,

To an endless waking ? thrones and
seraphim,

Through the long ranks of their solemnities, 150

Sunning thee with calm looks of Heaven's
surprise,

But thine alone on Him ?

Or else, self-willed, to tread the Godless
place,

(God keep thy will !) feel thine own energies
Cold, strong, objectless, like a dead man's
clasp,

The sleepless deathless life within thee
grasp, —

While myriad faces, like one changeless
face,

With woe *not love's*, shall glass thee every-
where

And overcome thee with thine own despair ?

X

More soft, less solemn images 160
Drifted o'er the lady's heart

Silently as snow.

She had seen eight days depart

Hour by hour, on bended knees,

With pale-wrung hands and prayings low
And broken, through which came the sound

Of tears that fell against the ground,
Making sad stops : — ' Dear Lord, dear
Lord ! '

She still had prayed, (the heavenly word
Broken by an earthly sigh) 170

— ' Thou who didst not erst deny

The mother-joy to Mary mild,

Blessèd in the blessèd child

Which hearkened in meek babyhood

Her cradle-hymn, albeit used

To all that music interfused

In breasts of angels high and good !

Oh, take not, Lord, my babe away —

Oh, take not to thy songful heaven

The pretty baby thou hast given, 180

Or ere that I have seen him play

Around his father's knees and known

That *he* knew how my love has gone

From all the world to him.

Think, God among the cherubim,

How I shall shiver every day

In thy June sunshine, knowing where

The grave-grass keeps it from his fair

Still cheeks: and feel, at every tread,

His little body, which is dead 190

And hidden in thy turfy fold,

Doth make thy whole warm earth a-cold !

O God, I am so young, so young —

I am not used to tears at nights

Instead of slumber — not to prayer

With sobbing lips and hands out-wrung !

Thou knowest all my prayings were

' I bless thee, God, for past delights —

Thank God ! ' I am not used to bear
Hard thoughts of death; the earth doth

cover 200

No face from me of friend or lover:

And must the first who teaches me

The form of shrouds and funerals, be

Mine own first-born belovèd ? he

Who taught me first this mother-love ?

Dear Lord who spreadest out above

Thy loving, transpierced hands to meet

All lifted hearts with blessing sweet, —

Pierce not my heart, my tender heart

Thou madest tender ! ' Thou who art 210

So happy in thy heaven always,

Take not mine only bliss away ! '

XI

She so had prayed: and God, who hears

Through seraph-songs the sound of tears

From that belovèd babe had ta'en

The fever and the beating pain.

And more and more smiled Isobel

To see the baby sleep so well,

(She knew not that she smiled, I wis)

Until the pleasant gradual thought 220

Which near her heart the smile enwrought,

Now soft and slow, itself did seem

To float along a happy dream,

Beyond it into speech like this.

XII

' I prayed for thee, my little child,

And God has heard my prayer !

And when thy babyhood is gone,

We two together undefiled

By men's repinings, will kneel down

Upon his earth which will be fair 230
(Not covering thee, sweet !) to us twain,
And give Him thankful praise.'

XIII

Dully and wildly drives the rain:
Against the lattices drives the rain.

XIV

'I thank Him now, that I can think
Of those same future days,
Nor from the harmless image shrink
Of what I there might see —
Strange babies on their mothers' knee,
Whose innocent soft faces might 240
From off mine eyelids strike the light,
With looks not meant for me!'

XV

Gustily blows the wind through the rain,
As against the lattices drives the rain.

XVI

'But now, O baby mine, together,
We turn this hope of ours again
To many an hour of summer weather,
When we shall sit and intertwine
Our spirits, and instruct each other
In the pure loves of child and mother! 250
Two human loves make one divine.'

XVII

The thunder tears through the wind and
the rain,
As full on the lattices drives the rain.

XVIII

'My little child, what wilt thou choose ?
Now let me look at thee and ponder.
What gladness, from the gladnesses
Futurity is spreading under
Thy gladsome sight ? Beneath the trees
Wilt thou lean all day, and lose
Thy spirit with the river seen 260
Intermittently between
The winding beechen alleys, —
Half in labor, half repose,
Like a shepherd keeping sheep,
Thou, with only thoughts to keep
Which never a bound will overpass,
And which are innocent as those
That feed among Arcadian valleys
Upon the dewy grass ?'

XIX

The large white owl that with age is blind, 270
That hath sate for years in the old tree
hollow,
Is carried away in a gust of wind;
His wings could bear him not as fast
As he goeth now the lattice past;
He is borne by the winds, the rains do
follow
His white wings to the blast outflowing,
He hooteth in going,
And still, in the lightnings, coldly glitter
His round unblinking eyes.

XX

'Or, baby, wilt thou think it fitter 280
To be eloquent and wise,
One upon whose lips the air
Turns to solemn verities
For men to breathe anew, and win
A deeper-seated life within ?
Wilt be a philosopher,
By whose voice the earth and skies
Shall speak to the unborn ?
Or a poet, broadly spreading
The golden immortalities 290
Of thy soul on natures lorn
And poor of such, them all to guard
From their decay, — beneath thy treading,
Earth's flowers recovering hues of Eden, —
And stars, drawn downward by thy looks,
To shine ascendant in thy books ?'

XXI

The tame hawk in the castle-yard,
How it screams to the lightning, with its
wet
Jagged plumes overhanging the parapet !
And at the lady's door the hound 300
Scratches with a crying sound.

XXII

'But, O my babe, thy lids are laid
Close, fast upon thy cheek,
And not a dream of power and sheen
Can make a passage up between;
Thy heart is of thy mother's made,
Thy looks are very meek,
And it will be their chosen place
To rest on some beloved face,
As these on thine, and let the noise 310
Of the whole world go on nor drown
The tender silence of thy joys:
Or when that silence shall have grown
Too tender for itself, the same

Yearning for sound, — to look above
And utter its one meaning, LOVE,
That *He* may hear his name.⁷

XXIII

No wind, no rain, no thunder !
The waters had trickled not slowly,
The thunder was not spent 320
Nor the wind near finishing;
Who would have said that the storm was
diminishing ?

No wind, no rain, no thunder !
Their noises dropped asunder
From the earth and the firmament,
From the towers and the lattices,
Abrupt and echoless
As ripe fruits on the ground unshaken
wholly —

As life in death !
And sudden and solemn the silence fell, 330
Startling the heart of Isobel

As the tempest could not:
Against the door went panting the breath
Of the lady's hound whose cry was still,
And she, constrained howe'er she would
not,

Lifted her eyes and saw the moon
Looking out of heaven alone
Upon the poplared hill, —
A calm of God, made visible
That men might bless it at their will. 340

XXIV

The moonshine on the baby's face
Falleth clear and cold:
The mother's looks have fallen back
To the same place:
Because no moon with silver rack,
Nor broad sunrise in jasper skies
Has power to hold
Our loving eyes,
Which still revert, as ever must
Wonder and Hope, to gaze on the dust. 350

XXV

The moonshine on the baby's face
Cold and clear remaineth;
The mother's looks do shrink away, —
The mother's looks return to stay,
As charmed by what paineth:
Is any glamour in the case ?
Is it dream, or is it sight ?
Hath the change upon the wild

Elements that sign the night,
Passed upon the child ? 360
It is not dream, but sight.

XXVI

The babe has awakened from sleep
And unto the gaze of its mother,
Bent over it, lifted another —
Not the baby-looks that go
Unaimingly to and fro,
But an earnest gazing deep
Such as soul gives soul at length
When by work and wail of years
It winneth a solemn strength 370
And mourneth as it wears.
A strong man could not brook,
With pulse unhurried by fears,
To meet that baby's look
O'er glazed by manhood's tears,
The tears of a man full grown,
With a power to wring our own,
In the eyes all undefiled
Of a little three-months child —
To see that babe-brow wrought 380
By the witnessing of thought
To judgment's prodigy,
And the small soft mouth unweaned,
By mother's kiss o'erleaned,
(Putting the sound of loving
Where no sound else was moving
Except the speechless cry)
Quickened to mind's expression,
Shaped to articulation,
Yea, uttering words, yea, naming woe, 390
In tones that with it strangely went
Because so baby-innocent,
As the child spake out to the mother, so:—

XXVII

'O mother, mother, loose thy prayer !
Christ's name hath made it strong.
It bindeth me, it holdeth me
With its most loving cruelty,
From floating my new soul along
The happy heavenly air.
It bindeth me, it holdeth me 400
In all this dark, upon this dull
Low earth, by only weepers trod.
It bindeth me, it holdeth me !
Mine angel looketh sorrowful
Upon the face of God.¹

¹ For I say unto you that in Heaven their angels do
always behold the face of my Father which is in Hea-
ven. — *Math.* xviii. 10.

XXVIII

'Mother, mother, can I dream
 Beneath your earthly trees ?
 I had a vision and a gleam,
 I heard a sound more sweet than these
 When rippled by the wind: 410
 Did you see the Dove with wings
 Bathed in golden glistenings
 From a sunless light behind,
 Dropping on me from the sky,
 Soft as mother's kiss, until
 I seemed to leap and yet was still ?
 Saw you how his love-large eye
 Looked upon me mystic calms,
 Till the power of his divine
 Vision was indrawn to mine ? 420

XXIX

'Oh, the dream within the dream !
 I saw celestial places even.
 Oh, the vistas of high palms
 Making finites of delight
 Through the heavenly infinite,
 Lifting up their green still tops
 To the heaven of heaven !
 Oh, the sweet life-tree that drops
 Shade like light across the river
 Glorified in its for-ever 430
 Flowing from the Throne !
 Oh, the shining holinesses
 Of the thousand, thousand faces
 God-sunned by the thronèd ONE,
 And made intense with such a love
 That, though I saw them turned above,
 Each loving seemed for also me !
 And, oh, the Unspeakable, the HE,
 The manifest in secrecies
 Yet of mine own heart partaker 440
 With the overcoming look
 Of One who hath been once forsook
 And blesseth the forsaker !
 Mother, mother, let me go
 Toward the Face that looketh so !
 Through the mystic wingèd Four
 Whose are inward, outward eyes
 Dark with light of mysteries
 And the restless evermore
 "Holy, holy, holy," — through 450
 The sevenfold Lamps that burn in view
 Of cherubim and seraphim, —
 Through the four-and-twenty crowned
 Stately elders white around
 Suffer me to go to Him !

XXX

'Is your wisdom very wise,
 Mother, on the narrow earth,
 Very happy, very worth
 That I should stay to learn ?
 Are these air-corrupting sighs 460
 Fashioned by unlearned breath ?
 Do the students' lamps that burn
 All night, illumine death ?
 Mother, albeit this be so,
 Loose thy prayer and let me go
 Where that bright chief angel stands
 Apart from all his brother bands,
 Too glad for smiling, having bent
 In angelic wilderment
 O'er the depths of God, and brought 470
 Reeling thence one only thought
 To fill his own eternity.
 He the teacher is for me —
 He can teach what I would know —
 Mother, mother, let me go !

XXXI

'Can your poet make an Eden
 No winter will undo,
 And light a starry fire while heeding
 His hearth's is burning too ?
 Drown in music the earth's din, 480
 And keep his own wild soul within
 The law of his own harmony ?
 Mother, albeit this be so,
 Let me to my heaven go !
 A little harp me waits thereby,
 A harp whose strings are golden all
 And tuned to music spherical,
 Hanging on the green life-tree
 Where no willows ever be.
 Shall I miss that harp of mine ? 490
 Mother, no ! — the Eye divine
 Turned upon it, makes it shine ;
 And when I touch it, poems sweet
 Like separate souls shall fly from it,
 Each to the immortal fyte.
 We shall all be poets there,
 Gazing on the chiefest Fair.

XXXII

'Love ! earth's love ! and can we love
 Fixedly where all things move ?
 Can the sinning love each other ? 500
 Mother, mother,
 I tremble in thy close embrace,
 I feel thy tears adown my face,
 Thy prayers do keep me out of bliss —

O dreary earthly love !
 Loose thy prayer and let me go
 To the place which loving is
 Yet not sad; and when is given
 Escape to *thee* from this below,
 Thou shalt behold me that I wait
 For thee beside the happy Gate,
 And silence shall be up in heaven
 To hear our greeting kiss.'

510

XXXIII

The nurse awakes in the morning sun,
 And starts to see beside her bed
 The lady with a grandeur spread
 Like pathos o'er her face, as one
 God-satisfied and earth-undone;
 The babe upon her arm was dead:
 And the nurse could utter forth no cry, —
 She was awed by the calm in the mother's
 eye.

521

XXXIV

'Wake, nurse !' the lady said;
 'We are waking — he and I —
 I, on earth, and he, in sky:
 And thou must help me to o'erlay
 With garment white this little clay
 Which needs no more our lullaby.'

XXXV

'I changed the cruel prayer I made,
 And bowed my meekened face, and prayed
 That God would do his will; and thus
 He did it, nurse ! He parted us:
 And his sun shows victorious
 The dead calm face, — and *I* am calm,
 And Heaven is hearkening a new psalm.'

530

XXXVI

'This earthly noise is too anear,
 Too loud, and will not let me hear
 The little harp. My death will soon
 Make silence.'

And a sense of tune,
 A satisfied love meanwhile
 Which nothing earthly could despoil,
 Sang on within her soul.

540

XXXVII

Oh you,
 Earth's tender and impassioned few,
 Take courage to entrust your love
 To Him so named who guards above
 Its ends and shall fulfil !

Breaking the narrow prayers that may
 Befit your narrow hearts, away
 In His broad, loving will.

550

A ROMANCE OF THE GANGES

First printed in Finden's *Tableaux* for 1838.

I

SEVEN maidens 'neath the midnight
 Stand near the river-sea
 Whose water sweepeth white around
 The shadow of the tree;
 The moon and earth are face to face,
 And earth is slumbering deep;
 The wave-voice seems the voice of dreams
 That wander through her sleep:
 The river floweth on.

II

What bring they 'neath the midnight,
 Beside the river-sea ?
 They bring the human heart wherein
 No nightly calm can be, —
 That droppeth never with the wind,
 Nor drieth with the dew:
 Oh, calm in God ! thy calm is broad
 To cover spirits too.
 The river floweth on.

10

III

The maidens lean them over
 The waters, side by side,
 And shun each other's deepening eyes,
 And gaze adown the tide;
 For each within a little boat
 A little lamp hath put,
 And heaped for freight some lily's weight
 Or scarlet rose half shut.
 The river floweth on.

20

IV

Of shell of cocoa carven
 Each little boat is made;
 Each carries a lamp, and carries a flower,
 And carries a hope unsaid;
 And when the boat hath carried the lamp
 Unquenched till out of sight,
 The maiden is sure that love will endure;
 But love will fail with light.
 The river floweth on.

31

V

Why, all the stars are ready
 To symbolize the soul,
 The stars untroubled by the wind,
 Unwearied as they roll;
 And yet the soul by instinct sad
 Reverts to symbols low —
 To that small flame, whose very name
 Breathed o'er it, shakes it so !
 The river floweth on.

VI

Six boats are on the river,
 Seven maidens on the shore,
 While still above them steadfastly
 The stars shine evermore.
 Go, little boats, go soft and safe,
 And guard the symbol spark !
 The boats aright go safe and bright
 Across the waters dark.
 The river floweth on.

VII

The maiden Luti watcheth
 Where onwardly they float:
 That look in her dilating eyes
 Might seem to drive her boat:
 Her eyes still mark the constant fire,
 And kindling unawares
 That hopeful while, she lets a smile
 Creep silent through her prayers.
 The river floweth on.

VIII

The smile — where hath it wandered ?
 She riseth from her knee,
 She holds her dark, wet locks away —
 There is no light to see !
 She cries a quick and bitter cry —
 ' Nuleeni, launch me thine !
 We must have light abroad to-night,
 For all the wreck of mine.'
 The river floweth on.

IX

' I do remember watching
 Beside this river-bed,
 When on my childish knee was leaned
 My dying father's head;
 I turned mine own to keep the tears
 From falling on his face:
 What doth it prove when Death and Love
 Choose out the self-same place ?'
 The river floweth on.

X

' They say the dead are joyful
 The death-change here receiving:
 Who say — ah me ! who dare to say
 Where joy comes to the living ?
 Thy boat, Nuleeni ! look not sad —
 Light up the waters rather !
 I weep no faithless lover where
 I wept a loving father.'
 The river floweth on.

XI

' My heart foretold his falsehood
 Ere my little boat grew dim;
 And though I closed mine eyes to dream
 That one last dream of *him*,
 They shall not now be wet to see
 The shining vision go:
 From earth's cold love I look above
 To the holy house of snow.'
 The river floweth on.

XII

' Come thou — thou never knewest
 A grief, that thou shouldst fear one !
 Thou wearest still the happy look
 That shines beneath a dear one:
 Thy humming-bird is in the sun,
 Thy cuckoo in the grove,
 And all the three broad worlds, for thee
 Are full of wandering love.'
 The river floweth on.

XIII

' Why, maiden, dost thou loiter ?
 What secret wouldst thou cover ?
 That peepul cannot hide thy boat,
 And I can guess thy lover;
 I heard thee sob his name in sleep,
 It was a name I knew:
 Come, little maid, be not afraid,
 But let us prove him true !'
 The river floweth on.

XIV

The little maiden cometh,
 She cometh shy and slow;
 I ween she seeth through her lids
 They drop adown so low:
 Her tresses meet her small bare feet,
 She stands and speaketh nought,
 Yet blusheth red as if she said
 The name she only thought.
 The river floweth on.

XV

She knelt beside the water,
 She lighted up the flame,
 And o'er her youthful forehead's calm
 The fitful radiance came: —
 'Go, little boat, go soft and safe,
 And guard the symbol spark !'
 Soft, safe doth float the little boat
 Across the waters dark.
 The river floweth on.

130

XVI

Glad tears her eyes have blinded,
 The light they cannot reach;
 She turneth with that sudden smile
 She learnt before her speech —
 'I do not hear his voice, the tears
 Have dimmed my light away,
 But the symbol light will last to-night,
 The love will last for aye !'
 The river floweth on.

140

XVII

Then Luti spake behind her,
 Outspake she bitterly —
 'By the symbol light that lasts to-night,
 Wilt vow a vow to me ?'
 Nuleeni gazeth up her face,
 Soft answer maketh she —
 'By loves that last when lights are past,
 I vow that vow to thee !'
 The river floweth on.

150

XVIII

An earthly look had Luti
 Though her voice was deep as prayer —
 'The rice is gathered from the plains
 To cast upon thine hair:
 But when *he* comes his marriage-band
 Around thy neck to throw,
 Thy bride-smile raise to meet his gaze,
 And whisper, — *There is one betrays,*
While Luti suffers woe.
 The river floweth on.

160

XIX

'And when in seasons after,
 Thy little bright-faced son
 Shall lean against thy knee and ask
 What deeds his sire hath done, —
 Press deeper down thy mother-smile
 His glossy curls among,
 View deep his pretty childish eyes,

And whisper, — *There is none denies,*
While Luti speaks of wrong.
 The river floweth on.

XX

Nuleeni looked in wonder,
 Yet softly answered she —
 'By loves that last when lights are past,
 I vowed that vow to thee:
 But why glads it thee that a bride-day be
 By a word of *woe* defiled ?
 That a word of *wrong* take the cradle-
 song
 From the ear of a sinless child ?'
 'Why ?' Luti said, and her laugh was
 dread,
 And her eyes dilated wild —
 'That the fair new love may her bride-
 groom prove,
 And the father shame the child !'
 The river floweth on.

180

XXI

'Thou flowest still, O river,
 Thou flowest 'neath the moon;
 Thy lily hath not changed a leaf,
 Thy charmed lute a tune:
 He mixed his voice with thine and *his*
 Was all I heard around;
 But now, beside his chosen bride,
 I hear the river's sound.'
 The river floweth on.

190

XXII

'I gaze upon her beauty
 Through the tresses that enwreath it;
 The light above thy wave, is hers —
 My rest, alone beneath it:
 Oh, give me back the dying look
 My father gave thy water !
 Give back — and let a little love
 O'erwatch thy weary daughter !'
 The river floweth on.

200

XXIII

'Give back !' she hath departed —
 The word is wandering with her;
 And the stricken maidens hear afar
 The step and cry together.
 Frail symbols ? None are frail enow
 For mortal joys to borrow ! —
 While bright doth float Nuleeni's boat,
 She weepeth dark with sorrow.
 The river floweth on.

210

AN ISLAND

'All goeth but Goddis will.' — *Old Poet.*

First printed in the *New Monthly Magazine*,
January, 1837.

I

My dream is of an island-place
Which distant seas keep lonely,
A little island on whose face
The stars are watchers only:
Those bright still stars! they need not
seem
Brighter or stiller in my dream.

II

An island full of hills and dells,
All rumpled and uneven
With green recesses, sudden swells,
And odorous valleys driven
So deep and straight that always there
The wind is cradled to soft air.

III

Hills running up to heaven for light
Through woods that half-way ran,
As if the wild earth mimicked right
The wilder heart of man:
Only it shall be greener far
And gladder than hearts ever are.

IV

More like, perhaps, that mountain piece
Of Dante's paradise,
Disrupt to an hundred hills like these,
In falling from the skies;
Bringing within it, all the roots
Of heavenly trees and flowers and fruits:

V

For — saving where the gray rocks strike
Their javelins up the azure,
Or where deep fissures miser-like
Hoard up some fountain treasure,
(And e'en in them, stoop down and hear,
Leaf sounds with water in your ear,) —

VI

The place is all awave with trees,
Limes, myrtles purple-beaded,
Acacias having drunk the lees
Of the night-dew, faint-headed,
And wan gray olive-woods which seem
The fittest foliage for a dream.

VII

Trees, trees on all sides! they combine
Their plummy shades to throw,
Through whose clear fruit and blossom
fine
Whene'er the sun may go,
The ground beneath he deeply stains,
As passing through cathedral panes.

VIII

But little needs this earth of ours
That shining from above her,
When many Pleiades of flowers
(Not one lost) star her over,
The rays of their unnumbered hues
Being all refracted by the dew.

IX

Wide-petalled plants that boldly drink
The Amreeta of the sky,
Shut bells that dull with rapture sink,
And lolling buds, half shy;
I cannot count them, but between
Is room for grass and mosses green,

X

And brooks, that glass in different strengths
All colors in disorder,
Or, gathering up their silver lengths
Beside their winding border,
Sleep, haunted through the slumber hidden,
By lilies white as dreams in Eden.

XI

Nor think each archèd tree with each
Too closely interlaces
To admit of vistas out of reach,
And broad moon-lighted places
Upon whose sward the antlered deer
May view their double image clear.

XII

For all this island's creature-full,
(Kept happy not by halves)
Mild cows, that at the vine-wreaths pull,
Then low back at their calves
With tender lowings, to approve
The warm mouths milking them for love.

XIII

Free gamesome horses, antelopes,
And harmless leaping leopards,
And buffaloes upon the slopes,
And sheep unrulèd by shepherds:

Hares, lizards, hedgehogs, badgers, mice,
Snakes, squirrels, frogs, and butterflies.

XIV

And birds that live there in a crowd,
Horned owls, rapt nightingales,
Larks bold with heaven, and peacocks proud,
Self-sphered in those grand tails;
All creatures glad and safe, I deem.
No guns nor springes in my dream !

XV

The island's edges are a-wing
With trees that overbranch
The sea with song-birds welcoming
The curlews to green change;
And doves from half-closed lids espy
The red and purple fish go by.

XVI

One dove is answering in trust
The water every minute,
Thinking so soft a murmur must
Have her mate's cooing in it:
So softly doth earth's beauty round
Infuse itself in ocean's sound.

XVII

My sanguine soul bounds forwarder
To meet the bounding waves;
Beside them straightway I repair,
To live within the caves:
And near me two or three may dwell
Whom dreams fantastic please as well.

XVIII

Long winding caverns, glittering far
Into a crystal distance !
Through clefts of which shall many a star
Shine clear without resistance,
And carry down its rays the smell
Of flowers above invisible.

XIX

I said that two or three might choose
Their dwelling near mine own:
Those who would change man's voice and
use,

For Nature's way and tone —
Man's veering heart and careless eyes,
For Nature's steadfast sympathies.

XX

Ourselves, to meet her faithfulness,
Shall play a faithful part;

Her beautiful shall ne'er address
The monstrous at our heart:
Her musical shall ever touch
Something within us also such.

XXI

Yet shall she not our mistress live,
As doth the moon of ocean,
Though gently as the moon she give
Our thoughts a light and motion:
More like a harp of many lays,
Moving its master while he plays.

XXII

No sod in all that island doth
Yawn open for the dead;
No wind hath borne a traitor's oath;
No earth, a mourner's tread;
We cannot say by stream or shade,
'I suffered *here*, — was *here* betrayed.'

XXIII

Our only 'farewell' we shall laugh
To shifting cloud or hour,
And use our only epitaph
To some bud turned a flower:
Our only tears shall serve to prove
Excess in pleasure or in love.

XXIV

Our fancies shall their plumage catch
From fairest island-birds,
Whose eggs let young ones out at hatch,
Born singing ! then our words
Unconsciously shall take the dyes
Of those prodigious fantasies.

XXV

Yea, soon, no consonant unsmooth
Our smile-tuned lips shall reach;
Sounds sweet as Hellas spake in youth
Shall glide into our speech:
(What music, certes, can you find
As soft as voices which are kind ?)

XXVI

And often, by the joy without
And in us, overcome,
We, through our musing, shall let float
Such poems, — sitting dumb, —
As Pindar might have writ if he
Had tended sheep in Arcady;

XXVII

Or Æschylus — the pleasant fields
 He died in, longer knowing;
 Or Homer, had men's sins and shields
 Been lost in Meles flowing;
 Or Poet Plato, had the undim
 Unsetting Godlight broke on him.

XXVIII

Choose me the cave most worthy choice,
 To make a place for prayer,
 And I will choose a praying voice
 To pour our spirits there:
 How silverly the echoes run!
Thy will be done, — thy will be done.

XXIX

Gently yet strangely uttered words!
 They lift me from my dream;
 The island fadeth with its swords
 That did no more than seem:
 The streams are dry, no sun could find —
 The fruits are fallen, without wind.

XXX

So oft the doing of God's will
 Our foolish wills undoeth!
 And yet what idle dream breaks ill,
 Which morning-light subdueth?
 And who would murmur and misdoubt,
 When God's great sunrise finds him out?

THE DESERTED GARDEN

I MIND me in the days departed,
 How often underneath the sun
 With childish bounds I used to run
 To a garden long deserted.

The beds and walks were vanished quite;
 And wheresoe'er had struck the spade,
 The greenest grasses Nature laid
 To sanctify her right.

I called the place my wilderness,
 For no one entered there but I;
 The sheep looked in, the grass to espy,
 And passed it ne'ertheless.

The trees were interwoven wild,
 And spread their boughs enough about
 To keep both sheep and shepherd out,
 But not a happy child.

Adventurous joy it was for me!
 I crept beneath the boughs, and found
 A circle smooth of mossy ground
 Beneath a poplar tree.

Old garden rose-trees hedged it in,
 Bedropt with roses waxen-white
 Well satisfied with dew and light
 And careless to be seen.

Long years ago it might befall,
 When all the garden flowers were trim,
 The grave old gardener prided him
 On these the most of all.

Some lady, stately overmuch,
 Here moving with a silken noise,
 Has blushed beside them at the voice
 That likened her to such.

And these, to make a diadem,
 She often may have plucked and twined,
 Half-smiling as it came to mind
 That few would look at *them*.

Oh, little thought that lady proud,
 A child would watch her fair white rose,
 When buried lay her whiter brows,
 And silk was changed for shroud!

Nor thought that gardener, (full of scorn
 For men unlearned and simple phrase,)
 A child would bring it all its praise
 By creeping through the thorns!

To me upon my low moss seat,
 Though never a dream the roses sent
 Of science or love's compliment,
 I ween they smelt as sweet.

It did not move my grief to see
 The trace of human step departed:
 Because the garden was deserted,
 The blither place for me!

Friends, blame me not! a narrow ken
 Has childhood 'twixt the sun and sward;
 We draw the moral afterward,
 We feel the gladness then.

And gladdest hours for me did glide
 In silence at the rose-tree wall:
 A thrush made gladness musical
 Upon the other side.

Nor he nor I did e'er incline
To peck or pluck the blossoms white;
How should I know but roses might
Lead lives as glad as mine ?

To make my hermit-home complete,
I brought clear water from the spring
Praised in its own low murmuring,
And cresses glossy wet.

And so, I thought, my likeness grew
(Without the melancholy tale)
To 'gentle hermit of the dale,'
And Angelina too.

For oft I read within my nook
Such minstrel stories; till the breeze
Made sounds poetic in the trees,
And then I shut the book.

If I shut this wherein I write
I hear no more the wind athwart
Those trees, nor feel that childish heart
Delighting in delight.

My childhood from my life is parted,
My footstep from the moss which drew
Its fairy circle round: anew
The garden is deserted.

Another thrush may there rehearse
The madrigals which sweetest are;
No more for me ! myself afar
Do sing a sadder verse.

Ah me, ah me ! when erst I lay
In that child's-nest so greenly wrought,
I laughed unto myself and thought
'The time will pass away.'

And still I laughed, and did not fear
But that, whene'er was past away
The childish time, some happier play
My womanhood would cheer.

I knew the time would pass away,
And yet, beside the rose-tree wall,
Dear God, how seldom, if at all,
Did I look up to pray !

The time is past; and now that grows
The cypress high among the trees,
And I behold white sepulchres
As well as the white rose,—

When graver, meeker thoughts are given,
And I have learnt to lift my face,
Reminded how earth's greenest place
The color draws from heaven, —

It something saith for earthly pain,
But more for Heavenly promise free,
That I who was, would shrink to be
That happy child again.

THE SOUL'S TRAVELLING

‘*Ἦδη νοερός
Πέρασαι ταρσούς,*’ — *Synesius.*

I

I DWELL amid the city ever.
The great humanity which beats
Its life along the stony streets,
Like a strong and unsunned river
In a self-made course,
I sit and hearken while it rolls.
Very sad and very hoarse
Certes is the flow of souls;
Infinitest tendencies
By the finite prest and pent, 10
In the finite, turbulent:
How we tremble in surprise
When sometimes, with an awful sound,
God's great plummet strikes the ground !

II

The champ of the steeds on the silver
bit,
As they whirl the rich man's carriage by;
The beggar's whine as he looks at it,—
But it goes too fast for charity;
The trail on the street of the poor man's
broom,
That the lady who walks to her palace-
home, 20
On her silken skirt may catch no dust;
The tread of the business-men who must
Count their per-cents by the paces they take;
The cry of the babe unheard of its mother
Though it lie on her breast, while she thinks
of her other
Laid yesterday where it will not wake;
The flower-girl's prayer to buy roses and
pinks
Held out in the smoke, like stars by day;
The gin-door's oath that hollowly chinks
Guilt upon grief and wrong upon hate; 30

The cabman's cry to get out of the way;
 The dustman's call down the area-grate;
 The young maid's jest, and the old wife's
 scold,
 The haggling talk of the boys at a stall,
 The fight in the street which is backed for
 gold,
 The plea of the lawyers in Westminster
 Hall;
 The drop on the stones of the blind man's
 staff
 As he trades in his own grief's sacred-
 ness,
 The brothel shriek, and the Newgate
 laugh,
 The hum upon 'Change, and the organ's
 grinding, 40
 (The grinder's face being nevertheless
 Dry and vacant of even woe
 While the children's hearts are leaping
 so
 At the merry music's winding;)
 The black-plumed funeral's creeping train,
 Long and slow (and yet they will go
 As fast as Life though it hurry and strain !)
 Creeping the populous houses through
 And nodding their plumes at either side, —
 At many a house, where an infant, new 50
 To the sunshiny world, has just struggled
 and cried, —
 At many a house where sitteth a bride
 Trying to-morrow's coronals
 With a scarlet blush to-day:
 Slowly creep the funerals,
 As none should hear the noise and say
 'The living, the living must go away
 To multiply the dead.'
 Hark ! an upward shout is sent,
 In grave strong joy from tower to steeple
 The bells ring out, 61
 The trumpets sound, the people shout,
 The young queen goes to her Parliament.
 She turneth round her large blue eyes
 More bright with childish memories
 Than royal hopes, upon the people;
 On either side she bows her head
 Lowly, with a queenly grace
 And smile most trusting-innocent,
 As if she smiled upon her mother; 70
 The thousands press before each other
 To bless her to her face;
 And booms the deep majestic voice
 Through trump and drum, — 'May the
 queen rejoice
 In the people's liberties !'

III

I dwell amid the city,
 And hear the flow of souls in act and speech,
 For pomp or trade, for merrymake or
 folly:
 I hear the confluence and sum of each,
 And that is melancholy ! 80
 Thy voice is a complaint, O crownèd city,
 The blue sky covering thee like God's
 great pity.

IV

O blue sky ! it mindeth me
 Of places where I used to see
 Its vast unbroken circle thrown
 From the far pale-peaked hill
 Out to the last verge of ocean,
 As by God's arm it were done
 Then for the first time, with the emotion
 Of that first impulse on it still. 90
 Oh, we spirits fly at will
 Faster than the wingèd steed
 Whereof in old book we read,
 With the sunlight foaming back
 From his flanks to a misty wrack,
 And his nostril reddening proud
 As he breasteth the steep thunder-cloud, —
 Smoother than Sabrina's chair
 Gliding up from wave to air,
 While she smileth debonaire 100
 Yet holy, coldly and yet brightly,
 Like her own mooned waters nightly,
 Through her dripping hair.

V

Very fast and smooth we fly,
 Spirits, though the flesh be by;
 All looks feed not from the eye
 Nor all hearings from the ear:
 We can hearken and espy
 Without either, we can journey
 Bold and gay as knight to tourney, 110
 And, though we wear no visor down
 To dark our countenance, the foe
 Shall never chafe us as we go.

VI

I am gone from peopled town !
 It passeth its street-thunder round
 My body which yet hears no sound,
 For now another sound, another
 Vision, my soul's senses have —
 O'er a hundred valleys deep
 Where the hills' green shadows sleep 120

Scarce known because the valley-trees
 Cross those upland images,
 O'er a hundred hills each other
 Watching to the western wave,
 I have travelled, — I have found
 The silent, lone, remembered ground.

VII

I have found a grassy niche
 Hollowed in a seaside hill,
 As if the ocean-grandeur which
 Is aspectable from the place,
 Had struck the hill as with a mace
 Sudden and cleaving. You might fill
 That little nook with the little cloud
 Which sometimes lieth by the moon
 To beautify a night of June;
 A cavelike nook which, opening all
 To the wide sea, is disallowed
 From its own earth's sweet pastoral:
 Cavelike, but roofless overhead
 And made of verdant banks instead
 Of any rocks, with flowerets spread
 Instead of spar and stalactite,
 Cowslips and daisies gold and white:
 Such pretty flowers on such green sward,
 You think the sea they look toward
 Doth serve them for another sky
 As warm and blue as that on high.

VIII

And in this hollow is a seat,
 And when you shall have crept to it,
 Slipping down the banks too steep
 To be o'erbrows'd by the sheep,
 Do not think — though at your feet
 The cliff's disrupt — you shall behold
 The line where earth and ocean meet;
 You sit too much above to view
 The solemn confluence of the two:
 You can hear them as they greet,
 You can hear that evermore
 Distance-softened noise more old
 Than Nereid's singing, the tide spent
 Joining soft issues with the shore
 In harmony of discontent,
 And when you hearken to the grave
 Lamenting of the underwave,
 You must believe in earth's communion
 Albeit you witness not the union.

IX

Except that sound, the place is full
 Of silences, which when you cull
 By any word, it thrills you so

That presently you let them grow
 To meditation's fullest length
 Across your soul with a soul's strength:
 And as they touch your soul, they borrow
 Both of its grandeur and its sorrow,
 That deathly odor which the clay
 Leaves on its deathlessness away.

X

Always! always? must this be?
 Rapid Soul from city gone,
 Dost thou carry inwardly
 What doth make the city's moan?
 Must this deep sigh of thine own
 Haunt thee with humanity?
 Green visioned banks that are too steep
 To be o'erbrows'd by the sheep,
 May all sad thoughts adown you creep
 Without a shepherd? Mighty sea,
 Can we dwarf thy magnitude
 And fit it to our straitest mood?
 O fair, fair Nature, are we thus
 Impotent and querulous
 Among thy workings glorious,
 Wealth and sanctities, that still
 Leave us vacant and defiled
 And wailing like a soft-kissed child,
 Kissed soft against his will?

XI

God, God!
 With a child's voice I cry,
 Weak, sad, confidently —
 God, God!
 Thou knowest, eyelids, raised not always
 up
 Unto thy love, (as none of ours are)
 droop
 As ours, o'er many a tear;
 Thou knowest, though thy universe is
 broad,
 Two little tears suffice to cover all:
 Thou knowest, Thou who art so prodigal
 Of beauty, we are oft but stricken deer
 Expiring in the woods, that care for none
 Of those delightful flowers they die
 upon.

XII

O blissful Mouth which breathed the
 mournful breath
 We name our souls, self-spoilt! — by that
 strong passion
 Which paled Thee once with sighs, by that
 strong death

Which made Thee once unbreathing —
 from the wrack
 Themselves have called around them, call
 them back,
 Back to Thee in continuous aspiration !
 For here, O Lord,
 For here they travel vainly, vainly pass
 From city-pavement to untrodden sward
 Where the lark finds her deep nest in the
 grass
 Cold with the earth's last dew. Yea, very
 vain
 The greatest speed of all these souls of men
 Unless they travel upward to the throne ²²¹
 Where sittest THOU the satisfying ONE,
 With help for sins and holy perfectings
 For all requirements: while the archangel,
 raising
 Unto thy face his full ecstatic gazing,
 Forgets the rush and rapture of his wings.

SOUNDS

‘*Ἦκουσας ἢ οὐκ ἤκουσας.*’ — *Æschylus.*

I

HEARKEN, hearken !
 The rapid river carrieth
 Many noises underneath
 The hoary ocean:
 Teaching his solemnity
 Sounds of inland life and glee
 Learnt beside the waving tree
 When the winds in summer prank
 Toss the shades from bank to bank,
 And the quick rains, in emotion ¹⁰
 Which rather gladdens earth than grieves,
 Count and visibly rehearse
 The pulses of the universe
 Upon the summer leaves —
 Learnt among the lilies straight
 When they bow them to the weight
 Of many bees whose hidden hum
 Seemeth from themselves to come —
 Learnt among the grasses green
 Where the rustling mice are seen ²⁰
 By the gleaming, as they run,
 Of their quick eyes in the sun;
 And lazy sheep are browsing through
 With their noses trailed in dew;
 And the squirrel leaps adown
 Holding fast the filbert brown;
 And the lark, with more of mirth
 In his song than suits the earth,

Droppeth some in soaring high,
 To pour the rest out in the sky ; ³⁰
 While the woodland doves apart
 In the copse's leafy heart,
 Solitary, not ascetic,
 Hidden and yet vocal, seem
 Joining, in a lovely psalm,
 Man's despondence, nature's calm,
 Half mystical and half pathetic,
 Like a singing in a dream.
 All these sounds the river telleth,
 Softened to an undertone ⁴⁰
 Which ever and anon he swelleth
 By a burden of his own,
 In the ocean's ear:
 Ay, and ocean seems to hear
 With an inward gentle scorn,
 Smiling to his caverns worn.

II

Hearken, hearken !
 The child is shouting at his play
 Just in the tramping funeral's way;
 The widow moans as she turns aside ⁵⁰
 To shun the face of the blushing bride
 While, shaking the tower of the ancient
 church,
 The marriage bells do swing;
 And in the shadow of the porch
 An idiot sits with his lean hands full
 Of hedgerow flowers and a poet's skull,
 Laughing loud and gibbering
 Because it is so brown a thing,
 While he sticketh the gaudy poppies red
 In and out the senseless head ⁶⁰
 Where all sweet fancies grew instead:
 And you may hear at the self-same time
 Another poet who reads his rhyme,
 Low as a brook in summer air,
 Save when he droppeth his voice adown
 To dream of the amaranthine crown
 His mortal brows shall wear:
 And a baby cries with a feeble sound
 'Neath the weary weight of the life new-
 found,
 And an old man groans, — with his testa-
 ment ⁷⁰
 Only half-signed, — for the life that's spent;
 And lovers twain do softly say,
 As they sit on a grave, 'For aye, for aye !'
 And foemen twain, while Earth their mother
 Looks greenly upward, curse each other;
 A school-boy drones his task, with looks
 Cast over the page to the elm-tree rooks;
 A lonely student cries aloud

Eureka! clasping at his shroud;
 A beldame's age-cracked voice doth sing 80
 To a little infant slumbering;
 A maid forgotten weeps alone,
 Muffling her sobs on the trysting-stone;
 A sick man wakes at his own mouth's wail,
 A gossip coughs in her thrice-told tale,
 A muttering gamester shakes the dice,
 A reaper foretells goodluck from the skies,
 A monarch vows as he lifts his hand to them;
 A patriot, leaving his native land to them,
 Cries to the world against perjured state; 90
 A priest disserts
 Upon linen skirts,
 A sinner screams for one hope more,
 A dancer's feet do palpitate
 A piper's music out on the floor;
 And nigh to the awful Dead, the living
 Low speech and stealthy steps are giving,
 Because he cannot hear;
 And *he* who on that narrow bier
 Has room enough, is closely wound 100
 In a silence piercing more than sound.

III

Hearken, hearken!
 God speaketh to thy soul,
 Using the supreme voice which doth con-
 found
 All life with consciousness of Deity,
 All senses into one, —
 As the seer-saint of Patmos, loving John
 (For whom did backward roll
 The cloud-gate of the future) turned to *see*
 The Voice which spake. It speaketh now,
 Through the regular breath of the calm
 creation, 111
 Through the moan of the creature's desola-
 tion
 Striking, and in its stroke resembling
 The memory of a solemn vow
 Which pierceth the din of a festival
 To one in the midst, — and he letteth fall
 The cup with a sudden trembling.

IV

Hearken, hearken!
 God speaketh in thy soul,
 Saying, 'O thou that movest 120
 With feeble steps across this earth of Mine,
 To break beside the fount thy golden bowl
 And spill its purple wine, —
 Look up to heaven and see how, like a
 scroll,
 My right hand hath thine immortality

In an eternal grasping! thou, that lovest
 The songful birds and grasses underfoot,
 And also what change mars and tombs
 pollute —

I am the end of love! give love to Me!
 O thou that sinnest, grace doth more
 abound 130
 Than all thy sin! sit still beneath My rood,
 And count the droppings of My victim-
 blood,
 And seek none other sound!'

V

Hearken, hearken!
 Shall we hear the lapsing river
 And our brother's sighing ever,
 And not the voice of God?

NIGHT AND THE MERRY MAN

NIGHT

'NEATH my moon what doest thou,
 With a somewhat paler brow
 Than she giveth to the ocean?
 He, without a pulse or motion,
 Muttering low before her stands,
 Lifting his invoking hands
 Like a seer before a sprite,
 To catch her oracles of light:
 But thy soul out-trembles now
 Many pulses on thy brow. 10
 Where be all thy laughs clear,
 Others laughed alone to hear?
 Where thy quaint jests, said for fame?
 Where thy dances, mixed with game?
 Where thy festive companies,
 Moonèd o'er with ladies' eyes
 All more bright for thee, I trow?
 'Neath my moon what doest thou?

THE MERRY MAN

I am digging my warm heart
 Till I find its coldest part; 20
 I am digging wide and low,
 Further than a spade will go,
 Till that, when the pit is deep
 And large enough, I there may heap
 All my present pain and past
 Joy, dead things that look aghast
 By the daylight: now 't is done.
 Throw them in, by one and one!
 I must laugh, at rising sun.

Memories — of fancy's golden 30
 Treasures which my hands have holden,
 Till the chillness made them ache;
 Of childhood's hopes that used to wake
 If birds were in a singing strain,
 And for less cause, sleep again;
 Of the moss-seat in the wood
 Where I tryed solitude;
 Of the hill-top where the wind
 Used to follow me behind,
 Then in sudden rush to blind 40
 Both my glad eyes with my hair,
 Taken gladly in the snare;
 Of the climbing up the rocks,
 Of the playing 'neath the oaks
 Which retain beneath them now
 Only shadow of the bough;
 Of the lying on the grass
 While the clouds did overpass,
 Only they, so lightly driven,
 Seeming betwixt me and Heaven; 50
 Of the little prayers serene,
 Murmuring of earth and sin;
 Of large-leaved philosophy
 Leaning from my childish knee;
 Of poetic book sublime,
 Soul-kissed for the first dear time,
 Greek or English, ere I knew
 Life was not a poem too: —
 Throw them in, by one and one !
 I must laugh, at rising sun. 60

— Of the glorious ambitions
 Yet unquenched by their fruitions;
 Of the reading out the nights;
 Of the straining at mad heights;
 Of achievements, less descried
 By a dear few than magnified;
 Of praises from the many earned
 When praise from love was undiscerned;
 Of the sweet reflecting gladness
 Softened by itself to sadness: — 70
 Throw them in, by one and one !
 I must laugh, at rising sun.

What are these ? more, more than these !
 Throw in dearer memories ! —
 Of voices whereof but to speak
 Makes mine own all sunk and weak;
 Of smiles the thought of which is sweeping
 All my soul to floods of weeping;
 Of looks whose absence fain would weigh
 My looks to the ground for aye; 80
 Of clasping hands — ah me, I wring
 Mine, and in a tremble fling

Downward, downward all this paining !
 Partings with the sting remaining,
 Meetings with a deeper throe
 Since the joy is ruined so,
 Changes with a fiery burning,
 (Shadows upon all the turning,)
 Thoughts of . . . with a storm they came,
 Them I have not breath to name: 90
 Downward, downward be they cast
 In the pit ! and now at last
 My work beneath the moon is done,
 And I shall laugh, at rising sun.

But let me pause or ere I cover
 All my treasures darkly over:
 I will speak not in thine ears,
 Only tell my beaded tears
 Silently, most silently.
 When the last is calmly told, 100
 Let that same moist rosary
 With the rest sepulchred be,
 Finished now ! The darksome mould
 Sealeth up the darksome pit.
 I will lay no stone on it,
 Grasses I will sow instead,
 Fit for Queen Titania's tread;
 Flowers, encolored with the sun,
 And *at at* written upon none;
 Thus, whenever saileth by 110
 The Lady World of dainty eye,
 Not a grief shall here remain,
 Silken shoon to damp or stain:
 And while she lisps, 'I have not seen
 Any place more smooth and clean' . . .
 Here she cometh ! — Ha, ha ! — who
 Laughs as loud as I can do ?

EARTH AND HER PRAISERS

I

THE Earth is old;
 Six thousand winters make her heart
 a-cold;
 The sceptre slanteth from her palsied hold.
 She saith, 'Las me ! God's word that I
 was "good"
 Is taken back to heaven,
 From whence when any sound comes, I am
 riven
 By some sharp bolt; and now no angel
 would
 Descend with sweet dew-silence on my
 mountains,

To glorify the lovely river fountains
 That gush along their side: ¹⁰
 I see — O weary change ! — I see instead
 This human wrath and pride,
 These thrones and tombs, judicial wrong
 and blood,
 And bitter words are poured upon mine
 head —
 "O Earth ! thou art a stage for tricks un-
 holy,
 A church for most remorseful melancholy;
 Thou art so spoilt, we should forget we
 had
 An Eden in thee, wert thou not so sad !"
 Sweet children, I am old ! ye, every one,
 Do keep me from a portion of my sun. ²⁰
 Give praise in change for brightness !
 That I may shake my hills in infiniteness
 Of breezy laughter, as in youthful mirth,
 To hear Earth's sons and daughters
 praising Earth.'

II

Whereupon a child began
 With spirit running up to man
 As by angels' shining ladder,
 (May he find no cloud above !)
 Seeming he had ne'er been sadder
 All his days than now, ³⁰
 Sitting in the chestnut grove,
 With that joyous overflow
 Of smiling from his mouth o'er brow
 And cheek and chin, as if the breeze
 Leaning tricky from the trees
 To part his golden hairs, had blown
 Into an hundred smiles that one.

III

'O rare, rare Earth !' he saith,
 'I will praise thee presently;
 Not to-day; I have no breath: ⁴⁰
 I have hunted squirrels three —
 Two ran down in the furzy hollow
 Where I could not see nor follow,
 One sits at the top of the filbert-tree,
 With a yellow nut and a mock at me:
 Presently it shall be done !
 When I see which way these two have
 run,
 When the mocking one at the filbert-top
 Shall leap adown and beside me stop,
 Then, rare Earth, rare Earth, ⁵⁰
 Will I pause, having known thy worth,
 To say all good of thee !'

IV

Next a lover, — with a dream
 'Neath his waking eyelids hidden,
 And a frequent sigh unbidden,
 And an idlesse all the day
 Beside a wandering stream,
 And a silence that is made
 Of a word he dares not say, —
 Shakes slow his pensive head: ⁶⁰
 'Earth, Earth !' saith he,
 'If spirits, like thy roses, grew
 On one stalk, and winds austere
 Could but only blow them near,
 To share each other's dew; —
 If, when summer rains agree
 To beautify thy hills, I knew
 Looking off them I might see
 Some one very beauteous too, —
 Then Earth,' saith he, ⁷⁰
 'I would praise . . . nay, nay — not
 thee !'

V

Will the pedant name her next ?
 Crabbed with a crabbed text
 Sits he in his study nook,
 With his elbow on a book,
 And with stately crossed knees,
 And a wrinkle deeply thrird
 Through his lowering brow,
 Caused by making proofs enow
 That Plato in 'Parmenides' ⁸⁰
 Meant the same Spinoza did, —
 Or, that an hundred of the groping
 Like himself, had made one Homer,
Homeros being a misnomer.
 What hath *he* to do with praise
 Of Earth or aught ? Whene'er the
 sloping
 Sunbeams through his window daze
 His eyes off from the learned phrase,
 Straightway he draws close the curtain.
 May abstraction keep him dumb ! ⁹⁰
 Were his lips to ope, 't is certain
 '*Derivatum est*' would come.

VI

Then a mourner moveth pale
 In a silence full of wail,
 Raising not his sunken head
 Because he wandered last that way
 With that one beneath the clay:
 Weeping not, because that one,
 The only one who would have said

'Cease to weep, beloved !' has gone 100
 Whence returneth comfort none.
 The silence breaketh suddenly, —
 'Earth, I praise thee !' crieth he,
 'Thou hast a grave for also me.'

VII

Ha, a poet ! know him by
 The ecstasy-dilated eye,
 Not uncharged with tears that ran
 Upward from his heart of man ;
 By the cheek, from hour to hour,
 Kindled bright or sunken wan 110
 With a sense of lonely power ;
 By the brow uplifted higher
 Than others, for more low declining :
 By the lip which words of fire
 Overboiling have burned white
 While they gave the nations light :
 Ay, in every time and place
 Ye may know the poet's face
 By the shade or shining.

VIII

'Neath a golden cloud he stands, 120
 Spreading his impassioned hands.
 'O God's Earth !' he saith, 'the sign
 From the Father-soul to mine
 Of all beauteous mysteries,
 Of all perfect images
 Which, divine in his divine,
 In my human only are
 Very excellent and fair !
 Think not, Earth, that I would raise
 Weary forehead in thy praise, 130
 (Weary, that I cannot go
 Farther from thy region low,)
 If were struck no richer meanings
 From thee than thyself. The leanings
 Of the close trees o'er the brim
 Of a sunshine-haunted stream
 Have a sound beneath their leaves,
 Not of wind, not of wind,
 Which the poet's voice achieves :
 The faint mountains, heaped behind, 140
 Have a falling on their tops,
 Not of dew, not of dew,
 Which the poet's fancy drops :
 Viewless things his eyes can view,
 Driftings of his dream do light
 All the skies by day and night,
 And the seas that deepest roll
 Carry murmurs of his soul.
 Earth, I praise thee ! praise thou me !
 God perfecteth his creation 150

With this recipient poet-passion,
 And makes the beautiful to be.
 I praise thee, O beloved sign,
 From the God-soul unto mine !
 Praise me, that I cast on thee
 The cunning sweet interpretation,
 The help and glory and dilation
 Of mine immortality !'

IX

There was silence. None did dare
 To use again the spoken air 160
 Of that far-charming voice, until
 A Christian resting on the hill,
 With a thoughtful smile subdued
 (Seeming learnt in solitude)
 Which a weeper might have viewed
 Without new tears, did softly say,
 And looked up unto heaven alway
 While he praised the Earth —

'O Earth,
 I count the praises thou art worth,
 By thy waves that move aloud, 170
 By thy hills against the cloud,
 By thy valleys warm and green,
 By the copses' elms between,
 By their birds which, like a sprite
 Scattered by a strong delight
 Into fragments musical,
 Stir and sing in every bush ;
 By thy silver founts that fall,
 As if to entice the stars at night
 To thine heart ; by grass and rush, 180
 And little weeds the children pull,
 Mistook for flowers !

— Oh, beautiful
 Art thou, Earth, albeit worse
 Than in heaven is called good !
 Good to us, that we may know
 Meekly from thy good to go ;
 While the holy, crying Blood
 Puts its music kind and low
 'Twixt such ears as are not dull,
 And thine ancient curse ! 190

X

'Praisèd be the mosses soft
 In thy forest pathways oft,
 And the thorns, which make us think
 Of the thornless river-brink
 Where the ransomed tread :
 Praisèd be thy sunny gleams,
 And the storm, that worketh dreams
 Of calm unfinished :
 Praisèd be thine active days,

And thy night-time's solemn need, 200
When in God's dear book we read

No night shall be therein :

Praised be thy dwellings warm
By household fagot's cheerful blaze,
Where, to hear of pardoned sin,
Pauseth oft the merry din,
Save the babe's upon the arm
Who croweth to the crackling wood:
Yea, and, better understood,
Praised be thy dwellings cold,
Hid beneath the churchyard mould, 210
Where the bodies of the saints
Separate from earthly taints
Lie asleep, in blessing bound,
Waiting for the trumpet's sound
To free them into blessing; — none
Weeping more beneath the sun,
Though dangerous words of human love
Be graven very near, above.

XI

'Earth, we Christians praise thee thus,
Even for the change that comes 221
With a grief from thee to us:
For thy cradles and thy tombs,
For the pleasant corn and wine
And summer-heat; and also for
The frost upon the sycamore
And hail upon the vine !'

THE VIRGIN MARY TO THE CHILD JESUS

'But see the Virgin blest
Hath laid her babe to rest.'

— MILTON'S *Hymn on the Nativity*.

I

SLEEP, sleep, mine Holy One !
My flesh, my Lord ! — what name ? I do
not know
A name that seemeth not too high or low,
Too far from me or heaven:
My Jesus, *that* is best ! that word being
given
By the majestic angel whose command
Was softly as a man's beseeching said,
When I and all the earth appeared to
stand
In the great overflow
Of light celestial from his wings and
head. 10
Sleep, sleep, my saving One !

II

And art Thou come for saving, baby-
browed
And speechless Being — art Thou come for
saving ?
The palm that grows beside our door is
bowed
By treadings of the low wind from the
south,
A restless shadow through the chamber
waving:
Upon its bough a bird sings in the sun,
But Thou, with that close slumber on thy
mouth,
Dost seem of wind and sun already weary.
Art come for saving, O my weary One ? 20

III

Perchance this sleep that shutteth out the
dreary
Earth-sounds and motions, opens on thy
soul
High dreams on fire with God;
High songs that make the pathways where
they roll
More bright than stars do theirs; and vi-
sions new
Of thine eternal Nature's old abode.
Suffer this mother's kiss,
Best thing that earthly is,
To glide the music and the glory through,
Nor narrow in thy dream the broad up-
liftings 30
Of any seraph wing.
Thus noiseless, thus. Sleep, sleep, my
dreaming One !

IV

The slumber of his lips meseems to run
Through *my* lips to mine heart, to all its
shiftings
Of sensual life, bringing contrariousness
In a great calm. I feel I could lie down
As Moses did, and die, — and then live
most.
I am 'ware of you, heavenly Presences,
That stand with your peculiar light unlost,
Each forehead with a high thought for a
crown, 40
Unsunned i' the sunshine ! I am 'ware.
Ye throw
No shade against the wall ! How motion-
less
Ye round me with your living statuary,

While through your whiteness, in and outwardly,

Continual thoughts of God appear to go,
Like light's soul in itself. I bear, I bear
To look upon the dropt lids of your eyes,
Though their external shining testifies
To that beatitude within which were
Enough to blast an eagle at his sun: 50

I fall not on my sad clay face before ye, —
I look on his. I know

My spirit which dilateth with the woe
Of his mortality,
May well contain your glory.
Yea, drop your lids more low.

Ye are but fellow-worshippers with me !
Sleep, sleep, my worshipped One !

V

We sate among the stalls at Bethlehem;
The dumb kine from their fodder turning
them, 60

Softened their hornèd faces
To almost human gazes
Toward the newly Born:

The simple shepherds from the star-lit
brooks

Brought visionary looks,
As yet in their astonied hearing rung
The strange sweet angel-tongue:

The magi of the East, in sandals worn,
Knelt reverent, sweeping round,
With long pale beards, their gifts upon
the ground, 70

The incense, myrrh and gold
These baby hands were impotent to hold:
So let all earthlies and celestials wait
Upon thy royal state.
Sleep, sleep, my kingly One !

VI

I am not proud — meek angels, ye invest
New meeknesses to hear such utterance
rest

On mortal lips, — 'I am not proud' —
not proud !

Albeit in my flesh God sent his Son,
Albeit over Him my head is bowed 80
As others bow before Him, still mine heart
Bows lower than their knees. O centuries
That roll in vision your futurities

My future grave athwart, —
Whose murmurs seem to reach me while I
keep
Watch o'er this sleep, —

Say of me as the Heavenly said — 'Thou
art

The blesseddest of women !' — blesseddest,
Not holiest, not noblest, no high name
Whose height misplaced may pierce me
like a shame 90

When I sit meek in heaven !

For me, for me,
God knows that I am feeble like the rest !
I often wandered forth, more child than
maiden

Among the midnight hills of Galilee

Whose summits looked heaven-laden,
Listening to silence as it seemed to be
God's voice, so soft yet strong, so fain to
press

Upon my heart as heaven did on the
height,

And waken up its shadows by a light,
And show its vileness by a holiness. 100
Then I knelt down most silent like the
night,

Too self-renounced for fears,
Raising my small face to the boundless
blue

Whose stars did mix and tremble in my
tears:

God heard *them* falling after, with his dew.

VII

So, seeing my corruption, can I see
This Incorruptible now born of me,
This fair new Innocence no sun did chance
To shine on, (for even Adam was no child,)
Created from my nature all defiled, 110
This mystery, from out mine ignorance, —
Nor feel the blindness, stain corruption
more

Than others do, or *I* did heretofore ?

Can hands wherein such burden pure has
been,

Not open with the cry 'unclean, unclean,'
More oft than any else beneath the skies ?

Ah King, ah Christ, ah son !

The kine, the shepherds, the abased wise
Must all less lowly wait

Than I, upon thy state. 120

Sleep, sleep, my kingly One !

VIII

Art Thou a King, then ? Come, his uni-
verse,

Come, crown me Him a King !

Pluck rays from all such stars as never
fling

Their light where fell a curse,
 And make a crowning for this kingly
 brow ! —
 What is my word ? Each empyreal star
 Sits in a sphere afar
 In shining ambuscade:
 The child-brow, crowned by none, 130
 Keeps its unchildlike shade.
 Sleep, sleep, my crownless One !

IX

Unchildlike shade ! No other babe doth
 wear
 An aspect very sorrowful, as Thou.
 No small babe-smiles my watching heart
 has seen
 To float like speech the speechless lips be-
 tween,
 No dovelike cooing in the golden air,
 No quick short joys of leaping babyhood.
 Alas, our earthly good
 In heaven thought evil, seems too good for
 Thee: 140
 Yet, sleep, my weary One !

X

And then the drear sharp tongue of pro-
 phesy,
 With the dread sense of things which shall
 be done,
 Doth smite me inly, like a sword: a sword ?
 That 'smites the Shepherd.' Then, I think
 aloud
 The words 'despised,' — 'rejected,' — every
 word
 Recoiling into darkness as I view
 The DARLING on my knee.
 Bright angels, — move not — lest ye stir the
 cloud
 Betwixt my soul and his futurity ! 150
 I must not die, with mother's work to do,
 And could not live — and see.

XI

It is enough to bear
 This image still and fair,
 This holier in sleep
 Than a saint at prayer,
 This aspect of a child
 Who never sinned or smiled;
 This Presence in an infant's face;
 This sadness most like love, 160
 This love than love more deep,
 This weakness like omnipotence
 It is so strong to move.

Awful is this watching place,
 Awful what I see from hence —
 A king, without regalia,
 A God, without the thunder,
 A child, without the heart for play;
 Ay, a Creator, rent asunder
 From his first glory and cast away
 On his own world, for me alone 171
 To hold in hands created, crying — SON !

XII

That tear fell not on Thee,
 Beloved, yet thou stirrest in thy slumber !
 THOU, stirring not for glad sounds out of
 number
 Which through the vibratory palm-trees run
 From summer-wind and bird,
 So quickly hast thou heard
 A tear fall silently ?
 Wak'st thou, O loving One ? — 180

TO BETTINE

THE CHILD-FRIEND OF GOETHE

'I have the second sight, Goethe !'
 — *Letters of a Child.*

I

BETTINE, friend of Goethe,
 Hadst thou the second sight —
 Upturning worship and delight
 With such a loving duty
 To his grand face, as women will,
 The childhood 'neath thine eyelids still ?

II

— Before his shrine to doom thee,
 Using the same child's smile
 That heaven and earth, beheld erewhile
 For the first time, won from thee
 Ere star and flower grew dim and dead
 Save at his feet and o'er his head ?

III

— Digging thine heart and throwing
 Away its childhood's gold,
 That so its woman-depth might hold
 His spirit's overflowing ?
 (For surging souls, no worlds can bound,
 Their channel in the heart have found.)

IV

O child, to change appointed,
 Thou hadst not second sight !

What eyes the future view aright
 Unless by tears anointed ?
 Yea, only tears themselves can show
 The burning ones that have to flow.

V

O woman, deeply loving,
 Thou hadst not second sight !
 The star is very high and bright,
 And none can see it moving.
 Love looks around, below, above,
 Yet all his prophecy is — love.

VI

The bird thy childhood's playing
 Sent onward o'er the sea,
 Thy dove of hope came back to thee
 Without a leaf: art laying
 Its wet cold wing no sun can dry,
 Still in thy bosom secretly ?

VII

Our Goethe's friend, Bettine,
 I have the second sight !
 The stone upon his grave is white,
 The funeral stone between ye;
 And in thy mirror thou hast viewed
 Some change as hardly understood.

VIII

Where's childhood ? where is Goethe ?
 The tears are in thine eyes.
 Nay, thou shalt yet reorganize
 Thy maidenhood of beauty
 In his own glory, which is smooth
 Of wrinkles and sublime in youth.

IX

The poet's arms have wound thee,
 He breathes upon thy brow,
 He lifts thee upward in the glow
 Of his great genius round thee, —
 The childlike poet undefiled
 Preserving evermore THE CHILD.

FELICIA HEMANS

TO L. E. L.

REFERRING TO HER MONODY ON THE
POETESS

First published with the title 'Stanzas on
 the Death of Mrs. Hemans.'

I

THOU bay-crowned living One that o'er the
 bay-crowned Dead art bowing,
 And o'er the shadeless moveless brow the
 vital shadow throwing,
 And o'er the sighless songless lips the wail
 and music wedding,
 And dropping o'er the tranquil eyes the
 tears not of their shedding ! —

II

Take music from the silent Dead whose
 meaning is completer,
 Reserve thy tears for living brows where
 all such tears are meeter,
 And leave the violets in the grass to
 brighten where thou treadest,
 No flowers for her ! no need of flowers,
 albeit 'bring flowers !' thou saidest.

III

Yes, flowers, to crown the 'cup and lute,'
 since both may come to breaking,
 Or flowers, to greet the 'bride' — the
 heart's own beating works its aching;
 Or flowers, to soothe the 'captive's' sight,
 from earth's free bosom gathered,
 Reminding of his earthly hope, then wither-
 ing as it withered:

IV

But bring not near the solemn corse a type
 of human seeming,
 Lay only dust's stern verity upon the dust
 undreaming:
 And while the calm perpetual stars shall
 look upon it solely,
 Her spherèd soul shall look on *them* with
 eyes more bright and holy.

V

Nor mourn, O living One, because her part
 in life was mourning:
 Would she have lost the poet's fire for
 anguish of the burning ?
 The minstrel harp, for the strained string ?
 the tripod, for the afflated
 Woe ? or the vision, for those tears in
 which it shone dilated ?

VI

Perhaps she shuddered while the world's
 cold hand her brow was wreathing,
 But never wronged that mystic breath
 which breathed in all her breathing,

Which drew, from rocky earth and man,
 abstractions high and moving,
 Beauty, if not the beautiful, and love, if
 not the loving.

VII

Such visionings have paled in sight; the
 Saviour she descrieth,
 And little recks *who* wreathed the brow
 which on his bosom lieth:
 The whiteness of his innocence o'er all her
 garments, flowing,
 There learneth she the sweet 'new song'
 she will not mourn in knowing.

VIII

Be happy, crowned and living One ! and as
 thy dust decayeth
 May thine own England say for thee what
 now for Her it sayeth —
 'Albeit softly in our ears her silver song
 was ringing,
 The foot-fall of her parting soul is softer
 than her singing.'

MEMORY AND HOPE

I

BACK-LOOKING Memory
 And prophet Hope both sprang from out
 the ground;
 One, where the flashing of cherubic sword
 Fell sad in Eden's ward,
 And one, from Eden earth within the sound
 Of the four rivers lapsing pleasantly,
 What time the promise after curse was
 said,
 'Thy seed shall bruise his head.'

II

Poor Memory's brain is wild,
 As moonstruck by that flaming atmosphere
 When she was born; her deep eyes shine
 and shone
 With light that conquereth sun
 And stars to vanner paleness year by year:
 With odorous gums she mixeth things de-
 filed,
 She trampleth down earth's grasses green
 and sweet
 With her far-wandering feet.

III

She plucketh many flowers,
 Their beauty on her bosom's coldness kill-
 ing;
 She teacheth every melancholy sound
 To winds and waters round;
 She droppeth tears with seed where man
 is tilling
 The rugged soil in his exhausted hours;
 She smileth — ah me ! in her smile doth go
 A mood of deeper woe.

IV

Hope tripped on out of sight,
 Crowned with an Eden wreath she saw not
 wither,
 And went a-nodding through the wilder-
 ness
 With brow that shone no less
 Than a sea-gull's wing, brought nearer by
 rough weather,
 Searching the treeless rock for fruits of
 light;
 Her fair quick feet being armed from
 stones and cold
 By slippers of pure gold.

V

Memory did Hope much wrong
 And, while she dreamed, her slippers stole
 away;
 But still she wended on with mirth unheed-
 ing,
 Although her feet were bleeding,
 Till Memory tracked her on a certain day,
 And with most evil eyes did search her
 long
 And cruelly, whereat she sank to ground
 In a stark deadly swoond.

VI

And so my Hope were slain,
 Had it not been that THOU wast standing
 near —
 Oh Thou who saidest 'Live,' to creatures
 lying
 In their own blood and dying !
 For Thou her forehead to thine heart didst
 rear
 And make its silent pulses sing again,
 Pouring a new light o'er her darkened
 eyne
 With tender tears from thine.

VII

Therefore my Hope arose
From out her swoond and gazed upon thy
face,
And, meeting there that soft subduing
look

Which Peter's spirit shook,
Sank downward in a rapture to embrace
Thy pierced hands and feet with kisses
close,
And prayed Thee to assist her evermore
To 'reach the things before.'

THE SLEEP

'He giveth His beloved sleep.'
— *Psalm cxxvii. 2.*

I

Of all the thoughts of God that are
Borne inward into souls afar,
Along the Psalmist's music deep,
Now tell me if that any is,
For gift or grace, surpassing this:
'He giveth his beloved — sleep?'

II

What would we give to our beloved?
The hero's heart to be unmoved,
The poet's star-tuned harp to sweep,
The patriot's voice to teach and rouse,
The monarch's crown to light the brows?
He giveth his beloved — sleep.

III

What do we give to our beloved?
A little faith all undisproved,
A little dust to overweep,
And bitter memories to make
The whole earth blasted for our sake:
He giveth his beloved — sleep.

IV

'Sleep soft,' beloved! we sometimes say,
Who have no tune to charm away
Sad dreams that through the eyelids creep:
But never doleful dream again
Shall break the happy slumber when
He giveth his beloved — sleep.

V

O earth, so full of dreary noises!
O men, with wailing in your voices!

O delvèd gold, the wailers heap!
O strife, O curse, that o'er it fall!
God strikes a silence through you all,
And giveth his beloved — sleep.

VI

His dews drop mutely on the hill,
His cloud above it saileth still,
Though on its slope men sow and reap:
More softly than the dew is shed,
Or cloud is floated overhead,
He giveth his beloved — sleep.

VII

Ay, men may wonder while they scan
A living, thinking, feeling man
Confirmed in such a rest to keep;
But angels say, and through the word
I think their happy smile is heard —
'He giveth his beloved — sleep.'

VIII

For me, my heart that erst did go
Most like a tired child at a show,
That sees through tears the mummers
leap,
Would now its wearied vision close,
Would childlike on his love repose
Who giveth his beloved — sleep.

IX

And friends, dear friends, when it shall be
That this low breath is gone from me,
And round my bier ye come to weep,
Let One, most loving of you all,
Say 'Not a tear must o'er her fall!
'He giveth his beloved sleep.'

MAN AND NATURE

A SAD man on a summer day
Did look upon the earth and say —

'Purple cloud the hill-top binding;
Folded hills the valleys wind in;
Valleys with fresh streams among you;
Streams with bosky trees along you;
Trees with many birds and blossoms;
Birds with music-trembling bosoms;
Blossoms dropping dews that wreathe you
To your fellow flowers beneath you;
Flowers that constellate on earth;
Earth that shakest to the mirth

Of the merry Titan Ocean,
All his shining hair in motion !
Why am I thus the only one
Who can be dark beneath the sun ?

But when the summer day was past,
He looked to heaven and smiled at last,
Self-answered so —

‘ Because, O cloud,
Pressing with thy crumpled shroud
Heavily on mountain top, —
Hills that almost seem to drop
Stricken with a misty death
To the valleys underneath, —
Valleys sighing with the torrent, —
Waters streaked with branches horrent, —
Branchless trees that shake your head
Wildly o’er your blossoms spread
Where the common flowers are found, —
Flowers with foreheads to the ground, —
Ground that shrieketh while the sea
With his iron smiteth thee —
I am, besides, the only one
Who can be bright *without* the sun.’

A SEA-SIDE WALK

I

WE walked beside the sea
After a day which perished silently
Of its own glory — like the princess weird
Who, combating the Genius, scorched and
seared,
Uttered with burning breath, ‘ Ho ! vic-
tory !’
And sank adown, a heap of ashes pale:
So runs the Arab tale.

II

The sky above us showed
A universal and unmoving cloud
On which the cliffs permitted us to see
Only the outline of their majesty,
As master-minds when gazed at by the
crowd:
And shining with a gloom, the water gray
Swang in its moon-taught way.

III

Nor moon, nor stars were out;
They did not dare to tread so soon about,
Though trembling, in the footsteps of the
sun:

The light was neither night’s nor day’s, but
one
Which, life-like, had a beauty in its doubt,
And silence’s impassioned breathings
round
Seemed wandering into sound.

IV

O solemn-beating heart
Of nature ! I have knowledge that thou
art
Bound unto man’s by cords he cannot
sever;
And, what time they are slackened by him
ever,
So to attest his own supernal part,
Still runneth thy vibration fast and strong
The slackened cord along:

V

For though we never spoke
Of the gray water and the shaded rock,
Dark wave and stone unconsciously were
fused
Into the plaintive speaking that we used
Of absent friends and memories unforsook;
And, had we seen each other’s face, we had
Seen haply each was sad.

THE SEA-MEW

AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED TO M. E. H.

I

How joyously the young sea-mew
Lay dreaming on the waters blue
Whereon our little bark had thrown
A little shade, the only one,
But shadows ever man pursue.

II

Familiar with the waves and free
As if their own white foam were he,
His heart upon the heart of ocean
Lay learning all its mystic motion,
And throbbing to the throbbing sea.

III

And such a brightness in his eye
As if the ocean and the sky
Within him had lit up and nurst
A soul God gave him not at first,
To comprehend their majesty.

IV

We were not cruel, yet did sunder
His white wing from the blue waves under,
And bound it, while his fearless eyes
Shone up to ours in calm surprise,
As deeming us some ocean wonder.

V

We bore our ocean bird unto
A grassy place where he might view
The flowers that curtsy to the bees,
The waving of the tall green trees,
The falling of the silver dew.

VI

But flowers of earth were pale to him
Who had seen the rainbow fishes swim;
And when earth's dew around him lay
He thought of ocean's wingèd spray,
And his eye waxèd sad and dim.

VII

The green trees round him only made
A prison with their darksome shade;
And drooped his wing, and mournèd he
For his own boundless glittering sea —
Albeit he knew not they could fade.

VIII

Then One her gladsome face did bring,
Her gentle voice's murmuring,
In ocean's stead his heart to move
And teach him what was human love:
He thought it a strange, mournful thing.

IX

He lay down in his grief to die,
(First looking to the sea-like sky
That hath no waves) because, alas!
Our human touch did on him pass,
And, with our touch, our agony.

THE LITTLE FRIEND

WRITTEN IN THE BOOK WHICH SHE
MADE AND SENT TO ME

‘— το δ’ ἦδη ἐξ οφθαλμων ἀπεληλυθεν.’
— *Marcus Antoninus.*

I

THE book thou givest, dear as such,
Shall bear thy dearer name;

And many a word the leaves shall touch,
For thee who form’dst the same!
And on them, many a thought shall grow
’Neath memory’s rain and sun,
Of thee, glad child, who dost not know
That thought and pain are one!

II

Yes! thoughts of thee, who satest oft,
A while since, at my side —
So wild to tame, — to move so soft,
So very hard to chide:
The childish vision at thine heart,
The lesson on the knee;
The wandering looks which *would* depart,
Like gulls, across the sea!

III

The laughter, which no half-belief
In wrath could all suppress:
The falling tears, which looked like grief,
And were but gentleness:
The fancies sent, for bliss, abroad,
As Eden’s were not done —
Mistaking still the cherub’s sword
For shining of the sun!

IV

The sportive speech with wisdom in’t —
The question strange and bold —
The childish fingers in the print
Of God’s creative hold:
The praying words in whispers said,
The sin with sobs confest;
The leaning of the young meek head
Upon the Saviour’s breast!

V

The gentle consciousness of praise,
With hues that went and came;
The brighter blush, a word could raise,
Were *that* — a father’s name!
The shadow on thy smile for each
That on his face could fall!
So quick hath love been, *thee* to teach,
What soon it teacheth all.

VI

Sit still as erst beside his feet!
The future days are dim, —
But those will seem to thee most sweet
Which keep thee nearest *him*!
Sit at his feet in quiet mirth,

And let him see arise
A clearer sun and greener earth
Within thy loving eyes ! —

VII

Ah, loving eyes ! that used to lift
Your childhood to my face —
That leave a memory on the gift
I look on in your place —
May bright-eyed hosts your guardians be
From all but thankful tears, —
While, brightly as you turn on *me*
Ye meet th' advancing years !

MY DOVES

' O Weisheit ! Du red'st wie eine Taube !'
— *Goethe.*

My little doves have left a nest
Upon an Indian tree
Whose leaves fantastic take their rest
Or motion from the sea;
For ever there the sea-winds go
With sunlit paces to and fro.

The tropic flowers looked up to it,
The tropic stars looked down,
And there my little doves did sit
With feathers softly brown,
And glittering eyes that showed their right
To general Nature's deep delight.

And God them taught, at every close
Of murmuring waves beyond
And green leaves round, to interpose
Their choral voices fond,
Interpreting that love must be
The meaning of the earth and sea.

Fit ministers ! Of living loves
Theirs hath the calmest fashion,
Their living voice the likeliest moves
To lifeless intonation,
The lovely monotone of springs
And winds and such insensate things.

My little doves were ta'en away
From that glad nest of theirs
Across an ocean rolling gray
And tempest-clouded airs:
My little doves, who lately knew
The sky and wave by warmth and blue.

And now, within the city prison,
In mist and chillness pent,
With sudden upward look they listen
For sounds of past content,
For lapse of water, swell of breeze,
Or nut-fruit falling from the trees.

The stir without the glow of passion,
The triumph of the mart,
The gold and silver as they clash on
Man's cold metallic heart,
The roar of wheels, the cry for bread, —
These only sounds are heard instead.

Yet still, as on my human hand
Their fearless heads they lean,
And almost seem to understand
What human musings mean,
(Their eyes with such a plaintive shine
Are fastened upwardly to mine !) —

Soft falls their chant as on the nest
Beneath the sunny zone;
For love that stirred it in their breast
Has not aweary grown,
And 'neath the city's shade can keep
The well of music clear and deep.

And love, that keeps the music, fills
With pastoral memories;
All echoings from out the hills,
All droppings from the skies,
All flowings from the wave and wind,
Remembered in their chant, I find.

So teach ye me the wisest part,
My little doves ! to move
Along the city-ways with heart
Assured by holy love,
And vocal with such songs as own
A fountain to the world unknown.

'T was hard to sing by Babel's stream —
More hard, in Babel's street:
But if the soulless creatures deem
Their music not unmeet
For sunless walls — let *us* begin,
Who wear immortal wings within !

To me, fair memories belong
Of scenes that used to bless,
For no regret, but present song
And lasting thankfulness,
And very soon to break away,
Like types, in purer things than they.

I will have hopes that cannot fade,
 For flowers the valley yields;
 I will have humble thoughts instead
 Of silent, dewy fields:
 My spirit and my God shall be
 My seaward hill, my boundless sea.

TO MARY RUSSELL MITFORD

IN HER GARDEN

WHAT time I lay these rhymes anear thy
 feet,
 Benignant friend, I will not proudly say
 As better poets use, 'These *flowers* I lay,'
 Because I would not wrong thy roses
 sweet,
 Blaspheming so their name. And yet, re-
 peat
 Thou, overleaning them this springtime
 day,
 With heart as open to love as theirs to
 May,
 — 'Low - rooted verse may reach some
 heavenly heat,
 Even like my blossoms, if as nature-true
 Though not as precious.' Thou art unper-
 plext —
 Dear friend, in whose dear writings drops
 the dew
 And blow the natural airs, — thou, who
 art next
 To nature's self in cheering the world's
 view, —
 To preach a sermon on so known a text !

THE STUDENT

'Τί οὖν τοῦτο πρὸς σε ; καὶ οὐδὲν λέγω ὅτι πρὸς τὸν
 τεθνηκότα, ἀλλὰ πρὸς τὸν ζῶντα, τί ὁ ἑπαινος.' — *Marcus*
Antoninus.

'My midnight lamp is weary as my soul,
 And, being unimmortal, has gone out.
 And now alone yon moony lamp of heaven,
 Which God lit and not man, illuminates
 These volumes, others wrote in weariness
 As I have read them; and this cheek and
 brow,
 Whose paleness, burnèd in with heats of
 thought,
 Would make an angel smile to see how ill
 Clay thrust from Paradise consorts with
 mind —
 If angels could, like men, smile bitterly.

'Yet, must my brow be paler ! I have
 vowed
 To clip it with the crown which cannot
 fade,
 When it is faded. Not in vain ye cry,
 O glorious voices that survive the tongues
 From whence was drawn your separate
 sovereignty —
 For I would reign beside you ! I would
 melt
 The golden treasures of my health and
 life
 Into that name ! My lips are vowed
 apart
 From cheerful words; mine ears, from
 pleasant sounds;
 Mine eyes, from sights God made so beau-
 tiful, —
 My feet, from wanderings under shady
 trees;
 Mine hands, from clasping of dear-loving
 friends, —
 My very heart, from feelings which move
 soft !
 Vowed am I from the day's delightsome-
 ness,
 And dreams of night ! and when the house
 is dumb
 In sleep, which is the pause 'twixt life and
 life,
 I live and waken thus; and pluck away
 Slumber's sleek poppies from my painèd
 lids —
 Goad my mind with thongs wrought by
 herself,
 To toil and struggle along this mountain-
 path
 Which hath no mountain-airs; until she
 sweat³⁰
 Like Adam's brow, and gasp, and rend
 away
 In agony, her garment of the flesh !'
 And so his midnight lamp was lit anew,
 And burned till morning. But his lamp
 of life
 Till morning burned not ! He was found
 embraced,
 Close, cold, and stiff, by Death's compell-
 ing sleep;
 His breast and brow supported on a page
 Charactered over with a praise of *fame*,
 Of its divineness and beatitude —
 Words which had often caused that heart to
 throb,⁴⁰

THEY bid me sing to thee,
Thou golden-haired and silver-voicèd child—
With lips by no worse sigh than sleep's
defiled —

With eyes unknowing how tears dim the sight,
And feet all trembling at the new delight
Treaders of earth to be !

II

Ah no ! the lark may bring
A song to thee from out the morning cloud,
The merry river from its lilies bowed,
The brisk rain from the trees, the lucky
wind
That half doth make its music, half doth
find, —

But I — I may not sing.

III

How could I think it right,
New-comer on our earth as, Sweet, thou
art,
To bring a verse from out a human heart
Made heavy with accumulated tears,
And cross with such amount of weary years
Thy day-sum of delight ?

IV

Even if the verse were said,
Thou — who wouldst clap thy tiny hands
to hear
The wind or rain, gay bird or river clear —
Wouldst, at that sound of sad humanities,
Upturn thy bright uncomprehending eyes
And bid me play instead.

V

Therefore no song of mine, —
But prayer in place of singing; prayer that
would
Commend thee to the new-creating God
Whose gift is childhood's heart without its
stain
Of weakness, ignorance, and changing
vain —
That gift of God be thine !

VI

So wilt thou aye be young,
In lovelier childhood than thy shining brow
And pretty winning accents make thee now:
Yea, sweeter than this scarce articulate
sound
(How sweet !) of ' father,' ' mother,' shall
be found
The ABBA on thy tongue.

VII

And so, as years shall chase
Each other's shadows, thou wilt less re-
semble
Thy fellows of the earth who toil and
tremble,
Than him thou seest not, thine angel bold
Yet meek, whose ever-lifted eyes behold
The Ever-loving's face.

STANZAS

I MAY sing; but minstrel's singing
Ever ceaseth with his playing.
I may smile; but time is bringing
Thoughts for smiles to wear away in.
I may view thee, mutely loving;
But *shall* view thee so in dying !
I may sigh; but life's removing,
And with breathing endeth sighing !
Be it so !

When no song of mine comes near thee,
Will its memory fail to soften ?
When no smile of mine can cheer thee,
Will thy smile be used as often ?
When my looks the darkness boundeth,
Will thine own be lighted after ?
When my sigh no longer soundeth,
Wilt thou list another's laughter ?
Be it so !

THE YOUNG QUEEN

' This awful responsibility is imposed upon me so suddenly and at so early a period of my life, that I should feel myself utterly oppressed by the burden, were I not sustained by the hope that Divine Providence, which has called me to this work, will give me strength for the performance of it.'

— *The Queen's Declaration in Council.*

I

THE shroud is yet unspread
To wrap our crownèd dead;
His soul hath scarcely hearkened for the
thrilling word of doom;
And Death, that makes serene
Ev'n brows where crowns have been,
Hath scarcely time to meeten his for silence
of the tomb.

II

St. Paul's king-dirging note
The city's heart hath smote —

The city's heart is struck with thought
 more solemn than the tone !
 A shadow sweeps apace
 Before the nation's face,
 Confusing in a shapeless blot the sepulchre
 and throne.

III

The palace sounds with wail —
 The courtly dames are pale —
 A widow o'er the purple bows, and weeps
 its splendor dim:
 And we who hold the boon,
 A king for freedom won,
 Do feel eternity rise up between our thanks
 and him.

IV

And while all things express
 All glory's nothingness,
 A royal maiden treadeth firm where *that*
 departed trod !
 The deathly scented crown
 Weighs her shining ringlets down;
 But calm she lifts her trusting face, and
 calleth upon God.

V

Her thoughts are deep within her:
 No outward pageants win her
 From memories that in her soul are rolling
 wave on wave —
 Her palace walls enring
 The dust that was a king —
 And very cold beneath her feet, she feels
 her father's grave.

VI

And One, as fair as she,
 Can scarce forgotten be, —
 Who clasped a little infant dead, for all a
 kingdom's worth !
 The mournèd, blessèd One,
 Who views Jehovah's throne,
 Aye smiling to the angels, that she lost a
 throne on earth.

VII

Perhaps our youthful Queen
 Remembers what has been —
 Her childhood's rest by loving heart, and
 sport on grassy sod —
 Alas ! can others wear
 A mother's heart for her ?
 But calm she lifts her trusting face, and
 calleth upon God.

VIII

Yea ! call on God, thou maiden
 Of spirit nobly laden,
 And leave such happy days behind, for
 happy-making years !
 A nation looks to thee
 For steadfast sympathy:
 Make room within thy bright clear eyes
 for all its gathered tears.

IX

And so the grateful isles
 Shall give thee back their smiles,
 And as thy mother joys in thee, in them
 shalt *thou* rejoice;
 Rejoice to meekly bow
 A somewhat paler brow,
 While the King of kings shall bless thee by
 the British people's voice !

VICTORIA'S TEARS

'Hark ! the reiterated clangor sounds !
 Now murmurs, like the sea or like the storm,
 Or like the flames on forests, move and mount
 From rank to rank, and loud and louder roll,
 Till all the people is one vast applause.'
 — LANDOR's *Gebir*.

'O MAIDEN ! heir of kings !
 A king has left his place !
 The majesty of Death has swept
 All other from his face !
 And thou upon thy mother's breast
 No longer lean adown,
 But take the glory for the rest,
 And rule the land that loves thee best !'
 She heard, and wept —
 She wept, to wear a crown !

They decked her courtly halls;
 They reined her hundred steeds;
 They shouted at her palace gate,
 'A noble Queen succeeds !'
 Her name has stirred the mountain's sleep
 Her praise has filled the town !
 And mourners God had stricken deep,
 Looked hearkening up, and did not weep.
 Alone she wept,
 Who wept, to wear a crown !

She saw no purples shine,
 For tears had dimmed her eyes;
 She only knew her childhood's flowers
 Were happier pageantries !

And while her heralds played the part,
 For million shouts to drown —
 'God save the Queen' from hill to mart, —
 She heard through all her beating heart,
 And turned and wept —
 She wept, to wear a crown !

God save thee, weeping Queen !
 Thou shalt be well beloved !
 The tyrant's sceptre cannot move,
 As those pure tears have moved !
 The nature in thine eyes we see,
 That tyrants cannot own —
 The love that guardeth liberties !
 Strange blessing on the nation lies,
 Whose Sovereign wept —
 Yea ! wept, to wear its crown !

God bless thee, weeping Queen,
 With blessing more divine !
 And fill with happier love than earth's
 That tender heart of thine !
 That when the thrones of earth shall be
 As low as graves brought down,
 A piercèd Hand may give to thee
 The crown which angels shout to see !
 Thou wilt not weep,
 To wear that heavenly crown !

VANITIES

* From fading things, fond men, lift your desire.'
 — *Drummond*.

COULD ye be very blest in hearkening
 Youth's often danced-to melodies —
 Hearing it piped, the midnight darkening
 Doth come to show the starry skies, —
 To freshen garden-flowers, the rain ? —
 It is in vain, it is in vain !

Could ye be very blest in urging
 A captive nation's strength to thunder
 Out into foam, and with its surging
 The Xerxean fetters break asunder ?
 The storm is cruel as the chain ! —
 It is in vain, it is in vain !

Could ye be very blest in paling
 Your brows with studious nights and days,
 When like your lamps your life is failing,
 And sighs, not breath, are wrought from
 praise ?
 Your tombs, not ye, that praise retain —
 It is in vain, it is in vain !

Yea ! but ye *could* be very blest,
 If some ye nearest love were nearest !
 Must *they* not love when lovèd best ?
 Must *ye* not happiest love when dearest ?
 Alas ! how hard to feel again, —
 It is in vain, it is in vain !

For those ye love are not unsighing —
 They are unchanging least of all:
 And ye the loved — ah ! no denying,
 Will leave your lips beneath the pall,
 When passioned ones have o'er it sain
 'It is in vain, it is in vain !'

BEREAVEMENT

WHEN some Beloveds, 'neath whose eye-
 lids lay
 The sweet lights of my childhood, one by
 one
 Did leave me dark before the natural
 sun,
 And I astonied fell and could not pray, —
 A thought within me to myself did say,
 'Is God less God, that *thou* art left un-
 done ?
 Rise, worship, bless Him, in this sackcloth
 spun,
 As in that purple !' — But I answered
 Nay !
 What child his filial heart in words can
 loose
 If he behold his tender father raise
 The hand that chastens sorely ? can he
 choose
 But sob in silence with an upward gaze ? —
 And *my* great Father, thinking fit to bruise,
 Discerns in speechless tears both prayer
 and praise.

CONSOLATION

ALL are not taken; there are left be-
 hind
 Living Belovèds, tender looks to bring
 And make the daylight still a happy thing,
 And tender voices, to make soft the wind:
 But if it were not so — if I could find
 No love in all the world for comforting,
 Nor any path but hollowly did ring
 Where 'dust to dust' the love from life
 disjoined,

And if, before those sepulchres unmoving
 I stood alone, (as some forsaken lamb
 Goes bleating up the moors in weary
 dearth,)
 Crying 'Where are ye, O my loved and
 loving?' —
 I know a Voice would sound, 'Daughter,
 I AM.
 Can I suffice for HEAVEN and not for
 earth?'

A SUPPLICATION FOR LOVE

HYMN I

'The Lord Jesus, although gone to the Father, and
 we see Him no more, is still present with His Church;
 and in His heavenly glory expends upon her as intense
 a love, as in the agony of the garden, and the crucifixion
 of the tree. Those eyes that wept, still gaze upon her.'
 — *Recalled words of an extempore Discourse, preached
 at Sidmouth, 1833.*

GOD, namèd Love, whose fount Thou art,
 Thy crownless Church before Thee
 stands,

With too much hating in her heart,
 And too much striving in her hands !

O loving Lord ! O slain for love !
 Thy blood upon thy garments came —
 Inwrap their folds our brows above,
 Before we tell Thee all our shame !

'Love as I loved you,' was the sound
 That on thy lips expiring sate !
 Sweet words, in bitter strivings drowned !
 We hated as the worldly hate.

The spear that pierced for love thy side,
 We dared for wrathful use to crave;
 And with our cruel noise denied
 Its silence to thy blood-red grave !

Ab, blood ! that speaketh more of love
 Than Abel's — could we speak like Cain,
 And grieve and scare that holy Dove,
 The parting love-gift of the Slain ?

Yet, Lord, thy wrongèd love fulfil !
 Thy Church, though fallen, before Thee
 stands —
 Behold, the voice is Jacob's still,
 Albeit the hands are Esau's hands !

Hast Thou no tears, like those besprent
 Upon thy Zion's ancient part ?
 No moving looks, like those which sent
 Their softness through a traitor's heart ?

No touching tale of anguish dear;
 Whereby like children we may creep,
 All trembling, to each other near,
 And view each other's face, and weep ?

Oh, move us — THOU hast power to move —
 One in the one Beloved to be !
 Teach us the heights and depths of love —
 Give THINE — that we may love like
 THEE !

THE MEDIATOR

HYMN II

'As the greatest of all sacrifices was required, we
 may be assured that no other would have sufficed.' —
 BOYD'S *Essay on the Atonement*.

How high Thou art ! our songs can own
 No music Thou couldst stoop to hear !
 But still the Son's expiring groan
 Is vocal in the Father's ear.

How pure Thou art ! our hands are dyed
 With curses, red with murder's hue —
 But HE hath stretched HIS hands to
 hide
 The sins that pierced them from thy
 view.

How strong Thou art ! we tremble lest
 The thunders of thine arm be moved —
 But HE is lying on thy breast,
 And Thou must clasp thy best Be-
 loved !

How kind Thou art ! Thou didst not
 choose
 To joy in Him for ever so;
 But that embrace Thou wilt not loose
 For vengeance, didst for love forego !

High God, and pure, and strong, and kind !
 The low, the foul, the feeble, spare !
 Thy brightness in his face we find —
 Behold our darkness only *there* !

THE WEEPING SAVIOUR

HYMN III

Whether His countenance can thee affright,
Tears in His eyes quench the amazing light,
— tell
— *Donne.*

WHEN Jesus' friend had ceased to be,
Still Jesus' heart its friendship kept —
'Where have ye laid him?' — 'Come and
see!'

But ere his eyes could see, they wept.

Lord! not in sepulchres alone
Corruption's worm is rank and free:
The shroud of death our bosoms own —
The shades of sorrow! Come and see!

Come, Lord! God's image cannot shine
Where sin's funereal darkness lowers —
Come! Turn those weeping eyes of thine
Upon these sinning souls of ours!

And let those eyes with shepherd care
Their moving watch above us keep;
Till love the strength of sorrow wear,
And, as Thou weepedst, *we* may weep!

For surely we may weep to know,
So dark and deep our spirits' stain;
That, had thy blood refused to flow
Thy very tears had flowed in vain.

THE MEASURE

HYMN IV

'He comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure'
(שֵׁלִיטָה). — *Isaiah xl.*

'Thou givest them tears to drink in a measure'
(שֵׁלִיטָה)¹. — *Psalms lxxx.*

I

GOD the Creator, with a pulseless hand
Of unoriginated power, hath weighed
The dust of earth and tears of man in one
Measure, and by one weight:
So saith his holy book.

II

Shall we, then, who have issued from the
dust
And there return, — shall we, who toil for
dust,

¹ I believe that the word occurs in no other part of the Hebrew Scriptures.

And wrap our winnings in this dusty life,
Say 'No more tears, Lord God!
The measure runneth o'er'?

III

Oh, Holder of the balance, laughest Thou?
Nay, Lord! be gentler to our foolish-
ness,

For his sake who assumed our dust and
turns

On Thee pathetic eyes
Still moistened with our tears.

IV

And teach us, O our Father, while we weep,
To look in patience upon earth and learn —
Waiting, in that meek gesture, till at
last

These tearful eyes be filled
With the dry dust of death.

COWPER'S GRAVE

I

It is a place where poets crowned may
feel the heart's decaying;
It is a place where happy saints may weep
amid their praying;
Yet let the grief and humbleness as low as
silence languish:
Earth surely now may give her calm to
whom she gave her anguish.

II

O poets, from a maniac's tongue was
poured the deathless singing!
O Christians, at your cross of hope a hope-
less hand was clinging!
O men, this man in brotherhood your weary
paths beguiling,
Groaned inly while he taught you peace,
and died while ye were smiling!

III

And now, what time ye all may read
through dimming tears his story,
How discord on the music fell and dark-
ness on the glory,
And how when, one by one, sweet sounds
and wandering lights departed,
He wore no less a loving face because so
broken-hearted,

IV

He shall be strong to sanctify the poet's
high vocation,
And bow the meekest Christian down in
meeker adoration;
Nor ever shall he be, in praise, by wise or
good forsaken,
Named softly as the household name of
one whom God hath taken.

V

With quiet sadness and no gloom I learn
to think upon him,
With meekness that is gratefulness to God
whose heaven hath won him,
Who suffered once the madness-cloud to
his own love to blind him,
But gently led the blind along where
breath and bird could find him;

VI

And wrought within his shattered brain
such quick poetic senses
As hills have language for, and stars, har-
monious influences:
The pulse of dew upon the grass kept his
within its number,
And silent shadows from the trees refreshed
him like a slumber.

VII

Wild timid hares were drawn from woods
to share his home-caresses,
Uplooking to his human eyes with sylvan
tendernesses:
The very world, by God's constraint, from
falsehood's ways removing,
Its women and its men became, beside him,
true and loving.

VIII

And though, in blindness, he remained un-
conscious of that guiding,
And things provided came without the
sweet sense of providing,
He testified this solemn truth, while phrenzy
desolated,
— Nor man nor nature satisfies whom only
God created.

IX

Like a sick child that knoweth not his mo-
ther while she blesses

And drops upon his burning brow the cool-
ness of her kisses, —
That turns his fevered eyes around, — 'My
mother! where's my mother?' —
As if such tender words and deeds could
come from any other! —

X

The fever gone, with leaps of heart he sees
her bending o'er him,
Her face all pale from watchful love, the
unweary love she bore him!
Thus woke the poet from the dream his
life's long fever gave him,
Beneath those deep pathetic Eyes which
closed in death to save him.

XI

Thus? oh, not *thus*! no type of earth can
image that awaking,
Wherein he scarcely heard the chant of
seraphs, round him breaking,
Or felt the new immortal throb of soul
from body parted,
But felt those eyes alone, and knew — 'My
Saviour! *not* deserted!'

XII

Deserted! Who hath dreamt that when
the cross in darkness rested,
Upon the Victim's hidden face no love was
manifested?
What frantic hands outstretched have e'er
the atoning drops averted?
What tears have washed them from the
soul, that *one* should be deserted?

XIII

Deserted! God could separate from his
own essence rather;
And Adam's sins *have* swept between the
righteous Son and Father:
Yea, once, Immanuel's orphaned cry his
universe hath shaken —
It went up single, echoless, 'My God, I am
forsaken!'

XIV

It went up from the Holy's lips amid his
lost creation,
That, of the lost, no son should use those
words of desolation!

That Earth's worst phrenzies, marring
 hope, should mar not hope's fruition,
 And I, on Cowper's grave, should see his
 rapture in a vision.

THE WEAKEST THING

I

WHICH is the weakest thing of all
 Mine heart can ponder ?
 The sun, a little cloud can pall
 With darkness yonder ?
 The cloud, a little wind can move
 Where'er it listeth ?
 The wind, a little leaf above,
 Though sere, resisteth ?

II

What time that yellow leaf was green,
 My days were gladder;
 But now, whatever Spring may mean,
 I must grow sadder.
 Ah me ! a *leaf* with sighs can wring
 My lips asunder ?
 Then is mine heart the weakest thing
 Itself can ponder.

III

Yet, Heart, when sun and cloud are pined
 And drop together,
 And at a blast which is not wind
 The forests wither,
 Thou, from the darkening deathly curse
 To glory breakest, —
 The Strongest of the universe
 Guarding the weakest !

THE PET-NAME

... the name
 Which from THEIR lips seemed a caress.
 — MISS MITFORD'S *Dramatic Scenes*.

First printed under the title of 'The Name.'
 This name, as all the world knows since the
 publication of Mrs. Browning's most intimate
 correspondence, was the monosyllable Bā, (pro-
 nounced *bay*).

I

I HAVE a name, a little name,
 Uncadenced for the ear,
 Unhonored by ancestral claim,

Unsanctified by prayer and psalm
 The solemn font anear.

II

It never did to pages wove
 For gay romance belong;
 It never dedicate did move
 As 'Sacharissa' unto love,
 'Orinda' unto song.

III

Though I write books, it will be read
 Upon the leaves of none,
 And afterward, when I am dead,
 Will ne'er be graved for sight or tread,
 Across my funeral-stone.

IV

This name, whoever chance to call,
 Perhaps your smile may win:
 Nay, do not smile ! mine eyelids fall
 Over mine eyes and feel withal
 The sudden tears within.

V

Is there a leaf, that greenly grows
 Where summer meadows bloom,
 But gathereth the winter snows
 And changeth to the hue of those,
 If lasting till they come ?

VI

Is there a word, or jest, or game,
 But time incrusteth round
 With sad associate thoughts the same ?
 And so to me my very name
 Assumes a mournful sound.

VII

My brother gave that name to me
 When we were children twain,
 When names acquired baptismally
 Were hard to utter, as to see
 That life had any pain.

VIII

No shade was on us then, save one
 Of chestnuts from the hill;
 And through the word our laugh did run
 As part thereof: the mirth being done,
 He calls me by it still.

IX

Nay, do not smile ! I hear in it
 What none of you can hear, —

The talk upon the willow seat,
The bird and wind that did repeat
Around, our human cheer.

X

I hear the birthday's noisy bliss,
My sisters' woodland glee,
My father's praise I did not miss,
When stooping down he cared to kiss
The poet at his knee, —

XI

And voices which, to name me, aye
Their tenderest tones were keeping —
To some I never more can say
An answer till God wipes away
In heaven these drops of weeping.

XII

My name to me a sadness wears:
No murmurs cross my mind —
Now God be thanked for these thick tears
Which show, of those departed years,
Sweet memories left behind.

XIII

Now God be thanked for years enwrought
With love which softens yet:
Now God be thanked for every thought
Which is so tender it has caught
Earth's guerdon of regret.

XIV

Earth saddens, never shall remove
Affections purely given;
And e'en that mortal grief shall prove
The immortality of love,
And heighten it with Heaven.

'SINCE WITHOUT THEE WE
DO NO GOOD'

HYMN

'Lord, I cry unto thee, make haste unto me.' —
Psalm cxli.

'The Lord is nigh unto them that call upon him.' —
Psalm cxlv.

'This hymn was included among the few
fugitive pieces bound up with Miss Barrett's
first and subsequently suppressed translation
of the *Prometheus Bound*.'

SINCE without Thee we do no good,
And with Thee do no ill,

Abide with us in weal and woe, —
In action and in will.

In weal, — that while our lips confess
The Lord who 'gives,' we may
Remember, with an humble thought,
The Lord who 'takes away.'

In woe, — that, while to drowning tears
Our hearts their joys resign,
We may remember *who* can turn
Such water into wine.

By hours of day, — that when our feet
O'er hill and valley run,
We still may think the light of truth
More welcome than the sun.

By hours of night, — that when the air
Its dew and shadow yields,
We still may hear the voice of God
In silence of the fields.

Oh! then sleep comes on us like death,
All soundless, deaf and deep:
Lord! teach us so to watch and pray,
That death may come like sleep.

Abide with *us*, abide with *us*,
While flesh and soul agree;
And when our flesh is only dust,
Abide our souls with *Thee*.

QUEEN ANNELIDA AND FALSE
ARCITE

(MODERNIZED FROM CHAUCER)

First published in *The Poems of Geoffrey Chaucer Modernized* (London, 1841). This volume was edited by R. H. Horne, who contributed some of the modernizations. Wordsworth, who had first suggested the scheme of turning Chaucer into modern English verse, made several contributions, as did also Leigh Hunt. Tennyson and Robert Browning were invited to coöperate in the work, but declined. Miss Barrett executed the modernization, here reprinted, of Queen Annelida's story, and gave critical assistance about the whole compilation.

I

O THOU fierce God of armies, Mars the
red,
Who in thy frosty country callèd Thrace,

Within thy grisly temples full of dread,
 Art honored as the patron of that place,
 With the Bellona Pallas, full of grace !
 Be present; guide, sustain this song of
 mine,
 Beginning which, I cry toward thy shrine.

II

For deep the hope is sunken in my mind,
 In piteous-hearted English to indite
 This story old, which I in Latin find,
 Of Queen Annelida and false Arcite:
 Since Time, whose rust can all things fret
 and bite,
 In fretting many a tale of equal fame,
 Hath from our memory nigh devoured this
 same.

III

Thy favor, Polyhymnia, also deign
 Who, in thy sisters' green Parnassian glade,
 By Helicon, not far from Cirrha's fane,
 Singest with voice memorial in the shade
 Under the laurel which can never fade;
 Now grant my ship, that some smooth
 haven win her !
 I follow Statius first, and then Corinna.

IV

When Theseus by a long and deathly war
 The hardy Scythian race had overcome,
 He, laurel-crownèd, in his gold-wrought
 car,
 Returning to his native city home,
 The blissful people for his pomp make
 room,
 And throw their shouts up to the stars,
 and bring
 The general heart out for his honoring.

V

Before the Duke, in sign of victory,
 The trumpets sound, and in his banner
 large
 Dilates the figure of Mars — and men
 may see,
 In token of glory, many a treasure charge,
 Many a bright helm, and many a spear
 and targe,
 Many a fresh knight, and many a blissful
 rout
 On horse and foot, in all the field about.

VI

Hippolyte, his wife, the heroic queen
 Of Scythia, conqueress though conquerèd,

With Emily, her youthful sister sheen,
 Fair in a car of gold he with him led.
 The ground about her car she overspread
 With brightness from the beauty in her
 face,
 Which smiled forth largesses of love and
 grace.

VII

Thus triumphing, and laurel-crownèd thus,
 In all the flower of Fortune's high pro-
 viding,
 I leave this noble prince, this Theseus,
 Toward the walls of Athens bravely rid-
 ing, —
 And seek to bring in, without more abid-
 ing,
 Something of that whereof I 'gan to write
 Of fair Annelida and false Arcite.

VIII

Fierce Mars, who in his furious course of
 ire,
 The ancient wrath of Juno to fulfil,
 Had set the nations' mutual hearts on fire
 In Thebes and Argos, (so that each would
 kill
 Either with bloody spears,) grew never
 still —
 But rushed now here, now there, among
 them both,
 Till each was slain by each, they were so
 wroth.

IX

For when Parthenopæus and Tydeus
 Had perished with Hippomedon, — also
 Amphiaraus and proud Capaneus, —
 And when the wretched Theban brethren
 two
 Were slain, and King Adrastus home did
 go —
 So desolate stood Thebes, her halls so bare,
 That no man's love could remedy his care.

X

And when the old man, Creon, 'gan espy
 How darkly the blood royal was brought
 down,
 He held the city in his tyranny,
 And forced the nobles of that region
 To be his friends and dwell within the town;
 Till half for love of him, and half for fear,
 Those princely persons yielded, and drew
 near, —

XI

Among the rest the young Armenian queen,
Annelida, was in that city living.
She was as beauteous as the sun was sheen,
Her fame to distant lands such glory giving
That all men in the world had some heart-
striving
To look on her. No woman, sooth, can be,
Though earth is rich in fairness, fair as she.

XII

Young was this queen, but twenty summers
old,
Of middle stature, and such wondrous
beauty,
That Nature, self-delighted, did behold
A rare work in her — while, in stedfast
duty,
Lucretia and Penelope would suit ye
With a worse model — all things under-
stood,
She was, in short, most perfect fair and
good.

XIII

The Theban knight eke, to give all their
due,
Was young, and therewithal a lusty knight.
But he was double in love, and nothing true,
Ay, subtler in that craft than any wight,
And with his cunning won this lady bright;
So working on her simpleness of nature,
That she him trusted above every creature.

XIV

What shall I say? She lovèd Arcite so,
That if at any hour he parted from her,
Her heart seemed ready anon to burst in
two;
For he with lowliness had overcome her:
She thought she knew the heart which did
foredoom her.
But he was false, and all that softness feign-
ing, —
I trow men need not learn such arts of
paining.

XV

And ne'ertheless full mickle business
Had he, before he might his lady win, —
He swore that he should die of his distress,
His brain would madden with the fire
within!
Alas, the while! for it was ruth and sin,

That she, sweet soul, upon his grief should
rue;
But little reckon false hearts as the true.

XVI

And she to Arcite so subjected her,
That all she did or had seemed his of right:
No creature in her house met smile or cheer,
Further than would be pleasant to Arcite;
There was no lack whereby she did despise
To his least will — for hers to his was bent,
And all things which pleased him made her
content.

XVII

No kind of letter to her fair hands came,
Touching on love, from any kind of wight,
But him she showed it ere she burned the
same:
So open was she, doing all she might,
That nothing should be hidden from her
knight,
Lest he for any untruth should upbraid
her, —
The slave of his unspoken will she made
her.

XVIII

He played his jealous fancies over her,
And if he heard that any other man
Spoke to her, would beseech her straight to
swear
To each word — or the speaker had his ban;
And out of her sweet wits she almost ran
For fear; but all was fraud and flattery,
Since without love he feignèd jealousy.

XIX

All which with so much sweetness suffered
she,
Whate'er he willed she thought the wisest
thing;
And evermore she loved him tenderly,
And did him honor as he were a king.
Her heart was wedded to him with a ring,
So eager to be faithful and intent,
That wheresoe'er he wandered, there it went.

XX

When she would eat he stole away her
thought,
Till little thought for food, I ween, was
kept;
And when a time for rest the midnight
brought,

She always mused upon him till she slept, —
When he was absent, secretly she wept;
And thus lived Queen Annelida the fair,
For false Arcite, who worked her this
despair.

XXI

This false Arcite in his new-fangleness,
Because so gentle were her ways and true,
Took the less pleasure in her stedfastness,
And saw another lady proud and new,
And right anon he clad him in her hue;
I know not whether white, or red, or green,
Betraying fair Annelida the Queen.

XXII

And yet it was no thing to wonder on,
Though he were false — It is the way of
man,
(Since Lamech was, who flourished years
agone,)

To be in love as false as any can;
For he was the first father who began
To love two; and I trow, indeed, that he
Invented tents as well as bigamy.

XXIII

And having so betrayed her, false Arcite
Feign'd more, that primal wrong to justify.
A vicious horse will snort besides his bite;
And so he taunted her with treachery,
Swearing he saw thro' her duplicity,
And how she was not loving, but false-
hearted —

The perjured traitor swore thus, and de-
parted.

XXIV

Alas, alas, what heart could suffer it,
For ruth, the story of her grief to tell?
What thinker hath the cunning and the
wit
To image it? what hearer, strength to
dwell

A room's length off, while I rehearse the
hell

Suffered by Queen Annelida the fair
For false Arcite, who worked her this de-
spair?

XXV

She weepeth, waileth, swooneth piteously;
She falleth on the earth dead as a stone;
Her graceful limbs are cramped convul-
sively;

She speaketh out wild, as her wits were
gone.

No color, but an ashen paleness — none —
Touched cheek or lips; and no word shook
their white,

But 'Mercy, cruel heart! mine own
Arcite!'

XXVI

Thus it continued, till she pin'd so,
And grew so weak, her feet no more could
bear

Her body, languishing in ceaseless woe.
Whereof Arcite had neither ruth nor
care —

His heart had put out new-green shoots
elsewhere;

Therefore he deigned not on her grief to
think,

And reckoned little, did she float or sink.

XXVII

His fine new lady kept him in such narrow
Strict limit, by the bridle, at the end
O' the whip, he feared her least word as
an arrow, —

Her threatening made him, as a bow, to
bend,

And at her pleasure did he turn and wend;
Seeing she never granted to this lover
A single grace he could sing 'Ios' over.

XXVIII

She drove him forth — she scarcely deigned
to know

That he was servant to her ladyship:

But, lest he should be proud, she kept him
low,

Nor paid his service from a smiling lip:

She sent him now to land, and now to
ship;

And giving him all danger to his fill,

She thereby had him at her sovereign will.

XXIX

Be taught of this, ye prudent women all,

Warn'd by Annelida and false Arcite:

Because she chose, himself, 'dear heart' to
call

And be so meek, he loved her not aright.

The nature of man's heart is to delight

In something strange — moreover, (may
Heaven save

The wrong'd) the thing they cannot, they
would have.

XXX

Now turn we to Annelida again,
 Who pinèd day by day in languishment.
 But when she saw no comfort met her
 pain,
 Weeping once in a woeful unconstraint,
 She set herself to fashion a complaint,
 Which with her own pale hand she 'gan to
 write,
 And sent it to her lover, to Arcite.

THE COMPLAINT OF ANNELIDA
TO FALSE ARCITE

I

THE sword of sorrow, whetted sharp for
 me
 On false delight, with point of memory
 Stabb'd so mine heart, bliss-bare and black
 of hue,
 That all to dread is turn'd my dance's glee,
 My face's beauty to despondency —
 For nothing it availeth to be true —
 And, whosoever is so, she shall rue
 Obeying love, and cleaving faithfully
 Always to one, and changing for no new.

II

I ought to know it well as any wight,
 For I loved one with all my heart and
 might,
 More than myself a hundred-thousand fold,
 And callèd him my heart's dear life, my
 knight,
 And was all his, as far as it was right;
 His gladness did my blitheness make of
 old,
 And in his least disease my death was told;
 Who, on his side, had plighted lovers'
 plight,
 Me, evermore, his lady and love to hold.

III

Now is he false — alas, alas ! — although
 Unwronged ! and acting such a ruthless
 part,
 That with a little word he will not deign
 To bring the peace back to my mournful
 heart.
 Drawn in, and caught up by another's art,
 Right as he will, he laugheth at my pain;
 While I — I cannot my weak heart restrain

From loving him — still, aye; yet none I
 know
 To whom of all this grief I can complain.

IV

Shall I complain (ah, piteous and harsh
 sound !)
 Unto my foe, who gave mine heart a
 wound,
 And still desireth that the harm be more ?
 Now certes, if I sought the whole earth
 round,
 No other help, no better leech were found !
 My destiny hath shaped it so of yore —
 I would not other medicine, nor yet lore.
 I would be ever where I once was bound;
 And what I said, would say for evermore.

V

Alas ! and where is gone your gentillesse ?
 Where gone your pleasant words, your
 humbleness ?
 Where your devotion full of reverent fear,
 Your patient loyalty, your busy address
 To me, whom once you callèd nothing less
 Than mistress, sovereign lady, i' the sphere
 O' the world ? Ah me ! no word, no look
 of cheer,
 Will you vouchsafe upon my heaviness !
 Alas your love ! I bought it all too dear.

VI

Now certes, sweet, howe'er you be
 The cause so, and so causelessly,
 Of this my mortal agony,
 Your reason should amend the failing !
 Your friend, your true love, do you flee,
 Who never in time nor yet degree
 Grieved you: so may the all-knowing he
 Save my lorn soul from future wailing.

VII

Because I was so plain, Arcite,
 In all my doings, your delight
 Seeking in all things, where I might
 In honor, — meek and kind and free;
 Therefore you do me such despite.
 Alas ! howe'er through cruelty
 My heart with sorrow's sword you smite,
 You cannot kill its love. — Ah me !

VIII

Ah, my sweet foe, why do you so
 For shame ?

Think you that praise, in sooth, will raise
 Your name,
 Loving anew, and being untrue
 For aye ?
 Thus casting down your manhood's crown
 In blame,
 And working me adversity,
 The same
 Who loves you most — (O God, * thou
 know'st !)
 Alway ?
 Yet turn again — be fair and plain
 Some day;
 And then shall this, that seems amiss,
 Be game,
 All being forgiv'n, while yet from heav'n
 I stay.

IX

Behold, dear heart, I write this to obtain
 Some knowledge, whether I should pray or
 'plaine:
 Which way is best to force you to be true?
 For either I must have you in my chain,
 Or you, sweet, with the death must part us
 twain;
 There is no mean, no other way more new:
 And, that Heaven's mercy on my soul may
 rue
 And let you slay me outright with this
 pain,
 The whiteness in my cheeks may prove to
 you.

X

For hitherto mine own death have I sought;
 Myself I murder with my secret thought,
 In sorrow and ruth of your unkindnesses !
 I weep, I wail, I fast — all helpeth nought,
 I flee all joy (I mean the name of aught),
 I flee all company, all mirthfulness —
 Why, who can make her boast of more dis-
 tress
 Than I ? To such a plight you have me
 brought,
 Guiltless (I need no witness) ne'ertheless.

XI

Shall I go pray and wail my womanhood ?
 Compared to such a deed, death's self were
 good.
 What ! ask for mercy, and guiltless —
 where's the need ?
 And if I wailed my life so, — that you
 would

Care nothing, is less feared than under-
 stood:
 And if mine oath of love I dared to plead
 In mine excuse, — your scorn would be its
 need.
 Ah, love ! it giveth flowers instead of
 seed —
 Full long ago I might have taken heed.

XII

And though I had you back to-morrow
 again,
 I might as well hold April from the rain
 As hold you to the vows you vowed me
 last.
 Maker of all things, and truth's sovereign,
 Where is the truth of man, who hath it
 slain,
 That she who loveth him should find him
 fast
 As in a tempest is a rotten mast ?
 Is that a tame beast which is ever fain
 To flee us when restraint and fear are
 past?

XIII

Now mercy, sweet, if I mis-say; —
 Have I said aught is wrong to-day ?
 I do not know — my wit's astray —
 I fare as doth the song of one who weep-
 eth;
 For now I 'plaine, and now I play —
 I am so 'mazed, I die away —
 Arcite, you have the key for aye
 Of all my world, and all the good it keep-
 eth.

XIV

And in this world there is not one
 Who walketh with a sadder moan,
 And bears more grief than I have done;
 And if light slumbers overcome me,
 Methinks your image, in the glory
 Of skyey azure, stands before me,
 Re-vowing the old love you bore me,
 And praying for new mercy from me.

XV

Through the long night, this wondrous
 sight,
 Bear I,
 Which haunteth still, the daylight, till
 I die:
 But nought of this, your heart, I wis,
 Can reach.

Mine eyes down-pour, they nevermore
 Are dry,
 While to your ruth, and eke your truth,
 I cry —
 But, weladay, too far be they
 To fetch.
 Thus destiny is holding me —
 Ah, wretch !
 And when I fain would break the chain,
 And try —
 Faileth my wit (so weak is it)
 With speech.

XVI

Therefore I end thus, since my hope is
 o'er —
 I give all up both now and evermore;
 And in the balance ne'er again will lay

My safety, nor be studious in love-lore.
 But like the swan who, as I heard of yore,
 Singeth life's penance on his deathly day,
 So I sing here my life and woes away, —
 Ay, how you, cruel Arcite, wounded sore,
 With memory's point, your poor Annelida.

XVII

After Annelida, the woeful queen,
 Had written in her own hand in this wise,
 With ghastly face, less pale than white, I
 ween,
 She fell a-swooning; then she 'gan arise,
 And unto Mars voweth a sacrifice
 Within the temple, with a sorrowful bearing,
 And in such phrase as meets your present
 hearing.

POEMS OF 1844

In 1844 appeared, *Poems. By Elizabeth Barrett Barrett, Author of The Seraphim, etc. In two volumes.* (London, Edward Moxon, Dover Street.) This edition, the last which bore Mrs. Browning's maiden name, was dedicated to her father, and 'A Drama of Exile' was its

initial and longest poem. Her mind, as when she wrote 'The Seraphim,' was still preoccupied by the idea of casting the stupendous incidents of the Christian story into a form approximating that of Greek tragedy.

A DRAMA OF EXILE

'De patrie, et de Dieu, des poètes, de l'âme
 Qui s'élève en priant.' —Victor Hugo.

PERSONS

CHRIST, *in a Vision.*
 ADAM.
 EVE.
 GABRIEL.
 LUCIFER.

Angels, Eden Spirits, Earth Spirits, and Phantasms.

SCENE. — *The outer side of the gate of Eden shut fast with cloud, from the depth of which revolves a sword of fire self-moved. ADAM and EVE are seen in the distance flying along the glare.*

LUCIFER, *alone.*

REJOICE in the clefts of Gehenna,
 My exiled, my host !
 Earth has exiles as hopeless as when a
 Heaven's empire was lost.

Through the seams of her shaken foundations,

Smoke up in great joy !
 With the smoke of your fierce exultations
 Deform and destroy !
 Smoke up with your lurid revenges,
 And darken the face ¹⁰
 Of the white heavens and taunt them with
 changes

From glory and grace.
 We, in falling, while destiny strangles,
 Pull down with us all.
 Let them look to the rest of their angels !
 Who's safe from a fall ?

HE saves not. Where's Adam ? Can
 pardon

Requicken that sod ?
 Unkinged is the King of the Garden,
 The image of God.

Other exiles are cast out of Eden, —
 More curse has been hurled:

Come up, O my locusts, and feed in
 The green of the world !
 Come up ! we have conquered by evil;
 Good reigns not alone: ²⁰

I prevail now, and, angel or devil,
Inherit a throne.

[In sudden apparition a watch of innumerable Angels, rank above rank, slopes up from around the gate to the zenith. The Angel GABRIEL descends.]

Lucifer. Hail, Gabriel, the keeper of the gate!

Now that the fruit is plucked, prince
Gabriel, 30

I hold that Eden is impregnable
Under thy keeping.

Gabriel. Angel of the sin,
Such as thou standest, — pale in the drear
light

Which rounds the rebel's work with
Maker's wrath, —

Thou shalt be an Idea to all souls,
A monumental melancholy gloom
Seen down all ages, whence to mark de-
spair

And measure out the distances from good.
Go from us straightway!

Lucifer. Wherefore?

Gabriel. *Lucifer,*
Thy last step in this place trod sorrow
up. 40

Recoil before that sorrow, if not this sword.

Lucifer. Angels are in the world —

wherefore not I?

Exiles are in the world — wherefore not I?
The cursed are in the world — wherefore
not I?

Gabriel. Depart!

Lucifer. And where's the logic of 'de-
part'?

Our lady Eve had half been satisfied
To obey her Maker, if I had not learnt
To fix my postulate better. Dost thou
dream

Of guarding some monopoly in heaven
Instead of earth? Why, I can dream with
thee 50

To the length of thy wings.

Gabriel. I do not dream.

This is not heaven, even in a dream, nor
earth,

As earth was once, first breathed among
the stars,

Articulate glory from the mouth divine,
To which the myriad spheres thrilled au-
dibly,

Touched like a lute-string, and the sons of
God

Said AMEN, singing it. I know that this

Is earth not new created but new cursed —
This, Eden's gate not opened but built
up

With a final cloud of sunset. Do I
dream? 60

Alas, not so! this is the Eden lost
By Lucifer the serpent; this the sword
(This sword alive with justice and with
fire)

That smote, upon the forehead, Lucifer
The angel. Wherefore, angel, go — de-
part!

Enough is sinned and suffered.

Lucifer. By no means.
Here's a brave earth to sin and suffer
on:

It holds fast still — it cracks not under
curse;

It holds like mine immortal. Presently
We'll sow it thick enough with graves as
green 70

Or greener certes, than its knowledge-tree.
We'll have the cypress for the tree of
life,

More eminent for shadow: for the rest,
We'll build it dark with towns and pyra-
mids,

And temples, if it please you: — we'll
have feasts

And funerals also, merrymakes and wars,
Till blood and wine shall mix and run
along

Right o'er the edges. And, good Gabriel
(Ye like that word in heaven), I too have
strength —

Strength to behold Him and not worship
Him, 80

Strength to fall from Him and not cry on
Him,

Strength to be in the universe and yet
Neither God nor his servant. The red
sign

Burnt on my forehead, which you taunt me
with,

Is God's sign that it bows not unto God,
The potter's mark upon his work, to show
It rings well to the striker. I and the
earth

Can bear more curse.

Gabriel. O miserable earth,
O ruined angel!

Lucifer. Well, and if it be!

I CHOSE this ruin; I elected it 90
Of my will, not of service. What I do,
I do volitient, not obedient,

And overtop thy crown with my despair.
My sorrow crowns me. Get thee back to
heaven,
And leave me to the earth, which is mine
own

In virtue of her ruin, as I hers
In virtue of my revolt! Turn thou from
both

That bright, impassive, passive angelhood,
And spare to read us backward any more
Of the spent hallelujahs!

Gabriel. Spirit of scorn, ¹⁰⁰
I might say, of unreason! I might say,
That who despairs, acts; that who acts,
connives

With God's relations set in time and space;
That who elects, assumes a something good
Which God made possible; that who lives,
obeys

The law of a Life-maker . . .

Lucifer. Let it pass!
No more, thou Gabriel! What if I stand
up

And strike my brow against the crystal-
line

Roofing the creatures, — shall I say, for
that,

My stature is too high for me to
stand, — ¹¹⁰

Henceforward I must sit? Sit thou!

Gabriel. I kneel.

Lucifer. A heavenly answer. Get thee
to thy heaven,

And leave my earth to me!

Gabriel. Through heaven and earth
God's will moves freely, and I follow it,
As color follows light. He overflows
The firmamental walls with deity,
Therefore with love; his lightnings go
abroad,

His pity may do so, his angels must,

Whene'er He gives them charges.

Lucifer. Verily,
I and my demons, who are spirits of
scorn, ¹²⁰
Might hold this charge of standing with a
sword

"Twixt man and his inheritance, as well
As the benignest angel of you all.

Gabriel. Thou speakest in the shadow of
thy change.

If thou hadst gazed upon the face of God
This morning for a moment, thou hadst
known

That only pity fitly can chastise:
Hate but avenges.

Lucifer. As it is, I know
Something of pity. When I reeled in
heaven,

And my sword grew too heavy for my
grasp, ¹³⁰

Stabbing through matter, which it could not
pierce

So much as the first shell of, — toward the
throne;

When I fell back, down, — staring up as I
fell, —

The lightnings holding open my scathed
lids,

And that thought of the infinite of God,

Hurled after to precipitate descent;

When countless angel faces still and stern

Pressed out upon me from the level
heavens

Adown the abysmal spaces, and I fell

Trampled down by your stillness, and struck
blind ¹⁴⁰

By the sight within your eyes, — 't was then
I knew

How ye could pity, my kind angelhood!

Gabriel. Alas, discrowned one, by the
truth in me

Which God keeps in me, I would give
away

All — save that truth and his love keeping
it —

To lead thee home again into the light

And hear thy voice chant with the morning
stars,

When their rays tremble round them with
much song

Sung in more gladness!

Lucifer. Sing, my Morning Star!

Last beautiful, last heavenly, that I
loved! ¹⁵⁰

If I could drench thy golden locks with
tears,

What were it to this angel?

Gabriel. What love is.
And now I have named God.

Lucifer. Yet, Gabriel,
By the lie in me which I keep myself,

Thou'rt a false swearer. Were it other-
wise,

What dost thou here, vouchsafing tender
thoughts

To that earth-angel or earth-demon —
which,

Thou and I have not solved the problem
yet
Enough to argue,—that fallen Adam
there,—
That red-clay and a breath,—who must,
forsooth, 160

Live in a new apocalypse of sense,
With beauty and music waving in his trees
And running in his rivers, to make glad
His soul made perfect?—is it not for
hope,

A hope within thee deeper than thy truth,
Of finally conducting him and his
To fill the vacant thrones of me and mine,
Which affront heaven with their vacu-
ity?

Gabriel. Angel, there are no vacant thrones
in heaven

To suit thy empty words. Glory and
life 170

Fulfil their own depletions; and if God
Sighed you far from Him, his next breath
drew in

A compensative splendor up the vast,
Flushing the starry arteries.

Lucifer. What a change!
So, let the vacant thrones and gardens too
Fill as may please you!—and be pitiful,
As ye translate that word, to the dethroned
And exiled, man or angel. The fact stands,
That I, the rebel, the cast out and down,
Am here and will not go; while there,
along 180

The light to which ye flash the desert
out,

Flies your adopted Adam, your red-clay
In two kinds, both being flawed. Why,
what is this?

Whose work is this? Whose hand was in
the work?

Against whose hand? In this last strife,
methinks,

I am not a fallen angel!

Gabriel. Dost thou know
Aught of those exiles?

Lucifer. Ay: I know they have fled
Silent all day along the wilderness:
I know they wear, for burden on their
backs,

The thought of a shut gate of Paradise, 190
And faces of the marshalled cherubim
Shining against, not for them; and I know
They dare not look in one another's
face,—

As if each were a cherub!

Gabriel. Dost thou know
Aught of their future?

Lucifer. Only as much as this:
That evil will increase and multiply
Without a benediction.

Gabriel. Nothing more?

Lucifer. Why so the angels taunt!

What should be more?

Gabriel. God is more.

Lucifer. Proving what?

Gabriel. That he is God,
And capable of saving. *Lucifer,* 200

I charge thee by the solitude He kept
Ere He created,—leave the earth to God!

Lucifer. My foot is on the earth, firm
as my sin.

Gabriel. I charge thee by the memory
of heaven

Ere any sin was done,—leave earth to
God!

Lucifer. My sin is on the earth, to
reign thereon.

Gabriel. I charge thee by the choral
song we sang,

When up against the white shore of our
feet

The depths of the creation swelled and
broke,—

And the new worlds, the beaded foam and
flower 210

Of all that coil, roared outward into space
On thunder-edges,—leave the earth to
God!

Lucifer. My woe is on the earth, to
curse thereby.

Gabriel. I charge thee by that mourn-
ful Morning Star

Which trembles . . .

Lucifer. Enough spoken. As the pine
In norland forest drops its weight of snows
By a night's growth, so, growing toward
my ends

I drop thy counsels. Farewell, Gabriel!
Watch out thy service; I achieve my
will.

And peradventure in the after years, 220
When thoughtful men shall bend their
spacious brows

Upon the storm and strife seen everywhere
To ruffle their smooth manhood and break
up

With lurid lights of intermittent hope
Their human fear and wrong,—they may
discern

The heart of a lost angel in the earth.

CHORUS OF EDEN SPIRITS

(*Chanting from Paradise, while ADAM and EVE fly across the Sword-glare.*)

Hearken, oh hearken ! let your souls behind you

Turn, gently moved !

Our voices feel along the Dread to find you,

O lost, beloved ! 230

Through the thick-shielded and strong-marshalled angels,

They press and pierce:

Our requiems follow fast on our evangels, —

Voice throbs in verse.

We are but orphaned spirits left in Eden

A time ago:

God gave us golden cups, and we were bidden

To feed you so.

But now our right hand hath no cup remaining,

No work to do, 240

The mystic hydromel is spilt, and staining

The whole earth through.

Most ineradicable stains, for showing

(Not interfused !)

That brighter colors were the world's foregoing,

Than shall be used.

Hearken, oh hearken ! ye shall hearken surely

For years and years,

The noise beside you, dripping coldly, purely,

Of spirits' tears. 250

The yearning to a beautiful denied you Shall strain your powers;

Ideal sweetnesses shall overglide you, Resumed from ours.

In all your music, our pathetic minor

Your ears shall cross;

And all good gifts shall mind you of diviner,

With sense of loss.

We shall be near you in your poet-languors

And wild extremes, 260

What time ye vex the desert with vain angers,

Or mock with dreams.

And when upon you, weary after roaming,

Death's seal is put,

By the foregone ye shall discern the coming,

Through eyelids shut.

Spirits of the Trees.

Hark ! the Eden trees are stirring,

Soft and solemn in your hearing !

Oak and linden, palm and fir,

Tamarisk and juniper, 270

Each still throbbing in vibration

Since that crowning of creation

When the God-breath spake abroad,

Let us make man like to God !

And the pine stood quivering

As the awful word went by,

Like a vibrant music-string

Stretched from mountain-peak to sky ;

And the platan did expand 279

Slow and gradual, branch and head ;

And the cedar's strong black shade

Fluttered brokenly and grand:

Grove and wood were swept aslant

In emotion jubilant.

Voice of the same, but softer.

Which divine impulsion cleaves

In dim movements to the leaves

Dropt and lifted, dropt and lifted,

In the sunlight greenly sifted, —

In the sunlight and the moonlight

Greenly sifted through the trees. 290

Ever wave the Eden trees

In the nightlight and the noonlight,

With a ruffling of green branches

Shaded off to resonances,

Never stirred by rain or breeze.

Fare ye well, farewell !

The sylvan sounds, no longer audible,

Expire at Eden's door.

Each footstep of your treading

Treads out some murmur which ye heard before. 300

Farewell ! the trees of Eden

Ye shall hear nevermore.

River Spirits.

Hark ! the flow of the four rivers —

Hark the flow !

How the silence round you shivers,

While our voices through it go,

Cold and clear.

A softer Voice.

Think a little, while ye hear,

Of the banks

Where the willows and the deer 310
 Crowd in intermingled ranks,
 As if all would drink at once
 Where the living water runs ! —
 Of the fishes' golden edges
 Flashing in and out the sedges;
 Of the swans on silver thrones,
 Floating down the winding streams
 With impassive eyes turned shoreward
 And a chant of undertones, —
 And the lotos leaning forward 320
 To help them into dreams !
 Fare ye well, farewell !
 The river-sounds, no longer audible,
 Expire at Eden's door.
 Each footstep of your treading
 Treads out some murmur which ye heard
 before.
 Farewell ! the streams of Eden
 Ye shall hear nevermore.

Bird Spirit.

I am the nearest nightingale
 That singeth in Eden after you; 330
 And I am singing loud and true,
 And sweet, — I do not fail.
 I sit upon a cypress bough,
 Close to the gate, and I fling my song
 Over the gate and through the mail
 Of the warden angels marshalled
 strong, —
 Over the gate and after you.
 And the warden angels let it pass,
 Because the poor brown bird, alas,
 Sings in the garden, sweet and true. 340
 And I build my song of high pure notes,
 Note over note, height over height,
 Till I strike the arch of the Infinite,
 And I bridge abysmal agonies
 With strong, clear calms of harmonies, —
 And something abides, and something
 floats,
 In the song which I sing after you.
 Fare ye well, farewell !
 The creature-sounds, no longer audible,
 Expire at Eden's door. 350
 Each footstep of your treading
 Treads out some cadence which ye heard
 before.
 Farewell ! the birds of Eden
 Ye shall hear nevermore.

Flower Spirits.

We linger, we linger,
 The last of the throng,
 Like the tones of a singer
 Who loves his own song.

We are spirit-aromas
 Of blossom and bloom. 360
 We call your thoughts home, — as
 Ye breathe our perfume, —
 To the amaranth's splendor
 Afire on the slopes;
 To the lily-bells tender,
 And gray heliotropes;
 To the poppy-plains keeping
 Such dream-breath and blee
 That the angels there stepping
 Grew whiter to see: 370
 To the nook, set with moly,
 Ye jested one day in,
 Till your smile waxed too holy
 And left your lips praying:
 To the rose in the bower-place,
 That dripped o'er you sleeping;
 To the asphodel flower-place,
 Ye walked ankle-deep in.
 We pluck at your raiment,
 We stroke down your hair, 380
 We faint in our lament
 And pine into air.
 Fare ye well, farewell !
 The Eden scents, no longer sensible,
 Expire at Eden's door.
 Each footstep of your treading
 Treads out some fragrance which ye knew
 before.
 Farewell ! the flowers of Eden
 Ye shall smell nevermore.
 [*There is silence. ADAM and EVE
 fly on, and never look back. Only
 a colossal shadow, as of the dark
 Angel passing quickly, is cast upon
 the Sword-glare.*]

SCENE. — *The extremity of the Sword-glare.*

Adam. Pausing a moment on this outer
 edge 390
 Where the supernal sword-glare cuts in
 light
 The dark exterior desert, — hast thou
 strength,
 Beloved, to look behind us to the gate ?
Eve. Have I not strength to look up to
 thy face ?
Adam. We need be strong: yon spectacle
 of cloud
 Which seals the gate up to the final doom,
 Is God's seal manifest. There seem to
 lie

A hundred thunders in it, dark and dead;
The unmolten lightnings vein it motionless;
And, outward from its depth, the self-
moved sword ⁴⁰⁰

Swings slow its awful gnomon of red fire
From side to side, in pendulous horror slow,
Across the stagnant ghastly glare thrown
flat

On the intermediate ground from that to
this.

The angelic hosts, the archangelic pomps,
Thrones, dominations, principedoms, rank on
rank,

Rising sublimely to the feet of God,
On either side and overhead the gate,
Show like a glittering and sustained smoke
Drawn to an apex. That their faces shine ⁴¹⁰
Betwixt the solemn clasping of their wings
Clasped high to a silver point above their
heads, —

We only guess from hence, and not discern.

Eve. Though we were near enough to
see them shine,
The shadow on thy face were awfuller,
To me, at least, — to me — than all their
light.

Adam. What is this, Eve? thou drop-
pest heavily

In a heap earthward, and thy body heaves
Under the golden floodings of thine hair!

Eve. O Adam, Adam! by that name
of Eve — ⁴²⁰

Thine Eve, thy life — which suits me little
now,

Seeing that I now confess myself thy death
And thine undoer, as the snake was
mine, —

I do adjure thee, put me straight away,
Together with my name! Sweet, punish
me!

O Love, be just! and, ere we pass beyond
The light cast outward by the fiery sword,
Into the dark which earth must be to us,
Bruise my head with thy foot, — as the
curse said

My seed shall the first tempter's! strike
with curse, ⁴³⁰

As God struck in the garden! and as HE,
Being satisfied with justice and with wrath,
Did roll his thunder gentler at the close, —
Thou, peradventure, mayst at last recoil
To some soft need of mercy. Strike, my
lord!

I, also, after tempting, writhe on the
ground,

And I would feed on ashes from thine
hand,

As suits me, O my tempted!

Adam. My beloved,
Mine Eve and life — I have no other name
For thee or for the sun than what ye are,
My utter life and light! If we have
fallen, ⁴⁴¹

It is that we have sinned, — we: God is
just;

And, since his curse doth comprehend us
both,

It must be that his balance holds the
weights

Of first and last sin on a level. What!
Shall I who had not virtue to stand
straight

Among the hills of Eden, here assume
To mend the justice of the perfect God,
By piling up a curse upon his curse,
Against thee — thee?

Eve. For so, perchance, thy God ⁴⁵⁰
Might take thee into grace for scorning
me;

Thy wrath against the sinner giving proof
Of inward abrogation of the sin:

And so, the blessed angels might come
down

And walk with thee as erst, — I think they
would, —

Because I was not near to make them sad
Or soil the rustling of their innocence.

Adam. They know me. I am deepest
in the guilt,

If last in the transgression.

Eve. Thou!

Adam. If God,
Who gave the right and joyaunce of the
world ⁴⁶⁰

Both unto thee and me, — gave thee to me,
The best gift last, the last sin was the
worst,

Which sinned against more complement of
gifts

And grace of giving. God! I render back
Strong benediction and perpetual praise
From mortal feeble lips (as incense-smoke,
Out of a little censer, may fill heaven),
That thou, in striking my benumbed hands
And forcing them to drop all other boons
Of beauty and dominion and delight, — ⁴⁷⁰
Hast left this well-beloved Eve, this life
Within life, this best gift between their
palms,

In gracious compensation!

Eve. Is it thy voice ?
Or some saluting angel's — calling home
My feet into the garden ?

Adam. O my God !
I, standing here between the glory and
dark,—

The glory of thy wrath projected forth
From Eden's wall, the dark of our dis-
tress

Which settles a step off in that drear
world —

Lift up to Thee the hands from whence
hath fallen 480

Only creation's sceptre, — thanking Thee
That rather Thou hast cast me out with
her

Than left me lorn of her in Paradise,
With angel looks and angel songs around
To show the absence of her eyes and voice,
And make society full desertness
Without her use in comfort!

Eve. Where is loss ?
Am I in Eden ? can another speak
Mine own love's tongue ?

Adam. Because with *her*, I stand
Upright, as far as can be in this fall, 490
And look away from heaven which doth
accuse,

And look away from earth which doth con-
vict,
Into her face, and crown my dis-crowned
brow

Out of her love, and put the thought of
her

Around me, for an Eden full of birds,
And lift her body up — thus — to my heart,
And with my lips upon her lips, — thus,
thus, —

Do quicken and sublimate my mortal
breath

Which cannot climb against the grave's
steep sides

But overtops this grief.

Eve. I am renewed. 500
My eyes grow with the light which is in
thine;

The silence of my heart is full of sound.
Hold me up — so ! Because I compre-
hend

This human love, I shall not be afraid
Of any human death; and yet because
I know this strength of love, I seem to
know

Death's strength by that same sign. Kiss
on my lips,

To shut the door close on my rising soul, —
Lest it pass outwards in astonishment
And leave thee lonely !

Adam. Yet thou liest, Eve, 510
Bent heavily on thyself across mine arm,
Thy face flat to the sky.

Eve. Ay, and the tears
Running, as it might seem, my life from
me,

They run so fast and warm. Let me lie
so,

And weep so, as if in a dream or prayer,
Unfastening, clasp by clasp, the hard tight
thought

Which clipped my heart and showed me
evermore

Loathed of thy justice as I loathe the snake,
And as the pure ones loathe our sin. To-
day,

All day, belovèd, as we fled across 520
This desolating radiance cast by swords

Not suns, — my lips prayed soundless to
myself,

Striking against each other — 'O Lord
God !'

('T was so I prayed) 'I ask Thee by my
sin,

And by thy curse, and by thy blameless
heavens,

Make dreadful haste to hide me from thy
face

And from the face of my belovèd here
For whom I am no helpmeet, quick away
Into the new dark mystery of death ! 529

I will lie still there, I will make no plaint,
I will not sigh, nor sob, nor speak a word,
Nor struggle to come back beneath the
sun

Where peradventure I might sin anew
Against thy mercy and his pleasure.

Death,
O death, whate'er it be, is good enough
For such as I am: while for Adam here,
No voice shall say again, in heaven or
earth,

It is not good for him to be alone.'

Adam. And was it good for such a
prayer to pass,

My unkind Eve, betwixt our mutual lives ?
If I am exiled, must I be bereaved ? 541

Eve. 'T was an ill prayer: it shall be
prayed no more;

And God did use it like a foolishness,
Giving no answer. Now my heart has
grown

Too high and strong for such a foolish
prayer;
Love makes it strong: and since I was the
first

In the transgression, with a steady foot
I will be first to tread from this sword-
glare

Into the outer darkness of the waste, —
And thus I do it.

Adam. Thus I follow thee, 550
As erewhile in the sin. — What sounds !
what sounds !

I feel a music which comes straight from
heaven,

As tender as a watering dew.

Eve. I think
That angels — not those guarding Para-
dise, —

But the love-angels, who came erst to us,
And when we said 'God,' fainted unawares
Back from our mortal presence unto God,
(As if He drew them inward in a breath)
His name being heard of them, — I think
that they

With sliding voices lean from heavenly
towers, 560

Invisible but gracious. Hark — how soft !

CHORUS OF INVISIBLE ANGELS

Faint and tender.

Mortal man and woman,
Go upon your travel !
Heaven assist the human
Smoothly to unravel
All that web of pain
Wherein ye are holden.
Do ye know our voices
Chanting down the Golden ?
Do ye guess our choice is, 570
Being un beholden,
To be hearkened by you yet again ?

This pure door of opal
God hath shut between us, —
Us, his shining people,
You, who once have seen us
And are blinded new !
Yet, across the doorway,
Past the silence reaching,
Farewells evermore may, 580
Blessing in the teaching,
Glide from us to you.

First Semichorus.

Think how erst your Eden,
Day on day succeeding,
With our presence glowed.
We came as if the Heavens were bowed
To a milder music rare.
Ye saw us in our solemn treading,
Treading down the steps of cloud,
While our wings, outspreading 590
Double calms of whiteness,
Dropped superfluous brightness
Down from stair to stair.

Second Semichorus.

Or oft, abrupt though tender,
While ye gazed on space,
We flashed our angel-splendor
In either human face.
With mystic lilies in our hands,
From the atmospheric bands
Breaking with a sudden grace, 600
We took you unaware !
While our feet struck glories
Outward, smooth and fair,
Which we stood on floorwise,
Platformed in mid-air.

First Semichorus.

Or oft, when Heaven-descended,
Stood we in our wondering sight
In a mute apocalypse
With dumb vibrations on our lips
From hosannas ended, 610
And grand half-vanishings
Of the empyreal things
Within our eyes belated,
Till the heavenly Infinite
Falling off from the Created,
Left our inward contemplation
Opened into ministration.

Chorus.

Then upon our axle turning
Of great joy to sympathy,
We sang out the morning 620
Broadening up the sky.
Or we drew
Our music through
The noontide's hush and heat and shine,
Informed with our intense Divine:
Interrupted vital notes
Palpitating hither, thither,
Burning out into the æther,
Sensible like fiery motes.
Or, whenever twilight drifted 630
Through the cedar masses,
The globed sun we lifted,
Trailing purple, trailing gold

Out between the passes
Of the mountains manifold,
To anthems slowly sung:
While he, — aweary, half in swoon
For joy to hear our climbing tune
Transpierce the stars' concentric rings, —
The burden of his glory flung 640
In broken lights upon our wings.
[*The chant dies away confusedly, and
LUCIFER appears.*

Lucifer. Now may all fruits be pleasant
to thy lips,
Beautiful Eve ! 'The times have somewhat
changed
Since thou and I had talk beneath a tree,
Albeit ye are not gods yet.

Eve. Adam ! hold
My right hand strongly ! It is Lucifer —
And we have love to lose.

Adam. I' the name of God,
Go apart from us, O thou Lucifer !
And leave us to the desert thou hast made
Out of thy treason. Bring no serpent-
slime 650
Athwart this path kept holy to our tears !
Or we may curse thee with their bitterness.

Lucifer. Curse freely ! curses thicken.
Why, this Eve
Who thought me once part worthy of her
ear

And somewhat wiser than the other
beasts, —

Drawing together her large globes of eyes,
The light of which is throbbing in and out
Their steadfast continuity of gaze, —
Knots her fair eyebrows in so hard a knot,
And down from her white heights of woman-
hood 660

Looks on me so amazed, — I scarce should
fear

To wager such an apple as she plucked
Against one riper from the tree of life,
That she could curse too — as a woman
may —
Smooth in the vowels.

Eve. So — speak wickedly !
I like it best so. Let thy words be
wounds, —

For, so, I shall not fear thy power to hurt.
Trench on the forms of good by open ill —
For, so, I shall wax strong and grand with
scorn,

Scorning myself for ever trusting thee 670
As far as thinking, ere a snake ate dust,
He could speak wisdom.

Lucifer. Our new gods, it seems
Deal more in thunders than in courtesies.
And, sooth, mine own Olympus, which anon
I shall build up to loud-voiced imagery
From all the wandering visions of the
world,

May show worse railing than our lady Eve
Pours o'er the rounding of her argent arm.
But why should this be ? Adam pardoned
Eve.

Adam. Adam loved Eve. Jehovah pah-
doned both ! 680

Eve. Adam forgave Eve — because lov-
ing Eve.

Lucifer. So, well. Yet Adam was un-
done of Eve,

As both were by the snake. Therefore
forgive,

In like wise, fellow-temptress, the poor
snake —

Who stung there, not so poorly ! [*Aside.*
Eve. Hold thy wrath,

Belovèd Adam ! let me answer him ;
For this time he speaks truth, which we
should hear,

And asks for mercy, which I most should
grant,

In like wise, as he tells us — in like
wise !

And therefore I thee pardon, Lucifer, 690
As freely as the streams of Eden flowed
When we were happy by them. So, de-
part ;

Leave us to walk the remnant of our time
Out mildly in the desert. Do not seek
To harm us any more or scoff at us,
Or ere the dust be laid upon our face,
To find there the communion of the dust
And issue of the dust. — Go !

Adam. At once, go !

Lucifer. Forgive ! and go ! Ye images
of clay,
Shrunk somewhat in the mould, — what
jest is this ? 700

What words are these to use ? By what a
thought

Conceive ye of me ? Yesterday — a snake !
To-day — what ?

Adam. A strong spirit.

Eve. A sad spirit.

Adam. Perhaps a fallen angel. — Who
shall say !

Lucifer. Who told thee, Adam ?

Adam. Thou ! The prodigy
Of thy vast brows and melancholy eyes

Which comprehend the heights of some great fall.

I think that thou hast one day worn a crown

Under the eyes of God.

Lucifer. And why of God ?
Adam. It were no crown else. Verily, I think

Thou'rt fallen far. I had not yesterday
 Said it so surely, but I know to-day
 Grief by grief, sin by sin.

Lucifer. A crown, by a crown.
Adam. Ay, mock me ! now I know more than I knew :

Now I know that thou art fallen below hope

Of final re-ascent.

Lucifer. Because ?

Adam. Because

A spirit who expected to see God
 Though at the last point of a million years,
 Could dare no mockery of a ruined man
 Such as this Adam.

Lucifer. Who is high and bold — ⁷²⁰
 Be it said passing ! — of a good red clay
 Discovered on some top of Lebanon,
 Or haply of Aornus, beyond sweep
 Of the black eagle's wing ! A furlong
 lower

Had made a meeker king for Eden. Soh !
 Is it not possible, by sin and grief
 (To give the things your names) that spirits
 should rise

Instead of falling ?

Adam. Most impossible.

The Highest being the Holy and the Glad,
 Whoever rises must approach delight ⁷³⁰
 And sanctity in the act.

Lucifer. Ha, my clay-king !
 Thou wilt not rule by wisdom very long
 The after generations. Earth, methinks,
 Will disinherit thy philosophy
 For a new doctrine suited to thine heirs,
 And class these present dogmas with the
 rest

Of the old-world traditions, Eden fruits
 And Saurian fossils.

Eve. Speak no more with him,
 Beloved ! it is not good to speak with him.
 Go from us, Lucifer, and speak no more !
 We have no pardon which thou dost not
 scorn, ⁷⁴¹

Nor any bliss, thou seest, for coveting,
 Nor innocence for staining. Being bereft,
 We would be alone. — Go !

Lucifer. Ah ! ye talk the same,
 All of you — spirits and clay — go, and
 depart !

In Heaven they said so, and at Eden's gate,
 And here, reiterant, in the wilderness.

None saith, Stay with me, for thy face is
 fair !

None saith, Stay with me, for thy voice is
 sweet !

And yet I was not fashioned out of clay. ⁷⁵⁰
 Look on me, woman ! Am I beautiful ?

Eve. Thou hast a glorious darkness.

Lucifer. Nothing more ?

Eve. I think, no more.

Lucifer. False Heart — thou thinkest
 more !

Thou canst not choose but think, as I praise
 God,

Unwillingly but fully, that I stand
 Most absolute in beauty. As yourselves
 Were fashioned very good at best, so *we*
 Sprang very beauteous from the creant
 Word

Which thrilled behind us, God himself being
 moved

When that august work of a perfect shape,
 His dignities of sovran angelhood, ⁷⁶¹

Swept out into the universe, — divine
 With thunderous movements, earnest looks
 of gods,

And silver-solemn clash of cymbal wings.
 Whereof was I, in motion and in form,
 A part not poorest. And yet, — yet, per-
 haps,

This beauty which I speak of, is not here,
 As God's voice is not here, nor even my
 crown —

I do not know. What is this thought or
 thing

Which I call beauty ? Is it thought, or
 thing ? ⁷⁷⁰

Is it a thought accepted for a thing ?

Or both ? or neither ? — a pretext — a
 word ?

Its meaning flutters in me like a flame
 Under my own breath: my perceptions reel
 For evermore around it, and fall off,
 As if it too were holy.

Eve. Which it is.

Adam. The essence of all beauty, I call
 love.

The attribute, the evidence, and end,
 The consummation to the inward sense,
 Of beauty apprehended from without, ⁷⁸⁰
 I still call love. As form, when colorless,

Is nothing to the eye,—that pine-tree
there,
Without its black and green, being all a
blank,—

So, without love, is beauty undiscerned
In man or angel. Angel! rather ask
What love is in thee, what love moves to
thee,

And what collateral love moves on with
thee;

Then shalt thou know if thou art beautiful.
Lucifer. Love! what is love? I lose it.
Beauty and love

I darken to the image. Beauty — love! ⁷⁹⁰
[*He fades away, while a low music
sounds.*

Adam. Thou art pale, Eve.

Eve. The precipice of ill

Down this colossal nature, dizzies me:
And, hark! the starry harmony remote
Seems measuring the heights from whence
he fell.

Adam. Think that we have not fallen so!

By the hope

And aspiration, by the love and faith,
We do exceed the stature of this angel.

Eve. Happier we are than he is, by the
death.

Adam. Or rather, by the life of the Lord
God!

How dim the angel grows, as if that blast ⁸⁰⁰
Of music swept him back into the dark.

[*The music is stronger, gathering itself
into uncertain articulation.*

Eve. It throbs in on us like a plaintive
heart,

Pressing, with slow pulsations, vibrative,
Its gradual sweetness through the yielding
air,

To such expression as the stars may use,
Most starry-sweet and strange! With every
note

That grows more loud, the angel grows
more dim,

Receding in proportion to approach,
Until he stand afar,—a shade.

Adam. Now, words.

SONG OF THE MORNING STAR TO LUCIFER

*He fades utterly away and vanishes, as it
proceeds.*

Mine orbèd image sinks ⁸¹⁰
Back from thee, back from thee,

As thou art fallen, methinks,
Back from me, back from me.

O my light-bearer,
Could another fairer

Lack to thee, lack to thee?

Ah, ah, Heosphoros!

I loved thee with the fiery love of stars
Who love by burning, and by loving move,
Too near the throned Jehovah not to love. ⁸²⁰

Ah, ah, Heosphoros!

Their brows flash fast on me from gliding
cars,

Pale-passioned for my loss.

Ah, ah, Heosphoros!

Mine orbèd heats drop cold

Down from thee, down from thee,

As fell thy grace of old

Down from me, down from me.

O my light-bearer,

Is another fairer ⁸³⁰

Won to thee, won to thee?

Ah, ah, Heosphoros,

Great love preceded loss,

Known to thee, known to thee.

Ah, ah!

Thou, breathing thy communicable grace

Of life into my light,

Mine astral faces, from thine angel face,

Hast inly fed,

And flooded me with radiance overmuch ⁸⁴⁰

From thy pure height.

Ah, ah!

Thou, with calm, floating pinions both ways
spread,

Erect, irradiated,

Didst sting my wheel of glory

On, on before thee

Along the Godlight by a quickening touch!

Ha, ha!

Around, around the firmamental ocean

I swam expanding with delirious fire! ⁸⁵⁰

Around, around, around, in blind desire

To be drawn upward to the Infinite—

Ha, ha!

Until, the motion flinging out the motion

To a keen whirl of passion and avidity,

To a dim whirl of languor and delight,

I wound in gyant orbits smooth and white

With that intense rapidity.

Around, around,

I wound and interwound, ⁸⁶⁰

While all the cyclic heavens about me
spun.

Stars, planets, suns, and moons dilated
broad,
Then flashed together into a single sun,
And wound, and wound in one:
And as they wound I wound, — around,
around,
In a great fire I almost took for God.
Ha, ha, Heosphoros !

Thine angel glory sinks
Down from me, down from me —
My beauty falls, methinks, 870
Down from thee, down from thee !
O my light-bearer,
O my path-preparer,
Gone from me, gone from me !
Ah, ah, Heosphoros !
I cannot kindle underneath the brow
Of this new angel here, who is not thou.
All things are altered since that time
ago, —
And if I shine at eve, I shall not know.
I am strange — I am slow. 880
Ah, ah, Heosphoros !
Henceforward, human eyes of lovers be
The only sweetest sight that I shall see,
With tears between the looks raised up to
me.

Ah, ah !
When, having wept all night, at break of
day
Above the folded hills they shall survey
My light, a little trembling, in the gray.

Ah, ah !
And gazing on me, such shall compre-
hend, 890
Through all my piteous pomp at morn
or even,
And melancholy leaning out of heaven,
That love, their own divine, may change
or end,
That love may close in loss !
Ah, ah, Heosphoros !

SCENE. — *Farther on. A wild open country
seen vaguely in the approaching night.*

Adam. How doth the wide and melan-
choly earth
Gather her hills around us, gray and ghast,
And stare with blank significance of loss
Right in our faces ! Is the wind up ?
Eve. Nay.

Adam. And yet the cedars and the ju-
nipers 900
Rock slowly through the mist, without a
sound,
And shapes which have no certainty of
shape
Drift duskly in and out between the pines,
And loom along the edges of the hills,
And lie flat, curdling in the open ground —
Shadows without a body, which contract
And lengthen as we gaze on them.

Eve. O life
Which is not man's nor angel's ! What is
this ?

Adam. No cause for fear. The circle
of God's life
Contains all life beside.

Eve. I think the earth 910
Is crazed with curse, and wanders from
the sense

Of those first laws affixed to form and
space

Or ever she knew sin.

Adam. We will not fear:
We were brave sinning.

Eve. Yea, I plucked the fruit
With eyes upturned to heaven and seeing
there

Our god-thrones, as the tempter said, —
not God.

My heart, which beat then, sinks. The
sun hath sunk

Out of sight with our Eden.

Adam. Night is near.

Eve. And God's curse, nearest. Let us
travel back

And stand within the sword-glare till we
die, 920

Believing it is better to meet death
Than suffer desolation.

Adam. Nay, beloved !
We must not pluck death from the Maker's
hand,
As erst we plucked the apple: we must
wait

Until He gives death as he gave us
life,

Nor murmur faintly o'er the primal gift
Because we spoil its sweetness with our
sin.

Eve. Ah, ah ! dost thou discern what I
behold ?

Adam. I see all. How the spirits in
thine eyes

From their dilated orbits bound before 930
To meet the spectral Dread !

Eve.

I am afraid —

Ah, ah ! the twilight bristles wild with
shapes

Of intermittent motion, aspect vague
And mystic bearings, which o'ercreep the
earth,

Keeping slow time with horrors in the
blood.

How near they reach . . . and far ! How
gray they move —

Treading upon the darkness without feet,
And fluttering on the darkness without
wings !

Some run like dogs, with noses to the
ground ;

Some keep one path, like sheep ; some rock
like trees ; 940

Some glide like a fallen leaf ; and some
flow on

Copious as rivers.

Adam.

Some spring up like fire :

And some coil . . .

Eve.

Ah, ah ! dost thou pause to say
Like what ? — coil like the serpent, when
he fell

From all the emerald splendor of his height
And writhed, and could not climb against
the curse,

Not a ring's length. I am afraid —
afraid —

I think it is God's will to make me
afraid, —

Permitting THESE to haunt us in the place
Of his belovèd angels — gone from us 950
Because we are not pure. Dear Pity of
God,

That didst permit the angels to go home
And live no more with us who are not
pure,

Save us too from a loathly company —

Almost as loathly in our eyes, perhaps,

As we are in the purest ! Pity us —

Us too ! nor shut us in the dark, away

From verity and from stability,
Or what we name such through the pre-
cedence

Of earth's adjusted uses, — leave us not 960
To doubt betwixt our senses and our
souls,

Which are the more distraught and full of
pain

And weak of apprehension !

Adam.

Courage, Sweet !

The mystic shapes ebb back from us, and
drop

With slow concentric movement, each on
each, —

Expressing wider spaces, — and collapsed
In lines more definite for imagery

And clearer for relation, till the throng
Of shapeless spectra merge into a few
Distinguishable phantasms vague and
grand 970

Which sweep out and around us vastly

And hold us in a circle and a calm.

Eve. Strange phantasms of pale shad-
ow ! there are twelve.

Thou who didst name all lives, hast names
for these ?

Adam. Methinks this is the zodiac of
the earth,

Which rounds us with a visionary dread,
Responding with twelve shadowy signs of
earth,

In fantasmic opposition and approach,
To those celestial, constellated twelve

Which palpitate adown the silent nights 980
Under the pressure of the hand of God

Stretched wide in benediction. At this
hour,

Not a star pricketh the flat gloom of
heaven :

But, girdling close our nether wilderness,
The zodiac - figures of the earth loom
slow, —

Drawn out, as 'suiteth with the place and
time,

In twelve colossal shades instead of stars,
Through which the ecliptic line of mystery
Strikes bleakly with an unrelenting scope,
Foreshowing life and death.

Eve.

By dream or sense, 990

Do we see this ?

Adam. Our spirits have climbed high

By reason of the passion of our grief,
And, from the top of sense, looked over
sense

To the significance and heart of things

Rather than things themselves.

Eve.

And the dim twelve . . .

Adam. Are dim exponents of the crea-
ture-life

As earth contains it. Gaze on them, be-
loved !

By stricter apprehension of the sight,
Suggestions of the creatures shall assuage

The terror of the shadows, — what is
known 1000

Subduing the unknown and taming it
From all prodigious dread. That phan-
tasm, there,

Presents a lion, albeit twenty times
As large as any lion — with a roar
Set soundless in his vibratory jaws,
And a strange horror stirring in his mane.
And, there, a pendulous shadow seems to
weigh —

Good against ill, perchance; and there, a
crab

Puts coldly out its gradual shadow-claws,
Like a slow blot that spreads, — till all the
ground, ¹⁰¹⁰

Crawled over by it, seems to crawl itself.
A bull stands hornèd here with gibbous
glooms;

And a ram likewise: and a scorpion
writhes

Its tail in ghastly slime and stings the
dark.

This way a goat leaps with wild blank of
beard;

And here, fantastic fishes duskly float,
Using the calm for waters, while their
fins

Throb out quick rhythms along the shallow
air.

While images more human —

Eve. How he stands,
That phantasm of a man — who is not *thou*!
Two phantasms of two men!

Adam. One that sustains, ¹⁰²¹
And one that strives, — resuming, so, the
ends

Of manhood's curse of labor. Dost thou
see

That phantasm of a woman?

Eve. I have seen;
But look off to those small humanities
Which draw me tenderly across my fear, —
Lesser and fainter than my womanhood,
Or yet thy manhood — with strange inno-
cence

Set in the misty lines of head and hand.
They lean together! I would gaze on
them ¹⁰³⁰

Longer and longer, till my watching eyes,
As the stars do in watching anything,
Should light them forward from their out-
line vague

To clear configuration.

[Two Spirits, of Organic and Inorganic
Nature, arise from the ground.

But what Shapes

Rise up between us in the open space,
And thrust me into horror, back from
hope!

Adam. Colossal Shapes — twin sovran
images,

With a disconsolate, blank majesty
Set in their wondrous faces! with no look,
And yet an aspect — a significance ¹⁰⁴⁰
Of individual life and passionate ends,
Which overcomes us gazing.

O bleak sound,
O shadow of sound, O phantasm of thin
sound!

How it comes, wheeling as the pale moth
wheels,

Wheeling and wheeling in continuous wail
Around the cyclic zodiac, and gains force,
And gathers, settling coldly like a moth,
On the wan faces of these images

We see before us, — whereby modified,
It draws a straight line of articulate
song ¹⁰⁵⁰

From out that spiral faintness of lament,
And, by one voice, expresses many griefs.

First Spirit.

I am the spirit of the harmless earth.

God spake me softly out among the stars,
As softly as a blessing of much worth;

And then his smile did follow unawares,
That all things fashioned so for use and
duty

Might shine anointed with his chrism of
beauty —

Yet I wail!

I drave on with the worlds exultingly, ¹⁰⁶⁰
Obliquely down the Godlight's gradual
fall;

Individual aspect and complexity

Of gyrotory orb and interval

Lost in the fluent motion of delight

Toward the high ends of Being beyond
sight —

Yet I wail!

Second Spirit.

I am the spirit of the harmless beasts,

Of flying things, and creeping things,
and swimming;

Of all the lives, erst set at silent feasts,

That found the love-kiss on the goblet
brimming, ¹⁰⁷⁰

And tasted in each drop within the mea-
sure

The sweetest pleasure of their Lord's good
pleasure —

Yet I wail!

What a full hum of life around his lips
Bore witness to the fulness of crea-
tion !

How all the grand words were full-laden
ships

Each sailing onward from enunciation
To separate existence, — and each bear-
ing

The creature's power of joying, hoping,
fearing !

Yet I wail ! 1080

Eve. They wail, beloved ! they speak of
glory and God,

And they wail — wail. That burden of
the song

Drops from it like its fruit, and heavily
falls

Into the lap of silence.

Adam.

Hark, again !

First Spirit.

I was so beautiful, so beautiful,

My joy stood up within me bold to add
A word to God's, — and, when his work
was full,

To 'very good' responded 'very glad !'
Filtered through roses did the light enclose
me,

And bunches of the grape swam blue across
me — 1090

Yet I wail !

Second Spirit.

I bounded with my panthers: I rejoiced

In my young tumbling lions rolled to-
gether:

My stag, the river at his fetlocks, poised
Then dipped his antlers through the
golden weather

In the same ripple which the alligator
Left, in his joyous troubling of the water —

Yet I wail !

First Spirit.

O my deep waters, cataract and flood,
What wordless triumph did your voices
render ! 1100

O mountain-summits, where the angels
stood

And shook from head and wing thick
dews of splendor !

How, with a holy quiet, did your Earthy
Accept that Heavenly, knowing ye were
worthy !

Yet I wail !

Second Spirit.

O my wild wood-dogs, with your listening
eyes !

My horses — my ground-eagles, for swift
fleeing !

My birds, with viewless wings of harmon-
ies,

My calm cold fishes of a silver being,

How happy were ye, living and possess-
ing, 1110

O fair half-souls capacious of full bless-
ing !

Yet I wail !

First Spirit.

I wail, I wail ! Now hear my charge to-
day,

Thou man, thou woman, marked as the
misdoers

By God's sword at your backs ! I lent my
clay

To make your bodies, which had grown
more flowers:

And now, in change for what I lent, ye
give me

The thorn to vex, the tempest-fire to cleave
me —

And I wail !

Second Spirit.

I wail, I wail ! Behold ye that I fasten 1120
My sorrow's fang upon your souls dis-
honored ?

Accursed transgressors ! down the steep ye
hasten, —

Your crown's weight on the world, to
drag it downward

Unto your ruin. Lo ! my lions, scent-
ing

The blood of wars, roar hoarse and unre-
lenting —

And I wail !

First Spirit.

I wail, I wail ! Do you hear that I wail ?
I had no part in your transgression —

none.

My roses on the bough did bud not pale,
My rivers did not loiter in the sun; 1130

I was obedient. Wherefore in my cen-
tre

Do I thrill at this curse of death and
winter ? —

Do I wail ?

Second Spirit.

I wail, I wail ! I wail in the assault

Of undeserved perdition, sorely wounded !

My nightingale sang sweet without a fault,
My gentle leopards innocently bounded.

We were obedient. What is this con-
vulsus

Our blameless life with pangs and fever
pulses ?

And I wail ! 1140

Eve. I choose God's thunder and his
angels' swords

To die by, Adam, rather than such words.
Let us pass out and flee.

Adam. We cannot flee.
This zodiac of the creatures' cruelty
Curls round us, like a river cold and drear,
And shuts us in, constraining us to hear.

First Spirit.
I feel your steps, O wandering sinners,
strike

A sense of death to me, and undug
graves !
The heart of earth, once calm, is trem-
bling like

The ragged foam along the ocean-waves:
The restless earthquakes rock against each
other; 1151

The elements moan 'round me — ' Mother,
mother ' —

And I wail !

Second Spirit.
Your melancholy looks do pierce me
through;

Corruption swathes the paleness of your
beauty.

Why have ye done this thing ? What did
we do

That we should fall from bliss as ye from
duty ?

Wild shriek the hawks, in waiting for their
jesses,

Fierce howl the wolves along the wilder-
nesses —

And I wail ! 1160

Adam. To thee, the Spirit of the harm-
less earth,

To thee, the Spirit of earth's harmless
lives,

Inferior creatures but still innocent,
Be salutation from a guilty mouth

Yet worthy of some audience and respect
From you who are not guilty. If we have
sinned,

God hath rebuked us, who is over us
To give rebuke or death, and if ye wail

Because of any suffering from our sin,
Ye who are under and not over us, 1170

Be satisfied with God, if not with us,
And pass out from our presence in such
peace

As we have left you, to enjoy revenge

Such as the heavens have made you.
Verily,

There must be strife between us, large as
sin.

Eve. No strife, mine Adam ! Let us
not stand high

Upon the wrong we did to reach disdain,
Who rather should be humbler evermore
Since self-made sadder. Adam ! shall I
speak

I who spake once to such a bitter
end — 1180

Shall I speak humbly now who once was
proud ?

I, schooled by sin to more humility
Than thou hast, O mine Adam, O my
king —

My king, if not the world's ?

Adam. Speak as thou wilt.

Eve. Thus, then — my hand in thine —
. . . Sweet, dreadful Spirits !

I pray you humbly in the name of God,
Not to say of these tears, which are im-
pure —

Grant me such pardoning grace as can go
forth

From clean volitions toward a spotted will,
From the wronged to the wronger, this and
no more ! 1190

I do not ask more. I am 'ware, indeed,
That absolute pardon is impossible

From you to me, by reason of my sin, —
And that I cannot evermore, as once,

With worthy acceptance of pure joy,
Behold the trances of the holy hills

Beneath the leaning stars, or watch the
vales

Dew-pallid with their morning ecstasy, —
Or hear the winds make pastoral peace be-
tween

Two grassy uplands, — and the river-
wells 1200

Work out their bubbling mysteries under-
ground, —

And all the birds sing, till for joy of song
They lift their trembling wings as if to
heave

The too-much weight of music from their
heart

And float it up the æther. I am 'ware
That these things I can no more appre-
hend

With a pure organ into a full delight, —
The sense of beauty and of melody
Being no more aided in me by the sense

Of personal adjustment to those heights
Of what I see well-formed or hear well-
tuned, 1211

But rather coupled darkly and made
ashamed

By my percipieny of sin and fall
In melancholy of humilient thoughts.

But, oh ! fair, dreadful Spirits — albeit this
Your accusation must confront my soul,
And your pathetic utterance and full gaze
Must evermore subdue me, — be content !
Conquer me gently — as if pitying me,
Not to say loving ! let my tears fall
thick 1220

As watering dews of Eden, unreprouched ;
And when your tongues reprove me, make
me smooth,

Not ruffled — smooth and still with your
reproof,

And peradventure better while more sad !
For look to it, sweet Spirits, look well to
it,

It will not be amiss in you who kept
The law of your own righteousness, and
keep

The right of your own griefs to mourn
themselves, —

To pity me twice fallen, from that, and
this,

From joy of place, and also right of
wail, 1230

‘I wail’ being not for me — only ‘I sin.’
Look to it, O sweet Spirits !

For was I not,
At that last sunset seen in Paradise,
When all the westerling clouds flashed out
in throngs

Of sudden angel-faces, face by face,
All hushed and solemn, as a thought of
God

Held them suspended, — was I not, that
hour,

The lady of the world, princess of life,
Mistress of feast and favor ? Could I
touch

A rose with my white hand, but it be-
came 1240

Redder at once ? Could I walk leisurely
Along our swarded garden, but the grass
Tracked me with greenness ? Could I
stand aside

A moment underneath a cornel-tree,
But all the leaves did tremble as alive
With songs of fifty birds who were made
glad

Because I stood there ? Could I turn to
look

With these twain eyes of mine, now weep-
ing fast,

Now good for only weeping, — upon man,
Angel, or beast, or bird, but each re-
joiced 1250

Because I looked on him ? Alas, alas !
And is not this much woe, to cry ‘alas !’

Speaking of joy ? And is not this more
shame,

To have made the woe myself, from all
that joy ?

To have stretched my hand, and plucked it
from the tree,

And chosen it for fruit ? Nay, is not
this

Still most despair, — to have halved that
bitter fruit,

And ruined, so, the sweetest friend I have,
Turning the GREATEST to mine enemy ?

Adam. I will not hear thee speak so.
Hearken, Spirits ! 1260

Our God, who is the enemy of none
But only of their sin, hath set your hope

And my hope, in a promise, on this Head.
Show reverence, then, and never bruise her
more

With unpermitted and extreme re-
proach, —

Lest, passionate in anguish, she fling down
Beneath your trampling feet, God’s gift to
us

Of sovranity by reason and freewill,
Sinning against the province of the Soul

To rule the soulless. Reverence her es-
tate, 1270

And pass out from her presence with no
words !

Eve. O dearest Heart, have patience
with my heart !

O Spirits, have patience, ’stead of rever-
ence,

And let me speak, for, not being inno-
cent,

It little doth become me to be proud,
And I am prescient by the very hope

And promise set upon me, that hence-
forth

Only my gentleness shall make me great,
My humbleness exalt me. Awful Spirits,

Be witness that I stand in your reproof 1280
But one sun’s length off from my happi-
ness —

Happy, as I have said, to look around,

Clear to look up! — And now! I need not speak —

Ye see me what I am; ye scorn me so,
Because ye see me what I have made myself

From God's best making! Alas, — peace
forgone,

Love wronged, and virtue forfeit, and tears
wept

Upon all, vainly! Alas, me! alas,
Who have undone myself, from all that
best,

Fairest and sweetest, to this wretched-
est 1290

Saddest and most defiled — cast out, cast
down —

What word metes absolute loss? let abso-
lute loss

Suffice you for revenge. For *I*, who lived
Beneath the wings of angels yesterday,
Wander to-day beneath the roofless world:
I, reigning the earth's empress yesterday,
Put off from me, to-day, your hate with
prayers:

I, yesterday, who answered the Lord God,
Composed and glad as singing-birds the
sun,

Might shriek now from our dismal desert,
'God,' 1300

And hear him make reply, 'What is thy
need,

Thou whom I cursed to-day?'
Adam. Eve!

Eve. I, at last,
Who yesterday was helpmate and delight
Unto mine Adam, am to-day the grief
And curse-mete for him. And, so, pity
us,

Ye gentle Spirits, and pardon him and me,
And let some tender peace, made of our
pain,

Grow up betwixt us, as a tree might grow,
With boughs on both sides! In the shade
of which,

When presently ye shall behold us dead, —
For the poor sake of our humility, 1311
Breathe out your pardon on our breathless
lips,

And drop your twilight dews against our
brows,

And stroking with mild airs our harmless
hands

Left empty of all fruit, perceive your love
Distilling through your pity over us,
And suffer it, self-reconciled, to pass!

LUCIFER rises in the circle.

Lucifer. Who talks here of a comple-
ment of grief?

Of expiation wrought by loss and fall?
Of hate subduable to pity? Eve? 1320

Take counsel from thy counsellor the snake,
And boast no more in grief, nor hope from
pain,

My docile Eve! I teach you to despond
Who taught you disobedience. Look
around: —

Earth spirits and phantasms hear you talk
unmoved,

As if ye were red clay again and talked!
What are your words to them — your grief
to them —

Your deaths, indeed, to them? Did the
hand pause,

For *their* sake, in the plucking of the fruit,
That they should pause for *you*, in hating
you? 1330

Or will your grief or death, as did your
sin,

Bring change upon their final doom? Be-
hold,

Your grief is but your sin in the rebound,
And cannot expiate for it.

Adam. That is true.

Lucifer. Ay, that is true. The clay-
king testifies

To the snake's counsel, — hear him! —
very true.

Earth Spirits. I wail, I wail!

Lucifer. And certes, *that* is true.
Ye wail, ye all wail. Peradventure I

Could wail among you. O thou universe,
That holdest sin and woe, — more room
for wail! 1340

Distant Starry Voice. Ah, ah, Heospho-
ros! Heosphoros!

Adam. Mark Lucifer! He changes aw-
fully.

Eve. It seems as if he looked from
grief to God

And could not see him. Wretched Luci-
fer!

Adam. How he stands — yet an angel!

Earth Spirits. We all wail!

Lucifer (after a pause). Dost thou re-
member, Adam, when the curse

Took us in Eden? On a mountain-peak
Half-seathed in primal woods and glitter-
ing

In spasms of awful sunshine at that hour,

A lion couched, part raised upon his paws,
 With his calm massive face turned full on
 thine, ¹³⁵¹
 And his mane listening. When the ended
 curse

Left silence in the world, right suddenly
 He sprang up rampant and stood straight
 and stiff,

As if the new reality of death
 Were dashed against his eyes, and roared
 so fierce,

(Such thick carnivorous passion in his
 throat

Tearing a passage through the wrath and
 fear)

And roared so wild, and smote from all the
 hills

Such fast keen echoes crumbling down the
 vales ¹³⁶⁰

Precipitately, — that the forest beasts,
 One after one, did mutter a response
 Of savage and of sorrowful complaint
 Which trailed along the gorges. Then, at
 once,

He fell back, and rolled crashing from the
 height

Into the dusk of pines.

Adam. It might have been.
 I heard the curse alone.

Earth Spirits. I wail, I wail !

Lucifer. That lion is the type of what I
 am.

And as he fixed thee with his full-faced
 hate,

And roared, O Adam, comprehending doom,
 So, gazing on the face of the Unseen, ¹³⁷¹

I cry out here between the Heavens and
 Earth

My conscience of this sin, this woe, this
 wrath,

Which damn me to this depth.

Earth Spirits. I wail, I wail !

Eve. I wail — O God !

Lucifer. I scorn you that ye wail,

Who use your petty griefs for pedestals
 To stand on, beckoning pity from without,
 And deal in pathos of antithesis

Of what ye *were* forsooth, and what ye
 are; —

I scorn you like an angel ! Yet, one cry ¹³⁸⁰
 I, too, would drive up like a column erect,

Marble to marble, from my heart to heaven,
 A monument of anguish to transpierce

And overtop your vapory complaints
 Expressed from feeble woes.

Earth Spirits.

I wail, I wail !

Lucifer. For, O ye heavens, ye are my
 witnesses,

That I, struck out from nature in a blot,
 The outcast and the mildew of things good,
 The leper of angels, the excepted dust
 Under the common rain of daily gifts, — ¹³⁹⁰

I the snake, I the tempter, I the cursed, —
 To whom the highest and the lowest alike
 Say, Go from us — we have no need of
 thee, —

Was made by God like others. Good and
 fair,

He did create me ! — ask him, if not
 fair !

Ask, if I caught not fair and silverly
 His blessing for chief angels on my head
 Until it grew there, a crown crystallized !

Ask, if he never called me by my name,
Lucifer — kindly said as ‘Gabriel’ — ¹⁴⁰⁰

Lucifer — soft as ‘Michael !’ while serene
 I, standing in the glory of the lamps,
 Answered ‘my Father,’ innocent of shame
 And of the sense of thunder. Ha ! ye think,
 White angels in your niches, — I repent,
 And would tread down my own offences
 back

To service at the footstool ? *that’s* read
 wrong !

I cry as the beast did, that I may cry —
 Expansive, not appealing ! Fallen so deep,
 Against the sides of this prodigious pit ¹⁴¹⁰
 I cry — cry — dashing out the hands of
 wail

On each side, to meet anguish everywhere,
 And to attest it in the ecstasy
 And exaltation of a woe sustained
 Because provoked and chosen.

Pass along
 Your wilderness, vain mortals ! Puny griefs
 In transitory shapes, be henceforth dwarfed
 To your own conscience, by the dread ex-
 tremes

Of what I am and have been. If ye have
 fallen,

It is but a step’s fall, — the whole ground
 beneath ¹⁴²⁰

Strewn woolly soft with promise ! if ye have
 sinned,

Your prayers tread high as angels ! if ye
 have grieved,

Ye are too mortal to be pitiable,
 The power to die disproves the right to
 grieve.

Go to ! ye call this ruin ? I half-scorn

The ill I did you ! Were ye wronged by me,
Hated and tempted and undone of me, —
Still, what's your hurt to mine of doing
hurt,

Of hating, tempting, and so ruining ?
This sword's *hilt* is the sharpest, and cuts
through 1430

The hand that wields it.
Go ! I curse you all.
Hate one another — feebly — as ye can !
I would not certes cut you short in hate,
Far be it from me ! hate on as ye can !
I breathe into your faces, spirits of earth,
As wintry blast may breathe on wintry
leaves

And lifting up their brownness show beneath
The branches bare. Beseech you, spirits,
give

To Eve who beggarly entreats your love
For her and Adam when they shall be dead,
An answer rather fitting to the sin 1441
Than to the sorrow — as the heavens, I
trow,

For justice' sake gave theirs.
I curse you both,
Adam and Eve. Say grace as after meat,
After my curses ! May your tears fall
hot

On all the hissing scorns o' the creatures
here, —

And yet rejoice ! Increase and multiply,
Ye in your generations, in all plagues,
Corruptions, melancholies, poverities,
And hideous forms of life and fears of
death, — 1450

The thought of death being alway immi-
nent,

Immovable and dreadful in your life,
And deafly and dumbly insignificant
Of any hope beyond, — as death itself,
Whichever of you lieth dead the first,
Shall seem to the survivor — yet rejoice !
My curse catch at you strongly, body and
soul,

And HE find no redemption — nor the wing
Of seraph move your way ; and yet rejoice !
Rejoice, — because ye have not, set in you,
This hate which shall pursue you — this fire-
hate 1461

Which glares without, because it burns
within —

Which kills from ashes — this potential
hate,

Wherein I, angel, in antagonism
To God and his reflex beatitudes,

Moan ever, in the central universe,
With the great woe of striving against
Love

And gasp for space amid the Infinite,
And toss for rest amid the Desertness,
Self-orphaned by my will, and self-elect 1470
To kingship of resistant agony

Toward the Good round me — hating good
and love,

And willing to hate good and to hate love,
And willing to will on so evermore,
Scorning the past and damning the to-
come —

Go and rejoice ! I curse you.
[LUCIFER vanishes.]

Earth Spirits.

And we scorn you ! there's no pardon
Which can lean to you aright.

When your bodies take the guerdon
Of the death-curse in our sight, 1480

Then the bee that hummeth lowest shall
transcend you :

Then ye shall not move an eyelid
Though the stars look down your
eyes ;

And the earth which ye defiled
Shall expose you to the skies, —

'Lo ! these kings of ours, who sought to
comprehend you.'

First Spirit.

And the elements shall boldly
All your dust to dust constrain.

Unresistedly and coldly

I will smite you with my rain. 1490
From the slowest of my frosts is no reced-
ing.

Second Spirit.

And my little worm, appointed

To assume a royal part,

He shall reign, crowned and anointed,
O'er the noble human heart.

Give him counsel against losing of that
Eden !

Adam. Do ye scorn us ? Back your
scorn

Toward your faces gray and lorn,

As the wind drives back the rain,
Thus I drive with passion-strife, 1500

I who stand beneath God's sun,
Made like God, and, though undone,
Not unmade for love and life.

Lo ! ye utter threats in vain.
By my free will that chose sin,
By mine agony within
Round the passage of the fire,

By the pinings which disclose
That my native soul is higher
Than what it chose, 1510
We are yet too high, O Spirits, for your
disdain !

Eve. Nay, beloved ! If these be low,
We confront them from no height.
We have stooped down to their level
By infecting them with evil,
And their scorn that meets our blow
Seathes aright.
Amen. Let it be so.

Earth Spirits.

We shall triumph — triumph greatly
When ye lie beneath the sward. 1520
There, our lily shall grow stately
Though ye answer not a word,
And her fragrance shall be scornful of your
silence:

While your throne ascending calmly
We, in heirdom of your soul,
Flash the river, lift the palm-tree,
The dilated ocean roll,
By the thoughts that throbbed within you,
round the islands.

Alp and torrent shall inherit
Your significance of will, 1530
And the grandeur of your spirit
Shall our broad savannahs fill;
In our winds, your exultations shall be
springing !
Even your parlance which inveigles,
By our rudeness shall be won.
Hearts poetic in our eagles
Shall beat up against the sun
And strike downward in articulate clear
singing.

Your bold speeches our Behemoth 1539
With his thunderous jaw shall wield.
Your high fancies shall our Mammoth
Breathe sublimely up the shield
Of Saint Michael at God's throne, who
waits to speed him:
Till the heavens' smooth-groovèd thun-
der
Spinning back, shall leave them clear,
And the angels, smiling wonder,
With dropt looks from sphere to
sphere,
Shall cry 'Ho, ye heirs of Adam ! ye ex-
ceed him.'

Adam. Root out thine eyes, Sweet, from
the dreary ground !

Beloved, we may be overcome by God, 1550
But not by these.

Eve. By God, perhaps, in these.

Adam. I think, not so. Had God fore-
doomed despair
He had not spoken hope. He may destroy
Certes, but not deceive.

Eve. Behold this rose !
I plucked it in our bower of Paradise
This morning as I went forth, and my
heart

Has beat against its petals all the day.
I thought it would be always red and full
As when I plucked it. *Is it ?* — ye may
see !

I cast it down to you that ye may see, 1560
All of you ! — count the petals lost of it,
And note the colors faded ! ye may see !
And I am as it is, who yesterday
Grew in the same place. O ye spirits of
earth,

I almost, from my miserable heart,
Could here upbraid you for your cruel
heart,

Which will not let me, down the slope of
death,

Draw any of your pity after me,
Or lie still in the quiet of your looks,
As my flower, there, in mine.

[*A bleak wind, quickened with indistinct
Human Voices, spins around the Earth-
zodiac, filling the circle with its pres-
ence; and then, wailing off into the
East, carries the rose away with it.
EVE falls upon her face. ADAM
stands erect.*

Adam. So, verily, 1570
The last departs.

Eve. So Memory follows Hope,
And Life both. Love said to me, 'Do not
die,'

And I replied, 'O Love, I will not die.
I exiled and I will not orphan Love.'
But now it is no choice of mine to die:
My heart throbs from me.

Adam. Call it straightway back !
Death's consummation crowns completed
life,

Or comes too early. Hope being set on
thee

For others, if for others then for thee, —
For thee and me.

[*The wind revolves from the East, and
round again to the East, perfumed by
the Eden rose, and full of Voices*

which sweep out into articulation as
they pass.

Let thy soul shake its leaves
To feel the mystic wind — hark !

Eve. I hear life.

Infant Voices passing in the wind.

O we live, O we live — 1582
And this life that we receive
Is a warm thing and a new,
Which we softly bud into
From the heart and from the brain, —
Something strange that overmuch is
Of the sound and of the sight,
Flowing round in trickling touches, 1590
With a sorrow and delight, —
Yet is it all in vain ?

Rock us softly,

Lest it be all in vain.

Youthful Voices passing.

O we live, O we live —
And this life that we achieve
Is a loud thing and a bold
Which with pulses manifold
Strikes the heart out full and fain —
Active doer, noble liver,
Strong to struggle, sure to conquer, 1600
Though the vessel's prow will quiver
At the lifting of the anchor:
Yet do we strive in vain ?

Infant Voices passing.

Rock us softly,

Lest it be all in vain.

Poet Voices passing.

O we live, O we live —
And this life that we conceive
Is a clear thing and a fair,
Which we set in crystal air
That its beauty may be plain ! 1610
With a breathing and a flooding
Of the heaven-life on the whole,
While we hear the forests budding
To the music of the soul —
Yet is it tuned in vain ?

Infant Voices passing.

Rock us softly,

Lest it be all in vain.

Philosophic Voices passing.

O we live, O we live —
And this life that we perceive
Is a great thing and a grave 1620
Which for others' use we have,
Duty-laden to remain.
We are helpers, fellow-creatures,
Of the right against the wrong;
We are earnest-hearted teachers

Of the truth which maketh strong —
Yet do we teach in vain ?

Infant Voices passing.

Rock us softly,

Lest it be all in vain.

Revel Voices passing.

O we live, O we live — 1630
And this life that we reprieve
Is a low thing and a light,
Which is jested out of sight
And made worthy of disdain !
Strike with bold electric laughter
The high tops of things divine —
Turn thy head, my brother, after,
Lest thy tears fall in my wine !
For is all laughed in vain ?

Infant Voices passing.

Rock us softly, 1640

Lest it be all in vain.

Eve. I hear a sound of life — of life
like ours —

Of laughter and of wailing, of grave
speech,

Of little plaintive voices innocent,
Of life in separate courses flowing out
Like our four rivers to some outward main.
I hear life — life !

Adam. And, so, thy cheeks have snatched
Scarlet to paleness, and thine eyes drink
fast

Of glory from full cups, and thy moist
lips

Seem trembling, both of them, with ear-
nest doubts 1650

Whether to utter words or only smile.

Eve. Shall I be mother of the coming
life ?

Hear the steep generations, how they fall
Adown the visionary stairs of Time
Like supernatural thunders — far, yet
near, —

Sowing their fiery echoes through the hills.
Am I a cloud to these — mother to these ?

Earth Spirits. And bringer of the curse
upon all these.

[*EVE sinks down again.*

Poet Voices passing.

O we live, O we live —
And this life that we conceive 1660
Is a noble thing and high,
Which we climb up loftily
To view God without a stain;
Till, recoiling where the shade is,
We retread our steps again,
And descend the gloomy Hades

To resume man's mortal pain.
Shall it be climbed in vain ?

Infant Voices passing.

Rock us softly,

Lest it be all in vain.

1670

Love Voices passing.

O we live, O we live —

And this life we would retrieve,

Is a faithful thing apart

Which we love in, heart to heart,

Until one heart fitteth twain.

'Wilt thou be one with me ?'

'I will be one with thee.'

'Ha, ha ! — we love and live !'

Alas ! ye love and die.

Shriek — who shall reply ?

1680

For is it not loved in vain ?

Infant Voices passing.

Rock us softly,

Though it be all in vain.

Aged Voices passing.

O we live, O we live —

And this life we would survive,

Is a gloomy thing and brief,

Which consummated in grief,

Leaveth ashes for all gain.

Is it not all in vain ?

Infant Voices passing.

Rock us softly,

1690

Though it be all in vain.

[*Voices die away.*

Earth Spirits. And bringer of the curse
upon all these.

Eve. The voices of foreshown Humanity

Die off ; — so let me die.

Adam.

So let us die,

When God's will soundeth the right hour
of death.

Earth Spirits. And bringer of the curse
upon all these.

Eve. O Spirits ! by the gentleness ye
use

In winds at night, and floating clouds at
noon,

In gliding waters under lily-leaves,

In chirp of crickets, and the settling
hush

1700

A bird makes in her nest with feet and
wings, —

Fulfil your natures now !

Earth Spirits. Agreed, allowed !

We gather out our natures like a cloud,

And thus fulfil their lightnings ! Thus,
and thus !

Hearken, oh hearken to us !

First Spirit.

As the storm-wind blows bleakly from the
norland,

As the snow-wind beats blindly on the
moorland,

As the simoom drive shot across the des-
ert,

As the thunder roars deep in the Umea-
sured,

As the torrent tears the ocean-world to
atoms,

1710

As the whirlpool grinds it fathoms below
fathoms,

Thus, — and thus !

Second Spirit.

As the yellow toad, that spits its poison
chilly,

As the tiger, in the jungle crouching stilly,
As the wild boar, with ragged tusks of
anger,

As the wolf-dog, with teeth of glittering
clangor,

As the vultures, that scream against the
thunder,

As the owlets, that sit and moan asun-
der,

Thus, — and thus !

Eve. Adam ! God !

Adam. Cruel, unrelenting Spirits !

1720

By the power in me of the sovran soul
Whose thoughts keep pace yet with the
angel's march,

I charge you into silence — trample you
Down to obedience. I am king of you !

Earth Spirits.

Ha, ha ! thou art king !

With a sin for a crown,

And a soul undone !

Thou, the antagonized,

Tortured and agonized,

Held in the ring

1730

Of the zodiac !

Now, king, beware !

We are many and strong

Whom thou standest among, —

And we press on the air,

And we stifle thee back,

And we multiply where

Thou wouldst trample us down

From rights of our own

To an utter wrong —

1740

And, from under the feet of thy scorn,
O forlorn,

We shall spring up like corn,

And our stubble be strong.

Adam. God, there is power in thee ! I
make appeal
Unto thy kingship.

Eve. There is pity in THEE,
O sinned against, great God ! — My seed,
my seed,
There is hope set on THEE — I cry to thee,
Thou mystic Seed that shalt be ! — leave
us not

In agony beyond what we can bear, ¹⁷⁵⁰
Fallen in debasement below thunder-mark,
A mark for scorning — taunted and perplex
By all these creatures we ruled yesterday,
Whom thou, Lord, rulest alway ! O my
Seed,

Through the tempestuous years that rain
so thick
Betwixt my ghostly vision and thy face,
Let me have token ! for my soul is bruised
Before the serpent's head is.

[*A vision of CHRIST appears in the midst
of the Zodiac, which pales before the
heavenly light. The Earth Spirits
grow grayer and fainter.*

CHRIST. I AM HERE !

Adam. This is God ! — Curse us not,
God, any more !

Eve. But gazing so — so — with omnific
eyes, ¹⁷⁶⁰
Lift my soul upward till it touch thy
feet !

Or lift it only, — not to seem too proud, —
To the low height of some good angel's
feet,

For such to tread on when he walketh
straight

And thy lips praise him !

CHRIST. Spirits of the earth,
I meet you with rebuke for the reproach
And cruel and unmitigated blame

Ye cast upon your masters. True, they
have sinned ;

And true their sin is reckoned in loss
For you the sinless. Yet, your inno-
cence ¹⁷⁷⁰

Which of you praises ? since God made
your acts

Inherent in your lives, and bound your
hands

With instincts and imperious sanctities
From self-defacement. Which of you dis-
dains

These sinners who in falling proved their
height

Above you by their liberty to fall ?
And which of you complains of loss by
them,

For whose delight and use ye have your
life

And honor in creation ? Ponder it !

This regent and sublime Humanity, ¹⁷⁸⁰

Though fallen, exceeds you ! this shall film
your sun,

Shall hunt your lightning to its lair of
cloud,

Turn back your rivers, footpath all your
seas,

Lay flat your forests, master with a look
Your lion at his fasting, and fetch down
Your eagle flying. Nay, without this law
Of mandom, ye would perish, — beast by
beast

Devouring, — tree by tree, with strangling
roots

And trunks set tuskwise. Ye would gaze
on God

With imperceptive blankness up the
stars, ¹⁷⁹⁰

And mutter, ' Why, God, hast thou made
us thus ? '

And pining to a sallow idiocy
Stagger up blindly against the ends of life,
Then stagnate into rottenness and drop
Heavily — poor, dead matter — piecemeal
down

The abysmal spaces — like a little stone
Let fall to chaos. Therefore over you
Receive man's sceptre ! — therefore be con-
tent

To minister with voluntary grace
And melancholy pardon, every rite ¹⁸⁰⁰
And function in you, to the human hand !

Be ye to man as angels are to God,
Servants in pleasure, singers of delight,
Suggesters to his soul of higher things
Than any of your highest ! So at last,
He shall look round on you with lids too
straight

To hold the grateful tears, and thank you
well,

And bless you when he prays his secret
prayers,

And praise you when he sings his open
songs

For the clear song-note he has learnt in
you ¹⁸¹⁰

Of purifying sweetness, and extend
Across your head his golden fantasies
Which glorify you into soul from sense.

Go, serve him for such price ! That not in
vain
Nor yet ignobly ye shall serve, I place
My word here for an oath, mine oath for
act

To be hereafter. In the name of which
Perfect redemption and perpetual grace,
I bless you through the hope and through
the peace

Which are mine, — to the Love, which is
myself. 1820

Eve. Speak on still, Christ ! Albeit
thou bless me not

In set words, I am blessed in hearkening
thee —

Speak, Christ !

CHRIST. Speak, Adam ! Bless the wo-
man, man !

It is thine office.

Adam. Mother of the world,
Take heart before this Presence ! Lo, my
voice,

Which, naming erst the creatures, did ex-
press

(God breathing through my breath) the
attributes

And instincts of each creature in its name,
Floats to the same afflatus, — floats and
heaves

Like a water-weed that opens to a wave, —
A full-leaved prophecy affecting thee, 1831
Out fairly and wide. Henceforward, arise,
aspire

To all the calms and magnanimities,
The lofty uses and the noble ends,
The sanctified devotion and full work,
To which thou art elect for evermore,
First woman, wife, and mother !

Eve. And first in sin.

Adam. And also the sole bearer of the
Seed

Whereby sin dieth. Raise the majesties 1839
Of thy disconsolate brows, O well-beloved,
And front with level eyelids the To-come,
And all the dark o' the world ! Rise, woman,
rise

To thy peculiar and best altitudes
Of doing good and of enduring ill,
Of comforting for ill, and teaching good,
And reconciling all that ill and good
Unto the patience of a constant hope, —
Rise with thy daughters ! If sin came by
thee,
And by sin, death, — the ransom-righteous-
ness,

The heavenly life and compensative rest 1850
Shall come by means of thee. If woe by thee
Had issue to the world, thou shalt go forth
An angel of the woe thou didst achieve,
Found acceptable to the world instead
Of others of that name, of whose bright
steps

Thy deed stripped bare the hills. Be satis-
fied ;

Something thou hast to bear through wo-
manhood,

Peculiar suffering answering to the sin, —
Some pang paid down for each new human
life,

Some weariness in guarding such a life, 1860
Some coldness from the guarded, some mis-
trust

From those thou hast too well served, from
those beloved

Too loyally some treason ; feebleness
Within thy heart, and cruelty without,
And pressures of an alien tyranny
With its dynastic reasons of larger bones
And stronger sinews. But, go to ! thy love
Shall chant itself its own beatitudes
After its own life-working. A child's kiss
Set on thy sighing lips shall make thee
glad ; 1870

A poor man served by thee shall make thee
rich ;

A sick man helped by thee shall make thee
strong ;

Thou shalt be served thyself by every sense
Of service which thou renderest. Such a
crown

I set upon thy head, — Christ witnessing
With looks of prompting love — to keep
thee clear

Of all reproach against the sin forgone,
From all the generations which succeed.
Thy hand which plucked the apple I clasp
close,

Thy lips which spake wrong counsel I kiss
close, 1880

I bless thee in the name of Paradise
And by the memory of Edenic joys
Forfeit and lost, — by that last cypress
tree,

Green at the gate, which thrilled as we
came out,

And by the blessed nightingale which threw
Its melancholy music after us, —

And by the flowers, whose spirits full of
smells

Did follow softly, plucking us behind

Back to the gradual banks and vernal bowers
And fourfold river-courses. — By all these,
I bless thee to the contraries of these, ¹⁸⁹¹
I bless thee to the desert and the thorns,
To the elemental change and turbulence,
And to the roar of the estrangèd beasts,
And to the solemn dignities of grief, —
To each one of these ends, — and to their

END

Of Death and the hereafter.

Eve. I accept
For me and for my daughters this high part
Which lowly shall be counted. Noble work
Shall hold me in the place of garden-rest,
And in the place of Eden's lost delight ¹⁹⁰¹
Worthy endurance of permitted pain;
While on my longest patience there shall
wait

Death's speechless angel, smiling in the east,
Whence cometh the cold wind. I bow my-
self

Humbly henceforward on the ill I did,
That humbleness may keep it in the shade.
Shall it be so? shall I smile, saying so?
O Seed! O King! O God, who *shalt* be
seed, —

What shall I say? As Eden's fountains
swelled ¹⁹¹⁰
Brightly betwixt their banks, so swells my
soul

Betwixt thy love and power!

And, sweetest thoughts
Of forgone Eden! now, for the first time
Since God said 'Adam,' walking through
the trees,

I dare to pluck you as I plucked erewhile
The lily or pink, the rose or heliotrope.
So pluck I you — so largely — with both
hands,

And throw you forward on the outer earth,
Wherein we are cast out, to sweeten it.

Adam. As thou, Christ, to illumine it,
holdest Heaven ¹⁹²⁰
Broadly over our heads.

[*The CHRIST is gradually transfigured,
during the following phrases of dia-
logue, into humanity and suffering.*

Eve. O Saviour Christ
Thou standest mute in glory, like the sun!

Adam. We worship in thy silence,
Saviour Christ!

Eve. Thy brows grow grander with a
forecast woe, —
Diviner, with the possible of death.

We worship in thy sorrow, Saviour Christ!

Adam. How do thy clear, still eyes trans-
pierce our souls,
As gazing *through* them toward the Father-
throne

In a pathological, full Deity, ¹⁹²⁹
Serenely as the stars gaze through the air
Straight on each other!

Eve. O pathetic Christ,
Thou standest mute in glory, like the
moon!

CHRIST. Eternity stands always front-
ing God;

A stern colossal image, with blind eyes
And grand dim lips that murmur evermore
God, God, God! while the rush of life and
death,

The roar of act and thought, of evil and
good,

The avalanches of the ruining worlds
Tolling down space, — the new worlds'
genesis

Budding in fire, — the gradual humming
growth ¹⁹⁴⁰

Of the ancient atoms and first forms of
earth,

The slow procession of the swathing seas
And firmamental waters, — and the noise
Of the broad, fluent strata of pure airs, —
All these flow onward in the intervals
Of that reiterated sound of — GOD!

Which word innumerable angels straight-
way lift

Wide on celestial altitudes of song
And choral adoration, and then drop ¹⁹⁴⁹
The burden softly, shutting the last notes
In silver wings. Howbeit in the noon of
time

Eternity shall wax as dumb as Death,
While a new voice beneath the spheres
shall cry,

'God! why hast thou forsaken me, my
God?'

And not a voice in Heaven shall answer it.
[*The transfiguration is complete in sad-
ness.*

Adam. Thy speech is of the Heavenlies,
yet, O Christ,

Awfully human are thy voice and face!

Eve. My nature overcomes me from
thine eyes.

CHRIST. In the set noon of time shall
one from Heaven,

An angel fresh from looking upon God, ¹⁹⁶⁰
Descend before a woman, blessing her
With perfect benediction of pure love,

For all the world in all its elements,
 For all the creatures of earth, air, and sea,
 For all men in the body and in the soul,
 Unto all ends of glory and sanctity.

Eve. O pale, pathetic Christ—I worship thee!

I thank thee for that woman!

CHRIST. Then, at last,
 I, wrapping round me your humanity,
 Which, being sustained, shall neither break
 nor burn 1970

Beneath the fire of Godhead, will tread
 earth,

And ransom you and it, and set strong
 peace

Betwixt you and its creatures. With my
 pangs

I will confront your sins; and since those
 sins

Have sunken to all Nature's heart from
 yours,

The tears of my clean soul shall follow
 them

And set a holy passion to work clear
 Absolute consecration. In my brow
 Of kingly whiteness shall be crowned
 anew

Your disrowned human nature. Look on
 me! 1980

As I shall be uplifted on a cross
 In darkness of eclipse and anguish dread,
 So shall I lift up in my pierced hands,
 Not into dark, but light—not unto death,
 But life,—beyond the reach of guilt and
 grief,

The whole creation. Henceforth in my
 name

Take courage, O thou woman,—man, take
 hope!

Your grave shall be as smooth as Eden's
 sward,

Beneath the steps of your prospective
 thoughts,

And, one step past it, a new Eden-gate 1990
 Shall open on a hinge of harmony

And let you through to mercy. Ye shall
 fall

No more, within that Eden, nor pass out
 Any more from it. In which hope, move
 on,

First sinners and first mourners! Live
 and love,—

Doing both nobly because lowly!

Live and work, strongly because patiently!

And, for the deed of death, trust it to God

That it be well done, unrepented of,
 And not to loss! And thence, with con-
 stant prayers, 2000

Fasten your souls so high, that constantly
 The smile of your heroic cheer may float
 Above all floods of earthly agonies,
 Purification being the joy of pain!

[*The vision of CHRIST vanishes. ADAM
 and EVE stand in an ecstasy. The
 Earth-zodiac pales away shade by
 shade, as the stars, star by star, shine
 out in the sky; and the following chant
 from the two Earth Spirits (as they
 sweep back into the Zodiac and disap-
 pear with it) accompanies the process
 of change.*

Earth Spirits.

By the mighty word thus spoken
 Both for living and for dying,
 We our homage-oath, once broken,
 Fasten back again in sighing,
 And the creatures and the elements renew
 their covenanting.

Here, forgive us all our scorning; 2010

Here, we promise milder duty:

And the evening and the morning

Shall re-organize in beauty

A sabbath day of sabbath joy, for universal
 chanting.

And if, still, this melancholy

May be strong to overcome us,

If this mortal and unholy

We still fail to cast out from us,

If we turn upon you, unaware, your own
 dark influences,—

If ye tremble when surrounded 2020

By our forest pine and palm trees,

If we cannot cure the wounded

With our gum trees and our balm
 trees,

And if your souls all mournfully sit down
 among your senses,—

Yet, O mortals, do not fear us!

We are gentle in our languor;

Much more good ye shall have near us

Than any pain or anger,

And our God's refracted blessing in our
 blessing shall be given.

By the desert's endless vigil

We will solemnize your passions, 2030

By the wheel of the black eagle
We will teach you exaltations,
When he sails against the wind, to the white
spot up in heaven.

Ye shall find us tender nurses
To your weariness of nature,
And our hands shall stroke the curse's
Dreary furrows from the creature,
Till your bodies shall lie smooth in death
and straight and slumberful.

Then, a couch we will provide you 2040
Where no summer heats shall dazzle,
Strewing on you and beside you
Thyme and rosemary and basil,
And the yew-tree shall grow overhead to
keep all safe and cool.

Till the Holy Blood awaited
Shall be chrism around us running,
Whereby, newly-consecrated,
We shall leap up in God's sunning,
To join the spheric company which purer
worlds assemble:

While, renewed by new evangels, 2050
Soul-consummated, made glorious,
Ye shall brighten past the angels,
Ye shall kneel to Christ victorious,
And the rays around his feet beneath your
sobbing lips shall tremble.

*[The phantastic Vision has all passed;
the Earth-zodiac has broken like a
belt, and is dissolved from the Desert.
The Earth Spirits vanish, and the
stars shine out above.]*

CHORUS OF INVISIBLE ANGELS

While ADAM and EVE advance into the
Desert, hand in hand

Hear our heavenly promise
Through your mortal passion !
Love, ye shall have from us,
In a pure relation.
As a fish or bird
Swims or flies, if moving, 2060
We unseen are heard
To live on by loving.
Far above the glances
Of your eager eyes,
Listen ! we are loving.
Listen, through man's ignorances —

Listen, through God's mysteries —
Listen down the heart of things,
Ye shall hear our mystic wings
Murmurous with loving. 2070
Through the opal door
Listen evermore
How we live by loving !

First Semichorus.

When your bodies therefore
Reach the grave their goal,
Softly will we care for
Each enfranchised soul.
Softly and unlothly
Through the door of opal
Toward the heavenly people, 2080
Floated on a minor fine
Into the full chant divine,
We will draw you smoothly, —
While the human in the minor
Makes the harmony diviner.
Listen to our loving !

Second Semichorus.

There, a sigh of glory
Shall breathe on you as you come,
Ruffling round the doorway
All the light of angeldom. 2090
From the empyrean centre
Heavenly voices shall repeat,
'Souls redeemed and pardoned, enter,
For the chrism on you is sweet !'
And every angel in the place
Lowly shall bow his face,
Folded fair on softened sounds,
Because upon your hands and feet
He images his Master's wounds.
Listen to our loving ! 2100

First Semichorus.

So, in the universe's
Consummated undoing,
Our seraphs of white mercies
Shall hover round the ruin.
Their wings shall stream upon the flame
As if incorporate of the same
In elemental fusion;
And calm their faces shall burn out
With a pale and mastering thought,
And a steadfast looking of desire 2110
From out between the clefts of fire, —
While they cry, in the Holy's name,
To the final Restitution.
Listen to our loving !

Second Semichorus.

So, when the day of God is
To the thick graves accompted,
Awaking the dead bodies,

The angel of the trumpet
 Shall split and shatter the earth
 To the roots of the grave — 2120
 Which never before were slackened —
 And quicken the charnel birth
 With his blast so clear and brave
 That the Dead shall start and stand erect
 And every face of the burial-place
 Shall the awful, single look reflect
 Wherewith he them awakened.
 Listen to our loving !

First Semichorus.

But wild is the horse of Death !
 He will leap up wild at the clamor 2130
 Above and beneath.
 And where is his Tamer
 On that last day,
 When he crieth Ha, ha !
 To the trumpet's blare,
 And paweth the earth's Aceldama ?
 When he tosseth his head,
 The drear-white steed,
 And ghastlily champeth the last moon-
 ray —
 What angel there 2140
 Can lead him away,
 That the living may rule for the Dead ?

Second Semichorus.

Yet a TAMER shall be found !
 One more bright than seraph crowned,
 And more strong than cherub bold,
 Elder, too, than angel old,
 By his gray eternities.
 He shall master and surprise
 The steed of Death.
 For He is strong, and He is fain. 2150
 He shall quell him with a breath,
 And shall lead him where He will,
 With a whisper in the ear,
 Full of fear,
 And a hand upon the mane,
 Grand and still.

First Semichorus.

Through the flats of Hades where the souls
 assemble
 He will guide the Death-steed calm between
 their ranks,
 While, like beaten dogs, they a little moan
 and tremble
 To see the darkness curdle from the horse's
 glittering flanks. 2160
 Through the flats of Hades where the
 dreary shade is,
 Up the steep of heaven will the Tamer
 guide the steed, —

Up the spheric circles, circle above circle,
 We who count the ages shall count the toll-
 ing tread —
 Every hoof-fall striking a blinder blanker
 sparkle
 From the stony orbs, which shall show as
 they were dead.

Second Semichorus.

All the way the Death-steed with tolling
 hoofs shall travel,
 Ashen-gray the planets shall be motionless
 as stones,
 Loosely shall the systems eject their parts
 coæval,
 Stagnant in the spaces shall float the pallid
 moons: 2170
 Suns that touch their apogees, reeling from
 their level,
 Shall run back on their axles, in wild low
 broken tunes.

Chorus.

Up against the arches of the crystal ceil-
 ing,
 From the horse's nostrils shall stream the
 blurring breath:
 Up between the angels pale with silent
 feeling
 Will the Tamer calmly lead the horse of
 Death.

Semichorus.

Cleaving all that silence, cleaving all that
 glory,
 Will the Tamer lead him straightway to the
 Throne;
 'Look out, O Jehovah, to this I bring be-
 fore Thee,
 With a hand nail-piercèd, I who am thy
 Son.' 2180
 Then the Eye Divinest, from the Deepest,
 flaming,
 On the mystic courser shall look out in fire:
 Blind the beast shall stagger where It over-
 came him,
 Meek as lamb at pasture, bloodless in
 desire.
 Down the beast shall shiver, — slain amid
 the taming, —
 And, by Life essential, the phantasm Death
 expire.

Chorus.

Listen, man, through life and death,
 Through the dust and through the breath,
 Listen down the heart of things !
 Ye shall hear our mystic wings 2190
 Murmurous with loving.

A Voice from below. Gabriel, thou Gabriel !

A Voice from above. What wouldst thou with me ?

First Voice. I heard thy voice sound in the angels' song,

And I would give thee question.

Second Voice. Question me !

First Voice. Why have I called thrice to my Morning Star

And had no answer ? All the stars are out,

And answer in their places. Only in vain

I cast my voice against the outer rays

Of my Star shut in light behind the sun.

No more reply than from a breaking string,

Breaking when touched. Or is she *not* my star ? 2201

Where is my Star — my Star ? Have ye cast down

Her glory like my glory ? Has she waxed Mortal, like Adam ? Has she learnt to hate

Like any angel ?

Second Voice. She is sad for thee.

All things grow sadder to thee, one by one.

Angel Chorus.

Live, work on, O Earthy !

By the Actual's tension,

Speed the arrow worthy

Of a pure ascension ! 2210

From the low earth round you,

Reach the heights above you:

From the stripes that wound you,

Seek the loves that love you !

God's divinest burneth plain

Through the crystal diaphane

Of our loves that love you.

First Voice. Gabriel, O Gabriel !

Second Voice. What wouldst thou with me ?

First Voice. Is it true, O thou Gabriel, that the crown

Of sorrow which I claimed, another claims ?

That HE claims THAT too ?

Second Voice. Lost one, it is true. 2221

First Voice. That HE will be an exile from his heaven,

To lead those exiles homeward ?

Second Voice. It is true.

First Voice. That HE will be an exile by his will,

As I by mine election ?

Second Voice. It is true.

First Voice. That I shall stand sole exile finally, —

Made desolate for fruition ?

Second Voice. It is true.

First Voice. Gabriel !

Second Voice. I hearken.

First Voice. Is it true besides —

Aright true — that mine orient Star will give

Her name of 'Bright and Morning-Star' to HIM, — 2230

And take the fairness of his virtue back

To cover loss and sadness ?

Second Voice. It is true.

First Voice. Untrue, Untrue ! O Morning Star, O MINE,

Who sittest secret in a veil of light

Far up the starry spaces, say — *Untrue !*

Speak but so loud as doth a wasted moon

To Tyrrhene waters. I am Lucifer.

[*A pause. Silence in the stars.*]

All things grow sadder to me, one by one.

Angel Chorus.

Exiled human creatures,

Let your hope grow larger ! 2240

Larger grows the vision

Of the new delight.

From this chain of Nature's

God is the Discharger,

And the Actual's prison

Opens to your sight.

Semichorus.

Calm the stars and golden

In a light exceeding:

What their rays have measured

Let your feet fulfil ! 2250

These are stars beholden

By your eyes in Eden,

Yet, across the desert,

See them shining still !

Chorus.

Future joy and far light

Working such relations,

Hear us singing gently

Exiled is not lost !

God, above the starlight,

God, above the patience, 2260

Shall at last present ye

Guerdons worth the cost.

Patiently enduring,

Painfully surrounded,

Listen how we love you,

Hope the uttermost !

Waiting for that curing

Which exalts the wounded,

Hear us sing above you —

EXILED, BUT NOT LOST ! 2270

[*The stars shine on brightly while
ADAM and EVE pursue their way
into the far wilderness. There is a
sound through the silence, as of the
falling tears of an angel.*]

SONNETS

THE SOUL'S EXPRESSION

WITH stammering lips and insufficient
sound

I strive and struggle to deliver right
That music of my nature, day and night
With dream and thought and feeling inter-
wound,

And inly answering all the senses round
With octaves of a mystic depth and height
Which step out grandly to the infinite
From the dark edges of the sensual
ground.

This song of soul I struggle to outbear
Through portals of the sense, sublime and
whole,

And utter all myself into the air:
But if I did it, — as the thunder-roll
Breaks its own cloud, my flesh would per-
ish there,

Before that dread apocalypse of soul.

THE SERAPH AND POET

THE seraph sings before the manifest
God-One, and in the burning of the Seven,
And with the full life of consummate
Heaven

Heaving beneath him like a mother's
breast

Warm with her first-born's slumber in that
nest.

The poet sings upon the earth grave-riven,
Before the naughty world, soon self-for-
given

For wronging him, — and in the darkness
prest

From his own soul by worldly weights.
Even so,

Sing, seraph with the glory ! heaven is high;
Sing, poet with the sorrow ! earth is low:
The universe's inward voices cry

'Amen' to either song of joy and woe:
Sing, seraph, — poet, — sing on equally !

ON A PORTRAIT OF WORDS- WORTH BY B. R. HAYDON

First printed in the *Athenæum*, October 29,
1842, as 'On Mr. Haydon's Portrait of Words-
worth.'

WORDSWORTH upon Helvellyn ! Let the
cloud

Ebb audibly along the mountain-wind,
Then break against the rock, and show be-
hind

The lowland valleys floating up to crowd
The sense with beauty. He with forehead
bowed

And humble-lidded eyes, as one inclined
Before the sovran thought of his own
mind,

And very meek with inspirations proud,
Takes here his rightful place as poet-priest
By the high altar, singing prayer and
prayer

To the higher Heavens. A noble vision free
Our Haydon's hand has flung out from the
mist:

No portrait this, with Academic air !
This is the poet and his poetry.

PAST AND FUTURE

MY future will not copy fair my past
On any leaf but Heaven's. Be fully done,
Supernal Will ! I would not fain be one
Who, satisfying thirst and breaking fast,
Upon the fulness of the heart at last
Says no grace after meat. My wine has run
Indeed out of my cup, and there is none
To gather up the bread of my repast
Scattered and trampled; yet I find some
good

In earth's green herbs, and streams that
bubble up

Clear from the darkling ground, — content
until

I sit with angels before better food:
Dear Christ ! when thy new vintage fills
my cup,

This hand shall shake no more, nor that
wine spill.

IRREPARABLENESS

I HAVE been in the meadows all the day
And gathered there the nosegay that you
see,

Singing within myself as bird or bee
When such do field-work on a morn of
May.

But, now I look upon my flowers, decay
Has met them in my hands more fatally
Because more warmly clasped, — and sobs
are free

To come instead of songs. What do you
say,

Sweet counsellors, dear friends? that I
should go

Back straightway to the fields and gather
more?

Another, sooth, may do it, but not I!

My heart is very tired, my strength is low,
My hands are full of blossoms plucked be-
fore,

Held dead within them till myself shall
die.

TEARS

THANK God, bless God, all ye who suffer
not

More grief than ye can weep for. That is
well —

That is light grieving! lighter, none befell
Since Adam forfeited the primal lot.

Tears! what are tears? The babe weeps
in its cot,

The mother singing; at her marriage-bell
The bride weeps, and before the oracle
Of high-faned hills the poet has forgot

Such moisture on his cheeks. Thank God
for grace,

Ye who weep only! If, as some have
done,

Ye grope tear-blinded in a desert place
And touch but tombs, — look up! those
tears will run

Soon in long rivers down the lifted face,
And leave the vision clear for stars and
sun.

GRIEF

I TELL you, hopeless grief is passionless;
That only men incredulous of despair,

Half-taught in anguish, through the mid-
night air

Beat upward to God's throne in loud access
Of shrieking and reproach. Full desert-
ness,

In souls as countries, lieth silent-bare
Under the blanching, vertical eye-glare
Of the absolute Heavens. Deep-hearted
man, express

Grief for thy Dead in silence like to
death —

Most like a monumental statue set

In everlasting watch and moveless woe
Till itself crumble to the dust beneath.

Touch it; the marble eyelids are not wet:
If it could weep, it could arise and go.

SUBSTITUTION

WHEN some beloved voice that was to you
Both sound and sweetness, faileth sud-
denly,

And silence, against which you dare not
cry,

Aches round you like a strong disease and
new —

What hope? what help? what music will
undo

That silence to your sense? Not friend-
ship's sigh,

Not reason's subtle count; not melody
Of viols, nor of pipes that Faunus blew;

Not songs of poets, nor of nightingales
Whose hearts leap upward through the
cypress-trees

To the clear moon; nor yet the spheric
laws

Self-chanted, nor the angels' sweet 'All
hails,'

Met in the smile of God: nay, none of
these.

Speak THOU, availing Christ! — and fill
this pause.

COMFORT

SPEAK low to me, my Saviour, low and
sweet

From out the hallelujahs, sweet and low
Lest I should fear and fall, and miss Thee
so

Who art not missed by any that entreat.
Speak to me as to Mary at thy feet!

And if no precious gums my hands bestow,
 Let my tears drop like amber while I go
 In reach of thy divinest voice complete
 In humanest affection — thus, in sooth,
 To lose the sense of losing. As a child,
 Whose song-bird seeks the wood for ever-
 more,

Is sung to in its stead by mother's mouth
 Till, sinking on her breast, love-reconciled,
 He sleeps the faster that he wept before.

PERPLEXED MUSIC

AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED TO E. J.

EXPERIENCE, like a pale musician, holds
 A dulcimer of patience in his hand,
 Whence harmonies, we cannot understand,
 Of God's will in his worlds, the strain un-
 folds

In sad-perplexed minors: deathly colds
 Fall on us while we hear, and countermand
 Our sanguine heart back from the fancy-
 land

With nightingales in visionary wolds.
 We murmur 'Where is any certain tune
 Or measured music in such notes as
 these?'

But angels, leaning from the golden seat,
 Are not so minded; their fine ear hath won
 The issue of completed cadences,
 And, smiling down the stars, they whisper —
 SWEET.

WORK

WHAT are we set on earth for? Say, to
 toil;

Nor seek to leave thy tending of the vines
 For all the heat o' the day, till it declines,
 And Death's mild curfew shall from work
 assail.

God did anoint thee with his odorous oil,
 To wrestle, not to reign; and He assigns
 All thy tears over, like pure crystallines,
 For younger fellow-workers of the soil
 To wear for amulets. So others shall
 Take patience, labor, to their heart and
 hand,
 From thy hand and thy heart and thy
 brave cheer,
 And God's grace fructify through thee to
 all.

The least flower with a brimming cup may
 stand,
 And share its dew-drop with another near.

FUTURITY

AND, O belovèd voices, upon which
 Ours passionately call because erelong
 Ye brake off in the middle of that song
 We sang together softly, to enrich
 The poor world with the sense of love, and
 witch

The heart out of things evil, — I am
 strong,

Knowing ye are not lost for aye among
 The hills, with last year's thrush. God
 keeps a niche

In Heaven to hold our idols; and albeit
 He brake them to our faces and denied
 That our close kisses should impair their
 white,

I know we shall behold them raised, com-
 plete,

The dust swept from their beauty, — glori-
 fied

New Memnons singing in the great God-
 light.

THE TWO SAYINGS

Two sayings of the Holy Scriptures beat
 Like pulses in the Church's brow and
 breast;

And by them we find rest in our unrest
 And, heart deep in salt-tears, do yet en-
 treat

God's fellowship as if on heavenly seat.
 The first is JESUS WEPT, — whereon is
 prest

Full many a sobbing face that drops its
 best

And sweetest waters on the record sweet:
 And one is where the Christ, denied and
 scorned,

LOOKED UPON PETER. Oh, to render
 plain,

By help of having loved a little and
 mourned,

That look of sovran love and sovran pain
 Which HE, who could not sin yet suffered,
 turned

On him who could reject but not sus-
 tain!

THE LOOK

THE Saviour looked on Peter. Ay, no word,
 No gesture of reproach; the Heavens serene
 Though heavy with armed justice, did not lean
 Their thunders that way: the forsaken Lord
Looked only, on the traitor. None record
 What that look was, none guess; for those who have seen
 Wronged lovers loving through a death-pang keen,
 Or pale-cheeked martyrs smiling to a sword,
 Have missed Jehovah at the judgment-call.
 And Peter, from the height of blasphemy —
 ‘I never knew this man’ — did quail and fall
 As knowing straight THAT GOD; and turned free
 And went out speechless from the face of all,
 And filled the silence, weeping bitterly.

THE MEANING OF THE LOOK

I THINK that look of Christ might seem to say —
 ‘Thou Peter! art thou then a common stone
 Which I at last must break my heart upon,
 For all God’s charge to his high angels may
 Guard my foot better? Did I yesterday
 Wash *thy* feet, my beloved, that they should run
 Quick to deny me ’neath the morning sun?
 And do thy kisses, like the rest, betray?
 The cock crows coldly. — Go, and manifest
 A late contrition, but no bootless fear!
 For when thy final need is dreariest,
 Thou shalt not be denied, as I am here;
 My voice to God and angels shall attest,
Because I know this man, let him be clear.

A THOUGHT FOR A LONELY DEATH-BED

INSCRIBED TO MY FRIEND E. C.

IF God compel thee to this destiny,
 To die alone, with none beside thy bed
 To ruffle round with sobs thy last word said
 And mark with tears the pulses ebb from thee, —
 Pray then alone, ‘O Christ, come tenderly!
 By thy forsaken Sonship in the red
 Drear wine-press, — by the wilderness outspread, —
 And the lone garden where thine agony
 Fell bloody from thy brow, — by all of those
 Permitted desolations, comfort mine!
 No earthly friend being near me, interpose
 No deathly angel ’twixt my face and thine,
 But stoop Thyself to gather my life’s rose,
 And smile away my mortal to Divine!’

WORK AND CONTEMPLATION

THE woman singeth at her spinning-wheel
 A pleasant chant, ballad or barcarole;
 She thinketh of her song, upon the whole,
 Far more than of her flax; and yet the reel
 Is full, and artfully her fingers feel
 With quick adjustment, provident control,
 The lines — too subtly twisted to unroll —
 Out to a perfect thread. I hence appeal
 To the dear Christian Church — that we may do
 Our Father’s business in these temples mirk,
 Thus swift and steadfast, thus intent and strong;
 While thus, apart from toil, our souls pursue
 Some high calm spheric tune, and prove our work
 The better for the sweetness of our song.

PAIN IN PLEASURE

A THOUGHT ay like a flower upon mine heart,
 And drew around it other thoughts like bees

For multitude and thirst of sweetnesses ;
 Whereat rejoicing, I desired the art
 Of the Greek whistler, who to wharf and
 mart
 Could lure those insect swarms from orange-
 trees,
 That I might hive with me such thoughts
 and please
 My soul so, always. Foolish counterpart
 Of a weak man's vain wishes ! While I
 spoke,
 The thought I called a flower grew nettle-
 rough,
 The thoughts, called bees, stung me to fes-
 tering:
 Oh, entertain (cried Reason as she woke)
 Your best and gladdest thoughts but long
 enough,
 And they will all prove sad enough to
 sting !

AN APPREHENSION

If all the gentlest-hearted friends I know
 Concentred in one heart their gentleness,
 That still grew gentler till its pulse was
 less
 For life than pity, — I should yet be slow
 To bring my own heart nakedly below
 The palm of such a friend, that he should
 press
 Motive, condition, means, appliances,
 My false ideal joy and fickle woe,
 Out full to light and knowledge; I should
 fear
 Some plait between the brows, some
 rougher chime
 In the free voice. O angels, let your flood
 Of bitter scorn dash on me ! do ye hear
 What I say who bear calmly all the time
 This everlasting face to face with God ?

DISCONTENT

LIGHT human nature is too lightly tost
 And ruffled without cause, complaining
 on —
 Restless with rest, until, being overthrown,
 It learneth to lie quiet. Let a frost
 Or a small wasp have crept to the inner-
 most
 Of our ripe peach, or let the wilful sun

Shine westward of our window, — straight
 we run
 A furlong's sigh as if the world were lost.
 But what time through the heart and
 through the brain
 God hath transfixd us, — we, so moved
 before,
 Attain to a calm. Ay, shouldering weights
 of pain,
 We anchor in deep waters, safe from
 shore,
 And hear submissive o'er the stormy main
 God's chartered judgments walk for ever-
 more.

PATIENCE TAUGHT BY NATURE

'O DREARY life,' we cry, 'O dreary life !'
 And still the generations of the birds
 Sing through our sighing, and the flocks
 and herds
 Serenely live while we are keeping strife
 With Heaven's true purpose in us, as a
 knife
 Against which we may struggle ! Ocean
 girds
 Unslackened the dry land, savannah-
 swards
 Unweary sweep, hills watch unworn, and
 rise
 Meek leaves drop yearly from the forest-
 trees
 To show, above, the unwasted stars that
 pass
 In their old glory: O thou God of old,
 Grant me some smaller grace than comes
 to these ! —
 But so much patience as a blade of grass
 Grows by, contented through the heat and
 cold.

CHEERFULNESS TAUGHT BY REASON

I THINK we are too ready with complaint
 In this fair world of God's. Had we no
 hope
 Indeed beyond the zenith and the slope
 Of yon gray blank of sky, we might grow
 faint
 To muse upon eternity's constraint
 Round our aspirant souls; but since the
 scope

Must widen early, is it well to droop,
 For a few days consumed in loss and taint?
 O pusillanimous Heart, be comforted
 And, like a cheerful traveller, take the
 road,
 Singing beside the hedge. What if the
 bread
 Be bitter in thine inn, and thou unshod
 To meet the flints? At least it may be
 said
 'Because the way is *short*, I thank thee,
 God.'

EXAGGERATION

We overstate the ills of life, and take
 Imagination (given us to bring down
 The choirs of singing angels overshadowed
 By God's clear glory) down our earth to
 rake
 The dismal snows instead, flake following
 flake,
 To cover all the corn; we walk upon
 The shadow of hills across a level thrown,
 And pant like climbers: near the alder
 brake
 We sigh so loud, the nightingale within
 Refuses to sing loud, as else she would.
 O brothers, let us leave the shame and
 sin
 Of taking vainly, in a plaintive mood,
 The holy name of GRIEF! — holy herein,
 That by the grief of ONE came all our
 good.

ADEQUACY

Now, by the verdure on thy thousand hills,
 Belovèd England, doth the earth appear
 Quite good enough for men to overbear
 The will of God in, with rebellious wills!
 We cannot say the morning-sun fulfils
 Ingloriously its course, nor that the clear
 Strong stars without significance insphere
 Our habitation: we, meantime, our ills
 Heap up against this good and lift a cry
 Against this work-day world, this ill-spread
 feast,
 As if ourselves were better certainly
 Than what we come to. Maker and High
 Priest,
 I ask thee not my joys to multiply, —
 Only to make me worthier of the least.

TO GEORGE SAND

A DESIRE

THOU large-brained woman and large-
 hearted man,
 Self-called George Sand! whose soul, amid
 the lions
 Of thy tumultuous senses, moans defiance
 And answers roar for roar, as spirits can:
 I would some mild miraculous thunder ran
 Above the applauded circus, in appliance
 Of thine own nobler nature's strength and
 science,
 Drawing two pinions, white as wings of
 swan,
 From thy strong shoulders, to amaze the
 place
 With holier light! that thou to woman's
 claim
 And man's, mightst join beside the angel's
 grace
 Of a pure genius sanctified from blame,
 Till child and maiden pressed to thine em-
 brace
 To kiss upon thy lips a stainless fame.

TO GEORGE SAND

A RECOGNITION

TRUE genius, but true woman! dost deny
 The woman's nature with a manly scorn,
 And break away the gauds and armlets
 worn
 By weaker women in captivity?
 Ah, vain denial! that revolted cry
 Is sobbed in by a woman's voice forlorn, —
 Thy woman's hair, my sister, all unshorn
 Floats back dishevelled strength in agony,
 Disproving thy man's name: and while be-
 fore
 The world thou burnest in a poet-fire,
 We see thy woman-heart beat evermore
 Through the large flame. Beat purer,
 heart, and higher,
 Till God unsex thee on the heavenly shore
 Where unincarnate spirits purely aspire!

THE PRISONER

I COUNT the dismal time by months and
 years
 Since last I felt the green sward under
 foot,

And the great breath of all things summer-
 mute
 Met mine upon my lips. Now earth ap-
 pears
 As strange to me as dreams of distant
 spheres
 Or thoughts of Heaven we weep at. Na-
 ture's lute
 Sounds on, behind this door so closely shut,
 A strange wild music to the prisoner's ears,
 Dilated by the distance, till the brain
 Grows dim with fancies which it feels too
 fine:
 While ever, with a visionary pain,
 Past the precluded senses, sweep and shine
 Streams, forests, glades, and many a
 golden train
 Of sunlit hills transfigured to Divine.

INSUFFICIENCY

WHEN I attain to utter forth in verse
 Some inward thought, my soul throbs au-
 dibly
 Along my pulses, yearning to be free
 And something farther, fuller, higher, re-
 hearse,
 To the individual, true, and the universe,
 In consummation of right harmony:
 But, like a wind-exposed distorted tree,
 We are blown against for ever by the curse
 Which breathes through Nature. Oh, the
 world is weak!
 The effluence of each is false to all,
 And what we best conceive we fail to
 speak.
 Wait, soul, until thine ashen garments fall,
 And then resume thy broken strains, and
 seek
 Fit peroration without let or thrall.

THE ROMAUNT OF THE PAGE

First printed in Finden's *Tableaux* for 1839.

I

A KNIGHT of gallant deeds
 And a young page at his side,
 From the holy war in Palestine
 Did slow and thoughtful ride,
 As each were a palmer and told for beads
 The dews of the eventide.

II

'O young page,' said the knight,
 'A noble page art thou!
 Thou fearest not to steep in blood
 The curls upon thy brow;
 And once in the tent, and twice in the
 fight,
 Didst ward me a mortal blow.'

III

'O brave knight,' said the page,
 'Or ere we hither came,
 We talked in tent, we talked in field,
 Of the bloody battle-game;
 But here, below this greenwood bough,
 I cannot speak the same.'

IV

'Our troop is far behind,
 The woodland calm is new;
 Our steeds, with slow grass-muffled hoofs
 Tread deep the shadows through;
 And, in my mind, some blessing kind
 Is dropping with the dew.'

V

'The woodland calm is pure —
 I cannot choose but have
 A thought from these, o' the beechen-trees,
 Which in our England wave,
 And of the little finches fine
 Which sang there while in Palestine
 The warrior-hilt we drave.'

VI

'Methinks, a moment gone,
 I heard my mother pray!
 I heard, sir knight, the prayer for me
 Wherein she passed away;
 And I know the heavens are leaning down
 To hear what I shall say.'

VII

The page spake calm and high,
 As of no mean degree;
 Perhaps he felt in nature's broad
 Full heart, his own was free:
 And the knight looked up to his lifted eye,
 Then answered smilingly —

VIII

'Sir page, I pray your grace!
 Certes, I meant not so
 To cross your pastoral mood, sir page,
 With the crook of the battle-bow;

But a knight may speak of a lady's face,
I ween, in any mood or place,
If the grasses die or grow.

50

IX

'And this I meant to say —
My lady's face shall shine
As ladies' faces use, to greet
My page from Palestine;
Or, speak she fair or prank she gay,
She is no lady of mine.

X

'And this I meant to fear —
Her bower may suit thee ill;
For, sooth, in that same field and tent,
Thy *talk* was somewhat still: 60
And fitter thy hand for my knightly spear
Than thy tongue for my lady's will!'

XI

Slowly and thankfully
The young page bowed his head;
His large eyes seemed to muse a smile,
Until he blushed instead,
And no lady in her bower, pardiè,
Could blush more sudden red:
'Sir Knight, — thy lady's bower to me
Is suited well,' he said. 70

XII

Beati, beati, mortui!

From the convent on the sea,
One mile off, or scarce so nigh,
Swells the dirge as clear and high
As if that, over brake and lea,
Bodily the wind did carry
The great altar of Saint Mary,
And the fifty tapers burning o'er it,
And the Lady Abbess dead before it,
And the chanting nuns whom yesterweek
Her voice did charge and bless, — 81
Chanting steady, chanting meek,
Chanting with a solemn breath,
Because that they are thinking less
Upon the dead than upon death.

Beati, beati, mortui!

Now the vision in the sound
Wheeleth on the wind around;
Now it sweepeth back, away —
The uplands will not let it stay 90
To dark the western sun:
Mortui! — away at last, —

Or ere the page's blush is past!
And the knight heard all, and the page
heard none.

XIII

'A boon, thou noble knight,
If ever I servèd thee!
Though thou art a knight and I am a
page,
Now grant a boon to me;
And tell me sooth, if dark or bright,
If little loved or loved aright 100
Be the face of thy ladye.'

XIV

Gloomily looked the knight —
'As a son thou hast servèd me,
And would to none I had granted boon
Except to only thee!
For haply then I should love aright,
For then I should know if dark or bright
Were the face of my ladye.

XV

'Yet it ill suits my knightly tongue
To grudge that granted boon, 110
That heavy price from heart and life
I paid in silence down;
The hand that claimed it, cleared in fine
My father's fame: I swear by mine,
That price was nobly won!

XVI

'Earl Walter was a brave old earl,
He was my father's friend;
And while I rode the lists at court
And little guessed the end,
My noble father in his shroud 120
Against a slanderer lying loud,
He rose up to defend.

XVII

'Oh, calm below the marble gray
My father's dust was strown!
Oh, meek above the marble gray
His image prayed alone!
The slanderer lied: the wretch was brave:
For, looking up the minister-nave,
He saw my father's knightly glaive 130
Was changed from steel to stone.

XVIII

'Earl Walter's glaive was steel,
With a brave old hand to wear it,

And dashed the lie back in the mouth
Which lied against the godly truth

And against the knightly merit:
The slanderer, 'neath the avenger's heel,
Struck up the dagger in appeal
From stealthy lie to brutal force —
And out upon the traitor's corse
Was yielded the true spirit.

140

XIX

'I would mine hand had fought that fight
And justified my father !
I would mine heart had caught that wound
And slept beside him rather !
I think it were a better thing
Than murdered friend and marriage ring
Forced on my life together.

XX

'Wail shook Earl Walter's house;
His true wife shed no tear;
She lay upon her bed as mute 150
As the earl did on his bier:
Till — "Ride, ride fast," she said at last,
"And bring the avengèd's son anear !
Ride fast, ride free, as a dart can flee,
For white of blee with waiting for me
Is the corse in the next chambère."

XXI

'I came, I knelt beside her bed;
Her calm was worse than strife:
"My husband, for thy father dear,
Gave freely when thou wast not here 160
His own and eke my life.
A boon ! Of that sweet child we make
An orphan for thy father's sake,
Make thou, for ours, a wife."

XXII

'I said, "My steed neighs in the court,
My bark rocks on the brine,
And the warrior's vow I am under now
To free the pilgrim's shrine;
But fetch the ring and fetch the priest
And call that daughter of thine, 170
And rule she wide from my castle on
Nyde
While I am in Palestine."

XXIII

'In the dark chambère, if the bride was
fair,
Ye wis, I could not see,

But the steed thrice neighed, and the priest
fast prayed,

And wedded fast were we.
Her mother smiled upon her bed
As at its side we knelt to wed,
And the bride rose from her knee
And kissed the smile of her mother dead,
Or ever she kissed me. 181

XXIV

'My page, my page, what grieves thee so,
That the tears run down thy face ?' —
'Alas, alas ! mine own sister
Was in thy lady's case:
But *she* laid down the silks she wore
And followed him she wed before,
Disguised as his true servitor,
To the very battle-place.'

XXV

And wept the page, but laughed the knight,
A careless laugh laughed he: 191
'Well done it were for thy sistèr,
But not for my ladye !
My love, so please you, shall requite
No woman, whether dark or bright,
Unwomaned if she be.'

XXVI

The page stopped weeping and smiled
cold —
'Your wisdom may declare
That womanhood is proved the best
By golden brooch and glossy vest 200
The mincing ladies wear;
Yet is it proved, and was of old,
Anear as well, I dare to hold,
By truth, or by despair.'

XXVII

He smiled no more, he wept no more,
But passionate he spake —
'Oh, womanly she prayed in tent,
When none beside did wake !
Oh, womanly she paled in fight,
For one belovèd's sake — 210
And her little hand, defiled with blood,
Her tender tears of womanhood
Most woman-pure did make !'

XXVIII

— 'Well done it were for thy sistèr,
Thou tellest well her tale !
But for my lady, she shall pray
I' the kirk of Nydesdale.

Not dread for me but love for me
 Shall make my lady pale;
 No casque shall hide her woman's tear —
 It shall have room to trickle clear 221
 Behind her woman's veil.'

XXIX

— 'But what if she mistook thy mind
 And followed thee to strife,
 Then kneeling did entreat thy love
 As Paynims ask for life?'
 — 'I would forgive, and evermore
 Would love her as my servitor,
 But little as my wife.

XXX

'Look up — there is a small bright cloud
 Alone amid the skies! 231
 So high, so pure, and so apart,
 A woman's honor lies.'
 The page looked up — the cloud was
 sheen —
 A sadder cloud did rush, I ween,
 Betwixt it and his eyes.

XXXI

Then dimly dropped his eyes away
 From welkin unto hill —
 Ha! who rides there? — the page is 'ware,
 Though the cry at his heart is still: 240
 And the page seeth all and the knight
 seeth none,
 Though banner and spear do fleck the sun,
 And the Saraceus ride at will.

XXXII

He speaketh calm, he speaketh low, —
 'Ride fast, my master, ride,
 Or ere within the broadening dark
 The narrow shadows hide.'
 'Yea, fast, my page, I will do so,
 And keep thou at my side.'

XXXIII

'Now nay, now nay, ride on thy way, 250
 Thy faithful page precede.
 For I must loose on saddle-bow
 My battle-casque that galls, I trow,
 The shoulder of my steed;
 And I must pray, as I did vow,
 For one in bitter need.

XXXIV

'Ere night I shall be near to thee, —
 Now ride, my master, ride!

Ere night, as parted spirits cleave
 To mortals too beloved to leave, 260
 I shall be at thy side.'
 The knight smiled free at the fantasy,
 And adown the dell did ride.

XXXV

Had the knight looked up to the page's face,
 No smile the word had won;
 Had the knight looked up to the page's face,
 I ween he had never gone:
 Had the knight looked back to the page's
 geste,
 I ween he had turned anon, 269
 For dread was the woe in the face so young,
 And wild was the silent geste that flung
 Casque, sword to earth, as the boy down-
 sprung
 And stood — alone, alone.

XXXVI

He clenched his hands as if to hold
 His soul's great agony —
 'Have I renounced my womanhood,
 For wifehood unto thee,
 And is this the last, last look of thine
 That ever I shall see? 279

XXXVII

'Yet God thee save, and mayst thou have
 A lady to thy mind,
 More woman-proud and half as true
 As one thou leav'st behind!
 And God me take with HIM to dwell —
 For HIM I cannot love too well,
 As I have loved my kind.'

XXXVIII

She looketh up, in earth's despair,
 The hopeful heavens to seek;
 That little cloud still floateth there,
 Whereof her loved did speak: 290
 How bright the little cloud appears!
 Her eyelids fall upon the tears,
 And the tears down either cheek.

XXXIX

The tramp of hoof, the flash of steel —
 The Paynims round her coming!
 The sound and sight have made her
 calm, —
 False page, but truthful woman;
 She stands amid them all unmoved:
 A heart once broken by the loved
 Is strong to meet the foeman. 300

XL

'Ho, Christian page ! art keeping sheep,
 From pouring wine-cups resting ?' —
 'I keep my master's noble name,
 For warring, not for feasting;
 And if that here Sir Hubert were,
 My master brave, my master dear,
 Ye would not stay the questing.'

XLI

'Where is thy master, scornful page,
 That we may slay or bind him ?' —
 'Now search the lea and search the wood,
 And see if ye can find him !
 Nathless, as hath been often tried,
 Your Paynim heroes faster ride
 Before him than behind him.'

311

XLII

'Give smoother answers, lying page,
 Or perish in the lying !' —
 'I trow that if the warrior brand
 Beside my foot, were in my hand,
 'T were better at replying !'
 They cursed her deep, they smote her low,
 They cleft her golden ringlets through;
 The Loving is the Dying.

319

XLIII

She felt the scimitar gleam down,
 And met it from beneath
 With smile more bright in victory
 Than any sword from sheath, —
 Which flashed across her lip serene,
 Most like the spirit-light between
 The darks of life and death.

XLIV

Ingemisco, ingemisco !
 From the convent on the sea,
 Now it sweepeth solemnly,
 As over wood and over lea
 Bodily the wind did carry
 The great altar of St. Mary,
 And the fifty tapers paling o'er it,
 And the Lady Abbess stark before it,
 And the weary nuns with hearts that faintly
 Beat along their voices saintly —
Ingemisco, ingemisco !
 Dirge for abbess laid in shroud
 Sweepeth o'er the shroudless dead,
 Page or lady, as we said,
 With the dews upon her head,
 All as sad if not as loud.

330

340

Ingemisco, ingemisco !

Is ever a lament begun
 By any mourner under sun,
 Which, ere it endeth, suits but *one* ?

THE LAY OF THE BROWN
ROSARY

First printed in Finden's *Tableaux* for 1840
 as, 'Legend of the Brown Rosary.'

FIRST PART

I

'ONORA, Onora,' — her mother is calling,
 She sits at the lattice and hears the dew
 falling
 Drop after drop from the sycamores laden
 With dew as with blossom, and calls home
 the maiden,
 'Night cometh, Onora.'

II

She looks down the garden-walk caverned
 with trees,
 To the limes at the end where the green
 arbor is —
 'Some sweet thought or other may keep
 where it found her,
 While, forgot or unseen in the dreamlight
 around her,
 Night cometh — Onora !'

10

III

She looks up the forest whose alleys shoot
 on
 Like the mute minster-aisles when the
 anthem is done,
 And the choristers sitting with faces aslant
 Feel the silence to consecrate more than the
 chant —
 'Onora, Onora !'

IV

And forward she looketh across the brown
 heath —
 'Onora, art coming ?' — what is it she
 seeth ?
 Nought, nought but the gray border-stone
 that is wist
 To dilate and assume a wild shape in the
 mist —
 'My daughter !' Then over

20

V

The casement she leaneth, and as she doth
 She is ^{so} 'ware of her little son playing be-
 low:
 'Now where is Onora?' He hung down
 his head
 And spake not, then answering blushed
 scarlet-red, —
 'At the tryst with her lover.'

VI

But his mother was wroth: in a sternness
 quoth she,
 'As thou play'st at the ball art thou play-
 ing with me?
 When we know that her lover to battle is
 gone,
 And the saints know above that she loveth
 but one
 And will ne'er wed another?' 30

VII

Then the boy wept aloud; 't was a fair
 sight yet sad
 To see the tears run down the sweet blooms
 he had:
 He stamped with his foot, said — 'The
 saints know I lied
 Because truth that is wicked is fittest to
 hide:
 Must I utter it, mother?'

VIII

In his vehement childhood he hurried
 within
 And knelt at her feet as in prayer against
 sin,
 But a child at a prayer never sobbeth as
 he —
 'Oh! she sits with the nun of the brown
 rosary,
 At nights in the ruin —' 40

IX

'The old convent ruin the ivy rots off,
 Where the owl hoots by day and the toad
 is sun-proof,
 Where no singing-birds build and the trees
 gaunt and gray
 As in stormy sea-coasts appear blasted one
 way —
 But is *this* the wind's doing?'

X

'A nun in the east wall was buried alive
 Who mocked at the priest when he called
 her to thrive,
 And shrieked such a curse, as the stone
 took her breath,
 The old abbess fell backwards and swooned
 unto death
 With an Ave half-spoken. 50

XI

'I tried once to pass it, myself and my
 hound,
 Till, as fearing the lash, down he shivered
 to ground —
 A brave hound, my mother! a brave
 hound, ye wot!
 And the wolf thought the same with his
 fangs at her throat
 In the pass of the Brocken.

XII

'At dawn and at eve, mother, who sitteth
 there
 With the brown rosary never used for a
 prayer?
 Stoop low, mother, low! If we went there
 to see,
 What an ugly great hole in that east wall
 must be
 At dawn and at even! 60

XIII

'Who meet there, my mother, at dawn
 and at even?
 Who meet by that wall, never looking to
 heaven?
 O sweetest my sister, what doeth with *thee*
 The ghost of a nun with a brown rosary
 And a face turned from heaven?

XIV

'Saint Agnes o'erwatcheth my dreams and
 erewhile
 I have felt through mine eyelids the warmth
 of her smile;
 But last night, as a sadness like pity came
 o'er her,
 She whispered — "Say *two* prayers at dawn
 for Onora:
 The Tempted is sinning." 70

XV

'Onora, Onora!' they heard her not com-
 ing,

Not a step on the grass, not a voice through
 the gloaming;
 But her mother looked up, and she stood
 on the floor
 Fair and still as the moonlight that came
 there before,
 And a smile just beginning:

XVI

It touches her lips but it dares not arise
 To the height of the mystical sphere of her
 eyes,
 And the large musing eyes, neither joyous
 nor sorry,
 Sing on like the angels in separate glory
 Between clouds of amber; 80

XVII

For the hair droops in clouds amber-col-
 ored till stirred
 Into gold by the gesture that comes with a
 word;
 While — O soft ! — her speaking is so inter-
 wound
 Of the dim and the sweet, 't is a twilight
 of sound
 And floats through the chamber.

XVIII

'Since thou shrivest my brother, fair mo-
 ther,' said she,
 'I count on thy priesthood for marrying of
 me;
 And I know by the hills that the battle is
 done,
 That my lover rides on, will be here with
 the sun,
 'Neath the eyes that behold thee.' 90

XIX

Her mother sat silent — too tender, I wis,
 Of the smile her dead father smiled dying
 to kiss:
 But the boy started up pale with tears,
 passion-wrought —
 'O wicked fair sister, the hills utter
 nought !
 If he cometh, who told thee ?'

XX

'I know by the hills,' she resumed calm
 and clear,
 'By the beauty upon them, that HE is
 anear:

Did they ever look so since he bade me
 adieu ?
 Oh, love in the waking, sweet brother, is
 true,
 As Saint Agnes in sleeping !' 100

XXI

Half-ashamed and half-softened the boy
 did not speak,
 And the blush met the lashes which fell on
 his cheek:
 She bowed down to kiss him: dear saints,
 did he see
 Or feel on her bosom the BROWN ROSARY,
 That he shrank away weeping ?

SECOND PART

A bed. ONORA, sleeping. Angels, but
 not near.

First Angel.

Must we stand so far, and she
 So very fair ?

Second Angel.

As bodies be.

First Angel.

And she so mild ?

Second Angel.

As spirits when

They meeken, not to God, but men.

First Angel.

And she so young, that I who bring
 Good dreams for saintly children,
 might 111

Mistake that small soft face to-night,
 And fetch her such a blessed thing
 That at her waking she would weep
 For childhood lost anew in sleep.

How hath she sinned ?

Second Angel.

In bartering love;

God's love for man's.

First Angel.

We may reprove

The world for this, not only her:
 Let me approach to breathe away
 This dust o' the heart with holy air.

Second Angel.

Stand off ! She sleeps, and did not
 pray. 121

First Angel.

Did none pray for her ?

Second Angel.

Ay, a child, —

Who never, praying, wept before:
While, in a mother undefiled,
Prayer goeth on in sleep, as true
And pauseless as the pulses do.

First Angel.

Then I approach.

Second Angel.

It is not WILLED.

First Angel.

One word: is she redeemed ?

Second Angel.

No more !

The place is filled. [*Angels vanish.*]

Evil Spirit (in a Nun's garb by the bed).

Forbear that dream — forbear that dream !
too near to heaven it leaned. 130

Onora (in sleep).

Nay, leave me this — but only this ! 't is
but a dream, sweet fiend !

Evil Spirit.

It is a thought.

Onora (in sleep).

A sleeping thought — most innocent of
good:

It doth the Devil no harm, sweet fiend ! it
cannot if it would.

I say in it no holy hymn, I do no holy
work,

I scarcely hear the sabbath-bell that chim-
eth from the kirk.

Evil Spirit.

Forbear that dream — forbear that dream !

Onora (in sleep).

Nay, let me dream at least.

That far-off bell, it may be took for viol at
a feast:

I only walk among the fields, beneath the
autumn-sun,

With my dead father, hand in hand, as I
have often done.

Evil Spirit.

Forbear that dream — forbear that dream !

Onora (in sleep).

Nay, sweet fiend, let me go: 140

I never more can walk with him, oh, never
more but so !

For they have tied my father's feet be-
neath the kirkyard stone,

Oh, deep and straight ! oh, very straight !
they move at nights alone:

And then he calleth through my dreams,
he calleth tenderly,

'Come forth, my daughter, my beloved,
and walk the fields with me !'

Evil Spirit.

Forbear that dream, or else disprove its
pureness by a sign.

Onora (in sleep).

Speak on, thou shalt be satisfied, my word
shall answer thine.

I heard a bird which used to sing when I a
child was praying,

I see the poppies in the corn I used to
sport away in:

What shall I do — tread down the dew
and pull the blossoms blowing ? 150

Or clap my wicked hands to fright the
finches from the rowan ?

Evil Spirit.

Thou shalt do something harder still.
Stand up where thou dost stand

Among the fields of Dreamland with thy
father hand in hand,

And clear and slow repeat the vow, de-
clare its cause and kind,

Which not to break, in sleep or wake thou
bearest on thy mind.

Onora (in sleep).

I bear a vow of sinful kind, a vow for
mournful cause;

I vowed it deep, I vowed it strong, the
spirits laughed applause:

The spirits trailed along the pines low
laughter like a breeze,

While, high atween their swinging tops,
the stars appeared to freeze.

Evil Spirit.

More calm and free, speak out to me why
such a vow was made. 160

Onora (in sleep).

Because that God decreed my death and I
shrank back afraid.

Have patience, O dead father mine ! I did
not fear to die —

I wish I were a young dead child and had
thy company !

I wish I lay beside thy feet, a buried three-
year child,

And wearing only a kiss of thine upon my
lips that smiled !

The linden-tree that covers thee might so
have shadowed twain,

For death itself I did not fear — 't is love
that makes the pain:

Love feareth death. I was no child, I was
betrothed that day;

I wore a troth-kiss on my lips I could not
give away.

How could I bear to lie content and still
beneath a stone, 170

And feel mine own betrothed go by — alas !
 no more mine own —
 Go leading by in wedding pomp some lovely
 lady brave,
 With cheeks that blushed as red as rose,
 while mine were white in grave ?
 How could I bear to sit in heaven, on e'er
 so high a throne,
 And hear him say to her — to *her* ! that
 else he loveth none ?
 Though e'er so high I sate above, though
 e'er so low he spake,
 As clear as thunder I should hear the new
 oath he might take,
 That hers, forsooth, were heavenly eyes —
 ah me, while very dim
 Some heavenly eyes (indeed of heaven !)
 would darken down to *him* !

Evil Spirit.

Who told thee thou wast called to death ?
Onora (in sleep).
 I sate all night beside thee: 180
 The gray owl on the ruined wall shut both
 his eyes to hide thee,
 And ever he flapped his heavy wing all
 brokenly and weak,
 And the long grass waved against the sky,
 around his gasping beak.
 I sate beside thee all the night, while the
 moonlight lay forlorn
 Strewn round us like a dead world's shroud
 in ghastly fragments torn:
 And through the night, and through the
 hush, and over the flapping wing,
 We heard beside the Heavenly Gate the
 angels murmuring:
 We heard them say, 'Put day to day, and
 count the days to seven,
 And God will draw Onora up the golden
 stairs of heaven.
 And yet the Evil ones have leave that
 purpose to defer, 190
 For if she has no need of HIM, He has no
 need of her.'

Evil Spirit.

Speak out to me, speak bold and free.

Onora (in sleep).

And then I heard thee say —
 I count upon my rosary brown the hours
 thou hast to stay !
 Yet God permits us Evil ones to put by
 that decree,
 Since if thou hast no need of HIM, He has
 no need of thee:
 And if thou wilt forgo the sight of angels,
 verily

Thy true love gazing on thy face shall
 guess what angels be;
 Nor bride shall pass, save thee ' . . . Alas !
 — my father's hand 's a-cold,
 The meadows seem . . .

Evil Spirit.

Forbear the dream, or let the vow be
 told.

Onora (in sleep).

I vowed upon thy rosary brown, this string
 of antique beads, 200
 By charnel lichens overgrown, and dank
 among the weeds,
 This rosary brown which is thine own, —
 lost soul of buried nun !
 Who, lost by vow, wouldst render now all
 souls alike undone, —
 I vowed upon thy rosary brown, — and, till
 such vow should break,
 A pledge always of living days 't was
 hung around my neck —
 I vowed to thee on rosary (dead father,
 look not so !),
*I would not thank God in my weal, nor seek
 God in my woe.*

Evil Spirit.

And canst thou prove . . .

Onora (in sleep).

O love, my love ! I felt him near
 again !
 I saw his steed on mountain-head, I heard
 it on the plain !
 Was this no weal for me to feel ? Is
 greater weal than this ? 210
 Yet when he came, I wept his name — and
 the angels heard but *his*.

Evil Spirit.

Well done, well done !

Onora (in sleep).

Ah me, the sun ! the dreamlight 'gins
 to pine, —

Ah me, how dread can look the Dead !
 Aroint thee, father mine !

She starteth from slumber, she sitteth up-
 right,
 And her breath comes in sobs, while she
 stares through the night;
 There is nought; the great willow, her lat-
 tice before,
 Large-drawn in the moon, lieth calm on
 the floor:
 But her hands tremble fast as their pulses
 and, free
 From the death-clasp, close over — the
 BROWN ROSARY.

THIRD PART

I

'T is a morn for a bridal; the merry bride-
bell²²⁰
Rings clear through the greenwood that
skirts the chapelle,
And the priest at the altar awaiteth the
bride,
And the sacristans slyly are jesting aside
At the work shall be doing;

II

While down through the wood rides that
fair company,
The youths with the courtship, the maids
with the glee,
Till the chapel-cross opens to sight, and at
once
All the maids sigh demurely and think for
the nonce,
'And so endeth a wooing!'

III

And the bride and the bridegroom are
leading the way,²³⁰
With his hand on her rein, and a word yet
to say;
Her dropt eyelids suggest the soft answers
beneath,
And the little quick smiles come and go
with her breath
When she sigheth or speaketh.

IV

And the tender bride-mother breaks off
unaware
From an Ave, to think that her daughter
is fair,
Till in nearing the chapel and glancing
before,
She seeth her little son stand at the door:
Is it play that he seeketh?

V

Is it play, when his eyes wander innocent-
wild²⁴⁰
And sublimed with a sadness unfitting a
child?
He trembles not, weeps not; the passion is
done,

And calmly he kneels in their midst, with
the sun
On his head like a glory.

VI

'O fair-featured maids, ye are many!' he
cried,
'But in fairness and vileness who matcheth
the bride?
O brave-hearted youths, ye are many! but
whom
For the courage and woe can ye match with
the groom
As ye see them before ye?'

VII

Out spake the bride's mother, 'The vileness
is thine²⁵⁰
If thou shame thine own sister, a bride at
the shrine!
Out spake the bride's lover, 'The vileness
be mine
If he shame mine own wife at the hearth
or the shrine
And the charge be unprovèd.

VIII

'Bring the charge, prove the charge, brother!
speak it aloud:
Let thy father and hers hear it deep in his
shroud!'
—'O father, thou seest, for dead eyes can
see,
How she wears on her bosom a BROWN
ROSARY,
O my father beloved!'

IX

Then out laughed the bridegroom, and out
laughed withal²⁶⁰
Both maidens and youths by the old chapel-
wall:
'So she weareth no love-gift, kind brother,'
quoth he,
'She may wear an she listeth a brown
rosary,
Like a pure-hearted lady.'

X

Then swept through the chapel the long
bridal train;
Though he spake to the bride she replied
not again;

On, as one in a dream, pale and stately she
 went
 Where the altar-lights burn o'er the great
 sacrament,
 Faint with daylight, but steady.

XI

But her brother had passed in between
 them and her,
 And calmly knelt down on the high-altar²⁷⁰
 stair —
 Of an infantine aspect so stern to the view
 That the priest could not smile on the
 child's eyes of blue
 As he would for another.

XII

He knelt like a child marble-sculptured and
 white
 That seems kneeling to pray on the tomb
 of a knight,
 With a look taken up to each iris of stone
 From the greatness and death where he
 kneeleth, but none
 From the face of a mother.

XIII

'In your chapel, O priest, ye have wedded
 and shriven²⁸⁰
 Fair wives for the hearth, and fair sinners
 for heaven;
 But this fairest my sister, ye think now to
 wed,
 Bid her kneel where she standeth, and
 shrive her instead:
 O shrive her and wed not !'

XIV

In tears, the bride's mother, — 'Sir priest,
 unto thee
 Would he lie, as he lied to this fair com-
 pany.'
 In wrath, the bride's lover, — 'The lie
 shall be clear !
 Speak it out, boy ! the saints in their niches
 shall hear:
 Be the charge proved or said not !'

XV

Then serene in his childhood he lifted his
 face,
 And his voice sounded holy and fit for the²⁹⁰
 place, —
 'Look down from your niches, ye still saints,
 and see

How she wears on her bosom a BROWN
 ROSARY !
 Is it used for the praying ?'

XVI

The youths looked aside — to laugh there
 were a sin —
 And the maidens' lips trembled from smiles
 shut within.
 Quoth the priest, 'Thou art wild, pretty
 boy ! Blessed she
 Who prefers at her bridal a brown rosary
 To a worldly arraying.'

XVII

The bridegroom spake low and led onward
 the bride³⁰⁰
 And before the high altar they stood side
 by side:
 The rite-book is opened, the rite is begun,
 They have knelt down together to rise up
 as one.
 Who laughed by the altar ?

XVIII

The maidens looked forward, the youths
 looked around,
 The bridegroom's eye flashed from his
 prayer at the sound;
 And each saw the bride, as if no bride she
 were,
 Gazing cold at the priest without gesture
 of prayer,
 As he read from the psalter.

XIX

The priest never knew that she did so, but
 still³¹⁰
 He felt a power on him too strong for his
 will:
 And whenever the Great Name was there
 to be read,
 His voice sank to silence — THAT could not
 be said,
 Or the air could not hold it.

XX

'I have sinned,' quoth he, 'I have sinned,
 I wot' —
 And the tears ran adown his old cheeks at
 the thought:
 They dropped fast on the book, but he
 read on the same,

And aye was the silence where should be
the NAME, —
As the choristers told it.

XXI

The rite-book is closed, and the rite being
done³²⁰
They, who knelt down together, arise up as
one:
Fair riseth the bride — Oh, a fair bride is
she,
But, for all (think the maidens) that brown
rosary,
No saint at her praying !

XXII

What aileth the bridegroom ? He glares
blank and wide;
Then suddenly turning he kisseth the bride;
His lips stung her with cold; she glanced
upwardly mute:
' Mine own wife,' he said, and fell stark at
her foot
In the word he was saying.

XXIII

They have lifted him up, but his head sinks
away,³³⁰
And his face showeth bleak in the sunshine
and gray.
Leave him now where he lieth — for oh,
never more
Will he kneel at an altar or stand on a floor !
Let his bride gaze upon him.

XXIV

Long and still was her gaze while they
chafèd him there
And breathed in the mouth whose last life
had kissed her,
But when they stood up — only *they* ! with
a start
The shriek from her soul struck her pale
lips apart:
She has lived, and forgone him !

XXV

And low on his body she droppeth adown —
' Didst call me thine own wife, belovèd —
thine own ?'³⁴¹
Then take thine own with thee ! thy cold-
ness is warm
To the world's cold without thee ! Come,
keep me from harm
In a calm of thy teaching !'

XXVI

She looked in his face earnest-long, as in
sooth
There were hope of an answer, and then
kissed his mouth,
And with head on his bosom, wept, wept
bitterly, —
' Now, O God, take pity — take pity on
me !
God, hear my beseeching !'

XXVII

She was 'ware of a shadow that crossed
where she lay,³⁵⁰
She was 'ware of a presence that withered
the day:
Wild she sprang to her feet, — ' I surrender
to *thee*
The broken vow's pledge, the accursed
rosary, —
I am ready for dying !'

XXVIII

She dashed it in scorn to the marble-paved
ground
Where it fell mute as snow, and a weird
music-sound
Crept up, like a chill, up the aisles long
and dim, —
As the fiends tried to mock at the choristers'
hymn
And moaned in the trying.

FOURTH PART

Onora looketh listlessly adown the garden
walk:³⁶⁰
' I am weary, O my mother, of thy tender
talk.
I am weary of the trees a-waving to and
fro,
Of the steadfast skies above, the running
brooks below.
All things are the same, but I, — only I
am dreary,
And, mother, of my dreariness behold me
very weary.
' Mother, brother, pull the flowers I planted
in the spring
And smiled to think I should smile more
upon their gathering:
The bees will find out other flowers — oh,
pull them, dearest mine,

And carry them and carry me before Saint
 Agnes' shrine.
 — Whereat they pulled the summer flowers
 she planted in the spring, ³⁷⁰
 And her and them all mournfully to Agnes'
 shrine did bring.

She looked up to the pictured saint and
 gently shook her head —
 'The picture is too calm for me — too calm
 for me,' she said:
 'The little flowers we brought with us,
 before it we may lay,
 For those are used to look at heaven, — but
 I must turn away,
 Because no sinner under sun can dare or
 bear to gaze
 On God's or angel's holiness, except in
 Jesu's face.'

She spoke with passion after pause — 'And
 were it wisely done
 If we who cannot gaze above, should walk
 the earth alone ?
 If we whose virtue is so weak should have
 a will so strong, ³⁸⁰
 And stand blind on the rocks to choose the
 right path from the wrong ?
 To choose perhaps a love-lit hearth, instead
 of love and heaven, —
 A single rose, for a rose-tree which beareth
 seven times seven ?
 A rose that droppeth from the hand, that
 fadeth in the breast, —
 Until, in grieving for the worst, we learn
 what is the best !'

Then breaking into tears, — 'Dear God,'
 she cried, 'and must we see
 All blissful things depart from us or ere
 we go to THEE ?
 We cannot guess Thee in the wood or hear
 Thee in the wind ?
 Our cedars must fall round us ere we see
 the light behind ?
 Ay sooth, we feel too strong, in weal, to
 need Thee on that road, ³⁹⁰
 But woe being come, the soul is dumb that
 crieth not on "God."'

Her mother could not speak for tears; she
 ever mused thus,
 'The bees will find out other flowers, — but
 what is left for us ?'

But her young brother stayed his sobs and
 knelt beside her knee,
 — 'Thou sweetest sister in the world, hast
 never a word for me ?'
 She passed her hand across his face, she
 pressed it on his cheek,
 So tenderly, so tenderly — she needed not
 to speak.

The wreath which lay on shrine that day,
 at vespers bloomed no more.
 The woman fair who placed it there had
 died an hour before.
 Both perished mute for lack of root, earth's
 nourishment to reach. ⁴⁰⁰
 O reader, breathe (the ballad saith) some
 sweetness out of each !

THE MOURNING MOTHER

(OF THE DEAD BLIND)

First printed as 'The Mournful Mother.'

I

Dost thou weep, mourning mother,
 For thy blind boy in grave ?
 That no more with each other
 Sweet counsel ye can have ?
 That he, left dark by nature,
 Can never more be led
 By thee, maternal creature,
 Along smooth paths instead ?
 That thou canst no more show him
 The sunshine, by the heat; ¹⁰
 The river's silver flowing,
 By murmurs at his feet ?
 The foliage, by its coolness;
 The roses, by their smell;
 And all creation's fulness,
 By Love's invisible ?
 Weepest thou to behold not
 His meek blind eyes again, —
 Closed doorways which were folded,
 And prayed against in vain — ²⁰
 And under which, sat smiling
 The child-mouth evermore,
 As one who watcheth, wiling
 The time by, at a door ?
 And weepest thou to feel not
 His clinging hand on thine —
 Which now, at dream-time, will not
 Its cold touch disentwine ?
 And weepest thou still oft,

Oh, never more to mark
His low soft words, made softer
By speaking in the dark ?
Weep on, thou mourning mother !

II

But since to him when living,
Thou wast both sun and moon,
Look o'er his grave, surviving,
From a high sphere alone:
Sustain that exaltation,
Expand that tender light,
And hold in mother-passion
Thy Blessèd in thy sight.
See how he went out straightway
From the dark world he knew, —
No twilight in the gateway
To mediate 'twixt the two, —
Into the sudden glory,
Out of the dark he trod,
Departing from before thee
At once to light and God ! —
For the first face, beholding
The Christ's in its divine,
For the first place, the golden
And tideless hyaline,
With trees at lasting summer
That rock to songful sound,
While angels the new-comer
Wrap a still smile around.
Oh, in the blessèd psalm now,
His happy voice he tries,
Spreading a thicker palm-bough,
Than others, o'er his eyes !
Yet still, in all the singing,
Thinks haply of thy song
Which, in his life's first springing,
Sang to him all night long;
And wishes it beside him,
With kissing lips that cool
And soft did overglide him,
To make the sweetness full.
Look up, O mourning mother !
Thy blind boy walks in light:
Ye wait for one another
Before God's infinite.
But thou art now the darkest,
Thou mother left below —
Thou, the sole blind, — thou markest,
Content that it be so, —
Until ye two have meeting
Where Heaven's pearl-gate is,
And *he* shall lead thy feet in,
As once thou leddest *his*.
Wait on, thou mourning mother !

30

40

50

60

70

80

A VALEDICTION

God be with thee, my belovèd, — God be
with thee !
Else alone thou goest forth,
Thy face unto the north,
Moor and pleasance all around thee and
beneath thee
Looking equal in one snow;
While I, who try to reach thee,
Vainly follow, vainly follow
With the farewell and the hollo,
And cannot reach thee so.
Alas, I can but teach thee !
God be with thee, my belovèd, — God be
with thee !

II

Can I teach thee, my belovèd, — can I
teach thee ?
If I said, 'Go left or right,'
The counsel would be light,
The wisdom, poor of all that could enrich
thee;
My right would show like left;
My raising would depress thee,
My choice of light would blind thee,
Of way — would leave behind thee,
Of end — would leave bereft.
Alas, I can but bless thee !
May God teach thee, my belovèd, — may
God teach thee !

III

Can I bless thee, my belovèd, — can I bless
thee ?
What blessing word can I
From mine own tears keep dry ?
What flowers grow in my field wherewith
to dress thee ?
My good reverts to ill;
My calmnesses would move thee,
My softnesses would prick thee,
My bindings up would break thee,
My crownings curse and kill.
Alas, I can but love thee !
May God bless thee, my belovèd, — may
God bless thee !

IV

Can I love thee, my belovèd, — can I love
thee ?
And is *this* like love, to stand

With no help in my hand,
When strong as death I fain would watch
above thee ?

My love-kiss can deny
No tear that falls beneath it;
Mine oath of love can swear thee
From no ill that comes near thee,
And thou diest while I breathe it,
And I—I can but die !

May God love thee, my beloved, — may
God love thee !

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP

A ROMANCE OF THE AGE

A special interest attaches to this poem as the one which induced Robert Browning to seek Miss Barrett's acquaintance. She herself had been rather inclined to think lightly of it because it was, in some sense, written to order, and that with extraordinary rapidity. In a letter to H. S. Boyd, dated August 1, 1844, she gives the following account of its origin : ' Last Saturday, on its being discovered that my first volume consisted of only 208 pages, and my second of 280 pages, Mr. Moxon uttered a cry of reprehension . . . and wanted to tear away several poems from the end of the second volume, and tie them on to the end of the first ! I could not and would not hear of this because I had set my heart on having ' Dead Pan ' to conclude with. So there was nothing for it but to finish a ballad poem called ' Lady Geraldine's Courtship,' which was lying by me, and I did so by writing — i. e., composing, — one hundred and forty lines last Saturday. I seemed to be in a dream all day. Long lines, too. — fifteen syllables each ! ' Elsewhere she entreats Mr. Boyd never to tell anybody in what haste the poem was written. This highly colored rhymed romance of modern life proved far more attractive to the general reader than some of the more elaborate and more truly artistic pieces in the edition of 1844. It was also a special favorite both with Carlyle and Miss Martineau.

A Poet writes to his Friend. PLACE — *A Room in Wycombe Hall.* TIME — *Late in the evening.*

I

DEAR my friend and fellow - student, I
would lean my spirit o'er you !
Down the purple of this chamber tears
should scarcely run at will.

I am humbled who was humble. Friend,
I bow my head before you:
You should lead me to my peasants, but
their faces are too still.

II

There's a lady, an earl's daughter, — she
is proud and she is noble,
And she treads the crimson carpet and she
breathes the perfumed air,
And a kingly blood sends glances up, her
princely eye to trouble,
And the shadow of a monarch's crown is
softened in her hair.

III

She has halls among the woodlands, she
has castles by the breakers,
She has farms and she has manors, she can
threaten and command:
And the palpitating engines snort in steam
across her acres,
As they mark upon the blasted heaven the
measure of the land.

IV

There are none of England's daughters
who can show a prouder presence;
Upon princely suitors' praying she has
looked in her disdain.
She was sprung of English nobles, I was
born of English peasants;
What was I that I should love her, save
for competence to pain ?

V

I was only a poor poet, made for singing
at her casement,
As the finches or the thrushes, while she
thought of other things.
Oh, she walked so high above me, she ap-
peared to my abasement,
In her lovely silken murmur, like an angel
clad in wings !

VI

Many vassals bow before her as her ear-
riage sweeps their doorways;
She has blessed their little children, as a
priest or queen were she:

Far too tender, or too cruel far, her smile
upon the poor was,
For I thought it was the same smile which
she used to smile on *me*.

VII

She has voters in the Commons, she has
lovers in the palace,
And, of all the fair court-ladies, few have
jewels half as fine;
Oft the Prince has named her beauty 'twixt
the red wine and the chalice:
Oh, and what was *I* to love her? my be-
loved, my Geraldine!

VIII

Yet I could not choose but love her: I was
born to poet-uses,
To love all things set above me, all of good
and all of fair.
Nymphs of mountain, not of valley, we are
wont to call the Muses;
And in nympholeptic climbing, poets pass
from mount to star.

IX

And because I was a poet, and because the
public praised me,
With a critical deduction for the modern
writer's fault,
I could sit at rich men's tables, — though
the courtesies that raised me,
Still suggested clear between us the pale
spectrum of the salt.

X

And they praised me in her presence —
'Will your book appear this sum-
mer?'
Then returning to each other — 'Yes, our
plans are for the moors.'
Then with whisper dropped behind me —
'There he is! the latest comer.'
Oh, she only likes his verses! what is over,
she endures.

XI

'Quite low-born, self-educated! somewhat
gifted though by nature,
And we make a point of asking him, — of
being very kind.
You may speak, he does not hear you! and,
besides, he writes no satire, —
All these serpents kept by charmers leave
the natural sting behind.'

XII

I grew scornfuller, grew colder, as I stood
up there among them,
Till as frost intense will burn you, the cold
scorning scorched my brow;
When a sudden silver speaking, gravely
cadenced, over-rung them,
And a sudden silken stirring touched my
inner nature through.

XIII

I looked upward and beheld her: with a
calm and regnant spirit,
Slowly round she swept her eyelids, and
said clear before them all —
'Have you such superfluous honor, sir,
that able to confer it
You will come down, Mister Bertram, as
my guest to Wycombe Hall?'

XIV

Here she paused; she had been paler at the
first word of her speaking,
But, because a silence followed it, blushed
somewhat, as for shame:
Then, as scorning her own feeling, resumed
calmly — 'I am seeking
More distinction than these gentlemen think
worthy of my claim.

XV

'Ne'ertheless, you see, I seek it — not be-
cause I am a woman,'
(Here her smile sprang like a fountain and,
so, overflowed her mouth)
'But because my woods in Sussex have
some purple shades at gloaming
Which are worthy of a king in state, or
poet in his youth.

XVI

'I invite you, Mister Bertram, to no scene
for worldly speeches —
Sir, I scarce should dare — but only where
God asked the thrushes first:
And if *you* will sing beside them, in the
covert of my beeches,
I will thank you for the woodlands, — for
the human world, at worst.'

XVII

Then she smiled around right childly, then
she gazed around right queenly,
And I bowed — I could not answer; alter-
nated light and gloom —

While as one who quells the lions, with a
steady eye serenely,
She, with level fronting eyelids, passed out
stately from the room.

XVIII

Oh, the blessèd woods of Sussex, I can hear
them still around me,
With their leafy tide of greenery still rip-
pling up the wind !
Oh, the cursèd woods of Sussex ! where the
hunter's arrow found me,
When a fair face and a tender voice had
made me mad and blind !

XIX

In that ancient hall of Wycombe thronged
the numerous guests invited,
And the lovely London ladies trod the
floors with gliding feet;
And their voices low with fashion, not with
feeling, softly freighted
All the air about the windows with elastic
laughters sweet.

XX

For at eve the open windows flung their
light out on the terrace
Which the floating orbs of curtains did with
gradual shadow sweep,
While the swans upon the river, fed at
morning by the heiress,
Trembled downward through their snowy
wings at music in their sleep.

XXI

And there evermore was music, both of
instrument and singing,
Till the finches of the shrubberies grew
restless in the dark;
But the cedars stood up motionless, each in
a moonlight's ringing,
And the deer, half in the glimmer, strewed
the hollows of the park.

XXII

And though sometimes she would bind me
with her silver-corded speeches
To commix my words and laughter with
the converse and the jest,
Oft I sat apart and, gazing on the river
through the beeches,
Heard, as pure the swans swam down it,
her pure voice o'erfloat the rest.

XXIII

In the morning, horn of huntsman, hoof of
steed and laugh of rider,
Spread out cheery from the courtyard till
we lost them in the hills,
While herself and other ladies, and her
suitsors left beside her,
Went a-wandering up the gardens through
the laurels and abeles.

XXIV

Thus, her foot upon the new-mown grass,
bareheaded, with the flowing
Of the virginal white vesture gathered
closely to her throat,
And the golden ringlets in her neck just
quickenied by her going,
And appearing to breathe sun for air, and
doubting if to float, —

XXV

With a bunch of dewy maple, which her
right hand held above her,
And which trembled a green shadow in be-
twixt her and the skies,
As she turned her face in going, thus, she
drew me on to love her,
And to worship the divineness of the smile
hid in her eyes.

XXVI

For her eyes alone smile constantly; her
lips have serious sweetness,
And her front is calm, the dimple rarely
ripples on the cheek;
But her deep blue eyes smile constantly, as
if they in discreetness
Kept the secret of a happy dream she did
not care to speak.

XXVII

Thus she drew me the first morning, out
across into the garden,
And I walked among her noble friends and
could not keep behind.
Spake she unto all and unto me — ‘ Behold,
I am the warden
Of the song-birds in these lindens, which
are cages to their mind.

XXVIII

‘ But within this swarded circle into which
the lime-walk brings us,
Whence the beeches, rounded greenly, stand
away in reverent fear,

I will let no music enter, saving what the
fountain sings us
Which the lilies round the basin may seem
pure enough to hear.

XXIX

'The live air that waves the lilies waves
the slender jet of water
Like a holy thought sent feebly up from
soul of fasting saint:
Whereby lies a marble Silence, sleeping
(Lough the sculptor wrought her),
So asleep she is forgetting to say Hush!
— a fancy quaint.

XXX

'Mark how heavy white her eyelids ! not
a dream between them lingers;
And the left hand's index droppeth from
the lips upon the cheek:
While the right hand, — with the symbol-
rose held slack within the fingers, —
Has fallen backward in the basin — yet
this Silence will not speak !

XXXI

'That the essential meaning growing may
exceed the special symbol,
Is the thought as I conceive it: it applies
more high and low.
Our true noblemen will often through right
nobleness grow humble,
And assert an inward honor by denying
outward show.'

XXXII

'Nay, your Silence,' said I, 'truly, holds
her symbol-rose but slackly,
Yet *she holds it*, or would scarcely be a Si-
lence to our ken:
And your nobles wear their ermine on the
outside, or walk blackly
In the presence of the social law as mere
ignoble men.

XXXIII

'Let the poets dream such dreaming !
madam, in these British islands
'T is the substance that wanes ever, 't is the
symbol that exceeds.
Soon we shall have nought but symbol: and,
for statues like this Silence,
Shall accept the rose's image — in another
case, the weed's.'

XXXIV

'Not so quickly,' she retorted, — 'I con-
fess, where'er you go, you
Find for things, names — shows for actions,
and pure gold for honor clear:
But when all is run to symbol in the Social,
I will throw you
The world's book which now reads dryly,
and sit down with Silence here.'

XXXV

Half in playfulness she spoke, I thought,
and half in indignation;
Friends, who listened, laughed her words
off, while her lovers deemed her fair:
A fair woman, flushed with feeling, in her
noble-lighted station
Near the statue's white reposing — and
both bathed in sunny air !

XXXVI

With the trees round, not so distant but
you heard their vernal murmur,
And beheld in light and shadow the leaves
in and outward move,
And the little fountain leaping toward the
sun-heart to be warmer,
Then recoiling in a tremble from the too
much light above.

XXXVII

'T is a picture for remembrance. And thus,
morning after morning,
Did I follow as she drew me by the spirit
to her feet.
Why, her greyhound followed also ! dogs —
we both were dogs for scorning —
To be sent back when she pleased it and
her path lay through the wheat.

XXXVIII

And thus, morning after morning, spite of
vows and spite of sorrow,
Did I follow at her drawing, while the
week-days passed along, —
Just to feed the swans this noontide, or to
see the fawns to-morrow,
Or to teach the hill-side echo some sweet
Tuscan in a song.

XXXIX

Ay, for sometimes on the hill-side, while we
sate down in the gowans,
With the forest green behind us and its
shadow cast before,

And the river running under, and across it
from the rowans
A brown partridge whirring near us till we
felt the air it bore, —

XL

There, obedient to her praying, did I read
aloud the poems
Made to Tuscan flutes, or instruments
more various of our own;
Read the pastoral parts of Spenser, or the
subtle interflowings
Found in Petrarch's sonnets — here's the
book, the leaf is folded down !

XLI

Or at times a modern volume, Words-
worth's solemn-thoughted idyl,
Howitt's ballad-verse, or Tennyson's en-
chanted reverie, —
Or from Browning some 'Pomegranate,'
which, if cut deep down the middle,
Shows a heart within blood-tintured, of a
veined humanity.

XLII

Or at times I read there, hoarsely, some
new poem of my making:
Poets ever fail in reading their own verses
to their worth,
For the echo in you breaks upon the words
which you are speaking,
And the chariot wheels jar in the gate
through which you drive them forth.

XLIII

After, when we were grown tired of books,
the silence round us flinging
A slow arm of sweet compression, felt with
beatings at the breast,
She would break out on a sudden in a gush
of woodland singing,
Like a child's emotion in a god — a naiad
tired of rest.

XLIV

Oh, to see or hear her singing ! scarce I
know which is divinest,
For her looks sing too — she modulates
her gestures on the tune,
And her mouth stirs with the song, like
song; and when the notes are finest,
'T is the eyes that shoot out vocal light
and seem to swell them on.

XLV

Then we talked — oh, how we talked !
her voice, so cadenced in the talking,
Made another singing — of the soul ! a
music without bars:
While the leafy sounds of woodlands, hum-
ming round where we were walking,
Brought interposition worthy-sweet, — as
skies about the stars.

XLVI

And she spake such good thoughts natural,
as if she always thought them;
She had sympathies so rapid, open, free as
bird on branch,
Just as ready to fly east as west, whichever
way besought them,
In the birchen-wood a chirrup, or a cock-
crow in the grange.

XLVII

In her utmost lightness there is truth —
and often she speaks lightly,
Has a grace in being gay which even
mournful souls approve,
For the root of some grave earnest thought
is understruck so rightly
As to justify the foliage and the waving
flowers above.

XLVIII

And she talked on — *we* talked, rather !
upon all things, substance, shadow,
Of the sheep that browsed the grasses, of
the reapers in the corn,
Of the little children from the schools, seen
winding through the meadow,
Of the poor rich world beyond them, still
kept poorer by its scorn.

XLIX

So, of men, and so, of letters — books are
men of higher stature,
And the only men that speak aloud for
future times to hear;
So, of mankind in the abstract, which
grows slowly into nature,
Yet will lift the cry of 'progress,' as it
trod from sphere to sphere.

L

And her custom was to praise me when I
said, — 'The Age culls simples,
With a broad clown's back turned broadly
to the glory of the stars.

We are gods by our own reck'ning, and
may well shut up the temples,
And wield on, amid the incense-steam, the
thunder of our cars.

LI

'For we throw out acclamations of self-
thanking, self-admiring,
With, at every mile run faster, — "O the
wondrous wondrous age!"
Little thinking if we work our SOULS as
nobly as our iron,
Or if angels will commend us at the goal
of pilgrimage.

LII

'Why, what is this patient entrance into
nature's deep resources
But the child's most gradual learning to
walk upright without bane!
When we drive out, from the cloud of
steam, majestic white horses,
Are we greater than the first men who led
black ones by the mane?

LIII

'If we trod the deeps of ocean, if we
struck the stars in rising,
If we wrapped the globe intensely with one
hot electric breath,
'T were but power within our tether, no
new spirit-power comprising,
And in life we were not greater men, nor
bolder men in death.'

LIV

She was patient with my talking; and I
loved her, loved her certes
As I loved all heavenly objects, with up-
lifted eyes and hands;
As I loved pure inspirations, loved the
graces, loved the virtues,
In a Love content with writing his own
name on desert sands.

LV

Or at least I thought so, purely; thought
no idiot Hope was raising
Any crown to crown Love's silence, silent
Love that sate alone:
Out, alas! the stag is like me, he that tries
to go on grazing
With the great deep gun-wound in his
neck, then reels with sudden moan.

LVI

It was thus I reeled. I told you that her
hand had many suitors;
But she smiles them down imperially as
Venus did the waves,
And with such a gracious coldness that
they cannot press their futures
On the present of her courtesy, which
yieldingly enslaves.

LVII

And this morning as I sat alone within the
inner chamber
With the great saloon beyond it, lost in
pleasant thought serene,
For I had been reading Camoëns, that
poem you remember,
Which his lady's eyes are praised in as the
sweetest ever seen.

LVIII

And the book lay open, and my thought
flew from it, taking from it
A vibration and impulsion to an end be-
yond its own,
As the branch of a green osier, when a
child would overcome it,
Springs up freely from his claspings and
goes swinging in the sun.

LIX

As I mused I heard a murmur; it grew
deep as it grew longer,
Speakers using earnest language — 'Lady
Geraldine, you *would!*'
And I heard a voice that pleaded, ever on
in accents stronger,
As a sense of reason gave it power to make
its rhetoric good.

LX

Well I knew that voice; it was an earl's, of
soul that matched his station,
Soul completed into lordship, might and
right read on his brow;
Very finely courteous; far too proud to
doubt his domination
Of the common people, he atones for gran-
deur by a bow.

LXI

High straight forehead, nose of eagle, cold
blue eyes of less expression
Than resistance, coldly casting off the looks
of other men,

As steel, arrows; unelastic lips which seem
to taste possession
And be cautious lest the common air should
injure or distract.

LXII

For the rest, accomplished, upright, — ay,
and standing by his order
With a bearing not ungraceful; fond of
art and letters too;
Just a good man made a proud man, — as
the sandy rocks that border
A wild coast, by circumstances, in a regnant
ebb and flow.

LXIII

Thus, I knew that voice, I heard it, and I
could not help the hearkening:
In the room I stood up blindly, and my
burning heart within
Seemed to seethe and fuse my senses till
they ran on all sides darkening,
And scorched, weighed like melted metal
round my feet that stood therein.

LXIV

And that voice, I heard it pleading, for
love's sake, for wealth, position,
For the sake of liberal uses and great ac-
tions to be done:
And she interrupted gently, 'Nay, my
lord, the old tradition
Of your Normans, by some worthier hand
than mine is, should be won.'

LXV

'Ah, that white hand!' he said quickly, —
and in his he either drew it
Or attempted — for with gravity and in-
stance she replied,
'Nay, indeed, my lord, this talk is vain,
and we had best eschew it
And pass on, like friends, to other points
less easy to decide.'

LXVI

What he said again, I know not: it is
likely that his trouble
Worked his pride up to the surface, for
she answered in slow scorn,
'And your lordship judges rightly. Whom
I marry shall be noble,
Ay, and wealthy. I shall never blush to
think how he was born.'

LXVII

There, I maddened! her words stung me.
Life swept through me into fever,
And my soul sprang up astonished, sprang
full-statured in an hour.
Know you what it is when anguish, with
apocalyptic NEVER,
To a Pythian height dilates you, and de-
spair sublines to power?

LXVIII

From my brain the soul-wings budded,
waved a flame about my body,
Whence conventions coiled to ashes. I felt
self-drawn out, as man,
From amalgamate false natures, and I saw
the skies grow ruddy
With the deepening feet of angels, and I
knew what spirits can.

LXIX

I was mad, inspired — say either! (anguish
worketh inspiration)
Was a man or beast — perhaps so, for the
tiger roars when speared;
And I walked on, step by step along the
level of my passion —
Oh my soul! and passed the doorway to
her face, and never feared.

LXX

He had left her, peradventure, when my
footstep proved my coming,
But for her — she half arose, then sate,
grew scarlet and grew pale.
Oh, she trembled! 't is so always with a
worldly man or woman
In the presence of true spirits; what else
can they do but quail?

LXXI

Oh, she fluttered like a tame bird, in among
its forest brothers
Far too strong for it; then drooping, bowed
her face upon her hands;
And I spake out wildly, fiercely, brutal
truths of her and others:
I, she planted in the desert, swathed her,
windlike, with my sands.

LXXII

I plucked up her social fictions, bloody-
rooted though leaf-verdant,
Trode them down with words of shaming, —
all the purple and the gold,

All the 'landed stakes' and lordships, all
that spirits pure and ardent
Are cast out of love and honor because
chancing not to hold.

LXXIII

'For myself I do not argue,' said I, 'though
I love you, madam,
But for better souls that nearer to the
height of yours have trod:
And this age shows, to my thinking, still
more infidels to Adam
Than directly, by profession, simple infidels
to God.

LXXIV

'Yet, O God,' I said, 'O grave,' I said,
O mother's heart and bosom,
With whom first and last are equal, saint
and corpse and little child!
We are fools to your deductions, in these
figments of heart-closing;
We are traitors to your causes, in these
sympathies defiled.

LXXV

'Learn more reverence, madam, not for
rank or wealth — *that* needs no
learning:
That comes quickly, quick as sin does, ay,
and culminates to sin;
But for Adam's seed, MAN! Trust me,
't is a clay above your scorning,
With God's image stamped upon it, and
God's kindling breath within.

LXXVI

'What right have you, madam, gazing
your palace mirror daily,
Getting so by heart your beauty which all
others must adore,
While you draw the golden ringlets down
your fingers, to vow gaily
You will wed no man that's only good to
God, and nothing more?

LXXXVII

'Why, what right have you, made fair by
that same God, the sweetest woman
Of all women He has fashioned, with your
lovely spirit-face
Which would seem too near to vanish if its
smile were not so human,
And your voice of holy sweetness, turning
common words to grace, —

LXXVIII

'What right *can* you have, God's other
works to scorn, despise, revile them
In the gross, as mere men, broadly — not
as *noble* men, forsooth, —
As mere Pariahs of the outer world, for-
bidden to assail them
In the hope of living, dying, near that
sweetness of your mouth?

LXXIX

'Have you any answer, madam? If my
spirit were less earthly,
If its instrument were gifted with a better
silver string,
I would kneel down where I stand, and
say — Behold me! I am worthy
Of thy loving, for I love thee. I am wor-
thy as a king.

LXXX

'As it is — your ermined pride, I swear,
shall feel this stain upon her,
That *I*, poor, weak, tost with passion,
scorned by me and you again,
Love you, madam, dare to love you, to my
grief and your dishonor,
To my endless desolation, and your impo-
tent disdain!'

LXXXI

More mad words like these — mere mad-
ness! friend, I need not write them
fuller,
For I hear my hot soul dropping on the
lines in showers of tears.
Oh, a woman! friend, a woman! why, a
beast had scarce been duller
Than roar bestial loud complaints against
the shining of the spheres.

LXXXII

But at last there came a pause. I stood all
vibrating with thunder
Which my soul had used. The silence
drew her face up like a call.
Could you guess what word she uttered?
She looked up, as if in wonder,
With tears beaded on her lashes, and said —
'Bertram!' — It was all.

LXXXIII

If she had cursed me, and she might have,
or if even, with queenly bearing
Which at need is used by women, she had
risen up and said,

'Sir, you are my guest, and therefore I
have given you a full hearing:
Now, beseech you, choose a name exacting
somewhat less, instead !' —

LXXXIV

I had borne it: but that 'Bertram' — why,
it lies there on the paper
A mere word, without her accent, and you
cannot judge the weight
Of the calm which crushed my passion: I
seemed drowning in a vapor;
And her gentleness destroyed me whom her
scorn made desolate.

LXXXV

So, struck backward and exhausted by that
inward flow of passion
Which had rushed on, sparing nothing, into
forms of abstract truth,
By a logic agonizing through unseemly demon-
stration,
And by youth's own anguish turning grimly
gray the hairs of youth, —

LXXXVI

By the sense accursed and instant, that if
even I spake wisely
I spake basely — using truth, if what I
spake indeed was true,
To avenge wrong on a woman — *her*, who
sate there weighing nicely
A poor manhood's worth, found guilty of
such deeds as I could do ! —

LXXXVII

By such wrong and woe exhausted — what
I suffered and occasioned, —
As a wild horse through a city runs with
lightning in his eyes,
And then dashing at a church's cold and
passive wall, impassioned,
Strikes the death into his burning brain,
and blindly drops and dies —

LXXXVIII

So I fell, struck down before her — do you
blame me, friend, for weakness ?
'T was my strength of passion slew me ! —
fell before her like a stone;
Fast the dreadful world rolled from me on
its roaring wheels of blackness:
When the light came I was lying in this
chamber and alone.

LXXXIX

Oh, of course she charged her lacqueys to
bear out the sickly burden,
And to cast it from her scornful sight, but
not *beyond* the gate;
She is too kind to be cruel, and too haughty
not to pardon
Such a man as I; 't were something to be
level to her hate.

XC

But for me — you now are conscious why,
my friend, I write this letter,
How my life is read all backward, and the
charm of life undone.
I shall leave her house at dawn; I would
to-night, if I were better —
And I charge my soul to hold my body
strengthened for the sun.

XCI

When the sun has dyed the oriel, I depart,
with no last gazes,
No weak moanings (one word only, left in
writing for her hands),
Out of reach of all derision, and some un-
availing praises,
To make front against this anguish in the
far and foreign lands.

XCII

Blame me not. I would not squander life
in grief — I am abstemious.
I but nurse my spirit's falcon that its wing
may soar again.
There's no room for tears of weakness in the
blind eyes of a Phemius:
Into work the poet kneads them, and he does
not die *till then*.

CONCLUSION

I

Bertram finished the last pages, while along
the silence ever
Still in hot and heavy splashes fell the tears
on every leaf.
Having ended, he leans backward in his
chair, with lips that quiver
From the deep unspoken, ay, and deep un-
written thoughts of grief.

II

Soh ! how still the lady standeth ! 'Tis a dream — a dream of mercies !
 'Twixt the purple lattice-curtains how she standeth still and pale !
 'Tis a vision, sure, of mercies, sent to soften his self-curses,
 Sent to sweep a patient quiet o'er the tossing of his wail.

III

'Eyes,' he said, 'now throbbing through me ! are ye eyes that did undo me ?
 Shining eyes, like antique jewels set in Parian statue-stone !
 Underneath that calm white forehead are ye ever burning torrid
 O'er the desolate sand-desert of my heart and life undone ?'

IV

With a murmurous stir uncertain, in the air the purple curtain
 Swelleth in and swelleth out around her motionless pale brows,
 While the gliding of the river sends a rippling noise for ever
 Through the open casement whitened by the moonlight's slant repose.

V

Said he — 'Vision of a lady ! stand there silent, stand there steady !
 Now I see it plainly, plainly now I cannot hope or doubt —
 There, the brows of mild repression — there, the lips of silent passion,
 Curvèd like an archer's bow to send the bitter arrows out.'

VI

Ever, evermore the while in a slow silence she kept smiling,
 And approached him slowly, slowly, in a gliding measured pace;
 With her two white hands extended as if praying one offended,
 And a look of supplication gazing earnest in his face.

VII

Said he — 'Wake me by no gesture, — sound of breath, or stir of vesture !
 Let the blessed apparition melt not yet to its divine !

No approaching — hush, no breathing ! or my heart must swoon to death in
 The too utter life thou bringest, O thou dream of Geraldine !'

VIII

Ever, evermore the while in a slow silence she kept smiling,
 But the tears ran over lightly from her eyes and tenderly : —
 'Dost thou, Bertram, truly love me ? Is no woman far above me
 Found more worthy of thy poet-heart than such a one as I ?'

IX

Said he — 'I would dream so ever, like the flowing of that river,
 Flowing ever in a shadow greenly onward to the sea !
 So, thou vision of all sweetness, princely to a full completeness
 Would my heart and life flow onward, deathward, through this dream of THEE !'

X

Ever, evermore the while in a slow silence she kept smiling,
 While the silver tears ran faster down the blushing of her cheeks;
 Then with both her hands enfolding both of his, she softly told him,
 'Bertram, if I say I love thee, . . . 'tis the vision only speaks.'

XI

Softened, quickened to adore her, on his knee he fell before her,
 And she whispered low in triumph, 'It shall be as I have sworn.
 Very rich he is in virtues, very noble — noble, certes;
 And I shall not blush in knowing that men call him lowly born.'

A VISION OF POETS

On September 19, 1843, Miss Barrett wrote to her stanch friend and valued literary counsellor, Hugh Stuart Boyd : 'I have just finished a poem of some eight hundred lines called "A Vision of Poets;" — philosophical, allegorical, anything but popular. It is in stanzas,

every one an octosyllabic triplet, which you will think odd, and I have not *sanguinity* enough to defend.' Elsewhere she explained that the object of the poem was to indicate 'the necessary relations of genius to suffering and self-sacrifice.' To Robert Browning, at least, the 'Vision of Poets' needed neither defence nor elucidation. Words appear almost to have failed him for the adequate expression of his enthusiasm, when he wrote to his *fiancée* on Sunday evening, August 4, 1845: 'Let me say how perfect, absolutely perfect, are those three or four pages in the Vision which present the Poets: — a line, a few words and the man there — one twang of the bow, and the arrow-head in the white — Shelley's "white ideal all statue-blind" is perfect — how can I coin words? And dear deaf old Hesiod, and all, all — are perfect — perfect.'

'O Sacred Essence, lighting me this hour,
How may I lightly stile thy great power?

Echo. Power.

Power! but of whence? under the greenwood
spraye?

Or liv'st in Heaven? saye.

Echo. In Heavens aye.

In Heavens aye! tell, may I it obtayne
By alms, by fasting, prayer, — by paine?

Echo. By paine.

Show me the paine, it shall be undergone:
I to mine end will still go on.

Echo. Go on.

— *Britannia's Pastorals.*

A POET could not sleep aright,
For his soul kept up too much light
Under his eyelids for the night.

And thus he rose disquieted
With sweet rhymes ringing through his
head,
And in the forest wanderèd

Where, sloping up the darkest glades,
The moon had drawn long colonnades
Upon whose floor the verdure fades

To a faint silver: pavement fair, 10
The antique wood-nymphs scarce would
dare
To foot-print o'er, had such been there,

And rather sit by breathlessly,
With fear in their large eyes, to see
The consecrated sight. But HE —

The poet who, with spirit-kiss
Familiar, had long claimed for his
Whatever earthly beauty is,

Who also in his spirit bore
A beauty passing the earth's store, — 20
Walked calmly onward evermore.

His aimless thoughts in metre went,
Like a babe's hand without intent
Drawn down a seven-stringed instrument:

Nor jarred it with his humor as,
With a faint stirring of the grass,
An apparition fair did pass.

He might have feared another time,
But all things fair and strange did chime
With his thoughts then, as rhyme to rhyme.

An angel had not startled him, 31
Alighted from heaven's burning rim
To breathe from glory in the Dim;

Much less a lady riding slow
Upon a palfrey white as snow,
And smooth as a snow-cloud could go.

Full upon his she turned her face,
'What ho, sir poet! dost thou pace
Our woods at night in ghostly chase

'Of some fair Dryad of old tales 40
Who chants between the nightingales
And over sleep by song prevails?'

She smiled; but he could see arise
Her soul from far adown her eyes,
Prepared as if for sacrifice.

She looked a queen who seemeth gay,
From royal grace alone. 'Now, nay,'
He answered, 'slumber passed away,

'Compelled by instincts in my head
That I should see to-night, instead 50
Of a fair nymph, some fairer Dread.'

She looked up quickly to the sky
And spake: 'The moon's regality
Will hear no praise; She is as I.

'She is in heaven, and I on earth;
This is my kingdom: I come forth
To crown all poets to their worth.'

He brake in with a voice that mourned;
'To their worth, lady? They are scorned
By men they sing for, till inurned. 60

'To their worth? Beauty in the mind
Leaves the hearth cold, and love-refined
Ambitions make the world unkind.

'The boor who ploughs the daisy down,
The chief whose mortgage of renown,
Fixed upon graves, has bought a crown —

'Both these are happier, more approved
Than poets! — why should I be moved
In saying, both are more beloved?'

'The south can judge not of the north,' 70
She resumed calmly; 'I come forth
To crown all poets to their worth.

'Yea, verily, to anoint them all
With blessed oils which surely shall
Smell sweeter as the ages fall.'

'As sweet,' the poet said, and rung
A low sad laugh, 'as flowers are, sprung
Out of their graves when they die young;

'As sweet as window-eglantine,
Some bough of which, as they decline, 80
The hired nurse gathers at their sign:

'As sweet, in short, as perfumed shroud
Which the gay Roman maidens sewed
For English Keats, singing aloud.'

The lady answered, 'Yea, as sweet!
The things thou namest being complete
In fragrance, as I measure it.

'Since sweet the death-clothes and the knell
Of him who having lived, dies well;
And wholly sweet the asphodel 90

'Stirred softly by that foot of his,
When he treads brave on all that is,
Into the world of souls, from this.

'Since sweet the tears, dropped at the door
Of tearless Death, and even before:
Sweet, consecrated evermore.

'What, dost thou judge it a strange thing
That poets, crowned for vanquishing,
Should bear some dust from out the ring?

'Come on with me, come on with me, 100
And learn in coming: let me free
Thy spirit into verity.'

She ceased: her palfrey's paces sent
No separate noises as she went;
'T was a bee's hum, a little spent.

And while the poet seemed to tread
Along the drowsy noise so made,
The forest heaved up overhead

Its billowy foliage through the air,
And the calm stars did far and spare 110
O'erswim the masses everywhere;

Save when the overtopping pines
Did bar their tremulous light with lines
All fixed and black. Now the moon shines

A broader glory. You may see
The trees grow rarer presently;
The air blows up more fresh and free:

Until they come from dark to light,
And from the forest to the sight 119
Of the large heaven-heart, bare with night,

A fiery throb in every star,
Those burning arteries that are
The conduits of God's life afar, —

A wild brown moorland underneath,
And four pools breaking up the heath
With white low gleamings, blank as death.

Beside the first pool, near the wood,
A dead tree in set horror stood,
Peeled and disjointed, stark as rood;

Since thunder-stricken, years ago, 130
Fixed in the spectral strain and throe
Wherewith it struggled from the blow:

A monumental tree, alone,
That will not bend in storms, nor groan,
But break off sudden like a stone.

Its lifeless shadow lies oblique
Upon the pool where, javelin-like,
The star-rays quiver while they strike.

'Drink,' said the lady, very still —
'Be holy and cold.' He did her will 140
And drank the starry water chill.

The next pool they came near unto
Was bare of trees; there, only grew
Straight flags, and lilies just a few

Which sullen on the water sate
And leant their faces on the flat,
As weary of the starlight-state.

'Drink,' said the lady, grave and slow —
'*World's use* behoveth thee to know.'
He drank the bitter wave below. 150

The third pool, girt with thorny bushes
And flaunting weeds and reeds and rushes
That winds sang through in mournful
gushes,

Was whitely smeared in many a round
By a slow slime; the starlight sround
Over the ghastly light it found.

'Drink,' said the lady, sad and slow —
'*World's love* behoveth thee to know.'
He looked to her commanding so;

Her brow was troubled, but her eye 160
Struck clear to his soul. For all reply
He drank the water suddenly, —

Then, with a deathly sickness, passed
Beside the fourth pool and the last,
Where weights of shadow were down-
cast

From yew and alder and rank trails
Of nightshade clasping the trunk-scales
And flung across the intervals

From yew to yew: who dares to stoop
Where those dank branches overdroop, 170
Into his heart the chill strikes up;

He hears a silent gliding coil,
The snakes strain hard against the soil,
His foot slips in their slimy oil,

And toads seem crawling on his hand,
And clinging bats but dimly scanned
Full in his face their wings expand.

A paleness took the poet's cheek:
'Must I drink *here*?' he seemed to
seek
The lady's will with utterance meek: 180

'Ay, ay,' she said, 'it so must be;
(And this time she spake cheerfully)
'Behoves thee know *World's cruelty*.'

He bowed his forehead till his mouth
Curved in the wave, and drank unloth
As if from rivers of the south;

His lips sobbed through the water rank,
His heart paused in him while he drank,
His brain beat heart-like, rose and sank,

And he swooned backward to a dream 190
Wherein he lay 'twixt gloom and gleam,
With Death and Life at each extreme:

And spiritual thunders, born of soul
Not cloud, did leap from mystic pole
And o'er him roll and counter-roll,

Crushing their echoes reboant
With their own wheels. Did Heaven so
grant
His spirit a sign of covenant?

At last came silence. A slow kiss
Did crown his forehead after this; 200
His eyelids flew back for the bliss —

The lady stood beside his head,
Smiling a thought, with hair dispread;
The moonshine seemed dishevelled

In her sleek tresses manifold
Like Danae's in the rain of old
That dripped with melancholy gold:

But SHE was holy, pale and high
As one who saw an ecstasy
Beyond a foretold agony. 210

'Rise up!' said she with voice where song
Eddied through speech, 'rise up; be
strong:
And learn how right avenges wrong.'

The poet rose up on his feet:
He stood before an altar set
For sacrament with vessels meet

And mystic altar-lights which shine
As if their flames were crystalline
Carved flames that would not shrink or
pine.

The altar filled the central place 220
Of a great church, and toward its face
Long aisles did shoot and interlace,

And from it a continuous mist
Of incense (round the edges kissed
By a yellow light of amethyst)

Wound upward slowly and throbbingly,
Cloud within cloud, right silverly,
Cloud above cloud, victoriously, —

Broke full against the archèd roof
And thence refracting eddied off 230
And floated through the marble woof

Of many a fine-wrought architrave,
Then, poisoning its white masses brave,
Swept solemnly down aisle and nave

Where, now in dark and now in light,
The countless columns, glimmering white,
Seemed leading out to the Infinite:

Plunged halfway up the shaft, they showed
In that pale shifting incense-cloud
Which flowed them by and overflowed 240

Till mist and marble seemed to blend,
And the whole temple, at the end,
With its own incense to distend, —

The arches like a giant's bow
To bend and slacken, — and below,
The nichèd saints to come and go:

Alone amid the shifting scene
That central altar stood serene
In its clear steadfast taper-sheen.

Then first, the poet was aware 250
Of a chief angel standing there
Before that altar, in the glare.

His eyes were dreadful, for you saw
That *they* saw God; his lips and jaw
Grand-made and strong, as Sinai's Law

They could enunciate and refrain
From vibratory after-pain,
And his brow's height was sovereign.

On the vast background of his wings
Rises his image, and he flings 260
From each plumed arc pale glitterings

And fiery flakes (as beateth, more
Or less, the angel-heart) before
And round him upon roof and floor,

Edging with fire the shifting fumes,
While at his side 'twixt lights and glooms
The phantasm of an organ booms.

Extending from which instrument
And angel, right and left-way bent,
The poet's sight grew sentient 270

Of a strange company around
And toward the altar; pale and bound
With bay above the eyes profound.

Deathful their faces were, and yet
The power of life was in them set —
Never forgot nor to forget:

Sublime significance of mouth,
Dilated nostril full of youth,
And forehead royal with the truth.

These faces were not multiplied 280
Beyond your count, but side by side
Did front the altar, glorified,

Still as a vision, yet exprest
Full as an action — look and geste
Of buried saint in risen rest.

The poet knew them. Faint and dim
His spirits seemed to sink in him —
Then, like a dolphin, change and swim

The current: these were poets true,
Who died for Beauty as martyrs do 290
For Truth — the ends being scarcely two.

God's prophets of the Beautiful
These poets were; of iron rule,
The rugged cilix, serge of wool.

Here Homer, with a broad suspense
Of thunderous brows, and lips intense
Of garrulous god-innocence.

There Shakespeare, on whose forehead climb
The crowns o' the world: O eyes sublime
With tears and laughter for all time! 300

Here Æschylus, the women swooned
To see so awful, when he frowned
As the gods did: he standeth crowned.

Euripides, with close and mild
Scholastic lips, that could be wild
And laugh or sob out like a child

Even in the classes. Sophocles,
With that king's-look which down the trees
Followed the dark effigies

Of the lost Theban. Hesiod old, 310
Who, somewhat blind and deaf and cold,
Cared most for gods and bulls. And bold

Electric Pindar, quick as fear,
With race-dust on his cheeks, and clear
Slant startled eyes that seem to hear

The chariot rounding the last goal,
To hurtle past it in his soul.
And Sappho, with that gloriole

Of ebon hair on calmèd brows —
O poet-woman ! none foregoes 320
The leap, attaining the repose.

Theocritus, with glittering locks
Dropped sideways, as betwixt the rocks
He watched the visionary flocks.

And Aristophanes, who took
The world with mirth, and laughter-struck
The hollow caves of Thought and woke

The infinite echoes hid in each.
And Virgil: shade of Mantuan beech
Did help the shade of bay to reach 330

And knit around his forehead high:
For his gods wore less majesty
Than his brown bees hummed deathlessly.

Lucretius, nobler than his mood,
Who dropped his plummet down the broad
Deep universe and said 'No God —'

Finding no bottom: he denied
Divinely the divine, and died
Chief poet on the Tiber-side

By grace of God: his face is stern 340
As one compelled, in spite of scorn,
To teach a truth he would not learn.

And Ossian, dimly seen or guessed;
Once counted greater than the rest,
When mountain-winds blew out his vest.

And Spenser drooped his dreaming head
(With languid sleep-smile you had said
From his own verse engendered)

On Ariosto's, till they ran
Their curls in one: the Italian 350
Shot nimbler heat of bolder man

From his fine lids. And Dante stern
And sweet, whose spirit was an urn
For wine and milk poured out in turn.

Hard-souled Alfieri; and fancy-willed
Boiardo, who with laughter filled
The pauses of the jostled shield.

And Berni, with a hand stretched out
To sleek that storm. And, not with-
out 360
The wreath he died in and the doubt

He died by, Tasso, bard and lover,
Whose visions were too thin to cover
The face of a false woman over.

And soft Racine; and grave Corneille,
The orator of rhymes, whose wail
Searce shook his purple. And Petrarch
pale,

From whose brain-lighted heart were
thrown
A thousand thoughts beneath the sun,
Each lucid with the name of One.

And Camoens, with that look he had, 370
Compelling India's Genius sad
From the wave through the Lusiad, —

The murmurs of the storm-cape ocean
Indrawn in vibrative emotion
Along the verse. And, while devotion

In his wild eyes fantastic shone
Under the tonsure blown upon
By airs celestial, Calderon.

And bold De Vega, who breathed quick
Verse after verse, till death's old trick 380
Put pause to life and rhetoric.

And Goethe, with that reaching eye
His soul reached out from, far and
high,
And fell from inner entity.

And Schiller, with heroic front
Worthy of Plutarch's kiss upon 't,
Too large for wreath of modern wont.

And Chaucer, with his infantine
Familiar clasp of things divine;
That mark upon his lip is wine. 390

Here, Milton's eyes strike piercing-dim:
The shapes of suns and stars did swim
Like clouds from them, and granted him

God for sole vision. Cowley, there,
Whose active fancy debonair
Drew straws like amber — foul to fair.

Drayton and Browne, with smiles they drew
From outward nature, still kept new
From their own inward nature true.

And Marlowe, Webster, Fletcher, Ben, 400
Whose fire-hearts sowed our furrows when
The world was worthy of such men.

And Burns, with pungent passionings
Set in his eyes: deep lyric springs
Are of the fire-mount's issuings.

And Shelley, in his white ideal,
All statue-blind. And Keats the real
Adonis with the hymeneal

Fresh vernal buds half sunk between
His youthful curls, kissed straight and 410
sheen
In his Rome-grave, by Venus queen.

And poor, proud Byron, sad as grave
And salt as life; forlornly brave,
And quivering with the dart he drave.

And visionary Coleridge, who
Did sweep his thoughts as angels do
Their wings with cadence up the Blue.

These poets faced (and many more)
The lighted altar looming o'er
The clouds of incense dim and hoar: 420

And all their faces, in the lull
Of natural things, looked wonderful
With life and death and deathless rule.

All, still as stone and yet intense;
As if by spirit's vehemence
That stone were carved and not by sense.

But where the heart of each should beat,
There seemed a wound instead of it,
From whence the blood dropped to their
feet

Drop after drop — dropped heavily 430
As century follows century
Into the deep eternity.

Then said the lady — and her word
Came distant, as wide waves were stirred
Between her and the ear that heard, —

' *World's use* is cold, *world's love* is vain,
World's cruelty is bitter bane,
But pain is not the fruit of pain.

' Harken, O poet, whom I led
From the dark wood: dismissing dread, 440
Now hear this angel in my stead.

' His organ's clavier strikes along
These poets' hearts, sonorous, strong,
They gave him without count of wrong, —

' A diapason whence to guide
Up to God's feet, from these who died,
An anthem fully glorified —

' Whereat God's blessing, IBARAK (יברך)
Breathes back this music, folds it back 450
About the earth in vapory rack,

' And men walk in it, crying "Lo
The world is wider, and we know
The very heavens look brighter so:

"The stars move statelier round the edge
Of the silver spheres, and give in pledge
Their light for nobler privilege:

"No little flower but joys or grieves,
Full life is rustling in the sheaves,
Full spirit sweeps the forest-leaves."

' So works this music on the earth, 460
God so admits it, sends it forth
To add another worth to worth —

' A new creation-bloom that rounds
The old creation and expounds
His Beautiful in tuneful sounds.

'Now hearken!' Then the poet gazed
Upon the angel glorious-faced
Whose hand, majestically raised,

Floated across the organ-keys,
Like a pale moon o'er murmuring seas, 470
With no touch but with influences:

Then rose and fell (with swell and swound
Of shapeless noises wandering round
A concord which at last they found)

Those mystic keys: the tones were mixed,
Dim, faint, and thrilled and throbbed be-
twixt
The incomplete and the unfixed:

And therein mighty minds were heard
In mighty musings, inly stirred,
And struggling outward for a word: 480

Until these surges, having run
This way and that, gave out as one
An Aphrodite of sweet tune,

A Harmony that, finding vent,
Upward in grand ascension went,
Winged to a heavenly argument,

Up, upward like a saint who strips
The shroud back from his eyes and lips,
And rises in apocalypse:

A Harmony sublime and plain, 490
Which cleft (as flying swan, the rain, —
Throwing the drops off with a strain

Of her white wing) those undertones
Of perplex chords, and soared at once
And struck out from the starry thrones

Their several silver octaves as
It passed to God. The music was
Of divine stature; strong to pass:

And those who heard it, understood
Something of life in spirit and blood, 500
Something of nature's fair and good:

And while it sounded, those great souls
Did thrill as racers at the goals
And burn in all their aureoles;

But she the lady, as vapor-bound,
Stood calmly in the joy of sound,
Like Nature with the showers around:

And when it ceased, the blood which fell
Again, alone grew audible,
Tolling the silence as a bell. 510

The sovran angel lifted high
His hand, and spake out sovranly:
'Tried poets, hearken and reply!

'Give me true answers. If we grant
That not to suffer, is to want
The conscience of the jubilant, —

'If ignorance of anguish is
But ignorance, and mortals miss
Far prospects, by a level bliss, —

'If, as two colors must be viewed 520
In a visible image, mortals should
Need good and evil, to see good, —

'If to speak nobly, comprehends
To feel profoundly, — if the ends
Of power and suffering, Nature blends, —

'If poets on the tripod must
Writhe like the Pythian to make just
Their oracles and merit trust, —

'If every vatic word that sweeps
To change the world must pale their lips
And leave their own souls in eclipse, — 531

'If to search deep the universe
Must pierce the searcher with the curse,
Because that bolt (in man's reverse)

'Was shot to the heart o' the wood and
lies
Wedged deepest in the best, — if eyes
That look for visions and surprise

'From influent angels, must shut down
Their eyelids first to sun and moon,
The head asleep upon a stone, — 540

'If ONE who did redeem you back,
By His own loss, from final wrack,
Did consecrate by touch and track

'Those temporal sorrows till the taste
Of brackish waters of the waste
Is salt with tears He dropped too fast, —

'If all the crowns of earth must wound
With prickings of the thorns He found, —
If saddest sighs swell sweetest sound, —

'What say ye unto this? — refuse 550
This baptism in salt water? — choose
Calm breasts, mute lips, and labor loose?

'Or, O ye gifted givers! ye
Who give your liberal hearts to me
To make the world this harmony,

'Are ye resigned that they be spent
To such world's help?' The Spirits bent
Their awful brows and said 'Content.'

Content! it sounded like *Amen*
Said by a choir of mourning men; 560
An affirmation full of pain

And patience, — ay, of glorying
And adoration, as a king
Might seal an oath for governing.

Then said the angel — and his face
Lightened abroad until the place
Grew larger for a moment's space, —

The long aisles flashing out in light,
And nave and transept, columns white
And arches crossed, being clear to sight 570

As if the roof were off and all
Stood in the noon-sun, — 'Lo, I call
To other hearts as liberal.

'This pedal strikes out in the air:
My instrument has room to bear
Still fuller strains and perfecter.

'Herein is room, and shall be room
While Time lasts, for new hearts to come
Consummating while they consume.

'What living man will bring a gift 580
Of his own heart and help to lift
The tune? — The race is to the swift.'

So asked the angel. Straight the while,
A company came up the aisle
With measured step and sorted smile;

Cleaving the incense-clouds that rise,
With winking unaccustomed eyes
And love-locks smelling sweet of spice.

One bore his head above the rest
As if the world were dispossessed, 590
And one did pillow chin on breast,

Right languid, an as he should faint;
One shook his curls across his paint
And moralized on worldly taint;

One, slanting up his face, did wink
The salt rheum to the eyelid's brink,
To think — O gods! or — not to think.

Some trod out stealthily and slow,
As if the sun would fall in snow
If they walked to instead of fro; 600

And some, with conscious ambling free,
Did shake their bells right daintily
On hand and foot, for harmony;

And some, composing sudden sighs
In attitudes of point-device,
Rehearsed impromptu agonies.

And when this company drew near
The spirits crowned, it might appear
Submitted to a ghastly fear;

As a sane eye in master-passion 610
Constrains a maniac to the fashion
Of hideous maniac imitation

In the least geste — the dropping low
O' the lid, the wrinkling of the brow,
Exaggerate with mock and mow, —

So mastered was that company
By the crowned vision utterly,
Swayed to a maniac mockery.

One dulled his eyeballs, as they ached 619
With Homer's forehead, though he lacked
An inch of any; and one racked

His lower lip with restless tooth,
As Pindar's rushing words forsooth
Were pent behind it; one his smooth

Pink cheeks did rumple passionate
Like Æschylus, and tried to prate
On trolling tongue of fate and fate;

One set her eyes like Sappho's — or
Any light woman's; one forbore
Like Dante, or any man as poor

630

In mirth, to let a smile undo
His hard-shut lips; and one that drew
Sour humors from his mother, blew

His sunken cheeks out to the size
Of most unnatural jollities,
Because Anacreon looked jest-wise;

So with the rest: it was a sight
A great world-laughter would requite,
Or great world-wrath, with equal right.

Out came a speaker from that crowd
To speak for all, in sleek and proud
Exordial periods, while he bowed

640

His knee before the angel — 'Thus,
O angel who hast called for us,
We bring thee service emulous.

'Fit service from sufficient soul,
Hand-service to receive world's dole,
Lip-service in world's ear to roll

Adjusted concords — soft enow
To hear the wine-cups passing, through, 650
And not too grave to spoil the show:

'Thou, certes, when thou askest more,
O sapient angel, leanest o'er
The window-sill of metaphor.

'To give our hearts up? fie! that rage
Barbaric antedates the age;
It is not done on any stage.

'Because your scald or gleeman went
With seven or nine-stringed instrument
Upon his back, — must ours be bent? 660

'We are not pilgrims, by your leave;
No, nor yet martyrs; if we grieve,
It is to rhyme to — summer eve:

'And if we labor, it shall be
As suiteth best with our degree,
In after-dinner reverie.'

More yet that speaker would have said,
Poising between his smiles fair-fed
Each separate phrase till finishèd;

But all the foreheads of those born 670
And dead true poets flashed with scorn
Betwixt the bay leaves round them worn,

Ay, jetted such brave fire that they,
The new-come, shrank and paled away
Like leaden ashes when the day

Strikes on the hearth. A spirit-blast,
A presence known by power, at last
Took them up mutely: they had passed.

And he our pilgrim-poet saw
Only their places, in deep awe, 680
What time the angel's smile did draw

His gazing upward. Smiling on,
The angel in the angel shone,
Revealing glory in benison;

Till, ripened in the light which shut
The poet in, his spirit mute
Dropped sudden as a perfect fruit:

He fell before the angel's feet,
Saying, 'If what is true is sweet,
In something I may compass it: 690

'For, where my worthiness is poor,
My will stands richly at the door
To pay shortcomings evermore.

'Accept me therefore: not for price
And not for pride my sacrifice
Is tendered, for my soul is nice

'And will beat down those dusty seeds
Of bearded corn if she succeeds
In soaring while the covey feeds.

'I soar, I am drawn up like the lark 700
To its white cloud: so high my mark,
Albeit my wing is small and dark.

'I ask no wages, seek no fame:
Sew me, for shroud round face and name,
God's banner of the oriflamme.

'I only would have leave to loose
(In tears and blood if so He choose)
Mine inward music out to use;

'I only would be spent — in pain
And loss, perchance, but not in vain — 710
Upon the sweetness of that strain;

'Only project beyond the bound
Of mine own life, so lost and found,
My voice, and live on in its sound;

'Only embrace and be embraced
By fiery ends, whereby to waste,
And light God's future with my past.'

The angel's smile grew more divine,
The mortal speaking; ay, its shine
Swelled fuller, like a choir-note fine, 720

Till the broad glory round his brow
Did vibrate with the light below;
But what he said I do not know.

Nor know I if the man who prayed,
Rose up accepted, unforbade,
From the church-floor where he was laid, —

Nor if a listening life did run
Through the king-poets, one by one
Rejoicing in a worthy son:

My soul, which might have seen, grew blind
By what it looked on: I can find 731
No certain count of things behind.

I saw alone, dim, white and grand
As in a dream, the angel's hand
Stretched forth in gesture of command

Straight through the haze. And so, as erst,
A strain more noble than the first
Mused in the organ, and outburst:

With giant march from floor to roof
Rose the full notes, now parted off 740
In pauses massively aloof

Like measured thunders, now re-joined
In concords of mysterious kind
Which fused together sense and mind,

Now flashing sharp on sharp along
Exultant in a mounting throng,
Now dying off to a low song

Fed upon minors, wavelike sounds
Re-eddying into silver rounds,
Enlarging liberty with bounds: 750

And every rhythm that seemed to close
Survived in confluent underflows
Symphonious with the next that rose.

Thus the whole strain being multiplied
And greatened, with its glorified
Wings shot abroad from side to side,

Waved backward (as a wind might wave
A Brocken mist and with as brave
Wild roaring) arch and architrave,

Aisle, transept, column, marble wall, — 760
Then swelling outward, prodigal
Of aspiration beyond thrall,

Soared, and drew up with it the whole
Of this said vision, as a soul
Is raised by a thought. And as a scroll

Of bright devices is unrolled
Still upward with a gradual gold,
So rose the vision manifold,

Angel and organ, and the round
Of spirits, solemnized and crowned; 770
While the freed clouds of incense wound

Ascending, following in their track,
And glimmering faintly like the rack
O' the moon in her own light cast back.

And as that solemn dream withdrew,
The lady's kiss did fall anew
Cold on the poet's brow as dew.

And that same kiss which bound him first
Beyond the senses, now reversed
Its own law and most subtly pierced 780

His spirit with the sense of things
Sensual and present. Vanishings
Of glory with Æolian wings

Struck him and passed: the lady's face
Did melt back in the chrysopras
Of the orient morning sky that was

Yet clear of lark and there and so
She melted as a star might do,
Still smiling as she melted slow:

Smiling so slow, he seemed to see 790
Her smile the last thing, gloriously
Beyond her, far as memory.

Then he looked round: he was alone.
He lay before the breaking sun,
As Jacob at the Bethel stone.

And thought's entangled skein being wound,
He knew the moorland of his swoond,
And the pale pools that smeared the
ground;

The far wood-pines like offing ships;
The fourth pool's yew anear him drips, 800
World's cruelty attaints his lips,

And still he tastes it, bitter still;
Through all that glorious possible
He had the sight of present ill.

Yet rising calmly up and slowly
With such a cheer as scorneth folly,
A mild delightsome melancholy,

He journeyed homeward through the wood
And prayed along the solitude
Betwixt the pines, 'O God, my God!' 810

The golden morning's open flowings
Did sway the trees to murmurous bowings,
In metric chant of blessed poems.

And passing homeward through the wood,
He prayed along the solitude,
'THOU, Poet-God, art great and good!

'And though we must have, and have had
Right reason to be earthly sad,
THOU, Poet-God, art great and glad!'

CONCLUSION

Life treads on life, and heart on heart; 820
We press too close in church and mart
To keep a dream or grave apart:

And I was 'ware of walking down
That same green forest where had gone
The poet-pilgrim. One by one

I traced his footsteps. From the east
A red and tender radiance pressed
Through the near trees, until I guessed

The sun behind shone full and round;
While up the leafiness profound 830
A wind scarce old enough for sound

Stood ready to blow on me when
I turned that way, and now and then
The birds sang and brake off again

To shake their pretty feathers dry
Of the dew sliding droppingly
From the leaf-edges and apply

Back to their song: 'twixt dew and bird
So sweet a silence ministered,
God seemed to use it for a word, 840

Yet morning souls did leap and run
In all things, as the least had won
A joyous insight of the sun,

And no one looking round the wood
Could help confessing as he stood,
This Poet-God is glad and good.

But hark! a distant sound that grows,
A heaving, sinking of the boughs,
A rustling murmur, not of those,

A breezy noise which is not breeze! 850
And white-clad children by degrees
Steal out in troops among the trees,

Fair little children morning-bright,
With faces grave yet soft to sight,
Expressive of restrained delight.

Some plucked the palm-boughs within reach,
And others leapt up high to catch
The upper boughs and shake from each

A rain of dew till, wetted so,
The child who held the branch let go 860
And it swang backward with a flow

Of faster drippings. Then I knew
The children laughed; but the laugh flew
From its own chirrup as might do

A frightened song-bird; and a child
Who seemed the chief said very mild,
'Hush! keep this morning undefiled.'

His eyes rebuked them from calm spheres;
His soul upon his brow appears
In waiting for more holy years. 870

I called the child to me, and said,
 'What are your palms for?' 'To be
 spread,'
 He answered, 'on a poet dead.

'The poet died last month, and now
 The world which had been somewhat slow
 In honoring his living brow,

'Commands the palms; they must be
 strewn
 On his new marble very soon,
 In a procession of the town.'

I sighed and said, 'Did he foresee 880
 Any such honor?' 'Verily
 I cannot tell you,' answered he.

'But this I know, I fain would lay
 My own head down, another day,
 As *he* did, — with the fame away.

'A lily, a friend's hand had plucked,
 Lay by his death-bed, which he looked
 As deep down as a bee had sucked,

'Then, turning to the lattice, gazed 890
 O'er hill and river and upraised
 His eyes illumined and amazed

'With the world's beauty, up to God,
 Re-offering on their iris broad
 The images of things bestowed

'By the chief Poet. "God!" he cried,
 "Be praised for anguish which has tried,
 For beauty which has satisfied:

"For this world's presence half within
 And half without me — thought and
 scene —
 This sense of Being and Having Been. 900

"I thank Thee that my soul hath room
 For Thy grand world: both guests may
 come —
 Beauty, to soul — Body, to tomb.

"I am content to be so weak:
 Put strength into the words I speak,
 And I am strong in what I seek.

"I am content to be so bare
 Before the archers, everywhere
 My wounds being stroked by heavenly air.

"I laid my soul before Thy feet 910
 That images of fair and sweet
 Should walk to other men on it.

"I am content to feel the step,
 Of each pure image: let those keep
 To mandragore who care to sleep.

"I am content to touch the brink
 Of the other goblet and I think
 My bitter drink a wholesome drink.

"Because my portion was assigned
 Wholesome and bitter, Thou art kind, 920
 And I am blessed to my mind.

"Gifted for giving, I receive
 The maythorn and its scent outgive:
 I grieve not that I once did grieve.

"In my large joy of sight and touch
 Beyond what others count for such,
 I am content to suffer much.

"*I know* — is all the mourner saith,
 Knowledge by suffering entereth,
 And Life is perfected by Death." 930

The child spake nobly: strange to hear,
 His infantine soft accents clear
 Charged with high meanings, did appear;

And fair to see, his form and face
 Winged out with whiteness and pure grace
 From the green darkness of the place.

Behind his head a palm-tree grew;
 An orient beam which pierced it through
 Transversely on his forehead drew

The figure of a palm-branch brown 940
 Traced on its brightness up and down
 In fine fair lines, — a shadow-crown:

Guido might paint his angels so —
 A little angel, taught to go
 With holy words to saints below —

Such innocence of action yet
 Significance of object met
 In his whole bearing strong and sweet.

And all the children, the whole band,
 Did round in rosy reverence stand, 950
 Each with a palm-bough in his hand.

'And so he died,' I whispered. 'Nay,
Not so,' the childish voice did say,
'That poet turned him first to pray

'In silence, and God heard the rest
'Twixt the sun's footsteps down the
west.

Then he called one who loved him best,

'Yea, he called softly through the room
(His voice was weak yet tender)—
"Come,"

He said, "come nearer! Let the bloom

"Of Life grow over, undenied, 961
This bridge of Death, which is not wide —
I shall be soon at the other side.

"Come, kiss me!" So the one in truth
Who loved him best, — in love, not ruth,
Bowed down and kissed him mouth to
mouth:

'And in that kiss of love was won
Life's manumission. All was done:
The mouth that kissed last, kissed *alone*.

'But in the former, confluent kiss, 970
The same was sealed, I think, by His,
To words of truth and uprightness.'

The child's voice trembled, his lips shook
Like a rose leaning o'er a brook,
Which vibrates though it is not struck.

'And who,' I asked, a little moved
Yet curious-eyed, 'was this that loved
And kissed him last, as it behooved?'

'I,' softly said the child; and then 980
'I,' said he louder, once again:
'His son, my rank is among men:

'And now that men exalt his name
I come to gather palms with them,
That holy love may hallow fame.

'He did not die alone, nor should
His memory live so, 'mid these rude
World-praisers — a worse solitude.

'Me, a voice calleth to that tomb
Where these are strewing branch and
bloom,
Saying, "Come nearer:" and I come. 990

'Glory to God!' resumèd he,
And his eyes smiled for victory
O'er their own tears which I could see

Fallen on the palm, down cheek and chin:
'That poet now has entered in
The place of rest which is not sin.

'And while he rests, his songs in troops
Walk up and down our earthly slopes,
Companioned by diviner hopes.'

'But *thou*,' I murmured to engage 1000
The child's speech farther — 'hast an age
Too tender for this orphanage.'

'Glory to God — to God!' he saith:
'KNOWLEDGE BY SUFFERING ENTERETH,
AND LIFE IS PERFECTED BY DEATH.'

RHYME OF THE DUCHESS MAY

Despite the irritating iteration of the refrain *Toll slowly* — which most people omit in reading — the 'Rhyme of the Duchess May' has generally been accounted much the best of Mrs. Browning's longer ballads. Yet the author herself did not like it. On August 22, 1844, she wrote as follows to Mr. Thomas Westwood, — a frequent and valued correspondent; himself a poet of some note, author of *Beads from a Rosary* and *The Burden of the Bell*. 'It is curious that Duchess May is not a favorite of mine, and that I have sighed one or two secret wishes toward its extirpation; but other writers beside yourself have signalled it out for praise, in private letters to me.' We gather from a similarly deprecatory allusion in a letter to her lifelong friend, Mrs. Martin, that the nonconformist conscience of the poet pricked her a little on account of the signal glorification of suicide implied in the dénouement of the Rhyme.

I

To the belfry, one by one, went the ringers
from the sun,

Toll slowly.

And the oldest ringer said, 'Ours is music
for the dead
When the rebecks are all done.'

II

Six abeles i' the churchyard grow on the
north side in a row,

Toll slowly.

And the shadows of their tops rock across
the little slopes
Of the grassy graves below.

III

On the south side and the west a small
river runs in haste,
Toll slowly.
And, between the river flowing and the
fair green trees a-growing,
Do the dead lie at their rest.

IV

On the east I sate that day, up against a
willow gray:
Toll slowly.
Through the rain of willow-branches I
could see the low hill-ranges
And the river on its way.

V

There I sate beneath the tree, and the bell
tolled solemnly,
Toll slowly.
While the trees' and river's voices flowed
between the solemn noises, —
Yet death seemed more loud to me.

VI

There I read this ancient rhyme while the
bell did all the time
Toll slowly.
And the solemn knell fell in with the tale
of life and sin,
Like a rhythmic fate sublime.

THE RHYME

I

Broad the forests stood (I read) on the
hills of Linteged,
Toll slowly.
And three hundred years had stood mute
adown each hoary wood,
Like a full heart having prayed.

II

And the little birds sang east, and the little
birds sang west,
Toll slowly.
And but little thought was theirs of the
silent antique years,
In the building of their nest.

III

Down the sun dropped large and red on the
towers of Linteged, —
Toll slowly.
Lance and spear upon the height, bristling
strange in fiery light,
While the castle stood in shade.

IV

There the castle stood up black with the
red sun at its back —
Toll slowly.
Like a sullen smouldering pyre with a top
that flickers fire
When the wind is on its track.

V

And five hundred archers tall did besiege
the castle wall —
Toll slowly.
And the castle, seethed in blood, fourteen
days and nights had stood
And to-night was near its fall.

VI

Yet thereunto, blind to doom, three months
since, a bride did come —
Toll slowly.
One who proudly trod the floors and softly
whispered in the doors,
'May good angels bless our home.'

VII

Oh, a bride of queenly eyes, with a front of
constancies:
Toll slowly.
Oh, a bride of cordial mouth where the
untired smile of youth
Did light outward its own sighs!

VIII

'T was a Duke's fair orphan-girl, and her
uncle's ward — the Earl —
Toll slowly.
Who betrothed her twelve years old, for
the sake of dowry gold,
To his son Lord Leigh the churl.

IX

But what time she had made good all her
years of womanhood —
Toll slowly.
Unto both these lords of Leigh spake she
out right sovrantly,
'My will runneth as my blood.'

X

'And while this same blood makes red this
same right hand's veins,' she said —

Toll slowly —

'T is my will, as lady free, not to wed a
lord of Leigh,
But Sir Guy of Linteged.'

XI

The old Earl he smiled smooth, then he
sighed for wilful youth —

Toll slowly.

'Good my niece, that hand withal looketh
somewhat soft and small
For so large a will, in sooth.'

XII

She too smiled by that same sign, but her
smile was cold and fine —

Toll slowly.

'Little hand clasps muckle gold, or it were
not worth the hold
Of thy son, good uncle mine !'

XIII

Then the young lord jerked his breath, and
sware thickly in his teeth —

Toll slowly —

'He would wed his own betrothed, an she
loved him an she loathed,
Let the life come or the death.'

XIV

Up she rose with scornful eyes, as her fa-
ther's child might rise —

Toll slowly.

'Thy hound's blood, my lords, which made him,
stains thy knightly heel,' quoth she,
'And he moans not where he lies:

XV

'But a woman's will dies hard, in the hall
or on the sward' —

Toll slowly.

'By that grave, my lords, which made me
orphaned girl and dowered lady,
I deny you wife and ward !'

XVI

Unto each she bowed her head and swept
past with lofty tread.

Toll slowly.

Ere the midnight-bell had ceased, in the
chapel had the priest,
Blessed her, bride of Linteged.

XVII

Fast and fain the bridal train along the
night-storm rode amain —

Toll slowly.

Hard the steeds of lord and serf struck
their hoofs out on the turf,
In the pauses of the rain.

XVIII

Fast and fain the kinsmen's train along the
storm pursued amain —

Toll slowly.

Steed on steed-track, dashing off, — thick-
ening, doubling, hoof on hoof,
In the pauses of the rain.

XIX

And the bridegroom led the flight on his
red-roan steed of might —

Toll slowly.

And the bride lay on his arm, still, as if
she feared no harm,
Smiling out into the night.

XX

'Dost thou fear ?' he said at last. 'Nay,'
she answered him in haste, —

Toll slowly.

'Not such death as we could find — only
life with one behind.
Ride on fast as fear, ride fast !'

XXI

Up the mountain wheeled the steed — girth
to ground, and fetlocks spread —

Toll slowly.

Headlong bounds, and rocking flanks, —
down he staggered, down the banks,
To the towers of Linteged.

XXII

High and low the serfs looked out, red the
flambeaus tossed about —

Toll slowly.

In the courtyard rose the cry, 'Live the
Duchess and Sir Guy !'
But she never heard them shout.

XXIII

On the steed she dropped her cheek, kissed
his mane and kissed his neck —

Toll slowly.

'I had happier died by thee than lived on,
a Lady Leigh,'
Were the first words she did speak.

XXIV

But a three months' joyaunce lay 'twixt
that moment and to-day —

Toll slowly.

When five hundred archers tall stand beside
the castle wall

To recapture Duchess May.

XXV

And the castle standeth black with the red
sun at its back —

Toll slowly.

And a fortnight's siege is done, and, except
the duchess, none

Can misdoubt the coming wrack.

XXVI

Then the captain, young Lord Leigh, with
his eyes so gray of blee —

Toll slowly.

And thin lips that scarcely sheathe the cold
white gnashing of his teeth,

Gnashed in smiling, absently, —

XXVII

Cried aloud, 'So goes the day, bridegroom
fair of Duchess May !'

Toll slowly.

'Look thy last upon that sun ! if thou seest
to-morrow's one

'T will be through a foot of clay.

XXVIII

'Ha, fair bride ! dost hear no sound save
that moaning of the hound ?'

Toll slowly.

'Thou and I have parted troth, yet I keep
my vengeance-oath,

And the other may come round.

XXIX

'Ha ! thy will is brave to dare, and thy
new love past compare' —

Toll slowly.

'Yet thine old love's falchion brave is as
strong a thing to have,

As the will of lady fair.

XXX

'Peck on blindly, netted dove ! If a wife's
name thee behove' —

Toll slowly.

'Thou shalt wear the same to-morrow, ere
the grave has hid the sorrow

Of thy last ill-mated love.

XXXI

'O'er his fixed and silent mouth, thou and I
will call back troth :'

Toll slowly.

'He shall altar be and priest, — and he will
not cry at least

"I forbid you, I am loth !"

XXXII

'I will wring thy fingers pale in the gaunt-
let of my mail :'

Toll slowly.

"Little hand and muckle gold" close shall
lie within my hold,

As the sword did, to prevail.'

XXXIII

Oh, the little birds sang east, and the little
birds sang west —

Toll slowly.

Oh, and laughed the Duchess May, and her
soul did put away

All his boasting, for a jest.

XXXIV

In her chamber did she sit, laughing low to
think of it, —

Toll slowly.

'Tower is strong and will is free: thou
canst boast, my lord of Leigh,

But thou boastest little wit.'

XXXV

In her tire-glass gazed she, and she blushed
right womanly —

Toll slowly.

She blushed half from her disdain, half her
beauty was so plain,

— 'Oath for oath, my lord of Leigh !'

XXXVI

Straight she called her maidens in — 'Since
ye gave me blame herein' —

Toll slowly.

'That a bridal such as mine should lack
gauds to make it fine,

Come and shrive me from that sin.

XXXVII

'It is three months gone to-day since I
gave mine hand away :'

Toll slowly.

'Bring the gold and bring the gem, we will
keep bride-state in them,

While we keep the foe at bay.

XXXVIII

'On your arms I loose mine hair; comb it
smooth and crown it fair'—

Toll slowly.

'I would look in purple pall from this
lattice down the wall,
And throw scorn to one that 's there !'

XXXIX

Oh, the little birds sang east, and the little
birds sang west—

Toll slowly.

On the tower the castle's lord leant in silence
on his sword,
With an anguish in his breast.

XL

With a spirit-laden weight did he lean down
passionate:

Toll slowly.

They have almost sapped the wall,— they
will enter therewithal
With no knocking at the gate.

XLI

Then the sword he leant upon, shivered,
snapped upon the stone—

Toll slowly.

'Sword,' he thought, with inward laugh,
'ill thou servest for a staff
When thy nobler use is done !

XLII

'Sword, thy nobler use is done ! tower is
lost, and shame begun !'—

Toll slowly.

'If we met them in the breach, hilt to hilt
or speech to speech,
We should die there, each for one.

XLIII

'If we met them at the wall, we should
singly, vainly fall'—

Toll slowly.

'But if I die here alone,— then I die who
am but one,
And die nobly for them all.

XLIV

'Five true friends lie for my sake in the
moat and in the brake'—

Toll slowly.

'Thirteen warriors lie at rest with a black
wound in the breast,
And not one of these will wake.

XLV

'So, no more of this shall be ! heart-blood
weighs too heavily'—

Toll slowly.

'And I could not sleep in grave, with the
faithful and the brave
Heaped around and over me.

XLVI

'Since young Clare a mother hath, and
young Ralph a plighted faith'—

Toll slowly.

'Since my pale young sister's cheeks blush
like rose when Ronald speaks,
Albeit never a word she saith—

XLVII

'These shall never die for me: life-blood
falls too heavily:'

Toll slowly.

'And if I die here apart, o'er my dead and
silent heart
They shall pass out safe and free.

XLVIII

'When the foe hath heard it said — "Death
holds Guy of Linteged"'—

Toll slowly.

'That new corse new peace shall bring, and
a blessed, blessed thing
Shall the stone be at its head.

XLIX

'Then my friends shall pass out free, and
shall bear my memory'—

Toll slowly.

'Then my foes shall sleek their pride, sooth-
ing fair my widowed bride
Whose sole sin was love of me:

L

'With their words all smooth and sweet,
they will front her and entreat'—

Toll slowly.

'And their purple pall will spread under-
neath her fainting head
While her tears drop over it.

LI

'She will weep her woman's tears, she will
pray her woman's prayers'—

Toll slowly.

'But her heart is young in pain, and her
hopes will spring again
By the suntime of her years.

LII

'Ah, sweet May! ah, sweetest grief! —
once I vowed thee my belief' —
Toll slowly —
'That thy name expressed thy sweetness,
— May of poets, in completeness!
Now my May-day seemeth brief.'

LIII

All these silent thoughts did swim o'er his
eyes grown strange and dim —
Toll slowly.
Till his true men, in the place, wished they
stood there face to face
With the foe instead of him.

LIV

'One last oath, my friends that wear faith-
ful hearts to do and dare!' —
Toll slowly.
'Tower must fall and bride be lost — swear
me service worth the cost!' —
Bold they stood around to swear.

LV

'Each man clasp my hand and swear by
the deed we failed in there' —
Toll slowly.
'Not for vengeance, not for right, will ye
strike one blow to-night!' —
Pale they stood around to swear.

LVI

'One last boon, young Ralph and Clare!
faithful hearts to do and dare!' —
Toll slowly.
'Bring that steed up from his stall, which
she kissed before you all:
Guide him up the turret-stair.

LVII

'Ye shall harness him aright, and lead up-
ward to this height:' —
Toll slowly.
'Once in love and twice in war hath he
borne me strong and far:
He shall bear me far to-night.'

LVIII

Then his men looked to and fro, when they
heard him speaking so —
Toll slowly.
'Las! the noble heart,' they thought, 'he
in sooth is grief-distraught:
Would we stood here with the foe!'

LIX

But a fire flashed from his eye, 'twixt their
thought and their reply —
Toll slowly.
'Have ye so much time to waste? We
who ride here, must ride fast
As we wish our foes to fly.'

LX

They have fetched the steed with care, in
the harness he did wear —
Toll slowly.
Past the court and through the doors,
across the rushes of the floors,
But they goad him up the stair.

LXI

Then from out her bower chambère did the
Duchess May repair:
Toll slowly.
'Tell me now what is your need,' said the
lady, 'of this steed,
That ye goad him up the stair?'

LXII

Calm she stood; unbodkined through, fell
her dark hair to her shoe:
Toll slowly.
And the smile upon her face, ere she left
the tiring-glass,
Had not time enough to go.

LXIII

'Get thee back, sweet Duchess May! hope
is gone like yesterday' —
Toll slowly.
'One half-hour completes the breach; and
thy lord grows wild of speech —
Get thee in, sweet lady, and pray!

LXIV

'In the east tower, high'st of all, loud he
cries for steed from stall:' —
Toll slowly.
'"He would ride as far," quoth he, "as
for love and victory,
Though he rides the castle-wall."

LXV

'And we fetch the steed from stall, up
where never a hoof did fall' —
Toll slowly.
'Wifely prayer meets deathly need: may
the sweet Heavens hear thee plead
If he rides the castle-wall!'

LXXVI

Low she dropped her head, and lower, till
her hair coiled on the floor —

Toll slowly.

And tear after tear you heard fall distinct
as any word
Which you might be listening for.

LXXVII

‘Get thee in, thou soft ladye ! here is
never a place for thee !’

Toll slowly.

‘Braid thine hair and clasp thy gown, that
thy beauty in its moan
May find grace with Leigh of Leigh.’

LXXVIII

She stood up in bitter case, with a pale yet
steady face:

Toll slowly.

Like a statue thunderstruck, which, though
quivering, seems to look
Right against the thunder-place.

LXXIX

And her foot trod in, with pride, her own
tears i’ the stone beside —

Toll slowly.

‘Go to, faithful friends, go to ! judge no
more what ladies do,
No, nor how their lords may ride !’

LXXX

Then the good steed’s rein she took, and
his neck did kiss and stroke:

Toll slowly.

Soft he neighed to answer her, and then
followed up the stair
For the love of her sweet look:

LXXI

Oh, and steeply, steeply wound up the nar-
row stair around —

Toll slowly.

Oh, and closely, closely speeding, step by
step beside her treading
Did he follow, meek as hound.

LXXII

On the east tower, high’st of all, — there,
where never a hoof did fall —

Toll slowly.

Out they swept, a vision steady, noble steed
and lovely lady,
Calm as if in bower or stall.

LXXIII

Down she knelt at her lord’s knee, and she
looked up silently —

Toll slowly.

And he kissed her twice and thrice, for
that look within her eyes
Which he could not bear to see.

LXXIV

Quoth he, ‘Get thee from this strife, and
the sweet saints bless thy life !’

Toll slowly.

‘In this hour I stand in need of my noble
red-roan steed,
But no more of my noble wife.’

LXXV

Quoth she, ‘Meekly have I done all thy
biddings under sun:’

Toll slowly.

‘But by all my womanhood, which is
proved so, true and good,
I will never do this one.

LXXVI

‘Now by womanhood’s degree and by wife-
hood’s verity’ —

Toll slowly.

‘In this hour if thou hast need of thy
noble red-roan steed,
Thou hast also need of me.

LXXVII

‘By this golden ring ye see on this lifted
hand pardiè’ —

Toll slowly.

‘If, this hour, on castle-wall can be room
for steed from stall,
Shall be also room for me.

LXXVIII

‘So the sweet saints with me be,’ (did she
utter solemnly) —

Toll slowly.

‘If a man, this eventide, on this castle-
wall will ride,
He shall ride the same with me.’

LXXIX

Oh, he sprang up in the selle and he
laughed out bitter-well —

Toll slowly.

‘Wouldst thou ride among the leaves, as
we used on other eves,
To hear chime a vesper-bell ?’

LXXX

She clung closer to his knee — ‘Ay, beneath the cypress-tree!’

Toll slowly.

‘Mock me not, for otherwise than along the greenwood fair
Have I ridden fast with thee.

LXXXI

‘Fast I rode with new-made vows from my angry kinsman’s house:’

Toll slowly.

‘What, and would you men should reckon that I dared more for love’s sake
As a bride than as a spouse?’

LXXXII

‘What, and would you it should fall, as a proverb, before all’ —

Toll slowly.

‘That a bride may keep your side while through castle-gate you ride,
Yet eschew the castle-wall?’

LXXXIII

Ho! the breach yawns into ruin and roars up against her suing —

Toll slowly.

With the inarticulate din and the dreadful falling in —
Shrieks of doing and undoing!

LXXXIV

Twice he wrung her hands in twain, but the small hands closed again.

Toll slowly.

Back he reined the steed — back, back!
but she trailed along his track
With a frantic clasp and strain.

LXXXV

Evermore the foemen pour through the crash of window and door —

Toll slowly.

And the shouts of Leigh and Leigh, and the shrieks of ‘kill!’ and ‘flee!’
Strike up clear amid the roar.

LXXXVI

Thrice he wrung her hands in twain, but they closed and clung again —

Toll slowly.

While she clung, as one, withstood, clasps a Christ upon the rood,
In a spasm of deathly pain.

LXXXVII

She clung wild and she clung mute with her shuddering lips half-shut:

Toll slowly.

Her head fallen as half in swoond, hair and knee swept on the ground,
She clung wild to stirrup and foot.

LXXXVIII

Back he reined his steed back-thrown on the slippery coping-stone:

Toll slowly.

Back the iron hoofs did grind on the battlement behind
Whence a hundred feet went down:

LXXXIX

And his heel did press and goad on the quivering flank bestrode —

Toll slowly.

‘Friends and brothers, save my wife! Pardon, sweet, in change for life, —
But I ride alone to God.’

XC

Straight as if the Holy name had up-breathed her like a flame —

Toll slowly.

She upsprang, she rose upright, in his selle she sate in sight,
By her love she overcame.

XCI

And her head was on his breast where she smiled as one at rest —

Toll slowly.

‘Ring,’ she cried, ‘O vesper-bell in the beechwood’s old chapelle —
But the passing-bell rings best!’

XCII

They have caught out at the rein which Sir Guy threw loose — in vain —

Toll slowly.

For the horse in stark despair, with his front hoofs poised in air,
On the last verge rears amain.

XCIII

Now he hangs, he rocks between, and his nostrils curdle in —

Toll slowly.

Now he shivers head and hoof and the flakes of foam fall off,
And his face grows fierce and thin:

XCIV

And a look of human woe from his staring
eyes did go:

Toll slowly.

And a sharp cry uttered he, in a foretold
agony

Of the headlong death below, —

XCV

And, 'Ring, ring, thou passing-bell,' still
she cried, 'i' the old chapelle !'

Toll slowly.

Then, back-toppling, crashing back — a
dead weight flung out to wrack,
Horse and riders overfell.

I

Oh, the little birds sang east, and the little
birds sang west —

Toll slowly.

And I read this ancient Rhyme, in the
churchyard, while the chime
Slowly tolled for one at rest.

II

The abeles moved in the sun, and the river
smooth did run —

Toll slowly.

And the ancient Rhyme rang strange, with
its passion and its change,
Here, where all done lay undone.

III

And beneath a willow tree I a little grave
did see —

Toll slowly —

Where was graved — HERE, UNDEFILED,
LIETH MAUD, A THREE-YEAR CHILD,
EIGHTEEN HUNDRED FORTY-THREE.

IV

Then, O spirits, did I say, ye who rode so
fast that day —

Toll slowly.

Did star-wheels and angel wings with their
holy winnowings
Keep beside you all the way ?

V

Though in passion ye would dash, with a
blind and heavy crash —

Toll slowly —

Up against the thick-bossed shield of God's
judgment in the field, —
Though your heart and brain were
rash, —

VI

Now, your will is all unwilling; now, your
pulses are all stilled:

Toll slowly.

Now, ye lie as meek and mild (whereso
laid) as Maud the child
Whose small grave was lately filled.

VII

Beating heart and burning brow, ye are
very patient now —

Toll slowly.

And the children might be bold to pluck
the kingeups from your mould
Ere a month had let them grow.

VIII

And you let the goldfinch sing in the alder
near in spring —

Toll slowly.

Let her build her nest and sit all the three
weeks out on it,
Murmuring not at anything.

IX

In your patience ye are strong, cold and
heat ye take not wrong —

Toll slowly.

When the trumpet of the angel blows eter-
nity's evangel,
Time will seem to you not long.

X

Oh, the little birds sang east, and the little
birds sang west —

Toll slowly.

And I said in underbreath, — All our life
is mixed with death,
And who knoweth which is best ?

XI

Oh, the little birds sang east, and the little
birds sang west —

Toll slowly.

And I smiled to think God's greatness
flowed around our incompleteness, —
Round our restlessness, His rest.

THE LADY'S 'YES'

I

'YES,' I answered you last night;
 'No,' this morning, sir, I say:
 Colors seen by candle-light
 Will not look the same by day.

II

When the viols played their best,
 Lamps above and laughs below,
Love me sounded like a jest,
 Fit for *yes* or fit for *no*.

III

Call me false or call me free,
 Vow, whatever light may shine, —
 No man on your face shall see
 Any grief for change on mine.

IV

Yet the sin is on us both;
 Time to dance is not to woo;
 Wooing light makes fickle troth,
 Scorn of *me* recoils on *you*.

V

Learn to win a lady's faith
 Nobly, as the thing is high,
 Bravely, as for life and death,
 With a loyal gravity.

VI

Lead her from the festive boards,
 Point her to the starry skies;
 Guard her, by your truthful words,
 Pure from courtship's flatteries.

VII

By your truth she shall be true,
 Ever true, as wives of yore;
 And her *yes*, once said to you,
 SHALL be Yes for evermore.

THE POET AND THE BIRD

A FABLE

I

SAID a people to a poet—'Go out from
 among us straightway!
 While we are thinking earthly things,
 thou singest of divine:

There's a little fair brown nightingale who,
 sitting in the gateway,
 Makes fitter music to our ear than any
 song of thine !'

II

The poet went out weeping; the nightin-
 gale ceased chanting:
 'Now, wherefore, O thou nightingale, is
 all thy sweetness done ?'
 — 'I cannot sing my earthly things, the
 heavenly poet wanting,
 Whose highest harmony includes the
 lowest under sun.'

III

The poet went out weeping, and died
 abroad, bereft there;
 The bird flew to his grave and died amid
 a thousand wails:
 And when I last came by the place, I
 swear the music left there
 Was only of the poet's song, and not the
 nightingale's.

THE LOST BOWER

The scene of 'The Lost Bower' was the
 wood above the garden at Hope End, among the
 Malvern Hills, — the beautiful home of Eliz-
 beth Barrett's girlhood, — and the incident
 which it relates was an actual experience of
 her juvenile years.

I

In the pleasant orchard-closes,
 'God bless all our gains,' say we,
 But 'May God bless all our losses'
 Better suits with our degree.
 Listen, gentle — ay, and simple ! listen,
 children on the knee !

II

Green the land is where my daily
 Steps in jocund childhood played,
 Dimpled close with hill and valley,
 Dappled very close with shade:
 Summer-snow of apple-blossoms running
 up from glade to glade.

III

There is one hill I see nearer
 In my vision of the rest;
 And a little wood seems clearer

As it climbeth from the west,
Sideway from the tree-locked valley, to
the airy upland crest.

IV

Small the wood is, green with hazels,
And, completing the ascent,
Where the wind blows and sun dazzles,
Thrills in leafy tremblement,
Like a heart that after climbing beateth
quickly through content.

V

Not a step the wood advances
O'er the open hill-top's bound;
There, in green arrest, the branches
See their image on the ground:
You may walk beneath them smiling, glad
with sight and glad with sound.

VI

For you hearken on your right hand,
How the birds do leap and call
In the greenwood, out of sight and
Out of reach and fear of all;
And the squirrels crack the filberts through
their cheerful madrigal.

VII

On your left, the sheep are cropping
The slant grass and daisies pale,
And five apple-trees stand dropping
Separate shadows toward the vale
Over which, in choral silence, the hills look
you their 'All hail!'

VIII

Far out, kindled by each other,
Shining hills on hills arise,
Close as brother leans to brother
When they press beneath the eyes
Of some father praying blessings from the
gifts of paradise.

IX

While beyond, above them mounted,
And above their woods also,
Malvern hills, for mountains counted
Not unduly, loom a-row —
Keepers of Piers Plowman's visions through
the sunshine and the snow.

X

Yet, in childhood, little prized I
That fair walk and far survey;

'T was a straight walk unadvised by
The least mischief worth a nay;
Up and down — as dull as grammar on the
eve of holiday.

XI

But the wood, all close and clenching
Bough in bough and root in root, —
No more sky (for overbranching)
At your head than at your foot, —
Oh, the wood drew me within it by a glamour
past dispute!

XII

Few and broken paths showed through
it,
Where the sheep had tried to run, —
Forced with snowy wool to strew it
Round the thickets, when anon
They, with silly thorn-pricked noses,
bleated back into the sun.

XIII

But my childish heart beat stronger
Than those thickets dared to grow:
I could pierce them! *I* could longer
Travel on, methought, than so:
Sheep for sheep-paths! braver children
climb and creep where they would
go.

XIV

And the poets wander, said I,
Over places all as rude:
Bold Rinaldo's lovely lady
Sat to meet him in a wood:
Rosalinda, like a fountain, laughed out
pure with solitude.

XV

And if Chaucer had not travelled
Through a forest by a well,
He had never dreamt nor marvelled
At those ladies fair and fell
Who lived smiling without loving in their
island-citadel.

XVI

Thus I thought of the old singers
And took courage from their song,
Till my little struggling fingers
Tore asunder gyve and thong
Of the brambles which entrapped me, and
the barrier branches strong.

XVII

On a day, such pastime keeping,
 With a fawn's heart debonair,
 Under-crawling, overleaping
 Thorns that prick and boughs that bear,
 I stood suddenly astonished — I was glad-
 dened unaware.

XVIII

From the place I stood in, floated
 Back the covert dim and close,
 And the open ground was coated
 Carpet-smooth with grass and moss,
 And the blue-bell's purple presence signed
 it worthily across.

XIX

Here a linden-tree stood, bright'ning
 All adown its silver rind;
 For as some trees draw the lightning,
 So this tree, unto my mind,
 Drew to earth the blessed sunshine from
 the sky where it was shrined.

XX

Tall the linden-tree, and near it
 An old hawthorn also grew;
 And wood-ivy like a spirit
 Hovered dimly round the two,
 Shaping thence that bower of beauty which
 I sing of thus to you.

XXI

'T was a bower for garden fitter
 Than for any woodland wide:
 Though a fresh and dewy glitter
 Struck it through from side to side,
 Shaped and shaven was the freshness, as
 by garden-cunning plied.

XXII

Oh, a lady might have come there,
 Hooded fairly like her hawk,
 With a book or lute in summer,
 And a hope of sweeter talk, —
 Listening less to her own music than for
 footsteps on the walk !

XXIII

But that bower appeared a marvel
 In the wildness of the place;
 With such seeming art and travail,
 Finely fixed and fitted was
 Leaf to leaf, the dark-green ivy, to the
 summit from the base.

XXIV

And the ivy veined and glossy
 Was enwrought with eglantine;
 And the wild hop fibred closely,
 And the large-leaved columbine,
 Arch of door and window-mullion, did
 right sylvanly entwine.

XXV

Rose-trees either side the door were
 Growing lithe and growing tall,
 Each one set a summer warder
 For the keeping of the hall, —
 With a red rose and a white rose, leaning,
 nodding at the wall.

XXVI

As I entered, mosses hushing
 Stole all noises from my foot;
 And a green elastic cushion,
 Clapsed within the linden's root,
 Took me in a chair of silence very rare and
 absolute.

XXVII

All the floor was paved with glory,
 Greenly, silently inlaid
 (Through quick motions made before
 me)
 With fair counterparts in shade
 Of the fair serrated ivy-leaves which
 slanted overhead.

XXVIII

'Is such pavement in a palace ?'
 So I questioned in my thought:
 The sun, shining through the chalice
 Of the red rose hung without,
 Threw within a red libation, like an answer
 to my doubt.

XXIX

At the same time, on the linen
 Of my childish lap there fell
 Two white may-leaves, downward win-
 ning
 Through the ceiling's miracle,
 From a blossom, like an angel, out of sight
 yet blessing well.

XXX

Down to floor and up to ceiling
 Quick I turned my childish face,
 With an innocent appealing

For the secret of the place
To the trees, which surely knew it in part-
taking of the grace.

XXXI

Where's no foot of human creature
How could reach a human hand?
And if this be work of Nature,
Why has Nature turned so bland,
Breaking off from other wild-work? It
was hard to understand.

XXXII

Was she weary of rough-doing,
Of the bramble and the thorn?
Did she pause in tender raneing
Here of all her sylvan scorn?
Or in mock of Art's deceiving was the sud-
den mildness worn?

XXXIII

Or could this same bower (I fancied)
Be the work of Dryad strong,
Who, surviving all that chanced
In the world's old pagan wrong,
Lay hid, feeding in the woodland on the
last true poet's song?

XXXIV

Or was this the house of fairies,
Left, because of the rough ways,
Unassailed by Ave Marys
Which the passing pilgrim prays,
And beyond St. Catherine's chiming on the
blessèd Sabbath days?

XXXV

So, young muser, I sat listening
To my fancy's wildest word:
On a sudden, through the glistening
Leaves around, a little stirred,
Came a sound, a sense of music which was
rather felt than heard.

XXXVI

Softly, finely, it inwound me;
From the world it shut me in,—
Like a fountain, falling round me,
Which with silver waters thin
Clips a little water Naiad sitting smilingly
within.

XXXVII

Whence the music came, who knoweth?
I know nothing: but indeed
Pan or Faunus never bloweth

So much sweetness from a reed
Which has sucked the milk of waters at the
oldest river-head.

XXXVIII

Never lark the sun can waken
With such sweetness! when the lark,
The high planets overtaking
In the half-*evanished* Dark,
Casts his singing to their singing, like an
arrow to the mark.

XXXIX

Never nightingale so singeth:
Oh, she leans on thorny tree
And her poet-song she flingeth
Over pain to victory!
Yet she never sings such music,—or she
sings it not to me.

XL

Never blackbirds, never thrushes
Nor small finches sing as sweet,
When the sun strikes through the bushes
To their crimson clinging feet,
And their pretty eyes look sideways to the
summer heavens complete.

XLI

If it *were* a bird, it seemèd
Most like Chaucer's, which, in sooth.
He of green and azure dreamèd,
While it sat in spirit-ruth
On that bier of a crowned lady, singing
nigh her silent mouth.

XLII

If it *were* a bird?—ah, sceptic,
Give me 'yea' or give me 'nay'—
Though my soul were nympholeptic
As I heard that virèlay,
You may stoop your pride to pardon, for
my sin is far away!

XLIII

I rose up in exaltation
And an inward trembling heat,
And (it seemèd) in geste of passion
Dropped the music to my feet
Like a garment rustling downwards—such
a silence followed it!

XLIV

Heart and head beat through the quiet
Full and heavily, though slower:

In the song, I think, and by it,
Mystic Presences of power
Had up-snatched me to the Timeless, then
returned me to the Hour.

XLV

In a child-abstraction lifted,
Straightway from the bower I past,
Foot and soul being dimly drifted
Through the greenwood, till, at last,
In the hill-top's open sunshine I all con-
sciously was cast.

XLVI

Face to face with the true mountains
I stood silently and still,
Drawing strength from fancy's daunt-
ings,
From the air about the hill,
And from Nature's open mercies and most
debonair goodwill.

XLVII

Oh, the golden-hearted daisies
Witnessed there, before my youth,
To the truth of things, with praises
Of the beauty of the truth;
And I woke to Nature's real, laughing joy-
fully for both.

XLVIII

And I said within me, laughing,
I have found a bower to-day,
A green lusus, fashioned half in
Chance and half in Nature's play,
And a little bird sings nigh it, I will never-
more missay.

XLIX

Henceforth, *I* will be the fairy
Of this bower not built by one;
I will go there, sad or merry,
With each morning's benison,
And the bird shall be my harper in the
dream-hall I have won.

L

So I said. But the next morning,
(— Child, look up into my face —
'Ware, oh sceptic, of your scorning!
This is truth in its pure grace!)
The next morning, all had vanished, or my
wandering missed the place.

LI

Bring an oath most sylvan-holy,
And upon it swear me true —
By the wind-bells swinging slowly
Their mute curfews in the dew,
By the advent of the snowdrop, by the
rosemary and rue, —

LII

I affirm by all or any,
Let the cause be charm or chance,
That my wandering searches many
Missed the bower of my romance —
That I nevermore upon it turned my mortal
countenance.

LIII

I affirm that, since I lost it,
Never bower has seemed so fair;
Never garden-creeper crossed it
With so deft and brave an air,
Never bird sung in the summer, as I saw
and heard them there.

LIV

Day by day, with new desire,
Toward my wood I ran in faith,
Under leaf and over brier,
Through the thickets, out of breath;
Like the prince who rescued Beauty from
the sleep as long as death.

LV

But his sword of mettle clashèd,
And his arm smote strong, I ween,
And her dreaming spirit flashèd
Through her body's fair white screen,
And the light thereof might guide him up
the cedar alleys green:

LVI

But for me, I saw no splendor —
All my sword was my child-heart;
And the wood refused surrender
Of that bower it held apart,
Safe as Ædipus's grave-place 'mid Colonos'
olives swart.

LVII

As Aladdin sought the basements
His fair palace rose upon,
And the four-and-twenty casements
Which gave answers to the sun;
So, in 'wilderment of gazing, I looked up
and I looked down.

LVIII

Years have vanished since, as wholly
 As the little bower did then;
 And you call it tender folly
 That such thoughts should come again ?
 Ah, I cannot change this sighing for your
 smiling, brother men !

LIX

For this loss it did prefigure
 Other loss of better good,
 When my soul, in spirit-vigor
 And in ripened womanhood,
 Fell from visions of more beauty than an
 arbor in a wood.

LX

I have lost — oh, many a pleasure,
 Many a hope and many a power —
 Studious health and merry leisure,
 The first dew on the first flower !
 But the first of all my losses was the losing
 of the bower.

LXI

I have lost the dream of Doing,
 And the other dream of Done,
 The first spring in the pursuing,
 The first pride in the Begun, —
 First recoil from incompleteness, in the face
 of what is won —

LXII

Exaltations in the far light
 Where some cottage only is;
 Mild dejections in the starlight,
 Which the sadder-hearted miss;
 And the child-cheek blushing scarlet for
 the very shame of bliss.

LXIII

I have lost the sound child-sleeping
 Which the thunder could not break;
 Something too of the strong leaping
 Of the staglike heart awake,
 Which the pale is low for keeping in the
 road it ought to take.

LXIV

Some respect to social fictions
 Has been also lost by me;
 And some generous genuflexions,
 Which my spirit offered free
 To the pleasant old conventions of our
 false humanity.

LXV

All my losses did I tell you,
 Ye perchance would look away; —
 Ye would answer me, 'Farewell ! you
 Make sad company to-day,
 And your tears are falling faster than the
 bitter words you say.'

LXVI

For God placed me like a dial
 In the open ground with power,
 And my heart had for its trial
 All the sun and all the shower:
 And I suffered many losses, — and my first
 was of the bower.

LXVII

Laugh you ? If that loss of mine be
 Of no heavy-seeming weight —
 When the cone falls from the pine-tree,
 The young children laugh thereat;
 Yet the wind that struck it, riseth, and the
 tempest shall be great.

LXVIII

One who knew me in my childhood
 In the glamour and the game,
 Looking on me long and mild, would
 Never know me for the same.
 Come, unchanging recollections, where
 those changes overcame !

LXIX

By this couch I weakly lie on,
 While I count my memories, —
 Through the fingers which, still sighing,
 I press closely on mine eyes, —
 Clear as once beneath the sunshine, I be-
 hold the bower arise.

LXX

Springs the linden-tree as greenly,
 Stroked with light adown its rind;
 And the ivy-leaves serenely
 Each in either intertwined;
 And the rose-trees at the doorway, they
 have neither grown nor pined.

LXXI

From those overblown faint roses
 Not a leaf appeareth shed,
 And that little bud discloses
 Not a thorn's-breadth more of red,
 For the winters and the summers which
 have passed me overhead.

LXXII

And that music overfloweth,
Sudden sweet, the sylvan eaves:
Thrush or nightingale—who knoweth?
Fay or Faunus—who believes?
But my heart still trembles in me to the
trembling of the leaves.

LXXIII

Is the bower lost, then? who sayeth
That the bower indeed is lost?
Hark! my spirit in it prayeth
Through the sunshine and the frost,—
And the prayer preserves it greenly, to the
last and uttermost.

LXXIV

Till another open for me
In God's Eden-land unknown,
With an angel at the doorway,
White with gazing at his Throne;
And a saint's voice in the palm-trees, sing-
ing—'All is lost . . . and won!'

A CHILD ASLEEP

First printed in Finden's *Tableaux* for 1840
as 'The Dream.'

I

How he sleepeth, having drunken
Weary childhood's mandragore!
From its pretty eyes have sunken
Pleasures to make room for more;
Sleeping near the withered nosegay which
he pulled the day before.

II

Nosegays! leave them for the waking;
Throw them earthward where they
grew;
Dim are such beside the breaking
Amaranths he looks unto:
Folded eyes see brighter colors than the
open ever do.

III

Heaven-flowers, rayed by shadows golden
From the palms they sprang beneath,
Now perhaps divinely holden,
Swing against him in a wreath:
We may think so from the quickening of
his bloom and of his breath.

IV

Vision unto vision calleth
While the young child dreameth on:
Fair, O dreamer, thee befalleth
With the glory thou hast won!
Darker wast thou in the garden yestermorn
by summer sun.

V

We should see the spirits ringing
Round thee, were the clouds away:
'T is the child-heart draws them, singing
In the silent-seeming clay—
Singing! stars that seem the mutest go in
music all the way.

VI

As the moths around a taper,
As the bees around a rose,
As the gnats around a vapor,
So the spirits group and close
Round about a holy childhood as if drinking
its repose.

VII

Shapes of brightness overlean thee,
Flash their diadems of youth
On the ringlets which half screen thee,
While thou smilest . . . not in sooth
Thy smile, but the overfair one, dropt from
some ethereal mouth.

VIII

Haply it is angels' duty,
During slumber, shade by shade
To fine down this childish beauty
To the thing it must be made
Ere the world shall bring it praises, or the
tomb shall see it fade.

IX

Softly, softly! make no noises!
Now he lieth dead and dumb;
Now he hears the angels' voices
Folding silence in the room:
Now he muses deep the meaning of the
Heaven-words as they come.

X

Speak not! he is consecrated;
Breathe no breath across his eyes:
Lifted up and separated
On the hand of God he lies
In a sweetness beyond touching, held in
cloistral sanctities.

XI

Could ye bless him, father — mother,
 Bless the dimple in his cheek ?
 Dare ye look at one another
 And the benediction speak ?
 Would ye not break out in weeping and
 confess yourselves too weak ?

XII

He is harmless, ye are sinful;
 Ye are troubled, he at ease;
 From his slumber virtue winful
 Floweth outward with increase.
 Dare not bless him ! but be blessed by his
 peace, and go in peace.

THE CRY OF THE CHILDREN

‘Φεῦ, φεῦ, τί προσδέρκεσθαι μ’ ὄμμασιν, τέκνα ;’
 — *Medea.*

‘The Cry of the Children,’ first published in *Blackwood’s Magazine*, for August, 1843, was called forth by Mr. Horne’s report as assistant Commissioner on the employment of children in mines and factories.

I

Do ye hear the children weeping, O my
 brothers,
 Ere the sorrow comes with years ?
 They are leaning their young heads against
 their mothers,
 And that cannot stop their tears.
 The young lambs are bleating in the
 meadows,
 The young birds are chirping in the nest,
 The young fawns are playing with the
 shadows,
 The young flowers are blowing toward
 the west —
 But the young, young children, O my
 brothers,
 They are weeping bitterly !
 They are weeping in the playtime of the
 others,
 In the country of the free.

II

Do you question the young children in the
 sorrow
 Why their tears are falling so ?
 The old man may weep for his to-morrow
 Which is lost in Long Ago;

The old tree is leafless in the forest,
 The old year is ending in the frost,
 The old wound, if stricken, is the sorest,
 The old hope is hardest to be lost: 20
 But the young, young children, O my
 brothers,
 Do you ask them why they stand
 Weeping sore before the bosoms of their
 mothers,
 In our happy Fatherland ?

III

They look up with their pale and sunken
 faces,
 And their looks are sad to see,
 For the man’s hoary anguish draws and
 presses
 Down the cheeks of infancy;
 ‘Your old earth,’ they say, ‘is very dreary,
 Our young feet,’ they say, ‘are very
 weak;’ 30
 Few paces have we taken, yet are
 weary —
 Our grave-rest is very far to seek:
 Ask the aged why they weep, and not the
 children,
 For the outside earth is cold,
 And we young ones stand without, in our
 bewildering,
 And the graves are for the old.

IV

‘True,’ say the children, ‘it may happen
 That we die before our time:
 Little Alice died last year, her grave is
 shapen
 Like a snowball, in the rime. 40
 We looked into the pit prepared to take
 her:
 Was no room for any work in the close
 clay !
 From the sleep wherein she lieth none will
 wake her,
 Crying, “Get up, little Alice ! it is day.”
 If you listen by that grave, in sun and
 shower,
 With your ear down, little Alice never
 cries;
 Could we see her face, be sure we should
 not know her,
 For the smile has time for growing in
 her eyes:
 And merry go her moments, lulled and
 stilled in
 The shroud by the kirk-chime. 50

It is good when it happens,' say the children,
'That we die before our time.'

V

Alas, alas, the children ! they are seeking
Death in life, as best to have:
They are binding up their hearts away from
breaking,
With a cerement from the grave.
Go out, children, from the mine and from
the city,
Sing out, children, as the little thrushes
do;
Pluck your handfuls of the meadow-cow-
slips pretty.
Laugh aloud, to feel your fingers let
them through ! 60
But they answer, 'Are your cowslips of the
meadows
Like our weeds anear the mine ?
Leave us quiet in the dark of the coal-
shadows,
From your pleasures fair and fine !

VI

'For oh,' say the children, 'we are weary,
And we cannot run or leap;
If we cared for any meadows, it were
merely
To drop down in them and sleep.
Our knees tremble sorely in the stooping,
We fall upon our faces, trying to go; 70
And, underneath our heavy eyelids droop-
ing
The reddest flower would look as pale
as snow.
For, all day, we drag our burden tiring
Through the coal-dark, underground;
Or, all day, we drive the wheels of iron
In the factories, round and round.

VII

'For all day the wheels are droning, turn-
ing;
Their wind comes in our faces,
Till our hearts turn, our heads with pulses
burning,
And the walls turn in their places: 80
Turns the sky* in the high window, blank
and reeling,
Turns the long light that drops adown
the wall,
Turn the black flies that crawl along the
ceiling:

All are turning, all the day, and we with
all.
And all day the iron wheels are droning,
And sometimes we could pray,
"O ye wheels" (breaking out in a mad
moaning),
"Stop ! be silent for to-day !"

VIII

Ay, be silent ! Let them hear each other
breathing
For a moment, mouth to mouth ! 90
Let them touch each other's hands, in a
fresh wreathing
Of their tender human youth !
Let them feel that this cold metallic motion
Is not all the life God fashions or re-
veals:
Let them prove their living souls against
the notion
That they live in you, or under you, O
wheels !
Still, all day, the iron wheels go onward,
Grinding life down from its mark;
And the children's souls, which God is call-
ing sunward,
Spin on blindly in the dark. 100

IX

Now tell the poor young children, O my
brothers,
To look up to Him and pray;
So the blessed One who blesseth all the
others,
Will bless them another day.
They answer, 'Who is God that He should
hear us,
While the rushing of the iron wheels is
stirred ?
When we sob aloud, the human creatures
near us
Pass by, hearing not, or answer not a
word.
And we hear not (for the wheels in their
resounding)
Strangers speaking at the door: 110
Is it likely God, with angels singing round
Him,
Hears our weeping any more ?

X

'Two words, indeed, of praying we re-
member,
And at midnight's hour of harm,

"Our Father," looking upward in the chamber,

We say softly for a charm.

We know no other words except "Our Father,"

And we think that, in some pause of angels' song,

God may pluck them with the silence sweet to gather,

And hold both within his right hand which is strong. 120

"Our Father!" If He heard us, He would surely

(For they call Him good and mild)

Answer, smiling down the steep world very purely,

"Come and rest with me, my child."

XI

'But, no!' say the children, weeping faster,

'He is speechless as a stone:

And they tell us, of His image is the master

Who commands us to work on.

Go to!' say the children, — 'up in Heaven,

Dark, wheel-like, turning clouds are all we find. 130

Do not mock us; grief has made us unbelieving:

We look up for God, but tears have made us blind.'

Do you hear the children weeping and disproving,

O my brothers, what ye preach?

For God's possible is taught by his world's loving,

And the children doubt of each.

XII

And well may the children weep before you!

They are weary ere they run;

They have never seen the sunshine, nor the glory

Which is brighter than the sun. 140

They know the grief of man, without its wisdom;

They sink in man's despair, without its calm;

Are slaves, without the liberty in Christ-dom,

Are martyrs, by the pang without the palm:

Are worn as if with age, yet unretrievingly

The harvest of its memories cannot reap, —

Are orphans of the earthly love and heavenly.

Let them weep! let them weep!

XIII

They look up with their pale and sunken faces,

And their look is dread to see, 150

For they mind you of their angels in high places,

With eyes turned on Deity.

'How long,' they say, 'how long, O cruel nation,

Will you stand, to move the world, on a child's heart, —

Stifle down with a mailèd heel its palpitation,

And tread onward to your throne amid the mart?

Our blood splashes upward, O gold-heaper,

And your purple shows your path!

But the child's sob in the silence curses deeper

Than the strong man in his wrath.'

CROWNED AND WEDDED

Queen Victoria and Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha were betrothed in October, 1839, and married February 1, 1840. This poem was first printed in the *Athenæum* for February 15, 1840, as 'The Crowned and Wedded Queen.'

I

WHEN last before her people's face her own fair face she bent,

Within the meek projection of that shade she was content

To erase the child-smile from her lips, which seemed as if it might

Be still kept holy from the world to childhood still in sight —

To erase it with a solemn vow, a princely vow — to rule;

A priestly vow — to rule by grace of God the pitiful;

A very godlike vow — to rule in right and
righteousness
And with the law and for the land — so
God the vower bless !

II

The minster was alight that day, but not
with fire, I ween,
And long-drawn glitterings swept adown
that mighty aisled scene; ¹⁰
The priests stood stoled in their pomp, the
sworded chiefs in theirs,
And so, the collared knights, and so, the
civil ministers,
And so, the waiting lords and dames, and
little pages best
At holding trains, and legates so, from
countries east and west;
So, alien princes, native peers, and high-
born ladies bright,
Along whose brows the Queen's, now
crowned, flashed coronets to light;
And so, the people at the gates with priestly
hands on high
Which bring the first anointing to all legal
majesty;
And so the DEAD, who lie in rows beneath
the minster floor,
There verily an awful state maintaining
evermore: ²⁰
The statesman whose clean palm will kiss
no bribe whate'er it be,
The courtier who for no fair queen will rise
up to his knee,
The court-dame who for no court-tire will
leave her shroud behind,
The laureate who no courtlier rhyme than
'dust to dust' can find,
The kings and queens who having made
that vow and worn that crown,
Descended unto lower thrones and darker,
deep adown:
Dieu et mon droit — what is 't to them ?
what meaning can it have ? —
The King of kings, the right of death —
God's judgment and the grave.
And when betwixt the quick and dead the
young fair queen had vowed,
The living shouted ' May she live ! Victoria,
live ! ' aloud: ³⁰
And as the loyal shouts went up, true
spirits prayed between,
' The blessings happy monarchs have be-
thine, O crowned queen ! '

III

But now before her people's face she
bendeth hers anew,
And calls them, while she vows, to be her
witness thereunto.
She vowed to rule, and in that oath her
childhood put away:
She doth maintain her womanhood, in vow-
ing love to-day.
O lovely lady ! let her vow ! such lips be-
come such vows,
And fairer goeth bridal wreath than crown
with vernal brows.
O lovely lady ! let her vow ! yea, let her
vow to love !
And though she be no less a queen, with
purples hung above, ⁴⁰
The pageant of a court behind, the royal
kin around,
And woven gold to catch her looks turned
maidenly to ground,
Yet may the bride-veil hide from her a
little of that state,
While loving hopes for retinues about her
sweetness wait.
SHE vows to love who vowed to rule — (the
chosen at her side)
Let none say, God preserve the queen ! but
rather, Bless the bride !
None blow the trump, none bend the knee,
none violate the dream
Wherein no monarch but a wife she to her-
self may seem.
Or if ye say, Preserve the queen ! oh,
breathe it inward low —
She is a *woman*, and *beloved* ! and 't is
enough but so. ⁵⁰
Count it enough, thou noble prince who
tak'st her by the hand
And claimest for thy lady-love our lady of
the land !
And since, Prince Albert, men have called
thy spirit high and rare,
And true to truth and brave for truth as
some at Augsburg were,
We charge thee by thy lofty thoughts and
by thy poet-mind
Which not by glory and degree takes
measure of mankind,
Esteem that wedded hand less dear for
sceptre than for ring,
And hold her uncrowned womanhood to be
the royal thing.

IV

And now, upon our queen's last vow what
 blessings shall we pray ?
 None straitened to a shallow crown will
 suit our lips to-day: 60
 Behold, they must be free as love, they
 must be broad as free,
 Even to the borders of heaven's light and
 earth's humanity.
 Long live she ! — send up loyal shouts, and
 true hearts pray between, —
 'The blessings happy PEASANTS have, be
 thine, O crownèd queen !'

CROWNED AND BURIED

First printed in the *Athenæum* for July 4,
 1840, as 'Napoleon's Return.' On the 8th of the
 same month Miss Barrett wrote from Beacon
 Terrace, Torquay, to H. S. Boyd: 'The sub-
 ject of the removal of Napoleon's ashes is a
 fitter subject for you than for me. Napoleon
 is no idol of mine. I never made a "setting
 sun" of him. But my physician suggested the
 subject as a noble one, and then there was some-
 thing suggestive in the consideration that the
 Bellerophon lay on those very bay-waters
 opposite my bed.'

I

NAPOLÉON ! — years ago, and that great
 word
 Compact of human breath in hate and dread
 And exultation, skied us overhead —
 An atmosphere whose lightning was the
 sword
 Scathing the cedars of the world, — drawn
 down
 In burnings, by the metal of a crown.

II

Napoleon ! — nations, while they cursed
 that name,
 Shook at their own curse; and while others
 bore
 Its sound, as of a trumpet, on before,
 Brass-fronted legions justified its fame;
 And dying men on trampled battle-sods
 Near their last silence uttered it for God's.

III

Napoleon ! — sages, with high foreheads
 drooped,
 Did use it for a problem; children small

Leapt up to greet it, as at manhood's call;
 Priests blessed it from their altars over-
 stooped
 By meek-eyed Christs; and widows with a
 moan
 Spake it, when questioned why they sat
 alone.

IV

That name consumed the silence of the
 snows
 In Alpine keeping, holy and cloud-hid;
 The mimic eagles dared what Nature's did,
 And over-rushed her mountainous repose
 In search of eyries: and the Egyptian river
 Mingled the same word with its grand
 'For ever.'

V

That name was shouted near the pyramidal
 Nilotic tombs, whose mummied habitants,
 Packed to humanity's significance,
 Motioned it back with stillness, — shouts
 as idle
 As hireling artists' work of myrrh and
 spice
 Which swathed last glories round the Ptole-
 mies.

VI

The world's face changed to hear it; kingly
 men
 Came down in chidden babes' bewildering
 ment
 From autocratic places, each content
 With sprinkled ashes for anointing: then
 The people laughed or wondered for the
 nonce,
 To see one throne a composite of thrones.

VII

Napoleon ! — even the torrid vastitude
 Of India felt in throbbings of the air
 That name which scattered by disastrous
 blare
 All Europe's bound-lines, — drawn afresh
 in blood.
 Napoleon ! — from the Russias west to
 Spain:
 And Austria trembled till ye heard her
 chain.

VIII

And Germany was 'ware; and Italy
 Oblivious of old fames — her laurel-locked,

High-ghosted Cæsars passing uninvoked —
 Did crumble her own ruins with her knee,
 To serve a newer: ay! but Frenchmen
 cast
 A future from them nobler than their
 past:

IX

For verily though France augustly rose
 With that raised NAME, and did assume by
 such
 The purple of the world, none gave so
 much
 As she in purchase — to speak plain, in
 loss —
 Whose hands, toward freedom stretched,
 dropped paralyzed
 To wield a sword or fit an undersized

X

King's crown to a great man's head. And
 though along
 Her Paris' streets did float on frequent
 streams
 Of triumph, pictured or enmarbled dreams
 Dreamt right by genius in a world gone
 wrong, —
 No dream of all so won was fair to see
 As the lost vision of her liberty.

XI

Napoleon! — 't was a high name lifted
 high:
 It met at last God's thunder sent to clear
 Our compassing and covering atmosphere
 And open a clear sight beyond the sky
 Of supreme empire; this of earth's was
 done —
 And kings crept out again to feel the sun.

XII

The kings crept out — the peoples sat at
 home,
 And finding the long-invoked peace
 (A pall embroidered with worn images
 Of rights divine) too scant to cover doom
 Such as they suffered, cursed the corn
 that grew
 Rankly, to bitter bread, on Waterloo.

XIII

A deep gloom centred in the deep repose;
 The nations stood up mute to count their
 dead:

And he who owned the NAME which vi-
 brated
 Through silence, — trusting to his noblest
 foes
 When earth was all too gray for chivalry,
 Died of their mercies 'mid the desert sea.

XIV

O wild Saint Helen! very still she kept
 him,
 With a green willow for all pyramid,
 Which stirred a little if the low wind did,
 A little more if pilgrims overwept him,
 Disparting the lithe boughs to see the clay
 Which seemed to cover his for judgment-
 day.

XV

Nay, not so long! France kept her old
 affection
 As deeply as the sepulchre the corse;
 Until, dilated by such love's remorse
 To a new angel of the resurrection,
 She cried 'Behold, thou England! I would
 have
 The dead, whereof thou wottest, from that
 grave.'

XVI

And England answered in the courtesy
 Which, ancient foes turned lovers, may
 befit:
 'Take back thy dead! and when thou
 buriest it,
 Throw in all former strifes 'twixt thee and
 me.'
 Amen, mine England! 't is a courteous
 claim:
 But ask a little room too — for thy shame!

XVII

Because it was not well, it was not well,
 Nor tuneless with thy lofty-chanted part
 Among the Oceanides, — that Heart
 To bind and bare and vex with vulture fell.
 I would, my noble England, men might
 seek
 All crimson stains upon thy breast — not
 cheek!

XVIII

I would that hostile fleets had scarred Tor-
 bay,
 Instead of the lone ship which waited
 moored

Until thy princely purpose was assured,
Then left a shadow, not to pass away —
Not for to-night's moon, nor to-morrow's
sun:

Green watching hills, ye witnessed what
was done !

XIX

But since it *was* done, — in sepulchral dust
We fain would pay back something of our
debt

To France, if not to honor, and forget,
How through much fear we falsified the
trust

Of a fallen foe and exile. We return
Orestes to Electra — in his urn.

XX

A little urn — a little dust inside,
Which once outbalanced the large earth,
albeit

To-day a four-years child might carry it
Sleek-browed and smiling, 'Let the bur-
den 'bide !'

Orestes to Electra ! — O fair town
Of Paris, how the wild tears will run down

XXI

And run back in the chariot-marks of
time,

When all the people shall come forth to
meet

The passive victor, death-still in the street
He rode through 'mid the shouting and
bell-chime

And martial music, under eagles which
Dyed their rapacious beaks at Austerlitz !

XXII

Napoleon ! — he hath come again, borne
home

Upon the popular ebbing heart, — a sea
Which gathers its own wrecks perpetually,
Majestically moaning. Give him room !
Room for the dead in Paris ! welcome
solemn

And grave-deep, 'neath the cannon-moulded
column !

XXIII

There, weapon spent and warrior spent
may rest

From roar of fields, — provided Jupiter
Dare trust Saturnus to lie down so near
His bolts ! — and this he may: for, dispos-
sessed

Of any godship lies the godlike arm —
The goat, Jove sucked, as likely to do
harm.

XXIV

And yet . . . Napoleon ! — the recovered
name

Shakes the old casements of the world; and
we

Look out upon the passing pageantry,
Attesting that the Dead makes good his
claim

To a French grave, — another kingdom
won,

The last, of few spans — by Napoleon.

XXV

Blood fell like dew beneath his sunrise —
sooth

But glittered dew-like in the covenanted
Meridian light. He was a despot —
granted !

But the *αὐτοκράτορ* of his autocratic mouth
Said yea i' the people's French; he magni-
fied

The image of the freedom he denied:

XXVI

And if they asked for rights, he made
reply

'Ye have my glory !' — and so, drawing
round them

His ample purple, glorified and bound
them

In an embrace that seemed identity.
He ruled them like a tyrant — true ! but
none

Were ruled like slaves: each felt Napo-
leon.

XXVII

I do not praise this man: the man was
flawed

For Adam — much more, Christ ! — his
knee unbent,

His hand unclean, his aspiration pent
Within a sword-sweep — pshaw ! — but
since he had

The genius to be loved, why, let him have
The justice to be honored in his grave.

XXVIII

I think this nation's tears thus poured to-
gether,

Better than shouts. I think this funeral

Grandeur than crownings, though a Pope
 bless all.
 I think this grave stronger than thrones.
 But whether
 The crowned Napoleon or the buried clay
 Be worthier, I discern not: angels may.

TO FLUSH, MY DOG

First printed in the *Athenæum*, July 22, 1843. 'This dog,' says the author, 'was the gift of my dear and admired friend, Miss Mitford, and belongs to the beautiful race she has rendered celebrated among English and American readers. The Flushes have their laurels as well as the Cæsars,—the chief difference (at least the very head and front of it) consisting, perhaps, in the bald head of the latter under the crown.'

I

LOVING friend, the gift of one
 Who her own true faith has run
 Through thy lower nature,
 Be my benediction said
 With my hand upon thy head,
 Gentle fellow-creature!

II

Like a lady's ringlets brown,
 Flow thy silken ears adown
 Either side demurely
 Of thy silver-suited breast
 Shining out from all the rest
 Of thy body purely.

III

Darkly brown thy body is,
 Till the sunshine striking this
 Alchemize its dulness,
 When the sleek curls manifold
 Flash all over into gold
 With a burnished fulness.

IV

Underneath my stroking hand,
 Startled eyes of hazel bland
 Kindling, growing larger,
 Up thou leapest with a spring,
 Full of prank and curvetting,
 Leaping like a charger.

V

Leap! thy broad tail waves a light,
 Leap! thy slender feet are bright,

Canopied in fringes;
 Leap! those tasselled ears of thine
 Flicker strangely, fair and fine
 Down their golden inches.

VI

Yet, my pretty, sportive friend,
 Little is't to such an end
 That I praise thy rareness;
 Other dogs may be thy peers
 Haply in these drooping ears
 And this glossy fairness.

VII

But of *thee* it shall be said,
 This dog watched beside a bed
 Day and night unwearied,
 Watched within a curtained room
 Where no sunbeam brake the gloom
 Round the sick and dreary.

VIII

Roses, gathered for a vase,
 In that chamber died apace,
 Beam and breeze resigning;
 This dog only, waited on,
 Knowing that when light is gone
 Love remains for shining.

IX

Other dogs in thymy dew
 Tracked the hares and followed through
 Sunny moor or meadow;
 This dog only, crept and crept
 Next a languid cheek that slept,
 Sharing in the shadow.

X

Other dogs of loyal cheer
 Bounded at the whistle clear,
 Up the woodside hieing;
 This dog only, watched in reach
 Of a faintly uttered speech
 Or a louder sighing.

XI

And if one or two quick tears
 Dropped upon his glossy ears
 Or a sigh came double,
 Up he sprang in eager haste,
 Fawning, fondling, breathing fast,
 In a tender trouble.

XII

And this dog was satisfied
 If a pale thin hand would glide

Down his dewlaps sloping, —
Which he pushed his nose within,
After, — platforming his chin
On the palm left open.

XIII

This dog, if a friendly voice
Call him now to blither choice
Than such chamber-keeping,
'Come out !' praying from the door, —
Presseth backward as before,
Up against me leaping.

XIV

Therefore to this dog will I,
Tenderly not scornfully,
Render praise and favor:
With my hand upon his head,
Is my benediction said
Therefore and for ever.

XV

And because he loves me so,
Better than his kind will do
Often man or woman,
Give I back more love again
Than dogs often take of men,
Leaning from my Human.

XVI

Blessings on thee, dog of mine,
Pretty collars make thee fine,
Sugared milk make fat thee !
Pleasures wag on in thy tail,
Hands of gentle motion fail
Nevermore, to pat thee !

XVII

Downy pillow take thy head,
Silken coverlid bestead,
Sunshine help thy sleeping !
No fly's buzzing wake thee up,
No man break thy purple cup
Set for drinking deep in.

XVIII

Whiskered cats aointed flee,
Sturdy stoppers keep from thee
Cologne distillations;
Nuts lie in thy path for stones,
And thy feast-day macaroons
Turn to daily rations !

XIX

Mock I thee, in wishing weal ? —
Tears are in my eyes to feel

Thou art made so straitly,
Blessing needs must straiten too, —
Little canst thou joy or do,
Thou who lovest *greatly*.

XX

Yet be blessed to the height
Of all good and all delight
Pervious to thy nature;
Only *loved* beyond that line,
With a love that answers thine,
Loving fellow-creature !

THE FOURFOLD ASPECT

I

WHEN ye stood up in the house
With your little childish feet,
And, in touching Life's first shows,
First the touch of Love did meet, —
Love and Nearness seeming one,
By the heartlight cast before,
And of all Beloveds, none
Standing farther than the door;
Not a name being dear to thought,
With its owner beyond call; 10
Not a face, unless it brought
Its own shadow to the wall;
When the worst recorded change
Was of apple dropt from bough,
When love's sorrow seemed more strange
Than love's treason can seem now; —
Then, the Loving took you up
Soft, upon their elder knees,
Telling why the statues droop
Underneath the churchyard trees, 20
And how ye must lie beneath them
Through the winters long and deep,
Till the last trump overbreathe them,
And ye smile out of your sleep.
Oh, ye lifted up your head, and it seemed as
if they said
A tale of fairy ships
With a swan-wing for a sail;
Oh, ye kissed their loving lips
For the merry merry tale — 25
So carelessly ye thought upon the Dead !

II

Soon ye read in solemn stories
Of the men of long ago,
Of the pale bewildering glories
Shining farther than we know;

Of the heroes with the laurel,
 Of the poets with the bay,
 Of the two worlds' earnest quarrel
 For that beauteous Helena;
 How Achilles at the portal
 Of the tent heard footsteps nigh, 40
 And his strong heart, half-immortal,
 Met the *keitai* with a cry;
 How Ulysses left the sunlight
 For the pale eidola race
 Blank and passive through the dun light,
 Staring blindly in his face;
 How that true wife said to Pætus,
 With calm smile and wounded heart,
 'Sweet, it hurts not !' How Admetus
 Saw his blessed one depart; 50
 How King Arthur proved his mission,
 And Sir Roland wound his horn,
 And at Sangreal's moony vision
 Swords did bristle round like corn.
 Oh, ye lifted up your head, and it seemed,
 the while ye read,
 That this Death, then, must be
 found
 A Valhalla for the crowned,
 The heroic who prevail:
 None, be sure can enter in
 Far below a paladin 60
 Of a noble noble tale —
 So awfully ye thought upon the Dead !

III

Ay, but soon ye woke up shrieking,
 As a child that wakes at night
 From a dream of sisters speaking
 In a garden's summer-light, —
 That wakes, starting up and bounding,
 In a lonely lonely bed,
 With a wall of darkness round him,
 Stifling black about his head ! 70
 And the full sense of your mortal
 Rushed upon you deep and loud,
 And ye heard the thunder hurtle
 From the silence of the cloud.
 Funeral-torches at your gateway
 Threw a dreadful light within.
 All things changed: you rose up straight-
 way,
 And saluted Death and Sin.
 Since, your outward man has rallied,
 And your eye and voice grown bold;
 Yet the Sphinx of Life stands pallid, 81
 With her saddest secret told.
 Happy places have grown holy:
 If ye went where once ye went,

Only tears would fall down slowly,
 As at solemn sacrament.
 Merry books, once read for pastime,
 If ye dared to read again,
 Only memories of the last time
 Would swim darkly up the brain. 90
 Household names, which used to flut-
 ter
 Through your laughter unawares, —
 God's Divinest ye could utter
 With less trembling in your prayers.
 Ye have dropt adown your head, and it
 seems as if ye tread
 On your own hearts in the path
 Ye are called to in His wrath,
 And your prayers go up in wail
 — 'Dost Thou see, then, all our
 loss,
 O Thou agonized on cross ? 100
 Art thou reading all its tale ?'
 So mournfully ye think upon the Dead !

IV

Pray, pray, thou who also weepst,
 And the drops will slacken so.
 Weep, weep, and the watch thou keepest
 With a quicker count will go.
 Think: the shadow on the dial
 For the nature most undone,
 Marks the passing of the trial,
 Proves the presence of the sun. 110
 Look, look up, in starry passion,
 To the throne above the spheres:
 Learn: the spirit's gravitation
 Still must differ from the tear's.
 Hope: with all the strength thou usest
 In embracing thy despair.
 Love: the earthly love thou lovest
 Shall return to thee more fair.
 Work: make clear the forest-tangles
 Of the wildest stranger-land. 120
 Trust: the blessed deathly angels
 Whisper, 'Sabbath hours at hand !'
 By the heart's wound when most gory,
 By the longest agony,
 Smile ! Behold in sudden glory
 The TRANSFIGURED smiles on thee !
 And ye lifted up your head, and it seemed
 as if He said,
 'My Belovèd, is it so ?
 Have ye tasted of my woe ?
 Of my Heaven ye shall not
 fail !' 130
 He stands brightly where the
 shade is,

With the keys of Death and
Hades,
And there, ends the mournful
tale —

So hopefully ye think upon the Dead !

A FLOWER IN A LETTER

I

My lonely chamber next the sea
Is full of many flowers set free
By summer's earliest duty:
Dear friends upon the garden-walk
Might stop amid their fondest talk
To pull the least in beauty.

II

A thousand flowers, each seeming one
That learnt by gazing on the sun
To counterfeit his shining;
Within whose leaves the holy dew
That falls from heaven has won anew
A glory, in declining.

III

Red roses, used to praises long,
Contented with the poet's song,
The nightingale's being over;
And lilies white, prepared to touch
The whitest thought, nor soil it much,
Of dreamer turned to lover.

IV

Deep violets, you liken to
The kindest eyes that look on you,
Without a thought disloyal;
And cactuses a queen might don
If weary of a golden crown,
And still appear as royal.

V

Pansies for ladies all, — I wis
That none who wear such brooches miss
A jewel in the mirror;
And tulips, children love to stretch
Their fingers down, to feel in each
Its beauty's secret nearer.

VI

Love's language may be talked with these;
To work out choicest sentences,
No blossoms can be meter;

And, such being used in Eastern bowers,
Young maids may wonder if the flowers
Or meanings be the sweeter.

VII

And such being strewn before a bride,
Her little foot may turn aside,
Their longer bloom decreeing,
Unless some voice's whispered sound
Should make her gaze upon the ground
Too earnestly for seeing.

VIII

And such being scattered on a grave,
Whoever mourneth there may have
A type which seemeth worthy
Of that fair body hid below,
Which bloomed on earth a time ago,
Then perished as the earthy.

IX

And such being wreathed for worldly feast,
Across the brimming cup some guest
Their rainbow colors viewing
May feel them, with a silent start,
The covenant, his childish heart
With nature made, renewing.

X

No flowers our gardened England hath
To match with these, in bloom and breath,
Which from the world are hiding
In sunny Devon moist with rills, —
A nunnery of cloistered hills,
The elements presiding.

XI

By Loddon's stream the flowers are fair
That meet one gifted lady's care
With prodigal rewarding:
(For Beauty is too used to run
To Mitford's bower — to want the sun
To light her through the garden).

XII

But here, all summers are comprised,
The nightly frosts shrink exorcised
Before the priestly moonshine;
And every wind with stoled feet
In wandering down the alleys sweet
Steps lightly on the sunshine.

XIII

And (having promised Harpocrate
Among the nodding roses that

No harm shall touch his daughters)
Gives quite away the rushing sound
He dares not use upon such ground
To ever-trickling waters.

XIV

Yet, sun and wind ! what can ye do
But make the leaves more brightly show
In posies newly gathered ?
I look away from all your best
To one poor flower unlike the rest,
A little flower half-withered.

XV

I do not think it ever was
A pretty flower, — to make the grass
Look greener where it reddened;
And now it seems ashamed to be
Alone, in all this company,
Of aspect shrunk and saddened.

XVI

A chamber-window was the spot
It grew in, from a garden-pot,
Among the city shadows:
If any, tending it, might seem
To smile, 't was only in a dream
Of nature in the meadows.

XVII

How coldly on its head did fall
The sunshine, from the city wall
In pale refraction driven !
How sadly plashed upon its leaves
The raindrops, losing in the eaves
The first sweet news of heaven !

XVIII

And those who planted, gathered it
In gamesome or in loving fit,
And sent it as a token
Of what their city pleasures be, —
For one, in Devon by the sea
And garden blooms, to look on.

XIX

But SHE for whom the jest was meant,
With a grave passion innocent
Receiving what was given, —
Oh, if her face she turned then,
Let none say 't was to gaze again
Upon the flowers of Devon !

XX

Because, whatever virtue dwells
In genial skies, warm oracles

For gardens brightly springing, —
The flower which grew beneath your eyes,
Belovèd friends, to mine supplies
A beauty worthier singing !

THE CRY OF THE HUMAN

First printed in *Graham's American Magazine*, 1842.

I

'THERE is no God' the foolish saith,
But none 'There is no sorrow,'
And nature oft the cry of faith
In bitter need will borrow:
Eyes, which the preacher could not school,
By wayside graves are raised,
And lips say 'God be pitiful,'
Who ne'er said 'God be praised.'
Be pitiful, O God !

II

The tempest stretches from the steep
The shadow of its coming,
The beasts grow tame and near us creep,
As help were in the human;
Yet, while the cloud-wheels roll and
grind,
We spirits tremble under —
The hills have echoes, but we find
No answer for the thunder.
Be pitiful, O God !

III

The battle hurtles on the plains,
Earth feels new scythes upon her;
We reap our brothers for the wains,
And call the harvest — honor:
Draw face to face, front line to line,
One image all inherit, —
Then kill, curse on, by that same sign,
Clay — clay, and spirit — spirit.
Be pitiful, O God !

IV

The plague runs festering through the
town,
And never a bell is tolling,
And corpses, jostled 'neath the moon,
Nod to the dead-cart's rolling:
The young child calleth for the cup,
The strong man brings it weeping,
The mother from her babe looks up,

And shrieks away its sleeping.
Be pitiful, O God !

V

The plague of gold strikes far and near,
And deep and strong it enters;
This purple chinar which we wear
Makes madder than the centaur's:
Our thoughts grow blank, our words grow
strange,
We cheer the pale gold-diggers,
Each soul is worth so much on 'Change,
And marked, like sheep, with figures.
Be pitiful, O God !

VI

The curse of gold upon the land
The lack of bread enforces;
The rail-cars snort from strand to strand,
Like more of Death's White Horses:
The rich preach 'rights' and 'future days,'
And hear no angel scoffing,
The poor die mute, with starving gaze
On corn-ships in the offing.
Be pitiful, O God !

VII

We meet together at the feast,
To private mirth betake us;
We stare down in the winecup, lest
Some vacant chair should shake us:
We name delight, and pledge it round —
'It shall be ours to-morrow !'
God's seraphs, do your voices sound
As sad, in naming sorrow ?
Be pitiful, O God !

VIII

We sit together, with the skies,
The steadfast skies, above us,
We look into each other's eyes,
'And how long will you love us ?'
The eyes grow dim with prophecy,
The voices, low and breathless, —
'Till death us part !' — O words, to be
Our best, for love the deathless !
Be pitiful, O God !

IX

We tremble by the harmless bed
Of one loved and departed:
Our tears drop on the lips that said
Last night 'Be stronger-hearted !'
O God — to clasp those fingers close,

And yet to feel so lonely !
To see a light upon such brows,
Which is the daylight only !
Be pitiful, O God !

X

The happy children come to us
And look up in our faces;
They ask us 'Was it thus, and thus,
When we were in their places ?'
We cannot speak; — we see anew
The hills we used to live in,
And feel our mother's smile press through
The kisses she is giving.
Be pitiful, O God !

XI

We pray together at the kirk
For mercy, mercy solely:
Hands weary with the evil work,
We lift them to the Holy.
The corpse is calm below our knee,
Its spirit, bright before Thee:
Between them, worse than either, we —
Without the rest or glory.
Be pitiful, O God !

XII

We leave the communing of men,
The murmur of the passions,
And live alone, to live again
With endless generations:
Are we so brave ? The sea and sky
In silence lift their mirrors,
And, glassed therein, our spirits high
Recoil from their own terrors.
Be pitiful, O God !

XIII

We sit on hills our childhood wist,
Woods, hamlets, streams, beholding
The sun strikes through the farthest mist
The city's spire to golden:
The city's golden spire it was,
When hope and health were strongest,
But now it is the churchyard grass
We look upon the longest.
Be pitiful, O God !

XIV

And soon all vision waxeth dull;
Men whisper 'He is dying;'
We cry no more 'Be pitiful !'
We have no strength for crying:

No strength, no need. Then, soul of mine,
 Look up and triumph rather !
 Lo, in the depth of God's Divine,
 The Son adjures the Father,
 BE PITIFUL, O GOD !

A LAY OF THE EARLY ROSE

' . . . discordance that can accord.'
 — *Romance of the Rose.*

A ROSE once grew within
 A garden April-green,
 In her loneliness, in her loneliness,
 And the fairer for that oneness.

A white rose delicate
 On a tall bough and straight:
 Early comer, early comer,
 Never waiting for the summer.

Her pretty gestes did win
 South winds to let her in, 10
 In her loneliness, in her loneliness,
 All the fairer for that oneness.

'For if I wait,' said she,
 'Till time for roses be,
 For the moss-rose and the musk-rose,
 Maiden-blush and royal-dusk rose,

'What glory then for me
 In such a company ? —
 Roses plenty, roses plenty
 And one nightingale for twenty ! 20

'Nay, let me in,' said she,
 'Before the rest are free,
 In my loneliness, in my loneliness,
 All the fairer for that oneness.

'For I would lonely stand
 Uplifting my white hand,
 On a mission, on a mission,
 To declare the coming vision.

'Upon which lifted sign,
 What worship will be mine ! 30
 What addressing, what caressing,
 And what thanks and praise and blessing !

'A windlike joy will rush
 Through every tree and bush,

Bending softly in affection
 And spontaneous benediction.

'Insects, that only may
 Live in a sunbright ray,
 To my whiteness, to my whiteness,
 Shall be drawn as to a brightness, — 40

'And every moth and bee
 Approach me reverently,
 Wheeling o'er me, wheeling o'er me,
 Coronals of motioned glory.

'Three larks shall leave a cloud,
 To my whiter beauty vowed,
 Singing gladly all the moontide,
 Never waiting for the suntide.

'Ten nightingales shall flee
 Their woods for love of me, 50
 Singing sadly all the suntide,
 Never waiting for the moontide.

'I ween the very skies
 Will look down with surprise,
 When below on earth they see me
 With my starry aspect dreamy.

'And earth will call her flowers
 To hasten out of doors,
 By their curtsies and sweet-smelling
 To give grace to my foretelling.' 60

So praying, did she win
 South winds to let her in,
 In her loneliness, in her loneliness,
 And the fairer for that oneness.

But ah, — alas for her !
 No thing did minister
 To her praises, to her praises,
 More than might unto a daisy's.

No tree nor bush was seen
 To boast a perfect green, 70
 Scarcely having, scarcely having
 One leaf broad enough for waving.

The little flies did crawl
 Along the southern wall,
 Faintly shifting, faintly shifting
 Wings scarce long enough for lifting.

The lark, too high or low,
 I ween, did miss her so,

With his nest down in the gorses,
And his song in the star-courses.

80

The nightingale did please
To loiter beyond seas:
Guess him in the Happy Islands,
Learning music from the silence!

Only the bee, forsooth,
Came in the place of both,
Doing honor, doing honor
To the honey-dews upon her.

The skies looked coldly down
As on a royal crown;
Then with drop for drop, at leisure,
They began to rain for pleasure.

90

Whereat the earth did seem
To waken from a dream,
Winter-frozen, winter-frozen,
Her unquiet eyes unclosing —

Said to the Rose, 'Ha, snow!
And art thou fallen so?
Thou, who wast enthronèd stately
All along my mountains lately?

100

'Holla, thou world-wide snow!
And art thou wasted so,
With a little bough to catch thee,
And a little bee to watch thee?'

— Poor Rose, to be misknown!
Would she had ne'er been blown,
In her loneliness, in her loneliness,
All the sadder for that oneness!

Some word she tried to say,
Some *no* . . . ah, wellaway!
But the passion did o'ercome her,
And the fair frail leaves dropped from her.

110

— Dropped from her fair and mute,
Close to a poet's foot,
Who beheld them, smiling slowly,
As at something sad yet holy, —

Said 'Verily and thus
It chances too with *us*
Poets, singing sweetest snatches
While that deaf men keep the watches: 120

'Vaunting to come before
Our own age evermore,

In a loneliness, in a loneliness,
And the nobler for that oneness.

'Holy in voice and heart,
To high ends, set apart:
All unmated, all unmated,
Just because so consecrated.

'But if alone we be,
Where is our empery?
And if none can reach our stature,
Who can mete our lofty nature?

130

'What bell will yield a tone,
Swung in the air alone?
If no brazen clapper bringing,
Who can hear the chimèd ringing?

'What angel but would seem
To sensual eyes, ghost-dim?
And without assimilation
Vain is interpenetration.

140

'And thus, what can we do,
Poor rose and poet too,
Who both antedate our mission
In an unprepared season?

'Drop, leaf! be silent, song!
Cold things we come among:
We must warm them, we must warm them,
Ere we ever hope to charm them.

'Howbeit' (here his face
Lightened around the place,
So to mark the outward turning
Of its spirit's inward burning)

150

'Something it is, to hold
In God's worlds manifold,
First revealed to creature-duty,
Some new form of his mild Beauty.

'Whether that form respect
The sense or intellect,
Holy be, in mood or meadow,
The Chief Beauty's sign and shadow! 160

'Holy, in me and thee,
Rose fallen from the tree, —
Though the world stand dumb around us,
All unable to expound us.

'Though none us deign to bless,
Blessèd are we, natheless;

Blessèd still and consecrated
In that, rose, we were created.

‘Oh, shame to poet’s lays
Sung for the dole of praise, —
Hoarsely sung upon the highway
With that *obolum da mihi!*

‘Shame, shame to poet’s soul
Pining for such a dole,
When Heaven-chosen to inherit
The high throne of a chief spirit !

Sit still upon your thrones,
O ye poetic ones !
And if, sooth, the world decri you,
Let it pass unchallenged by you.

‘Ye to yourselves suffice,
Without its flatteries.
Self-contentedly approve you
Unto HIM who sits above you, —

‘In prayers, that upward mount
Like to a fair-sunned fount
Which, in gushing back upon you,
Hath an upper music won you, —

‘In faith, that still perceives
No rose can shed her leaves,
Far less, poet fall from mission,
With an unfulfilled fruition, —

‘In hope, that apprehends
An end beyond these ends,
And great uses rendered duly
By the meanest song sung truly, —

‘In thanks, for all the good
By poets understood,
For the sound of seraphs moving
Down the hidden depths of loving, —

‘For sights of things away
Through fissures of the clay,
Promised things which *shall* be given
And sung over, up in Heaven, —

‘For life, so lovely-vain,
For death, which breaks the chain,
For this sense of present sweetness,
And this yearning to completeness !’

BERTHA IN THE LANE

I

PUT the broidery-frame away,
For my sewing is all done:
The last thread is used to-day,
And I need not join it on.
Though the clock stands at the noon
I am weary. I have sewn,
Sweet, for thee, a wedding-gown.

II

Sister, help me to the bed,
And stand near me, Dearest-sweet.
Do not shrink nor be afraid,
Blushing with a sudden heat !
No one standeth in the street ? —
By God’s love I go to meet,
Love I thee with love complete.

III

Lean thy face down; drop it in
These two hands, that I may hold
’Twixt their palms thy cheek and chin,
Stroking back the curls of gold:
’Tis a fair, fair face, in sooth —
Larger eyes and redder mouth
Than mine were in my first youth.

IV

Thou art younger by seven years —
Ah ! — so bashful at my gaze,
That the lashes, hung with tears,
Grow too heavy to upraise ?
I would wound thee by no touch
Which thy shyness feels as such.
Dost thou mind me, Dear, so much ?

V

Have I not been nigh a mother
To thy sweetness — tell me, Dear ?
Have we not loved one another
Tenderly, from year to year,
Since our dying mother mild
Said with accents undefiled,
‘Child, be mother to this child !’

VI

Mother, mother, up in heaven,
Stand up on the jasper sea,
And be witness I have given
All the gifts required of me, —

Hope that blessed me, bliss that crowned,
Love that left me with a wound,
Life itself that turneth round !

VII

Mother, mother, thou art kind,
Thou art standing in the room,
In a molten glory shrined
That rays off into the gloom !
But thy smile is bright and bleak
Like cold waves — I cannot speak,
I sob in it, and grow weak.

VIII

Ghostly mother, keep aloof
One hour longer from my soul,
For I still am thinking of
Earth's warm-beating joy and dole !
On my finger is a ring
Which I still see glittering
When the night hides everything.

IX

Little sister, thou art pale !
Ah, I have a wandering brain —
But I lose that fever-bale,
And my thoughts grow calm again.
Lean down closer — closer still !
I have words thine ear to fill,
And would kiss thee at my will.

X

Dear, I heard thee in the spring,
Thee and Robert — through the trees, —
When we all went gathering
Boughs of may-bloom for the bees.
Do not start so ! think instead
How the sunshine overhead
Seemed to trickle through the shade.

XI

What a day it was, that day !
Hills and vales did openly
Seem to heave and throb away
At the sight of the great sky:
And the silence, as it stood
In the glory's golden flood,
Audibly did bud, and bud.

XII

Through the winding hedgerows green,
How we wandered, I and you,
With the bowery tops shut in,
And the gates that showed the view !
How we talked there; thrushes soft

Sang our praises out, or oft
Bleatings took them from the croft:

XIII

Till the pleasure grown too strong
Left me muter evermore,
And, the winding road being long,
I walked out of sight, before,
And so, wrapt in musings fond,
Issued (past the wayside pond)
On the meadow-lands beyond.

XIV

I sate down beneath the beech
Which leans over to the lane,
And the far sound of your speech
Did not promise any pain;
And I blessed you full and free,
With a smile stooped tenderly
O'er the may-flowers on my knee.

XV

But the sound grew into word
As the speakers drew more near —
Sweet, forgive me that I heard
What you wished me not to hear.
Do not weep so, do not shake,
Oh, — I heard thee, Bertha, make
Good true answers for my sake.

XVI

Yes, and HE too ! let him stand
In thy thoughts, untouched by blame.
Could he help it, if my hand
He had claimed with hasty claim?
That was wrong perhaps — but then
Such things be — and will, again.
Women cannot judge for men.

XVII

Had he seen thee when he swore
He would love but me alone ?
Thou wast absent, sent before
To our kin in Sidmouth town.
When he saw thee who art blest
Past compare, and loveliest,
He but judged thee as the rest.

XVIII

Could we blame him with grave words,
Thou and I, Dear, if we might ?
Thy brown eyes have looks like birds
Flying straightway to the light:
Mine are older. — Hush ! — look out —

Up the street ! Is none without ?
How the poplar swings about !

XIX

And that hour — beneath the beech,
When I listened in a dream,
And he said in his deep speech
That he owed me all *esteem*, —
Each word swam in on my brain
With a dim, dilating pain,
Till it burst with that last strain.

XX

I fell flooded with a dark,
In the silence of a swoon.
When I rose, still cold and stark,
There was night; I saw the moon
And the stars, each in its place,
And the may-blooms on the grass
Seemed to wonder what I was.

XXI

And I walked as if apart
From myself, when I could stand,
And I pitied my own heart,
As if I held it in my hand —
Somewhat coldly, with a sense
Of fulfilled benevolence,
And a 'Poor thing' negligence.

XXII

And I answered coldly too,
When you met me at the door;
And I only *heard* the dew
Dripping from me to the floor:
And the flowers, I bade you see,
Were too withered for the bee, —
As my life, henceforth, for me.

XXIII

Do not weep so — Dear, — heart-warm !
All was best as it befell.
If I say he did me harm,
I speak wild, — I am not well.
All his words were kind and good —
He esteemed me. Only, blood
Runs so faint in womanhood !

XXIV

Then I always was too grave, —
Like the saddest ballad sung, —
With that look, besides, we have
In our faces, who die young.
I had died, Dear, all the same;

Life's long, joyous, jostling game
Is too loud for my meek shame.

XXV

We are so unlike each other,
Thou and I, that none could guess
We were children of one mother,
But for mutual tenderness.
Thou art rose-lined from the cold,
And meant verily to hold
Life's pure pleasures manifold.

XXVI

I am pale as crocus grows
Close beside a rose-tree's root;
Whosoe'er would reach the rose,
Treads the crocus underfoot.
I, like may-bloom on thorn-tree,
Thou, like merry summer-bee, —
Fit that I be plucked for thee !

XXVII

Yet who plucks me ? — no one mourns,
I have lived my season out,
And now die of my own thorns
Which I could not live without.
Sweet, be merry ! How the light
Comes and goes ! If it be night,
Keep the candles in my sight.

XXVIII

Are there footsteps at the door ?
Look out quickly. Yea, or nay ?
Some one might be waiting for
Some last word that I might say.
Nay ? So best ! — so angels would
Stand off clear from deathly road,
Not to cross the sight of God.

XXIX

Colder grow my hands and feet.
When I wear the shroud I made,
Let the folds lie straight and neat,
And the rosemary be spread,
That if any friend should come,
(To see *thee*, Sweet !) all the room
May be lifted out of gloom.

XXX

And, dear Bertha, let me keep
On my hand this little ring,
Which at nights, when others sleep,
I can still see glittering !
Let me wear it out of sight,

In the grave, — where it will light
All the dark up, day and night.

XXXI

On that grave drop not a tear !
Else, though fathom-deep the place,
Through the woollen shroud I wear
I shall feel it on my face.
Rather smile there, blessed one,
Thinking of me in the sun,
Or forget me — smiling on !

XXXII

Art thou near me ? nearer ! so —
Kiss me close upon the eyes,
That the earthly light may go
Sweetly, as it used to rise
When I watched the morning-gray
Strike, betwixt the hills, the way
He was sure to come that day.

XXXIII

So, — no more vain words be said !
The hosannas nearer roll.
Mother, smile now on thy Dead,
I am death-strong in my soul.
Mystic Dove alit on cross,
Guide the poor bird of the snows
Through the snow-wind above loss !

XXXIV

Jesus, Victim, comprehending
Love's divine self-abnegation,
Cleanse my love in its self-spending,
And absorb the poor libation !
Wind my thread of life up higher,
Up, through angels' hands of fire !
I aspire while I expire.

THAT DAY

I

I STAND by the river where both of us
stood,
And there is but one shadow to darken the
flood;
And the path leading to it, where both used
to pass,
Has the step but of one, to take dew from
the grass, —
One forlorn since that day.

II

The flowers of the margin are many to see;
None stoops at my bidding to pluck them
for me.
The bird in the alder sings loudly and
long, —
My low sound of weeping disturbs not his
song,
As thy vow did, that day.

III

I stand by the river, I think of the vow;
Oh, calm as the place is, vow-breaker, be
thou !
I leave the flower growing, the bird unre-
proved;
Would I trouble *thee* rather than *them*, my
beloved, —
And my lover that day ?

IV

Go, be sure of my love, by that treason for-
given;
Of my prayers, by the blessings they win
thee from Heaven;
Of my grief — (guess the length of the
sword by the sheath's)
By the silence of life, more pathetic than
death's !
Go, — be clear of that day !

LOVED ONCE

I

I CLASSED, appraising once,
Earth's lamentable sounds, — the wella-
day,
The jarring yea and nay,
The fall of kisses on unanswering clay,
The sobbed farewell, the welcome mourn-
fuller, —
But all did leaven the air
With a less bitter leaven of sure despair
Than these words — ' I loved ONCE.'

II

And who saith ' I loved ONCE ' ?
Not angels, — whose clear eyes, love, love
foresee,
Love, through eternity,
And by To Love do apprehend To Be.
Not God, called LOVE, his noble crown-
name casting,

A light too broad for blasting:
The great God, changing not from ever-
lasting,
Saith never 'I loved ONCE.'

III

Oh, never is 'Loved ONCE'
Thy word, Thou Victim-Christ, misprizèd
friend!

Thy cross and curse may read,
But having loved Thou lovest to the end.
This is man's saying — man's: too weak to
move

One spherèd star above,
Man desecrates the eternal God-word Love
By his No More, and Once.

IV

How say ye 'We loved once,'
Blasphemers? Is your earth not cold
enow,

Mourners, without that snow?
Ah friends, and would ye wrong each other
so?

And could ye say of some whose love is
known,

Whose prayers have met your own,
Whose tears have fallen for you, whose
smiles have shown

So long, — 'We loved them ONCE'?

V

Could ye 'We loved her once'
Say calm of me, sweet friends, when out of
sight?

When hearts of better right
Stand in between me and your happy
light?

Or when, as flowers kept too long in the
shade,

Ye find my colors fade,
And all that is not love in me decayed?
Such words — Ye loved me ONCE!

VI

Could ye 'We loved her once'
Say cold of me when further put away
In earth's sepulchral clay,
When mute the lips which deprecate to-
day?

Not, so! not then — least then! When
life is shriven

And death's full joy is given, —
Of those who sit and love you up in heaven
Say not 'We loved them once.'

VII

Say never ye loved ONCE:
God is too near above, the grave beneath,
And all our moments breathe
Too quick in mysteries of life and death,
For such a word. The eternities avenge
Affections light of range.
There comes no change to justify that
change,
Whatever comes — Loved ONCE!

VIII

And yet that same word ONCE
Is humanly acceptive. Kings have said,
Shaking a discrowned head,
'We ruled once,' — dotards, 'We once
taught and led,'
Cripples once danced i' the vines, and bards
approved,
Were once by scornings moved:
But love strikes one hour — LOVE! Those
never loved
Who dream that they loved ONCE.

A RHAPSODY OF LIFE'S
PROGRESS

'Fill all the stops of life with tuneful breath.'
— *Poems on Man*, by CORNELIUS MATHEWS.

I

WE are born into life — it is sweet, it is
strange.

We lie still on the knee of a mild Mystery
Which smiles with a change;

But we doubt not of changes, we know not
of spaces,

The Heavens seem as near as our own
mother's face is,

And we think we could touch all the stars
that we see;

And the milk of our mother is white on
our mouth;

And, with small childish hands, we are
turning around

The apple of Life which another has found;
It is warm with our touch, not with sun of
the south,

And we count, as we turn it, the red side¹⁰
for four.

O Life, O Beyond,
Thou art sweet, thou art strange ever-
more!

II

Then all things look strange in the pure
golden æther;
We walk through the gardens with hands
linked together,
And the lilies look large as the trees;
And, as loud as the birds, sing the bloom-
loving bees,
And the birds sing like angels, so mystical-
fine,
And the cedars are brushing the arch-
angels' feet,
And time is eternity, love is divine, 20
And the world is complete.
Now, God bless the child, — father, mother,
respond !
O Life, O Beyond,
Thou art strange, thou art sweet.

III

Then we leap on the earth with the armor
of youth,
And the earth rings again;
And we breathe out 'O Beauty !' we
cry out 'O truth !'
And the bloom of our lips drops with
wine,
And our blood runs amazed 'neath the
calm hyaline;
The earth cleaves to the foot, the sun
burns to the brain, — 30
What is this exultation ? and what this
despair ? —
The strong pleasure is smiting the nerves
into pain,
And we drop from the Fair as we climb to
the Fair,
And we lie in a trance at its feet;
And the breath of an angel cold-piercing
the air
Breathes fresh on our faces in swoon,
And we think him so near he is this side
the sun,
And we wake to a whisper self-murmured
and fond,
O Life, O Beyond,
Thou art strange, thou art sweet ! 40

IV

And the winds and the waters in pastoral
measures
Go winding around us, with roll upon roll,
Till the soul lies within in a circle of plea-
sures
Which hideth the soul:

And we run with the stag, and we leap
with the horse,
And we swim with the fish through the
broad watercourse,
And we strike with the falcon, and hunt
with the hound,
And the joy which is in us flies out by a
wound.
And we shout so aloud, ' We exult, we re-
joice,'
That we lose the low moan of our brothers
around: 50
And we shout so adeep down creation's
profound,
We are deaf to God's voice.
And we bind the rose-garland on forehead
and ears
Yet we are not ashamed,
And the dew of the roses that runneth un-
blamed
Down our cheeks, is not taken for tears.
Help us, God ! trust us, man ! love us, wo-
man ! 'I hold
Thy small head in my hands, — with its
grapelets of gold
Growing bright through my fingers, — like
altar for oath,
'Neath the vast golden spaces like witness-
ing faces 60
That watch the eternity strong in the
troth —
I love thee, I leave thee,
Live for thee, die for thee !
I prove thee, deceive thee,
Undo evermore thee !
Help me, God ! slay me, man ! — one is
mourning for both.'
And we stand up though young near the
funeral-sheet
Which covers old Cæsar and old Phara-
mond,
And death is so nigh us, life cools from its
heat.
O Life, O Beyond, 70
Art thou fair, art thou sweet ?

V

Then we act to a purpose, we spring up
erect:
We will tame the wild mouths of the wil-
derness-steeds,
We will plough up the deep in the ships
double-decked,
We will build the great cities, and do the
great deeds,

Strike the steel upon steel, strike the soul
 upon soul,
 Strike the dole on the weal, overcoming
 the dole.
 Let the cloud meet the cloud in a grand
 thunder-roll!
 'While the eagle of Thought rides the
 tempest in scorn,
 Who cares if the lightning is burning the
 corn? 80
 Let us sit on the thrones
 In a purple sublimity,
 And grind down men's bones
 To a pale unanimity.
 Speed me, God! serve me, man! I am
 god over men;
 When I speak in my cloud, none shall an-
 swer again;
 'Neath the stripe and the bond,
 Lie and mourn at my feet!
 O Life, O Beyond,
 Thou art strange, thou art sweet!

VI

Then we grow into thought, and with in-
 ward ascensions 91
 Touch the bounds of our Being.
 We lie in the dark here, swathed doubly
 around
 With our sensual relations and social con-
 ventions,
 Yet are 'ware of a sight, yet are 'ware of
 a sound
 Beyond Hearing and Seeing, —
 Are aware that a Hades rolls deep on all
 sides
 With its infinite tides
 About and above us, — until the strong
 arch
 Of our life creaks and bends as if ready
 for falling, 100
 And through the dim rolling we hear the
 sweet calling
 Of spirits that speak in a soft under-
 tongue
 The sense of the mystical march:
 And we cry to them softly, 'Come nearer,
 come nearer,
 And lift up the lap of this dark, and speak
 clearer,
 And teach us the song that ye sung!'
 And we smile in our thought as they an-
 swer or no,
 For to dream of a sweetness is sweet as to
 know.

Wonders breathe in our face
 And we ask not their name; 110
 Love takes all the blame
 Of the world's prison-place;
 And we sing back the songs as we guess
 them, aloud,
 And we send up the lark of our music that
 cuts
 Untired through the cloud
 To beat with its wings at the lattice Hea-
 ven shuts;
 Yet the angels look down and the mortals
 look up
 As the little wings beat,
 And the poet is blessed with their pity or
 hope.
 'Twixt the heavens and the earth can a
 poet despond? 120
 O Life, O Beyond,
 Thou art strange, thou art sweet!

VII

Then we wring from our souls their appli-
 cative strength,
 And bend to the cord the strong bow of
 our ken,
 And bringing our lives to the level of
 others,
 Hold the cup we have filled, to their uses
 at length.
 'Help me, God! love me, man! I am
 man among men,
 And my life is a pledge
 Of the ease of another's!'
 From the fire and the water we drive out
 the steam 130
 With a rush and a roar and the speed of a
 dream;
 And the car without horses, the car with-
 out wings,
 Roars onward and flies
 On its gray iron edge
 'Neath the heat of a Thought sitting still in
 our eyes:
 And our hand knots in air, with the bridge
 that it flings,
 Two peaks far disrupted by ocean and
 skies,
 And, lifting a fold of the smooth-flowing
 Thames,
 Draws under the world with its turmoils
 and pothers,
 While the swans float on softly, untouched
 in their calms 140

By humanity's hum at the root of the
springs.

And with reachings of Thought we reach
down to the deeps

Of the souls of our brothers,

We teach them full words with our slow-
moving lips,

'God,' 'Liberty,' 'Truth,' — which they
hearken and think

And work into harmony, link upon link,
Till the silver meets round the earth gelid
and dense,

Shedding sparks of electric responding in-
tense

On the dark of eclipse.

Then we hear through the silence and glory
afar, 150

As from shores of a star

In aphelion, the new generations that cry
Disenthralled by our voice to harmonious
reply,

'God,' 'Liberty,' 'Truth !'

We are glorious forsooth,

And our name has a seat,

Though the shroud should be donned.

O Life, O Beyond,

Thou art strange, thou art sweet !

VIII

Help me, God ! help me, man ! I am low,
I am weak: 160

Death loosens my sinews and creeps in my
veins;

My body is cleft by these wedges of pains
From my spirit's serene,

And I feel the externe and insensate creep
in

On my organized clay;

I sob not, nor shriek,

Yet I faint fast away:

I am strong in the spirit, — deep-thoughted,
clear-eyed, —

I could walk, step for step, with an angel
beside,

On the heaven-heights of truth. 170

Oh, the soul keeps its youth

But the body faints sore, it is tried in the
race,

It sinks from the chariot ere reaching the
goal,

It is weak, it is cold,

The rein drops from its hold,

It sinks back, with the death in its face.

On, chariot ! on, soul !

Ye are all the more fleet —

Be alone at the goal
Of the strange and the sweet ! 180

IX

Love us, God ! love us, man ! we believe,
we achieve:

Let us love, let us live,

For the acts correspond;

We are glorious, and die:

And again on the knee of a mild Mystery

That smiles with a change,

Here we lie.

O DEATH, O BEYOND,

Thou art sweet, thou art strange !

L. E. L.'S LAST QUESTION

'Do you think of me as I think of you ?'

*(From her poem written during
the voyage to the Cape.)*

First printed in the *Athenæum*, January 26,
1839.

I

'Do you think of me as I think of you,
My friends, my friends ?' — She said it
from the sea,

The English minstrel in her minstrelsy,
While, under brighter skies than erst she
knew,

Her heart grew dark, and groped there as
the blind

To reach across the waves friends left be-
hind —

'Do you think of me as I think of you ?'

II

It seemed not much to ask — 'as *I* of
you ?'

We all do ask the same; no eyelids cover
Within the meekest eyes that question
over:

And little in the world the Loving do
But sit (among the rocks ?) and listen for
The echo of their own love evermore —

'Do you think of me as I think of you ?'

III

Love-learnèd she had sung of love and
love, —

And like a child that, sleeping with dropt
head

Upon the fairy-book he lately read,

Whatever household noises round him
 move,
 Hears in his dream some elfin turbu-
 lence, —
 Even so suggestive to her inward sense,
 All sounds of life assumed one tune of
 love.

IV

And when the glory of her dream with-
 drew,
 When knightly gestes and courtly pagean-
 tries
 Were broken in her visionary eyes
 By tears the solemn seas attested true, —
 Forgetting that sweet lute beside her hand,
 She asked not, — ‘Do you praise me, O
 my land?’
 But, — ‘Think ye of me, friends, as I of
 you?’

V

Hers was the hand that played for many a
 year
 Love’s silver phrase for England, smooth
 and well.
 Would God her heart’s more inward oracle
 In that lone moment might confirm her
 dear!
 For when her questioned friends in agony
 Made passionate response, ‘We think of
 thee,’
 Her place was in the dust, too deep to
 hear.

VI

Could she not wait to catch their answering
 breath?
 Was she content, content with ocean’s
 sound
 Which dashed its mocking infinite around
 One thirsty for a little love? — beneath
 Those stars content, where last her song
 had gone, —
 They mute and cold in radiant life, as
 soon
 Their singer was to be, in darksome
 death?

VII

Bring your vain answers — cry, ‘We think
 of thee!’
 How think ye of her? warm in long ago
 Delights? or crowned with budding bays?
 Not so.

None smile and none are crowned where
 lieth she,
 With all her visions unfulfilled save one,
 Her childhood’s, of the palm-trees in the
 sun —
 And lo! their shadow on her sepulchre!

VIII

‘Do ye think of me as I think of you?’ —
 O friends, O kindred, O dear brotherhood
 Of all the world! what are we that we
 should
 For covenants of long affection sue?
 Why press so near each other when the
 touch
 Is barred by graves? Not much, and yet
 too much
 Is this ‘Think of me as I think of you.’

IX

But while on mortal lips I shape anew
 A sigh to mortal issues, verily
 Above the unshaken stars that see us
 die,
 A vocal pathos rolls; and HE who drew
 All life from dust, and for all tasted death,
 By death and life and love appealing, saith
Do you think of me as I think of you?

THE HOUSE OF CLOUDS

First printed in the *Athenæum* August 21,
 1841. On August 31, 1843, Miss Barrett
 wrote to R. H. Horne: ‘Mr. Boyd told me
 that he had read my papers on the Greek
 fathers with the more satisfaction because he
 had inferred from my ‘House of Clouds’ that
 illness had *impaired my faculties*.’ But to Mr.
 Boyd himself she wrote at about the same
 time with her usual invincible good humor
 and sweet independence: ‘With regard to the
 ‘House of Clouds,’ I disagree both with you
 and Miss Mitford, thinking it, comparatively
 with my other poems, neither so bad nor so
 good as you two account it.’ And, in this in-
 stance at least, her own judgment was certainly
 sound.

I

I WOULD build a cloudy House
 For my thoughts to live in,
 When for earth too fancy-loose,
 And too low for heaven:
 Hush! I talk my dream aloud,
 I build it bright to see, —

I build it on the moonlit cloud
To which I looked with *thee*.

II

Cloud-walls of the morning's gray,
Faced with amber column,
Crowned with crimson cupola
From a sunset solemn:
May-mists, for the casements, fetch,
Pale and glimmering,
With a sunbeam hid in each
And a smell of spring.

III

Build the entrance high and proud,
Darkening and then brightening,
Of a riven thunder-cloud,
Veined by the lightning:
Use one with an iris-stain
For the door so thin,
Turning to a sound like rain
As I enter in.

IV

Build a spacious hall thereby
Boldly, never fearing;
Use the blue place of the sky
Which the wind is clearing:
Branched with corridors sublime,
Flecked with winding stairs,
Such as children wish to climb
Following their own prayers.

V

In the mutest of the house
I will have my chamber;
Silence at the door shall use
Evening's light of amber,
Solemnizing every mood,
Softening in degree,
Turning sadness into good
As I turn the key.

VI

Be my chamber tapestried
With the showers of summer,
Close, but soundless, glorified
When the sunbeams come here —
Wandering harpers, harping on
Waters stringed for such,
Drawing color, for a tune,
With a vibrant touch.

VII

Bring a shadow green and still
From the chestnut-forest,

Bring a purple from the hill,
When the heat is sorest;
Spread them out from wall to wall,
Carpet-wove around,
Whereupon the foot shall fall
In light instead of sound.

VIII

Bring fantastic cloudlets home
From the noontide zenith,
Ranged for sculptures round the room,
Named as Fancy weeneth;
Some be Junos, without eyes,
Naiads, without sources,
Some be birds of paradise,
Some, Olympian horses.

IX

Bring the dews the birds shake off
Waking in the hedges, —
Those too perfumed, for a proof,
From the lilies' edges:
From our England's field and moor,
Bring them calm and white in,
Whence to form a mirror pure
For Love's self-delighting.

X

Bring a gray cloud from the east
Where the lark is singing,
(Something of the song at least
Unlost in the bringing):
That shall be a morning-chair,
Poet-dream may sit in
When it leans out on the air,
Unrhymed and unwritten.

XI

Bring the red cloud from the sun,
While he sinketh catch it;
That shall be a couch, — with one
Sidelong star to watch it, —
Fit for poet's finest thought
At the curfew-sounding;
Things unseen being nearer brought
Than the seen, around him.

XII

Poet's thought, — not poet's sigh.
'Las, they come together!
Cloudy walls divide and fly
As in April weather.
Cupola and column proud,
Structure bright to see,

Gone ! except that moonlit cloud
To which I looked with *thee*.

XIII

Let them ! Wipe such visionings
From the fancy's cartel:
Love secures some fairer things,
Dowered with his immortal.
The sun may darken, heaven be bowed,
But still unchanged shall be, —
Here, in my soul, — that moonlit cloud
To which I looked with *THEE* !

CATARINA TO CAMOENS

(DYING IN HIS ABSENCE ABROAD, AND
REFERRING TO THE POEM IN WHICH
HE RECORDED THE SWEETNESS OF
HER EYES)

I

ON the door you will not enter,
I have gazed too long: adieu !
Hope withdraws her peradventure;
Death is near me, — and not *you*.
Come, O lover,
Close and cover
These poor eyes, you called, I ween,
'Sweetest eyes were ever seen !'

II

When I heard you sing that burden
In my vernal days and bowers,
Other praises disregarding,
I but hearkened that of yours —
Only saying
In heart-playing,
Blessed eyes mine eyes have been,
If the sweetest his have seen !'

III

But all changes. At this vesper,
Cold the sun shines down the door.
If you stood there, would you whisper
'Love, I love you,' as before, —
Death pervading
Now, and shading
Eyes you sang of, that yestreen,
As the sweetest ever seen ?

IV

Yes. I think, were you beside them,
Near the bed I die upon,

Though their beauty you denied them,
As you stood there, looking down,
You would truly
Call them duly,
For the love's sake found therein,
'Sweetest eyes were ever seen.'

V

And if *you* looked down upon them,
And if *they* looked up to *you*,
All the light which has forgone them
Would be gathered back anew:
They would truly
Be as duly
Love-transformed to beauty's sheen,
'Sweetest eyes were ever seen.'

VI

But, ah me ! you only see me,
In your thoughts of loving man,
Smiling soft perhaps and dreamy
Through the wavings of my fan;
And unweeting
Go repeating,
In your reverie serene,
'Sweetest eyes were ever seen —'

VII

While my spirit leans and reaches
From my body still and pale,
Fain to hear what tender speech is
In your love to help my bale.
O my poet,
Come and show it !
Come, latest love, to glean
'Sweetest eyes were ever seen.'

VIII

O my poet, O my prophet,
When you praised their sweetness so,
Did you think, in singing of it,
That it might be near to go ?
Had you fancies
From their glances,
That the grave would quickly screen
'Sweetest eyes were ever seen' ?

IX

No reply. The fountain's warble
In the courtyard sounds alone.
As the water to the marble
So my heart falls with a moan
From love-sighing
To this dying.

Death forerunneth Love to win
 'Sweetest eyes were ever seen.'

X

Will you come? When I'm departed
 Where all sweetnesses are hid,
 Where thy voice, my tender-hearted,
 Will not lift up either lid.
 Cry, O lover,
 Love is over!
 Cry, beneath the cypress green,
 'Sweetest eyes were ever seen!'

XI

When the angelus is ringing,
 Near the convent will you walk,
 And recall the choral singing
 Which brought angels down our talk?
 Spirit-shriven
 I viewed Heaven,
 Till you smiled — 'Is earth unclean,
 Sweetest eyes were ever seen?'

XII

When beneath the palace-lattice
 You ride slow as you have done,
 And you see a face there that is
 Not the old familiar one, —
 Will you oftly
 Murmur softly,
 'Here ye watched me morn and e'en,
 Sweetest eyes were ever seen!'

XIII

When the palace-ladies, sitting
 Round your gittern, shall have said,
 'Poet, sing those verses written
 For the lady who is dead,'
 Will you tremble
 Yet dissemble, —
 Or sing hoarse, with tears between,
 'Sweetest eyes were ever seen?'

XIV

'Sweetest eyes!' how sweet in flowings
 The repeated cadence is!
 Though you sang a hundred poems,
 Still the best one would be this.
 I can hear it
 'Twixt my spirit
 And the earth-noise intervene —
 'Sweetest eyes were ever seen!'

XV

But the priest waits for the praying,
 And the choir are on their knees,

And the soul must pass away in
 Strains more solemn-high than these.

Miserere

For the weary!
 Oh, no longer for Catrine
 'Sweetest eyes were ever seen!'

XVI

Keep my riband, take and keep it,
 (I have loosed it from my hair)
 Feeling, while you overweep it,
 Not alone in your despair,
 Since with saintly
 Watch unfaintly
 Out of heaven shall o'er you lean
 'Sweetest eyes were ever seen.'

XVII

But — but *now* — yet unremoved
 Up to heaven, they glisten fast;
 You may cast away, Belovèd,
 In your future all my past:
 Such old phrases
 May be praises
 For some fairer bosom-queen —
 'Sweetest eyes were ever seen!'

XVIII

Eyes of mine, what are ye doing?
 Faithless, faithless, — praised amiss
 If a tear be of your showing,
 Dropt for any hope of HIS!
 Death has boldness
 Besides coldness,
 If unworthy tears demean
 'Sweetest eyes were ever seen.'

XIX

I will look out to his future;
 I will bless it till it shine.
 Should he ever be a suitor
 Unto sweeter eyes than mine,
 Sunshine gild them,
 Angels shield them,
 Whatsoever eyes terrene
 Be the sweetest HIS have seen!

A PORTRAIT

'One name is Elizabeth.' — *Ben Jonson.*

I WILL paint her as I see her.
 Ten times have the lilies blown
 Since she looked upon the sun.

And her face is lily-clear,
Lily-shaped, and dropped in duty
To the law of its own beauty.

Oval cheeks encolored faintly,
Which a trail of golden hair
Keeps from fading off to air:

And a forehead fair and saintly,
Which two blue eyes undershine,
Like meek prayers before a shrine.

Face and figure of a child, —
Though too calm, you think, and tender,
For the childhood you would lend her.

Yet child-simple, undefiled,
Frank, obedient, waiting still
On the turnings of your will.

Moving light, as all young things,
As young birds, or early wheat
When the wind blows over it.

Only, free from flutterings
Of loud mirth that scorneth measure —
Taking love for her chief pleasure.

Choosing pleasures, for the rest,
Which come softly — just as she,
When she nestles at your knee.

Quiet talk she liketh best,
In a bower of gentle looks, —
Watering flowers, or reading books.

And her voice, it murmurs lowly,
As a silver stream may run,
Which yet feels (you feel) the sun.

And her smile it seems half holy,
As if drawn from thoughts more far
Than our common jestings are.

And if any poet knew her,
He would sing of her with falls
Used in lovely madrigals.

And if any painter drew her,
He would paint her unaware
With a halo round the hair.

And if reader read the poem,
He would whisper 'You have done a
Consecrated little Una.'

And a dreamer (did you show him
That same picture) would exclaim,
'T is my angel, with a name !'

And a stranger, when he sees her
In the street even, smileth stilly,
Just as you would at a lily.

And all voices that address her,
Softened, sleecken every word,
As if speaking to a bird.

And all fancies yearn to cover
The hard earth, whereon she passes,
With the thymy-scented grasses.

And all hearts do pray 'God love her !'
Ay and always, in good sooth,
We may all be sure HE DOTH.

SLEEPING AND WATCHING

I

SLEEP on, baby, on the floor,
Tired of all the playing:
Sleep with smile the sweeter for
That, you dropped away in.
On your curls' full roundness stand
Golden lights serenely;
One cheek, pushed out by the hand,
Folds the dimple inly:
Little head and little foot
Heavy laid for pleasure,
Underneath the lids half shut
Slants the shining azure.
Open-soul in noonday sun,
So you lie and slumber:
Nothing evil having done,
Nothing can encumber.

II

I, who cannot sleep as well,
Shall I sigh to view you ?
Or sigh further to foretell
All that may undo you ?
Nay, keep smiling, little child,
Ere the sorrow neareth:
I will smile too ! patience mild
Pleasure's token weareth.
Nay, keep sleeping before loss:
I shall sleep though losing !
As by cradle, so by cross,
Sure is the reposing.

III

And God knows who sees us twain,
 Child at childish leisure,
 I am near as tired of pain
 As you seem of pleasure.
 Very soon too, by his grace
 Gently wrapt around me,
 Shall I show as calm a face,
 Shall I sleep as soundly.
 Differing in this, that you
 Clasp your playthings, sleeping,
 While my hand shall drop the few
 Given to my keeping:
 Differing in this, that I
 Sleeping shall be colder,
 And in waking presently,
 Brighter to beholder:
 Differing in this beside —
 (Sleeper, have you heard me ?
 Do you move, and open wide
 Eyes of wonder toward me ?) —
 That while you I thus recall
 From your sleep, I solely,
 Me from mine an angel shall,
 With reveille holy.

WINE OF CYPRUS

GIVEN TO ME BY H. S. BOYD, AUTHOR
 OF 'SELECT PASSAGES FROM THE
 GREEK FATHERS,' ETC.

TO WHOM THESE STANZAS ARE ADDRESSED

I

If old Bacchus were the speaker,
 He would tell you with a sigh
 Of the Cyprus in this beaker
 I am sipping like a fly, —
 Like a fly or gnat on Ida
 At the hour of goblet-pledge,
 By queen Juno brushed aside, a
 Full white arm-sweep, from the edge.

II

Sooth, the drinking should be ampler
 When the drink is so divine,
 And some deep-mouthed Greek exemplar
 Would become your Cyprus wine:
 Cyclops' mouth might plunge aright in,
 While his one eye overleered,
 Nor too large were mouth of Titan
 Drinking rivers down his beard.

III

Pan might dip his head so deep in,
 That his ears alone pricked out,
 Fauns around him pressing, leaping,
 Each one pointing to his throat:
 While the Naiads, like Bacchantes,
 Wild, with urns thrown out to waste,
 Cry, 'O earth, that thou wouldst grant us
 Springs to keep, of such a taste !'

IV

But for me, I am not worthy
 After gods and Greeks to drink,
 And my lips are pale and earthy
 To go bathing from this brink:
 Since you heard them speak the last time,
 They have faded from their blooms,
 And the laughter of my pastime
 Has learnt silence at the tombs.

V

Ah, my friend ! the antique drinkers
 Crowned the cup and crowned the brow.
 Can I answer the old thinkers
 In the forms they thought of, now ?
 Who will fetch from garden-closes
 Some new garlands while I speak,
 That the forehead, crowned with roses,
 May strike scarlet down the cheek ?

VI

Do not mock me ! with my mortal
 Suits no wreath again, indeed ;
 I am sad-voiced as the turtle
 Which Anacreon used to feed:
 Yet as that same bird demurely
 Wet her beak in cup of his,
 So, without a garland, surely
 I may touch the brim of this.

VII

Go, — let others praise the Chian !
 This is soft as Muses' string,
 This is tawny as Rhea's lion,
 This is rapid as his spring,
 Bright as Paphia's eyes e'er met us,
 Light as ever trod her feet ;
 And the brown bees of Hymettus
 Make their honey not so sweet.

VIII

Very copious are my praises,
 Though I sip it like a fly !
 Ah — but, sipping, — times and places

Change before me suddenly:
As Ulysses' old libation
Drew the ghosts from every part,
So your Cyprus wine, dear Grecian,
Stirs the Hades of my heart.

IX

And I think of those long mornings
Which my thought goes far to seek,
When, betwixt the folio's turnings,
Solemn flowed the rhythmic Greek:
Past the pane the mountain spreading,
Swept the sheep's-bell's tinkling noise,
While a girlish voice was reading,
Somewhat low for *ai's* and *oi's*.

X

Then, what golden hours were for us !
While we sat together there,
How the white vests of the chorus
Seemed to wave up a live air !
How the cothurns trod majestic
Down the deep iambic lines,
And the rolling anapaestic
Curled like vapor over shrines !

XI

Oh, our Æschylus, the thunderous,
How he drove the bolted breath
Through the cloud, to wedge it ponderous
In the gnarlèd oak beneath !
Oh, our Sophocles, the royal,
Who was born to monarch's place,
And who made the whole world loyal
Less by kingly power than grace !

XII

Our Euripides, the human,
With his droppings of warm tears,
And his touches of things common
Till they rose to touch the spheres !
Our Theocritus, our Bion,
And our Pindar's shining goals ! —
These were cup-bearers undying
Of the wine that 's meant for souls.

XIII

And my Plato, the divine one,
If men know the gods aright
By their motions as they shine on
With a glorious trail of light !
And your noble Christian bishops,
Who mouthed grandly the last Greek !
Though the sponges on their hyssops
Were distent with wine — too weak.

XIV

Yet, your Chrysostom, you praised him
As a liberal mouth of gold;
And your Basil, you upraised him
To the height of speakers old:
And we both praised Heliodorus
For his secret of pure lies, —
Who forged first his linked stories
In the heat of ladies' eyes.

XV

And we both praised your Synesius
For the fire shot up his odes,
Though the Church was scarce propitious
As he whistled dogs and gods.
And we both praised Nazianzen
For the fervid heart and speech:
Only I eschewed his glancing
At the lyre hung out of reach.

XVI

Do you mind that deed of Atè
Which you bound me to so fast, —
Reading 'De Virginitate,'
From the first line to the last ?
How I said at ending, solemn
As I turned and looked at you,
That Saint Simeon on the column
Had had somewhat less to do ?

XVII

For we sometimes gently wrangled,
Very gently, be it said,
Since our thoughts were disentangled
By no breaking of the thread !
And I charged you with extortions
On the nobler fames of old —
Ay, and sometimes thought your Porsons
Stained the purple they would fold.

XVIII

For the rest — a mystic moaning
Kept Cassandra at the gate,
With wild eyes the vision shone in,
And wide nostrils scenting fate.
And Prometheus, bound in passion
By brute Force to the blind stone,
Showed us looks of invocation
Turned to ocean and the sun.

XIX

And Medea we saw burning
At her nature's planted stake:
And proud Œdipus fate-scorning

While the cloud came on to break —
 While the cloud came on slow, slower,
 Till he stood discrowned, resigned ! —
 But the reader's voice dropped lower
 When the poet called him BLIND.

XX

Ah, my gossip ! you were older,
 And more learned, and a man !
 Yet that shadow, the enfolder
 Of your quiet eyelids, ran
 Both our spirits to one level;
 And I turned from hill and lea
 And the summer-sun's green revel,
 To your eyes that could not see.

XXI

Now Christ bless you with the one light
 Which goes shining night and day !
 May the flowers which grow in sunlight
 Shed their fragrance in your way !
 Is it not right to remember
 All your kindness, friend of mine,
 When we two sat in the chamber,
 And the poets poured us wine ?

XXII

So, to come back to the drinking
 Of this Cyprus, — it is well,
 But those memories, to my thinking,
 Make a better ænomet;
 And whoever be the speaker,
 None can murmur with a sigh
 That, in drinking from *that* beaker,
 I am sipping like a fly.

THE ROMANCE OF THE SWAN'S NEST

'So the dreams depart,
 So the fading phantoms flee,
 And the sharp reality
 Now must act its part.'
Westwood's Beads from a Rosary.

I

LITTLE Ellie sits alone
 'Mid the beeches of a meadow,
 By a stream-side on the grass,
 And the trees are showering down
 Doubles of their leaves in shadow
 On her shining hair and face.

II

She has thrown her bonnet by,
 And her feet she has been dipping

In the shallow water's flow:
 Now she holds them nakedly
 In her hands, all sleek and dripping,
 While she rocketh to and fro.

III

Little Ellie sits alone,
 And the smile she softly uses
 Fills the silence like a speech,
 While she thinks what shall be done,
 And the sweetest pleasure chooses
 For her future within reach.

IV

Little Ellie in her smile
 Chooses — 'I will have a lover
 Riding on a steed of steeds:
 He shall love me without guile,
 And to *him* I will discover
 The swan's nest among the reeds.

V

'And the steed shall be red-roan,
 And the lover shall be noble,
 With an eye that takes the breath:
 And the lute he plays upon
 Shall strike ladies into trouble,
 As his sword strikes men to death.

VI

'And the steed it shall be shod
 All in silver, housed in azure,
 And the mane shall swim the wind;
 And the hoofs along the sod
 Shall flash onward and keep measure,
 Till the shepherds look behind.

VII

'But my lover will not prize
 All the glory that he rides in,
 When he gazes in my face:
 He will say, "O Love, thine eyes
 Build the shrine my soul abides in,
 And I kneel here for thy grace !"

VIII

'Then, ay, then he shall kneel low,
 With the red-roan steed anear him
 Which shall seem to understand,
 Till I answer, "Rise and go !
 For the world must love and fear him
 Whom I gift with heart and hand."

IX

'Then he will arise so pale,
 I shall feel my own lips tremble
 With a *yes* I must not say,
 Nathless maiden-brave, "Farewell,"
 I will utter, and dissemble —
 "Light to-morrow with to-day !"

X

'Then he'll ride among the hills
 To the wide world past the river,
 There to put away all wrong;
 To make straight distorted wills,
 And to empty the broad quiver
 Which the wicked bear along.

XI

'Three times shall a young foot-page
 Swim the stream and climb the moun-
 tain
 And kneel down beside my feet —
 "Lo, my master sends this gage,
 Lady, for thy pity's counting !
 What wilt thou exchange for it ?"

XII

'And the first time I will send
 A white rosebud for a guerdon,
 And the second time, a glove;
 But the third time — I may bend
 From my pride, and answer — "Pardon
 If he comes to take my love."

XIII

'Then the young foot-page will run,
 Then my lover will ride faster,
 Till he kneeleth at my knee:
 "I am a duke's eldest son,
 Thousand serfs do call me master,
 But, O Love, I love but *thee* !"

XIV

'He will kiss me on the mouth
 Then, and lead me as a lover
 Through the crowds that praise his
 deeds;
 And, when soul-tied by one troth,
 Unto *him* I will discover
 That swan's nest among the reeds.'

XV

Little Ellie, with her smile
 Not yet ended, rose up gaily,
 Tied the bonnet, donned the shoe,

And went homeward, round a mile,
 Just to see, as she did daily,
 What more eggs were with the two.

XVI

Pushing through the elm-tree copse,
 Winding up the stream, light-hearted,
 Where the osier pathway leads,
 Past the boughs she stoops — and stops.
 Lo, the wild swan had deserted,
 And a rat had gnawed the reeds !

XVII

Ellie went home sad and slow.
 If she found the lover ever,
 With his red-roan steed of steeds,
 Sooth I know not; but I know
 She could never show him — never,
 That swan's nest among the reeds !

LESSONS FROM THE GORSE

'To win the secret of a weed's plain heart.'
 — *Lowell.*

First printed in the *Athenæum*, October 23,
 1841.

I

MOUNTAIN gorses, ever-golden,
 Cankered not the whole year long !
 Do ye teach us to be strong,
 Howsoever pricked and holden
 Like your thorny blooms, and so
 Trodden on by rain and snow,
 Up the hill-side of this life, as bleak as
 where ye grow ?

II

Mountain blossoms, shining blossoms,
 Do ye teach us to be glad
 When no summer can be had,
 Blooming in our inward bosoms ?
 Ye, whom God preserveth still,
 Set as lights upon a hill,
 Tokens to the wintry earth that Beauty
 liveth still !

III

Mountain gorses, do ye teach us
 From that academic chair
 Canopied with azure air,
 That the wisest word man reaches
 Is the humblest he can speak ?

Ye, who live on mountain peak,
Yet live low along the ground, beside the
grasses meek !

IV

Mountain gorses, since Linnæus
Knelt beside you on the sod,
For your beauty thanking God, —
For your teaching, ye should see us
Bowing in prostration new !
Whence arisen, — if one or two
Drops be on our cheeks — O world, they
are not tears but dew.

THE DEAD PAN

When publishing this poem, the author accompanied it with the following note : —

‘Excited by Schiller’s *Götter Griechenlands*, and partly founded on a well-known tradition mentioned in a treatise of Plutarch (*De Oraculorum Defectu*), according to which, at the hour of the Saviour’s agony, a cry of “Great Pan is dead !” swept across the waves in the hearing of certain mariners, — and the oracles ceased.

‘It is in all veneration to the memory of the deathless Schiller that I oppose a doctrine still more dishonoring to poetry than to Christianity.

‘As Mr. Kenyon’s graceful and harmonious paraphrase of the German poem was the first occasion of the turning of my thoughts in this direction, I take advantage of the pretence to indulge my feelings (which overflow on other grounds) by inscribing my lyric to that dear friend and relative, with the earnestness of appreciating esteem as well as of affectionate gratitude.’

Many passages in Mrs. Browning’s correspondence (see *Notes and Illustrations* at the end of this volume) testify to the importance which she herself attached to ‘The Dead Pan,’ — a poem which shows her at her best and at her worst, exhibiting in an equally striking manner her besetting faults of style and the virile strength and splendor of her imagination. It seems to have been as a distinct and solemn public profession of Christian faith triumphant over pagan fancy that she insisted on having it stand last in the collection of her poems published in 1844.

I

Gods of Hellas, gods of Hellas,
Can ye listen in your silence ?
Can your mystic voices tell us

Where ye hide ? In floating islands,
With a wind that evermore
Keeps you out of sight of shore ?
Pan, Pan is dead.

II

In what revels are ye sunk
In old Æthiopia ?
Have the Pygmies made you drunken,
Bathing in mandragora
Your divine pale lips that shiver
Like the lotus in the river ?
Pan, Pan is dead.

III

Do ye sit there still in slumber,
In gigantic Alpine rows ?
The black poppies out of number
Nodding, dripping from your brows
To the red lees of your wine,
And so kept alive and fine ?
Pan, Pan is dead.

IV

Or lie crushed your stagnant corses
Where the silver spheres roll on,
Stung to life by centric forces
Thrown like rays out from the sun ? —
While the smoke of your old altars
Is the shroud that round you welters ?
Great Pan is dead.

V

‘Gods of Hellas, gods of Hellas’
Said the old Hellenic tongue, —
Said the hero-oaths, as well as
Poets’ songs the sweetest sung:
Have ye grown deaf in a day ?
Can ye speak not yea or nay,
Since Pan is dead ?

VI

Do ye leave your rivers flowing
All alone, O Naiades,
While your drenchèd locks dry slow in
This cold feeble sun and breeze ?
Not a word the Naiads say,
Though the rivers run for aye;
For Pan is dead.

VII

From the gloaming of the oak-wood,
O ye Dryads, could ye flee ?
At the rushing thunderstroke, would
No sob tremble through the tree ?

Not a word the Dryads say,
Though the forests wave for aye;
For Pan is dead.

VIII

Have ye left the mountain places,
Oreads wild, for other tryst?
Shall we see no sudden faces
Strike a glory through the mist?
Not a sound the silence thrills
Of the everlasting hills:
Pan, Pan is dead.

IX

O twelve gods of Plato's vision,
Crowned to starry wanderings,
With your chariots in procession
And your silver clash of wings!
Very pale ye seem to rise,
Ghosts of Grecian deities,
Now Pan is dead!

X

Jove, that right hand is unloaded
Whence the thunder did prevail,
While in idiocy of godhead
Thou art staring the stars pale!
And thine eagle, blind and old,
Roughs his feathers in the cold.
Pan, Pan is dead.

XI

Where, O Juno, is the glory
Of thy regal look and tread?
Will they lay, for evermore, thee
On thy dim, strait, golden bed?
Will thy queendom all lie hid
Meekly under either lid?
Pan, Pan is dead.

XII

Ha, Apollo! floats his golden
Hair all mist-like where he stands,
While the Muses hang enfolding
Knee and foot with faint wild hands?
'Neath the clanging of thy bow,
Niobe looked lost as thou!
Pan, Pan is dead.

XIII

Shall the casque with its brown iron
Pallas' broad blue eyes eclipse,
And no hero take inspiring
From the god-Greek of her lips?
'Neath her olive dost thou sit,

Mars the mighty, cursing it?
Pan, Pan is dead.

XIV

Bacchus, Bacchus! on the panther
He swoons, bound with his own vines;
And his Mænads slowly saunter,
Head aside, among the pines,
While they murmur dreamingly
'Evohe! — ah — evohe! —
Ah, Pan is dead!

XV

Neptune lies beside the trident,
Dull and senseless as a stone;
And old Pluto deaf and silent
Is cast out into the sun:
Ceres smileth stern thereat,
'We *all* now are desolate —
Now Pan is dead.'

XVI

Aphrodite! dead and driven
As thy native foam thou art;
With the cestus long done heaving
On the white calm of thine heart!
Ai Adonis! at that shriek
Not a tear runs down her cheek —
Pan, Pan is dead.

XVII

And the Loves, we used to know from
One another, huddled lie,
Frore as taken in a snow-storm,
Close beside her tenderly;
As if each had weakly tried
Once to kiss her as he died.
Pan, Pan is dead.

XVIII

What, and Hermes? Time enthralleth
All thy cunning, Hermes, thus,
And the ivy blindly crawlth
Round thy brave caduceus?
Hast thou no new message for us,
Full of thunder and Jove-glories?
Nay, Pan is dead.

XIX

Crownèd Cybele's great turret
Rocks and crumbles on her head;
Roar the lions of her chariot
Toward the wilderness, unfed:
Scornful children are not mute, —
'Mother, mother, walk afoot,
Since Pan is dead!'

XX

In the fiery-hearted centre
Of the solemn universe,
Ancient Vesta, — who could enter
To consume thee with this curse?
Drop thy gray chin on thy knee,
O thou palsied Mystery!
For Pan is dead.

XXI

Gods, we vainly do adjure you, —
Ye return nor voice nor sign!
Not a votary could secure you
Even a grave for your Divine:
Not a grave, to show thereby
Here these gray old gods do lie.
Pan, Pan is dead.

XXII

Even that Greece who took your wages
Calls the obolus outworn;
And the hoarse, deep-throated ages
Laugh your godships unto scorn:
And the poets do disclaim you,
Or grow colder if they name you —
And Pan is dead.

XXIII

Gods bereaved, gods belated,
With your purples rent asunder!
Gods discrowned and desecrated,
Disinherited of thunder!
Now, the goats may climb and crop
The soft grass on Ida's top —
Now Pan is dead.

XXIV

Calm, of old, the bark went onward,
When a cry more loud than wind
Rose up, deepened, and swept sunward
From the pilèd Dark behind;
And the sun shrank and grew pale,
Breathed against by the great wail —
'Pan, Pan is dead.'

XXV

And the rowers from the benches
Fell, each shuddering on his face,
While departing Influences
Struck a cold back through the place;
And the shadow of the ship
Reeled along the passive deep —
'Pan, Pan is dead.'

XXVI

And that dismal cry rose slowly
And sank slowly through the air,
Full of spirit's melancholy
And eternity's despair!
And they heard the words it said —
PAN IS DEAD — GREAT PAN IS DEAD —
Pan, Pan is dead.

XXVII

'T was the hour when One in Sion
Hung for love's sake on a cross;
When his brow was chill with dying
And his soul was faint with loss;
When his priestly blood dropped down-
ward
And his kingly eyes looked throneward —
Then, Pan was dead.

XXVIII

By the love, He stood alone in,
His sole Godhead rose complete,
And the false gods fell down moaning
Each from off his golden seat;
All the false gods with a cry
Rendered up their deity —
Pan, Pan was dead.

XXIX

Wailing wide across the islands,
They rent, vest-like, their Divine;
And a darkness and a silence
Quenched the light of every shrine;
And Dodona's oak swang lonely
Henceforth, to the tempest only:
Pan, Pan was dead.

XXX

Pythia staggered, feeling o'er her
Her lost god's forsaking look;
Straight her eyeballs filmed with horror
And her crispy fillets shook
And her lips gasped, through their foam,
For a word that did not come.
Pan, Pan was dead.

XXXI

O ye vain false gods of Hellas,
Ye are silent evermore!
And I dash down this old chalice
Whence libations ran of yore.
See, the wine crawls in the dust
Wormlike — as your glories must,
Since Pan is dead.

XXXII

Get to dust, as common mortals,
By a common doom and track !
Let no Schiller from the portals
Of that Hades call you back,
Or instruct us to weep all
At your antique funeral.

Pan, Pan is dead.

XXXIII

By your beauty, which confesses
Some chief Beauty conquering you, —
By our grand heroic guesses
Through your falsehood at the True, —
We will weep *not* ! earth shall roll
Heir to each god's aureole —

And Pan is dead.

XXXIV

Earth outgrows the mythic fancies
Sung beside her in her youth,
And those debonair romances
Sound but dull beside the truth.
Phæbus' chariot-course is run:
Look up, poets, to the sun !

Pan, Pan is dead.

XXXV

Christ hath sent us down the angels;
And the whole earth and the skies
Are illumed by altar-candles
Lit for blessed mysteries;
And a Priest's hand through creation
Waveth calm and consecration:

And Pan is dead.

XXXVI

Truth is fair: should we forgo it ?
Can we sigh right for a wrong ?
God Himself is the best Poet,
And the Real is his song.
Sing his truth out fair and full,
And secure his beautiful !

Let Pan be dead !

XXXVII

Truth is large: our aspiration
Scarce embraces half we be.
Shame, to stand in his creation
And doubt truth's sufficiency ! —
To think God's song unexcelling
The poor tales of our own telling —

When Pan is dead !

XXXVIII

What is true and just and honest,
What is lovely, what is pure,
All of praise that hath admonisht,
All of virtue, — shall endure;
These are themes for poets' uses,
Stirring nobler than the Muses,

Ere Pan was dead.

XXXIX

O brave poets, keep back nothing,
Nor mix falsehood with the whole !
Look up Godward; speak the truth in
Worthy song from earnest soul:
Hold, in high poetic duty,
Truest Truth the fairest Beauty !

Pan, Pan is dead.

POEMS OF 1850

In 1850, four years after Miss Barrett's marriage to Robert Browning, a new edition of her poems appeared under the title of *Poems by Elizabeth Barrett Browning in two volumes, London, Chapman and Hall*. This edition retained the dedication to Mr. Moulton-Barrett of the edition of 1844, and contained, beside the contents of the previous volumes, translations of the *Prometheus Bound* of Æschylus and the *Lament for Adonis* of Bion, — which will be found with other translations at the end of this volume, — and the poems which follow.

The first of these poems, 'The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point,' was first printed in 1848 in *The Liberty Bell*, the annual publication issued for many years and sold at the National Anti-Slavery Bazaar held in Boston. 'The Runaway Slave' was reprinted the following year as a pamphlet for the author's own use. She says of it in a letter from Pisa to Mr. Boyd, dated December 21, 1846, 'I am just sending off an anti-slavery poem for America, too ferocious, perhaps, for the Americans to publish: but they asked for a poem, and shall have it.'

THE RUNAWAY SLAVE AT PILGRIM'S POINT

I

I STAND on the mark beside the shore
Of the first white pilgrim's bended knee,
Where exile turned to ancestor,
And God was thanked for liberty.
I have run through the night, my skin is as
dark,
I bend my knee down on this mark:
I look on the sky and the sea.

II

O pilgrim-souls, I speak to you !
I see you come proud and slow
From the land of the spirits pale as dew
And round me and round me ye go.
O pilgrims, I have gasped and run
All night long from the whips of one
Who in your names works sin and woe !

III

And thus I thought that I would come
And kneel here where ye knelt before,
And feel your souls around me hum
In undertone to the ocean's roar;
And lift my black face, my black hand,
Here, in your names, to curse this land
Ye blessed in freedom's, evermore.

IV

I am black, I am black,
And yet God made me, they say:
But if He did so, smiling back
He must have cast his work away
Under the feet of his white creatures,
With a look of scorn, that the dusky fea-
tures
Might be trodden again to clay.

V

And yet He has made dark things
To be glad and merry as light:
There's a little dark bird sits and sings,
There's a dark stream ripples out of
sight,
And the dark frogs chant in the safe
morass,
And the sweetest stars are made to pass
O'er the face of the darkest night.

VI

But *we* who are dark, we are dark !
Ah God, we have no stars !

About our souls in care and cark
Our blackness shuts like prison-bars:
The poor souls crouch so far behind
That never a comfort can they find
By reaching through the prison-bars.

VII

Indeed we live beneath the sky,
That great smooth Hand of God stretched
out
On all his children fatherly,
To save them from the dread and doubt
Which would be if, from this low place,
All opened straight up to his face
Into the grand-eternity.

VIII

And still God's sunshine and his frost,
They make us hot, they make us cold,
As if we were not black and lost;
And the beasts and birds, in wood and
fold,
Do fear and take us for very men:
Could the whip-poor-will or the cat of the
glen
Look into my eyes and be bold ?

IX

I am black, I am black !
But, once, I laughed in girlish glee,
For one of my color stood in the track
Where the drivers drove, and looked at
me,
And tender and full was the look he gave —
Could a slave look *so* at another slave ? —
I look at the sky and the sea.

X

And from that hour our spirits grew
As free as if unsold, unbought:
Oh, strong enough, since we were two,
To conquer the world, we thought.
The drivers drove us day by day;
We did not mind, we went one way,
And no better a freedom sought.

XI

In the sunny ground between the canes,
He said 'I love you' as he passed;
When the shingle-roof rang sharp with the
rains,
I heard how he vowed it fast:
While others shook he smiled in the hut,
As he carved me a bowl of the cocoa-nut
Through the roar of the hurricanes.

XII

I sang his name instead of a song,
 Over and over I sang his name,
 Upward and downward I drew it along
 My various notes, — the same, the
 same !
 I sang it low, that the slave-girls near
 Might never guess, from aught they could
 hear,
 It was only a name — a name.

XIII

I look on the sky and the sea.
 We were two to love and two to pray:
 Yes, two, O God, who cried to Thee,
 Though nothing didst Thou say !
 Coldly Thou sat'st behind the sun:
 And now I cry who am but one,
 Thou wilt not speak to-day.

XIV

We were black, we were black,
 We had no claim to love and bliss,
 What marvel if each went to wrack ?
 They wrung my cold hands out of his,
 They dragged him — where ? I crawled
 to touch
 His blood's mark in the dust . . . not
 much,
 Ye pilgrim-souls, though plain as *this* !

XV

Wrong, followed by a deeper wrong !
 Mere grief's too good for such as I:
 So the white men brought the shame ere
 long
 To strangle the sob of my agony.
 They would not leave me for my dull
 Wet eyes ! — it was too merciful
 To let me weep pure tears and die.

XVI

I am black, I am black !
 I wore a child upon my breast,
 An amulet that hung too slack,
 And, in my unrest, could not rest:
 Thus we went moaning, child and mother,
 One to another, one to another,
 Until all ended for the best.

XVII

For hark ! I will tell you low, low,
 I am black, you see, —
 And the babe who lay on my bosom so,
 Was far too white, too white for me;

As white as the ladies who scorned to pray
 Beside me at church but yesterday,
 Though my tears had washed a place for
 my knee.

XVIII

My own, own child ! I could not bear
 To look in his face, it was so white;
 I covered him up with a kerchief there,
 I covered his face in close and tight:
 And he moaned and struggled, as well
 might be,
 For the white child wanted his liberty —
 Ha, ha ! he wanted the master-right.

XIX

He moaned and beat with his head and
 feet,
 His little feet that never grew;
 He struck them out, as it was meet,
 Against my heart to break it through:
 I might have sung and made him mild,
 But I dared not sing to the white-faced
 child
 The only song I knew.

XX

I pulled the kerchief very close:
 He could not see the sun, I swear,
 More, then, alive, than now he does
 From between the roots of the mango
 . . . where ?
 I know where. Close ! A child and mo-
 ther
 Do wrong to look at one another
 When one is black and one is fair.

XXI

Why, in that single glance I had
 Of my child's face, . . . I tell you all,
 I saw a look that made me mad !
 The *master's* look, that used to fall
 On my soul like his lash . . . or worse !
 And so, to save it from my curse,
 I twisted it round in my shawl.

XXII

And he moaned and trembled from foot to
 head,
 He shivered from head to foot;
 Till after a time, he lay instead
 Too suddenly still and mute.
 I felt, beside, a stiffening cold:
 I dared to lift up just a fold,
 As in lifting a leaf of the mango-fruit.

XXIII

But *my* fruit . . . ha, ha !— there, had
been

(I laugh to think on't at this hour !)
Your fine white angels (who have seen
Nearest the secret of God's power)
And plucked my fruit to make them wine,
And sucked the soul of that child of mine
As the humming-bird sucks the soul of
the flower.

XXIV

Ha, ha, the trick of the angels white !
They freed the white child's spirit so.
I said not a word, but day and night
I carried the body to and fro,
And it lay on my heart like a stone, as
chill.
— The sun may shine out as much as he
will:
I am cold, though it happened a month
ago.

XXV

From the white man's house, and the
black man's hut,
I carried the little body on;
The forest's arms did round us shut,
And silence through the trees did run:
They asked no question as I went,
They stood too high for astonishment,
They could see God sit on his throne.

XXVI

My little body, kerchiefed fast,
I bore it on through the forest, on;
And when I felt it was tired at last,
I scooped a hole beneath the moon:
Through the forest-tops the angels far,
With a white sharp finger from every star,
Did point and mock at what was done.

XXVII

Yet when it was all done aright, —
Earth, 'twixt me and my baby,
strewed, —
All, changed to black earth, — nothing
white, —
A dark child in the dark ! — ensued
Some comfort, and my heart grew young;
I sate down smiling there and sung
The song I learnt in my maidenhood.

XXVIII

And thus we two were reconciled,
The white child and black mother, thus;

For as I sang it soft and wild,
The same song, more melodious,
Rose from the grave whereon I sate:
It was the dead child singing that,
To join the souls of both of us.

XXIX

I look on the sea and the sky.
Where the pilgrims' ships first anchored
lay
The free sun rideth gloriously,
But the pilgrim-ghosts have slid away
Through the earliest streaks of the morn :
My face is black, but it glares with a scorn
Which they dare not meet by day.

XXX

Ha ! — in their stead, their hunter sons !
Ha, ha ! they are on me — they hunt in
a ring !
Keep off ! I brave you all at once,
I throw off your eyes like snakes that
sting !
You have killed the black eagle at nest, I
think:
Did you ever stand still in your triumph,
and shrink
From the stroke of her wounded wing ?

XXXI

(Man, drop that stone you dared to
lift ! —)
I wish you who stand there five abreast,
Each, for his own wife's joy and gift,
A little corpse as safely at rest
As mine in the mangoes ! Yes, but *she*
May keep live babies on her knee,
And sing the song she likes the best.

XXXII

I am not mad: I am black.
I see you staring in my face —
I know you staring, shrinking back,
Ye are born of the Washington-race,
And this land is the free America,
And this mark on my wrist — (I prove what
I say)
Ropes tied me up here to the flogging-
place.

XXXIII

You think I shrieked then ? Not a sound !
I hung, as a gourd hangs in the sun;
I only cursed them all around
As softly as I might have done

My very own child: from these sands
Up to the mountains, lift your hands,
O slaves, and end what I begun !

XXXIV

Whips, curses; these must answer those !
For in this UNION you have set
Two kinds of men in adverse rows,
Each loathing each; and all forget
The seven wounds in Christ's body fair,
While HE sees gaping everywhere
Our countless wounds that pay no debt.

XXXV

Our wounds are different. Your white
men
Are, after all, not gods indeed,
Nor able to make Christs again
Do good with bleeding. *We* who bleed
(Stand off !) we help not in our loss !
We are too heavy for our cross,
And fall and crush you and your seed.

XXXVI

I fall, I swoon ! I look at the sky.
The clouds are breaking on my brain;
I am floated along, as if I should die
Of liberty's exquisite pain.
In the name of the white child waiting for
me
In the death-dark where we may kiss and
agree,
White men, I leave you all curse-free
In my broken heart's disdain !

HECTOR IN THE GARDEN

First printed in *Blackwood's Magazine* for
October, 1846. The colossal design in flower-
ing annuals here described was one of the adorn-
ments of the garden at Hope End.

I

NINE years old ! The first of any
Seem the happiest years that come:
Yet when *I* was nine, I said
No such word ! I thought instead
That the Greeks had used as many
In besieging Ilium.

II

Nine green years had scarcely brought me
To my childhood's haunted spring;
I had life, like flowers and bees,

In betwixt the country trees,
And the sun the pleasure taught me
Which he teacheth every thing.

III

If the rain fell, there was sorrow:
Little head leant on the pane,
Little finger drawing down it
Then the rain hummed dimly off,
And the 'Rain, rain, come to-morrow,'
Said for charm against the rain.

IV

Such a charm was right Canidian,
Though you meet it with a jeer !
If I said it long enough,
Then the rain hummed dimly off,
And the thrush with his pure Lydian
Was left only to the ear;

V

And the sun and I together
Went a-rushing out of doors:
We our tender spirits drew
Over hill and dale in view,
Glimmering hither, glimmering thither
In the footsteps of the showers.

VI

Underneath the chestnuts dripping,
Through the grasses wet and fair,
Straight I sought my garden-ground
With the laurel on the mound,
And the pear-tree oversweeping
A side-shadow of green air.

VII

In the garden lay supinely
A huge giant wrought of spade !
Arms and legs were stretched at length
In a passive giant strength, —
The fine meadow turf, cut finely,
Round them laid and interlaid.

VIII

Call him Hector, son of Priam !
Such his title and degree.
With my rake I smoothed his brow,
Both his cheeks I weeded through,
But a rhymer such as I am,
Scarce can sing his dignity.

IX

Eyes of gentianellas azure,
Staring, winking at the skies:

Nose of gillyflowers and box;
Scented grasses put for locks,
Which a little breeze at pleasure
Set a-waving round his eyes:

X

Brazen helm of daffodillies,
With a glitter toward the light;
Purple violets for the mouth,
Breathing perfumes west and south;
And a sword of flashing lilies,
Holden ready for the fight:

XI

And a breastplate made of daisies,
Closely fitting, leaf on leaf;
Periwinkles interlaced
Drawn for belt about the waist;
While the brown bees, humming praises,
Shot their arrows round the chief.

XII

And who knows (I sometimes wondered)
If the disembodied soul
Of old Hector, once of Troy,
Might not take a dreary joy
Here to enter — if it thundered,
Rolling up the thunder-roll?

XIII

Rolling this way from Troy-ruin,
In this body rude and rife
Just to enter, and take rest
'Neath the daisies of the breast —
They, with tender roots, renewing
His heroic heart to life?

XIV

Who could know? I sometimes started
At a motion or a sound!
Did his mouth speak — naming Troy
With an *ὀρορορορο*?
Did the pulse of the Strong-hearted
Make the daisies tremble round?

XV

It was hard to answer, often:
But the birds sang in the tree,
But the little birds sang bold
In the pear-tree green and old,
And my terror seemed to soften
Through the courage of their glee.

XVI

Oh, the birds, the tree, the ruddy
And white blossoms sleek with rain!
Oh, my garden rich with pansies!
Oh, my childhood's bright romances!
All revive, like Hector's body,
And I see them stir again.

XVII

And despite life's changes, chances,
And despite the deathbell's toll,
They press on me in full seeming
Help, some angel! stay this dream-
ing!
As the birds sang in the branches,
Sing God's patience through my soul!

XVIII

That no dreamer, no neglecter
Of the present's work unsped,
I may wake up and be doing,
Life's heroic ends pursuing,
Though my past is dead as Hector,
And though Hector is twice dead.

SONNETS

FLUSH OR FAUNUS

You see this dog; it was but yesterday
I mused forgetful of his presence here,
Till thought on thought drew downward
tear on tear:
When from the pillow where wet-cheeked
I lay,
A head as hairy as Faunus thrust its
way
Right sudden against my face, two golden-
clear
Great eyes astonished mine, a drooping
ear
Did flap me on either cheek to dry the
spray!
I started first as some Arcadian
Amazed by goatly god in twilight grove:
But as the bearded vision closelier ran
My tears off, I knew Flush, and rose above
Surprise and sadness, — thanking the true
PAN
Who by low creatures leads to heights of
love.

FINITE AND INFINITE

THE wind sounds only in opposing straits,
The sea, beside the shore; man's spirit
reads

Its quiet only up against the ends
Of wants and oppositions, loves and hates,
Where, worked and worn by passionate
debates,

And losing by the loss it apprehends,
The flesh rocks round and every breath it
sends

Is ravelled to a sigh. All tortured states
Suppose a straitened place. Jehovah
Lord,

Make room for rest, around me ! out of
sight

Now float me of the vexing land abhorred,
Till in deep calms of space my soul may
right

Her nature, shoot large sail on lengthen-
ing cord,
And rush exultant on the Infinite.

TWO SKETCHES

There can be no violation of privacy now
in identifying the originals of these two
sketches as the beloved sisters of the poetess,
Henrietta and Arabella Moulton-Barrett.
These sonnets appeared in *Blackwood's Maga-
zine* during the summer of 1847.

I

H. B.

THE shadow of her face upon the wall
May take your memory to the perfect
Greek,

But when you front her, you would call
the cheek

Too full, sir, for your models, if withal
That bloom it wears could leave you criti-
cal,

And that smile reaching toward the rosy
streak;

For one who smiles so has no need to
speak

To lead your thoughts along, as steed to
stall.

A smile that turns the sunny side o' the
heart

On all the world, as if herself did win
By what she lavished on an open mart !

Let no man call the liberal sweetness,
sin, —
For friends may whisper as they stand
apart,
'Methinks there's still some warmer place
within.'

II

A. B.

HER azure eyes, dark lashes hold in fee;
Her fair superfluous ringlets without check
Drop after one another down her neck,
As many to each cheek as you might see
Green leaves to a wild rose; this sign out-
wardly,

And a like woman-covering seems to deck
Her inner nature, for she will not fleck
World's sunshine with a finger. Sympa-
thy

Must call her in Love's name ! and then, I
know,

She rises up, and brightens as she should,
And lights her smile for comfort, and is
slow

In nothing of high-hearted fortitude.

To smell this flower, come near it ! such
can grow

In that sole garden where Christ's brow
dropped blood.

MOUNTAINEER AND POET

THE simple goatherd between Alp and
sky,

Seeing his shadow, in that awful tryst,
Dilated to a giant's on the mist,

Esteems not his own stature larger by
The apparent image, but more patiently
Strikes his staff down beneath his clenching
fist,

While the snow-mountains lift their ame-
thyst

And sapphire crowns of splendor, far and
nigh,

Into the air around him. Learn from hence
Meek morals, all ye poets that pursue
Your way still onward up to eminence !

Ye are not great because creation drew
Large revelations round your earliest sense,
Nor bright because God's glory shines for
you.

THE POET

THE poet hath the child's sight in his breast
 And sees all *new*. What oftenest he has
 viewed
 He views with the first glory. Fair and
 good
 Pall never on him, at the fairest, best,
 But stand before him holy and undressed
 In week-day false conventions, such as
 would
 Drag other men down from the altitude
 Of primal types, too early dispossessed.
 Why, God would tire of all his heavens, as
 soon
 As thou, O godlike, childlike poet, didst
 Of daily and nightly sights of sun and
 moon!
 And therefore hath He set thee in the midst
 Where men may hear thy wonder's cease-
 less tune
 And praise his world for ever, as thou
 bidst.

HIRAM POWERS' 'GREEK
SLAVE'

The American sculptor Hiram Powers and his family were among the few intimate friends of the Brownings during their first years in Florence.

THEY say Ideal beauty cannot enter
 The house of anguish. On the threshold
 stands
 An alien Image with enshackled hands,
 Called the Greek Slave! as if the artist
 meant her
 (That passionless perfection which he lent
 her,
 Shadowed not darkened where the sill
 expands)
 To so confront man's crimes in different
 lands
 With man's ideal sense. Pierce to the
 centre,
 Art's fiery finger, and break up ere long
 The serfdom of this world. Appeal, fair
 stone,
 From God's pure heights of beauty against
 man's wrong!
 Catch up in thy divine face, not alone
 East griefs but west, and strike and shame
 the strong,
 By thunders of white silence, overthrown.

LIFE

First printed in *Blackwood's Magazine*, May, 1847.

EACH creature holds an insular point in
 space;
 Yet what man stirs a finger, breathes a
 sound,
 But all the multitudinous beings round
 In all the countless worlds with time and
 place
 For their conditions, down to the central
 base,
 Thrill, haply, in vibration and rebound,
 Life answering life across the vast pro-
 found,
 In full antiphony, by a common grace?
 I think this sudden joyance which illumines
 A child's mouth sleeping, unaware may
 run
 From some soul newly loosened from earth's
 tombs:
 I think this passionate sigh, which half-
 begun
 I stifle back, may reach and stir the plumes
 Of God's calm angel standing in the
 sun.

LOVE

First printed in *Blackwood's Magazine*, May, 1847.

WE cannot live, except thus mutually
 We alternate, aware or unaware,
 The reflex act of life: and when we bear
 Our virtue outward most impulsively,
 Most full of invocation, and to be
 Most instantly compellant, certes there
 We live most life, whoever breathes most
 air
 And counts his dying years by sun and
 sea.
 But when a soul, by choice and conscience,
 doth
 Throw out her full force on another
 soul,
 The conscience and the concentration both
 Make mere life, Love. For Life in perfect
 whole
 And aim consummated, is Love in sooth,
 As Nature's magnet-heat rounds pole with
 pole.

HEAVEN AND EARTH

'And there was silence in heaven for the space of half an hour.'

First printed in *Blackwood*, May, 1847.

GOD, who with thunders and great voices
kept

Beneath thy throne, and stars most silver-
paced

Along the inferior gyres, and open-faced
Melodious angels round, canst intercept
Music with music, — yet, at will, has
swept

All back, all back (said he in Patmos
placed,)

To fill the heavens with silence of the waste
Which lasted half an hour! Lo, I who have
wept

All day and night, beseech Thee by my
tears,

And by that dread response of curse and
groan

Men alternate across these hemispheres,
Vouchsafe us such a half-hour's hush alone,
In compensation for our stormy years:

As heaven has paused from song, let earth
from moan!

THE PROSPECT

First printed in *Blackwood* with the two
preceding.

METHINKS we do as fretful children do,
Leaning their faces on the window-pane
To sigh the glass dim with their own breath's
stain,

And shut the sky and landscape from their
view:

And thus, alas, since God the maker drew
A mystic separation 'twixt those twain, —
The life beyond us, and our souls in pain, —
We miss the prospect which we are called
unto

By grief we are fools to use. Be still and
strong,

O man, my brother! Hold thy sobbing
breath,

And keep thy soul's large window pure
from wrong!

That so, as life's appointment issueth,
Thy vision may be clear to watch along
The sunset consummation-lights of death.

HUGH STUART BOYD

HIS BLINDNESS

To whom was inscribed, in grateful affection, my poem of 'Cyprus Wine.' There comes a moment in life when even gratitude and affection turn to pain, as they do now with me. This excellent and learned man, enthusiastic for the good and the beautiful, and one of the most simple and upright of human beings, passed out of his long darkness through death in the summer of 1848; Dr. Adam Clarke's daughter and biographer, Mrs. Smith (happier in this than the absent), fulfilling a doubly filial duty as she sat by the death-bed of her father's friend and hers. — E. B. B.

God would not let the spheric lights ac-
cost

This God-loved man, and bade the earth
stand off

With all her beckoning hills whose golden
stuff

Under the feet of the royal sun is crossed.
Yet such things were to him not wholly
lost, —

Permitted, with his wandering eyes light-
proof,

To catch fair visions rendered full enough
By many a ministrant accomplished
ghost, —

Still seeing, to sounds of softly-turned
book-leaves,

Sappho's crown-rose, and Meleager's
Spring,

And Gregory's starlight on Greek-bur-
nished eyes:

Till Sensuous and Unsensuous seemed one
thing,

Viewed from one level, — earth's reapers
at the sheaves

Scarce plainer than Heaven's angels on
the wing.

HUGH STUART BOYD

HIS DEATH, 1848

BELOVED friend, who living many years
With sightless eyes raised vainly to the
sun,

Didst learn to keep thy patient soul in
tune

To visible nature's elemental cheers!

God has not caught thee to new hemispheres

Because thou wast weary of this one; —
I think thine angel's patience first was done,

And that he spake out with celestial tears,
'Is it enough, dear God? then lighten so
This soul that smiles in darkness!'

Steadfast friend,

Who never didst my heart or life mis-know,

Nor either's faults too keenly apprehend, —

How can I wonder when I see thee go
To join the Dead found faithful to the end?

HUGH STUART BOYD

LEGACIES

THREE gifts the Dying left me, — Æschylus,

And Gregory Nazianzen, and a clock
Chiming the gradual hours out like a flock
Of stars whose motion is melodious.

The books were those I used to read from,
thus

Assisting my dear teacher's soul to unlock
The darkness of his eyes; now, mine they mock,

Blinded in turn by tears; now, murmurous
Sad echoes of my young voice, years ago
Intoning from these leaves the Grecian phrase,

Return and choke my utterance. Books,
lie down

In silence on the shelf there, within gaze;
And thou, clock, striking the hour's pulses
on,

Chime in the day which ends these parting-days!

CONFESSIONS

I

FACE to face in my chamber, my silent
chamber, I saw her:

God and she and I only, there I sat down
to draw her

Soul through the clefts of confession:
'Speak, I am holding thee fast,

As the angel of resurrection shall do at the last!'

'My cup is blood-red

With my sin,' she said,

'And I pour it out to the bitter lees,
As if the angels of judgment stood over me
strong at the last,

Or as thou wert as these.'

II

When God smote his hands together, and
struck out thy soul as a spark ¹⁰

Into the organized glory of things, from
deeps of the dark, —

Say, didst thou shine, didst thou burn,
didst thou honor the power in the
form,

As the star does at night, or the fire-fly, or
even the little ground-worm?

'I have sinned,' she said,

'For my seed-light shed

Has smouldered away from his first
decrees.

The cypress praiseth the fire-fly, the
ground-leaf praiseth the worm;

I am viler than these.'

III

When God on that sin had pity, and did
not trample thee straight

With his wild rains beating and drenching
thy light found inadequate; ²⁰

When He only sent thee the north-wind, a
little searching and chill,

To quicken thy flame — didst thou kindle
and flash to the heights of his will?

'I have sinned,' she said,

'Unquickened, unspread,

My fire dropt down, and I wept on my
knees:

I only said of his winds of the north as I
shrank from their chill,

What delight is in these?'

IV

When God on that sin had pity, and did
not meet it as such,

But tempered the wind to thy uses, and
softened the world to thy touch,

At least thou wast moved in thy soul,
though unable to prove it afar, ³⁰

Thou couldst carry thy light like a jewel,
not giving it out like a star?

'I have sinned,' she said,

'And not merited

The gift He gives, by the grace He sees !

The mine-cave praiseth the jewel, the hillside praiseth the star;
I am viler than these.'

V

Then I cried aloud in my passion, — Unthankful and impotent creature,
To throw up thy scorn unto God through the rents in thy beggarly nature !

If He, the all-giving and loving, is served so unduly, what then

Hast thou done to the weak and the false and the changing, — thy fellows of men ? 40

'I have *loved*,' she said,

(Words bowing her head

As the wind the wet acacia-trees)

'I saw God sitting above me, but I . . . I sat among men,

And I have loved these.'

VI

Again with a lifted voice, like a choral trumpet that takes

The lowest note of a viol that trembles, and triumphing breaks

On the air with its solemn and clear, — 'Behold ! I have sinned not in this !

Where I loved, I have loved much and well, — I have verily loved not amiss.

Let the living,' she said, 50

'Inquire of the dead,

In the house of the pale-fronted images.

My own true dead will answer for me, that I have not loved amiss

In my love for all these.

VII

'The least touch of their hands in the morning, I keep it by day and by night;

Their least step on the stair, at the door, still throbs through me, if ever so light;

Their least gift, which they left to my childhood, far off in the long-ago years,

Is now turned from a toy to a relic, and seen through the crystals of tears.

Dig the snow,' she said,

'For my churchyard bed, 60

Yet I, as I sleep, shall not fear to freeze,

If one only of these my beloveds shall love me with heart-warm tears,
As I have loved these !

VIII

'If I angered any among them, from thenceforth my own life was sore;

If I fell by chance from their presence, I clung to their memory more:

Their tender I often felt holy, their bitter I sometimes called sweet;

And whenever their heart has refused me, I fell down straight at their feet.

I have loved,' she said, —

'Man is weak, God is dread,

Yet the weak man dies with his spirit at ease, 70

Having poured such an unguent of love but once on the Saviour's feet

As I lavished for these.'

IX

Go, I cried, thou hast chosen the Human, and left the Divine !

Then, at least, have the Human shared with thee their wild-berry wine ?

Have they loved back thy love, and when strangers approached thee with blame,

Have they covered thy fault with their kisses, and loved thee the same ?

But she shrunk and said

'God, over my head,

Must sweep in the wrath of his judgment-seas,

If *He* shall deal with me sinning, but only indeed the same 80

And no gentler than these.'

A SABBATH MORNING AT SEA

First printed in *The Amaranth*, 1839, as 'A Sabbath on the Sea.'

I

THE ship went on with solemn face;

To meet the darkness on the deep,

The solemn ship went onward:

I bowed down weary in the place,

For parting tears and present sleep

Had weighed mine eyelids downward.

II

Thick sleep which shut all dreams from me,
 And kept my inner self apart
 And quiet from emotion,
 Then brake away and left me free,
 Made conscious of a human heart
 Betwixt the heaven and ocean.

III

The new sight, the new wondrous sight !
 The waters round me, turbulent,
 The skies impassive o'er me,
 Calm in a moonless, sunless light,
 Half glorified by that intent
 Of holding the day-glory !

IV

Two pale thin clouds did stand upon
 The meeting line of sea and sky,
 With aspect still and mystic:
 I think they did foresee the sun,
 And rested on their prophecy
 In quietude majestic,

V

Then flushed to radiance where they stood,
 Like statues by the open tomb
 Of shining saints half risen.
 The sun ! — he came up to be viewed,
 And sky and sea made mighty room
 To inaugurate the vision.

VI

I oft had seen the dawnlight run
 As red wine through the hills, and break
 Through many a mist's inurning;
 But, here, no earth profaned the sun:
 Heaven, ocean, did alone partake
 The sacrament of morning.

VII

Away with thoughts fantastical !
 I would be humble to my worth,
 Self-guarded as self-doubted:
 Though here no earthly shadows fall,
 I, joying, grieving without earth,
 May desecrate without it.

VIII

God's sabbath morning sweeps the waves;
 I would not praise the pageant high
 Yet miss the dedication:
 I, carried toward the sunless graves
 By force of natural things, — should I
 Exult in only Nature ?

IX

And could I bear to sit alone
 'Mid Nature's fixed benignities,
 While my warm pulse was moving ?
 Too dark thou art, O glittering sun,
 Too strait ye are, capacious seas,
 To satisfy the loving !

X

It seems a better lot than so,
 To sit with friends beneath the beech,
 And feel them dear and dearer;
 Or follow children as they go
 In pretty pairs, with softened speech,
 As the church-bells ring nearer.

XI

Love me, sweet friends, this sabbath day !
 The sea sings round me while ye roll
 Afar the hymn unaltered,
 And kneel, where once I knelt to pray,
 And bless me deeper in the soul,
 Because the voice has faltered.

XII

And though this sabbath comes to me
 Without the stoled minister
 Or chanting congregation,
 God's Spirit brings communion, He
 Who brooded soft on waters dear,
 Creator on creation.

XIII

Himself, I think, shall draw me higher
 Where keep the saints with harp and song
 An endless sabbath morning,
 And on that sea commixed with fire
 Oft drop their eyelids, raised too long
 To the full Godhead's burning.

THE MASK

I

I HAVE a smiling face, she said,
 I have a jest for all I meet,
 I have a garland for my head
 And all its flowers are sweet, —
 And so you call me gay, she said.

II

Grief taught to me this smile, she said,
 And Wrong did teach this jesting bold;
 These flowers were plucked from garden-
 bed

While a death-chime was tolled:
And what now will you say? — she said.

III

Behind no prison-grate, she said,
Which slurs the sunshine half a mile,
Live captives so uncomforted
As souls behind a smile.
God's pity let us pray, she said.

IV

I know my face is bright, she said, —
Such brightness dying suns diffuse:
I bear upon my forehead shed
The sign of what I lose,
The ending of my day, she said.

V

If I dared leave this smile, she said,
And take a moan upon my mouth,
And tie a cypress round my head,
And let my tears run smooth,
It were the happier way, she said.

VI

And since that must not be, she said,
I fain your bitter world would leave.
How calmly, calmly smile the Dead,
Who do not, therefore, grieve!
The yea of Heaven is yea, she said.

VII

But in your bitter world, she said,
Face-joy's a costly mask to wear;
'T is bought with pangs long nourished,
And rounded to despair:
Grief's earnest makes life's play, she said.

VIII

Ye weep for those who weep? she said —
Ah fools! I bid you pass them by.
Go, weep for those whose hearts have
bled
What time their eyes were dry.
Whom sadder can I say? she said.

CALLS ON THE HEART

I

FREE Heart, that singest to-day
Like a bird on the first green spray,
Wilt thou go forth to the world

Where the hawk hath his wing unfurled
To follow, perhaps, thy way?
Where the tamer thine own will bind,
And, to make thee sing, will blind,
While the little hip grows for the free
behind?
Heart, wilt thou go?
— 'No, no!
Free hearts are better so.'

II

The world, thou hast heard it told,
Has counted its robber-gold,
And the pieces stick to the hand;
The world goes riding it fair and grand,
While the truth is bought and sold;
World-voices east, world-voices west,
They call thee, Heart, from thine early
rest,
'Come hither, come hither and be our
guest.'
Heart, wilt thou go?
— 'No, no!
Good hearts are calmer so.'

III

Who calleth thee, Heart? World's Strife,
With a golden heft to his knife;
World's Mirth, with a finger fine
That draws on a board in wine
Her blood-red plans of life;
World's Gain, with a brow knit down;
World's Fame, with a laurel crown
Which rustles most as the leaves turn
brown:
Heart, wilt thou go?
— 'No, no!
Calm hearts are wiser so.'

IV

Hast heard that Proserpina
(Once fooling) was snatched away
To partake the dark king's seat,
And the tears ran fast on her feet
To think how the sun shone yesterday?
With her ankles sunken in asphodel
She wept for the roses of earth which
fell
From her lap when the wild car drave to
hell.
Heart, wilt thou go?
— 'No, no!
Wise hearts are warmer so.'

V

And what is this place not seen,
 Where Hearts may hide serene ?
 'T is a fair still house well-kept
 Which humble thoughts have swept
 And holy prayers made clean.
 There I sit with Love in the sun,
 And we two never have done
 Singing sweeter songs than are guessed by
one.'

Heart, wilt thou go ?

— 'No, no !

Warm hearts are fuller so.'

VI

O Heart, O Love, — I fear
 That Love may be kept too near.
 Hast heard, O Heart, that tale,
 How Love may be false and frail
 To a Heart once holden dear ?
 — 'But this true Love of mine
 Clings fast as the clinging vine,
 And mingles pure as the grapes in wine.'

Heart, wilt thou go ?

— 'No, no !

Full hearts beat higher so.'

VII

O Heart, O Love, beware !
 Look up, and boast not there,
 For who has twirled at the pin ?
 'Tis the World, between Death and
 Sin, —

The World and the World's Despair !
 And Death has quickened his pace
 To the hearth, with a mocking face,
 Familiar as Love, in Love's own place.

Heart, wilt thou go ?

'Still, no !

High hearts must grieve even so.'

VIII

The house is waste to-day,
 The leaf has dropt from the spray,
 The thorn, prickt through to the song:
 If summer doeth no wrong,
 The winter will, they say.
 Sing, Heart ! What heart replies ?
 In vain we were calm and wise,
 If the tears unvisited stand on in our eyes.

Heart, wilt thou go ?

— 'Ah, no !

Grieved hearts must break even so.'

IX

Howbeit all is not lost.
 The warm noon ends in frost,
 And worldly tongues of promise
 Like sheep-bells die off from us
 On the desert hills cloud-crossed:
 Yet through the silence shall
 Pierce the death-angel's call,
 And 'Come up hither,' recover all.
 Heart, wilt thou go ?
 — 'I go !
 Broken hearts triumph so.'

WISDOM UNAPPLIED

I

If I were thou, O butterfly,
 And poised my purple wing to spy
 The sweetest flowers that live and die,

II

I would not waste my strength on those,
 As thou, — for summer has a close,
 And pansies bloom not in the snows.

III

If I were thou, O working bee,
 And all that honey-gold I see
 Could delve from roses easily,

IV

I would not hive it at man's door,
 As thou, — that heirdom of my store
 Should make him rich and leave me poor.

V

If I were thou, O eagle proud,
 And screamed the thunder back aloud,
 And faced the lightning from the cloud,

VI

I would not build my eyrie-throne,
 As thou, — upon a crumbling stone
 Which the next storm may trample down.

VII

If I were thou, O gallant steed,
 With pawing hoof and dancing head,
 And eye outrunning thine own speed,

VIII

I would not meeken to the rein,
As thou, — nor smooth my nostril plain
From the glad desert's snort and strain.

IX

If I were thou, red-breasted bird,
With song at shut-up window heard,
Like Love's sweet Yes too long deferred,

X

I would not overstay delight,
As thou, — but take a swallow-flight
Till the new spring returned to sight.

XI

While yet I spake, a touch was laid
Upon my brow, whose pride did fade
As thus, methought, an angel said, —

XII

'If I were *thou* who sing'st this song,
Most wise for others, and most strong
In seeing right while doing wrong,

XIII

'I would not waste my cares, and choose,
As thou, — to seek what thou must lose,
Such gains as perish in the use.

XIV

'I would not work where none can win,
As thou, — halfway 'twixt grief and sin,
But look above and judge within.

XV

'I would not let my pulse beat high,
As thou, — towards fame's regality,
Nor yet in love's great jeopardy.

XVI

'I would not champ the hard cold bit,
As thou, — of what the world thinks fit,
But take God's freedom, using it.

XVII

'I would not play earth's winter out,
As thou, — but gird my soul about,
And live for life past death and doubt.

XVIII

'Then sing, O singer! — but allow,
Beast, fly and bird, called foolish now,
Are wise (for all thy scorn) as thou.'

HUMAN LIFE'S MYSTERY

I

WE sow the glebe, we reap the corn,
We build the house where we may rest,
And then, at moments, suddenly
We look up to the great wide sky,
Inquiring wherefore we were born,
For earnest or for jest?

II

The senses folding thick and dark
About the stifled soul within,
We guess diviner things beyond,
And yearn to them with yearning fond;
We strike out blindly to a mark
Believed in, but not seen.

III

We vibrate to the pant and thrill
Wherewith Eternity has curled
In serpent-twine about God's seat:
While, freshening upward to his feet,
In gradual growth his full-leaved will
Expands from world to world.

IV

And, in the tumult and excess
Of act and passion under sun,
We sometimes hear — oh, soft and far,
As silver star did touch with star,
The kiss of Peace and Righteousness
Through all things that are done.

V

God keeps his holy mysteries
Just on the outside of man's dream;
In diapason slow, we think
To hear their pinions rise and sink,
While they float pure beneath his eyes,
Like swans adown a stream.

VI

Abstractions, are they, from the forms
Of his great beauty? — exaltations
From his great glory? — strong previsions
Of what we shall be? — intuitions
Of what we are — in calms and storms
Beyond our peace and passions?

VII

Things nameless! which, in passing so,
Do stroke us with a subtle grace;
We say, 'Who passes?' — they are dumb;

We cannot see them go or come,
Their touches fall soft, cold, as snow
Upon a blind man's face.

VIII

Yet, touching so, they draw above
Our common thoughts to Heaven's unknown;
Our daily joy and pain advance
To a divine significance
Our human love — O mortal love,
That light is not its own !

IX

And sometimes horror chills our blood
To be so near such mystic Things,
And we wrap round us for defence
Our purple manners, moods of sense —
As angels from the face of God
Stand hidden in their wings.

X

And sometimes through life's heavy s wound
We grope for them, with strangled
breath
We stretch our hands abroad and try
To reach them in our agony;
And widen, so, the broad life-wound
Soon large enough for death.

A CHILD'S THOUGHT OF GOD

I

THEY say that God lives very high;
But if you look above the pines
You cannot see our God; and why ?

II

And if you dig down in the mines
You never see Him in the gold;
Though from Him all that's glory shines.

III

God is so good, He wears a fold
Of heaven and earth across his face —
Like secrets kept, for love, untold.

IV

But still I feel that his embrace
Slides down by thrills, through all things
made,
Through sight and sound of every place:

V

As if my tender mother laid
On my shut lips her kisses' pressure,
Half-waking me at night, and said
'Who kissed you through the dark, dear
guesser ?'

THE CLAIM

First printed in the *Athenæum*, September
17, 1842, as 'A Claim on Allegory.'

I

GRIEF sate upon a rock and sighed one
day,
(Sighing is all her rest,)
'Wellaway, wellaway, ah wellaway !'
As ocean beat the stone, did she her
breast,
'Ah wellaway ! ah me ! alas, ah me !'
Such sighing uttered she.

II

A Cloud spake out of heaven, as soft as
rain
That falls on water, — 'Lo,
The winds have wandered from me ! I
remain
Alone in the sky-waste, and cannot go
To lean my whiteness on the mountain
blue
Till wanted for more dew.

III

'The sun has struck my brain to weary
peace,
Whereby constrained and pale
I spin for him a larger golden fleece
Than Jason's, yearning for as full a sail.
Sweet Grief, when thou hast sighed to thy
mind,
Give me a sigh for wind,

IV

'And let it carry me adown the west !'
But Love, who prostrated
Lay at Grief's foot, his lifted eyes pos-
sessed
Of her full image, answered in her stead;
'Now nay, now nay ! she shall not give
away
What is my wealth, for any Cloud that
flieth:

Where Grief makes moan,
 Love claims his own,
 And therefore do I lie here night and day,
 And eke my life out with the breath she
 sigheth.'

A DEAD ROSE

First printed in *Blackwood's Magazine*,
 October, 1846.

I

O ROSE, who dares to name thee ?
 No longer roseate now, nor soft nor sweet,
 But pale and hard and dry as stubble
 wheat, —
 Kept seven years in a drawer, thy titles
 shame thee.

II

The breeze that used to blow thee
 Between the hedgerow thorns, and take
 away
 An odor up the lane to last all day, —
 If breathing now, unsweetened would
 forgo thee.

III

The sun that used to smite thee,
 And mix his glory in thy gorgeous urn
 Till beam appeared to bloom, and flower
 to burn, —
 If shining now, with not a hue would
 light thee.

IV

The dew that used to wet thee,
 And, white first, grow incarnadined be-
 cause
 It lay upon thee where the crimson was, —
 If dropping now, would darken where it
 met thee.

V

The fly that 'lit upon thee
 To stretch the tendrils of its tiny feet
 Along thy leaf's pure edges after heat, —
 If 'lighting now, would coldly overrun
 thee.

VI

The bee that once did suck thee,
 And build thy perfumed ambers up his
 hive,

And swoon in thee for joy, till scarce
 alive, —
 If passing now, would blindly overlook
 thee.

VII

The heart doth recognize thee,
 Alone, alone ! the heart doth smell thee
 sweet,
 Doth view thee fair, doth judge thee most
 complete,
 Perceiving all those changes that dis-
 guise thee.

VIII

Yes, and the heart doth owe thee
 More love, dead rose, than to any roses
 bold
 Which Julia wears at dances, smiling
 cold : —
 Lie still upon this heart which breaks
 below thee !

A WOMAN'S SHORTCOMINGS

First printed in *Blackwood's Magazine*, Oc-
 tober, 1846.

I

SHE has laughed as softly as if she sighed,
 She has counted six, and over,
 Of a purse well filled and a heart well
 tried —

Oh, each a worthy lover !
 They 'give her time;' for her soul must
 slip

Where the world has set the groov-
 ing;
 She will lie to none with her fair red
 lip:

But love seeks truer loving.

II

She trembles her fan in a sweetness dumb,
 As her thoughts were beyond recalling,
 With a glance for *one*, and a glance for
some,

From her eyelids rising and falling;
 Speaks common words with a blushful air,
 Hears bold words, unrepining;
 But her silence says — what she never will
 swear —

And love seeks better loving.

III

Go, lady, lean to the night-guitar
 And drop a smile to the bringer;
 Then smile as sweetly, when he is far,
 At the voice of an in-door singer.
 Bask tenderly beneath tender eyes;
 Glance lightly, on their removing;
 And join new vows to old perjuries —
 But dare not call it loving.

IV

Unless you can think, when the song is
 done,
 No other is soft in the rhythm;
 Unless you can feel, when left by One,
 That all men else go with him;
 Unless you can know, when unpraised by
 his breath,
 That your beauty itself wants proving;
 Unless you can swear 'For life, for
 death!' —
 Oh, fear to call it loving!

V

Unless you can muse in a crowd all day
 On the absent face that fixed you;
 Unless you can love, as the angels may,
 With the breadth of heaven betwixt
 you;
 Unless you can dream that his faith is
 fast,
 Through behaving and unbehaving;
 Unless you can *die* when the dream is
 past —
 Oh, never call it loving!

A MAN'S REQUIREMENTS

First printed in *Blackwood's Magazine*, Oc-
 tober, 1846.

I

LOVE me, Sweet, with all thou art,
 Feeling, thinking, seeing;
 Love me in the lightest part,
 Love me in full being.

II

Love me with thine open youth
 In its frank surrender;
 With the vowing of thy mouth.
 With its silence tender.

III

Love me with thine azure eyes,
 Made for earnest granting;
 Taking color from the skies,
 Can Heaven's truth be wanting?

IV

Love me with their lids, that fall
 Snow-like at first meeting;
 Love me with thine heart, that all
 Neighbors then see beating.

V

Love me with thine hand stretched out
 Freely — open-minded:
 Love me with thy loitering foot, —
 Hearing one behind it.

VI

Love me with thy voice, that turns
 Sudden faint above me;
 Love me with thy blush that burns
 When I murmur *Love me!*

VII

Love me with thy thinking soul,
 Break it to love-sighing;
 Love me with thy thoughts that roll
 On through living — dying.

VIII

Love me in thy gorgeous airs,
 When the world has crowned thee;
 Love me, kneeling at thy prayers,
 With the angels round thee.

IX

Love me pure, as musers do,
 Up the woodlands shady:
 Love me gaily, fast and true,
 As a winsome lady.

X

Through all hopes that keep us brave,
 Farther off or nigher,
 Love me for the house and grave,
 And for something higher.

XI

Thus, if thou wilt prove me, Dear,
 Woman's love no fable,
 I will love *thee* — half a year —
 As a man is able.

A YEAR'S SPINNING

First printed in *Blackwood's Magazine*, October, 1846, as 'Maude's Spinning.'

I

He listened at the porch that day,
To hear the wheel go on, and on;
And then it stopped, ran back away,
While through the door he brought the sun:
But now my spinning is all done.

II

He sat beside me, with an oath
That love ne'er ended, once begun;
I smiled — believing for us both,
What was the truth for only one:
And now my spinning is all done.

III

My mother cursed me that I heard
A young man's wooing as I spun:
Thanks, cruel mother, for that word, —
For I have, since, a harder known!
And now my spinning is all done.

IV

I thought — O God! — my first-born's cry
Both voices to mine ear would drown:
I listened in mine agony —
It was the *silence* made me groan!
And now my spinning is all done.

V

Bury me 'twixt my mother's grave,
(Who cursed me on her death-bed lone)
And my dead baby's (God it save!)
Who, not to bless me, would not moan.
And now my spinning is all done.

VI

A stone upon my heart and head,
But no name written on the stone!
Sweet neighbors, whisper low instead,
'This sinner was a loving one —
And now her spinning is all done.'

VII

And let the door ajar remain,
In case he should pass by anon;
And leave the wheel out very plain, —
That HE, when passing in the sun,
May see the spinning is all done.

CHANGE UPON CHANGE

First printed in *Blackwood's Magazine*, October, 1846.

I

Five months ago the stream did flow,
The lilies bloomed within the sedge,
And we were lingering to and fro,
Where none will track thee in this snow,
Along the stream, beside the hedge.
Ah, Sweet, be free to love and go!
For if I do not hear thy foot,
The frozen river is as mute,
The flowers have dried down to the root:
And why, since these be changed since May,
Shouldst thou change less than *they*?

II

And slow, slow as the winter snow
The tears have drifted to mine eyes;
And my poor cheeks, five months ago
Set blushing at thy praises so,
Put paleness on for a disguise.
Ah, Sweet, be free to praise and go!
For if my face is turned too pale,
It was thine oath that first did fail, —
It was thy love proved false and frail, —
And why, since these be changed enow,
Should *I* change less than *thou*?

A REED

First printed in *Blackwood's Magazine*, October, 1846.

I

I AM no trumpet, but a reed;
No flattering breath shall from me lead
A silver sound, a hollow sound:
I will not ring, for priest or king,
One blast that in re-echoing
Would leave a bondsman faster bound.

II

I am no trumpet, but a reed, —
A broken reed, the wind indeed
Left flat upon a dismal shore;
Yet if a little maid or child
Should sigh within it, earnest-mild
This reed will answer evermore.

III

I am no trumpet, but a reed;
 Go, tell the fishers, as they spread
 Their nets along the river's edge,
 I will not tear their nets at all,
 Nor pierce their hands, if they should fall:
 Then let them leave me in the sedge.

A CHILD'S GRAVE AT FLORENCE

A. A. E. C.

BORN JULY, 1848. DIED NOVEMBER, 1849

First printed in the *Athenæum*, December 22, 1849. Alice Augusta Elizabeth was the daughter of Count and Countess Cottrell. The mother, to whom there are many affectionate allusions in Mrs. Browning's letters, was born Sophia Augusta Tulk, the daughter of an English clergyman. The father, Henry Cottrell, a young English artist, was member of the household of the last Duke of Lucca, and received his title from him.

OF English blood, of Tuscan birth,
 What country should we give her?
 Instead of any on the earth,
 The civic Heavens receive her.

And here among the English tombs
 In Tuscan ground we lay her,
 While the blue Tuscan sky endomes
 Our English words of prayer.

A little child! — how long she lived,
 By months, not years, is reckoned: 10
 Born in one July, she survived
 Alone to see a second.

Bright-featured, as the July sun
 Her little face still played in,
 And splendors, with her birth begun,
 Had had no time for fading.

So, LILY, from those July hours,
 No wonder we should call her;
 She looked such kinship to the flowers, —
 Was but a little taller. 20

A Tuscan Lily, — only white,
 As Dante, in abhorrence
 Of red corruption, wished aright
 The lilies of his Florence.

We could not wish her whiter, — her
 Who perfumed with pure blossom
 The house — a lovely thing to wear
 Upon a mother's bosom!

This July creature thought perhaps
 Our speech not worth assuming; 30
 She sat upon her parents' laps
 And mimicked the guat's humming;

Said 'father,' 'mother' — then left off,
 For tongues celestial, fitter:
 Her hair had grown just long enough
 To catch heaven's jasper-glitter.

Babes! Love could always hear and see
 Behind the cloud that hid them.
 'Let little children come to Me,
 And do not thou forbid them.' 40

So, unforbidding, have we met,
 And gently here have laid her,
 Though winter is no time to get
 The flowers that should o'erspread her:

We should bring pansies quick with spring,
 Rose, violet, daffodilly,
 And also, above everything,
 White lilies for our Lily.

Nay, more than flowers, this grave exacts, —
 Glad, grateful attestations 50
 Of her sweet eyes and pretty acts,
 With calm renunciations.

Her very mother with light feet
 Should leave the place too earthy,
 Saying 'The angels have thee, Sweet,
 Because we are not worthy.'

But winter kills the orange-buds,
 The gardens in the frost are,
 And all the heart dissolves in floods,
 Remembering we have lost her. 60

Poor earth, poor heart, — too weak, too
 weak
 To miss the July shining!
 Poor heart! — what bitter words we speak
 When God speaks of resigning!

Sustain this heart in us that faints,
 Thou God, the self-existent!
 We catch up wild at parting saints
 And feel thy heaven too distant.

The wind that swept them out of sin
Has ruffled all our vesture: 70
On the shut door that let them in
We beat with frantic gesture, —

To us, us also, open straight !
The outer life is chilly;
Are *we* too, like the earth, to wait
Till next year for our Lily ?

— Oh, my own baby on my knees,
My leaping, dimpled treasure,
At every word I write like these,
Clasped close with stronger pressure ! 80

Too well my own heart understands, —
At every word beats fuller —
My little feet, my little hands,
And hair of Lily's color !

But God gives patience, Love learns
strength,
And Faith remembers promise,
And Hope itself can smile at length
On other hopes gone from us.

Love, strong as Death, shall conquer Death,
Through struggle made more glorious:
This mother stills her sobbing breath, 91
Renouncing yet victorious.

Arms, empty of her child, she lifts
With spirit unbereaven, —
' God will not all take back his gifts;
My Lily's mine in heaven.

' Still mine ! maternal rights serene
Not given to another !
The crystal bars shine faint between
The souls of child and mother. 100

' Meanwhile,' the mother cries, ' content !
Our love was well divided:
Its sweetness following where she went,
Its anguish stayed where I did.

' Well done of God, to halve the lot,
And give her all the sweetness;
To us, the empty room and cot, —
To her, the Heaven's completeness.

' To us, this grave, — to her, the rows
The mystic palm-trees spring in; 110
To us, the silence in the house, —
To her, the choral singing.

' For her, to gladden in God's view, —
For us, to hope and bear on.
Grow, Lily, in thy garden new,
Beside the Rose of Sharon !

' Grow fast in heaven, sweet Lily clipped,
In love more calm than this is,
And may the angels dewy-lipped
Remind thee of our kisses ! 120

' While none shall tell thee of our tears,
These human tears now falling,
Till, after a few patient years,
One home shall take us all in.

' Child, father, mother — who, left out ?
Not mother, and not father !
And when, our dying couch about,
The natural mists shall gather,

' Some smiling angel close shall stand
In old Correggio's fashion, 130
And bear a LILY in his hand,
For death's ANNUNCIATION.'

LIFE AND LOVE

I

FAST this Life of mine was dying,
Blind already and calm as death,
Snowflakes on her bosom lying
Scarcely heaving with her breath.

II

Love came by, and having known her
In a dream of fabled lands,
Gently stooped, and laid upon her
Mystic chrism of holy hands;

III

Drew his smile across her folded
Eyelids, as the swallow dips;
Breathed as finely as the cold did
Through the locking of her lips.

IV

So, when Life looked upward, being
Warmed and breathed on from above,
What sight could she have for seeing,
Evermore . . . but only LOVE ?

A DENIAL

I

WE have met late — it is too late to meet,
 O friend, not more than friend !
 Death's forecome shroud is tangled round
 my feet,
 And if I step or stir, I touch the end.
 In this last jeopardy
 Can I approach thee, I, who cannot move ?
 How shall I answer thy request for love ?
 Look in my face and see.

II

I love thee not, I dare not love thee ! go
 In silence; drop my hand.
 If thou seek roses, seek them where they
 blow
 In garden-alleys, not in desert-sand.
 Can life and death agree,
 That thou shouldst stoop thy song to my
 complaint ?
 I cannot love thee. If the word is faint,
 Look in my face and see.

III

I might have loved thee in some former
 days.
 Oh, then, my spirits had leapt
 As now they sink, at hearing thy love-
 praise !
 Before these faded cheeks were overwept,
 Had this been asked of me,
 To love thee with my whole strong heart
 and head, —
 I should have said still . . . yes, but *smiled*
 and said,
 'Look in my face and see !'

IV

But now . . . God sees me, God, who took
 my heart
 And drowned it in life's surge.
 In all your wide warm earth I have no
 part —
 A light song overcomes me like a dirge.
 Could Love's great harmony
 The saints keep step to when their bonds
 are loose,
 Not weigh me down ? am I a wife to
 choose ?
 Look in my face and see —

V

While I behold, as plain as one who
 dreams,
 Some woman of full worth,
 Whose voice, as cadenced as a silver
 stream's,
 Shall prove the fountain-soul which sends
 it forth;
 One younger, more thought-free
 And fair and gay, than I, thou must forget,
 With brighter eyes than these . . . which
 are not wet . . .
 Look in my face and see !

VI

So farewell thou, whom I have known too
 late
 To let thee come so near.
 Be counted happy while men call thee
 great,
 And one beloved woman feels thee dear ! —
 Not I ! — that cannot be.
 I am lost, I am changed, — I must go
 farther, where
 The change shall take me worse, and no
 one dare
 Look in my face and see.

VII

Meantime I bless thee. By these thoughts
 of mine
 I bless thee from all such !
 I bless thy lamp to oil, thy cup to wine,
 Thy hearth to joy, thy hand to an equal
 touch
 Of loyal troth. For me,
 I love thee not, I love thee not ! — away !
 Here's no more courage in my soul to say
 'Look in my face and see.'

PROOF AND DISPROOF

I

Dost thou love me, my Belovèd ?
 Who shall answer yes or no ?
 What is provèd or disprovèd
 When my soul inquireth so,
 Dost thou love me, my Belovèd ?

II

I have seen thy heart to-day,
 Never open to the crowd,
 While to love me aye and aye

Was the vow as it was vowed
By thine eyes of steadfast gray.

III

Now I sit alone, alone —
And the hot tears break and burn,
Now, Belovèd, thou art gone,
Doubt and terror have their turn.
Is it love that I have known?

IV

I have known some bitter things, —
Anguish, anger, solitude.
Year by year an evil brings,
Year by year denies a good;
March winds violate my springs.

V

I have known how sickness bends,
I have known how sorrow breaks, —
How quick hopes have sudden ends,
How the heart thinks till it aches
Of the smile of buried friends.

VI

Last, I have known *thee*, my brave
Noble thinker, lover, doer!
The best knowledge last I have.
But thou comest as the thrower
Of fresh flowers upon a grave.

VII

Count what feelings used to move me!
Can this love assort with those?
Thou, who art so far above me,
Wilt thou stoop so, for repose?
Is it true that thou canst love me?

VIII

Do not blame me if I doubt thee.
I can call love by its name
When thine arm is wrapt about me;
But even love seems not the same,
When I sit alone, without thee.

IX

In thy clear eyes I desiered
Many a proof of love, to-day;
But to-night, those unbelied
Speechful eyes being gone away,
There's the proof to seek, beside.

X

Dost thou love me, my Belovèd?
Only *thou* canst answer yes!

And, thou gone, the proof's disprovèd,
And the cry rings answerless —
Dost thou love me, my Belovèd?

QUESTION AND ANSWER

I

LOVE you seek for, presupposes
Summer heat and sunny glow.
Tell me, do you find moss-roses
Budding, blooming in the snow?
Snow might kill the rose-tree's root —
Shake it quickly from your foot,
Lest it harm you as you go.

II

From the ivy where it dapples
A gray ruin, stone by stone,
Do you look for grapes or apples,
Or for sad green leaves alone?
Pluck the leaves off, two or three —
Keep them for morality
When you shall be safe and gone.

INCLUSIONS

I

OH, wilt thou have my hand, Dear, to lie
along in thine?
As a little stone in a running stream, it
seems to lie and pine.
Now drop the poor pale hand, Dear, unfit
to plight with thine.

II

Oh, wilt thou have my cheek, Dear, drawn
closer to thine own?
My cheek is white, my cheek is worn, by
many a tear run down.
Now leave a little space, Dear, lest it
should wet thine own.

III

Oh, must thou have my soul, Dear, com-
mingled with thy soul? —
Red grows the cheek, and warm the hand;
the part is in the whole:
Nor hands nor cheeks keep separate, when
soul is joined to soul.

INSUFFICIENCY

I

THERE is no one beside thee and no one
 above thee,
 Thou standest alone as the nightingale
 sings!
 And my words that would praise thee
 are impotent things,
 For none can express thee though all
 should approve thee.
 I love thee so, Dear, that I only can love
 thee.

II

SAY, what can I do for thee? weary thee,
 grieve thee?
 Lean on thy shoulder, new burdens to
 add?
 Weep my tears over thee, making thee
 sad?
 Oh, hold me not—love me not! let me
 retrieve thee.
 I love thee so, Dear, that I only can
 leave thee.

SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGUESE

It was while they were living in Pisa, soon after their marriage, that Mrs. Browning first showed her husband that unique sheaf of love-poems, first published in 1850 under the title of *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. Long after his wife's death Robert Browning described the scene to Mr. Edmund Gosse, who relates the tale in his *Critical Kit-Kats*, page 2.

'Their custom was, Mr. Browning said, to write alone, and not to show each other what they had written. This was a rule which he sometimes broke through, but she never. He had the habit of working in a downstairs room, where their meals were spread, while Mrs. Browning studied in a room on the floor above. One day, early in 1847, their breakfast being over, Mrs. Browning went upstairs, while her husband stood at the window watching the street till the table should be cleared. He was presently aware of some one behind him, although the servant was gone. It was Mrs. Browning, who held him by the shoulder to prevent his turning to look at her, and at the same time pushed a packet of papers into the pocket of his coat. She told him to read that, and to tear it up if he did not like it; and then she fled again to her own room.'

It was Robert Browning who overruled his wife's strong initial objection to making public these beautiful, but singularly intimate poems; and the fact furnishes an argument to those who believe that he, at least, would not have disliked the publication of the Love Letters. 'I dared not,' he once said, 'reserve to myself the finest Sonnets written in any language since Shakespeare.' Mrs. Browning's reluctance once overcome, her first fancy was to call the collection *Sonnets translated from the Bosnian* (though why from one rather than another of the innumerable Slavic dialects, it would be difficult to guess). But they connected themselves in the husband's mind with another poem for which he had a very special admiration, *Caterina to Camoëns*; and he decreed that they should be called *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. A small edition was first printed for private circulation, under the supervision of Miss Mitford, in a slender volume entitled *Sonnets by E. B. B.*, with the imprint Reading, 1847, and marked *Not for Publication*; but three years later the Sonnets were included in the new edition of Mrs. Browning's complete works.

SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGUESE

I

I THOUGHT once how Theocritus had sung
 Of the sweet years, the dear and wished-
 for years,
 Who each one in a gracious hand ap-
 pears
 To bear a gift for mortals, old or young:

And, as I mused it in his antique tongue,
 I saw, in gradual vision through my tears,
 The sweet, sad years, the melancholy years,
 Those of my own life, who by turns had
 flung
 A shadow across me. Straightway I was
 'ware,
 So weeping, how a mystic Shape did move
 Behind me, and drew me backward by the
 hair;

And a voice said in mastery, while I strove, —
 'Guess now who holds thee?' — 'Death,'
 I said. But, there,
 The silver answer rang, — 'Not Death, but Love.'

II

BUT only three in all God's universe
 Have heard this word thou hast said, —
 Himself, beside
 Thee speaking, and me listening! and replied
 One of us . . . *that* was God, . . . and laid
 the curse
 So darkly on my eyelids, as to amerce
 My sight from seeing thee, — that if I had
 died,
 The deathweights, placed there, would have signified
 Less absolute exclusion. 'Nay' is worse
 From God than from all others, O my friend!
 Men could not part us with their worldly jars,
 Nor the seas change us, nor the tempests bend;
 Our hands would touch for all the mountain-bars:
 And, heaven being rolled between us at the end,
 We should but vow the faster for the stars.

III

UNLIKE are we, unlike, O princely Heart!
 Unlike our uses and our destinies.
 Our ministering two angels look surprise
 On one another, as they strike athwart
 Their wings in passing. Thou, bethink thee, art
 A guest for queens to social pageantries,
 With gages from a hundred brighter eyes
 Than tears even can make mine, to play
 thy part
 Of chief musician. What hast *thou* to do
 With looking from the lattice-lights at me,
 A poor, tired, wandering singer, singing through
 The dark, and leaning up a cypress tree?
 The chrisn is on thine head, — on mine, the dew, —
 And Death must dig the level where these agree.

IV

THOU hast thy calling to some palace-floor,
 Most gracious singer of high poems! where
 The dancers will break footing, from the care
 Of watching up thy pregnant lips for more.
 And dost thou lift this house's latch too poor
 For hand of thine? and canst thou think and bear
 To let thy music drop here unaware
 In folds of golden fulness at my door?
 Look up and see the casement broken in,
 The bats and owlets builders in the roof!
 My cricket chirps against thy mandolin.
 Hush, call no echo up in further proof
 Of desolation! there's a voice within
 That weeps . . . as thou must sing . . . alone, aloof.

V

I LIFT my heavy heart up solemnly,
 As once Electra her sepulchral urn,
 And, looking in thine eyes, I overturn
 The ashes at thy feet. Behold and see
 What a great heap of grief lay hid in me,
 And how the red wild sparkles dimly burn
 Through the ashen grayness. If thy foot
 in scorn
 Could tread them out to darkness utterly,
 It might be well perhaps. But if instead
 Thou wait beside me for the wind to blow
 The gray dust up, . . . those laurels on
 thine head,
 O my Belovèd, will not shield thee so,
 That none of all the fires shall scorch and shred
 The hair beneath. Stand farther off then!
 go.

VI

Go from me. Yet I feel that I shall stand
 Henceforward in thy shadow. Nevermore
 Alone upon the threshold of my door
 Of individual life, I shall command
 The uses of my soul, nor lift my hand
 Serenely in the sunshine as before,
 Without the sense of that which I forbore —
 Thy touch upon the palm. The widest land
 Doom takes to part us, leaves thy heart in mine
 With pulses that beat double. What I do
 And what I dream include thee, as the wine

Must taste of its own grapes. And when I
sue
God for myself, He hears that name of
thine,
And sees within my eyes the tears of two.

VII

THE face of all the world is changed, I
think,
Since first I heard the footsteps of thy soul
Move still, oh, still, beside me, as they stole
Betwixt me and the dreadful outer brink
Of obvious death, where I, who thought to
sink,
Was caught up into love, and taught the
whole
Of life in a new rhythm. The cup of dole
God gave for baptism, I am fain to drink,
And praise its sweetness, Sweet, with thee
anear.
The names of country, heaven, are changed
away
For where thou art or shalt be, there or
here;
And this . . . this lute and song . . . loved
yesterday,
(The singing angels know) are only dear
Because thy name moves right in what they
say.

VIII

WHAT can I give thee back, O liberal
And princely giver, who hast brought the
gold
And purple of thine heart, unstained, un-
told,
And laid them on the outside of the wall
For such as I to take or leave withal,
In unexpected largesse? am I cold,
Ungrateful, that for these most manifold
High gifts, I render nothing back at all?
Not so; not cold, — but very poor instead.
Ask God who knows. For frequent tears
have run
The colors from my life, and left so dead
And pale a stuff, it were not fitly done
To give the same as pillow to thy head.
Go farther! let it serve to trample on.

IX

CAN it be right to give what I can give?
To let thee sit beneath the fall of tears
As salt as mine, and hear the sighing years
Re-sighing on my lips renunciative

Through those infrequent smiles which fail
to live
For all thy adjurations? O my fears,
That this can scarce be right! We are
not peers,
So to be lovers; and I own, and grieve,
That givers of such gifts as mine are, must
Be counted with the ungenerous. Out,
alas!
I will not soil thy purple with my dust,
Nor breathe my poison on thy Venice-
glass,
Nor give thee any love — which were un-
just.
Beloved, I only love thee! let it pass.

X

YET, love, mere love, is beautiful indeed
And worthy of acceptance. Fire is bright,
Let temple burn, or flax; an equal light
Leaps in the flame from cedar-plank or
weed:
And love is fire. And when I say at need
I love thee . . . mark! . . . I love thee — in
thy sight
I stand transfigured, glorified aright,
With conscience of the new rays that pro-
ceed
Out of my face toward thine. There's
nothing low
In love, when love the lowest: meanest
creatures
Who love God, God accepts while loving so.
And what I *feel*, across the inferior fea-
tures
Of what I *am*, doth flash itself, and show
How that great work of Love enhances
Nature's.

XI

AND therefore if to love can be desert,
I am not all unworthy. Cheeks as pale
As these you see, and trembling knees that
fail
To bear the burden of a heavy heart, —
This weary minstrel-life that once was girt
To climb Aornus, and can scarce avail
To pipe now 'gainst the valley nightingale
A melancholy music, — why advert
To these things? O Beloved, it is plain
I am not of thy worth nor for thy place!
And yet, because I love thee, I obtain
From that same love this vindicating
grace,

To live on still in love, and yet in vain, —
To bless thee, yet renounce thee to thy
face.

XII

INDEED this very love which is my boast,
And which, when rising up from breast to
brow,

Doth crown me with a ruby large enow
To draw men's eyes and prove the inner
cost, —

This love even, all my worth, to the utter-
most,

I should not love withal, unless that thou
Hadst set me an example, shown me how,
When first thine earnest eyes with mine
were crossed,

And love called love. And thus, I cannot
speak

Of love even, as a good thing of my own:
Thy soul hath snatched up mine all faint
and weak,

And placed it by thee on a golden
throne, —

And that I love (O soul, we must be
meek !)

Is by thee only, whom I love alone.

XIII

AND wilt thou have me fashion into speech
The love I bear thee, finding words enough,
And hold the torch out, while the winds
are rough,

Between our faces, to cast light on
each ? —

I drop it at thy feet. I cannot teach

My hand to hold my spirit so far off

From myself — me — that I should bring
thee proof

In words, of love hid in me out of reach.

Nay, let the silence of my womanhood
Commend my woman-love to thy belief, —
Seeing that I stand unwon, however wooed,
And rend the garment of my life, in brief,
By a most dauntless, voiceless fortitude,
Lest one touch of this heart convey its
grief.

XIV

If thou must love me, let it be for nought
Except for love's sake only. Do not say
' I love her for her smile — her look — her
way

Of speaking gently, — for a trick of
thought

That falls in well with mine, and certes
brought

A sense of pleasant ease on such a day ' —
For these things in themselves, Belovèd,
may

Be changed, or change for thee, — and
love, so wrought,

May be unwrought so. Neither love me
for

Thine own dear pity's wiping my cheeks
dry, —

A creature might forget to weep, who bore
Thy comfort long, and lose thy love
thereby !

But love me for love's sake, that evermore
Thou mayst love on, through love's eter-
nity.

XV

ACCUSE me not, beseech thee, that I wear
Too calm and sad a face in front of thine;
For we two look two ways, and cannot
shine

With the same sunlight on our brow and
hair.

On me thou lookest with no doubting care,
As on a bee shut in a crystalline;

Since sorrow hath shut me safe in love's
divine,

And to spread wing and fly in the outer
air

Were most impossible failure, if I strove
To fail so. But I look on thee — on
thee —

Beholding, besides love, the end of love,

Hearing oblivion beyond memory;

As one who sits and gazes from above,

Over the rivers to the bitter sea.

XVI

AND yet, because thou overcomest so,
Because thou art more noble and like a
king,

Thou canst prevail against my fears and
fling

Thy purple round me, till my heart shall
grow

Too close against thine heart henceforth to
know

How it shook when alone. Why, conquer-
ing

May prove as lordly and complete a thing
In lifting upward, as in crushing low !

And as a vanquished soldier yields his
sword

To one' who lifts him from the bloody
earth,
Even so, Belovèd, I at last record,
Here ends my strife. If *thou* invite me
forth,
I rise above abasement at the word.
Make thy love larger to enlarge my worth.

XVII

MY poet, thou canst touch on all the notes
God set between his After and Before,
And strike up and strike off the general
roar
Of the rushing worlds a melody that floats
In a serene air purely. Antidotes
Of medicated music, answering for
Mankind's forlornest uses, thou canst pour
From thence into their ears. God's will
devotes
Thine to such ends, and mine to wait on
thine.
How, Dearest, wilt thou have me for most
use ?
A hope, to sing by gladly ? or a fine
Sad memory, with thy songs to interfuse ?
A shade, in which to sing — of palm or pine ?
A grave, on which to rest from singing ?
Choose.

XVIII

I NEVER gave a lock of hair away
To a man, Dearest, except this to thee,
Which now upon my fingers thoughtfully,
I ring out to the full brown length and say
'Take it.' My day of youth went yester-
day;
My hair no longer bounds to my foot's glee,
Nor plant I it from rose or myrtle-tree,
As girls do, any more: it only may
Now shade on two pale cheeks the mark of
tears,
Taught drooping from the head that hangs
aside
Through sorrow's trick. I thought the
funeral-shears
Would take this first, but Love is justi-
fied, —
Take it thou, — finding pure, from all
those years,
The kiss my mother left here when she
died.

XIX

THE soul's Rialto hath its merchandise;
I barter curl for curl upon that mart,

And from my poet's forehead to my heart
Receive this lock which outweighs argo-
sies, —
As purply black, as erst to Pindar's eyes
The dim purpureal tresses gloomed
athwart
The nine white Muse-brows. For this
counterpart, . . .
The bay-crown's shade, Belovèd, I surmise,
Still lingers on thy curl, it is so black !
Thus, with a fillet of smooth-kissing
breath,
I tie the shadows safe from gliding back,
And lay the gift where nothing hindereth;
Here on my heart, as on thy brow, to lack
No natural heat till mine grows cold in
death.

XX

BELOVED, my Belovèd, when I think
That thou wast in the world a year ago,
What time I sat alone here in the snow
And saw no footprint, heard the silence
sink
No moment at thy voice, but, link by link,
Went counting all my chains as if that so
They never could fall off at any blow
Struck by thy possible hand, — why, thus
I drink
Of life's great cup of wonder ! Wonder-
ful,
Never to feel thee thrill the day or night
With personal act or speech, — nor ever
cull
Some prescience of thee with the blossoms
white
Thou sawest growing ! Atheists are as
dull,
Who cannot guess God's presence out of
sight.

XXI

SAY over again, and yet once over again,
That thou dost love me. Though the
word repeated
Should seem 'a cuckoo-song,' as thou dost
treat it,
Remember, never to the hill or plain,
Valley and wood, without her cuckoo-
strain
Comes the fresh Spring in all her green
completed.
Belovèd, I, amid the darkness greeted
By a doubtful spirit-voice, in that doubt's
pain

Cry, 'Speak once more — thou lovest !'
 Who can fear
 Too many stars, though each in heaven
 shall roll,
 Too many flowers, though each shall
 crown the year ?
 Say thou dost love me, love me, love me —
 toll
 The silver iterance ! — only minding,
 Dear,
 To love me also in silence with thy soul.

XXII

WHEN our two souls stand up erect and
 strong,
 Face to face, silent, drawing nigh and
 nigher,
 Until the lengthening wings break into fire
 At either curvèd point, — what bitter
 wrong
 Can the earth do to us, that we should not
 long
 Be here contented ? Think. In mount-
 ing higher,
 The angels would press on us and aspire
 To drop some golden orb of perfect song
 Into our deep, dear silence. Let us stay
 Rather on earth, Belovèd, — where the un-
 fit
 Contrarious moods of men recoil away
 And isolate pure spirits, and permit
 A place to stand and love in for a day,
 With darkness and the death-hour round-
 ing it.

XXIII

Is it indeed so ? If I lay here dead,
 Wouldst thou miss any life in losing
 mine ?
 And would the sun for thee more coldly
 shine
 Because of grave-damps falling round my
 head ?
 I marvelled, my Belovèd, when I read
 Thy thought so in the letter. I am thine —
 But . . . so much to thee ? Can I pour
 thy wine
 While my hands tremble ? Then my
 soul, instead
 Of dreams of death, resumes life's lower
 range.
 Then, love me, Love ! look on me —
 breathe on me !
 As brighter ladies do not count it strange,
 For love, to give up acres and degree,

I yield the grave for thy sake, and ex-
 change
 My near sweet view of Heaven, for earth
 with thee !

XXIV

LET the world's sharpness, like a clasping
 knife,
 Shut in upon itself and do no harm
 In this close hand of Love, now soft and
 warm,
 And let us hear no sound of human strife
 After the click of the shutting. Life to
 life —
 I lean upon thee, Dear, without alarm,
 And feel as safe as guarded by a charm
 Against the stab of worldlings, who if rife
 Are weak to injure. Very whitely still
 The lilies of our lives may reassure
 Their blossoms from their roots, accessible
 Alone to heavenly dews that drop not fewer,
 Growing straight, out of man's reach, on
 the hill.
 God only, who made us rich, can make us
 poor.

XXV

A HEAVY heart, Belovèd, have I borne
 From year to year until I saw thy face,
 And sorrow after sorrow took the place
 Of all those natural joys as lightly worn
 As the stringed pearls, each lifted in its
 turn
 By a beating heart at dance-time. Hopes
 apace
 Were changed to long despairs, till God's
 own grace
 Could scarcely lift above the world for-
 lorn
 My heavy heart. Then *thou* didst bid me
 bring
 And let it drop adown thy calmly great
 Deep being ! Fast it sinketh, as a thing
 Which its own nature doth precipitate,
 While thine doth close above it, mediating
 Betwixt the stars and the unaccomplished
 fate.

XXVI

I LIVED with visions for my company
 Instead of men and women, years ago,
 And found them gentle mates, nor thought
 to know
 A sweeter music than they played to me.

But soon their trailing purple was not free
 Of this world's dust, their lutes did silent
 grow,
 And I myself grew faint and blind below
 Their vanishing eyes. Then THOU didst
 come — to be,
 Belovèd, what they seemed. Their shining
 fronts,
 Their songs, their splendors (better, yet
 the same,
 As river-water hallowed into fonts),
 Met in thee, and from out thee overcame
 My soul with satisfaction of all wants:
 Because God's gifts put man's best dreams
 to shame.

XXVII

MY own Belovèd, who hast lifted me
 From this drear flat of earth where I was
 thrown,
 And, in betwixt the languid ringlets, blown
 A life-breath, till the forehead hopefully
 Shines out again, as all the angels see,
 Before thy saving kiss! My own, my
 own,
 Who camest to me when the world was
 gone,
 And I who looked for only God, found
 thee!
 I find thee; I am safe, and strong, and
 glad.
 As one who stands in dewless asphodel
 Looks backward on the tedious time he
 had
 In the upper life, — so I, with bosom-
 swell,
 Make witness, here, between the good and
 bad,
 That Love, as strong as Death, retrieves as
 well.

XXVIII

MY letters! all dead paper, mute and
 white!
 And yet they seem alive and quivering
 Against my tremulous hands which loose
 the string
 And let them drop down on my knee to-
 night.
 This said, — he wished to have me in his
 sight
 Once, as a friend: this fixed a day in spring
 To come and touch my hand . . . a simple
 thing,

Yet I wept for it! — this, . . . the paper's
 light . . .
 Said, *Dear, I love thee*; and I sank and
 quailed
 As if God's future thundered on my past.
 This said, *I am thine* — and so its ink has
 paled
 With lying at my heart that beat too fast.
 And this . . . O Love, thy words have ill
 availed
 If, what this said, I dared repeat at last!

XXIX

I THINK of thee! — my thoughts do twine
 and bud
 About thee, as wild vines, about a tree,
 Put out broad leaves, and soon there's
 nought to see
 Except the straggling green which hides
 the wood.
 Yet, O my palm-tree, be it understood
 I will not have my thoughts instead of
 thee
 Who art dearer, better! Rather, instantly
 Renew thy presence; as a strong tree
 should,
 Rustle thy boughs and set thy trunk all
 bare,
 And let these bands of greenery which in-
 sphere thee
 Drop heavily down, — burst, shattered,
 everywhere!
 Because, in this deep joy to see and hear
 thee
 And breathe within thy shadow a new air,
 I do not think of thee — I am too near thee.

XXX

I SEE thine image through my tears to-
 night,
 And yet to-day I saw thee smiling. How
 Refer the cause? — Belovèd, is it thou
 Or I, who makes me sad? The acolyte
 Amid the chanted joy and thankful rite
 May so fall flat, with pale insensate brow,
 On the altar-stair. I hear thy voice and
 vow,
 Perplexed, uncertain, since thou art out of
 sight,
 As he, in his swooning ears, the choir's
 Amen.
 Belovèd, dost thou love? or did I see all
 The glory as I dreamed, and fainted when
 Too vehement light dilated my ideal,

For my soul's eyes ? Will that light come
again,
As now these tears come — falling hot and
real ?

XXXI

THOU comest ! all is said without a word.
I sit beneath thy looks, as children do
In the noon-sun, with souls that tremble
through

Their happy eyelids from an unaverred
Yet prodigal inward joy. Behold, I erred
In that last doubt ! and yet I cannot rue
The sin most, but the occasion — that we
two

Should for a moment stand unministered
By a mutual presence. Ah, keep near and
close,

Thou dovelike help ! and, when my fears
would rise,

With thy broad heart serenely interpose:
Brood down with thy divine sufficiencies
These thoughts which tremble when bereft
of those,

Like callow birds left desert to the skies.

XXXII

THE first time that the sun rose on thine
oath

To love me, I looked forward to the moon
To slacken all those bonds which seemed
too soon

And quickly tied to make a lasting troth.
Quick-loving hearts, I thought, may quickly
loathe;

And, looking on myself, I seemed not one
For such man's love ! — more like an out-
of-tune

Worn viol, a good singer would be wroth
To spoil his song with, and which, snatched
in haste,

Is laid down at the first ill-sounding note.
I did not wrong myself so, but I placed
A wrong on *thee*. For perfect strains may
float

'Neath master-hands, from instruments de-
faced, —

And great souls, at one stroke, may do and
doat.

XXXIII

YES, call me by my pet-name ! let me hear
The name I used to run at, when a child,
From innocent play, and leave the cowslips
piled,

To glance up in some face that proved me
dear

With the look of its eyes. I miss the clear
Fond voices which, being drawn and recon-
ciled

Into the music of Heaven's undefiled,
Call me no longer. Silence on the bier,
While I call God — call God ! — So let thy
mouth

Be heir to those who are now exanimate.
Gather the north flowers to complete the
south,

And catch the early love up in the late.
Yes, call me by that name, — and I, in
truth,

With the same heart, will answer and not
wait.

XXXIV

WITH the same heart, I said, I'll answer
thee

As those, when thou shalt call me by my
name —

Lo, the vain promise ! is the same, the
same,

Perplexed and ruffled by life's strategy ?
When called before, I told how hastily
I dropped my flowers or brake off from a
game,

To run and answer with the smile that
came

At play last moment, and went on with me
Through my obedience. When I answer
now,

I drop a grave thought, break from soli-
tude;

Yet still my heart goes to thee — ponder
how —

Not as to a single good, but all my good !
Lay thy hand on it, best one, and allow
That no child's foot could run fast as this
blood.

XXXV

IF I leave all for thee, wilt thou exchange
And be all to me ? Shall I never miss
Home-talk and blessing and the common
kiss

That comes to each in turn, nor count it
strange,

When I look up, to drop on a new range
Of walls and floors, another home than
this ?

Nay, wilt thou fill that place by me which
is

Filled by dead eyes too tender to know
change?
That's hardest. If to conquer love, has
tried,
To conquer grief, tries more, as all things
prove;
For grief indeed is love and grief beside.
Alas, I have grieved so I am hard to love.
Yet love me — wilt thou? Open thine
heart wide,
And fold within the wet wings of thy dove.

XXXVI

WHEN we met first and loved, I did not
build
Upon the event with marble. Could it
mean
To last, a love set pendulous between
Sorrow and sorrow? Nay, I rather thrilled,
Distrusting every light that seemed to gild
The onward path, and feared to overlean
A finger even. And, though I have grown
serene
And strong since then, I think that God
has willed
A still renewable fear . . . O love, O
troth . . .
Lest these enclasped hands should never
hold,
This mutual kiss drop down between us
both
As an unowned thing, once the lips being
cold.
And Love, be false! if *he*, to keep one
oath,
Must lose one joy, by his life's star foretold.

XXXVII

PARDON, oh, pardon, that my soul should
make,
Of all that strong divineness which I know
For thine and thee, an image only so
Formed of the sand, and fit to shift and
break.
It is that distant years which did not take
Thy sovrantry, recoiling with a blow,
Have forced my swimming brain to under-
go
Their doubt and dread, and blindly to for-
sake
Thy purity of likeness and distort
Thy worthiest love to a worthless counter-
feit:
As if a shipwrecked Pagan, safe in port,

His guardian sea-god to commemorate,
Should set a sculptured porpoise, gills
a-snort
And vibrant tail, within the temple-gate.

XXXVIII

FIRST time he kissed me, he but only kissed
The fingers of this hand wherewith I write;
And ever since, it grew more clean and
white,
Slow to world-greetings, quick with its 'Oh,
list,'
When the angels speak. A ring of ame-
thyst
I could not wear here, plainer to my sight,
Than that first kiss. The second passed in
height
The first, and sought the forehead, and half
missed,
Half falling on the hair. O beyond meed!
That was the chrism of love, which love's
own crown,
With sanctifying sweetness, did precede.
The third upon my lips was folded down
In perfect, purple state; since when, in-
deed,
I have been proud and said, 'My love, my
own.'

XXXIX

BECAUSE thou hast the power and own'st
the grace
To look through and behind this mask of
me
(Against which years have beat thus blanch-
ingly
With their rains), and behold my soul's
true face,
The dim and weary witness of life's race, —
Because thou hast the faith and love to see,
Through that same soul's distracting
lethargy,
The patient angel waiting for a place
In the new Heavens, — because nor sin nor
woe,
Nor God's infliction, nor death's neighbor-
hood,
Nor all which others viewing, turn to
go,
Nor all which makes me tired of all, self-
viewed, —
Nothing repels thee, . . . Dearest, teach
me so
To pour out gratitude, as thou dost, good!

XL

OH, yes ! they love through all this world
of ours !

I will not gainsay love, called love forsooth.
I have heard love talked in my early youth,
And since, not so long back but that the
flowers

Then gathered, smell still. Mussulmans
and Giaours

Throw kerchiefs at a smile, and have no
ruth

For any weeping. Polypheme's white tooth
Slips on the nut if, after frequent showers,
The shell is over-smooth, — and not so
much

Will turn the thing called love, aside to
hate

Or else to oblivion. But thou art not such
A lover, my Belovèd ! thou canst wait
Through sorrow and sickness, to bring souls
to touch,

And think it soon when others cry 'Too
late.'

XLI

I THANK all who have loved me in their
hearts,

With thanks and love from mine. Deep
thanks to all

Who paused a little near the prison-wall
To hear my music in its louder parts
Ere they went onward, each one to the
mart's

Or temple's occupation, beyond call.
But thou, who, in my voice's sink and fall
When the sob took it, thy divinest Art's
Own instrument didst drop down at thy
foot

To hearken what I said between my
tears, . . .

Instruct me how to thank thee ! Oh, to
shoot

My soul's full meaning into future years,
That *they* should lend it utterance, and
salute

Love that endures, from Life that disap-
pears !

XLII

This sonnet was not in the privately printed
collection of 1847, which were forty-three in
all ; but was first inserted when the sonnets
were included among Mrs. Browning's other
poems in 1856.

'My future will not copy fair my past' —

I wrote that once ; and thinking at my side
My ministering life-angel justified
The word by his appealing look upcast
To the white throne of God, I turned at
last,

And there, instead, saw thee, not unallied
To angels in thy soul ! Then I, long tried
By natural ills, received the comfort fast,
While budding, at thy sight, my pilgrim's
staff

Gave out green leaves with morning dew's
impearled.

I seek no copy now of life's first half :
Leave here the pages with long musing
curled,

And write me new my future's epigraph,
New angel mine, unhopèd for in the world !

XLIII

How do I love thee ? Let me count the
ways.

I love thee to the depth and breadth and
height

My soul can reach, when feeling out of
sight

For the ends of Being and ideal Grace,
I love thee to the level of everyday's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right ;
I love thee purely, as they turn from
Praise.

I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's
faith.

I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints, — I love thee with
the breath,

Smiles, tears, of all my life ! — and, if God
choose,

I shall but love thee better after death.

XLIV

BELOVED, thou hast brought me many
flowers

Plucked in the garden, all the summer
through

And winter, and it seemed as if they grew
In this close room, nor missed the sun and
showers.

So, in the like name of that love of ours,
Take back these thoughts which here un-
folded too,

And which on warm and cold days I with-
drew

From my heart's ground. Indeed, those
beds and bowers
Be overgrown with bitter weeds and rue,
And wait thy weeding; yet here's eglantine,
Here's ivy! — take them, as I used to do

Thy flowers, and keep them where they
shall not pine.
Instruct thine eyes to keep their colors
true,
And tell thy soul their roots are left in
mine.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

Mr. and Mrs. Browning, who had passed the first winter of their married life at Pisa, moved on to Florence in May, 1847. They occupied for the first two or three months of their residence there an apartment in the Via delle Belle Donne, near the Duomo; but on their return to Florence, after a short visit to Vallombrosa at midsummer, they installed themselves in the palace on the Via Maggio, which has ever since been associated with their names; where the Italians have placed a tablet to Mrs. Browning's memory and which is now the property of Mr. Robert Barrett Browning. Mrs. Browning's first letter from 'Palazzo Guidi' is dated May 7, 1847. The windows of the apartment, which comprised six rooms on the *piano nobile*, overlooked the then Piazza del Gran Duca; now the Piazza Pitti, — which was the actual theatre of many of the most picturesque events and striking demonstrations connected with the abortive Italian revolution of 1848. The first part of the poem was written in that heroic year; the second, nearly three years later, in 1851, — the year of its first publication by Chapman & Hall. Mrs. Browning is careful to explain in her preface to this first edition, that she has attempted 'no continuous narrative, nor exposition of political philosophy,' but merely 'a simple story of personal impressions

whose only value is in the intensity with which they were received, as proving her warm attachment for a beautiful and unfortunate country.' She further apologizes for the discrepancy in tone between the two parts of the poem, which, she says, cannot be as painful to the reader as it is to the writer herself: though she thinks it should be accepted as a guaranty of her sincerity. Indeed Part II. shows a great, and much too great, revulsion of feeling from the facile sympathy and buoyant enthusiasm of Part I. Neither the optimism of 1848, nor the pessimism of 1851, was fully justified by facts; but in either case, the writer's point of view was more that of an artist than a politician; of a spectator at the play, than of an earnest partisan. Her whole-souled adoption of the cause of Italian independence, and passionate identification with it, date from a later period, after she had lived longer in Italy, and had begun to know Italians. The defeat of the patriots at Novara in 1849, which crushed the hopes of Italy for the time being, and was attended by peculiarly tragical circumstances, is barely mentioned in Mrs. Browning's letters. The premature peace of Villafranca, ten years later, almost broke her heart, and certainly shortened her days.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

A POEM, IN TWO PARTS

PART I

I HEARD last night a little child go singing
'Neath Casa Guidi windows, by the church,
O bella libertà, O bella! — stringing
The same words still on notes he went
in search
So high for, you concluded the upspringing

Of such a nimble bird to sky from perch
Must leave the whole bush in a tremble
green,

And that the heart of Italy must beat,
While such a voice had leave to rise serene
'Twixt church and palace of a Florence
street: 10

A little child, too, who not long had been
By mother's finger steadied on his feet,
And still *O bella libertà* he sang.

Then I thought, musing, of the innumerable

Sweet songs which still for Italy outrang
From older singers' lips who sang not thus

Exultingly and purely, yet, with pang
Fast sheathed in music, touched the heart
of us

So finely that the pity scarcely pained.
I thought how Filicaja led on others, ²⁰
Bewailers for their Italy enchained,
And how they called her childless among
mothers,

Widow of empires, ay, and scarce re-
frained

Cursing her beauty to her face, as brothers
Might a shamed sister's, — 'Had she
been less fair

She were less wretched;' — how, evoking
so

From congregated wrong and heaped
despair

Of men and women writhing under blow,
Harrowed and hideous in a filthy lair,

Some personating Image wherein woe ³⁰
Was wrapt in beauty from offending
much,

They called it Cybele, or Niobe,
Or laid it corpse-like on a bier for
such,

Where all the world might drop for It-
aly

Those cadenced tears which burn not
where they touch, —

'Juliet of nations, canst thou die as we ?
And was the violet crown that crowned
thy head

So over-large, though new buds made it
rough,

It slipped down and across thine eyelids
dead,

O sweet, fair Juliet ?' Of such songs
enough, ⁴⁰

Too many of such complaints ! behold,
instead,

Void at Verona, Juliet's marble trough:
As void as that is, are all images

Men set between themselves and actual
wrong,

To catch the weight of pity, meet the
stress

Of conscience, — since 't is easier to gaze
long

On mournful masks and sad effigies
Than on real, live, weak creatures crushed
by strong.

For me who stand in Italy to-day
Where worthier poets stood and sang be-
fore,

50

I kiss their footsteps yet their words gain-
say.

I can but muse in hope upon this shore
Of golden Arno as it shoots away

Through Florence' heart beneath her
bridges four:

Bent bridges, seeming to strain off like
bows

And tremble while the arrowy undertide
Shoots on and cleaves the marble as it
goes,

And strikes up palace-walls on either side,
And froths the cornice out in glittering
rows,

With doors and windows quaintly multi-
plied, ⁶⁰

And terrace-sweeps, and gazers upon all,
By whom if flower or kerchief were thrown
out

From any lattice there, the same would
fall

Into the river underneath, no doubt,
It runs so close and fast 'twixt wall and
wall.

How beautiful ! the mountains from with-
out

In silence listen for the word said next.
What word will men say, — here where
Giotto planted

His campanile like an unperplexed
Fine question Heavenward, touching the
things granted ⁷⁰

A noble people who, being greatly vexed
In act, in aspiration keep undaunted ?
What word will God say ? Michael's
Night and Day

And Dawn and Twilight wait in marble
scorn

Like dogs upon a dunghill, couched on
clay,

From whence the Medicean stamp's out-
worn,

The final putting off of all such sway
By all such hands, and freeing of the un-
born

In Florence and the great world outside
Florence.

Three hundred years his patient statues
wait ⁸⁰

In that small chapel of the dim Saint
Lawrence:

Day's eyes are breaking bold and passion-
ate

Over his shoulder, and will flash abhor-
rence

On darkness and with level looks meet
 fate,
 When once loose from that marble film
 of theirs;
 The Night has wild dreams in her sleep,
 the Dawn
 Is haggard as the sleepless, Twilight
 wears
 A sort of horror; as the veil withdrawn
 'Twixt the artist's soul and works had
 left them heirs
 Of speechless thoughts which would not
 quail nor fawn,
 Of angers and contempts, of hope and
 love:
 For not without a meaning did he place
 The princely Urbino on the seat above
 With everlasting shadow on his face,
 While the slow dawns and twilights dis-
 approve
 The ashes of his long-extinguished race
 Which never more shall clog the feet of
 men.
 I do believe, divinest Angelo,
 That winter-hour in Via Larga, when
 They bade thee build a statue up in snow
 And straight that marvel of thine art
 again
 Dissolved beneath the sun's Italian glow,
 Thine eyes, dilated with the plastic
 passion,
 Thawing too in drops of wounded man-
 hood, since,
 To mock alike thine art and indignation,
 Laughed at the palace-window the new
 prince, —
 ('Aha! this genius needs for exalta-
 tion,
 When all's said and howe'er the proud
 may wince,
 A little marble from our princely
 mines!')

I do believe that hour thou laughedst too
 For the whole sad world and for thy
 Florentines,
 After those few tears, which were only
 few!
 That as, beneath the sun, the grand
 white lines
 Of thy snow-statue trembled and with-
 drew, —
 The head, erect as Jove's, being palsied
 first,
 The eyelids flattened, the full brow turned
 blank,

The right-hand, raised but now as if it
 cursed,
 Dropt, a mere snowball, (till the people
 sank
 Their voices, though a louder laughter
 burst
 From the royal window) — thou couldst
 proudly thank
 God and the prince for promise and
 presage,
 And laugh the laugh back, I think verily,
 Thine eyes being purged by tears of
 righteous rage
 To read a wrong into a prophecy,
 And measure a true great man's heri-
 tage
 Against a mere great-duke's posterity.
 I think thy soul said then, 'I do not need
 A principedom and its quarries, after all;
 For if I write, paint, carve a word, in-
 deed,
 On book or board or dust, on floor or wall,
 The same is kept of God who taketh
 heed
 That not a letter of the meaning fall
 Or ere it touch and teach his world's
 deep heart,
 Outlasting, therefore, all your lordships,
 sir!
 So keep your stone, beseech you, for your
 part,
 To cover up your grave-place and refer
 The proper titles; *I live by my art.*
 The thought I threw into this snow shall
 stir
 This gazing people when their gaze is
 done;
 And the tradition of your act and mine,
 When all the snow is melted in the sun,
 Shall gather up, for unborn men, a sign
 Of what is the true principedom, — ay,
 and none
 Shall laugh that day, except the drunk
 with wine.'

Amen, great Angelo! the day's at hand.
 If many laugh not on it, shall we weep?
 Much more we must not, let us under-
 stand.
 Through rhymers sonneteering in their
 sleep,
 And archaists mumbling dry bones up
 the land,
 And sketchers lauding ruined towns
 a-heap, —

Through all that drowsy hum of voices
smooth,
The hopeful bird mounts carolling from
brake,
The hopeful child, with leaps to catch
his growth,
Sings open-eyed for liberty's sweet sake:
And I, a singer also from my youth,
Prefer to sing with these who are awake,
With birds, with babes, with men who
will not fear
The baptism of the holy morning dew,
(And many of such wakers now are here,
Complete in their anointed manhood, who
Will greatly dare and greatlier perse-
vere) ¹⁶¹
Than join those old thin voices with my
new,
And sigh for Italy with some safe sigh
Cooped up in music 'twixt an oh and ah, —
Nay, hand in hand with that young child,
will I
Go singing rather, '*Bella libertà,*'
Than, with those poets, croon the dead or
cry
'*Se tu men bella fossi, Italia !*'

'Less wretched if less fair.' Perhaps
a truth
Is so far plain in this, that Italy, ¹⁷⁰
Long trammelled with the purple of her
youth
Against her age's ripe activity,
Sits still upon her tombs, without death's
ruth
But also without life's brave energy.
'Now tell us what is Italy?' men ask:
And others answer, 'Virgil, Cicero,
Catullus, Cæsar.' What beside? to
task
The memory closer — 'Why, Boccaccio,
Dante, Petrarca,' — and if still the flask
Appears to yield its wine by drops too
slow, — ¹⁸⁰
'Angelo, Raffael, Pergolese,' — all
Whose strong hearts beat through stone,
or charged again
The paints with fire of souls electrical,
Or broke up heaven for music. What
more then?
Why, then, no more. The chaplet's last
beads fall
In naming the last saintship within ken,
And, after that, none prayeth in the land.
Alas, this Italy has too long swept

Heroic ashes up for hour-glass sand;
Of her own past, impassioned nympholept!
Consenting to be nailed here by the hand
To the very bay-tree under which she
stept ¹⁹²
A queen of old, and plucked a leafy
branch;
And, licensing the world too long indeed
To use her broad phylacteries to stanch
And stop her bloody lips, she takes no
heed
How one clear word would draw an
avalanche
Of living sons around her, to succeed
The vanished generations. Can she
count
These oil-eaters with large live mobile
mouths ²⁰⁰
Agape for macaroni, in the amount
Of consecrated heroes of her south's
Bright rosary? The pitcher at the
fount,
The gift of gods, being broken, she much
loathes
To let the ground-leaves of the place
confer
A natural bowl. So henceforth she would
seem
No nation, but the poet's pensioner,
With alms from every land of song and
dream,
While aye her pipers sadly pipe of her
Until their proper breaths, in that extreme
Of sighing, split the reed on which they
played: ²¹¹
Of which, no more. But never say 'no
more'
To Italy's life! Her memories undis-
mayed
Still argue 'evermore;' her graves implore
Her future to be strong and not afraid;
Her very statues send their looks before.

We do not serve the dead — the past is
past.
God lives, and lifts his glorious mornings
up
Before the eyes of men awake at last, ²¹⁹
Who put away the meats they used to sup,
And down upon the dust of earth outcast
The dregs remaining of the ancient cup,
Then turn to wakeful prayer and worthy
act.
The Dead, upon their awful 'vantage
ground,

The sun not in their faces, shall abstract
No more our strength; we will not be dis-
crowned

As guardians of their crowns, nor deign
transact

A barter of the present, for a sound
Of good so counted in the foregone days.

O Dead, ye shall no longer cling to us ²³⁰

With rigid hands of dessicating praise,
And drag us backward by the garment
thus,

To stand and laud you in long-drawn
virelays !

We will not henceforth be oblivious

Of our own lives, because ye lived be-
fore,

Nor of our acts, because ye acted well.

We thank you that ye first unlatched
the door,

But will not make it inaccessible

By thankings on the threshold any more.

We hurry onward to extinguish hell ²⁴⁰

With our fresh souls, our younger hope,
and God's

Maturity of purpose. Soon shall we

Die also ! and, that then our periods

Of life may round themselves to memory

As smoothly as on our graves the burial-
sods,

We now must look to it to excel as ye,

And bear our age as far, unlimited

By the last mind-mark; so, to be invoked

By future generations, as their Dead.

'Tis true that when the dust of death has
choked ²⁵⁰

A great man's voice, the common words
he said

Turn oracles, the common thoughts he
yoked

Like horses, draw like griffins: this is
true

And acceptable. I, too, should desire,

When men make record, with the flowers
they strew,

'Savonarola's soul went out in fire

Upon our Grand-duke's piazza, and
burned through

A moment first, or ere he did expire,

The veil betwixt the right and wrong, and
showed

How near God sat and judged the judges
there,' — ²⁶⁰

Upon the self-same pavement over-
strewed

To cast my violets with as reverent care,
And prove that all the winters which
have snowed

Cannot snow out the scent from stones and
air

Of a sincere man's virtues. This was he,
Savonarola, who, while Peter sank

With his whole boat-load, called coura-
geously

'Wake Christ, wake Christ !' — who,
having tried the tank

Of old church-waters used for baptism
Ere Luther came to spill them, swore they
stank; ²⁷⁰

Who also by a princely deathbed cried,
'Loose Florence, or God will not loose thy
soul !'

Then fell back the Magnificent and died
Beneath the star-look shooting from the
cowl,

Which turned to wormwood-bitterness
the wide

Deep sea of his ambitions. It were foul

To grudge Savonarola and the rest

Their violets: rather pay them quick and
fresh !

The emphasis of death makes manifest
The eloquence of action in our flesh; ²⁸⁰

And men who, living, were but dimly
guessed,

When once free from their life's entangled
mesh,

Show their full length in graves, or oft
indeed

Exaggerate their stature, in the flat,

To noble admirations which exceed

Most nobly, yet will calculate in that

But accurately. We, who are the seed
Of buried creatures, if we turned and
spat

Upon our antecedents, we were vile.

Bring violets rather. If these had not
walked ²⁹⁰

Their furlong, could we hope to walk our
mile ?

Therefore bring violets. Yet if we self-
balked

Stand still, a-strewing violets all the while,
These moved in vain, of whom we have
vainly talked.

So rise up henceforth with a cheerful
smile,

And having strewn the violets, reap the
corn,

And having reaped and garnered, bring
the plough
And draw new furrows 'neath the healthy
morn,
And plant the great Hereafter in this
Now.

Of old 't was so. How step by step was
worn, ³⁰⁰

As each man gained on each securely! —
how
Each by his own strength sought his own
Ideal, —

The ultimate Perfection leaning bright
From out the sun and stars to bless the
leal

And earnest search of all for Fair and
Right
Through doubtful forms by earth accounted
real!

Because old Jubal blew into delight
The souls of men with clear-piped melodies,
If youthful Asaph were content at most
To draw from Jubal's grave, with listening
eyes, ³¹⁰

Traditionary music's floating ghost
Into the grass-grown silence, were it wise?
And was 't not wiser, Jubal's breath being
lost,

That Miriam clashed her cymbals to sur-
prise

The sun between her white arms flung
apart,
With new glad golden sounds? that Da-
vid's strings

O'erflowed his hand with music from his
heart?

So harmony grows full from many springs,
And happy accident turns holy art.

You enter, in your Florence wanderings, ³²⁰
The church of Saint Maria Novella. Pass
The left stair, where at plague-time Ma-
chiavel

Saw One with set fair face as in a glass,
Dressed out against the fear of death and
hell,

Rustling her silks in pauses of the mass,
To keep the thought off how her husband
fell,

When she left home, stark dead across
her feet, —

The stair leads up to what the Orgagnas
save

Of Dante's dæmons; you, in passing it,

Ascend the right stair from the farther
nave ³³⁰

To muse in a small chapel scarcely lit
By Cimabue's Virgin. Bright and brave,
That picture was accounted, mark, of
old:

A king stood bare before its sovran grace,
A reverent people shouted to behold
The picture, not the king, and even the
place

Containing such a miracle grew bold,
Named the Glad Borgo from that beauteous
face

Which thrilled the artist, after work, to
think

His own ideal Mary-smile should stand ³⁴⁰
So very near him, — he, within the
brink

Of all that glory, let in by his hand
With too divine a rashness! Yet none
shrink

Who come to gaze here now; albeit 't was
planned

Sublimely in the thought's simplicity:
The Lady, throned in empyreal state,
Minds only the young Babe upon her
knee,

While sidelong angels bear the royal
weight,

Prostrated meekly, smiling tenderly ³⁴⁹
Oblivion of their wings; the Child thereat
Stretching its hand like God. If any
should,

Because of some stiff draperies and loose
joints,

Gaze scorn down from the heights of
Raffaelhood

On Cimabue's picture, — Heaven anoints
The head of no such critic, and his blood
The poet's curse strikes full on and ap-
points

To ague and cold spasms for evermore.
A noble picture! worthy of the shout
Wherewith along the streets the people
bore

Its cherub-faces which the sun threw
out ³⁶⁰

Until they stooped and entered the
church door.

Yet rightly was young Giotto talked about,
Whom Cimabue found among the sheep,
And knew, as gods know gods, and carried
home

To paint the things he had painted, with
a deep

And fuller insight, and so overcome
His chapel - Lady with a heavenlier
sweep

Of light: for thus we mount into the sum
Of great things known or acted. I
hold, too,

That Cimabue smiled upon the lad ³⁷⁰
At the first stroke which passed what he
could do,

Or else his Virgin's smile had never had
Such sweetness in 't. All great men who
foreknew

Their heirs in art, for art's sake have been
glad,

And bent their old white heads as if un-
crowned,

Fanatics of their pure Ideals still
Far more than of their triumphs, which
were found

With some less vehement struggle of the
will.

If old Margheritone trembled, swooned
And died despairing at the open sill ³⁸⁰
Of other men's achievements (who
achieved,

By loving art beyond the master), he
Was old Margheritone, and conceived
Never, at first youth and most ecstacy,
A Virgin like that dream of one, which
heaved

The death-sigh from his heart. If wist-
fully

Margheritone sickened at the smell
Of Cimabue's laurel, let him go!

For Cimabue stood up very well
In spite of Giotto's, and Angelico ³⁹⁰

The artist-saint kept smiling in his cell
The smile with which he welcomed the
sweet slow

Inbreak of angels (whitening through
the dim

That he might paint them), while the sud-
den sense

Of Raffael's future was revealed to him
By force of his own fair works' compe-
tence.

The same blue waters where the dol-
phins swim

Suggest the tritons. Through the blue
Immense

Strike out, all swimmers! cling not in
the way

Of one another, so to sink; but learn ⁴⁰⁰
The strong man's impulse, catch the
freshening spray

He throws up in his motions, and discern
By his clear westerling eye, the time of
day.

Thou, God, hast set us worthy gifts to
earn

Besides thy heaven and Thee! and when
I say

There's room here for the weakest man
alive

To live and die, there's room too, I re-
peat,

For all the strongest to live well, and
strive

Their own way, by their individual
heat, —

Like some new bee-swarm leaving the old
hive, ⁴¹⁰

Despite the wax which tempts so violet-
sweet.

Then let the living live, the dead retain
Their grave - cold flowers! — though
honor's best supplied

By bringing actions, to prove theirs not
vain.

Cold graves, we say? it shall be testi-
fied

That living men who burn in heart and
brain,

Without the dead were colder. If we
tried

To sink the past beneath our feet, be
sure

The future would not stand. Precipi-
tate

This old roof from the shrine, and, inse-
cure, ⁴²⁰

The nesting swallows fly off, mate from
mate.

How scant the gardens, if the graves were
fewer!

The tall green poplars grew no longer
straight

Whose tops not looked to Troy. Would
any fight

For Athens, and not swear by Mara-
thon?

Who dared build temples, without tombs
in sight?

Or live, without some dead man's beni-
son?

Or seek truth, hope for good, and strive
for right,

If, looking up, he saw not in the sun
Some angel of the martyrs all day long ⁴³⁰

Standing and waiting? Your last
rhythm will need
Your earliest key-note. Could I sing this
song,

If my dead masters had not taken heed
To help the heavens and earth to make me
strong,

As the wind ever will find out some reed
And touch it to such issues as belong

To such a frail thing? None may
grudge the Dead

Libations from full cups. Unless we choose
To look back to the hills behind us
spread,

The plains before us sadden and confuse;
If orphaned, we are disinherited. 447

I would but turn these lachrymals to use,
And pour fresh oil in from the olive-
grove,

To furnish them as new lamps. Shall I
say

What made my heart beat with exulting
love

A few weeks back? —

The day was such a day
As Florence owes the sun. The sky
above,

Its weight upon the mountains seemed to
lay,

And palpitate in glory, like a dove
Who has flown too fast, full-hearted —
take away 450

The image! for the heart of man beat
higher

That day in Florence, flooding all her
streets

And piazzas with a tumult and desire.

The people, with accumulated heats
And faces turned one way, as if one fire

Both drew and flushed them, left their
ancient beats

And went up towards the palace-Pitti
wall

To thank their Grand-duke who, not quite
of course,

Had graciously permitted, at their call,
The citizens to use their civic force 460

To guard their civic homes. So, one
and all,

The Tuscan cities streamed up to the
source

Of this new good at Florence, taking it
As good so far, presageful of more good, —

The first torch of Italian freedom, lit

To toss in the next tiger's face who should
Approach too near them in a greedy
fit, —

The first pulse of an even flow of blood
To prove the level of Italian veins

Towards rights perceived and granted.
How we gazed 470

From Casa Guidi windows while, in
trains

Of orderly procession — banners raised,
And intermittent bursts of martial
strains

Which died upon the shout, as if amazed
By gladness beyond music — they passed
on!

The Magistracy, with insignia, passed, —
And all the people shouted in the sun,
And all the thousand windows which had
cast

A ripple of silks in blue and scarlet
down

(As if the houses overflowed at last), 480
Seemed growing larger with fair heads
and eyes.

The Lawyers passed, — and still arose the
shout,

And hands broke from the windows to
surprise

Those grave calm brows with bay-tree
leaves thrown out.

The Priesthood passed, — the friars
with worldly-wise

Keen sidelong glances from their beards
about

The street to see who shouted; many a
monk

Who takes a long rope in the waist, was
there:

Whereat the popular exultation drunk
With indrawn 'vivas' the whole sunny air,

While through the murmuring windows
rose and sunk 491

A cloud of kerchiefed hands, — 'The
church makes fair

Her welcome in the new Pope's name.'
Ensued

The black sign of the 'Martyrs' — (name
no name,

But count the graves in silence). Next
were viewed

The Artists; next, the Trades; and after
came

The People, — flag and sign, and rights
as good —

And very loud the shout was for that same

Motto, 'Il popolo.' IL POPOLO, —
The word means dukedom, empire, majesty,
And kings in such an hour might read it so.

And next, with banners, each in his degree,
Deputed representatives a-row

Of every separate state of Tuscany:

Siena's she-wolf, bristling on the fold

Of the first flag, preceded Pisa's hare,

And Massa's lion floated calm in gold,

Pienza's following with his silver stare,

Arezzo's steed pranced clear from
bridle-hold, —

And well might shout our Florence, greet-
ing there

These, and more brethren. Last, the
world had sent

The various children of her teeming
flanks —

Greeks, English, French — as if to a
parliament

Of lovers of her Italy in ranks,

Each bearing its land's symbol reverent;

At which the stones seemed breaking into
thanks

And rattling up the sky, such sounds in
proof

Arose; the very house-walls seemed to
bend;

The very windows, up from door to roof,
Flashed out a rapture of bright heads, to
mend

With passionate looks the gesture's
whirling off

A hurricane of leaves. Three hours did
end

While all these passed; and ever in the
crowd,

Rude men, unconscious of the tears that
kept

Their beards moist, shouted; some few
laughed aloud,

And none asked any why they laughed and
wept:

Friends kissed each other's cheeks, and
foes long vowed

More warmly did it; two months' babies
leapt

Right upward in their mother's arms,
whose black

Wide glittering eyes looked elsewhere;
lovers pressed

Each before either, neither glancing
back;

And peasant maidens smoothly 'tired and
tressed

Forgot to finger on their throats the
slack

Great pearl-strings; while old blind men
would not rest,

But pattered with their staves and slid
their shoes

Along the stones, and smiled as if they
saw.

O heaven, I think that day had noble use
Among God's days! So near stood Right
and Law,

Both mutually forbore! Law would
not bruise

Nor Right deny, and each in reverent
awe

Honored the other. And if, ne'erthe-
less,

That good day's sun delivered to the vines
No charta, and the liberal Duke's ex-
cess

Did scarce exceed a Guelf's or Ghibel-
line's

In any special actual righteousness
Of what that day he granted, still the signs

Are good and full of promise, we must
say,

When multitudes approach their kings with
prayers

And kings concede their people's right to
pray

Both in one sunshine. Grievances are not de-
spairs,

So uttered, nor can royal claims dismay
When men from humble homes and ducal
chairs

Hate wrong together. It was well to
view

Those banners ruffled in a ruler's face
Inscribed, 'Live freedom, union, and all
true

Brave patriots who are aided by God's
grace!'

Nor was it ill when Leopoldo drew
His little children to the window-place

He stood in at the Pitti, to suggest
They too should govern as the people willed.

What a cry rose then! some, who saw
the best,

Declared his eyes filled up and overfilled
With good warm human tears which un-
repressed

Ran down. I like his face; the forehead's
build

Has no capacious genius, yet perhaps
 Sufficient comprehension, — mild and sad,
 And careful nobly, — not with care that
 wraps
 Self-loving hearts, to stifle and make mad,
 But careful with the care that shuns a
 lapse
 Of faith and duty, studious not to add 570
 A burden in the gathering of a gain.
 And so, God save the Duke, I say with
 those
 Who that day shouted it; and while
 dukes reign,
 May all wear in the visible overflows
 Of spirit, such a look of careful pain !
 For God must love it better than repose.

And all the people who went up to let
 Their hearts out to that Duke, as has
 been told —
 Where guess ye that the living people met,
 Kept tryst, formed ranks, chose leaders,
 first unrolled 580
 Their banners ?

In the Loggia ? where is set
 Cellini's godlike Perseus, bronze or gold,
 (How name the metal, when the statue
 flings
 Its soul so in your eyes ?) with brow and
 sword
 Superbly calm, as all opposing things,
 Slain with the Gorgon, were no more
 abhorred
 Since ended ?

No, the people sought no wings
 From Perseus in the Loggia, nor implored
 An inspiration in the place beside
 From that dim bust of Brutus, jagged
 and grand, 590
 Where Buonarroti passionately tried
 From out the close-clenched marble to
 demand

The head of Rome's sublimest homicide,
 Then dropt the quivering mallet from
 his hand,
 Despairing he could find no model-stuff
 Of Brutus in all Florence where he found
 The gods and gladiators thick enough.
 Nor there ! the people chose still holier
 ground:
 The people, who are simple, blind and
 rough,
 Know their own angels, after looking
 round. 600
 Whom chose they then ? where met they ?

On the stone
 Called Dante's, — a plain flat stone scarce
 discerned
 From others in the pavement, — whereupon
 He used to bring his quiet chair out,
 turned
 To Brunelleschi's church, and pour alone
 The lava of his spirit when it burned:
 It is not cold to-day. O passionate
 Poor Dante who, a banished Florentine,
 Didst sit austere at banquets of the great 609
 And muse upon this far-off stone of thine
 And think how oft some passer used to wait
 A moment, in the golden day's decline,
 With ' Good night, dearest Dante ! ' — well,
 good night !

I muse now, Dante, and think verily,
 Though chapelled in the byeway out of
 sight,
 Ravenna's bones would thrill with
 ecstasy,
 Couldst know thy favorite stone's elected
 right

As tryst-place for thy Tuscans to foresee
 Their earliest chartas from. Good night,
 good morn,

Henceforward, Dante ! now my soul is
 sure 620
 That thine is better comforted of scorn,
 And looks down earthward in completer
 cure

Than when, in Santa Croce church forlorn
 Of any corpse, the architect and hewer
 Did pile the empty marbles as thy tomb.

For now thou art no longer exiled, now
 Best honored: we salute thee who art come
 Back to the old stone with a softer brow
 Than Giotto drew upon the wall, for some
 Good lovers of our age to track and
 plough 630

Their way to, through time's ordures stratified,

And startle broad awake into the dull
 Bargello chamber: now thou 'rt milder-
 eyed, —

Now Beatrix may leap up glad to cull
 Thy first smile, even in heaven and at her
 side,

Like that which, nine years old, looked
 beautiful

At May-game. What do I say ? I only
 meant

That tender Dante loved his Florence
 well,

While Florence, now, to love him is content;

And, mark ye, that the piercingest sweet
 smell 640
 Of love's dear incense by the living sent
 To find the dead, is not accessible
 To lazy livers — no narcotic, — not
 Swung in a censer to a sleepy tune, —
 But trod out in the morning air by hot
 Quick spirits who tread firm to ends fore-
 shown,
 And use the name of greatness unforget,
 To meditate what greatness may be done.

For Dante sits in heaven and ye stand
 here,
 And more remains for doing, all must
 feel, 650
 Than trysting on his stone from year to
 year
 To shift processions, civic toe to heel,
 The town's thanks to the Pitti. Are ye
 freer
 For what was felt that day? a chariot-
 wheel
 May spin fast, yet the chariot never roll.
 But if that day suggested something
 good,
 And bettered, with one purpose, soul by
 soul, —
 Better means freer. A land's brother-
 hood
 Is most puissant: men, upon the whole,
 Are what they can be, — nations, what
 they would. 660

Will, therefore, to be strong, thou Italy!
 Will to be noble! Austrian Metter-
 nich
 Can fix no yoke unless the neck agree;
 And thine is like the lion's when the
 thick
 Dews shudder from it, and no man would
 be
 The stroker of his mane, which less
 would prick
 His nostril with a reed. When nations
 roar
 Like lions, who shall tame them and de-
 fraud
 Of the due pasture by the river-shore?
 Roar, therefore! shake your dewlaps
 dry abroad: 670
 The amphitheatre with open door
 Leads back upon the benches who ap-
 plaud
 The last spear-thruster.

Yet the Heavens forbid
 That we should call on passion to con-
 front
 The brutal with the brutal and, amid
 This ripening world, suggest a lion-hunt
 And lion's vengeance for the wrongs men
 did
 And do now, though the spears are get-
 ting blunt.
 We only call, because the sight and proof
 Of lion-strength hurts nothing; and to
 show 680
 A lion-heart, and measure paw with hoof,
 Helps something, even, and will instruct
 a foe
 As well as the onslaught, how to stand
 aloof:
 Or else the world gets past the mere
 brute blow
 Or given or taken. Children use the fist
 Until they are of age to use the brain;
 And so we needed Cæsars to assist
 Man's justice, and Napoleons to explain
 God's counsel, when a point was nearly
 missed,
 Until our generations should attain 690
 Christ's stature nearer. Not that we, alas,
 Attain already; but a single inch
 Will raise to look down on the swordsman's
 pass,
 As knightly Roland on the coward's
 flinch:
 And, after chloroform and ether-gas,
 We find out slowly what the bee and finch
 Have ready found, through Nature's lamp
 in each,
 How to our races we may justify
 Our individual claims and, as we reach
 Our own grapes, bend the top vines to
 supply 700
 The children's uses, — how to fill a breach
 With olive-branches, — how to quench a
 lie
 With truth, and smite a foe upon the cheek
 With Christ's most conquering kiss.
 Why, these are things
 Worth a great nation's finding, to prove
 weak
 The 'glorious arms' of military kings.
 And so with wide embrace, my England,
 seek
 To stifle the bad heat and flickerings
 Of this world's false and nearly expended
 fire!
 Draw palpitating arrows to the wood, 710

And twang abroad thy high hopes and thy
higher

Resolves, from that most virtuous altitude!
Till nations shall unconsciously aspire

By looking up to thee, and learn that
good

And glory are not different. Announce
law

By freedom; exalt chivalry by peace;
Instruct how clear calm eyes can overawe,
And how pure hands, stretched simply
to release

A bond-slave, will not need a sword to
draw

To be held dreadful. O my England,
cease 720

Thy purple with no alien agonies,
No struggles toward encroachment, no
vile war!

Disband thy captains, change thy victories,
Be henceforth prosperous as the angels
are,

Helping, not humbling.

Drums and battle-cries

Go out in music of the morning-star —
And soon we shall have thinkers in the
place

Of fighters, each found able as a man
To strike electric influence through a race,

Unstayed by city-wall and barbican. 730
The poet shall look grander in the face

Than even of old (when he of Greece
began

To sing 'that Achillean wrath which slew
So many heroes') — seeing he shall treat

The deeds of souls heroic toward the true,
The oracles of life, previsions sweet

And awful like divine swans gliding
through

White arms of Ledas, which will leave
the heat

Of their escaping godship to undue
The human medium with a heavenly

flush. 740

Meanwhile, in this same Italy we want

Not popular passion, to arise and crush,
But popular conscience, which may cove-
nant

For what it knows. Concede without a
blush,

To grant the 'civic guard' is not to grant

The civic spirit, living and awake:

Those lappets on your shoulders, citizens,

Your eyes strain after sideways till they
ache

(While still, in admirations and amens,
The crowd comes up on festa-days to
take 750

The great sight in) — are not intelligence,
Not courage even — alas, if not the sign

Of something very noble, they are nought;
For every day ye dress your fallow kine

With fringes down their cheeks, though
unbesought

They loll their heavy heads and drag the
wine

And bear the wooden yoke as they were
taught

The first day. What ye want is light —
indeed

Not sunlight — (ye may well look up sur-
prised

To those unfathomable heavens that
feed 760

Your purple hills) — but God's light or-
ganized

In some high soul, crowned capable to
lead

The conscious people, conscious and ad-
vised, —

For if we lift a people like mere clay,
It falls the same. We want thee, O un-
found

And sovran teacher! if thy beard be gray
Or black, we bid thee rise up from the

ground

And speak the word God giveth thee to
say,

Inspiring into all this people round,
Instead of passion, thought, which pio-
neers 770

All generous passion, purifies from sin,
And strikes the hour for. Rise up,

teacher! here's

A crowd to make a nation! — best begin
By making each a man, till all be peers

Of earth's true patriots and pure martyrs in
Knowing and daring. Best unbar the

doors

Which Peter's heirs keep locked so over-
close

They only let the mice across the floors,
While every churchman dangles, as he goes,

The great key at his girdle, and abhors 780
In Christ's name, meekly. Open wide the

house,
Concede the entrance with Christ's liberal
mind,

And set the tables with his wine and bread.

What! 'commune in both kinds?' In every kind —

Wine, wafer, love, hope, truth, unlimited,
Nothing kept back. For when a man is blind

To starlight, will he see the rose is red?

A bondsman shivering at a Jesuit's foot —
'Væ! meâ culpâ!' — is not like to stand

A freedman at a despot's and dispute ⁷⁹⁰
His titles by the balance in his hand,

Weighing them 'suo jure.' Tend the root

If careful of the branches, and expand

The inner souls of men before you strive
For civic heroes.

But the teacher, where?

From all these crowded faces, all alive,
Eyes, of their own lids flashing themselves bare,

And brows that with a mobile life contrive
A deeper shadow, — may we in no wise dare

To put a finger out and touch a man, ⁸⁰⁰
And cry 'this is the leader'? What, all these!

Broad heads, black eyes, — yet not a soul that ran

From God down with a message? All, to please

The donna waving measures with her fan,

And not the judgment-angel on his knees
(The trumpet just an inch off from his lips),

Who when he breathes next, will put out the sun?

Yet mankind's self were foundered in eclipse,

If lacking doers, with great works to be done;

And lo, the startled earth already dips ⁸¹⁰
Back into light; a better day's begun;

And soon this leader, teacher, will stand plain,

And build the golden pipes and synthesize
This people-organ for a holy strain.

We hold this hope, and still in all these eyes

Go sounding for the deep look which shall drain

Suffused thought into channelled enterprise.

Where is the teacher? What now may he do,

Who shall do greatly? Doth he gird his waist

With a monk's rope, like Luther? or pursue ⁸²⁰

The goat, like Tell? or dry his nets in haste,

Like Masaniello when the sky was blue?

Keep house, like other peasants, with inlaced
Bare brawny arms about a favorite child,

And meditative looks beyond the door
(But not to mark the kidling's teeth have filed

The green shoots of his vine which last year bore

Full twenty bunches), or, on triple-piled
Throne-velvets sit at ease to bless the poor,

Like other pontiffs, in the Poorest's name?
The old tiara keeps itself aslope ⁸³¹

Upon his steady brows which, all the same,

Bend mildly to permit the people's hope?

Whatever hand shall grasp this oriflamme,
Whatever man (last peasant or first pope,

Seeking to free his country) shall appear,
Teach, lead, strike fire into the masses, fill

These empty bladders with fine air,
insphere

These wills into a unity of will,

And make of Italy a nation — dear ⁸⁴⁰
And blessed be that man! the Heavens

shall kill

No leaf the earth lets grow for him, and Death

Shall cast him back upon the lap of Life

To live more surely, in a clarion-breath

Of hero-music. Brutus with the knife,

Rienzi with the fasces, throb beneath

Rome's stones, — and more who threw
away joy's life

Like Pallas, that the beauty of their souls

Might ever shine untroubled and entire:

But if it can be true that he who rolls ⁸⁵⁰
The Church's thunders will reserve her fire

For only light, — from eucharistic bowls
Will pour new life for nations that expire,

And rend the scarlet of his papal vest

To gird the weak loins of his countrymen, —
I hold that he surpasses all the rest

Of Romans, heroes, patriots; and that when
He sat down on the throne, he dis-

possessed

The first graves of some glory. See again,
 This country-saving is a glorious thing:
 And if a common man achieved it? well. 861
 Say, a rich man did? excellent. A king?
 That grows sublime. A priest? improbable.

A pope? Ah, there we stop, and cannot
 bring
 Our faith up to the leap, with history's
 bell
 So heavy round the neck of it — albeit
 We fain would grant the possibility
 For thy sake, Pio Nono!

Stretch thy feet
 In that case — I will kiss them reverently
 As any pilgrim to the papal seat: 870
 And, such proved possible, thy throne to
 me

Shall seem as holy a place as Pellico's
 Venetian dungeon, or as Spielberg's grate
 At which the Lombard woman hung the
 rose

Of her sweet soul by its own dewy weight,
 To feel the dungeon round her sunshine
 close,

And pining so, died early, yet too late
 For what she suffered. Yea, I will not
 choose

Betwixt thy throne, Pope Pius, and the
 spot

Marked red for ever, spite of rains and
 dews, 880

Where Two fell riddled by the Austrian's
 shot,

The brothers Bandiera, who accuse,
 With one same mother-voice and face
 (that what

They speak may be invincible) the sins
 Of earth's tormentors before God the just,
 Until the unconscious thunderbolt begins
 To loosen in his grasp.

And yet we must

Beware, and mark the natural kiths and
 kins

Of circumstance and office, and distrust

The rich man reasoning in a poor man's
 hut, 890

The poet who neglects pure truth to
 prove

Statistic fact, the child who leaves a rut
 For a smoother road, the priest who vows
 his glove

Exhales no grace, the prince who walks
 afoot,

The woman who has sworn she will not
 love,

And this Ninth Pius in Seventh Greg-
 ory's chair,
 With Andrea Doria's forehead!

Count what goes

To making up a pope, before he wear
 That triple crown. We pass the world-
 wide throes

Which went to make the popedom, —
 the despair 900

Of free men, good men, wise men; the
 dread shows

Of women's faces, by the faggot's flash
 Tossed out, to the minutest stir and throb
 O' the white lips, the least tremble of a
 lash,

To glut the red stare of a licensed mob;
 The short mad cries down oubliettes,
 and plash

So horribly far off; priests, trained to rob,
 And kings that, like encouraged night-
 mares, sat

On nations' hearts most heavily dis-
 tressed

With monstrous sights and apophthegms
 of fate — 910

We pass these things, — because 'the
 times' are prest

With necessary charges of the weight
 Of all this sin, and Calvin, for the rest,
 Made bold to burn Servetus. Ah, men
 err! —

And so do churches! which is all we mean
 To bring to proof in any register

Of theological fat kine and lean:
 So drive them back into the pens! re-
 fer

Old sins (with pourpoint, 'quotha' and 'I
 ween')

Entirely to the old times, the old times;
 Nor ever ask why this preponderant 921
 Infallible pure Church could set her
 chimes

Most loudly then, just then, — most jubi-
 lant,

Precisely then, when mankind stood in
 crimes

Full heart-deep, and Heaven's judgments
 were not scant.

Inquire still less, what signifies a church
 Of perfect inspiration and pure laws

Who burns the first man with a brim-
 stone-torch,

And grinds the second, bone by bone, because

The times, forsooth, are used to rack and scorch! 930

What is a holy Church unless she awes

The times down from their sins? Did Christ select

Such amiable times to come and teach

Love to, and mercy? The whole world were wrecked

If every mere great man, who lives to reach

A little leaf of popular respect, Attained not simply by some special breach

In the age's customs, by some precedence

In thought and act, which, having proved him higher

Than those he lived with, proved his competence 940

In helping them to wonder and aspire.

My words are guiltless of the bigot's sense;

My soul has fire to mingle with the fire

Of all these souls, within or out of doors Of Rome's church or another. I believe

In one Priest, and one temple with its floors

Of shining jasper gloom'd at morn and eve

By countless knees of earnest auditors, And crystal walls too lucid to perceive,

That none may take the measure of the place 950

And say 'So far the porphyry, then, the flint—

To this mark mercy goes, and there ends grace,'

Though still the permeable crystals hint

At some white starry distance, bathed in space.

I feel how nature's ice-crusts keep the dint

Of undersprings of silent Deity.

I hold the articulated gospels which

Show Christ among us crucified on tree.

I love all who love truth, if poor or rich

In what they have won of truth possessively. 960

No altars and no hands defiled with pitch

Shall scare me off, but I will pray and eat

With all these—taking leave to choose my ewers—

And say at last 'Your visible churches cheat

Their inward types; and, if a church assures

Of standing without failure and defeat, The same both fails and lies.'

To leave which lures

Of wider subject through past years,— behold,

We come back from the popedom to the pope,

To ponder what he *must* be, ere we are bold 970

For what he *may* be, with our heavy hope

To trust upon his soul. So, fold by fold,

Explore this mummy in the priestly cope, Transmitted through the darks of time,

to catch

The man within the wrappage, and discern How he, an honest man, upon the watch

Full fifty years for what a man may learn, Contrived to get just there; with what

a snatch

Of old-world oboli he had to earn

The passage through; with what a drowsy sop, 980

To drench the busy barkings of his brain; What ghosts of pale tradition, wreathed

with hope

'Gainst wakeful thought, he had to entertain

For heavenly visions; and consent to stop

The clock at noon, and let the hour remain (Without vain windings-up) inviolate

Against all chimings from the belfry. Lo,

From every given pope you must abate, Albeit you love him, some things—good,

you know—

Which every given heretic you hate, 990 Assumes for his, as being plainly so.

A pope must hold by popes a little,— yes,

By councils, from Nicæa up to Trent,— By hierocratic empire, more or less

Irresponsible to men,— he must resent Each man's particular conscience, and

repress

Inquiry, meditation, argument,

As tyrants faction. Also, he must not

Love truth too dangerously, but prefer

'The interests of the Church' (because
 a blot 1000
 Is better than a rent, in miniver) —
 Submit to see the people swallow hot
 Husk-porridge, which his chartered church-
 men stir
 Quoting the only true God's epigraph,
 'Feed my lambs, Peter!' — must consent
 to sit
 Attesting with his pastoral ring and
 staff
 To such a picture of our Lady, hit
 Off well by artist-angels (though not
 half
 As fair as Giotto would have painted it) —
 To such a vial, where a dead man's
 blood 1010
 Runs yearly warm beneath a churchman's
 finger, —
 To such a holy house of stone and wood,
 Whereof a cloud of angels was the bringer
 From Bethlehem to Loreto. Were it
 good
 For any pope on earth to be a finger
 Of stones against these high-niched
 counterfeits?
 Apostates only are iconoclasts.
 He dares not say, while this false thing
 abets
 That true thing, 'This is false.' He keeps
 his fasts
 And prayers, as prayer and fast were
 silver frets 1020
 To change a note upon a string that lasts,
 And make a lie a virtue. Now, if he
 Did more than this, higher hoped, and
 braver dared,
 I think he were a pope in jeopardy,
 Or no pope rather, for his truth had barred
 The vaulting of his life, — and certainly,
 If he do only this, mankind's regard
 Moves on from him at once, to seek
 some new
 Teacher and leader. He is good and
 great
 According to the deeds a pope can do;
 Most liberal, save those bonds; affection-
 ate, 1031
 As princes may be, and, as priests are,
 true;
 But only the Ninth Pius after eight,
 When all's praised most. At best and
 hopefullest,
 He's pope — we want a man! his heart
 beats warm,

But, like the prince enchanted to the
 waist,
 He sits in stone and hardens by a charm
 Into the marble of his throne high-
 placed.
 Mild benediction waves his saintly arm —
 So, good! but what we want's a perfect
 man, 1040
 Complete and all alive: half travertine
 Half suits our need, and ill subserves
 our plan.
 Feet, knees, nerves, sinews, energies di-
 vine
 Were never yet too much for men who
 ran
 In such hard ways as must be this of thine,
 Deliverer whom we seek, whoe'er thou
 art,
 Pope, prince, or peasant! If, indeed, the
 first,
 The noblest, therefore! since the heroic
 heart
 Within thee must be great enough to burst
 Those trammels buckling to the base
 part 1050
 Thy saintly peers in Rome, who crossed
 and cursed
 With the same finger.

 Come, appear, be found,
 If pope or peasant, come! we hear the
 cock,
 The courtier of the mountains when first
 crowned
 With golden dawn; and orient glories
 flock
 To meet the sun upon the highest
 ground.
 Take voice and work! we wait to hear thee
 knock
 At some one of our Florentine nine gates,
 On each of which was imaged a sublime
 Face of a Tuscan genius, which, for hate's
 And love's sake, both, our Florence in her
 prime 1061
 Turned boldly on all comers to her
 states,
 As heroes turned their shields in antique
 time
 Emblazoned with honorable acts. And
 though
 The gates are blank now of such images,
 And Petrarch looks no more from Nicolo
 Toward dear Arezzo, 'twixt the acacia-
 trees,

Nor Dante, from gate Gallo — still we know,

Despite the razing of the blazonries,
Remains the consecration of the shield:

The dead heroic faces will start out ¹⁰⁷¹

On all these gates, if foes should take the field,

And blend sublimely, at the earliest shout,
With living heroes who will scorn to yield

A hair's-breadth even, when, gazing round about,

They find in what a glorious company
They fight the foes of Florence. Who will grudge

His one poor life, when that great man we see

Has given five hundred years, the world being judge,

To help the glory of his Italy? ¹⁰⁸⁰

Who, born the fair side of the Alps, will budge,

When Dante stays, when Ariosto stays,
When Petrarch stays for ever? Ye bring swords,

My Tuscans? Ay, if wanted in this haze,

Bring swords: but first bring souls! — bring thoughts and words,

Untrusted by a tear of yesterday's,

Yet awful by its wrong, — and cut these cords,

And mow this green lush falseness to the roots,

And shut the mouth of hell below the swathe!

And, if ye can bring songs too, let the lute's ¹⁰⁹⁰

Recoverable music softly bathe

Some poet's hand, that, through all bursts and bruises

Of popular passion, all unripe and rather

Convictions of the popular intellect,

Ye may not lack a finger up the air,

Annunciative, reproving, pure, erect,

To show which way your first Ideal bare

The whiteness of its wings when (sorely pecked

By falcons on your wrists) it unaware

Arose up overhead and out of sight. ¹¹⁰⁰

Meanwhile, let all the far ends of the world

Breathe back the deep breath of their old delight,

To swell the Italian banner just unfurled.

Help, lands of Europe! for, if Austria fight,

The drums will bar your slumber. Had ye curled

The laurel for your thousand artists' brows,

If these Italian hands had planted none?

Can any sit down idle in the house

Nor hear appeals from Buonarroti's stone

And Raffael's canvas, rousing and to rouse? ¹¹¹⁰

Where's Poussin's master? Gallic Avignon

Bred Laura, and Vaucluse's fount has stirred

The heart of France too strongly, as it lets
Its little stream out (like a wizard's bird

Which bounds upon its emerald wing and wets

The rocks on each side), that she should not gird

Her loins with Charlemagne's sword when foes beset

The country of her Petrarch. Spain may well

Be minded how from Italy she caught,

To mingle with her tinkling Moorish bell, ¹¹²⁰

A fuller cadence and a subtler thought.

And even the New World, the receptacle

Of freemen, may send glad men, as it ought,

To greet Vespucci Amerigo's door.

While England claims, by trump of poetry,

Verona, Venice, the Ravenna-shore,

And dearer holds John Milton's Fiesole

Than Langland's Malvern with the stars in flower.

And Vallombrosa, we two went to see

Last June, beloved companion, — where sublime ¹¹³⁰

The mountains live in holy families,

And the slow pinewoods ever climb and climb

Half up their breasts, just stagger as they seize

Some gray crag, drop back with it many a time,

And straggle blindly down the precipice.

The Vallombrosan brooks were strewn as thick

That June day, knee-deep with dead
beechen leaves,

As Milton saw them ere his heart grew
sick

And his eyes blind. I think the monks
and beeves

Are all the same too: scarce have they
changed the wick 1140

On good Saint Gualbert's altar which re-
ceives

The convent's pilgrims; and the pool in
front

(Wherein the hill-stream trout are cast, to
wait

The beatific vision and the grunt
Used at refectory) keeps its weedy state,
To baffle saintly abbots who would
count

The fish across their breviary nor 'bate
The measure of their steps. O water-
falls

And forests! sound and silence! moun-
tains bare

That leap up peak by peak and catch
the palls 1150

Of purple and silver mist to rend and
share

With one another, at electric calls
Of life in the sunbeams, — till we cannot
dare

Fix your shapes, count your number! we
must think

Your beauty and your glory helped to fill
The cup of Milton's soul so to the brink,
He never more was thirsty when God's
will

Had shattered to his sense the last
chain-link

By which he had drawn from Nature's
visible

The fresh well-water. Satisfied by
this, 1160

He sang of Adam's paradise and
smiled,

Remembering Vallombrosa. Therefore
is

The place divine to English man and
child,

And pilgrims leave their souls here in a
kiss.

For Italy's the whole earth's treasury,
piled

With reveries of gentle ladies, flung

Aside, like ravelled silk, from life's worn
stuff;

With coins of scholars' fancy, which, be-
ing rung

On work-day counter, still sound silver-
proof;

In short, with all the dreams of
dreamers young, 1170

Before their heads have time for slipping
off

Hope's pillow to the ground. How oft,
indeed,

We've sent our souls out from the rigid
north,

On bare white feet which would not
print nor bleed,

To climb the Alpine passes and look forth,
Where booming low the Lombard
rivers lead

To gardens, vineyards, all a dream is
worth, —

Sights, thou and I, Love, have seen
afterward

From Tuscan Bellosguardo, wide awake,
When, standing on the actual blessed
sword 1180

Where Galileo stood at nights to take
The vision of the stars, we have found it
hard,

Gazing upon the earth and heaven, to
make

A choice of beauty.

Therefore let us all
Refreshed in England or in other land,

By visions, with their fountain-rise and
fall,

Of this earth's darling, — we, who under-
stand

A little how the Tuscan musical
Vowels do round themselves as if they
planned 1189

Eternities of separate sweetness, — we,
Who loved Sorrento vines in picture-book,

Or ere in wine-cup we pledged faith or
glee, —

Who loved Rome's wolf with demi-gods at
suck,

Or ere we loved truth's own divinity, —
Who loved, in brief, the classic hill and
brook,

And Ovid's dreaming tales and Pe-
trarch's song,

Or ere we loved Love's self even, — let us
give

The blessing of our souls (and wish them strong
 To bear it to the height where prayers arrive,
 When faithful spirits pray against a wrong,) ¹²⁰⁰
 To this great cause of southern men who strive
 In God's name for man's rights, and shall not fail.

Behold, they shall not fail. The shouts ascend
 Above the shrieks, in Naples, and prevail.
 Rows of shot corpses, waiting for the end
 Of burial, seem to smile up straight and pale
 Into the azure air and apprehend
 That final gun-flash from Palermo's coast
 Which lightens their apocalypse of death.
 So let them die ! The world shows nothing lost; ¹²¹⁰
 Therefore, not blood. Above or underneath,
 What matter, brothers, if ye keep your post
 On duty's side ? As sword returns to sheath,
 So dust to grave, but souls find place in Heaven.
 Heroic daring is the true success,
 The eucharistic bread requires no leaven;
 And though your ends were hopeless, we should bless
 Your cause as holy. Strive — and, having striven,
 Take, for God's recompense, that righteousness !

PART II

I wrote a meditation and a dream,
 Hearing a little child sing in the street:
 I leant upon his music as a theme,
 Till it gave way beneath my heart's full beat
 Which tried at an exultant prophecy
 But dropped before the measure was complete —
 Alas, for songs and hearts ! O Tuscany,
 O Dante's Florence, is the type too plain ?

Didst thou, too, only sing of liberty
 As little children take up a high strain ¹⁰
 With unintentioned voices, and break off
 To sleep upon their mothers' knees again ?
 Couldst thou not watch one hour ? then, sleep enough —
 That sleep may hasten manhood and sustain
 The faint pale spirit with some muscular stuff.

But we, who cannot slumber as thou dost,
 We thinkers, who have thought for thee and failed,
 We hoppers, who have hoped for thee and lost,
 We poets, wandered round by dreams, who hailed
 From this Atrides' roof (with lintel-post ²⁰
 Which still drips blood, — the worse part hath prevailed)
 The fire-voice of the beacons to declare
 Troy taken, sorrow ended, — cozened through
 A crimson sunset in a misty air,
 What now remains for such as we, to do ?
 God's judgments, peradventure, will He bare
 To the roots of thunder, if we kneel and sue ?

From Casa Guidi windows I looked forth,
 And saw ten thousand eyes of Florentines
 Flash back the triumph of the Lombard north, — ³⁰
 Saw fifty banners, freighted with the signs
 And exultations of the awakened earth,
 Float on above the multitude in lines,
 Straight to the Pitti. So, the vision went.
 And so, between those populous rough hands
 Raised in the sun, Duke Leopold outleant,
 And took the patriot's oath which henceforth stands
 Among the oaths of perjurers, eminent
 To catch the lightnings ripened for these lands.

Why swear at all, thou false Duke Leopold ? ⁴⁰
 What need to swear ? What need to boast thy blood

Unspoilt of Austria, and thy heart unsold
 Away from Florence? It was understood
 God made thee not too vigorous or too
 bold;

And men had patience with thy quiet
 mood,

And women, pity, as they saw thee pace
 Their festive streets with premature gray
 hairs.

We turned the mild dejection of thy face
 To princely meanings, took thy wrinkling
 cares

For ruffling hopes, and called thee weak,
 not base. 50

Nay, better light the torches for more
 prayers

And smoke the pale Madonnas at the
 shrine,

Being still 'our poor Grand-duke, our
 good Grand-duke,

Who cannot help the Austrian in his
 line,' —

Than write an oath upon a nation's book
 For men to spit at with scorn's blurring
 brine!

Who dares forgive what none can over-
 look?

For me, I do repent me in this dust
 Of towns and temples which makes It-
 aly, —

I sigh amid the sighs which breathe a
 gust 60

Of dying century to century
 Around us on the uneven crater-crust
 Of these old worlds, — I bow my soul and
 knee.

Absolve me, patriots, of my woman's
 fault

That ever I believed the man was true!

These sceptred strangers shun the com-
 mon salt,

And, therefore, when the general board's
 in view

And they stand up to carve for blind and
 halt,

The wise suspect the viands which ensue.

I much repent that, in this time and
 place 70

Where many corpse-lights of experience
 burn

From Cæsar's and Lorenzo's festering
 race,

To enlighten groping reasoners, I could
 learn

No better counsel for a simple case
 Than to put faith in princes, in my turn.

Had all the death-piles of the ancient
 years

Flared up in vain before me? knew I not
 What stench arises from some purple
 gears?

And how the sceptres witness whence they
 got

Their briar-wood, crackling through the
 atmosphere's 80

Foul smoke, by princely perjuries, kept
 hot?

Forgive me, ghosts of patriots, — Brutus,
 thou,

Who trailest downhill into life again

Thy blood-weighted cloak, to indict me
 with thy slow

Reproachful eyes! — for being taught in
 vain

That, while the illegitimate Cæsars show
 Of meaner stature than the first full strain
 (Confessed incompetent to conquer
 Gaul),

They swoon as feebly and cross Rubicons

As rashly as any Julius of them all! 90

Forgive, that I forgot the mind which runs
 Through absolute races, too unsceptical!
 I saw the man among his little sons,

His lips were warm with kisses while he
 swore;

And I, because I am a woman — I,

Who felt my own child's coming life be-
 fore

The prescience of my soul, and held faith
 high, —

I could not bear to think, whoever bore,
 That lips, so warmed, could shape so cold a
 lie.

From Casa Guidi windows I looked
 out, 100

Again looked, and beheld a different sight.

The Duke had fled before the people's
 shout

'Long live the Duke!' A people, to speak
 right,

Must speak as soft as courtiers, lest a
 doubt

Should curdle brows of gracious sovereigns,
 white.

Moreover that same dangerous shouting
 meant

Some gratitude for future favors, which
 Were only promised, the Constituent

Implied, the whole being subject to the
hitch

In 'motu proprios,' very incident ¹¹⁰
To all these Czars, from Paul to Paulovitch.

Whereat the people rose up in the dust
Of the ruler's flying feet, and shouted still
And loudly; only, this time, as was just,
Not 'Live the Duke,' who had fled for
good or ill,

But 'Live the People,' who remained and
must,

The unrenounced and unrenounceable.

Long live the people! How they lived!
and boiled

And bubbled in the cauldron of the street:

How the young blustered, nor the old
recoiled, ¹²⁰

And what a thunderous stir of tongues and
feet

Trod flat the palpitating bells and foiled
The joy-guns of their echo, shattering it!

How down they pulled the Duke's arms
everywhere!

How up they set new café-signs, to show

Where patriots might sip ices in pure
air —

(The fresh paint smelling somewhat)! To
and fro

How marched the civic guard, and
stopped to stare

When boys broke windows in a civic glow!
How rebel songs were sung to loyal
tunes, ¹³⁰

And bishops cursed in ecclesiastic metres:
How all the Circoli grew large as moons,

And all the speakers, moonstruck, — thank-
ful greeters

Of prospects which struck poor the ducal
boons,

A mere free Press, and Chambers! —
frank repeaters

Of great Guerazzi's praises — 'There's
a man,

The father of the land, who, truly great,
Takes off that national disgrace and ban,

The farthing tax upon our Florence-gate,
And saves Italia as he only can!' ¹⁴⁰

How all the nobles fled, and would not
wait,

Because they were most noble, — which
being so,

How Liberals vowed to burn their palaces,
Because free Tuscans were not free to
go!

How grown men raged at Austria's wicked-
ness,

And smoked, — while fifty striplings in
a row

Marched straight to Piedmont for the
wrong's redress!

You say we failed in duty, we who wore
Black velvet like Italian democrats,

Who slashed our sleeves like patriots,
nor forswore ¹⁵⁰

The true republic in the form of hats?

We chased the archbishop from the
Duomo door,

We chalked the walls with bloody caveats
Against all tyrants. If we did not fight

Exactly, we fired muskets up the air

To show that victory was ours of right.

We met, had free discussion everywhere
(Except perhaps i' the Chambers) day
and night.

We proved the poor should be employed,
. . . that's fair, —

And yet the rich not worked for any-
wise, — ¹⁶⁰

Pay certified, yet payers abrogated, —

Full work secured, yet liabilities

To overwork excluded, — not one bated

Of all our holidays, that still, at twice

Or thrice a week, are moderately rated.

We proved that Austria was dislodged,
or would

Or should be, and that Tuscany in arms
Should, would dislodge her, ending the
old feud;

And yet, to leave our piazzas, shops, and
farms,

For the simple sake of fighting, was not
good — ¹⁷⁰

We proved that also. 'Did we carry
charms

Against being killed ourselves, that we
should rush

On killing others? what, desert herewith
Our wives and mothers? — was that

duty? tush!' ¹⁸⁰

At which we shook the sword within the
sheath

Like heroes — only louder; and the flush
Ran up the cheek to meet the future

wreath.

Nay, what we proved, we shouted — how
we shouted

(Especially the boys did), boldly planting
That tree of liberty, whose fruit is
doubted, ¹⁸⁰

Because the roots are not of nature's granting !

A tree of good and evil: none, without it,
Grow gods; alas and, with it, men are
wanting !

O holy knowledge, holy liberty,
O holy rights of nations ! If I speak
These bitter things against the jugglery
Of days that in your names proved blind
and weak,

It is that tears are bitter. When we see
The brown skulls grin at death in church-
yards bleak,

We do not cry 'This Yorick is too light,'
For death grows deathlier with that mouth
he makes. ¹⁹¹

So with my mocking: bitter things I
write

Because my soul is bitter for your sakes,
O freedom ! O my Florence !

Men who might

Do greatly in a universe that breaks
And burns, must ever *know* before they do.
Courage and patience are but sacrifice;
And sacrifice is offered for and to
Something conceived of. Each man pays a
price

For what himself counts precious,
whether true ²⁰⁰
Or false the appreciation it implies.

But here, — no knowledge, no conception,
nought !

Desire was absent, that provides great deeds
From out the greatness of prevenient
thought:

And action, action, like a flame that needs
A steady breath and fuel, being caught
Up, like a burning reed from other reeds,
Flashed in the empty and uncertain air,
Then wavered, then went out. Behold, who
blames

A crooked course, when not a goal is
there ²¹⁰

To round the fervid striving of the games ?

An ignorance of means may minister
To greatness, but an ignorance of aims
Makes it impossible to be great at all.
So with our Tuscans ! Let none dare to
say,

'Here virtue never can be national;
Here fortitude can never cut a way
Between the Austrian muskets, out of
thrall.'

I tell you rather that, whoever may

Discern true ends here, shall grow pure
enough ²²⁰

To love them, brave enough to strive for
them,

And strong to reach them though the
roads be rough:

That having learnt — by no mere apoph-
them —

Not just the draping of a graceful stuff
About a statue, brodered at the hem, —

Not just the trilling on an opera-stage
Of 'libertà' to bravos — (a fair word,

Yet too allied to inarticulate rage
And breathless sobs, for singing, though
the chord

Were deeper than they struck it) but
the gauge ²³⁰

Of civil wants sustained and wrongs ab-
horred,

The serious sacred meaning and full use
Of freedom for a nation, — then, indeed,

Our Tuscans, underneath the bloody dew
Of some new morning, rising up agreed

And bold, will want no Saxon souls or
thews

To sweep their piazzas clear of Austria's
breed.

Alas, alas ! it was not so this time.

Conviction was not, courage failed, and
truth

Was something to be doubted of. The
mime ²⁴⁰

Changed masks, because a mime. The tide
as smooth

In running in as out, no sense of crime
Because no sense of virtue, — sudden ruth

Seized on the people: they would have
again

Their good Grand-duke and leave Guerazzi,
though

He took that tax from Florence. 'Much
in vain

He takes it from the market-carts, we
trow,

While urgent that no market-men remain,
But all march off and leave the spade and
plough,

To die among the Lombards. Was it
thus ²⁵⁰

The dear paternal Duke did ? Live the
Duke !

At which the joy-bells multitudinous,
Swept by an opposite wind, as loudly shook.

Call back the mild archbishop to his house,
To bless the people with his frightened look, —

He shall not yet be hanged, you comprehend !

Seize on Guerazzi; guard him in full view,
Or else we stab him in the back, to end !

Rub out those chalked devices, set up new
The Duke's arms, doff your Phrygian caps, and mend ²⁶⁰

The pavement of the piazzas broke into
By barren poles of freedom: smooth the way

For the ducal carriage, lest his highness sigh

'Here trees of liberty grew yesterday !'
'Long live the Duke !' — how roared the cannonry,

How rocked the bell-towers, and through thickening spray

Of nose-gays, wreaths, and kerchiefs tossed on high,

How marched the civic guard, the people still

Being good at shouts, especially the boys !
Alas, poor people, of an unfledged will ²⁷⁰

Most fitly expressed by such a callow voice !
Alas, still poorer Duke, incapable

Of being worthy even of so much noise !

You think he came back instantly, with thanks

And tears in his faint eyes, and hands extended

To stretch the franchise through their utmost ranks ?

That having, like a father, apprehended,

He came to pardon fatherly those pranks
Played out and now in filial service ended ? —

That some love-token, like a prince, he threw ²⁸⁰

To meet the people's love-call, in return ?

Well, how he came I will relate to you;
And if your hearts should burn, why, hearts *must* burn,

To make the ashes which things old and new

Shall be washed clean in — as this Duke will learn.

From Casa Guidi windows gazing, then,
I saw and witness how the Duke came back.

The regular tramp of horse and tread of men

Did smite the silence like an anvil black
And sparkless. With her wide eyes at full strain, ²⁹⁰

Our Tuscan nurse exclaimed 'Alack, alack, Signora ! these shall be the Austrians.'

'Nay,
Be still,' I answered, 'do not wake the child !'

— For so, my two-months' baby sleeping lay

In milky dreams upon the bed and smiled,
And I thought 'He shall sleep on, while he may,

Through the world's baseness: not being yet defiled,

Why should he be disturbed by what is done ?'

Then, gazing, I beheld the long-drawn street

Live out, from end to end, full in the sun, ³⁰⁰

With Austria's thousand; sword and bayonet,

Horse, foot, artillery, — cannons rolling on

Like blind slow storm-clouds gestant with the heat

Of undeveloped lightnings, each bestrode
By a single man, dust-white from head to heel,

Indifferent as the dreadful thing he rode,
Like a sculptured Fate serene and terrible.

As some smooth river which has overflowed

Will slow and silent down its current wheel
A loosened forest, all the pines erect, ³¹⁰

So swept, in mute significance of storm,
The marshalled thousands; not an eye deflect

To left or right, to catch a novel form
Of Florence city adorned by architect

And carver, or of Beauties live and warm
Scared at the casements, — all, straight-forward eyes

And faces, held as steadfast as their swords,
And cognizant of acts, not imageries.

The key, O Tuscans, too well fits the wards !
Ye asked for mimes, — these bring you tragedies: ³²⁰

For purple, — these shall wear it as your lords.

Ye played like children, — die like innocents.

Ye mimicked lightnings with a torch, — the crack

Of the actual bolt, your pastime circum-vents.

Ye called up ghosts, believing they were slack

To follow any voice from Gilboa's tents, . . .

Here's Samuel! — and, so, Grand-dukes come back!

And yet, they are no prophets though they come:

That awful mantle, they are drawing close,
Shall be searched, one day, by the shafts
of Doom ³³⁰

Through double folds now hoodwinking
the brows.

Resuscitated monarchs disentomb
Grave-reptiles with them, in their new life-
throes.

Let such beware. Behold, the people
waits,

Like God: as He, in his serene of might,
So they, in their endurance of long
straits.

Ye stamp no nation out, though day and
night

Ye tread them with that absolute heel
which grates

And grinds them flat from all attempted
height.

You kill worms sooner with a garden-
spade ³⁴⁰

Than you kill peoples: peoples will not die;
The tail curls stronger when you lop the
head:

They writhe at every wound and multiply
And shudder into a heap of life that's
made

Thus vital from God's own vitality.

'T is hard to shrivel back a day of God's
Once fixed for judgment; 't is as hard to
change

The peoples, when they rise beneath
their loads

And heave them from their backs with
violent wrench

To crush the oppressor: for that judg-
ment-rod's ³⁵⁰

The measure of this popular revenge.

Meanwhile, from Casa Guidi windows,
we

Beheld the armanent of Austria flow

Into the drowning heart of Tuscany:
And yet none wept, none cursed, or, if
't was so,

They wept and cursed in silence. Si-
lently

Our noisy Tuscans watched the invading
foe;

They had learnt silence. Pressed against
the wall,

And grouped upon the church-steps oppo-
site,

A few pale men and women stared at
all. ³⁶⁰

God knows what they were feeling, with
their white

Constrained faces, they, so prodigal
Of cry and gesture when the world goes
right,

Or wrong indeed. But here was depth
of wrong,

And here, still water; they were silent
here;

And through that sentient silence, struck
along

That measured tramp from which it stood
out clear,

Distinct the sound and silence, like a
gong

At midnight, each by the other awfuller, —
While every soldier in his cap displayed

A leaf of olive. Dusty, bitter thing! ³⁷¹

Was such plucked at Novara, is it said?

A cry is up in England, which doth ring
The hollow world through, that for ends
of trade

And virtue and God's better worshipping,
We henceforth should exalt the name of
Peace

And leave those rusty wars that eat the
soul, —

Besides their clippings at our golden
fleece.

I, too, have loved peace, and from bole to
bole

Of immemorial undeciduous trees ³⁸⁰

Would write, as lovers use upon a scroll,
The holy name of Peace and set it high

Where none could pluck it down. On
trees, I say, —

Not upon gibbets! — With the green-
ery

Of dewy branches and the flowery May,
Sweet mediation betwixt earth and sky

Providing, for the shepherd's holiday.

Not upon gibbets ! though the vulture
 leaves
 The bones to quiet, which he first picked
 bare.
 Not upon dungeons ! though the wretch
 who grieves ³⁹⁰
 And groans within less stirs the outer
 air
 Than any little field-mouse stirs the
 sheaves.
 Not upon chain-bolts ! though the slave's
 despair
 Has dulled his helpless miserable brain
 And left him blank beneath the freeman's
 whip
 To sing and laugh out idiocies of pain.
 Nor yet on starving homes ! where many a
 lip
 Has sobbed itself asleep through curses
 vain.
 I love no peace which is not fellowship
 And which includes not mercy. I would
 have ⁴⁰⁰
 Rather the raking of the guns across
 The world, and shrieks against Heaven's
 architrave;
 Rather the struggle in the slippery fosse
 Of dying men and horses, and the wave
 Blood-bubbling. . . . Enough said ! — by
 Christ's own cross,
 And by this faint heart of my woman-
 hood,
 Such things are better than a Peace that
 sits
 Beside a hearth in self-commended mood,
 And takes no thought how wind and rain
 by fits
 Are howling out of doors against the
 good ⁴¹⁰
 Of the poor wanderer. What ! your peace
 admits
 Of outside anguish while it keeps at
 home ?
 I loathe to take its name upon my tongue.
 'T is nowise peace: 't is treason, stiff with
 doom, —
 'T is gagged despair and inarticulate
 wrong, —
 Annihilated Poland, stifled Rome,
 Dazed Naples, Hungary fainting 'neath the
 thong,
 And Austria wearing a smooth olive-leaf
 On her brute forehead, while her hoofs out-
 press
 The life from these Italian souls, in brief.

O Lord of Peace, who art Lord of Right-
 eousness, ⁴²¹
 Constrain the anguished worlds from sin
 and grief,
 Pierce them with conscience, purge them
 with redress,
 And give us peace which is no counter-
 feit !
 But wherefore should we look out any
 more
 From Casa Guidi windows ? Shut them
 straight,
 And let us sit down by the folded door,
 And veil our saddened faces and, so,
 wait
 What next the judgment-heavens make
 ready for.
 I have grown too weary of these win-
 dows. Sights ⁴³⁰
 Come thick enough and clear enough in
 thought,
 Without the sunshine; souls have inner
 lights.
 And since the Grand-duke has come back
 and brought
 This army of the North which thus re-
 quites
 His filial South, we leave him to be taught.
 His South, too, has learnt something
 certainly,
 Whereof the practice will bring profit
 soon;
 And peradventure other eyes may see,
 From Casa Guidi windows, what is done
 Or undone. Whatsoever deeds they be,
 Pope Pius will be glorified in none. ⁴⁴¹
 Record that gain, Mazzini ! — it shall
 top
 Some heights of sorrow. Peter's rock, so
 named,
 Shall lure no vessel any more to drop
 Among the breakers. Peter's chair is
 shamed
 Like any vulgar throne the nations lop
 To pieces for their firewood unreclaimed, —
 And, when it burns too, we shall see as
 well
 In Italy as elsewhere. Let it burn.
 The cross, accounted still adorable, ⁴⁵⁰
 Is Christ's cross only ! — if the thief's
 would earn
 Some stealthy genuflexions, we rebel;
 And here the impenitent thief's has had its
 turn,

As God knows; and the people on their knees
 Scoff and toss back the crosiers stretched like yokes
 To press their heads down lower by degrees.
 So Italy, by means of these last strokes,
 Escapes the danger which preceded these,
 Of leaving captured hands in cloven oaks,—
 Of leaving very souls within the buckle⁴⁶⁰
 Whence bodies struggled outward,—of supposing
 That freemen may like bondsmen kneel and truckle,
 And then stand up as usual, without losing
 An inch of stature.
 Those whom she-wolves suckle
 Will bite as wolves do in the grapple-closing
 Of adverse interests. This at last is known
 (Thank Pius for the lesson), that albeit
 Among the popedom's hundred heads of stone
 Which blink down on you from the roof's retreat
 In Siena's tiger-striped cathedral, Joan
 And Borgia 'mid their fellows you may greet,⁴⁷¹
 A harlot and a devil,—you will see
 Not a man, still less angel, grandly set
 With open soul to render man more free.
 The fishers are still thinking of the net,
 And, if not thinking of the hook too, we
 Are counted somewhat deeply in their debt;
 But that's a rare case—so, by hook and crook
 They take the advantage, agonizing Christ
 By rustier nails than those of Cedron's brook,⁴⁸⁰
 I' the people's body very cheaply priced,—
 And quote high priesthood out of Holy book,
 While buying death-fields with the sacrificed.
 Priests, priests,—there's no such name!—God's own, except
 Ye take most vainly. Through heaven's lifted gate

The priestly ephod in sole glory swept
 When Christ ascended, entered in, and sate
 (With victor face sublimely overwept)
 At Deity's right hand, to mediate,
 He alone, He for ever. On his breast⁴⁹⁰
 The Urim and the Thummim, fed with fire
 From the full Godhead, flicker with the unrest
 Of human pitiful heart-beats. Come up higher,
 All Christians! Levi's tribe is disposed.
 That solitary alb ye shall admire,
 But not cast lots for. The last chrism,
 poured right,
 Was on that Head, and poured for burial
 And not for domination in men's sight.
 What are these churches? The old temple-wall
 Doth overlook them juggling with the sleight⁵⁰⁰
 Of surplice, candlestick and altar-pall;
 East church and west church, ay, north church and south,
 Rome's church and England's,—let them all repent,
 And make concordats 'twixt their soul and mouth,
 Succeed Saint Paul by working at the tent,
 Become infallible guides by speaking truth,
 And excommunicate their pride that bent
 And cramped the souls of men.
 Why, even here
 Priestcraft burns out, the twined linen blazes;
 Not, like asbestos, to grow white and clear,⁵¹⁰
 But all to perish!—while the fire-smell raises
 To life some swooning spirits who, last year,
 Lost breath and heart in these church-stuffed places.
 Why, almost, through this Pius, we believed,
 The priesthood could be an honest thing,
 he smiled
 So saintly while our corn was being sheaved
 For his own granaries! Showing now defiled

His hireling hands, a better help's
achieved
Than if they blessed us shepherd-like and
mild.

False doctrine, strangled by its own
amen,
Dies in the throat of all this nation. Who
Will speak a pope's name as they rise
again?

What woman or what child will count him
true?

What dreamer praise him with the voice
or pen?

What woman fight for him? — Pius takes
his due.

Record that gain, Mazzini! — Yes, but
first

Set down thy people's faults; set down the
want

Of soul-conviction; set down aims dis-
persed,

And incoherent means, and valor scant
Because of scanty faith, and schisms ac-
cursed

That wrench these brother-hearts from
covenant

With freedom and each other. Set
down this,

And this, and see to overcome it when
The seasons bring the fruits thou wilt
not miss

If wary. Let no cry of patriot men
Distract thee from the stern analysis
Of masses who cry only! keep thy ken
Clear as thy soul is virtuous. Heroes'
blood

Splashed up against thy noble brow in
Rome;

Let such not blind thee to an inter-
lude

Which was not also holy, yet did come
'Twixt sacramental actions, — brother-
hood

Despised even there, and something of the
doom

Of Remus in the trenches. Listen
now —

Rossi died silent near where Cæsar died.

He did not say 'My Brutus, is it thou?'
But Italy unquestioned testified

'I killed him! I am Brutus. — I avow.'
At which the whole world's laugh of scorn
replied

'A poor maimed copy of Brutus!'

Too much like, 550
Indeed, to be so unlike! too unskilled

At Philippi and the honest battle-pike,
To be so skilful where a man is killed

Near Pompey's statue, and the daggers
strike

At unawares i' the throat. Was thus ful-
filled

An omen once of Michael Angelo? —
When Marcus Brutus he conceived com-
plete,

And strove to hurl him out by blow on
blow

Upon the marble, at Art's thunderheat,
Till haply (some pre-shadow rising
slow 560

Of what his Italy would fancy meet
To be called BRUTUS) straight his plastic
hand

Fell back before his prophet-soul, and
left

A fragment, a maimed Brutus, — but
more grand

Than this, so named at Rome, was!

'Let thy weft
Stand
Present one woof and warp, Mazzini!

With no man hankering for a dagger's
heft,

No, not for Italy! — nor stand apart,
No, not for the Republic! — from those
pure

Brave men who hold the level of thy
heart 570

In patriot truth, as lover and as doer,
Albeit they will not follow where thou
art

As extreme theorist. Trust and distrust
fewer;

And so bind strong and keep unstained
the cause

Which (God's sign granted) war-trumps
newly blown

Shall yet annunciate to the world's ap-
plause.

But now, the world is busy; it has grown
A Fair-going world. Imperial England
draws

The flowing ends of the earth from Fez,
Canton,

Delhi and Stockholm, Athens and
Madrid, 580

The Russias and the vast Americas,
As if a queen drew in her robes amid

Her golden cincture, — isles, peninsulas,
Capes, continents, far inland countries
hid

By jasper-sands and hills of chrysopras,
All trailing in their splendors through
the door

Of the gorgeous Crystal Palace. Every
nation,

To every other nation strange of yore,
Gives face to face the civic salutation,
And holds up in a proud right hand be-
fore 590

That congress the best work which she can
fashion

By her best means. 'These corals, will
you please

To match against your oaks? They grow
as fast

Within my wilderness of purple seas.' —
'This diamond stared upon me as I passed
(As a live god's eye from a marble
frieze)

Along a dark of diamonds. Is it
classed?' —

'I wove these stuffs so subtly that the
gold

Swims to the surface of the silk like cream
And curdles to fair patterns. Ye be-
hold!' — 600

'These delicatest muslins rather seem
Than be, you think? Nay, touch them
and be bold,

Though such veiled Chakhi's face in Hafiz'
dream.' —

'These carpets — you walk slow on them
like kings,

Inaudible like spirits, while your foot
Dips deep in velvet roses and such
things.' —

'Even Apollonius might commend this
flute:

The music, winding through the stops,
upsprings

To make the player very rich: com-
pute!' —

'Here's goblet-glass, to take in with
your wine 610

The very sun its grapes were ripened
under:

Drink light and juice together, and each
fine.' —

'This model of a steamship moves your
wonder?

You should behold it crushing down the
brine

Like a blind Jove who feels his way with
thunder.' —

'Here's sculpture! Ah, *we* live too!
why not throw

Our life into our marbles? Art has place
For other artists after Angelo.' —

'I tried to paint out here a natural face;
For nature includes Raffael, as we know,
Not Raffael nature. Will it help my
case?' — 621

'Methinks you will not match this steel
of ours!' —

'Nor you this porcelain! One might
dream the clay

Retained in it the larvæ of the flowers,
They bud so, round the cup, the old Spring-
way.' —

'Nor you these earven woods, where
birds in bowers

With twisting snakes and climbing cupids,
play.'

O Magi of the east and of the west,
Your incense, gold and myrrh are ex-
cellent! —

What gifts for Christ, then, bring ye
with the rest? 630

Your hands have worked well: is your
courage spent

In handwork only? Have you nothing
best,

Which generous souls may perfect and
present,

And He shall thank the givers for? no
light

Of teaching, liberal nations, for the poor
Who sit in darkness when it is not night?

No cure for wicked children? Christ, — no
cure!

No help for women sobbing out of sight
Because men made the laws? no brothel-
lure

Burnt out by popular lightnings? Hast
thou found 640

No remedy, my England, for such woes?
No outlet, Austria, for the scourged and
bound,

No entrance for the exiled? no repose,
Russia, for knouted Poles worked under-
ground,

And gentle ladies bleached among the
snows?

No mercy for the slave, America?
No hope for Rome, free France, chivalric
France?

Alas, great nations have great shames, I
say.

No pity, O world, no tender utterance
Of benediction, and prayers stretched
this way 650

For poor Italia, baffled by mischance ?
O gracious nations, give some ear to
me !

You all go to your Fair, and I am one
Who at the roadside of humanity
Beseech your alms, — God's justice to be
done.

So, prosper !

In the name of Italy,
Meantime, her patriot Dead have benison.
They only have done well; and, what
they did

Being perfect, it shall triumph. Let them
slumber:

No king of Egypt in a pyramid 660
Is safer from oblivion, though he number
Full seventy cerements for a coverlid.
These Dead be seeds of life, and shall en-
cumber

The sad heart of the land until it loose
The clammy clods and let out the Spring-
growth

In beatific green through every bruise.
The tyrant should take heed to what he
doth,

Since every victim-carrion turns to use,
And drives a chariot, like a god made wroth,
Against each piled injustice. Ay, the
least, 670

Dead for Italia, not in vain has died;
Though many vainly, ere life's struggle
ceased,

To mad dissimilar ends have swerved aside;
Each grave her nationality has pieced
By its own majestic breadth, and fortified
And pinned it deeper to the soil. Forlorn
Of thanks be, therefore, no one of these
graves !

Not Hers, — who, at her husband's side,
in scorn,
Outfaced the whistling shot and hissing
waves,

Until she felt her little babe unborn 680
Recoil, within her, from the violent staves
And bloodhounds of the world, — at
which, her life

Dropt inwards from her eyes and followed
it

Beyond the hunters. Garibaldi's wife

And child died so. And now, the seaweeds
fit

Her body, like a proper shroud and coif,
And murmuringly the ebbing waters grit

The little pebbles while she lies interred
In the sea-sand. Perhaps, ere dying thus,
She looked up in his face (which never
stirred 690

From its clenched anguish) as to make
excuse

For leaving him for his, if so she erred.
He well remembers that she could not
choose.

A memorable grave ! Another is
At Genoa. There, a king may fitly lie,
Who, bursting that heroic heart of his
At lost Novara, that he could not die
(Though thrice into the cannon's eyes for
this

He plunged his shuddering steed, and felt
the sky

Reel back between the fire-shocks),
stripped away 700

The ancestral ermine ere the smoke had
cleared,

And, naked to the soul, that none might
say

His kingship covered what was base and
bleared

With reason, went out straight an exile,
yea,

An exiled patriot. Let him be revered.

Yea, verily, Charles Albert has died well;
And if he lived not all so, as one spoke,

The sin pass softly with the passing-bell:
For he was shriven, I think, in cannon-
smoke, 709

And, taking off his crown, made visible
A hero's forehead. Shaking Austria's yoke
He shattered his own hand and heart.

'So best,'
His last words were upon his lonely bed,
'I do not end like popes and dukes at
least —

Thank God for it.' And now that he is
dead,

Admitting it is proved and manifest
That he was worthy, with a discrowned
head,

To measure heights with patriots, let
them stand

Beside the man in his Oporto shroud,
And each vouchsafe to take him by the
hand, 720

And kiss him on the cheek, and say aloud, —
 'Thou, too, hast suffered for our native
 land !
 My brother, thou art one of us ! be proud.'

Still, graves, when Italy is talked upon.
 Still, still, the patriot's tomb, the stranger's
 hate.

Still Niobe ! still fainting in the sun,
 By whose most dazzling arrows violate
 Her beauteous offspring perished ! has
 she won

Nothing but garlands for the graves, from
 Fate ?

Nothing but death-songs ? — Yes, be it
 understood 730

Life throbs in noble Piedmont ! while the
 feet

Of Rome's clay image, dabbled soft in
 blood,

Grow flat with dissolution and, as meet,
 Will soon be shovelled off like other
 mud,

To leave the passage free in church and
 street.

And I, who first took hope up in this
 song,

Because a child was singing one . . . be-
 hold,

The hope and omen were not, haply,
 wrong !

Poets are soothsayers still, like those of
 old

Who studied flights of doves; and crea-
 tures young 740

And tender, mighty meanings may unfold.

The sun strikes, through the windows,
 up the floor;

Stand out in it, my own young Florentine,
 Not two years old, and let me see thee
 more !

It grows along thy amber curls, to shine
 Brighter than elsewhere. Now, look
 straight before,

And fix thy brave blue English eyes on
 mine,

And from my soul, which fronts the fu-
 ture so,

With unabashed and unabated gaze,
 Teach me to hope for, what the angels
 know 750

When they smile clear as thou dost. Down
 God's ways

With just alighted feet, between the snow

And snowdrops, where a little lamb may
 graze,

Thou hast no fear, my lamb, about the
 road,

Albeit in our vainglory we assume
 That, less than we have, thou hast
 learnt of God.

Stand out, my blue-eyed prophet ! — thou,
 to whom

The earliest world-day light that ever
 flowed,

Through Casa Guidi Windows chanced to
 come !

Now shake the glittering nimbus of thy
 hair, 760

And be God's witness that the elemental
 New springs of life are gushing every-
 where

To cleanse the watercourses, and prevent
 all

Concrete obstructions which infest the
 air !

That earth's alive, and gentle or ungentle
 Motions within her, signify but

growth ! —

The ground swells greenest o'er the labor-
 ing moles.

Howe'er the uneasy world is vexed and
 wroth,

Young children, lifted high on parent souls,
 Look round them with a smile upon the

mouth, 770

And take for music every bell that tolls;
 (WHO said we should be better if like
 these ?)

But *we* sit murmuring for the future
 though

Posterity is smiling on our knees,
 Convicting us of folly. Let us go —

We will trust God. The blank inter-
 stices

Men take for ruins, He will build into
 With pillared marbles rare, or knit

across

With generous arches, till the fane's com-
 plete.

This world has no perdition, if some
 loss. 780

Such cheer I gather from thy smiling,
 Sweet !

The self-same cherub-faces which em-
 boss

The Vail, lean inward to the Mercy-seat.

AURORA LEIGH

A POEM IN NINE BOOKS

From the time when Mrs. Browning dashed off the greater part of 'Lady Geraldine's Courtship' in response to a demand from her publisher for 'more copy,' she had cherished the design of writing a complete poetical romance, of which the scene should be laid in the present time amid the seemingly unromantic surroundings of modern society. When, therefore, she had become a little wonted to married life in Italy and had delivered her soul of the first ardent though fluctuating emotions excited by the earlier stages of the Italian struggle for independence, she set about the execution of her previous project. The narrative poem of *Aurora Leigh*, her most sustained and consider-

able if not her most symmetrical and beautiful work, was begun in Florence, or at the Baths of Lucca, in the early fifties, and continued during the summers of 1855 and 1856, which the Brownings passed in England, and the intervening winter, when they were living in Paris, in a small apartment on the Rue du Colisée. It was finally completed in England, in the London house of John Kenyon, Mrs. Browning's generous cousin, and the faithful friend of both poets, who lived only a few weeks after *Aurora Leigh* had received its dedication to him, in October, 1856. The first edition appeared at the Christmas holidays of that year, and bears the imprint London: Chapman & Hall, 1857.

DEDICATION

TO

JOHN KENYON, ESQ.

The words 'cousin' and 'friend' are constantly recurring in this poem, the last pages of which have been finished under the hospitality of your roof, my own dearest cousin and friend;—cousin and friend, in a sense of less equality and greater disinterestedness than 'Romney's'.

Ending, therefore, and preparing once more to quit England, I venture to leave in your hands this book, the most mature of my works, and the one into which my highest convictions upon Life and Art have entered; that as, through my various efforts in Literature and steps in life, you have believed in me, borne with me, and been generous to me, far beyond the common uses of mere relationship or sympathy of mind, so you may kindly accept, in sight of the public, this poor sign of esteem, gratitude, and affection from—Your unforgetting
E. B. B.

39 DEVONSHIRE PLACE: October 17, 1856.

AURORA LEIGH

FIRST BOOK

OF writing many books there is no end;
And I who have written much in prose and
verse
For others' uses, will write now for mine, —

Will write my story for my better self,
As when you paint your portrait for a
friend,

Who keeps it in a drawer and looks at it
Long after he has ceased to love you, just
To hold together what he was and is.

I, writing thus, am still what men call
young;

I have not so far left the coasts of life 10
To travel inland, that I cannot hear
That murmur of the outer Infinite
Which unweaned babies smile at in their
sleep

When wondered at for smiling; not so far,
But still I catch my mother at her post
Beside the nursery door, with finger up,
'Hush, hush—here's too much noise!' 15
while her sweet eyes

Leap forward, taking part against her word
In the child's riot. Still I sit and feel
My father's slow hand, when she had left
us both, 20

Stroke out my childish curls across his
knee,

And hear Assunta's daily jest (she knew
He liked it better than a better jest)
Inquire how many golden scudi went
To make such ringlets. O my father's
hand,

Stroke heavily, heavily the poor hair down,
Draw, press the child's head closer to thy
knee!

I'm still too young, too young, to sit alone.

I write. My mother was a Florentine,
Whose rare blue eyes were shut from see-
ing me 30

When scarcely I was four years old, my
life

A poor spark snatched up from a failing
lamp

Which went out therefore. She was weak
and frail;

She could not bear the joy of giving life,
The mother's rapture slew her. If her
kiss

Had left a longer weight upon my lips
It might have steadied the uneasy breath,
And reconciled and fraternized my soul
With the new order. As it was, indeed,
I felt a mother-want about the world, 40
And still went seeking, like a bleating
lamb

Left out at night in shutting up the
fold, —

As restless as a nest-deserted bird
Grown chill through something being away,
though what

It knows not. I, Aurora Leigh, was born
To make my father sadder, and myself
Not overjoyous, truly. Women know
The way to rear up children (to be just),
They know a simple, merry, tender knack
Of tying sashes, fitting baby-shoes, 50
And stringing pretty words that make no
sense,

And kissing full sense into empty words,
Which things are corals to cut life upon,
Although such trifles: children learn by
such,

Love's holy earnest in a pretty play
And get not over-early solemnized,
But seeing, as in a rose-bush, Love's
Divine

Which burns and hurts not, — not a single
bloom, —

Become aware and unafraid of Love.
Such good do mothers. Fathers love as
well 60

— Mine did, I know, — but still with
heavier brains,

And wills more consciously responsible,
And not as wisely, since less foolishly;
So mothers have God's license to be missed.

My father was an austere Englishman,
Who, after a dry lifetime spent at home
In college-learning, law, and parish talk,
Was flooded with a passion unaware,

His whole provisioned and complacent past
Drowned out from him that moment. As
he stood 70

In Florence, where he had come to spend
a month

And note the secret of Da Vinci's drains,
He musing somewhat absently perhaps
Some English question . . . whether men
should pay

The unpopular but necessary tax
With left or right hand — in the alien sun
In that great square of the Santissima
There drifted past him (scarcely marked
enough

To move his comfortable island scorn)
A train of priestly banners, cross and
psalm, 80

The white-veiled rose-crowned maidens
holding up

Tall tapers, weighty for such wrists, aslant
To the blue luminous tremor of the air,
And letting drop the white wax as they
went

To eat the bishop's wafer at the church;
From which long trail of chanting priests
and girls,

A face flashed like a cymbal on his face
And shook with silent clangor brain and
heart,

Transfiguring him to music. Thus, even
thus,

He too received his sacramental gift 90
With eucharistic meanings; for he loved.

And thus beloved, she died. I've heard it
said

That but to see him in the first surprise
Of widower and father, nursing me,
Unmothered little child of four years old,
His large man's hands afraid to touch my
curls,

As if the gold would tarnish, — his grave
lips

Contriving such a miserable smile
As if he knew needs must, or I should die,
And yet 't was hard, — would almost make
the stones 100

Cry out for pity. There's a verse he set
In Santa Croce to her memory, —

'Weep for an infant too young to weep
much

When death removed this mother' — stops
the mirth

To-day on women's faces when they walk
With rosy children hanging on their gowns,

Under the cloister to escape the sun
 That scorches in the piazza. After which
 He left our Florence and made haste to
 hide
 Himself, his prattling child, and silent
 grief, 110
 Among the mountains above Pelago;
 Because unmothered babes, he thought, had
 need
 Of mother nature more than others use,
 And Pan's white goats, with udders warm
 and full
 Of mystic contemplations, come to feed
 Poor milkless lips of orphans like his
 own —
 Such scholar-scraps he talked, I've heard
 from friends,
 For even prosaic men who wear grief long
 Will get to wear it as a hat aside
 With a flower stuck in't. Father, then,
 and child, 120
 We lived among the mountains many years,
 God's silence on the outside of the house,
 And we who did not speak too loud within,
 And old Assunta to make up the fire,
 Crossing herself whene'er a sudden flame
 Which lightened from the firewood, made
 alive
 That picture of my mother on the wall.
 The painter drew it after she was dead,
 And when the face was finished, throat
 and hands,
 Her cameriera carried him, in hate 130
 Of the English-fashioned shroud, the last
 brocade
 She dressed in at the Pitti; 'he should
 paint
 No sadder thing than that,' she swore, 'to
 wrong
 Her poor signora.' Therefore very strange
 The effect was. I, a little child, would
 crouch
 For hours upon the floor with knees drawn
 up,
 And gaze across them, half in terror, half
 In adoration, at the picture there, —
 That swan-like supernatural white life
 Just sailing upward from the red stiff
 silk 140
 Which seemed to have no part in it nor
 power
 To keep it from quite breaking out of
 bounds.
 For hours I sat and stared. Assunta's awe

And my poor father's melancholy eyes
 Still pointed that way. That way went my
 thoughts
 When wandering beyond sight. And as I
 grew
 In years, I mixed, confused, unconsciously,
 Whatever I last read or heard or dreamed,
 Abhorrent, admirable, beautiful,
 Pathetical, or ghastly, or grotesque, 150
 With still that face . . . which did not
 therefore change,
 But kept the mystic level of all forms,
 Hates, fears, and admirations, was by turns
 Ghost, fiend, and angel, fairy, witch, and
 sprite,
 A dauntless Muse who eyes a dreadful
 Fate,
 A loving Psyche who loses sight of Love,
 A still Medusa with mild milky brows
 All curdled and all clothed upon with
 snakes
 Whose slime falls fast as sweat will; or
 anon
 Our Lady of the Passion, stabbed with
 swords 160
 Where the Babe sucked; or Lamia in her
 first
 Moonlighted pallor, ere she shrunk and
 blinked
 And shuddering wriggled down to the un-
 clean;
 Or my own mother, leaving her last smile
 In her last kiss upon the baby-mouth
 My father pushed down on the bed for
 that, —
 Or my dead mother, without smile or
 kiss,
 Buried at Florence. All which images,
 Concentred on the picture, glassed them-
 selves
 Before my meditative childhood, as 170
 The incoherencies of change and death
 Are represented fully, mixed and merged,
 In the smooth fair mystery of perpetual
 Life.
 And while I stared away my childish
 wits
 Upon my mother's picture (ah, poor
 child !),
 My father, who through love had suddenly
 Thrown off the old conventions, broken
 loose
 From chin-bands of the soul, like Lazarus,
 Yet had no time to learn to talk and walk
 Or grow anew familiar with the sun, — 180

Who had reached to freedom, not to ac-
tion, lived,
But lived as one entranced, with thoughts,
not aims, —
Whom love had unmade from a common
man,
But not completed to an uncommon
man, —
My father taught me what he had learnt
the best
Before he died and left me, — grief and
love.
And, seeing we had books among the
hills,
Strong words of counselling souls con-
federate
With vocal pines and waters, — out of
books
He taught me all the ignorance of men, ¹⁹⁰
And how God laughs in heaven when any
man
Says 'Here I'm learned; this I under-
stand;
In that, I am never caught at fault or
doubt.'
He sent the schools to school, demonstrat-
ing
A fool will pass for such through one
mistake,
While a philosopher will pass for such,
Through said mistakes being ventured in
the gross
And heaped up to a system.

I am like,

They tell me, my dear father. Broader
brows
Howbeit, upon a slenderer undergrowth ²⁰⁰
Of delicate features, — paler, near as
grave;
But then my mother's smile breaks up the
whole,
And makes it better sometimes than itself.
So, nine full years, our days were hid with
God
Among his mountains: I was just thir-
teen,
Still growing like the plants from unseen
roots
In tongue-tied Springs, — and suddenly
awoke
To full life and life's needs and agonies
With an intense, strong, struggling heart
beside
A stone-dead father. Life, struck sharp
on death, 210

Makes awful lightning. His last word
was 'Love —',
'Love, my child, love, love!' — (then he
had done with grief)
'Love, my child.' Ere I answered he was
gone,
And none was left to love in all the world.

There, ended childhood. What succeeded
next
I recollect as, after fevers, men
Thread back the passage of delirium,
Missing the turn still, baffled by the door;
Smooth endless days, notched here and
there with knives,
A weary, wormy darkness, spurred i' the
flank ²²⁰
With flame, that it should eat and end it-
self
Like some tormented scorpion. Then at
last
I do remember clearly how there came
A stranger with authority, not right
(I thought not), who commanded, caught
me up
From old Assunta's neck; how, with a
shriek,
She let me go, — while I, with ears too
full
Of my father's silence to shriek back a
word,
In all a child's astonishment at grief
Stared at the wharf-edge where she stood
and moaned, ²³⁰
My poor Assunta, where she stood and
moaned!
The white walls, the blue hills, my Italy,
Drawn backward from the shuddering
steamer-deck,
Like one in anger drawing back her skirts
Which suppliants catch at. Then the bit-
ter sea
Inexorably pushed between us both
And, sweeping up the ship with my de-
spair,
Threw us out as a pasture to the stars.

Ten nights and days we voyaged on the
deep;
Ten nights and days without the common
face ²⁴⁰
Of any day or night; the moon and sun
Cut off from the green reconciling earth,
To starve into a blind ferocity
And glare unnatural; the very sky

(Dropping its bell-net down upon the sea,
As if no human heart should 'scape alive)
Bedraggled with the desolating salt,
Until it seemed no more that holy heaven
To which my father went. All new and

strange;
The universe turned stranger, for a
child. 250

Then, land! — then, England! oh, the
frosty cliffs

Looked cold upon me. Could I find a
home

Among those mean red houses through the
fog?

And when I heard my father's language
first

From alien lips which had no kiss for mine
I wept aloud, then laughed, then wept,
then wept,

And some one near me said the child was
mad

Through much sea-sickness. The train
swept us on:

Was this my father's England? the great
isle?

The ground seemed cut up from the fel-
lowship 260

Of verdure, field from field, as man from
man;

The skies themselves looked low and posi-
tive,

As almost you could touch them with a
hand,

And dared to do it they were so far off
From God's celestial crystals; all things
blurred

And dull and vague. Did Shakespeare
and his mates

Absorb the light here? — not a hill or
stone

With heart to strike a radiant color up
Or active outline on the indifferent air.

I think I see my father's sister stand 270
Upon the hall-step of her country-house

To give me welcome. She stood straight
and calm,

Her somewhat narrow forehead braided
tight

As if for taming accidental thoughts
From possible pulses; brown hair pricked

with gray
By frigid use of life (she was not old,
Although my father's elder by a year),

A nose drawn sharply, yet in delicate
lines;

A close mild mouth, a little soured about
The ends, through speaking unrequited
loves 280

Or peradventure niggardly half-truths;
Eyes of no color, — once they might have
smiled,

But never, never have forgot themselves
In smiling; cheeks, in which was yet a
rose

Of perished summers, like a rose in a
book,

Kept more for ruth than pleasure, — if past
bloom,

Past fading also.

She had lived, we'll say,
A harmless life, she called a virtuous
life,

A quiet life, which was not life at all
(But that, she had not lived enough to
know), 290

Between the vicar and the county squires,
The lord-lieutenant looking down some-
times

From the empyrean to assure their souls
Against chance vulgarisms, and, in the
abyss,

The apothecary, looked on once a year
To prove their soundness of humility.

The poor-club exercised her Christian
gifts

Of knitting stockings, stitching petticoats,
Because we are of one flesh, after all,

And need one flannel (with a proper sense
Of difference in the quality) — and still 301

The book-club, guarded from your modern
trick

Of shaking dangerous questions from the
crease,

Preserved her intellectual. She had lived
A sort of cage-bird life, born in a cage,

Accounting that to leap from perch to
perch

Was act and joy enough for any bird.
Dear heaven, how silly are the things that

live
In thickets, and eat berries!

I, alas,

A wild bird scarcely fledged, was brought
to her cage, 310

And she was there to meet me. Very
kind.

Bring the clean water, give out the fresh
seed.

She stood upon the steps to welcome me,
Calm, in black garb. I clung about her
neck, —

Young babes, who catch at every shred of
wool

To draw the new light closer, catch and
cling

Less blindly. In my ears my father's
word

Hummed ignorantly, as the sea in shells,
'Love, love, my child.' She, black there
with my grief,

Might feel my love — she was his sister
once — ³²⁰

I clung to her. A moment she seemed
moved,

Kissed me with cold lips, suffered me to
cling,

And drew me feebly through the hall
into

The room she sat in.

There, with some strange spasm
Of pain and passion, she wrung loose my
hands

Imperiously, and held me at arm's length,
And with two gray-steel naked-bladed
eyes

Searched through my face, — ay, stabbed it
through and through,

Through brows and cheeks and chin, as if
to find

A wicked murderer in my innocent
face, ³³⁰

If not here, there perhaps. Then, drawing
breath,

She struggled for her ordinary calm —
And missed it rather, — told me not to
shrink,

As if she had told me not to lie or
swear, —

'She loved my father and would love me
too

As long as I deserved it.' Very kind.

I understood her meaning afterward;
She thought to find my mother in my
face,

And questioned it for that. For she, my
aunt,

Had loved my father truly, as she
could, ³⁴⁰

And hated, with the gall of gentle souls,
My Tuscan mother who had fooled away
A wise man from wise courses, a good
man

From obvious duties, and, depriving her,
His sister, of the household precedence,
Had wronged his tenants, robbed his native
land,

And made him mad, alike by life and
death,

In love and sorrow. She had pored for
years

What sort of woman could be suitable
To her sort of hate, to entertain it with, ³⁵⁰
And so, her very curiosity

Became hate too, and all the idealism
She ever used in life was used for hate,

Till hate, so nourished, did exceed at last
The love from which it grew, in strength
and heat,

And wrinkled her smooth conscience with a
sense

Of disputable virtue (say not, sin)
When Christian doctrine was enforced at
church.

And thus my father's sister was to me
My mother's hater. From that day she
did ³⁶⁰

Her duty to me (I appreciate it
In her own word as spoken to herself),

Her duty, in large measure, well pressed
out,

But measured always. She was generous,
bland,

More courteous than was tender, gave me
still

The first place, — as if fearful that God's
saints

Would look down suddenly and say
'Herein

You missed a point, I think, through lack of
love.'

Alas, a mother never is afraid
Of speaking angrily to any child, ³⁷⁰

Since love, she knows, is justified of love.

And I, I was a good child on the whole,
A meek and manageable child. Why
not?

I did not live, to have the faults of life;
There seemed more true life in my father's

grave
Than in all England. Since *that* threw me
off

Who fain would cleave (his latest will, they
say,

Consigned me to his land), I only thought
Of lying quiet there where I was thrown

Like sea-weed on the rocks, and suffering
 her 380
 To prick me to a pattern with her pin,
 Fibre from fibre, delicate leaf from leaf,
 And dry out from my drowned anatomy
 The last sea-salt left in me.

So it was.

I broke the copious curls upon my head
 In braids, because she liked smooth-
 ordered hair.

I left off saying my sweet Tuscan words
 Which still at any stirring of the heart
 Came up to float across the English phrase
 As lilies (*Bene* or *Che che*), because 390
 She liked my father's child to speak his
 tongue.

I learnt the collects and the catechism,
 The creeds, from Athanasius back to Nice,
 The Articles, the Tracts *against* the times
 (By no means Buonaventure's 'Prick of
 Love'),

And various popular synopses of
 Inhuman doctrines never taught by John,
 Because she liked instructed piety.
 I learnt my complement of classic French
 (Kept pure of Balzac and neologism) 400
 And German also, since she liked a range
 Of liberal education, — tongues, not books.
 I learnt a little algebra, a little
 Of the mathematics, — brushed with ex-
 treme flounce

The circle of the sciences, because
 She disliked women who are frivolous.
 I learnt the royal genealogies
 Of Oviedo, the internal laws
 Of the Burmese empire, — by how many
 feet

Mount Chimborazo outsoars Teneriffe, 410
 What navigable river joins itself
 To Lara, and what census of the year five
 Was taken at Klagenfurt, — because she
 liked

A general insight into useful facts.
 I learnt much music, — such as would
 have been

As quite impossible in Johnson's day
 As still it might be wished — fine sleights
 of hand

And unimagined fingering, shuffling off
 The hearer's soul through hurricanes of
 notes

To a noisy Tophet; and I drew . . . cos-
 tumes 420

From French engravings, nereids neatly
 draped

(With smirks of simmering godship): I
 washed in
 Landscapes from nature (rather say,
 washed out).

I danced the polka and Cellarius,
 Spun glass, stuffed birds, and modelled
 flowers in wax,

Because she liked accomplishments in
 girls.

I read a score of books on womanhood
 To prove, if women do not think at all,
 They may teach thinking (to a maiden
 aunt

Or else the author), — books that boldly
 assert 430
 Their right of comprehending husband's
 talk

When not too deep, and even of answering
 With pretty 'may it please you,' or 'so it
 is,' —

Their rapid insight and fine aptitude,
 Particular worth and general missionari-
 ness,

As long as they keep quiet by the fire
 And never say 'no' when the world says
 'ay,'

For that is fatal, — their angelic reach
 Of virtue, chiefly used to sit and darn,
 And fatten household sinners, — their, in
 brief, 440

Potential faculty in everything
 Of abdicating power in it: she owned
 She liked a woman to be womanly,
 And English women, she thanked God
 and sighed

(Some people always sigh in thanking
 God),

Were models to the universe. And last
 I learnt cross-stitch, because she did not
 like

To see me wear the night with empty
 hands

A-doing nothing. So, my shepherdess
 Was something after all (the pastoral
 saints 450

Be praised for't), leaning lovelorn with
 pink eyes

To match her shoes, when I mistook the
 silks;

Her head uncrushed by that round weight
 of hat

So strangely similar to the tortoise shell
 Which slew the tragic poet.

By the way,
 The works of women are symbolical.

We sew, sew, prick our fingers, dull our sight,

Producing what? A pair of slippers, sir,
To put on when you're weary — or a stool
To stumble over and vex you . . . 'curse
that stool!' ⁴⁶⁰

Or else at best, a cushion, where you lean
And sleep, and dream of something we are
not

But would be for your sake. Alas, alas!
This hurts most, this — that, after all, we
are paid

The worth of our work, perhaps.

In looking down
Those years of education (to return)
I wonder if Brinvilliers suffered more
In the water-torture . . . flood succeed-
ing flood

To drench the incapable throat and split
the veins . . . ⁴⁶⁹

Than I did. Certain of your feebler souls
Go out in such a process; many pine
To a sick, inodorous light; my own en-
dured:

I had relations in the Unseen, and drew
The elemental nutriment and heat
From nature, as earth feels the sun at
nights,

Or as a babe sucks surely in the dark.
I kept the life thrust on me, on the out-
side

Of the inner life with all its ample room
For heart and lungs, for will and intellect,
Inviolable by conventions. God, ⁴⁸⁰
I thank thee for that grace of thine!

At first
I felt no life which was not patience, — did
The thing she bade me, without heed to a
thing

Beyond it, sat in just the chair she placed,
With back against the window, to ex-
clude

The sight of the great lime-tree on the
lawn,

Which seemed to have come on purpose
from the woods

To bring the house a message, — ay, and
walked

Demurely in her carpeted low rooms,
As if I should not, hearkening my own
steps, ⁴⁹⁰

Misdoubt I was alive. I read her
books,

Was civil to her cousin, Romney Leigh,
Gave ear to her vicar, tea to her visitors,

And heard them whisper, when I changed
a cup

(I blushed for joy at that), — 'The
Italian child,

For all her blue eyes and her quiet ways,
Thrives ill in England: she is paler yet
Than when we came the last time; she
will die.'

'Will die.' My cousin, Romney Leigh,
blushed too,

With sudden anger, and approaching me ⁵⁰⁰
Said low between his teeth, 'You're
wicked now?

You wish to die and leave the world a-dusk
For others, with your naughty light blown
out?'

I looked into his face defyingly;
He might have known that, being what I
was,

'T was natural to like to get away
As far as dead folk can: and then indeed
Some people make no trouble when they
die.

He turned and went abruptly, slammed
the door,

And shut his dog out.

Romney, Romney Leigh.
I have not named my cousin hitherto, ⁵¹¹
And yet I used him as a sort of friend;
My elder by few years, but cold and shy
And absent . . . tender, when he thought
of it,

Which scarcely was imperative, grave be-
times,

As well as early master of Leigh Hall,
Whereof the nightmare sat upon his youth,
Repressing all its seasonable delights,
And agonizing with a ghastly sense
Of universal hideous want and wrong ⁵²⁰
To incriminate possession. When he
came

From college to the country, very oft
He crossed the hill on visits to my aunt,
With gifts of blue grapes from the hot-
houses,

A book in one hand, — mere statistics (if
I chanced to lift the cover), count of all
The goats whose beards grow sprouting
down toward hell

Against God's separative judgment-hour.
And she, she almost loved him, — even al-
lowed

That sometimes he should seem to sigh my
way; ⁵³⁰

It made him easier to be pitiful,
 And sighing was his gift. So, undisturbed,
 At whiles she let him shut my music up
 And push my needles down, and lead me
 out
 To see in that south angle of the house
 The figs grow black as if by a Tuscan
 rock,
 On some light pretext. She would turn
 her head
 At other moments, go to fetch a thing,
 And leave me breath enough to speak with
 him,
 For his sake; it was simple.

Sometimes too
 He would have saved me utterly, it
 seemed, 541
 He stood and looked so.

Once, he stood so near,
 He dropped a sudden hand upon my head
 Bent down on woman's work, as soft as
 rain —
 But then I rose and shook it off as fire,
 The stranger's touch that took my father's
 place
 Yet dared seem soft.

I used him for a friend
 Before I ever knew him for a friend.
 'T was better, 't was worse also, afterward:
 We came so close, we saw our differ-
 ences 550

Too intimately. Always Romney Leigh
 Was looking for the worms, I for the
 gods.

A godlike nature his; the gods look down,
 Incurious of themselves; and certainly
 'T is well I should remember, how, those
 days,
 I was a worm too, and he looked on me.

A little by his act perhaps, yet more
 By something in me, surely not my will,
 I did not die. But slowly, as one in swoon,
 To whom life creeps back in the form of
 death, 560

With a sense of separation, a blind pain
 Of blank obstruction, and a roar i' the
 ears

Of visionary chariots which retreat
 As earth grows clearer . . . slowly, by de-
 grees,

I woke, rose up . . . where was I? in the
 world;

For uses therefore I must count worth
 while.

I had a little chamber in the house,
 As green as any privet-hedge a bird
 Might choose to build in, though the nest
 itself

Could show but dead-brown sticks and
 straws; the walls 570

Were green, the carpet was pure green,
 the straight

Small bed was curtained greenly, and the
 folds

Hung green about the window which let in
 The out-door world with all its greenery.

You could not push your head out and es-
 cape

A dash of dawn-dew from the honeysuckle,
 But so you were baptized into the grace
 And privilege of seeing. . . .

First, the lime
 (I had enough there, of the lime, be
 sure, —

My morning-dream was often hummed
 away 580

By the bees in it); past the lime, the lawn,
 Which, after sweeping broadly round the
 house,

Went trickling through the shrubberies in
 a stream

Of tender turf, and wore and lost itself
 Among the acacias, over which you saw
 The irregular line of elms by the deep lane
 Which stopped the grounds and dammed
 the overflow

Of arbutus and laurel. Out of sight
 The lane was; sunk so deep, no foreign
 tramp

Nor drover of wild ponies out of Wales 590
 Could guess if lady's hall or tenant's lodge
 Dispensed such odors, — though his stick
 well-crooked

Might reach the lowest trail of blossoming
 briar

Which dipped upon the wall. Behind the
 elms,

And through their tops, you saw the folded
 hills

Striped up and down with hedges (burly
 oaks

Projecting from the line to show them-
 selves),

Through which my cousin Romney's chim-
 neys smoked

As still as when a silent mouth in frost
 Breathes, showing where the woodlands
 hid Leigh Hall; 600

While, far above, a jut of table-land,

A promontory without water, stretched, —
You could not catch it if the days were
thick,

Or took it for a cloud; but, otherwise,
The vigorous sun would catch it up at eve
And use it for an anvil till he had filled
The shelves of heaven with burning thun-
derbolts,

Protesting against night and darkness: —
then,

When all his setting trouble was resolved
To a trance of passive glory, you might
see 610

In apparition on the golden sky
(Alas, my Giotto's background!) the sheep
run

Along the fine clear outline, small as mice
That run along a witch's scarlet thread.

Not a grand nature. Not my chestnut-
woods

Of Vallómbrosa, cleaving by the spurs
To the precipices. Not my headlong leaps
Of waters, that cry out for joy or fear
In leaping through the palpitating pines,
Like a white soul tossed out to eternity 620
With thrills of time upon it. Not indeed
My multitudinous mountains, sitting in
The magic circle, with the mutual touch
Electric, panting from their full deep
hearts

Beneath the influent heavens, and waiting
for

Communion and commission. Italy
Is one thing, England one.

On English ground
You understand the letter, — ere the fall
How Adam lived in a garden. All the
fields

Are tied up fast with hedges, nosegay like;
The hills are crumpled plains, the plains
parterres, 631

The trees, round, woolly, ready to be
clipped,

And if you seek for any wilderness
You find, at best, a park. A nature tamed
And grown domestic like a barn-door fowl,
Which does not awe you with its claws and
beak,

Nor tempt you to an eyrie too high up,
But which, in cackling, sets you thinking of
Your eggs to-morrow at breakfast, in the
pause

Of finer meditation.

Rather say, 640

A sweet familiar nature, stealing in
As a dog might, or child, to touch your
hand

Or pluck your gown, and humbly mind you
so

Of presence and affection, excellent
For inner uses, from the things without.

I could not be unthankful, I who was
Entreated thus and holpen. In the room
I speak of, ere the house was well awake,
And also after it was well asleep,
I sat alone, and drew the blessing in 650
Of all that nature. With a gradual step,
A stir among the leaves, a breath, a ray,
It came in softly, while the angels made
A place for it beside me. The moon
came,

And swept my chamber clean of foolish
thoughts.

The sun came, saying, 'Shall I lift this
light

Against the lime-tree, and you will not
look?

I make the birds sing — listen! but, for
you,

God never hears your voice, excepting
when

You lie upon the bed at nights and weep.'

Then, something moved me. Then, I
wakened up 661

More slowly than I verily write now,
But wholly, at last, I wakened, opened
wide

The window and my soul, and let the airs
And out-door sights sweep gradual gospels
in,

Regenerating what I was. O Life,
How oft we throw it off and think, —
'Enough,

Enough of life in so much! — here's a
cause

For rupture; — herein we must break with
Life,

Or be ourselves unworthy; here we are
wronged, 670

Maimed, spoiled for aspiration: farewell,
Life!'

And so, as froward babes, we hide our
eyes

And think all ended. — Then, Life calls to
us

In some transformed, apocalyptic voice,
Above us, or below us, or around:

Perhaps we name it Nature's voice, or
 Love's,
 Tricking ourselves, because we are more
 ashamed
 To own our compensations than our griefs:
 Still, Life's voice! — still, we make our
 peace with Life.

And I, so young then, was not sullen.
 Soon 680

I used to get up early, just to sit
 And watch the morning quicken in the
 gray,
 And hear the silence open like a flower
 Leaf after leaf, — and stroke with listless
 hand
 The woodbine through the window, till at
 last

I came to do it with a sort of love,
 At foolish unaware: whereat I smiled, —
 A melancholy smile, to catch myself
 Smiling for joy.

Capacity for joy

Admits temptation. It seemed, next,
 worth while 690
 To dodge the sharp sword set against my
 life;

To slip down stairs through all the sleepy
 house,

As mute as any dream there, and escape
 As a soul from the body, out of doors,
 Glide through the shrubberies, drop into
 the lane,

And wander on the hills an hour or two,
 Then back again before the house should
 stir.

Or else I sat on in my chamber green,
 And lived my life, and thought my
 thoughts, and prayed

My prayers without the vicar; read my
 books, 700

Without considering whether they were fit
 To do me good. Mark, there. We get no
 good

By being ungenerous, even to a book,
 And calculating profits, — so much help
 By so much reading. It is rather when
 We gloriously forget ourselves and plunge
 Soul-forward, headlong, into a book's pro-
 found,

Impassioned for its beauty and salt of
 truth —

'Tis then we get the right good from a
 book.

I read much. What my father taught be-
 fore 710

From many a volume, Love re-emphasized
 Upon the self-same pages: Theophrast
 Grew tender with the memory of his eyes,
 And Ælian made mine wet. The trick of
 Greek

And Latin he had taught me, as he would
 Have taught me wrestling or the game of
 fives

If such he had known, — most like a ship-
 wrecked man

Who heaps his single platter with goats'
 cheese

And scarlet berries; or like any man
 Who loves but one, and so gives all at
 once, 720

Because he has it, rather than because
 He counts it worthy. Thus, my father
 gave:

And thus, as did the women formerly
 By young Achilles, when they pinned a
 veil

Across the boy's audacious front, and swept
 With tuneful laughs the silver-fretted
 rocks,

He wrapt his little daughter in his large
 Man's doublet, careless did it fit or no.

But, after I had read for memory,
 I read for hope. The path my father's
 foot 730

Had trod me out (which suddenly broke
 off

What time he dropped the wallet of the
 flesh

And passed), alone I carried on, and set
 My child-heart 'gainst the thorny under-
 wood,

To reach the grassy shelter of the trees.
 Ah babe i' the wood, without a brother-
 babe!

My own self-pity, like the red-breast bird,
 Flies back to cover all that past with
 leaves.

Sublimest danger, over which none weeps,
 When any young wayfaring soul goes
 forth 740

Alone, unconscious of the perilous road,
 The day-sun dazzling in his limpid eyes,
 To thrust his own way, he an alien,
 through

The world of books! Ah, you! — you
 think it fine,

You clap hands — 'A fair day!' — you cheer him on,
 As if the worst, could happen, were to rest
 Too long beside a fountain. Yet, behold,
 Behold! — the world of books is still the world,
 And worldings in it are less merciful
 And more puissant. For the wicked there ⁷⁵⁰
 Are winged like angels; every knife that strikes
 Is edged from elemental fire to assail
 A spiritual life; the beautiful seems right
 By force of beauty, and the feeble wrong
 Because of weakness; power is justified
 Though armed against Saint Michael; many a crown
 Covers bald foreheads. In the book-world, true,
 There's no lack, neither, of God's saints and kings,
 That shake the ashes of the grave aside
 From their calm locks and undiscomfited ⁷⁶⁰
 Look steadfast truths against Time's changing mask.
 True, many a prophet teaches in the roads;
 True, many a seer pulls down the flaming heavens
 Upon his own head in strong martyrdom
 In order to light men a moment's space.
 But stay! — who judges? — who distinguishes
 'Twixt Saul and Nahash justly, at first sight,
 And leaves king Saul precisely at the sin,
 To serve king David? who discerns at once
 The sound of the trumpets, when the trumpets blow ⁷⁷⁰
 For Alaric as well as Charlemagne?
 Who judges wizards, and can tell true seers
 From conjurers? the child, there? Would you leave
 That child to wander in a battle-field
 And push his innocent smile against the guns;
 Or even in a catacomb, — his torch
 Grown ragged in the fluttering air, and all
 The dark a-mutter round him? not a child.
 I read books bad and good — some bad and good

At once (good aims not always make good books: ⁷⁸⁰
 Well-tempered spades turn up ill-smelling soils
 In digging vineyards even); books that prove
 God's being so definitely, that man's doubt
 Grows self-defined the other side the line,
 Made atheist by suggestion; moral books,
 Exasperating to license; genial books,
 Discounting from the human dignity;
 And merry books, which set you weeping when
 The sun shines, — ay, and melancholy books,
 Which make you laugh that any one should weep ⁷⁹⁰
 In this disjointed life for one wrong more.
 The world of books is still the world, I write,
 And both worlds have God's providence, thank God,
 To keep and hearten: with some struggle, indeed,
 Among the breakers, some hard swimming through
 The deeps — I lost breath in my soul sometimes
 And cried 'God save me if there's any God,'
 But, even so, God saved me; and, being dashed
 From error on to error, every turn
 Still brought me nearer to the central truth. ⁸⁰⁰
 I thought so. All this anguish in the thick
 Of men's opinions . . . press and counter-press,
 Now up, now down, now underfoot, and now
 Emergent . . . all the best of it, perhaps,
 But throws you back upon a noble trust
 And use of your own instinct, — merely proves
 Pure reason stronger than bare inference
 At strongest. Try it, — fix against heaven's wall
 The scaling-ladders of school logic — mount
 Step by step! — sight goes faster; that still ray ⁸¹⁰
 Which strikes out from you, how, you cannot tell,

And why, you know not (did you eliminate,
That such as you indeed should analyze ?)
Goes straight and fast as light, and high as
God.

The cygnet finds the water, but the man
Is born in ignorance of his element
And feels out blind at first, disorganized
By sin i' the blood, — his spirit-insight
dulled

And crossed by his sensations. Presently
He feels it quicken in the dark sometimes,
When, mark, be reverent, be obedient, ⁸²¹
For such dumb motions of imperfect life
Are oracles of vital Deity
Attesting the Hereafter. Let who says
'The soul's a clean white paper,' rather
say,

A palimpsest, a prophet's holograph
Defiled, erased and covered by a monk's; —
The apocalypse, by a Longus ! poring on
Which obscene text, we may discern per-
haps

Some fair, fine trace of what was written
once, ⁸³⁰

Some upstroke of an alpha and omega
Expressing the old scripture.

Books, books, books !

I had found the secret of a garret-room
Piled high with cases in my father's name,
Piled high, packed large, — where, creep-
ing in and out

Among the giant fossils of my past,
Like some small nimble mouse between the
ribs

Of a mastodon, I nibbled here and there
At this or that box, pulling through the gap,
In heats of terror, haste, victorious joy, ⁸⁴⁰
The first book first. And how I felt it beat
Under my pillow, in the morning's dark,
An hour before the sun would let me read !
My books ! At last because the time was
ripe,

I chanced upon the poets.

As the earth

Plunges in fury, when the internal fires
Have reached and pricked her heart, and,
throwing flat

The marts and temples, the triumphal gates
And towers of observation, clears herself
To elemental freedom — thus, my soul, ⁸⁵⁰
At poetry's divine first finger-touch,
Let go conventions and sprang up surprised,
Convicted of the great eternities
Before two worlds.

What's this, Aurora Leigh,
You write so of the poets, and not laugh ?
Those virtuous liars, dreamers after dark,
Exaggerators of the sun and moon,
And soothsayers in a tea-cup ?

I write so
Of the only truth-tellers now left to God,
The only speakers of essential truth, ⁸⁶⁰
Opposed to relative, comparative,
And temporal truths; the only holders by
His sun-skirts, through conventional gray
glooms;

The only teachers who instruct mankind
From just a shadow on a charnel-wall
To find man's veritable stature out
Erect, sublime, — the measure of a man,
And that's the measure of an angel, says
The apostle. Ay, and while your common
men

Lay telegraphs, gauge railroads, reign,
reap, dine, ⁸⁷⁰

And dust the flaunty carpets of the world
For kings to walk on, or our president,
The poet suddenly will catch them up
With his voice like a thunder, — 'This is
soul,

This is life, this word is being said in
heaven,

Here's God down on us ! what are you
about ?'

How all those workers start amid their
work,

Look round, look up, and feel, a moment's
space,

That carpet-dusting, though a pretty trade,
Is not the imperative labor after all. ⁸⁸⁰

My own best poets, am I one with you,
That thus I love you, — or but one through
love ?

Does all this smell of thyme about my
feet

Conclude my visit to your holy hill
In personal presence, or but testify
The rustling of your vesture through my
dreams

With influent odors ? When my joy and
pain,

My thought and aspiration, like the stops
Of pipe or flute, are absolutely dumb
Unless melodious, do you play on me ⁸⁹⁰
My pipers, — and if, sooth, you did not
blow,

Would no sound come ? or is the music
mine,

As a man's voice or breath is called his own,
Inbreathed by the Life-breather? There's
a doubt
For cloudy seasons!

But the sun was high
When first I felt my pulses set themselves
For concord; when the rhythmic turbulence
Of blood and brain swept outward upon
words,

As wind upon the alders, blanching them
By turning up their under-natures till ⁹⁰⁰
They trembled in dilation. O delight
And triumph of the poet, who would say
A man's mere 'yes,' a woman's common
'no,'

A little human hope of that or this,
And says the word so that it burns you
through

With a special revelation, shakes the heart
Of all the men and women in the world,
As if one came back from the dead and
spoke,

With eyes too happy, a familiar thing
Become divine i' the utterance! while for
him ⁹¹⁰

The poet, speaker, he expands with joy;
The palpitating angel in his flesh
Thrills inly with consenting fellowship
To those innumerable spirits who sun them-
selves

Outside of time.

O life, O poetry,
— Which means life in life! cognizant of
life

Beyond this blood-beat, passionate for truth
Beyond these senses! — poetry, my life,
My eagle, with both grappling feet still
hot

From Zeus's thunder, who hast ravished
me ⁹²⁰

Away from all the shepherds, sheep, and
dogs,

And set me in the Olympian roar and round
Of luminous faces for a cup-bearer,
To keep the mouths of all the godheads
moist

For everlasting laughter, — I myself
Half drunk across the beaker with their
eyes!

How those gods look!

Enough so, Ganymede,
We shall not bear above a round or two.
We drop the golden cup at Herè's foot
And swoon back to the earth, — and find
ourselves ⁹³⁰

Face-down among the pine-cones, cold with
dew,

While the dogs bark, and many a shepherd
scoffs,

'What's come now to the youth?' Such
ups and downs

Have poets.

Am I such indeed? The name
Is royal, and to sign it like a queen
Is what I dare not, — though some royal
blood

Would seem to tingle in me now and then,
With sense of power and ache, — with
imposthumes

And manias usual to the race. Howbeit
I dare not: 't is too easy to go mad ⁹⁴⁰
And ape a Bourbon in a crown of straws;
The thing's too common.

Many fervent souls
Strike rhyme on rhyme, who would strike
steel on steel

If steel had offered, in a restless heat
Of doing something. Many tender souls
Have strung their losses on a rhyming
thread,

As children cowslips: — the more pains
they take,

The work more withers. Young men, ay,
and maids,

Too often sow their wild oats in tame
verse,

Before they sit down under their own
vine ⁹⁵⁰

And live for use. Alas, near all the birds
Will sing at dawn, — and yet we do not
take

The chaffering swallow for the holy lark.

In those days, though, I never analyzed,

Not even myself. Analysis comes late.

You catch a sight of Nature, earliest,

In full front sun-face, and your eyelids
wink

And drop before the wonder of 't; you
miss

The work, through seeing the light. I
lived, those days,

And wrote because I lived — unlicensed
else; ⁹⁶⁰

My heart beat in my brain. Life's violent
flood

Abolished bounds, — and, which my neigh-
bor's field,

Which mine, what mattered? it is thus in
youth!

We play at leap-frog over the god Term;

The love within us and the love without
Are mixed, confounded; if we are loved or
love,
We scarce distinguish: thus, with other
power;

Being acted on and acting seem the same:
In that first onrush of life's chariot-wheels,
We know not if the forests move or we. 970

And so, like most young poets, in a flush
Of individual life I poured myself
Along the veins of others, and achieved
Mere lifeless imitations of live verse,
And made the living answer for the dead,
Profaning nature. 'Touch not, do not
taste,

Nor handle,' — we're too legal, who write
young:

We beat the phorminx till we hurt our
thumbs,

As if still ignorant of counterpoint;
We call the Muse, — 'O Muse, benignant
Muse,' — 980

As if we had seen her purple-braided head,
With the eyes in it, start between the
boughs

As often as a stag's. What make-believe,
With so much earnest! what effete re-
sults

From virile efforts! what cold wire-drawn
odes

From such white heats! — bucolics, where
the cows

Would scare the writer if they splashed
the mud

In lashing off the flies, — didactics, driven
Against the heels of what the master said;
And counterfeiting epics, shrill with
trumps 990

A babe might blow between two straining
cheeks

Of bubbled rose, to make his mother laugh;
And elegiac griefs, and songs of love,
Like cast-off nosegays picked up on the
road,

The worse for being warm: all these things,
writ

On happy mornings, with a morning heart,
That leaps for love, is active for resolve,
Weak for art only. Oft, the ancient
forms

Will thrill, indeed, in carrying the young
blood.

The wine-skins, now and then, a little
warped, 1000

Will crack even, as the new wine gurgles
in.

Spare the old bottles! — spill not the new
wine.

By Keats's soul, the man who never stepped
In gradual progress like another man,
But, turning grandly on his central self,
Ensphered himself in twenty perfect years
And died, not young (the life of a long
life

Distilled to a mere drop, falling like a
tear

Upon the world's cold cheek to make it
burn 1009

For ever); by that strong excepted soul,
I count it strange and hard to understand
That nearly all young poets should write
old,

That Pope was sexagenary at sixteen,
And beardless Byron academical,
And so with others. It may be perhaps
Such have not settled long and deep
enough

In trance, to attain to clairvoyance, — and
still

The memory mixes with the vision, spoils,
And works it turbid.

Or perhaps, again,
In order to discover the Muse-Sphinx, 1020
The melancholy desert must sweep round,
Behind you as before. —

For me, I wrote
False poems, like the rest, and thought
them true

Because myself was true in writing them.
I peradventure have writ true ones since
With less complacence.

But I could not hide
My quickening inner life from those at
watch.

They saw a light at a window, now and
then,

They had not set there: who had set it
there?

My father's sister started when she caught
My soul agaze in my eyes. She could not
say 1031

I had no business with a sort of soul,
But plainly she objected, — and demurred
That souls were dangerous things to carry
straight

Through all the spilt saltpetre of the world.
She said sometimes, 'Aurora, have you
done

Your task this morning? have you read
that book?

And are you ready for the crochet here?' —
As if she said, 'I know there's something
wrong;

I know I have not ground you down
enough 1040

To flatten and bake you to a wholesome
crust

For household uses and proprieties,
Before the rain has got into my barn
And set the grains a-sprouting. What,
you're green

With out-door impudence? you almost
grow?'

To which I answered, 'Would she hear
my task,

And verify my abstract of the book?
Or should I sit down to the crochet work?
Was such her pleasure?' Then I sat and
teased

The patient needle till it split the thread,
Which oozed off from it in meandering
lace 1051

From hour to hour. I was not, therefore,
sad;

My soul was singing at a work apart
Behind the wall of sense, as safe from
harm

As sings the lark when sucked up out of
sight

In vortices of glory and blue air.

And so, through forced work and spontane-
ous work,

The inner life informed the outer life,
Reduced the irregular blood to a settled
rhythm,

Made cool the forehead with fresh-sprin-
kling dreams, 1060

And, rounding to the spheric soul the thin,
Pined body, struck a color up the cheeks
Though somewhat faint. I clenched my
brows across

My blue eyes greatening in the looking-
glass,

And said 'We'll live, Aurora! we'll be
strong.

The dogs are on us — but we will not
die.'

Whoever lives true life will love true love.
I learnt to love that England. Very oft,
Before the day was born, or otherwise
Through secret windings of the afternoons,

I threw my hunters off and plunged my-
self 1071

Among the deep hills, as a hunted stag
Will take the waters, shivering with the
fear

And passion of the course. And when at
last

Escaped, so many a green slope built on
slope

Betwixt me and the enemy's house behind,
I dared to rest, or wander, in a rest

Made sweeter for the step upon the grass,
And view the ground's most gentle dimple-
ment

(As if God's finger touched but did not
press 1080

In making England), such an up and down
Of verdure, — nothing too much up or
down,

A ripple of land; such little hills, the
sky

Can stoop to tenderly and the wheatfields
climb;

Such nooks of valleys lined with orchises,
Fed full of noises by invisible streams;
And open pastures where you scarcely
tell

White daisies from white dew, — at inter-
vals

The mythic oaks and elm-trees standing
out

Self-poised upon their prodigy of shade, —
I thought my father's land was worthy
too 1091

Of being my Shakespeare's.

Very oft alone,

Unlicensed; not unfrequently with leave
To walk the third with Romney and his
friend

The rising painter, Vincent Carrington,
Whom men judge hardly as bee-bonneted,
Because he holds that, paint a body well,
You paint a soul by implication, like
The grand first Master. Pleasant walks!
for if

He said 'When I was last in Italy,' 1100

It sounded as an instrument that's played
Too far off for the tune — and yet it's
fine

To listen.

Offer we walked only two

If cousin Romney pleased to walk with
me.

We read, or talked, or quarrelled, as it
chanced.

We were not lovers, nor even friends well-matched:

Say rather, scholars upon different tracks,
And thinkers disagreed: he, overfull
Of what is, and I, haply, overbold
For what might be.

But then the thrushes sang,
And shook my pulses and the elms' new
leaves: 1111

At which I turned, and held my finger
up,
And bade him mark that, howsoe'er the
world

Went ill, as he related, certainly
The thrushes still sang in it. At the word
His brow would soften, — and he bore with
me

In melancholy patience, not unkind,
While breaking into voluble ecstasy
I flattered all the beauteous country
round,

As poets use, the skies, the clouds, the
fields, 1120

The happy violets hiding from the roads
The primroses run down to, carrying gold;
The tangled hedgerows, where the cows
push out

Impatient horns and tolerant churning
mouths

'Twixt dripping ash-boughs, — hedgerows
all alive

With birds and gnats and large white but-
terflies

Which look as if the may-flower had caught
life

And palpitated forth upon the wind;
Hills, vales, woods, netted in a silver mist,
Farms, granges, doubled up among the
hills; 1130

And cattle grazing in the watered vales,
And cottage-chimneys smoking from the
woods,

And cottage-gardens smelling everywhere,
Confused with smell of orchards. 'See,' I
said,

'And see! is God not with us on the
earth?

And shall we put Him down by aught we
do?

Who says there's nothing for the poor and
vile

Save poverty and wickedness? behold!'
And ankle-deep in English grass I leaped
And clapped my hands, and called all very
fair. 1140

In the beginning when God called all good,
Even then was evil near us, it is writ;
But we indeed who call things good and
fair,
The evil is upon us while we speak;
Deliver us from evil, let us pray.

SECOND BOOK

Times followed one another. Came a
morn

I stood upon the brink of twenty years,
And looked before and after, as I stood
Woman and artist, — either incomplete,
Both credulous of completion. There I
held

The whole creation in my little cup,
And smiled with thirsty lips before I
drank

'Good health to you and me, sweet neigh-
bor mine,
And all these peoples.'

I was glad, that day;
The June was in me, with its multitudes 10
Of nightingales all singing in the dark,
And rosebuds reddening where the calyx
split.

I felt so young, so strong, so sure of God!
So glad, I could not choose be very wise!
And, old at twenty, was inclined to pull
My childhood backward in a childish jest
To see the face of 't once more, and fare-
well!

In which fantastic mood I bounded forth
At early morning, — would not wait so
long

As even to snatch my bonnet by the
strings, 20

But, brushing a green trail across the lawn
With my gown in the dew, took will and
way

Among the acacias of the shrubberies,
To fly my fancies in the open air
And keep my birthday, till my aunt awoke
To stop good dreams. Meanwhile I mur-
mured on

As honeyed bees keep humming to them-
selves,

'The worthiest poets have remained un-
crowned

Till death has bleached their foreheads to
the bone;

And so with me it must be unless I prove
Unworthy of the grand adversity, 31

And certainly I would not fail so much.
What, therefore, if I crown myself to-day
In sport, not pride, to learn the feel of
it,

Before my brows be numbed as Dante's
own

To all the tender pricking of such leaves?
Such leaves! what leaves?'

I pulled the branches down
To choose from.

'Not the bay! I choose no bay
(The fates deny us if we are overbold),
Nor myrtle — which means chiefly love;
and love

Is something awful which one dares not
touch

So early o' mornings. This verbena strains
The point of passionate fragrance; and hard
by,

This guelder-rose, at far too slight a beck
Of the wind, will toss about her flower-
apples.

Ah — there's my choice, — that ivy on the
wall,

That headlong ivy! not a leaf will grow
But thinking of a wreath. Large leaves,
smooth leaves,

Serrated like my vines, and half as green.
I like such ivy, bold to leap a height

'Twas strong to climb; as good to grow on
graves

As twist about a thyrsus; pretty too
(And that's not ill) when twisted round a
comb.'

Thus speaking to myself, half singing it,
Because some thoughts are fashioned like a
bell

To ring with once being touched, I drew a
wreath

Drenched, blinding me with dew, across my
brow,

And fastening it behind so, turning faced
. . . My public! — cousin Romney — with
a mouth

Twice graver than his eyes.

I stood there fixed, —
My arms up, like the caryatid, sole
Of some abolished temple, helplessly
Persistent in a gesture which derides
A former purpose. Yet my blush was
flame,

As if from flax, not stone.

'Aurora Leigh,
The earliest of Auroras!'

Hand stretched out

I clasped, as shipwrecked men will clasp a
hand,
Indifferent to the sort of palm. The tide
Had caught me at my pastime, writing
down

My foolish name too near upon the sea 70
Which drowned me with a blush as foolish.

'You,
My cousin!'

The smile died out in his eyes
And dropped upon his lips, a cold dead
weight,

For just a moment, 'Here's a book I
found!

No name writ on it — poems, by the form;
Some Greek upon the margin, — lady's
Greek

Without the accents. Read it? Not a
word.

I saw at once the thing had witchcraft in 't,
Whereof the reading calls up dangerous
spirits:

I rather bring it to the witch.' 79

'My book.

You found it' . . .

'In the hollow by the stream
That beech leans down into — of which you
said

The Oread in it has a Naiad's heart
And pines for waters.'

'Thank you.'

'Thanks to you
My cousin! that I have seen you not too
much

Witch, scholar, poet, dreamer, and the rest,
To be a woman also.'

With a glance
The smile rose in his eyes again and
touched

The ivy on my forehead, light as air.

I answered gravely, 'Poets needs must
be

Or men or women — more's the pity.' 90

'Ah,
But men, and still less women, happily,
Scarce need be poets. Keep to the green
wreath,

Since even dreaming of the stone and
bronze

Brings headaches, pretty cousin, and de-
files

The clean white morning dresses.'

'So you judge!
Because I love the beautiful I must
Love pleasure chiefly, and be overcharged

For ease and whiteness ! well, you know
 the world,
 And only miss your cousin, 't is not
 much. ¹⁰⁰
 But learn this; I would rather take my
 part
 With God's Dead, who afford to walk in
 white
 Yet spread his glory, than keep quiet here
 And gather up my feet from even a step
 For fear to soil my gown in so much dust.
 I choose to walk at all risks. — Here, if
 heads
 That hold a rhythmic thought, must ache
 perforce,
 For my part I choose headaches, — and to-
 day's
 My birthday.'

'Dear Aurora, choose instead
 To cure them. You have balsams.'

'I perceive.
 The headache is too noble for my sex. ¹¹¹
 You think the heartache would sound de-
 center,
 Since that's the woman's special, proper
 ache,
 And altogether tolerable, except
 To a woman.'

Saying which, I loosed my wreath,
 And swinging it beside me as I walked,
 Half-petulant, half-playful, as we walked,
 I sent a sidelong look to find his thought, —
 As falcon set on falconer's finger may,
 With sidelong head, and startled, braving
 eye, ¹²⁰

Which means, 'You'll see — you'll see !
 I'll soon take flight,
 You shall not hinder.' He, as shaking out
 His hand and answering 'Fly then,' did not
 speak,

Except by such a gesture. Silently
 We paced, until, just coming into sight
 Of the house-windows, he abruptly caught
 At one end of the swinging wreath, and
 said

'Aurora !' There I stopped short, breath
 and all.

'Aurora, let's be serious, and throw by
 This game of head and heart. Life means,
 be sure, ¹³⁰
 Both heart and head, — both active, both
 complete,
 And both in earnest. Men and women
 make

The world, as head and heart make human
 life.

Work man, work woman, since there's work
 to do

In this beleaguered earth, for head and
 heart,

And thought can never do the work of
 love:

But work for ends, I mean for uses, not
 For such sleek fringes (do you call them
 ends,

Still less God's glory ?) as we sew ourselves
 Upon the velvet of those baldaquins ¹⁴⁰
 Held 'twixt us and the sun. That book of

yours,
 I have not read a page of; but I toss
 A rose up — it falls calyx down, you see !

The chances are that, being a woman, young
 And pure, with such a pair of large, calm
 eyes,

You write as well . . . and ill . . . upon
 the whole,

As other women. If as well, what then ?
 If even a little better, . . . still, what
 then ?

We want the Best in art now, or no art.
 The time is done for facile settings up ¹⁵⁰
 Of minnow gods, nymphs here and tritons
 there;

The polytheists have gone out in God,
 That unity of Bests. No best, no God !
 And so with art, we say. Give art's divine,
 Direct, indubitable, real as grief,
 Or leave us to the grief we grow ourselves
 Divine by overcoming with mere hope
 And most prosaic patience. You, you are
 young

As Eve with nature's daybreak on her face,
 But this same world you are come to, dearest
 coz, ¹⁶⁰

Has done with keeping birthdays, saves her
 wreaths

To hang upon her ruins, — and forgets
 To rhyme the cry with which she still beats
 back

Those savage, hungry dogs that hunt her
 down

To the empty grave of Christ. The world's
 hard pressed:

The sweat of labor in the early curse
 Has (turning acrid in six thousand years)
 Become the sweat of torture. Who has
 time,

An hour's time . . . think ! — to sit upon
 a bank

And hear the cymbal tinkle in white hands ?
When Egypt's slain, I say, let Miriam
sing ! —

171

Before — where's Moses ?

'Ah, exactly that.

Where's Moses ? — is a Moses to be found ?
You'll seek him vainly in the bulrushes,
While I in vain touch cymbals. Yet con-
cede,

Such sounding brass has done some actual
good

(The application in a woman's hand,
If that were credible, being scarcely spoilt,)
In colonizing beehives.'

'There it is ! —

You play beside a death-bed like a child, 180
Yet measure to yourself a prophet's place
To teach the living. None of all these
things

Can women understand. You generalize
Oh, nothing, — not even grief ! Your
quick-breathed hearts,

So sympathetic to the personal pang,
Close on each separate knife-stroke, yield-
ing up

A whole life at each wound, incapable
Of deepening, widening a large lap of life
To hold the world-full woe. The human
race

To you means, such a child, or such a
man, 190

You saw one morning waiting in the cold,
Beside that gate, perhaps. You gather up
A few such cases, and when strong some-
times

Will write of factories and of slaves, as if
Your father were a negro, and your son
A spinner in the mills. All's yours and
you,

All, colored with your blood, or otherwise
Just nothing to you. Why, I call you hard
To general suffering. Here's the world
half blind

With intellectual light, half brutalized 200
With civilization, having caught the plague
In silks from Tarsus, shrieking east and
west

Along a thousand railroads, mad with pain
And sin too ! . . . does one woman of you
all

(You who weep easily) grow pale to see
This tiger shake his cage ? — does one of
you

Stand still from dancing, stop from string-
ing pearls,

And pine and die because of the great sum
Of universal anguish ? — Show me a tear
Wet as Cordelia's, in eyes bright as yours,
Because the world is mad. You cannot
count, 211

That you should weep for this account, not
you !

You weep for what you know. A red-
haired child

Sick in a fever, if you touch him once,
Though but so little as with a finger-tip,
Will set you weeping; but a million
sick . . .

You could as soon weep for the rule of
three

Or compound fractions. Therefore, this
same world,

Uncomprehended by you, must remain
Uninfluenced by you. — Women as you are,
Mere women, personal and passionate, 221
You give us doating mothers, and perfect
wives,

Sublime Madonnas, and enduring saints !

We get no Christ from you, — and verily
We shall not get a poet, in my mind.'

'With which conclusion you conclude' . . .

'But this,

That you, Aurora, with the large live brow
And steady eyelids, cannot condescend

To play at art, as children play at swords,
To show a pretty spirit, chiefly admired 230
Because true action is impossible.

You never can be satisfied with praise
Which men give women when they judge a
book

Not as mere work but as mere woman's
work,

Expressing the comparative respect
Which means the absolute scorn. "Oh,
excellent,

What grace, what facile turns, what fluent
sweeps,

What delicate discernment . . . almost
thought !

The book does honor to the sex, we hold.

Among our female authors we make room
For this fair writer, and congratulate 241
The country that produces in these times
Such women, competent to . . . spell."

'Stop there,'

I answered, burning through his thread of
talk

With a quick flame of emotion, — 'You
have read

My soul, if not my book, and argue well

I would not condescend . . . we will not
 say
 To such a kind of praise (a worthless
 end
 Is praise of all kinds), but to such a use
 Of holy art and golden life. I am young, ²⁵⁰
 And peradventure weak — you tell me
 so —
 Through being a woman. And, for all the
 rest,
 Take thanks for justice. I would rather
 dance
 At fairs on tight-rope, till the babies
 dropped
 Their gingerbread for joy, — than shift the
 types
 For tolerable verse, intolerable
 To men who act and suffer. Better far
 Pursue a frivolous trade by serious means,
 Than a sublime art frivolously.’
 ‘You,
 Choose nobler work than either, O moist
 eyes ²⁶⁰
 And hurrying lips and heaving heart! We
 are young,
 Aurora, you and I. The world, — look
 round, —
 The world, we’re come to late, is swollen
 hard
 With perished generations and their sins:
 The civilizer’s spade grinds horribly
 On dead men’s bones, and cannot turn up
 soil
 That’s otherwise than fetid. All success
 Proves partial failure; all advance implies
 What’s left behind; all triumph, some-
 thing crushed
 At the chariot-wheels; all government,
 some wrong: ²⁷⁰
 And rich men make the poor, who curse
 the rich,
 Who agonize together, rich and poor,
 Under and over, in the social spasm
 And crisis of the ages. Here’s an age
 That makes its own vocation! here we
 have stepped
 Across the bounds of time! here’s nought
 to see,
 But just the rich man and just Lazarus,
 And both in torments, with a mediate gulf,
 Though not a hint of Abraham’s bosom.
 Who
 Being man, Aurora, can stand calmly by ²⁸⁰
 And view these things, and never tease his
 soul

For some great cure? No physic for this
 grief,
 In all the earth and heavens too?’
 ‘You believe
 In God, for your part? — ay? that He
 who makes
 Can make good things from ill things, best
 from worst,
 As men plant tulips upon dunghills when
 They wish them finest?’
 ‘True. A death-heat is
 The same as life-heat, to be accurate,
 And in all nature is no death at all,
 As men account of death, so long as
 God ²⁹⁰
 Stands witnessing for life perpetually,
 By being just God. That’s abstract truth,
 I know,
 Philosophy, or sympathy with God:
 But I, I sympathize with man, not God
 (I think I was a man for chiefly this),
 And when I stand beside a dying bed,
 ’Tis death to me. Observe, — it had not
 much
 Consolated the race of mastodons to know,
 Before they went to fossil, that anon
 Their place would quicken with the ele-
 phant. ³⁰⁰
 They were not elephants but mastodons;
 And I, a man, as men are now and not
 As men may be hereafter, feel with men
 In the agonizing present.’
 ‘Is it so,’
 I said, ‘my cousin? is the world so
 bad,
 While I hear nothing of it through the
 trees?
 The world was always evil, — but so
 bad?’
 ‘So bad, Aurora. Dear, my soul is gray
 With poring over the long sun of ill;
 So much for vice, so much for discontent,
 So much for the necessities of power, ³¹¹
 So much for the connivances of fear,
 Coherent in statistical despairs
 With such a total of distracted life, . . .
 To see it down in figures on a page,
 Plain, silent, clear, as God sees through
 the earth
 The sense of all the graves, — that’s ter-
 rible
 For one who is not God, and cannot right
 The wrong he looks on. May I choose in-
 deed,

But vow away my years, my means, my
aims, ³²⁰

Among the helpers, if there 's any help
In such a social strait? The common
blood

That swings along my veins is strong
enough

To draw me to this duty.'

Then I spoke.

'I have not stood long on the strand of
life,

And these salt waters have had scarcely
time

To creep so high up as to wet my feet:

I cannot judge these tides — I shall, per-
haps.

A woman 's always younger than a man
At equal years, because she is disal-
lowed ³³⁰

Maturing by the outdoor sun and air,
And kept in long-clothes past the age to
walk.

Ah well, I know you men judge otherwise !

You think a woman ripens, as a peach,

In the cheeks chiefly. Pass it to me now;

I'm young in age, and younger still, I
think,

As a woman. But a child may say amen
To a bishop's prayer and feel the way it
goes,

And I, incapable to loose the knot
Of social questions, can approve, applaud
August compassion, Christian thoughts
that shoot ³⁴¹

Beyond the vulgar white of personal aims.
Accept my reverence.'

There he glowed on me

With all his face and eyes. 'No other
help ?'

Said he — 'no more than so ?'

'What help ?' I asked.

'You'd scorn my help, — as Nature's
self, you say,

Has scorned to put her music in my mouth
Because a woman's. Do you now turn
round

And ask for what a woman cannot give ?'

'For what she only can, I turn and
ask,' ³⁵⁰

He answered, catching up my hands in his,
And dropping on me from his high-eaved
brow

The full weight of his soul, — 'I ask for
love,

And that, she can; for life in fellowship
Through bitter duties — that, I know she
can;

For wifehood — will she ?'

'Now,' I said, 'may God

Be witness 'twixt us two !' and with the
word,

Meseemed I floated into a sudden light

Above his stature, — 'am I proved too
weak

To stand alone, yet strong enough to
bear ³⁶⁰

Such leaners on my shoulder? poor to
think,

Yet rich enough to sympathize with
thought ?

Incompetent to sing, as blackbirds can,

Yet competent to love, like HIM ?'

I paused;

Perhaps I darkened, as the lighthouse
will

That turns upon the sea. 'It's always so.
Anything does for a wife.'

'Aurora, dear,

And dearly honored,' — he pressed in at
once

With eager utterance, — 'you translate
me ill.

I do not contradict my thought of you ³⁷⁰
Which is most reverent, with another
thought

Found less so. If your sex is weak for
art

(And I, who said so, did but honor you

By using truth in courtship), it is strong

For life and duty. Place your fecund
heart

In mine, and let us blossom for the
world

That wants love's color in the gray of
time.

My talk, meanwhile, is arid to you, ay,

Since all my talk can only set you where

You look down coldly on the arena-
heaps ³⁸⁰

Of headless bodies, shapeless, indistinct !

The Judgment-Angel scarce would find
his way

Through such a heap of generalized dis-
tress

To the individual man with lips and eyes,

Much less Aurora. Ah, my sweet, come
down,

And hand in hand we'll go where yours
shall touch

These victims, one by one! till, one by one,
The formless, nameless trunk of every man
Shall seem to wear a head with hair you know,
And every woman catch your mother's face
To melt you into passion.'

'I am a girl,'

I answered slowly; 'you do well to name
My mother's face. Though far too early,
alas,

God's hand did interpose 'twixt it and me,
I know so much of love as used to shine
In that face and another. Just so much;
No more indeed at all. I have not seen
So much love since, I pray you pardon
me,

As answers even to make a marriage with
In this cold land of England. What you
love

Is not a woman, Romney, but a cause:
You want a helpmate, not a mistress, sir,
A wife to help your ends, — in her no end.
Your cause is noble, your ends excellent,
But I, being most unworthy of these and
that,

Do otherwise conceive of love. Farewell.'

'Farewell, Aurora? you reject me thus?'
He said.

'Sir, you were married long ago.
You have a wife already whom you love,
Your social theory. Bless you both, I say.
For my part, I am scarcely meek enough
To be the handmaid of a lawful spouse.
Do I look a Hagar, think you?'

'So you jest.'

'Nay, so, I speak in earnest,' I replied.
'You treat of marriage too much like, at
least,

A chief apostle: you would bear with you
A wife . . . a sister . . . shall we speak
it out?

A sister of charity.'

'Then, must it be
Indeed farewell? And was I so far
wrong

In hope and in illusion, when I took
The woman to be nobler than the man,
Yourself the noblest woman, in the use
And comprehension of what love is, — love,
That generates the likeness of itself
Through all heroic duties? so far wrong,

In saying bluntly, venturing truth on love,
"Come, human creature, love and work
with me," —

Instead of "Lady, thou art wondrous fair,
And, where the Graces walk before, the
Muse

Will follow at the lightning of their eyes,
And where the Muse walks, lovers need
to creep:

Turn round and love me, or I die of
love."

With quiet indignation I broke in.

'You misconceive the question like a man,
Who sees the woman as the complement
Of his sex merely. You forget too much
That every creature, female as the male,
Stands single in responsible act and thought
As also in birth and death. Whoever
says

To a loyal woman, "Love and work with
me,"

Will get fair answers if the work and love,
Being good themselves, are good for her —
the best

She was born for. Women of a softer
mood,

Surprised by men when scarcely awake to
life,

Will sometimes only hear the first word,
love,

And catch up with it any kind of work,
Indifferent, so that dear love go with it.
I do not blame such women, though, for
love,

They pick much oakum; earth's fanatics
make

Too frequently heaven's saints. But *me*
your work

Is not the best for, — nor your love the
best,

Nor able to commend the kind of work
For love's sake merely. Ah, you force me,
sir,

To be overbold in speaking of myself:

I too have my vocation, — work to do,
The heavens and earth have set me since I
changed

My father's face for theirs, and, though
your world

Were twice as wretched as you represent,
Most serious work, most necessary work
As any of the economists'. Reform,

Make trade a Christian possibility,
And individual right no general wrong;

Wipe out earth's furrows of the Thine and Mine,

And leave one green for men to play at bowls,

With innings for them all! . . . What then, indeed,

If mortals are not greater by the head Than any of their prosperities? what then,

Unless the artist keep up open roads Betwixt the seen and unseen, — bursting through

The best of your conventions with his best, 470

The speakable, imaginable best God bids him speak, to prove what lies beyond

Both speech and imagination? A starved man

Exceeds a fat beast: we 'll not barter, sir, The beautiful for barley. — And, even so,

I hold you will not compass your poor ends

Of barley-feeding and material ease, Without a poet's individualism

To work your universal. It takes a soul, To move a body: it takes a high-souled man, 480

To move the masses, even to a cleaner sty:

It takes the ideal, to blow a hair's-breadth off

The dust of the actual. — Ah, your Fouriers failed,

Because not poets enough to understand That life develops from within. — For me,

Perhaps I am not worthy, as you say, Of work like this: perhaps a woman's soul

Aspires, and not creates: yet we aspire, And yet I 'll try out your perhapses, sir,

And if I fail . . . why, burn me up my straw 490

Like other false works — I 'll not ask for grace;

Your scorn is better, cousin Romney. I Who love my art, would never wish it lower

To suit my stature. I may love my art. You 'll grant that even a woman may love art,

Seeing that to waste true love on anything Is womanly, past question.'

I retain

The very last word which I said that day, As you the creaking of the door, years past,

Which let upon you such disabling news 500 You ever after have been graver. He,

His eyes, the motions in his silent mouth, Were fiery points on which my words were caught,

Transfixed for ever in my memory For his sake, not their own. And yet I know

I did not love him . . . nor he me . . . that's sure . . .

And what I said is unrepented of, As truth is always. Yet . . . a princely man! —

If hard to me, heroic for himself! He bears down on me through the slanting years, 510

The stronger for the distance. If he had loved,

Ay, loved me, with that retributive face, . . .

I might have been a common woman now And happier, less known and less left alone,

Perhaps a better woman after all, With chubby children hanging on my neck

To keep me low and wise. Ah me, the vines

That bear such fruit are proud to stoop with it.

The palm stands upright in a realm of sand.

And I, who spoke the truth then, stand upright, 520

Still worthy of having spoken out the truth,

By being content I spoke it though it set Him there, me here. — O woman's vile remorse,

To hanker after a mere name, a show, A supposition, a potential love!

Does every man who names love in our lives

Become a power for that? is love's true thing

So much best to us, that what personates love

Is next best? A potential love, forsooth! I 'm not so vile. No, no — he cleaves, I think, 530

This man, this image, — chiefly for the wrong

And shock he gave my life, in finding me Precisely where the devil of my youth

Had set me, on those mountain-peaks of hope

All glittering with the dawn-dew, all erect
And famished for the noon, — exclaiming,
while

I looked for empire and much tribute,
'Come,

I have some worthy work for thee below.
Come, sweep my barns and keep my hos-
pitals,

And I will pay thee with a current coin ⁵⁴⁰
Which men give women.'

As we spoke, the grass
Was trod in haste beside us, and my aunt,
With smile distorted by the sun, — face,
voice

As much at issue with the summer-day
As if you brought a candle out of doors,
Broke in with 'Romney here! — My child,
entreat

Your cousin to the house, and have your
talk,

If girls must talk upon their birthdays.
Come.'

He answered for me calmly, with pale lips
That seemed to motion for a smile in vain,
'The talk is ended, madam, where we
stand. ⁵⁵¹

Your brother's daughter has dismissed me
here;

And all my answer can be better said
Beneath the trees, than wrong by such a
word

Your house's hospitalities. Farewell.'

With that he vanished. I could hear his
heel

Ring bluntly in the lane, as down he leapt
The short way from us. — Then a measured
speech

Withdrew me. 'What means this, Aurora
Leigh?

My brother's daughter has dismissed my
guests?' ⁵⁶⁰

The lion in me felt the keeper's voice
Through all its quivering dew-laps; I was
quelled

Before her, — meekened to the child she
knew:

I prayed her pardon, said 'I had little
thought

To give dismissal to a guest of hers,
In letting go a friend of mine who came
To take me into service as a wife, —
No more than that, indeed.'

'No more, no more?

Pray Heaven,' she answered, 'that I was
not mad.

I could not mean to tell her to her face ⁵⁷⁰
That Romney Leigh had asked me for a
wife,

And I refused him?'

'Did he ask?' I said;

'I think he rather stooped to take me up
For certain uses which he found to do
For something called a wife. He never
asked.'

'What stuff!' she answered; 'are they
queens, these girls?

They must have mantles, stitched with
twenty silks,

Spread out upon the ground, before they'll
step

One footstep for the noblest lover born.'

'But I am born,' I said with firmness, 'I,
To walk another way than his, dear aunt.'

'You walk, you walk! A babe at thirteen
months ⁵⁸²

Will walk as well as you,' she cried in
haste,

'Without a steady finger. Why, you
child,

God help you, you are groping in the dark,
For all this sunlight. You suppose, per-
haps,

That you, sole offspring of an opulent
man,

Are rich and free to choose a way to
walk?

You think, and it's a reasonable thought,
That I, beside, being well to do in life, ⁵⁹⁰

Will leave my handful in my niece's hand
When death shall paralyze these fingers?

Pray,

Pray, child, albeit I know you love me
not,

As if you loved me, that I may not die!

For when I die and leave you, out you
go

(Unless I make room for you in my grave),
Unhoused, unfed, my dear poor brother's
lamb

(Ah heaven! — that pains!) — without a
right to crop

A single blade of grass beneath these trees,
Or cast a lamb's small shadow on the
lawn, ⁶⁰⁰

Unfed, unfolded! Ah, my brother, here's

The fruit you planted in your foreign
loves!—

Ay, there's the fruit he planted! never
look

Astonished at me with your mother's eyes,
For it was they who set you where you are,
An undowered orphan. Child, your
father's choice

Of that said mother disinherited
His daughter, his and hers. Men do not
think

Of sons and daughters, when they fall in
love,

So much more than of sisters; otherwise ⁶¹⁰
He would have paused to ponder what he
did,

And shrunk before that clause in the entail
Excluding offspring by a foreign wife
(The clause set up a hundred years ago
By a Leigh who wedded a French dancing-
girl

And had his heart danced over in return);
But this man shrank at nothing, never
thought

Of you, Aurora, any more than me—
Your mother must have been a pretty
thing,

For all the coarse Italian blacks and
browns, ⁶²⁰

To make a good man, which my brother
was,

Unchary of the duties to his house;
But so it fell indeed. Our cousin Vane,
Vane Leigh, the father of this Romney,
wrote

Directly on your birth, to Italy,
“I ask your baby daughter for my son,
In whom the entail now merges by the law.
Betroth her to us out of love, instead
Of colder reasons, and she shall not lose
By love or law from henceforth,”—so he
wrote; ⁶³⁰

A generous cousin was my cousin Vane.
Remember how he drew you to his knee
The year you came here, just before he
died,

And hollowed out his hands to hold your
cheeks,

And wished them redder,—you remember
Vane.

And now his son, who represents our
house,

And holds the fiefs and manors in his
place,

To whom reverts my pittance when I die

(Except a few books and a pair of shawls),
The boy is generous like him, and pre-
pared ⁶⁴⁰

To carry out his kindest word and thought
To you, Aurora. Yes, a fine young man
Is Romney Leigh; although the sun of
youth

Has shone too straight upon his brain, I
know,

And fevered him with dreams of doing
good

To good-for-nothing people. But a wife
Will put all right, and stroke his temples
cool

With healthy touches.' . . .

I broke in at that.

I could not lift my heavy heart to breathe
Till then, but then I raised it, and it fell
In broken words like these—‘No need to
wait:’ ⁶⁵¹

The dream of doing good to . . . me, at
least,

Is ended, without waiting for a wife
To cool the fever for him. We've escaped
That danger,—thank Heaven for it,'

‘You,’ she cried,
‘Have got a fever. What, I talk and talk
An hour long to you,—I instruct you
how

You cannot eat or drink or stand or sit
Or even die, like any decent wretch
In all this unroofed and unfurnished
world, ⁶⁶⁰

Without your cousin,—and you still main-
tain

There's room 'twixt him and you for flirt-
ing fans

And running knots in eyebrows? You
must have

A pattern lover sighing on his knee?
You do not count enough, a noble heart
(Above book-patterns) which this very
morn

Unclosed itself in two dear fathers' names
To embrace your orphaned life? Fie, fie!

But stay,
I write a word, and counteract this sin.'

She would have turned to leave me, but I
clung. ⁶⁷⁰

‘O sweet my father's sister, hear my word
Before you write yours. Cousin Vane did
well,

And cousin Romney well,—and I well
too,

In casting back with all my strength and
will
The good they meant me. O my God, my
God !

God meant me good, too, when He hindered
me
From saying "yes" this morning. If you
write

A word, it shall be "no." I say no, no !
I tie up "no" upon his altar-horns,
Quite out of reach of perjury ! At least 680
My soul is not a pauper; I can live
At least my soul's life, without alms from
men;

And if it must be in heaven instead of
earth,
Let heaven look to it, — I am not afraid.'

She seized my hands with both hers, strained
them fast,
And drew her probing and unscrupulous
eyes

Right through me, body and heart. 'Yet,
foolish Sweet,

You love this man. I've watched you when
he came,

And when he went, and when we've talked
of him:

I am not old for nothing; I can tell 690
The weather-signs of love: you love this
man.'

Girls blush sometimes because they are
alive,

Half wishing they were dead to save the
shame.

The sudden blush devours them, neck and
brow;

They have drawn too near the fire of life,
like gnats,

And flare up bodily, wings and all. What
then ?

Who's sorry for a gnat . . . or girl ?

I blushed.
I feel the brand upon my forehead now
Strike hot, sear deep, as guiltless men may
feel

The felon's iron, say, and scorn the
mark 700

Of what they are not. Most illogical
Irrational nature of our womanhood,
That blushes one way, feels another way,
And prays, perhaps, another ! After all,
We cannot be the equal of the male
Who rules his blood a little.

For although
I blushed indeed, as if I loved the man,
And her incisive smile, accrediting
That treason of false witness in my blush,
Did bow me downward like a swathe of
grass 710

Below its level that struck me, — I attest
The conscious skies and all their daily
suns,

I think I loved him not, — nor then, nor
since,

Nor ever. Do we love the schoolmaster,
Being busy in the woods ? much less, being
poor,

The overseer of the parish ? Do we keep
Our love to pay our debts with ?

White and cold
I grew next moment. As my blood re-
coiled

From that imputed ignominy, I made
My heart great with it. Then, at last, I
spoke, 720

Spoke veritable words but passionate,
Too passionate perhaps . . . ground up with
sobs

To shapeless endings. She let fall my
hands

And took her smile off, in sedate disgust,
As peradventure she had touched a
snake, —

A dead snake, mind ! — and, turning round,
replied,

'We'll leave Italian manners, if you
please.

I think you had an English father, child,
And ought to find it possible to speak 720

A quiet "yes" or "no," like English girls,
Without convulsions. In another month

We'll take another answer — no, or yes.'

With that, she left me in the garden-
walk.

I had a father ! yes, but long ago —
How long it seemed that moment. Oh, how
far,

How far and safe, God, dost thou keep thy
saints

When once gone from us ! We may call
against

The lighted windows of thy fair June-
heaven

Where all the souls are happy, — and not
one,

Not even my father, look from work or
play 740

To ask, 'Who is it that cries after us,
Below there, in the dusk?' Yet formerly
He turned his face upon me quick enough,
If I said 'father.' Now I might cry loud;
The little lark reached higher with his
song

Than I with crying. Oh, alone, alone, —
Not troubling any in heaven, nor any on
earth,

I stood there in the garden, and looked up
The deaf blue sky that brings the roses
out

On such June mornings.

You who keep account
Of crisis and transition in this life, 751
Set down the first time Nature says plain
'no'

To some 'yes' in you, and walks over you
In gorgeous sweeps of scorn. We all be-
gin

By singing with the birds, and running
fast

With June days, hand in hand: but once,
for all,

The birds must sing against us, and the
sun

Strike down upon us like a friend's sword
caught

By an enemy to slay us, while we read
The dear name on the blade which bites at
us! — 760

That's bitter and convincing: after that,
We seldom doubt that something in the
large

Smooth order of creation, though no more
Than haply a man's footstep, has gone
wrong.

Some tears fell down my cheeks, and then
I smiled,

As those smile who have no face in the
world

To smile back to them. I had lost a
friend

In Romney Leigh; the thing was sure —
a friend,

Who had looked at me most gently now
and then,

And spoken of my favorite books, 'our
books,' 770

With such a voice! Well, voice and look
were now

More utterly shut out from me, I felt,
Than even my father's. Romney now
was turned

To a benefactor, to a generous man,

Who had tied himself to marry . . . me,
instead

Of such a woman, with low timorous lids
He lifted with a sudden word one day,
And left, perhaps, for my sake. — Ah,
self-tied

By a contract, male Iphigenia bound
At a fatal Aulis for the winds to change 780
(But loose him, they'll not change), he
well might seem

A little cold and dominant in love!
He had a right to be dogmatical,
This poor, good Romney. Love, to him,
was made

A simple law-clause. If I married
him,

I should not dare to call my soul my own
Which so he had bought and paid for:
every thought

And every heart-beat down there in the
bill;

Not one found honestly deductible
From any use that pleased him! He
might cut 790

My body into coins to give away
Among his other paupers; change my
sons,

While I stood dumb as Griseld, for black
babes

Or piteous foundlings; might unquestioned
set

My right hand teaching in the Ragged
Schools,

My left hand washing in the Public Baths,
What time my angel of the Ideal stretched
Both his to me in vain. I could not claim
The poor right of a mouse in a trap, to
squeal,

And take so much as pity from myself. 800

Farewell, good Romney! if I loved you
even,

I could but ill afford to let you be
So generous to me. Farewell, friend,
since friend

Betwixt us two, forsooth, must be a word
So heavily overladen. And, since help
Must come to me from those who love me
not,

Farewell, all helpers — I must help my-
self,

And am alone from henceforth. — Then I
stooped

And lifted the soiled garland from the
earth,

And set it on my head as bitterly 810
 As when the Spanish monarch crowned the
 bones

Of his dead love. So be it. I preserve
 That crown still, — in the drawer there !
 't was the first.

The rest are like it; — those Olympian
 crowns,

We run for, till we lose sight of the sun
 In the dust of the racing chariots !

After that,

Before the evening fell, I had a note,
 Which ran, — 'Aurora, sweet Chaldean,
 you read

My meaning backward like your eastern
 books,

While I am from the west, dear. Read
 me now 820

A little plainer. Did you hate me quite
 But yesterday ? I loved you for my part;
 I love you. If I spoke untenderly
 This morning, my beloved, pardon it;
 And comprehend me that I loved you so
 I set you on the level of my soul,
 And overwashed you with the bitter brine
 Of some habitual thoughts. Henceforth,
 my flower,

Be planted out of reach of any such,
 And lean the side you please, with all your
 leaves ! 830

Write woman's verses and dream woman's
 dreams;

But let me feel your perfume in my home
 To make my sabbath after working-days.
 Bloom out your youth beside me, — be my
 wife.

I wrote in answer — 'We Chaldeans discern

Still farther than we read. I know your
 heart,

And shut it like the holy book it is,
 Reserved for mild-eyed saints to pore
 upon

Betwixt their prayers at vespers. Well,
 you're right,

I did not surely hate you yesterday; 840
 And yet I do not love you enough to-day
 To wed you, cousin Romney. Take this
 word,

And let it stop you as a generous man
 From speaking farther. You may tease,
 indeed,

And blow about my feelings, or my
 leaves,

And here's my aunt will help you with
 east winds

And break a stalk, perhaps, tormenting
 me;

But certain flowers grow near as deep as
 trees,

And, cousin, you'll not move my root, not
 you,

With all your confluent storms. Then let
 me grow 850

Within my wayside hedge, and pass your
 way !

This flower has never as much to say to
 you

As the antique tomb which said to travel-
 lers, "Pause,

Siste, viator." Ending thus, I sighed.

The next week passed in silence, so the
 next,

And several after: Romney did not come
 Nor my aunt chide me. I lived on and on,
 As if my heart were kept beneath a glass,
 And everybody stood, all eyes and ears,
 To see and hear it tick. I could not sit,
 Nor walk, nor take a book, nor lay it
 down, 861

Nor sew on steadily, nor drop a stitch,
 And a sigh with it, but I felt her looks
 Still cleaving to me, like the sucking asp
 To Cleopatra's breast, persistently
 Through the intermittent pantings. Being
 observed,

When observation is not sympathy,
 Is just being tortured. If she said a word,
 A 'thank you,' or an 'if it please you,
 dear,'

She meant a commination, or, at best, 870
 An exorcism against the devildom

Which plainly held me. So with all the
 house.

Susannah could not stand and twist my
 hair

Without such glancing at the looking-glass
 To see my face there, that she missed the
 plait.

And John, — I never sent my plate for
 soup,

Or did not send it, but the foolish John
 Resolved the problem, 'twixt his napkined
 thumbs,

Of what was signified by taking soup
 Or choosing mackerel. Neighbors who
 dropped in 880

On morning visits, feeling a joint wrong,

Smiled admonition, sat uneasily,
 And talked, with measured, emphasized re-
 serve,
 Of parish news, like doctors to the sick,
 When not called in, — as if, with leave to
 speak,
 They might say something. Nay, the very
 dog
 Would watch me from his sun-patch on the
 floor,
 In alternation with the large black fly
 Not yet in reach of snapping. So I lived.

A Roman died so; smeared with honey,
 teased 890
 By insects, stared to torture by the noon:
 And many patient souls 'neath English
 roofs
 Have died like Romans. I, in looking
 back,
 Wish only, now, I had borne the plague of
 all
 With meeker spirits than were rife at
 Rome.

For, on the sixth week, the dead sea broke
 up,
 Dashed suddenly through beneath the heel
 of Him
 Who stands upon the sea and earth and
 swears
 Time shall be nevermore. The clock struck
 nine
 That morning too, — no lark was out of
 tune, 900
 The hidden farms among the hills breathed
 straight
 Their smoke toward heaven, the lime-tree
 scarcely stirred
 Beneath the blue weight of the cloudless
 sky,
 Though still the July air came floating
 through
 The woodbine at my window, in and out,
 With touches of the out-door country
 news
 For a bending forehead. There I sat, and
 wished
 That morning-truce of God would last till
 eve,
 Or longer. 'Sleep,' I thought, 'late
 sleepers, — sleep,
 And spare me yet the burden of your
 eyes.' 910

Then, suddenly, a single ghastly shriek
 Tore upward from the bottom of the house.
 Like one who wakens in a grave and
 shrieks,
 The still house seemed to shriek itself alive,
 And shudder through its passages and
 stairs
 With slam of doors and clash of bells. —
 I sprang,
 I stood up in the middle of the room,
 And there confronted at my chamber-door
 A white face, — shivering, ineffectual lips.

'Come, come,' they tried to utter, and I
 went: 920
 As if a ghost had drawn me at the point
 Of a fiery finger through the uneven dark,
 I went with reeling footsteps down the
 stair,
 Nor asked a question.

There she sat, my aunt, —
 Bolt upright in the chair beside her bed,
 Whose pillow had no dint! she had used
 no bed
 For that night's sleeping, yet slept well.
 My God,
 The dumb derision of that gray, peaked
 face
 Concluded something grave against the sun,
 Which filled the chamber with its July
 burst 930

When Susan drew the curtains ignorant
 Of who sat open-eyed behind her. There
 She sat . . . it sat . . . we said 'she'
 yesterday . . .

And held a letter with unbroken seal
 As Susan gave it to her hand last night:
 All night she had held it. If its news re-
 ferred

To duchies or to dunghills, not an inch
 She'd budge, 't was obvious, for such worth-
 less odds:

Nor, though the stars were suns and over-
 burned

Their spheric limitations, swallowing up
 Like wax the azure spaces, could they
 force 941

Those open eyes to wink once. What last
 sight

Had left them blank and flat so, — draw-
 ing out

The faculty of vision from the roots,
 As nothing more, worth seeing, remained
 behind?

Were those the eyes that watched me,
worried me ?

That dogged me up and down the hours
and days,

A beaten, breathless, miserable soul ?

And did I pray, a half-hour back, but so,
To escape the burden of those eyes . . .
those eyes ? 950

‘Sleep late,’ I said ? —

Why, now, indeed, they sleep.
God answers sharp and sudden on some
prayers,

And thrusts the thing we have prayed for
in our face,

A gauntlet with a gift in ’t. Every wish
Is like a prayer, with God.

I had my wish,
To read and meditate the thing I would,
To fashion all my life upon my thought,
And marry or not marry. Henceforth none
Could disapprove me, vex me, hamper me.
Full ground-room, in this desert newly
made, 960

For Babylon or Baalbec, — when the breath,
Now choked with sand, returns for building
towns.

The heir came over on the funeral day,
And we two cousins met before the dead,
With two pale faces. Was it death or life
That moved us ? When the will was read
and done,

The official guests and witnesses withdrawn,
We rose up in a silence almost hard,
And looked at one another. Then I said,
‘Farewell, my cousin.’

But he touched, just touched
My hatstrings, tied for going (at the door
The carriage stood to take me), and said
low, 972

His voice a little unsteady through his
smile,

‘Siste, viator.’

‘Is there time,’ I asked,
‘In these last days of railroads, to stop
short

Like Cæsar’s chariot (weighing half a ton)
On the Appian road, for morals ?’

‘There is time,’
He answered grave, ‘for necessary words,
Inclusive, trust me, of no epitaph 979
On man or act, my cousin. We have read
A will, which gives you all the personal
goods

And funded moneys of your aunt.’

‘I thank
Her memory for it. With three hundred
pounds

We buy, in England even, clear standing-
room

To stand and work in. Only two hours
since,

I fancied I was poor.’

‘And, cousin, still
You ’re richer than you fancy. The will
says,

Three hundred pounds, and any other sum

Of which the said testatrix dies possessed.

I say she died possessed of other sums.’ 990

‘Dear Romney, need we chronicle the
pence ?

I ’m richer than I thought — that ’s evident.
Enough so.’

‘Listen rather. You ’ve to do
With business and a cousin,’ he resumed,
‘And both, I fear, need patience. Here ’s
the fact.

The other sum (there *is* another sum,
Unspecified in any will which dates
After possession, yet bequeathed as much
And clearly as those said three hundred
pounds)

Is thirty thousand. You will have it paid
When ? . . . where ? My duty troubles
you with words.’ 1001

He struck the iron when the bar was hot;
No wonder if my eyes sent out some sparks.
‘Pause there ! I thank you. You are deli-
cate

In glozing gifts; — but I, who share your
blood,

Am rather made for giving, like yourself,
Than taking, like your pensioners. Fare-
well.’

He stopped me with a gesture of calm
pride.

‘A Leigh,’ he said, ‘gives largesse and
gives love, 1009

But glozes never: if a Leigh could gloze,
He would not do it, moreover, to a Leigh,
With blood trained up along nine centu-
ries

To hound and hate a lie from eyes like
yours.

And now we ’ll make the rest as clear: your
aunt

Possessed these moneys.’

'You will make it clear,
My cousin, as the honor of us both,
Or one of us speaks vainly ! that's not I.
My aunt possessed this sum, — inherited
From whom, and when ? bring documents,
prove dates.'

'Why, now indeed you throw your bonnet
off ¹⁰²⁰

As if you had time left for a logarithm !
The faith's the want. Dear cousin, give
me faith,

And you shall walk this road with silken
shoes,

As clean as any lady of our house
Supposed the proudest. Oh, I comprehend

The whole position from your point of sight.
I oust you from your father's halls and
lands

And make you poor by getting rich —
that's laws;

Considering which, in common circumstance,

You would not scruple to accept from me
Some compensation, some sufficiency ¹⁰³¹

Of income — that were justice; but, alas,
I love you, — that's mere nature; you reject

My love, — that's nature also; and at once,
You cannot, from a suitor disallowed,
A hand thrown back as mine is, into yours
Receive a doit, a farthing, — not for the
world !

That's woman's etiquette, and obviously
Exceeds the claim of nature, law, and right,
Unanswerable to all. I grant, you see, ¹⁰⁴⁰
The case as you conceive it, — leave you
room

To sweep your ample skirts of womanhood,
While, standing humbly squeezed against
the wall,

I own myself excluded from being just,
Restrained from paying indubitable debts,
Because denied from giving you my soul.
That's my misfortune ! — I submit to it
As if, in some more reasonable age,
'T would not be less inevitable. Enough.

You'll trust me, cousin, as a gentleman, ¹⁰⁵⁰
To keep your honor, as you count it, pure,
Your scruples (just as if I thought them
wise)

Safe and inviolate from gifts of mine.'
I answered mild but earnest. 'I believe
In no one's honor which another keeps,

Nor man's nor woman's. As I keep, myself,

My truth and my religion, I depute
No father, though I had one this side death,
Nor brother, though I had twenty, much
less you,

Though twice my cousin, and once Romney
Leigh, ¹⁰⁶⁰

To keep my honor pure. You face, today,

A man who wants instruction, mark me,
not

A woman who wants protection. As to a
man,

Show manhood, speak out plainly, be precise

With facts and dates. My aunt inherited
This sum, you say' —

'I said she died possessed
Of this, dear cousin.'

'Not by heritage.
Thank you: we're getting to the facts at
last.

Perhaps she played at commerce with a
ship

Which came in heavy with Australian
gold ? ¹⁰⁷⁰

Or touched a lottery with her finger-end,
Which tumbled on a sudden into her lap

Some old Rhine tower or principality ?
Perhaps she had to do with a marine

Sub-transatlantic railroad, which pre-pays
As well as pre-supposes ? or perhaps

Some stale ancestral debt was after-paid
By a hundred years, and took her by surprise ? —

You shake your head, my cousin; I guess
ill.'

'You need not guess, Aurora, nor deride;
The truth is not afraid of hurting you. ¹⁰⁸¹

You'll find no cause, in all your scruples,
why

Your aunt should cavil at a deed of gift
'Twixt her and me.'

'I thought so — ah ! a gift.'

'You naturally thought so,' he resumed.
'A very natural gift.'

'A gift, a gift !
Her individual life being stranded high
Above all want, approaching opulence,
Too haughty was she to accept a gift
Without some ultimate aim: ah, ah, I
see, — ¹⁰⁹⁰

A gift intended plainly for her heirs,
 And so accepted . . . if accepted . . . ah,
 Indeed that might be; I am snared per-
 haps
 Just so. But, cousin, shall I pardon you,
 If thus you have caught me with a cruel
 springe ?'

He answered gently, 'Need you tremble
 and pant
 Like a netted lioness? is 't my fault,
 mine,
 That you're a grand wild creature of the
 woods
 And hate the stall built for you? Any
 way,
 Though triply netted, need you glare at
 me ?' 1100

I do not hold the cords of such a net;
 You're free from me, Aurora !'

'Now may God
 Deliver me from this strait ! This gift of
 yours
 Was tendered . . . when ? accepted . . .
 when ?' I asked.

'A month . . . a fortnight since ? Six
 weeks ago

It was not tendered; by a word she
 dropped

I know it was not tendered nor received.
 When was it ? bring your dates.'

'What matters when ?
 A half-hour ere she died, or a half-year,
 Secured the gift, maintains the heritage
 Inviolable with law. As easy pluck 1111
 The golden stars from heaven's embroid-
 ered stole

To pin them on the gray side of this earth,
 As make you poor again, thank God.'

'Not poor
 Nor clean again from henceforth, you
 thank God ?

Well, sir—I ask you—I insist at
 need,—

Vouchsafe the special date, the special
 date.'

'The day before her death-day,' he re-
 plied,

'The gift was in her hands. We'll find
 that deed,

And certify that date to you.'

As one 1120
 Who has climbed a mountain-height and
 carried up

His own heart climbing, panting in his
 throat

With the toil of the ascent, takes breath at
 last,

Looks back in triumph—so I stood and
 looked.

'Dear cousin Romney, we have reached the
 top

Of this steep question, and may rest, I
 think.

But first,—I pray you pardon, that the
 shock

And surge of natural feeling and event
 Has made me oblivious of acquainting you
 That this, this letter (unread, mark, still
 sealed), 1130

Was found enfolded in the poor dead
 hand:

That spirit of hers had gone beyond the
 address,

Which could not find her though you wrote
 it clear,—

I know your writing, Romney,— recog-
 nize

The open-hearted A, the liberal sweep
 Of the G. Now listen,—let us under-
 stand:

You will not find that famous deed of gift,
 Unless you find it in the letter here,

Which, not being mine, I give you back.—
 Refuse

To take the letter ? well then—you and
 I, 1140

As writer and as heiress, open it

Together, by your leave.— Exactly so:

The words in which the noble offering's
 made

Are nobler still, my cousin; and, I own,
 The proudest and most delicate heart
 alive,

Distracted from the measure of the gift

By such a grace in giving, might accept

Your largesse without thinking any more

Of the burthen of it, than King Solomon

Considered, when he wore his holy ring 1150

Charactered over with the ineffable spell,

How many carats of fine gold made up

Its money-value: so, Leigh gives to Leigh !

Or rather, might have given, observe,—
 for that's

The point we come to. Here's a proof of
 gift,

But here's no proof, sir, of acceptance,

But, rather, disproof. Death's black dust,
 being blown,

Infiltrated through every secret fold
Of this sealed letter by a puff of fate,
Dried up for ever the fresh-written ink,
Annulled the gift, disutilized the grace, ¹¹⁶¹
And left these fragments.'

As I spoke, I tore
The paper up and down, and down and up
And crosswise, till it fluttered from my
hands,

As forest-leaves, stripped suddenly and
rapt

By a whirlwind on Valdarno, drop again,
Drop slow, and strew the melancholy
ground

Before the amazèd hills . . . why, so, in-
deed,

I'm writing like a poet, somewhat large
In the type of the image, and exagger-
ate ¹¹⁷⁰

A small thing with a great thing, topping
it:—

But then I'm thinking how his eyes looked,
his,

With what despondent and surprised re-
proach!

I think the tears were in them as he
looked;

I think the manly mouth just trembled.
Then

He broke the silence.

'I may ask, perhaps,
Although no stranger . . . only Romney

Leigh,
Which means still less . . . than Vincent

Carrington,
Your plans in going hence, and where you

go.
This cannot be a secret.'

'All my life ¹¹⁸⁰
Is open to you, cousin. I go hence

To London, to the gathering-place of souls,
To live mine straight out, vocally, in

books;
Harmoniously for others, if indeed

A woman's soul, like man's, be wide
enough

To carry the whole octave (that's to
prove).

Or, if I fail, still purely for myself.
Pray God be with me, Romney.'

'Ah, poor child,
Who fight against the mother's 'tiring

hand,
And choose the headsman's! May God

change his world ¹¹⁹⁰

For your sake, sweet, and make it mild as
heaven,
And juster than I have found you.'

But I paused.
'And you, my cousin?'—

'I,' he said, — 'you ask?
You care to ask? Well, girls have curious

minds
And fain would know the end of every-
thing,

Of cousins therefore with the rest. For
me,

Aurora, I've my work; you know my
work;

And, having missed this year some personal
hope,

I must beware the rather that I miss
No reasonable duty. While you sing ¹²⁰⁰

Your happy pastorals of the meads and
trees,

Bethink you that I go to impress and
prove

On stifled brains and deafened ears, stunned
deaf,

Crushed dull with grief, that nature sings
itself,

And needs no mediate poet, lute or voice,
To make it vocal. While you ask of men

Your audience, I may get their leave per-
haps

For hungry orphans to say audibly
"We're hungry, see,"—for beaten and

bullied wives
To hold their unweaned babies up in

sight, ¹²¹⁰
Whom orphanage would better, and for all

To speak and claim their portion . . . by no
means

Of the soil, . . . but of the sweat in tilling
it;

Since this is nowadays turned privilege,
To have only God's curse on us, and not

man's.
Such work I have for doing, elbow-deep

In social problems,—as you tie your
rhymes,

To draw my uses to cohere with needs
And bring the uneven world back to its

round,
Or, failing so much, fill up, bridge at

least ¹²²⁰
To smother issues some abysmal cracks

And feuds of earth, intestine heats have
made

To keep men separate, — using sorry shifts

Of hospitals, almshouses, infant schools,
And other practical stuff of partial good
You lovers of the beautiful and whole
Despise by system.'

'I despise? The scorn
Is yours, my cousin. Poets become such
Through scorning nothing. You deery them
for

The good of beauty sung and taught by
them, 1230

While they respect your practical partial
good

As being a part of beauty's self. Adieu!
When God helps all the workers for his
world,

The singers shall have help of Him, not
last.'

He smiled as men smile when they will not
speak

Because of something bitter in the thought;
And still I feel his melancholy eyes
Look judgment on me. It is seven years
since:

I know not if 't was pity or 't was scorn
Has made them so far-reaching: judge it
ye 1240

Who have had to do with pity more than
love

And scorn than hatred. I am used, since
then,

To other ways, from equal men. But so,
Even so, we let go hands, my cousin and I,
And in between us rushed the torrent-
world

To blanch our faces like divided rocks,
And bar for ever mutual sight and touch
Except through swirl of spray and all that
roar.

THIRD BOOK

'To-day thou girdest up thy loins thyself
And goest where thou wouldst: presently
Others shall gird thee,' said the Lord, 'to
go

Where thou wouldst not.' He spoke to
Peter thus,

To signify the death which he should die
When crucified head downward.

If He spoke

To Peter then, He speaks to us the same;
The word suits many different martyr-
doms,

And signifies a multiform of death,
Although we scarcely die apostles, we, 10
And have mislaid the keys of heaven and
earth.

For 'tis not in mere death that men die
most,

And, after our first girding of the loins
In youth's fine linen and fair broidery
To run up hill and meet the rising sun,
We are apt to sit tired, patient as a fool,
While others gird us with the violent
bands

Of social figments, feints, and formalisms,
Reversing our straight nature, lifting up
Our base needs, keeping down our lofty
thoughts, 20

Head downward on the cross-sticks of the
world.

Yet He can pluck us from that shameful
cross.

God, set our feet low and our forehead
high,

And show us how a man was made to
walk!

Leave the lamp, Susan, and go up to bed.
The room does very well; I have to write
Beyond the stroke of midnight. Get away;
Your steps, for ever buzzing in the room,
Tease me like gnats. Ah, letters! throw
them down

At once, as I must have them, to be sure,
Whether I bid you never bring me such 31
At such an hour, or bid you. No excuse;
You choose to bring them, as I choose per-
haps

To throw them in the fire. Now get to
bed,

And dream, if possible, I am not cross.

Why what a pettish, petty thing I grow, —
A mere mere woman, a mere flaccid nerve,
A kerchief left out all night in the rain,
Turned soft so, — overtasked and over-
strained

And overlived in this close London life! 40
And yet I should be stronger.

Never burn

Your letters, poor Aurora! for they stare
With red seals from the table, saying each,
'Here's something that you know not.'

Out, alas,

'Tis scarcely that the world's more good
and wise

Or even straighter and more consequent
 Since yesterday at this time — yet, again,
 If but one angel spoke from Ararat
 I should be very sorry not to hear:
 So open all the letters ! let me read. ⁵⁰
 Blanche Ord, the writer in the 'Lady's
 Fan,'

Requests my judgment on . . . that, after-
 wards.

Kate Ward desires the model of my cloak,
 And signs 'Elisha to you.' Pringle
 Sharpe

Presents his work on 'Social Conduct,'
 craves

A little money for his pressing debts . . .
 From me, who scarce have money for my
 needs;

Art's fiery chariot which we journey in
 Being apt to singe our singing-ropes to
 holes,

Although you ask me for my cloak, Kate
 Ward ! ⁶⁰

Here's Rudgely knows it, — editor and
 scribe;

He's 'forced to marry where his heart is
 not,

Because the purse lacks where he lost his
 heart.'

Ah, — lost it because no one picked it up;
 That's really loss, — (and passable impu-
 dence).

My critic Hammond flatters prettily,
 And wants another volume like the last.

My critic Belfair wants another book
 Entirely different, which will sell (and
 live ?),

A striking book, yet not a startling book,
 The public blames originalities ⁷¹
 (You must not pump spring-water una-
 wares

Upon a gracious public full of nerves):
 Good things, not subtle, new yet ortho-
 dox,

As easy reading as the dog-eared page
 That's fingered by said public fifty years,
 Since first taught spelling by its grand-
 mother,

And yet a revelation in some sort:
 That's hard, my critic Belfair. So —
 what next ?

My critic Stokes objects to abstract
 thoughts; ⁸⁰

'Call a man John, a woman Joan,' says
 he,

'And do not prate so of *humanities*.'

Whereat I call my critic simply, Stokes.
 My critic Jobson recommends more mirth
 Because a cheerful genius suits the times,
 And all true poets laugh unquenchably
 Like Shakespeare and the gods. That's
 very hard.

The gods may laugh, and Shakespeare;
 Dante smiled

With such a needy heart on two pale lips,
 We cry 'Weep rather, Dante.' Poems
 are ⁹⁰

Men, if true poems: and who dares exclaim
 At any man's door, 'Here, 'tis understood
 The thunder fell last week and killed a
 wife

And scared a sickly husband — what of
 that ?

Get up, be merry, shout and clap your
 hands,

Because a cheerful genius suits the
 times — ' ?

None says so to the man, and why indeed
 Should any to the poem ? A ninth seal;
 The apocalypse is drawing to a close.

Ha, — this from Vincent Carrington, —
 'Dear friend, ¹⁰⁰

I want good counsel. Will you lend me
 wings

To raise me to the subject, in a sketch
 I'll bring to-morrow — may I ? at eleven ?
 A poet's only born to turn to use:

So save you ! for the world . . . and Car-
 rington.'

'(Writ after.) Have you heard of Rom-
 ney Leigh,

Beyond what's said of him in newspapers,
 His phalansteries there, his speeches here,
 His pamphlets, pleas, and statements,
 everywhere ? ¹⁰⁵

He dropped *me* long ago, but no one drops
 A golden apple — though indeed one day
 You hinted that, but jested. Well, at
 least

You know Lord Howe who sees him . . .
 whom he sees

And *you* see and I hate to see, — for Howe
 Stands high upon the brink of theories,
 Observes the swimmers and cries "Very
 fine,"

But keeps dry linen equally, — unlike
 That gallant breaster, Romney. Strange
 it is,

Such sudden madness seizing a young man
 To make earth over again, — while I'm
 content ¹²⁰

To make the pictures. Let me bring the sketch.

A tiptoe Danae, overbold and hot,
Both arms aflame to meet her wishing
Jove

Halfway, and burn him faster down; the
face

And breasts upturned and straining, the
loose locks

All glowing with the anticipated gold.
Or here's another on the self-same theme.
She lies here — flat upon her prison-floor,
The long hair swathed about her to the
heel

Like wet seaweed. You dimly see her
through ¹³⁰

The glittering haze of that prodigious rain,
Half blotted out of nature by a love
As heavy as fate. I'll bring you either
sketch.

I think, myself, the second indicates
More passion.'

Surely. Self is put away,
And calm with abdication. She is Jove,
And no more Danae — greater thus. Per-
haps

The painter symbolizes unaware
Two states of the recipient artist-soul,
One, forward, personal, wanting reverence,
Because aspiring only. We'll be calm, ¹⁴¹
And know that, when indeed our Joves
come down,

We all turn stiller than we have ever been.

Kind Vincent Carrington. I'll let him
come.

He talks of Florence, — and may say a
word

Of something as it chanced seven years
ago,

A hedgehog in the path, or a lame bird,
In those green country walks, in that good
time

When certainly I was so miserable . . .
I seem to have missed a blessing ever
since. ¹⁵⁰

The music soars within the little lark,
And the lark soars. It is not thus with
men.

We do not make our places with our
strains, —

Content, while they rise, to remain behind
Alone on earth instead of so in heaven.
No matter; I bear on my broken tale.

When Romney Leigh and I had parted
thus,

I took a chamber up three flights of stairs
Not far from being as steep as some larks
climb,

And there, in a certain house in Kensing-
ton, ¹⁶⁰

Three years I lived and worked. Get
leave to work

In this world — 't is the best you get at all;
For God, in cursing, gives us better gifts
Than men in benediction. God says,
'Sweat

For foreheads,' men say 'crowns,' and so
we are crowned,

Ay, gashed by some tormenting circle of
steel

Which snaps with a secret spring. Get
work, get work;

Be sure 't is better than what you work to
get.

Serene and unafraid of solitude,
I worked the short days out, — and watched
the sun ¹⁷⁰

On lurid morns or monstrous afternoons
(Like some Druidic idol's fiery brass
With fixed unflickering outline of dead
heat,

From which the blood of wretches pent in-
side

Seems oozing forth to incarnadine the air)
Push out through fog with his dilated disk,
And startle the slant roofs and chimney-
pots

With splashes of fierce color. Or I saw
Fog only, the great tawny weltering fog
Involve the passive city, strangle it ¹⁸⁰
Alive, and draw it off into the void,
Spires, bridges, streets, and squares, as if
a sponge

Had wiped out London, — or as noon and
night

Had clapped together and utterly struck
out

The intermediate time, undoing themselves
In the act. Your city poets see such
things

Not despicable. Mountains of the south,
When drunk and mad with elemental
wines

They rend the seamless mist and stand up
bare,

Make fewer singers, haply. No one sings,
Descending Sinai: on Parnassus mount ¹⁹¹

You take a mule to climb and not a muse
Except in fable and figure: forests chant
Their anthems to themselves, and leave you
dumb.

But sit in London at the day's decline,
And view the city perish in the mist
Like Pharaoh's armaments in the deep Red
Sea,

The chariots, horsemen, footmen, all the
host,

Sucked down and choked to silence — then,
surprised

By a sudden sense of vision and of tune, ²⁰⁰
You feel as conquerors though you did not
fight,

And you and Israel's other singing girls,
Ay, Miriam with them, sing the song you
choose.

I worked with patience, which means
almost power:

I did some excellent things indifferently,
Some bad things excellently. Both were
praised,

The latter loudest. And by such a time
That I myself had set them down as sins
Scarce worth the price of sackcloth, week
by week

Arrived some letter through the sedulous
post, ²¹⁰

Like these I've read, and yet dissimilar,
With pretty maiden seals, — initials twined
Of lilies, or a heart marked *Emily*

(Convicting Emily of being all heart);
Or rarer tokens from young bachelors,

Who wrote from college with the same
goose-quill,

Suppose, they had just been plucked of,
and a snatch

From Horace, 'Collegisse juvat,' set
Upon the first page. Many a letter, signed

Or unsigned, showing the writers at
eighteen ²²⁰

Had lived too long, although a muse should
help

Their dawn by holding candles, — compli-
ments

To smile or sigh at. Such could pass with
me

No more than coins from Moscow circulate
At Paris: would ten roubles buy a tag

Of ribbon on the boulevard, worth a sou?
I smiled that all this youth should love me,

— sighed
That such a love could scarcely raise them
up

To love what was more worthy than my-
self;

Then sighed again, again, less generously,
To think the very love they lavished so ²³¹
Proved me inferior. The strong loved me
not,

And he . . . my cousin Romney . . . did
not write.

I felt the silent finger of his scorn
Prick every bubble of my frivolous fame
As my breath blew it, and resolve it back
To the air it came from. Oh, I justified

The measure he had taken of my height:
The thing was plain — he was not wrong a
line;

I played at art, made thrusts with a toy-
sword, ²⁴⁰

Amused the lads and maidens.

Came a sigh
Deep, hoarse with resolution, — I would
work

To better ends, or play in earnest.
'Heavens,

I think I should be almost popular
If this went on!' — I ripped my verses up,

And found no blood upon the rapier's
point;

The heart in them was just an embryo's
heart

Which never yet had beat, that it should
die;

Just gasps of make-believe galvanic life;
Mere tones, inorganized to any tune. ²⁵⁰

And yet I felt it in me where it burnt,
Like those hot fire-seeds of creation held
In Jove's clenched palm before the worlds
were sown, —

But I — I was not Juno even! my hand
Was shut in weak convulsion, woman's ill,

And when I yearned to loose a finger — lo,
The nerve revolted. 'Tis the same even
now:

This hand may never, haply, open large,
Before the spark is quenched, or the palm
charred,

To prove the power not else than by the
pain. ²⁶⁰

It burnt, it burns — my whole life burnt
with it,

And light, not sunlight and not torchlight,
flashed

My steps out through the slow and diffi-
cult road.

I had grown distrustful of too forward
Springs,
The season's books in drear significance
Of morals, dropping round me. Lively
books ?

The ash has livelier verdure than the yew;
And yet the yew's green longer, and alone
Found worthy of the holy Christmas time:
We'll plant more yews if possible, albeit 270
We plant the graveyards with them.

Day and night
I worked my rhythmic thought, and fur-
rowed up

Both watch and slumber with long lines of
life

Which did not suit their season. The rose
fell

From either cheek, my eyes globed lumi-
nous

Through orbits of blue shadow, and my
pulse

Would shudder along the purple-veined
wrist

Like a shot bird. Youth's stern, set face
to face

With youth's ideal: and when people came
And said 'You work too much, you are
looking ill,' 280

I smiled for pity of them who pitied me,
And thought I should be better soon per-
haps

For those ill looks. Observe — 'I,' means
in youth

Just I, the conscious and eternal soul
With all its ends, and not the outside
life,

The parcel-man, the doublet of the flesh,
The so much liver, lung, integument,
Which make the sum of 'I' hereafter
when

World-talkers talk of doing well or ill.
I prosper if I gain a step, although 290
A nail then pierced my foot: although my
brain

Embracing any truth froze paralyzed,
I prosper: I but change my instrument;
I break the spade off, digging deep for
gold,

And catch the mattock up.

I worked on, on.
Through all the bristling fence of nights
and days

Which hedges time in from the eternities,
I struggled, — never stopped to note the
stakes

Which hurt me in my course. The mid-
night oil

Would stink sometimes; there came some
vulgar needs: 300

I had to live that therefore I might work,
And, being but poor, I was constrained,
for life,

To work with one hand for the book-
sellers

While working with the other for myself
And art: you swim with feet as well as
hands,

Or make small way. I apprehended
this, —

In England no one lives by verse that
lives;

And, apprehending, I resolved by prose
To make a space to sphere my living verse.

I wrote for cyclopædias, magazines, 310
And weekly papers, holding up my name
To keep it from the mud. I learnt the
use

Of the editorial 'we' in a review
As courtly ladies the fine trick of trains,
And swept it grandly through the open
doors

As if one could not pass through doors at
all

Save so encumbered. I wrote tales be-
side,

Carved many an article on cherry-stones
To suit light readers, — something in the
lines

Revealing, it was said, the mallet-hand, 320
But that, I'll never vouch for: what you
do

For bread will taste of common grain, not
grapes,

Although you have a vineyard in Cham-
pagne;

Much less in Nephelococcygia
As mine was, peradventure.

Having bread
For just so many days, just breathing-
room

For body and verse, I stood up straight
and worked

My veritable work. And as the soul
Which grows within a child makes the
child grow, —

Or as the fiery sap, the touch from God, 330
Careering through a tree, dilates the bark
And roughs with scale and knob, before
it strikes

The summer foliage out in a green flame —

So life, in deepening with me, deepened
all

The course I took, the work I did. In-
deed

The academic law convinced of sin;
The critics cried out on the falling off,
Regretting the first manner. But I felt
My heart's life throbbing in my verse to
show

It lived, it also — certes incomplete, ³⁴⁰
Disordered with all Adam in the blood,
But even its very tumors, warts and wens
Still organized by and implying life.

A lady called upon me on such a day.
She had the low voice of your English
dames,

Unused, it seems, to need rise half a note
To catch attention, — and their quiet mood,
As if they lived too high above the earth
For that to put them out in anything:

So gentle, because verily so proud; ³⁵⁰
So wary and afraid of hurting you,
By no means that you are not really vile,
But that they would not touch you with
their foot

To push you to your place; so self-possessed
Yet gracious and conciliating, it takes
An effort in their presence to speak truth:
You know the sort of woman, — brilliant
stuff,

And out of nature. 'Lady Waldemar.'
She said her name quite simply, as if it
meant

Not much indeed, but something, — took
my hands, ³⁶⁰

And smiled as if her smile could help my
case,

And dropped her eyes on me and let them
melt.

'Is this,' she said, 'the Muse'?

'No sybil even,'
I answered, 'since she fails to guess the
cause

Which taxed you with this visit, madam.'
'Good,'

She said; 'I value what's sincere at once.
Perhaps if I had found a literal Muse,
The visit might have taxed me. As it is,
You wear your blue so chiefly in your eyes,
My fair Aurora, in a frank good way, ³⁷⁰
It comforts me entirely for your fame,
As well as for the trouble of ascent
To this Olympus.'

There, a silver laugh

Ran rippling through her quickened little
breaths

The steep stair somewhat justified.

'But still
Your ladyship has left me curious why
You dared the risk of finding the said
Muse?'

'Ah, — keep me, notwithstanding, to the
point,

Like any pedant? Is the blue in eyes
As awful as in stockings after all, ³⁸⁰
I wonder, that you'd have my business
out

Before I breathe — exact the epic plunge
In spite of gasps? Well, naturally you
think

I've come here, as the lion-hunters go
To deserts, to secure you with a trap
For exhibition in my drawing-rooms
On zoologic soirées? Not in the least.
Roar softly at me; I am frivolous,
I dare say; I have played at wild-beast
shows

Like other women of my class, — but now
I meet my lion simply as Androcles ³⁹¹
Met his . . . when at his mercy.'

So, she bent
Her head, as queens may mock, — then
lifting up

Her eyelids with a real grave queenly look,
Which ruled and would not spare, not even
herself, —

'I think you have a cousin: — Romney
Leigh.'

'You bring a word from *him*? — my eyes
leapt up

To the very height of hers, — 'a word from
him?'

'I bring a word about him, actually.
But first' (she pressed me with her urgent
eyes), ⁴⁰⁰

'You do not love him, — you?'
'You're frank at least

In putting questions, madam,' I replied;
'I love my cousin cousinly — no more.'

'I guessed as much. I'm ready to be frank
In answering also, if you'll question me,
Or even for something less. You stand out-
side,

You artist women, of the common sex;
You share not with us, and exceed us so

Perhaps by what you're mulcted in, your
 hearts
 Being starved to make your heads: so run
 the old 410
 Traditions of you. I can therefore speak
 Without the natural shame which creatures
 feel
 When speaking on their level, to their like.
 There's many a papist she, would rather
 die
 Than own to her maid she put a ribbon on
 To catch the indifferent eye of such a man,
 Who yet would count adulteries on her
 beads
 At holy Mary's shrine and never blush; 418
 Because the saints are so far off, we lose
 All modesty before them. Thus, to-day.
 'Tis I, love Romney Leigh.'
 'Forbear,' I cried.
 'If here's no Muse, still less is any saint;
 Nor even a friend, that Lady Waldemar
 Should make confessions' . . .
 'That's unkindly said:
 If no friend, what forbids to make a friend
 To join to our confession ere we have done?
 I love your cousin. If it seems unwise
 To say so, it's still foolisher (we're frank)
 To feel so. My first husband left me young,
 And pretty enough, so please you, and rich
 enough, 430
 To keep my booth in Mayfair with the rest
 To happy issues. There are marquises
 Would serve seven years to call me wife, I
 know,
 And, after seven, I might consider it,
 For there's some comfort in a marquise
 When all's said, — yes, but after the seven
 years;
 I, now, love Romney. You put up your
 lip,
 So like a Leigh! so like him! — Pardon
 me,
 I'm well aware I do not derogate
 In loving Romney Leigh. The name is
 good, 440
 The means are excellent, but the man, the
 man —
 Heaven help us both, — I am near as mad
 as he,
 In loving such an one.'

She slowly swung
 Her heavy ringlets till they touched her
 smile,
 As reasonably sorry for herself,
 And thus continued.

'Of a truth, Miss Leigh,
 I have not, without struggle, come to this.
 I took a master in the German tongue,
 I gamed a little, went to Paris twice;
 But, after all, this love! . . . you eat of
 love, 450
 And do as vile a thing as if you ate
 Of garlic — which, whatever else you eat,
 Tastes uniformly acrid, till your peach
 Reminds you of your onion. Am I coarse?
 Well, love's coarse, nature's coarse — ah,
 there's the rub.
 We fair fine ladies, who park out our lives
 From common sheep-paths, cannot help the
 crows
 From flying over, — we're as natural still
 As Blowsalinda. Drape us perfectly
 In Lyons velvet, — we are not, for that, 460
 Lay-figures, look you: we have hearts
 within,
 Warm, live, improvident, indecent hearts,
 As ready for outrageous ends and acts
 As any distressed sempstress of them all
 That Romney groans and toils for. We
 catch love,
 And other fevers, in the vulgar way:
 Love will not be outwitted by our wit,
 Nor outrun by our equipages: — mine
 Persisted, spite of efforts. All my cards
 Turned up but Romney Leigh; my German
 stopped 470
 At germane Wertherism; my Paris rounds
 Returned me from the Champs Elysées
 just
 A ghost, and sighing like Dido's. I came
 home
 Uncured, — convicted rather to myself
 Of being in love . . . in love! That's
 coarse, you'll say.
 I'm talking garlic.'

Coldly I replied:
 'Apologize for atheism, not love!
 For me, I do believe in love, and God.
 I know my cousin: Lady Waldemar
 I know not: yet I say as much as this, —
 Whoever loves him, let her not excuse 481
 But cleanse herself, that, loving such a man,
 She may not do it with such unworthy
 love
 He cannot stoop and take it.'

'That is said
 Austerely, like a youthful prophetess,
 Who knits her brows across her pretty eyes
 To keep them back from following the gray
 flight

Of doves between the temple-columns.

Dear,

Be kinder with me; let us two be friends.
I'm a mere woman, — the more weak per-
haps

Through being so proud; you're better; as
for him,

He's best. Indeed he builds his goodness
up

So high, it topples down to the other side
And makes a sort of badness; there's the
worst

I have to say against your cousin's best!
And so be mild, Aurora, with my worst
For his sake, if not mine.'

'I own myself
Incredulous of confidence like this
Availing him or you.'

'And I, myself,
Of being worthy of him with any love: 500
In your sense I am not so — let it pass.
And yet I save him if I marry him;
Let that pass too.'

'Pass, pass! we play police
Upon my cousin's life, to indicate
What may or may not pass?' I cried.
'He knows

What's worthy of him; the choice remains
with him;
And what he chooses, act or wife, I think
I shall not call unworthy, I, for one.'

'T is somewhat rashly said,' she answered
slow;

'Now let's talk reason, though we talk of
love. 510

Your cousin Romney Leigh's a monster;
there,

The word's out fairly, let me prove the
fact.

We'll take, say, that most perfect of an-
tiques

They call the Genius of the Vatican
(Which seems too beauteous to endure it-
self

In this mixed world), and fasten it for
once

Upon the torso of the Dancing Faun
(Who might limp surely, if he did not
dance),

Instead of Buonarroti's mask: what then?
We show the sort of monster Romney
is, 520

With godlike virtues and heroic aims
Subjoined to limping possibilities

Of mismade human nature. Grant the
man

Twice godlike, twice heroic, — still he
limps,

And here's the point we come to.'

'Pardon me,
But, Lady Waldemar, the point's the
thing

We never come to.'

'Caustic, insolent
At need! I like you' — (there, she took
my hands)

'And now, my lioness, help Androcles,
For all your roaring. Help me! for my-
self 530

I would not say so — but for him. He
limps

So certainly, he'll fall into the pit
A week hence, — so I lose him — so he is
lost!

For when he's fairly married, he a Leigh,
To a girl of doubtful life, undoubtful birth,
Starved out in London till her coarse-
grained hands

Are whiter than her morals, — even you
May call his choice unworthy.'

'Married! lost!
He . . . Romney!'

'Ah, you're moved at last,' she said.
'These monsters, set out in the open sun,
Of course throw monstrous shadows: those
who think 541

Awry, will scarce act straightly. Who
but he?

And who but you can wonder? He has
been mad,

The whole world knows, since first, a nom-
inal man,

He soured the proctors, tried the gowns-
men's wits,

With equal scorn of triangles and wine,
And took no honors, yet was honorable.

They'll tell you he lost count of Homer's
ships

In Melbourne's poor-bills, Ashley's factory
bills, —

Ignored the Aspasia we all dare to praise,
For other women, dear, we could not name
Because we're decent. Well, he had some
right 552

On his side probably; men always have
Who go absurdly wrong. The living boor
Who brews your ale exceeds in vital worth
Dead Cæsar who "stops bungholes" in the
cask;

And also, to do good is excellent,
 For persons of his income, even to boors:
 I sympathize with all such things. But
 he
 Went mad upon them . . . madder and
 more mad ⁵⁶⁰
 From college times to these, — as, going
 down hill,
 The faster still, the farther. You must
 know
 Your Leigh by heart: he has sown his
 black young curls
 With bleaching cares of half a million men
 Already. If you do not starve, or sin,
 You're nothing to him: pay the income-
 tax
 And break your heart upon 't, he'll scarce
 be touched;
 But come upon the parish, qualified
 For the parish stocks, and Romney will be
 there
 To call you brother, sister, or perhaps ⁵⁷⁰
 A tenderer name still. Had I any chance
 With Mister Leigh, who am Lady Walde-
 mar
 And never committed felony? '
 'You speak
 Too bitterly,' I said, 'for the literal truth.'
 'The truth is bitter. Here's a man who
 looks
 For ever on the ground! you must be low,
 Or else a pictured ceiling overhead,
 Good painting thrown away. For me, I've
 done
 What women may — we're somewhat
 limited,
 We modest women — but I've done my
 best. ⁵⁸⁰
 — How men are perjured when they swear
 our eyes
 Have meaning in them! they're just blue
 or brown,
 They just can drop their lids a little. And
 yet
 Mine did more, for I read half Fourier
 through,
 Proudhon, Considérant, and Louis Blanc,
 With various others of his socialists,
 And, if I had been a fathom less in love,
 Had cured myself with gaping. As it
 was,
 I quoted from them prettily enough, ⁵⁸⁹
 Perhaps, to make them sound half rational
 To a saner man than he whene'er we talked

(For which I dodged occasion) — learnt by
 heart
 His speeches in the Commons and else-
 where
 Upon the social question; heaped reports
 Of wicked women and penitentiaries
 On all my tables (with a place for Sue),
 And gave my name to swell subscription
 lists
 Toward keeping up the sun at nights in
 heaven,
 And other possible ends. All things I did,
 Except the impossible . . . such as wear-
 ing gowns ⁶⁰⁰
 Provided by the Ten Hours' movement:
 there
 I stopped — we must stop somewhere.
 He, meanwhile
 Unmoved as the Indian tortoise 'neath the
 world,
 Let all that noise go on upon his back:
 He would not disconcert or throw me out,
 'Twas well to see a woman of my class
 With such a dawn of conscience. For the
 heart,
 Made firewood for his sake, and flaming
 up
 To his face, — he merely warmed his feet
 at it:
 Just deigned to let my carriage stop him
 short ⁶¹⁰
 In park or street, — he leaning on the
 door
 With news of the committee which sat last
 On pickpockets at suck.'
 'You jest — you jest.'
 'As martyrs jest, dear (if you read their
 lives),
 Upon the axe which kills them. When
 all's done
 By me, . . . for him — you'll ask him
 presently
 The color of my hair — he cannot tell,
 Or answers "dark" at random; while, be
 sure,
 He's absolute on the figure, five or ten,
 Of my last subscription. Is it bearable, ⁶²⁰
 And I a woman?'
 'Is it reparable,
 Though I were a man?'
 'I know not. That's to prove.
 But, first, this shameful marriage?'
 'Ay?' I cried.
 'Then really there's a marriage?'

'Yesterday
 I held him fast upon it. "Mister Leigh,"
 Said I, "shut up a thing, it makes more
 noise.
 The boiling town keeps secrets ill; I've
 known
 Yours since last week. Forgive my know-
 ledge so:
 You feel I'm not the woman of the world
 The world thinks; you have borne with
 me before 630
 And used me in your noble work, our
 work,
 And now you shall not cast me off be-
 cause
 You're at the difficult point, the *join*.
 'Tis true
 Even I can scarce admit the cogency
 Of such a marriage . . . where you do
 not love
 (Except the class), yet marry and throw
 your name
 Down to the gutter, for a fire-escape
 To future generations! 'tis sublime,
 A great example, a true Genesis
 Of the opening social era. But take
 heed, 640
 This virtuous act must have a patent
 weight,
 Or loses half its virtue. Make it tell,
 Interpret it, and set it in the light,
 And do not muffle it in a winter-cloak
 As a vulgar bit of shame, — as if, at best,
 A Leigh had made a misalliance and
 blushed
 A Howard should know it." Then, I
 pressed him more:
 "He would not choose," I said, "that even
 his kin, . . .
 Aurora Leigh, even . . . should conceive
 his act
 Less sacrifice, more fantasy." At which 650
 He grew so pale, dear, . . . to the lips, I
 knew
 I had touched him. "Do you know her,"
 he inquired,
 "My cousin Aurora?" "Yes," I said, and
 lied
 (But truly we all know you by your books),
 And so I offered to come straight to
 you,
 Explain the subject, justify the cause,
 And take you with me to Saint Margaret's
 Court
 To see this miracle, this Marian Erle,

This drover's daughter (she's not pretty,
 he swears),
 Upon whose finger, exquisitely pricked 660
 By a hundred needles, we're to hang the
 tie
 'Twixt class and class in England, — thus
 indeed
 By such a presence, yours and mine, to
 lift
 The match up from the doubtful place.
 At once
 He thanked me sighing, murmured to him-
 self
 "She'll do it perhaps, she's noble," —
 thanked me twice,
 And promised, as my guerdon, to put off
 His marriage for a month.
 I answered then.
 'I understand your drift imperfectly.
 You wish to lead me to my cousin's be-
 trothed, 670
 To touch her hand if worthy, and hold her
 hand
 If feeble, thus to justify his match.
 So be it then. But how this serves your
 ends,
 And how the strange confession of your
 love
 Serves this, I have to learn — I cannot
 see.'

She knit her restless forehead. 'Then,
 despite,
 Aurora, that most radiant morning name,
 You're dull as any London afternoon.
 I wanted time, and gained it, — wanted
 you,
 And gain you! you will come and see the
 girl 680
 In whose most prodigal eyes the lineal
 pearl
 And pride of all your lofty race of Leighs
 Is destined to solution. Authorized
 By sight and knowledge, then, you'll
 speak your mind,
 And prove to Romney, in your brilliant
 way,
 He'll wrong the people and posterity
 (Say such a thing is bad for me and
 you,
 And you fail utterly), by concluding thus
 An execrable marriage. Break it up,
 Disroot it — peradventure presently 690
 We'll plant a better fortune in its place.
 Be good to me, Aurora, scorn me less

For saying the thing I should not. Well
I know

I should not. I have kept, as others have,
The iron rule of womanly reserve
In lip and life, till now: I wept a week
Before I came here.' — Ending, she was
pale;

The last words, haughtily said, were trem-
ulous.

This palfrey pranced in harness, arched
her neck,

And, only by the foam upon the bit, 700
You saw she champed against it.

Then I rose.
'I love love: truth's no cleaner thing
than love.

I comprehend a love so fiery hot
It burns its natural veil of august shame,
And stands sublimely in the nude, as
chaste

As Medicean Venus. But I know,
A love that burns through veils will burn
through masks

And shrivel up treachery. What, love
and lie!

Nay — go to the opera! your love's cur-
able.'

'I love and lie?' she said — 'I lie, for-
sooth?' 710

And beat her taper foot upon the floor,
And smiled against the shoe, — 'You're
hard, Miss Leigh,

Unversed in current phrases. — Bowling
greens

Of poets are fresher than the world's high-
ways:

Forgive me that I rashly blew the dust
Which dims our hedges even, in your eyes,
And vexed you so much. You find, prob-
ably,

No evil in this marriage, — rather good
Of innocence, to pastoralize in song:

You'll give the bond your signature, per-
haps, 720

Beneath the lady's work, — indifferent
That Romney chose a wife could write
her name,

In witnessing he loved her.'

'Loved!' I cried;
'Who tells you that he wants a wife to
love?

He gets a horse to use, not love, I think:
There's work for wives as well, — and
after, straw,

When men are liberal. For myself, you
err

Supposing power in me to break this
match.

I could not do it to save Romney's life,
And would not to save mine.'

'You take it so,'
She said, 'farewell then. Write your books
in peace, 731

As far as may be for some secret stir
Now obvious to me, — for, most obviously,
In coming hither I mistook the way.'

Whereat she touched my hand and bent her
head,

And floated from me like a silent cloud
That leaves the sense of thunder.

I drew breath,
Oppressed in my deliverance. After all,
This woman breaks her social system up
For love, so counted — the love possi-
ble 740

To such, — and lilies are still lilies, pulled
By smutty hands, though spotted from their
white;

And thus she is better haply, of her kind,
Than Romney Leigh, who lives by dia-
grams,

And crosses out the spontaneities
Of all his individual, personal life
With formal universals. As if man
Were set upon a high stool at a desk
To keep God's books for Him in red and
black,

And feel by millions! What, if even
God 750

Were chiefly God by living out Himself
To an individualism of the Infinite,
Eterne, intense, profuse, — still throwing
up

The golden spray of multitudinous worlds
In measure to the proclive weight and

rush
Of his inner nature, — the spontaneous

love
Still proof and outflow of spontaneous
life?

Then live, Aurora.

Two hours afterward,
Within Saint Margaret's Court I stood
alone,

Close-veiled. A sick child, from an ague-
fit, 760

Whose wasted right hand gambled 'gainst
his left

With an old brass button in a blot of sun,

Jeered weakly at me as I passed across
 The uneven pavement; while a woman,
 rouged
 Upon the angular cheek-bones, kerchief
 torn,
 Thin dangling locks, and flat lascivious
 mouth,
 Cursed at a window both ways, in and out,
 By turns some bed-rid creature and my-
 self,—
 ‘Lie still there, mother! liker the dead
 dog
 You’ll be to-morrow. What, we pick our
 way,
 Fine madam, with those damnable small
 feet!
 We cover up our face from doing good,
 As if it were our purse! What brings you
 here,
 My lady? Is’t to find my gentleman
 Who visits his tame pigeon in the eaves?
 Our cholera catch you with its cramps and
 spasms,
 And tumble up your good clothes, veil and
 all,
 And turn your whiteness dead-blue.’ I
 looked up;
 I think I could have walked through hell
 that day,
 And never flinched. ‘The dear Christ com-
 fort you,’
 I said, ‘you must have been most miser-
 able
 To be so cruel,’ — and I emptied out
 My purse upon the stones: when, as I had
 cast
 The last charm in the cauldron, the whole
 court
 Went boiling, bubbling up, from all its
 doors
 And windows, with a hideous wail of
 laughs
 And roar of oaths, and blows perhaps . . .
 I passed
 Too quickly for distinguishing . . . and
 pushed
 A little side-door hanging on a hinge,
 And plunged into the dark, and groped and
 climbed
 The long, steep, narrow stair ’twixt broken
 rail
 And mildewed wall that let the plaster
 drop
 To startle me in the blackness. Still, up,
 up!

So high lived Romney’s bride. I paused
 at last
 Before a low door in the roof, and knocked.
 There came an answer like a hurried
 dove —
 ‘So soon? can that be Mister Leigh? so
 soon?’
 And, as I entered, an ineffable face
 Met mine upon the threshold. ‘Oh, not
 you,
 Not you!’ — the dropping of the voice im-
 plied;
 ‘Then, if not you, for me not any one.’
 I looked her in the eyes, and held her
 hands,
 And said ‘I am his cousin, — Romney
 Leigh’s;
 And here I come to see my cousin too.’
 She touched me with her face and with her
 voice,
 This daughter of the people. Such soft
 flowers
 From such rough roots? The people, un-
 der there,
 Can sin so, curse so, look so, smell so . . .
 faugh!
 Yet have such daughters?
 Nowise beautiful
 Was Marian Erle. She was not white nor
 brown,
 But could look either, like a mist that
 changed
 According to being shone on more or
 less:
 The hair, too, ran its opulence of curls
 In doubt ’twixt dark and bright, nor left
 you clear
 To name the color. Too much hair per-
 haps
 (I’ll name a fault here) for so small a
 head,
 Which seemed to droop on that side and on
 this,
 As a full-blown rose uneasy with its weight
 Though not a wind should trouble it.
 Again,
 The dimple in the cheek had better
 gone
 With redder, fuller rounds; and somewhat
 large
 The mouth was, though the milky little
 teeth
 Dissolved it to so infantine a smile.
 For soon it smiled at me; the eyes smiled
 too,

But 't was as if remembering they had
wept,
And knowing they should, some day, weep
again.

We talked. She told me all her story
out,

Which I'll re-tell with fuller utterance,
As colored and confirmed in after times
By others and herself too. Marian Erle ⁸³⁰
Was born upon the ledge of Malvern Hill,
To eastward, in a hut built up at night,
To evade the landlord's eye, of mud and
turf,

Still liable, if once he looked that way,
To being straight levelled, scattered by his
foot,

Like any other anthill. Born, I say;
God sent her to his world, commissioned
right,

Her human testimonials fully signed,
Not scant in soul—complete in lineaments;

But others had to swindle her a place ⁸⁴⁰
To wail in when she had come. No place
for her,

By man's law! born an outlaw was this
babe;

Her first cry in our strange and strangling
air,

When cast in spasms out by the shuddering
womb,

Was wrong against the social code,—
forced wrong:—

What business had the baby to cry there?

I tell her story and grow passionate.
She, Marian, did not tell it so, but used
Meek words that made no wonder of her-
self

For being so sad a creature. 'Mister
Leigh ⁸⁵⁰

Considered truly that such things should
change.

They *will*, in heaven—but meantime, on
the earth,

There's none can like a nettle as a pink,
Except himself. We're nettles, some of
us,

And give offence by the act of springing
up;

And, if we leave the damp side of the
wall,

The hoes, of course, are on us.' So she
said.

Her father earned his life by random jobs
Despised by steadier workmen—keeping
swine

On commons, picking hops, or hurrying on
The harvest at wet seasons, or, at need, ⁸⁶¹
Assisting the Welsh drovers, when a drove
Of startled horses plunged into the mist
Below the mountain-road, and sowed the
wind

With wandering neighings. In between
the gaps

Of such irregular work he drank and slept,
And cursed his wife because, the pence
being out,

She could not buy more drink. At which
she turned

(The worm), and beat her baby in revenge
For her own broken heart. There's not a
crime ⁸⁷⁰

But takes its proper change out still in
crime

If once rung on the counter of this world:
Let sinners look to it.

Yet the outcast child,
For whom the very mother's face forwent
The mother's special patience, lived and
grew;

Learnt early to cry low, and walk alone,
With that pathetic vacillating roll
Of the infant body on the uncertain feet
(The earth being felt unstable ground so
soon),

At which 'most women's arms unclosed at
once ⁸⁸⁰

With irrepressible instinct. Thus, at three,
This poor weaned kid would run off from
the fold,

This babe would steal off from the mother's
chair,

And, creeping through the golden walls of
gorse,

Would find some keyhole toward the se-
crecy

Of Heaven's high blue, and, nestling down,
peer out—

Oh, not to catch the angels at their
games,—

She had never heard of angels,—but to
gaze

She knew not why, to see she knew not
what,

A-hungering outward from the barren
earth ⁸⁹⁰

For something like a joy. She liked, she
said,

To dazzle black her sight against the sky,
For then, it seemed, some grand blind
Love came down,
And groped her out, and clasped her with
a kiss;

She learnt God that way, and was beat for
it

Whenever she went home, — yet came
again,

As surely as the trapped hare, getting free,
Returns to his form. This grand blind
Love, she said,

This skyeey father and mother both in one,
Instructed her and civilized her more ⁹⁰⁰
Than even Sunday-school did afterward,
To which a lady sent her to learn books
And sit upon a long bench in a row
With other children. Well, she laughed
sometimes

To see them laugh and laugh and maul
their texts;

But after she was sorrowful with noise
And wondered if their mothers beat them
hard

That ever they should laugh so. There
was one

She loved indeed, — Rose Bell, a seven
years' child,

So pretty and clever, who read syllables ⁹¹⁰
When Marian was at letters; *she* would
laugh

At nothing — hold your finger up, she
laughed,

Then shook her curls down over eyes and
mouth

To hide her make-mirth from the school-
master:

And Rose's pelting glee, as frank as rain
On cherry-blossoms, brightened Marian
too,

To see another merry whom she loved.
She whispered once (the children side by
side,

With mutual arms entwined about their
necks)

'Your mother lets you laugh so?' 'Ay,'
said Rose, ⁹²⁰

'She lets me. She was dug into the
ground

Six years since, I being but a yearling
wean.

Such others let us play and lose our
time,

And never scold nor beat us! Don't you
wish

You had one like that?' There, Marian
breaking off

Looked suddenly in my face. 'Poor Rose,'
said she,

'I heard her laugh last night in Oxford
Street.

I'd pour out half my blood to stop that
laugh.

Poor Rose, poor Rose!' said Marian.

She resumed.

It tried her, when she had learnt at Sun-
day-school ⁹³⁰

What God was, what He wanted from us
all,

And how in choosing sin we vexed the
Christ,

To go straight home and hear her father
pull

The Name down on us from the thunder-
shelf,

Then drink away his soul into the dark
From seeing judgment. Father, mother,

home,
Were God and heaven reversed to her:

the more
She knew of Right, the more she guessed
their wrong:

Her price paid down for knowledge, was to
know

The vileness of her kindred: through her
heart, ⁹⁴⁰

Her filial and tormented heart, henceforth,
They struck their blows at virtue. Oh, 't is

hard

To learn you have a father up in heaven
By a gathering certain sense of being, on

earth,
Still worse than orphaned: 't is too heavy
a grief,

The having to thank God for such a joy!

And so passed Marian's life from year to
year.

Her parents took her with them when they
tramped,

Dodged lanes and heaths, frequented towns
and fairs, ⁹⁴⁹

And once went farther and saw Manches-
ter,

And once the sea, that blue end of the
world,

That fair scroll-finis of a wicked book, —
And twice a prison, — back at intervals,

Returning to the hills. Hills draw like
heaven,

And stronger sometimes, holding out their hands
 To pull you from the vile flats up to them.
 And though perhaps these strollers still
 strolled back,
 As sheep do, simply that they knew the way,
 They certainly felt bettered unaware
 Emerging from the social smut of towns ⁹⁶⁰
 To wipe their feet clean on the mountain
 turf.
 In which long wanderings, Marian lived
 and learned,
 Endured and learned. The people on the
 roads
 Would stop and ask her why her eyes out-
 grew
 Her cheeks, and if she meant to lodge the
 birds
 In all that hair; and then they lifted her,
 The miller in his cart, a mile or twain,
 The butcher's boy on horseback. Often too
 The peddler stopped, and tapped her on the
 head ⁹⁶⁹
 With absolute forefinger, brown and ringed,
 And asked if peradventure she could read,
 And when she answered 'ay,' would toss
 her down
 Some stray odd volume from his heavy pack,
 A Thomson's Seasons, mulcted of the
 Spring,
 Or half a play of Shakespeare's torn across
 (She had to guess the bottom of a page
 By just the top sometimes, — as difficult,
 As, sitting on the moon, to guess the
 earth !),
 Or else a sheaf of leaves (for that small
 Ruth's
 Small gleanings) torn out from the heart of
 books, ⁹⁸⁰
 From Churchyard Elegies and Edens Lost,
 From Burns, and Bunyan, Selkirk, and Tom
 Jones, —
 'T was somewhat hard to keep the things
 distinct,
 And oft the jangling influence jarred the
 child
 Like looking at a sunset full of grace
 Through a pothouse window while the
 drunken oaths
 Went on behind her. But she weeded out
 Her book-leaves, threw away the leaves
 that hurt
 (First tore them small, that none should
 find a word), ⁹⁸⁹
 And made a nosegay of the sweet and good

To fold within her breast, and pore upon
 At broken moments of the noontide glare,
 When leave was given her to untie her
 cloak
 And rest upon the dusty highway's bank
 From the road's dust: or oft, the journey
 done,
 Some city friend would lead her by the
 hand
 To hear a lecture at an institute.
 And thus she had grown, this Marian Erle
 of ours, ⁹⁹⁸
 To no book-learning, — she was ignorant
 Of authors, — not in earshot of the things
 Outspoken o'er the heads of common men
 By men who are uncommon, — but within
 The cadenced hum of such, and capable
 Of catching from the fringes of the wing
 Some fragmentary phrases, here and there,
 Of that fine music, — which, being carried
 in
 To her soul, had reproduced itself afresh
 In finer motions of the lips and lids.
 She said, in speaking of it, 'If a flower ¹⁰⁰⁹
 Were thrown you out of heaven at intervals,
 You'd soon attain to a trick of looking
 up, —
 And so with her.' She counted me her
 years,
 Till I felt old; and then she counted me
 Her sorrowful pleasures, till I felt ashamed.
 She told me she was fortunate and calm
 On such and such a season, sat and sewed,
 With no one to break up her crystal
 thoughts,
 While rhymes from lovely poems span
 around
 Their ringing circles of ecstatic tune, ¹⁰¹⁹
 Beneath the moistened finger of the Hour.
 Her parents called her a strange, sickly
 child,
 Not good for much, and given to sulk and
 stare,
 And smile into the hedges and the clouds,
 And tremble if one shook her from her
 fit
 By any blow, or word even. Out-door jobs
 Went ill with her, and household quiet
 work
 She was not born to. Had they kept the
 north,
 They might have had their pennyworth out
 of her,
 Like other parents, in the factories

(Your children work for you, not you for them,
1030

Or else they better had been choked with air

The first breath drawn); but, in this tramp-
ing life,

Was nothing to be done with such a child
But tramp and tramp. And yet she knitted
hose

Not ill, and was not dull at needlework;
And all the country people gave her pence
For darning stockings past their natural
age,

And patching petticoats from old to new,
And other light work done for thrifty wives.

One day, said Marian — the sun shone that
day —
1040

Her mother had been badly beat, and felt
The bruises sore about her wretched soul
(That must have been): she came in
suddenly,

And snatching in a sort of breathless rage
Her daughter's headgear comb, let down
the hair

Upon her like a sudden waterfall,
Then drew her drenched and passive by the
arm

Outside the hut they lived in. When the
child

Could clear her blinded face from all that
stream

Of tresses . . . there, a man stood, with
beast's eyes
1050

That seemed as they would swallow her
alive

Complete in body and spirit, hair and
all, —

And burning stertorous breath that hurt
her cheek,

He breathed so near. The mother held
her tight,

Saying hard between her teeth — 'Why
wench, why wench,

The squire speaks to you now — the
squire's too good:

He means to set you up and comfort us.
Be mannerly at least.' The child turned
round

And looked up piteous in the mother's face
(Be sure that mother's death-bed will not
want
1060

Another devil to damn, than such a look),
'Oh, mother!' then, with desperate glance
to heaven,

'God, free me from my mother,' she
shrieked out,

'These mothers are too dreadful.' And,
with force

As passionate as fear, she tore her hands,
Like lilies from the rocks, from hers and
his,

And sprang down, bounded headlong down
the steep,

Away from both — away, if possible,
As far as God, — away! They yelled at
her,

As famished hounds at a hare. She heard
them yell;
1070

She felt her name hiss after her from the
hills,

Like shot from guns. On, on. And now
she had cast

The voices off with the uplands. On. Mad
fear

Was running in her feet and killing the
ground;

The white roads curled as if she burnt
them up,

The green fields melted, wayside trees fell
back

To make room for her. Then her head
grew vexed;

Trees, fields, turned on her and ran after
her;

She heard the quick pants of the hills be-
hind,

Their keen air pricked her neck: she had
lost her feet,
1080

Could run no more, yet somehow went as
fast,

The horizon red 'twixt steeples in the east
So sucked her forward, forward, while her
heart

Kept swelling, swelling, till it swelled so
big

It seemed to fill her body, — when it burst
And overflowed the world and swamped
the light;

'And now I am dead and safe,' thought
Marian Erle —

She had dropped, she had fainted.
As the sense returned,

The night had passed — not life's night.
She was 'ware

Of heavy tumbling motions, creaking
wheels,
1090

The driver shouting to the lazy team
That swung their rankling bells against
her brain,

While, through the wagon's coverture and
chinks,
The cruel yellow morning pecked at her
Alive or dead upon the straw inside, —
At which her soul ached back into the
dark
And prayed, 'no more of that.' A wag-
oner
Had found her in a ditch beneath the
moon,
As white as moonshine save for the oozing
blood.
At first he thought her dead; but when he
had wiped ¹¹⁰⁰
The mouth and heard it sigh, he raised her
up,
And laid her in his wagon in the straw,
And so conveyed her to the distant town
To which his business called himself, and
left
That heap of misery at the hospital.

She stirred; — the place seemed new and
strange as death.
The white strait bed, with others strait and
white,
Like graves dug side by side at measured
lengths,
And quiet people walking in and out
With wonderful low voices and soft steps
And apparitional equal care for each, ¹¹¹¹
Astonished her with order, silence, law.
And when a gentle hand held out a cup,
She took it, as you do at sacrament,
Half awed, half melted, — not being used,
indeed,
To so much love as makes the form of
love
And courtesy of manners. Delicate drinks
And rare white bread, to which some dying
eyes
Were turned in observation. O my God,
How sick we must be, ere we make men
just! ¹¹²⁰
I think it frets the saints in heaven to see
How many desolate creatures on the earth
Have learnt the simple dues of fellowship
And social comfort, in a hospital,
As Marian did. She lay there, stunned,
half tranced,
And wished, at intervals of growing sense,
She might be sicker yet, if sickness made
The world so marvellous kind, the air so
hushed,
And all her wake-time quiet as a sleep;

For now she understood (as such things
were) ¹¹³⁰
How sickness ended very oft in heaven
Among the unspoken raptures: — yet more
sick,
And surelier happy. Then she dropped
her lids,
And, folding up her hands as flowers at
night,
Would lose no moment of the blessed time.

She lay and seethed in fever many weeks,
But youth was strong and overcame the
test;
Revolted soul and flesh were reconciled
And fetched back to the necessary day
And daylight duties. She could creep
about ¹¹⁴⁰
The long bare rooms, and stare out drearily
From any narrow window on the street,
Till some one who had nursed her as a
friend
Said coldly to her, as an enemy,
'She had leave to go next week, being well
enough'
(While only her heart ached). 'Go next
week,' thought she:
'Next week! how would it be with her
next week,
Let out into that terrible street alone
Among the pushing people, . . . to go . . .
where?'

One day, the last before the dreaded last,
Among the convalescents, like herself ¹¹⁵¹
Prepared to go next morning, she sat
dumb,
And heard half absently the women
talk, —
How one was famished for her baby's
cheeks,
'The little wretch would know her! a
year old
And lively, like his father!' — one was
keen
To get to work, and fill some clamorous
mouths;
And one was tender for her dear goodman
Who had missed her sorely, — and one,
querulous . . .
'Would pay backbiting neighbors who had
dared ¹¹⁶⁰
To talk about her as already dead,' —
And one was proud . . . 'and if her sweet-
heart Luke

Had left her for a ruddier face than hers
 (The gossip would be seen through at a
 glance),
 Sweet riddance of such sweethearts — let
 him hang !
 'T were good to have been sick for such an
 end.'

And while they talked, and Marian felt the
 worse
 For having missed the worst of all their
 wrongs,

A visitor was ushered through the wards
 And paused among the talkers. 'When
 he looked 1170

It was as if he spoke, and when he spoke
 He sang perhaps,' said Marian; 'could she
 tell ?

She only knew' (so much she had chron-
 iced,

As seraphs might the making of the sun)
 'That he who came and spake was Rom-
 ney Leigh,
 And then and there she saw and heard him
 first.'

And when it was her turn to have the face
 Upon her, all those buzzing pallid lips
 Being satisfied with comfort — when he
 changed

To Marian, saying 'And *you* ? you're go-
 ing, where ?' — 1180

She, moveless as a worm beneath a stone
 Which some one's stumbling foot has
 spurned aside,

Writhed suddenly, astonished with the
 light,

And, breaking into sobs, cried 'Where I
 go ?

None asked me till this moment. Can I
 say

Where *I* go, — when it has not seemed
 worth while

To God Himself, who thinks of every one,
 To think of me and fix where I shall go ?'

'So young,' he gently asked her, 'you
 have lost

Your father and your mother ?'

'Both,' she said,
 'Both lost ! my father was burnt up with
 gin 1191

Or ever I sucked milk, and so is lost.

My mother sold me to a man last month,
 And so my mother's lost, 't is manifest.

And I, who fled from her for miles and
 miles,

As if I had caught sight of the fire of hell
 Through some wild gap (she was my
 mother, sir),

It seems I shall be lost too, presently,
 And so we end, all three of us.'

'Poor child,'

He said, — with such a pity in his voice,
 It soothed her more than her own tears, —
 'poor child ! 1201

'Tis simple that betrayal by mother's love
 Should bring despair of God's too. Yet be
 taught,

He's better to us than many mothers are,
 And children cannot wander beyond reach
 Of the sweep of his white raiment. Touch
 and hold !

And if you weep still, weep where John
 was laid

While Jesus loved him.

'She could say the words,'

She told me, 'exactly as he uttered them
 A year back, since in any doubt or dark
 They came out like the stars, and shone on
 her 1211

With just their comfort. Common words,
 perhaps;

The ministers in church might say the
 same;

But *he*, he made the church with what he
 spoke, —

The difference was the miracle,' said she.

Then catching up her smile to ravishment,
 She added quickly, 'I repeat his words,
 But not his tones: can any one repeat
 The music of an organ, out of church ?

And when he said "poor child," I shut my
 eyes 1220

To feel how tenderly his voice broke
 through,

As the ointment-box broke on the Holy feet
 To let out the rich medicative nard.'

She told me how he had raised and rescued
 her

With reverent pity, as, in touching grief,
 He touched the wounds of Christ, — and
 made her feel

More self-respecting. Hope he called be-
 lief

In God, — work, worship, — therefore let
 us pray !

And thus, to snatch her soul from atheism,

And keep it stainless from her mother's
face, ¹²³⁰
He sent her to a famous sempstress-house
Far off in London, there to work and hope.

With that they parted. She kept sight of
Heaven,
But not of Romney. He had good to do
To others: through the days and through
the nights
She sewed and sewed and sewed. She
drooped sometimes,
And wondered, while along the tawny
light
She struck the new thread into her needle's
eye,
How people without mothers on the hills
Could choose the town to live in! — then
she drew ¹²⁴⁰
The stitch, and mused how Romney's face
would look,
And if 't were likely he'd remember hers
When they two had their meeting after
death.

FOURTH BOOK

They met still sooner. 'T was a year from
thence
That Lucy Gresham, the sick sempstress
girl,
Who sewed by Marian's chair so still and
quick,
And leant her head upon its back to cough
More freely, when, the mistress turning
round,
The others took occasion to laugh out,
Gave up at last. Among the workers,
spoke
A bold girl with black eyebrows and red
lips:
'You know the news? Who's dying, do
you think?
Our Lucy Gresham. I expected it ¹⁰
As little as Nell Hart's wedding. Blush
not, Nell,
Thy curls be red enough without thy
cheeks,
And, some day, there 'll be found a man to
dote
On red curls. — Lucy Gresham swooned
last night,
Dropped sudden in the street while going
home;

And now the baker says, who took her up
And laid her by her grandmother in bed,
He'll give her a week to die in. Pass the
silk.

Let's hope he gave her a loaf too, within
reach,
For otherwise they'll starve before they
die, ²⁰
That funny pair of bedfellows! Miss
Bell,
I'll thank you for the scissors. The old
crone
Is paralytic — that's the reason why
Our Lucy's thread went faster than her
breath,
Which went too quick, we all know. Marian
Erle,
Why, Marian Erle, you're not the fool to
cry?
Your tears spoil Lady Waldemar's new
dress,
You piece of pity!

Marian rose up straight,
And, breaking through the talk and through
the work,
Went outward, in the face of their sur-
prise, ³⁰
To Lucy's home, to nurse her back to life
Or down to death. She knew, by such an
act,
All place and grace were forfeit in the
house,
Whose mistress would supply the missing
hand
With necessary, not inhuman haste,
And take no blame. But pity, too, had
dues:
She could not leave a solitary soul
To founder in the dark, while she sat still
And lavished stitches on a lady's hem
As if no other work were paramount. ⁴⁰
'Why, God,' thought Marian, 'has a miss-
ing hand
This moment; Lucy wants a drink, per-
haps.
Let others miss me! never miss me,
God!'

So Marian sat by Lucy's bed, content
With duty, and was strong, for recom-
pense,
To hold the lamp of human love arm-high,
To catch the death-strained eyes and com-
fort them,
Until the angels, on the luminous side

Of death, had got theirs ready. And she
said,

If Lucy thanked her sometimes, called her
kind, ⁵⁰

It touched her strangely. 'Marian Erle
called kind !

What, Marian, beaten and sold, who could
not die !

'Tis verily good fortune to be kind.

Ah you,' she said, 'who are born to such a
grace,

Be sorry for the unlicensed class, the poor,
Reduced to think the best good fortune
means

That others, simply, should be kind to
them.'

From sleep to sleep when Lucy had slid
away

So gently, like the light upon a hill,
Of which none names the moment that it
goes ⁶⁰

Though all see when 'tis gone, — a man
came in

And stood beside the bed. The old idiot
wretch

Screamed feebly, like a baby overlain,
'Sir, sir, you won't mistake me for the
corpse ?

Don't look at *me*, sir ! never bury *me* !
Although I lie here, I'm alive as you,

Except my legs and arms, — I eat and
drink

And understand, — (that you 're the gentle-
man

Who fits the funerals up, Heaven speed you,
sir),

And certainly I should be livelier still ⁷⁰
If Lucy here . . . sir, Lucy is the corpse . . .

Had worked more properly to buy me
wine;

But Lucy, sir, was always slow at work,
I shan't lose much by Lucy. Marian Erle,

Speak up and show the gentleman the
corpse.'

And then a voice said 'Marian Erle.' She
rose;

It was the hour for angels — there, stood
hers !

She scarcely marvelled to see Romney
Leigh.

As light November snows to empty nests,
As grass to graves, as moss to mildewed
stones, ⁸⁰

As July suns to ruins, through the rents,
As ministering spirits to mourners, through
a loss,

As Heaven itself to men, through pangs of
death,

He came uncalled wherever grief had
come.

'And so,' said Marian Erle, 'we met
anew,'

And added softly, 'so, we shall not part.'

He was not angry that she had left the
house

Wherein he placed her. Well — she had
feared it might

Have vexed him. Also, when he found her
set

On keeping, though the dead was out of
sight, ⁹⁰

That half-dead, half-alive body left behind
With cankerous heart and flesh, which took
your best

And cursed you for the little good it did
(Could any leave the bed-ridden wretch alone,

So joyless she was thankless even to God,
Much more to you ?), he did not say 't was
well,

Yet Marian thought he did not take it
ill, —

Since day by day he came, and every
day

She felt within his utterance and his eyes
A closer, tenderer presence of the soul, ¹⁰⁰

Until at last he said 'We shall not part.'

On that same day was Marian's work com-
plete:

She had smoothed the empty bed, and
swept the floor

Of coffin sawdust, set the chairs anew
The dead had ended gossip in, and stood

In that poor room so cold and orderly,
The door-key in her hand, prepared to go

As *they* had, howbeit not their way. He
spoke.

'Dear Marian, of one clay God made us
all,

And though men push and poke and pad-
dle in't ¹¹⁰

(As children play at fashioning dirt-pies)
And call their fancies by the name of facts,

Assuming difference, lordship, privilege,
When all's plain dirt, — they come back
to it at last,

The first grave-digger proves it with a spade,
And pats all even. Need we wait for this,
You, Marian, and I, Romney ?'

She, at that,
Looked blindly in his face, as when one looks
Through driving autumn-rains to find the sky.
He went on speaking.

'Marian, I being born
What men call noble, and you, issued from
The noble people, — though the tyrannous sword,
Which pierced Christ's heart, has cleft the world in twain

'Twixt class and class, opposing rich to poor,
Shall we keep parted ? Not so. Let us lean

And strain together rather, each to each,
Compress the red lips of this gaping wound

As far as two souls can, — ay, lean and league,

I from my superabundance, — from your want

You, — joining in a protest 'gainst the wrong

On both sides.'

All the rest, he held her hand
In speaking, which confused the sense of much.

Her heart against his words beat out so thick,

They might as well be written on the dust

Where some poor bird, escaping from hawk's beak,

Has dropped and beats its shuddering wings, — the lines

Are rubbed so, — yet 't was something like to this,

— 'That they two, standing at the two extremes

Of social classes, had received one seal,
Been dedicate and drawn beyond themselves

To mercy and ministration, — he, indeed,
Through what he knew, and she, through what she felt,

He, by man's conscience, she, by woman's heart,

Relinquishing their several 'vantage posts
Of wealthy ease and honorable toil,

To work with God at love. And since God willed

That putting out his hand to touch this ark
He found a woman's hand there, he'd accept

The sign too, hold the tender fingers fast,
And say "My fellow-worker, be my wife !"

150

She told the tale with simple, rustic turns, —

Strong leaps of meaning in her sudden eyes

That took the gaps of any imperfect phrase
Of the unschooled speaker: I have rather writ

The thing I understood so, than the thing I heard so. And I cannot render right

Her quick gesticulation, wild yet soft,
Self-startled from the habitual mood she used,

Half sad, half languid, — like dumb creatures (now

A rustling bird, and now a wandering deer,

160

Or squirrel 'gainst the oak-gloom flashing up

His sidelong burnished head, in just her way

Of savage spontaneity), that stir abruptly the green silence of the woods,

And make it stranger, holier, more profound;

As Nature's general heart confessed itself
Of life, and then fell backward on repose.

I kissed the lips that ended. — 'So indeed
He loves you, Marian ?'

'Loves me !' She looked up
With a child's wonder when you ask him first

170

Who made the sun — a puzzled blush, that grew,

Then broke off in a rapid radiant smile
Of sure solution. 'Loves me ! he loves all, —

And me, of course. He had not asked me else

To work with him for ever and be his wife.'

Her words reproved me. This perhaps was love —

To have its hands too full of gifts to give,
For putting out a hand to take a gift;

To love so much, the perfect round of love

Includes, in strict conclusion, being
loved; 180

As Eden-dew went up and fell again,
Enough for watering Eden. Obviously
She had not thought about his love at all:
The cataracts of her soul had poured them-
selves,

And risen self-crowned in rainbow: would
she ask

Who crowned her? — it sufficed that she
was crowned.

With women of my class 't is otherwise:
We haggle for the small change of our
gold,

And so much love accord for so much love,
Rialto-prices. Are we therefore wrong? 190
If marriage be a contract, look to it then,
Contracting parties should be equal, just;
But if, a simple fealty on one side,
A mere religion, — right to give, is all,
And certain brides of Europe duly ask
To mount the pile as Indian widows do,
The spices of their tender youth heaped
up,

The jewels of their gracious virtues worn,
More gems, more glory, — to consume en-
tire

For a living husband: as the man's
alive, 200

Not dead, the woman's duty by so much
Advanced in England beyond Hindostan.

I sat there musing, till she touched my
hand

With hers, as softly as a strange white bird
She feared to startle in touching. 'You
are kind,

But are you, peradventure, vexed at heart
Because your cousin takes me for a wife?
I know I am not worthy — nay, in truth,
I'm glad on 't, since, for that, he chooses
me.

He likes the poor things of the world the
best; 210

I would not therefore, if I could, be rich.
It pleasures him to stoop for buttercups;
I would not be a rose upon the wall
A queen might stop at, near the palace-
door,

To say to a courtier, "Pluck that rose for
me,

It's prettier than the rest." O Romney
Leigh!

I'd rather far be trodden by his foot,
Than lie in a great queen's bosom.'

She paused.

Out of breath,

'Sweet Marian, do you disavow
The roses with that face?'

She dropped her head
As if the wind had caught that flower of
her 221

And bent it in the garden, — then looked
up

With grave assurance. 'Well, you think
me bold!

But so we all are, when we're praying
God.

And if I'm bold — yet, lady, credit me,
That, since I know myself for what I
am,

Much fitter for his handmaid than his wife,
I'll prove the handmaid and the wife at
once,

Serve tenderly, and love obediently,
And be a worthier mate, perhaps, than
some 230

Who are wooed in silk among their learned
books;

While I shall set myself to read his eyes,
Till such grow plainer to me than the
French

To wisest ladies. Do you think I'll miss
A letter, in the spelling of his mind?

No more than they do when they sit and
write

Their flying words with flickering wild-fowl
tails,

Nor ever pause to ask how many t's,
Should that be *y* or *i*, they know 't so well:
I've seen them writing, when I brought a
dress 240

And waited, — floating out their soft white
hands

On shining paper. But they're hard,
sometimes,

For all those hands! — we've used out
many nights,

And worn the yellow daylight into shreds
Which flapped and shivered down our ach-
ing eyes

Till night appeared more tolerable, just
That pretty ladies might look beautiful,
Who said at last . . . "You're lazy in that
house!

You're slow in sending home the work, —
I count

I've waited near an hour for 't." Pardon
me, 250

I do not blame them, madam, nor misprize;

They are fair and gracious; ay, but not
like you,
Since none but you has Mister Leigh's own
blood,
Both noble and gentle, — and, without it
... well,

They are fair, I said; so fair, it scarce
seems strange
That, flashing out in any looking-glass
The wonder of their glorious brows and
breasts,

They're charmed so, they forget to look
behind
And mark how pale we've grown, we pitiful

Remainders of the world. And so perhaps
If Mister Leigh had chosen a wife from
these, ²⁶¹

She might, although he's better than her
best

And dearly she would know it, steal a
thought

Which should be all his, an eye-glance from
his face,

To plunge into the mirror opposite
In search of her own beauty's pearl; while
I . . .

Ah, dearest lady, serge will outweigh silk
For winter-wear when bodies feel a-cold,
And I'll be a true wife to your cousin
Leigh.' ²⁶⁹

Before I answered he was there himself.
I think he had been standing in the room
And listened probably to half her talk,
Arrested, turned to stone, — as white as
stone.

Will tender sayings make men look so
white?

He loves her then profoundly.

'You are here,
Aurora? Here I meet you!' — We
clasped hands.

'Even so, dear Romney. Lady Waldemar
Has sent me in haste to find a cousin of
mine
Who shall be.'

'Lady Waldemar is good.'

'Here's one, at least, who is good,' I
sighed, and touched ²⁸⁰
Poor Marian's happy head, as doglike she,
Most passionately patient, waited on,
A-tremble for her turn of greeting words;

'I've sat a full hour with your Marian
Erle,
And learnt the thing by heart, — and from
my heart
Am therefore competent to give you thanks
For such a cousin.'

'You accept at last
A gift from me, Aurora, without scorn?
At last I please you?' — How his voice
was changed.

'You cannot please a woman against her
will, ²⁹⁰
And once you vexed me. Shall we speak
of that?

We'll say, then, you were noble in it all,
And I not ignorant — let it pass! And
now

You please me, Romney, when you please
yourself;

So, please you, be fanatical in love,
And I'm well pleased. Ah, cousin! at
the old hall,

Among the gallery portraits of our Leighs,
We shall not find a sweeter signory
Than this pure forehead's.'

Not a word he said.
How arrogant men are! — Even philan-
thropists, ³⁰⁰

Who try to take a wife up in the way
They put down a subscription-cheque, — if
once

She turns and says 'I will not tax you so,
Most charitable sir,' — feel ill at ease
As though she had wronged them somehow.

I suppose
We women should remember what we are,
And not throw back an obolus inscribed
With Cæsar's image, lightly. I resumed.

'It strikes me, some of those sublime Van-
dykes

Were not too proud to make good saints in
heaven; ³¹⁰

And if so, then they're not too proud to-day,
To bow down (now the ruffs are off their
necks)

And own this good, true, noble Marian,
yours,

And mine, I'll say! — For poets (bear the
word),

Half-poets even, are still whole demo-
crats, —

Oh, not that we're disloyal to the high,
But loyal to the low, and cognizant

Of the less scrutable majesties. For me,
I comprehend your choice, I justify ³¹⁹
Your right in choosing.'

'No, no, no,' he sighed,
With a sort of melancholy, impatient scorn,
As some grown man who never had a child
Puts by some child who plays at being a
man,

'You did not, do not, cannot comprehend
My choice, my ends, my motives, nor my-
self:

No matter now; we'll let it pass, you say.
I thank you for your generous cousinship
Which helps this present; I accept for
her

Your favorable thoughts. We're fallen on
days,

We two who are not poets, when to wed ³³⁰
Requires less mutual love than common
love

For two together to bear out at once
Upon the loveless many. Work in pairs,
In galley-couplings or in marriage-rings,
The difference lies in the honor, not the
work,—

And such we're bound to, I and she. But
love

(You poets are benighted in this age,
The hour's too late for catching even moths,
You've gnats instead), love! — love's fool-
paradise

Is out of date, like Adam's. Set a swan ³⁴⁰
To swim the Trenton, rather than true love
To float its fabulous plumage safely down
The cataracts of this loud transition-time, —
Whose roar for ever henceforth in my ears
Must keep me deaf to music.'

There, I turned
And kissed poor Marian, out of discon-
tent.

The man had baffled, chafed me, till I flung
For refuge to the woman, — as, sometimes,
Impatient of some crowded room's close
smell,

You throw a window open and lean out ³⁵⁰
To breathe a long breath in the dewy night
And cool your angry forehead. She, at
least,

Was not built up as walls are, brick by
brick,
Each fancy squared, each feeling ranged by
line,

The very heat of burning youth applied
To indurate form and system! excellent
bricks,

A well-built wall, — which stops you on the
road,
And into which you cannot see an inch
Although you beat your head against it —
pshaw!

'Adieu,' I said, 'for this time, cousins
both, ³⁶⁰

And, cousin Romney, pardon me the word,
Be happy! — oh, in some esoteric sense
Of course! — I mean no harm in wishing
well.

Adieu, my Marian: — may she come to me,
Dear Romney, and be married from my
house?

It is not part of your philosophy
To keep your bird upon the blackthorn?'
'Ay,'

He answered, 'but it is. I take my wife
Directly from the people, — and she comes,
As Austria's daughter to imperial France,
Betwixt her eagles, blinking not her race, ³⁷¹
From Margaret's Court at garret-height, to
meet

And wed me at Saint James's, nor put off
Her gown of serge for that. The things we
do,

We do: we'll wear no mask, as if we
blushed.'

'Dear Romney, you're the poet,' I replied,
But felt my smile too mournful for my
word,

And turned and went. Ay, masks, I
thought, — beware

Of tragic masks we tie before the glass,
Uplifted on the cothurn half a yard ³⁸⁰
Above the natural stature! we would play
Heroic parts to ourselves, — and end, per-
haps,

As impotently as Athenian wives
Who shrieked in fits at the Eumenides.

His foot pursued me down the stair. 'At
least

You'll suffer me to walk with you beyond
These hideous streets, these graves, where
men alive

Packed close with earthworms, burr uncon-
sciously

About the plague that slew them; let me
go,

The very women pelt their souls in mud ³⁹⁰
At any woman who walks here alone.

How came you here alone? — you are ig-
norant.'

We had a strange and melancholy walk:
 The night came drizzling downward in
 dark rain,
 And, as we walked, the color of the time,
 The act, the presence, my hand upon his
 arm,
 His voice in my ear, and mine to my own
 sense,
 Appeared unnatural. We talked modern
 books
 And daily papers, Spanish marriage-
 schemes
 And English climate — was 't so cold last
 year? ⁴⁰⁰
 And will the wind change by to-morrow
 morn?
 Can Guizot stand? is London full? is
 trade
 Competitive? has Dickens turned his
 hinge
 A-pinch upon the fingers of the great?
 And are potatoes to grow mythical
 Like moly? will the apple die out too?
 Which way is the wind to-night? south-
 east? due east?

We talked on fast, while every common
 word
 Seemed tangled with the thunder at one
 end,
 And ready to pull down upon our heads ⁴¹⁰
 A terror out of sight. And yet to pause
 Were surelier mortal: we tore greedily
 up
 All silence, all the innocent breathing-
 points,
 As if, like pale conspirators in haste,
 We tore up papers where our signatures
 Imperilled us to an ugly shame or death.

I cannot tell you why it was. 'T is plain
 We had not loved nor hated: wherefore
 dread
 To spill gunpowder on ground safe from
 fire?
 Perhaps we had lived too closely, to di-
 verge ⁴²⁰
 So absolutely: leave two clocks, they say,
 Wound up to different hours, upon one
 shelf,
 And slowly, through the interior wheels of
 each,
 The blind mechanic motion sets itself
 A-throb to feel out for the mutual time.
 It was not so with us, indeed: while he

Struck midnight, I kept striking six at
 dawn;
 While he marked judgment, I, redemption-
 day;
 And such exception to a general law
 Imperious upon inert matter even, ⁴³⁰
 Might make us, each to either, insecure,
 A beckoning mystery or a troubling fear.

I mind me, when we parted at the door,
 How strange his good-night sounded, —
 like good-night
 Beside a deathbed, where the morrow's sun
 Is sure to come too late for more good-
 days:
 And all that night I thought . . . 'Good-
 night,' said he.

And so, a month passed. Let me set it
 down
 At once, — I have been wrong, I have been
 wrong.
 We are wrong always when we think too
 much ⁴⁴⁰
 Of what we think or are: albeit our
 thoughts
 Be verily bitter as self-sacrifice,
 We're no less selfish. If we sleep on
 rocks
 Or roses, sleeping past the hour of noon
 We're lazy. This I write against my-
 self.

I had done a duty in the visit paid
 To Marian, and was ready otherwise
 To give the witness of my presence and
 name
 Whenever she should marry. — Which, I
 thought,
 Sufficed. I even had cast into the scale ⁴⁵⁰
 An overweight of justice toward the
 match;
 The Lady Waldemar had missed her tool,
 Had broken it in the lock as being too
 straight
 For a crooked purpose, while poor Marian
 Erle
 Missed nothing in my accents or my acts:
 I had not been ungenerous on the whole,
 Nor yet untender; so, enough. I felt
 Tired, overworked: this marriage some-
 what jarred;
 Or, if it did not, all the bridal noise,
 The pricking of the map of life with pins,
 In schemes of . . . 'Here we'll go,' and
 'There we'll stay,' ⁴⁶¹

And 'Everywhere we'll prosper in our
love,

Was scarce my business: let them order it;
Who else should care? I threw myself
aside,

As one who had done her work and shuts
her eyes

To rest the better.

I, who should have known,
Forereckoned mischief! Where we dis-
vow

Being keeper to our brother, we're his
Cain.

I might have held that poor child to my
heart

A little longer! 't would have hurt me
much

To have hastened by its beats the marriage
day,

And kept her safe meantime from tamper-
ing hands

Or, peradventure, traps. What drew me
back

From telling Romney plainly the designs
Of Lady Waldemar, as spoken out

To me . . . me? Had I any right, ay,
right,

With womanly compassion and reserve,
To break the fall of woman's impu-
dence? —

To stand by calmly, knowing what I knew,
And hear him call her *good*?

Distrust that word.

'There is none good save God,' said Jesus
Christ.

If He once, in the first creation-week,
Called creatures good, — for ever, after-
ward,

The Devil only has done it, and his heirs,
The knaves who win so, and the fools who
lose;

The word's grown dangerous. In the
middle age,

I think they called malignant fays and
imps

Good people. A good neighbor, even in
this,

Is fatal sometimes, — cuts your morning
up

To mincemeat of the very smallest talk, ⁴⁹⁰
Then helps to sugar her bohea at night

With your reputation. I have known good
wives,

As chaste, or nearly so, as Potiphar's;

And good, good mothers, who would use a
child

To better an intrigue; good friends, be-
side

(Very good), who hung succinctly round
your neck

And sucked your breath, as cats are fabled
to do

By sleeping infants. And we all have
known

Good critics who have stamped out poet's
hope,

Good statesmen who pulled ruin on the
state,

Good patriots who for a theory risked a
cause,

Good kings who disembowelled for a tax,
Good popes who brought all good to jeop-
ardy,

Good Christians who sat still in easy chairs
And damned the general world for stand-
ing up. —

Now may the good God pardon all good
men!

How bitterly I speak, — how certainly
The innocent white milk in us is turned,

By much persistent shining of the sun! —
Shake up the sweetest in us long

enough,

With men, it drops to foolish curd, too
sour

To feed the most untender of Christ's
lambs.

I should have thought, — a woman of the
world

Like her I'm meaning, centre to herself,
Who has wheeled on her own pivot half a
life

In isolated self-love and self-will,
As a windmill seen at distance radiating

Its delicate white vans against the sky,
So soft and soundless, simply beautiful,

Seen nearer, — what a roar and tear it
makes,

How it grinds and bruises! — if she loves
at last,

Her love's a readjustment of self-love,
No more, — a need felt of another's use

To her one advantage, as the mill wants
grain,

The fire wants fuel, the very wolf wants
prey,

And none of these is more unscrupulous

Than such a charming woman when she
loves.

She 'll not be thwarted by an obstacle
So trifling as . . . her soul is, . . . much less
yours ! —

Is God a consideration ? — she loves
you,

Not God ; she will not flinch for Him in-
deed :

She did not for the Marchioness of Perth,
When wanting tickets for the fancy ball.
She loves you, sir, with passion, to lunacy ;
She loves you like her diamonds . . .
almost.

Well,

A month passed so, and then the notice
came,

On such a day the marriage at the church.
I was not backward.

Half Saint Giles in frieze
Was bidden to meet Saint James in cloth
of gold,

And, after contract at the altar, pass ⁵⁴⁰
To eat a marriage-feast on Hampstead
Heath.

Of course the people came in uncompelled,
Lame, blind, and worse — sick, sorrowful,
and worse —

The humors of the peccant social wound
All pressed out, poured down upon Pim-
lico,

Exasperating the unaccustomed air
With a hideous interfusion. You 'd sup-
pose

A finished generation, dead of plague,
Swept outward from their graves into the
sun,

The moil of death upon them. What a
sight ! ⁵⁵⁰

A holiday of miserable men
Is sadder than a burial-day of kings.

They clogged the streets, they oozed into
the church

In a dark slow stream, like blood. To see
that sight,

The noble ladies stood up in their pews,
Some pale for fear, a few as red for hate,
Some simply curious, some just insolent,
And some in wondering scorn, — ' What
next ? what next ? '

These crushed their delicate rose-lips from
the smile

That misbecame them in a holy place, ⁵⁶⁰
With brodered hems of perfumed hand-
kerchiefs ;

Those passed the salts, with confidence of
eyes

And simultaneous shiver of moiré silk :

While all the aisles, alive and black with
heads,

Crawled slowly toward the altar from the
street,

As bruised snakes crawl and hiss out of a
hole

With shuddering involution, swaying slow
From right to left, and then from left to
right,

In pants and pauses. What an ugly crest
Of faces rose upon you everywhere ⁵⁷⁰
From that crammed mass ! you did not
usually

See faces like them in the open day :

They hide in cellars, not to make you mad
As Romney Leigh is. — Faces ! — O my
God,

We call those, faces ? men's and women's
. . . ay,

And children's ; — babies, hanging like a
rag

Forgotten on their mother's neck, — poor
mouths,

Wiped clean of mother's milk by mother's
blow

Before they are taught her cursing. Faces ?
. . . phew,

We 'll call them vices, festering to de-
spairs, ⁵⁸⁰

Or sorrows, petrifying to vices : not
A finger-touch of God left whole on them,
All ruined, lost — the countenance worn
out

As the garment, the will dissolute as the
act,

The passions loose and dragging in the
dirt

To trip a foot up at the first free step !

Those, faces ? 't was as if you had stirred
up hell

To heave its lowest dreg-fiends upper-
most

In fiery swirls of slime, — such strangled
fronts,

Such obdurate jaws were thrown up con-
stantly ⁵⁹⁰

To twit you with your race, corrupt your
blood,

And grind to devilish colors all your
dreams

Henceforth, — though, haply, you should
drop asleep

By clink of silver waters, in a muse
On Raffael's mild Madonna of the Bird.

I've waked and slept through many nights
and days
Since then,—but still that day will catch
my breath
Like a nightmare. There are fatal days,
indeed,⁵⁹⁸
In which the fibrous years have taken root
So deeply, that they quiver to their tops
Whene'er you stir the dust of such a day.

My cousin met me with his eyes and hand,
And then, with just a word, . . . that
'Marian Erle
Was coming with her bridesmaids pre-
sently,'
Made haste to place me by the altar-stair
Where he and other noble gentlemen
And high-born ladies waited for the bride.

We waited. It was early: there was time
For greeting and the morning's compli-
ment,⁶⁰⁹

And gradually a ripple of women's talk
Arose and fell and tossed about a spray
Of English *s's*, soft as a silent hush,
And, notwithstanding, quite as audible
As louder phrases thrown out by the men.
—'Yes, really, if we need to wait in
church,

We need to talk there.' — 'She? 't is
Lady Ayr,
In blue — not purple! that's the dowager.'
— 'She looks as young' — 'She flirts as
young, you mean.

Why, if you had seen her upon Thursday
night,
You'd call Miss Norris modest.' — 'You
again!⁶²⁰

I waltzed with you three hours back. Up
at six,
Up still at ten; scarce time to change
one's shoes:

I feel as white and sulky as a ghost,
So pray don't speak to me, Lord Belcher.'
— 'No,

I'll look at you instead, and it's enough
While you have that face.' 'In church,
my lord! fie, fie!'

— 'Adair, you stayed for the Division?' —
'Lost

By one.' 'The devil it is! I'm sorry
for't.

And if I had not promised Mistress
Grove' . . .

'You might have kept your word to Liver-
pool.'⁶³⁰

— 'Constituents must remember, after all,
We're mortal.' — 'We remind them of it.'
— 'Hark,

The bride comes! here she comes, in a
stream of milk!'

— 'There? Dear, you are asleep still;
don't you know

The five Miss Granvilles? always dressed
in white

To show they're ready to be married.' —
'Lower!

The aunt is at your elbow.' — 'Lady
Maud,

Did Lady Waldemar tell you she had seen
This girl of Leigh's?' 'No, — wait!

't was Mistress Brookes,⁶³⁹

Who told me Lady Waldemar told her —
No, 't was n't Mistress Brookes.' — 'She's
pretty?' — 'Who?

Mistress Brookes? Lady Waldemar?' —
'How hot!

Pray is't the law to-day we're not to
breathe?

You're treading on my shawl — I thank
you, sir.'

— 'They say the bride's a mere child,
who can't read,

But knows the things she should n't, with
wide-awake

Great eyes. I'd go through fire to look
at her.'

— 'You do, I think.' — 'And Lady Walde-
mar

(You see her; sitting close to Romney
Leigh.⁶⁴⁹

How beautiful she looks, a little flushed!')
Has taken up the girl, and methodized

Leigh's folly.' Should I have come here,
you suppose,

Except she'd asked me?' — 'She'd have
served him more

By marrying him herself.'
'Ah — there she comes,

The bride, at last!'

'Indeed, no. Past eleven.
She puts off her patched petticoat to-day

And puts on Mayfair manners, so begins
By setting us to wait.' — 'Yes, yes, this
Leigh

Was always odd; it's in the blood, I think;
His father's uncle's cousin's second son⁶⁶⁰

Was, was . . . you understand me; and
for him,

He's stark, — has turned quite lunatic
upon

This modern question of the poor — the
poor.

An excellent subject when you're moder-
ate;

You've seen Prince Albert's model lodging-
house?

Does honor to his Royal Highness. Good!
But would he stop his carriage in Cheap-
side

To shake a common fellow by the fist
Whose name was . . . Shakespeare? No.

We draw a line,

And if we stand not by our order, we 670
In England, we fall headlong. Here's a
sight, —

A hideous sight, a most indecent sight!

My wife would come, sir, or I had kept her
back.

By heaven, sir, when poor Damiens' trunk
and limbs

Were torn by horses, women of the court

Stood by and stared, exactly as to-day

On this dismembering of society,

With pretty, troubled faces.'

'Now, at last.

She comes now.'

'Where? who sees? you push me, sir,
Beyond the point of what is mannerly. 680

You're standing, madam, on my second
founce.

I do beseech you . . . '

'No — it's not the bride.

Half-past eleven. How late. The bride-
groom, mark,

Gets anxious and goes out.'

'And as I said,

These Leighs! our best blood running in
the rut!

It's something awful. We had pardoned
him

A simple misalliance got up aside

For a pair of sky-blue eyes; the House of
Lords

Has winked at such things, and we've all
been young;

But here's an intermarriage reasoned out,
A contract (carried boldly to the light 691

To challenge observation, pioneer

Good acts by a great example) 'twixt the
extremes

Of martyriized society, — on the left

The well-born, on the right the merest mob,
To treat as equals! — 't is anarchical;

It means more than it says; 't is damnable.
Why, sir, we can't have even our coffee
good,

Unless we strain it.'

'Here, Miss Leigh!'

'Lord Howe,

You're Romney's friend. What's all this
waiting for?' 700

'I cannot tell. The bride has lost her head
(And way, perhaps!) to prove her sympathy
With the bridegroom.'

'What, — you also, disapprove!'

'Oh, I approve of nothing in the world,'

He answered, 'not of you, still less of me,
Nor even of Romney, though he's worth
us both.

We're all gone wrong. The tune in us is
lost;

And whistling down back alleys to the
moon

Will never catch it.'

Let me draw Lord Howe.

A born aristocrat, bred radical, 710

And educated socialist, who still

Goes floating, on traditions of his kind,

Across the theoretic flood from France,

Though, like a drenched Noah on a rotten
deck,

Scarce safer for his place there. He, at
least,

Will never land on Ararat, he knows,

To recommence the world on the new plan:
Indeed, he thinks, said world had better
end.

He sympathizes rather with the fish

Outside, than with the drowned paired
beasts within 720

Who cannot couple again or multiply, —

And that's the sort of Noah he is, Lord
Howe.

He never could be anything complete,

Except a loyal, upright gentleman,

A liberal landlord, graceful diner-out,

And entertainer more than hospitable,

Whom authors dine with and forget the
hock.

Whatever he believes, and it is much,

But nowise certain, now here and now there,

He still has sympathies beyond his creed 730

Diverting him from action. In the House,

No party counts upon him, while for all

His speeches have a noticeable weight.
Men like his books too (he has written
books),

Which, safe to lie beside a bishop's chair,
At times outreach themselves with jets of
fire

At which the foremost of the progressists
May warm audacious hands in passing by.
Of stature over-tall, lounging for ease;
Light hair, that seems to carry a wind in
it,

And eyes that, when they look on you, will
lean 741

Their whole weight, half in indolence and
half

In wishing you unmitigated good,
Until you know not if to flinch from him
Or thank him. — 'T is Lord Howe.

'We're all gone wrong,'
Said he; 'and Romney, that dear friend
of ours,

Is nowise right. There's one true thing
on earth,

That's love! he takes it up, and dresses it,
And acts a play with it, as Hamlet did,
To show what cruel uncles we have been, 750
And how we should be uneasy in our minds
While he, Prince Hamlet, weds a pretty
maid

(Who keeps us too long waiting, we'll con-
fess)

By symbol, to instruct us formally
To fill the ditches up 'twixt class and class,
And live together in phalansteries.

What then? — he's mad, our Hamlet! clap
his play,

And bind him.
'Ah, Lord Howe, this spectacle
Pulls stronger at us than the Dane's. See
there!

The crammed aisles heave and strain and
steam with life. 760

Dear Heaven, what life!'

'Why, yes, — a poet sees;
Which makes him different from a common
man.

I, too, see somewhat, though I cannot sing;
I should have been a poet, only that
My mother took fright at the ugly world,
And bore me tongue-tied. If you'll grant
me now

That Romney gives us a fine actor-piece
To make us merry on his marriage-morn,
The fable's worse than Hamlet's I'll con-
cede.

The terrible people, old and poor and
blind, 770
Their eyes eat out with plague and pov-
erty

From seeing beautiful and cheerful sights,
We'll liken to a brutalized King Lear,
Led out, — by no means to clear scores
with wrongs —

His wrongs are so far back, he has for-
got

(All's past like youth); but just to witness
here

A simple contract, — he, upon his side,
And Regan with her sister Goneril
And all the dappled courtiers and court-
fools

On their side. Not that any of these would
say 780

They're sorry, neither. What is done, is
done,

And violence is now turned privilege,
As cream turns cheese, if buried long
enough.

What could such lovely ladies have to do
With the old man there, in those ill-odor-
ous rags,

Except to keep the wind-side of him?
Lear

Is flat and quiet, as a decent grave;
He does not curse his daughters in the
least:

Be these his daughters? Lear is thinking
of

His porridge chiefly . . . is it getting cold
At Hampstead? will the ale be served in
pots? 791

Poor Lear, poor daughters! Bravo, Rom-
ney's play!'

A murmur and a movement drew around,
A naked whisper touched us. Something
wrong.

What's wrong? The black crowd, as an
overstrained

Cord, quivered in vibration, and I saw . . .
Was that *his* face I saw? . . . his . . .
Romney Leigh's . . .

Which tossed a sudden horror like a sponge
Into all eyes, — while himself stood white
upon 799

The topmost altar-stair and tried to speak,
And failed, and lifted higher above his
head

A letter, . . . as a man who drowns and
gasps.

'My brothers, bear with me ! I am very weak.

I meant but only good. Perhaps I meant Too proudly, and God snatched the circumstance

And changed it therefore. There's no marriage — none.

She leaves me, — she departs, — she disappears, —

I lose her. Yet I never forced her "ay," To have her "no" so cast into my teeth In manner of an accusation, thus. 810

My friends, you are dismissed. Go, eat and drink

According to the programme, — and farewell !

He ended. There was silence in the church.

We heard a baby sucking in its sleep At the farthest end of the aisle. Then spoke a man:

'Now, look to it, coves, that all the beef and drink

Be not filched from us like the other fun, For beef's spilt easier than a woman's lost !

This gentry is not honest with the poor; They bring us up, to trick us.' — 'Go it, Jim,' 820

A woman screamed back, — 'I'm a tender soul,

I never banged a child at two years old And drew blood from him, but I sobbed for it

Next moment, — and I've had a plague of seven.

I'm tender; I've no stomach even for beef,

Until I know about the girl that's lost, That's killed, mayhap. I did misdoubt, at first,

The fine lord meant no good by her or us. He, maybe, got the upper hand of her By holding up a wedding-ring, and then . . . 830

A choking finger on her throat last night, And just a clever tale to keep us still, As she is, poor lost innocent. "Disappear !"

Who ever disappears except a ghost ? And who believes a story of a ghost ?

I ask you, — would a girl go off, instead Of staying to be married ? a fine tale !

A wicked man, I say, a wicked man ! For my part, I would rather starve on gin

Than make my dinner on his beef and beer.' — 840

At which a cry rose up — 'We'll have our rights.

We'll have the girl, the girl ! Your ladies there

Are married safely and smoothly every day,

And *she* shall not drop through into a trap Because she's poor and of the people: shame !

We'll have no tricks played off by gentle-folk;

We'll see her righted.'

Through the rage and roar I heard the broken words which Romney

flung Among the turbulent masses, from the ground

He held still with his masterful pale face, — 850

As huntsmen throw the ration to the pack, Who, falling on it headlong, dog on dog

In heaps of fury, rend it, swallow it up With yelling hound-jaws, — his indignant

words, His suppliant words, his most pathetic

words, Whereof I caught the meaning here and there

By his gesture . . . torn in morsels, yelled across,

And so devoured. From end to end, the church

Rocked round us like the sea in storm, and then

Broke up like the earth in earthquake. Men cried out 860

'Police' — and women stood and shrieked for God,

Or dropped and swooned; or, like a herd of deer

(For whom the black woods suddenly grow alive,

Unleashing their wild shadows down the wind

To hunt the creatures into corners, back And forward), madly fled, or blindly fell,

Trod screeching underneath the feet of those

Who fled and screeched.

The last sight left to me Was Romney's terrible calm face above

The tumult ! — the last sound was 'Pull him down !' 870

Strike — kill him !' Stretching my un-
reasoning arms,
As men in dreams, who vainly interpose
"Twixt gods and their undoing, with a cry
I struggled to precipitate myself
Head-foremost to the rescue of my soul
In that white face, . . . till some one
caught me back,
And so the world went out, — I felt no
more.

What followed was told after by Lord
Howe,
Who bore me senseless from the strangling
crowd
In church and street, and then returned
alone 880
To see the tumult quelled. The men of
law
Had fallen as thunder on a roaring fire,
And made all silent, — while the people's
smoke
Passed eddying slowly from the emptied
aisles.

Here's Marian's letter, which a ragged
child
Brought running, just as Romney at the
porch
Looked out expectant of the bride. He
sent

The letter to me by his friend Lord Howe
Some two hours after, folded in a sheet
On which his well-known hand had left a
word. 890

Here's Marian's letter.

'Noble friend, dear saint,
Be patient with me. Never think me vile
Who might to-morrow morning be your
wife

But that I loved you more than such a
name.

Farewell, my Romney. Let me write it
once, —

My Romney.

'Tis so pretty a coupled word,
I have no heart to pluck it with a blot.

We say "my God" sometimes, upon our
knees,

Who is not therefore vexed: so bear with
it . . .

And me. I know I'm foolish, weak, and
vain: 900

Yet most of all I'm angry with myself
For losing your last footstep on the stair

That last time of your coming, — yester-
day !

The very first time I lost step of yours
(Its sweetness comes the next to what you
speak),

But yesterday sobs took me by the throat
And cut me off from music.

'Mister Leigh,
You'll set me down as wrong in many
things.

You've praised me, sir, for truth, — and
now you'll learn

I had not courage to be rightly true. 910

I once began to tell you how she came,
The woman . . . and you stared upon the
floor

In one of your fixed thoughts . . . which
put me out

For that day. After, some one spoke of
me,

So wisely, and of you, so tenderly,
Persuading me to silence for your
sake . . .

Well, well ! it seems this moment I was
wrong

In keeping back from telling you the
truth:

There might be truth betwixt us two, at
least,

If nothing else. And yet 't was danger-
ous. 920

Suppose a real angel came from heaven
To live with men and women ! he'd go
mad,

If no considerate hand should tie a blind
Across his piercing eyes. 'T is thus with
you:

You see us too much in your heavenly
light;

I always thought so, angel, — and indeed
There's danger that you beat yourself to
death

Against the edges of this alien world,
In some divine and fluttering pity.

'Yes,
It would be dreadful for a friend of
yours, 930

To see all England thrust you out of doors
And mock you from the windows. You
might say,

Or think (that's worse) "There's some
one in the house

I miss and love still." Dreadful !

'Very kind,
I pray you mark, was Lady Waldemar.

She came to see me nine times, rather
ten —

So beautiful, she hurts one like the day
Let suddenly on sick eyes.

‘Most kind of all,
Your cousin! — ah, most like you! Ere
you came

She kissed me mouth to mouth: I felt her
soul

Dip through her serious lips in holy fire.
God help me, but it made me arrogant;
I almost told her that you would not
lose

By taking me to wife: though ever since
I’ve pondered much a certain thing she
asked . . .

“He loves you, Marian?” . . . in a sort
of mild

Derisive sadness . . . as a mother asks
Her babe, “You’ll touch that star, you
think?”

‘Farewell!

I know I never touched it.

‘This is worst:
Babes grow and lose the hope of things
above;

A silver threepence sets them leaping
high —

But no more stars! mark that.

‘I’ve writ all night
Yet told you nothing. God, if I could
die,

And let this letter break off innocent
Just here! But no — for your sake.

‘Here’s the last:

I never could be happy as your wife,
I never could be harmless as your friend,
I never will look more into your face
Till God says “Look!” I charge you,
seek me not,

Nor vex yourself with lamentable thoughts
That peradventure I have come to grief;
Be sure I’m well, I’m merry, I’m at ease,
But such a long way, long way, long way
off,

I think you’ll find me sooner in my grave,
And that’s my choice, observe. For what
remains,

An over-generous friend will care for me
And keep me happy . . . happier . . .

‘There’s a blot!

This ink runs thick . . . we light girls lightly
weep . . .

And keep me happier . . . was the thing to
say,

Than as your wife I could be. — O, my
star,

My saint, my soul! for surely you’re my
soul,

Through whom God touched me! I am not
so lost

I cannot thank you for the good you did,
The tears you stopped, which fell down
bitterly,

Like these — the times you made me weep
for joy

At hoping I should learn to write your
notes

And save the tiring of your eyes, at night;
And most for that sweet thrice you kissed
my lips

Saying “Dear Marian.”

‘T would be hard to read,
This letter, for a reader half as learn’d; 980
But you’ll be sure to master it in spite
Of ups and downs. My hand shakes, I am
blind;

I’m poor at writing at the best, — and yet
I tried to make my *g*’s the way you
showed.

Farewell. Christ love you. — Say “poor
Marian” now.’

Poor Marian! — wanton Marian! — was it
so,

Or so? For days, her touching, foolish
lines

We mused on with conjectural fantasy,
As if some riddle of a summer-cloud
On which one tries unlike similitudes 990
Of now a spotted Hydra-skin cast off,
And now a screen of carven ivory
That shuts the heavens’ conventual secrets
up

From mortals overbold. We sought the
sense:

She loved him so perhaps (such words mean
love),

That, worked on by some shrewd perfidious
tongue

(And then I thought of Lady Waldemar),
She left him, not to hurt him; or per-
haps

She loved one in her class, — or did not
love,

But mused upon her wild bad tramping
life

Until the free blood fluttered at her heart, 1000
And black bread eaten by the roadside
hedge

Seemed sweeter than being put to Romney's
school

Of philanthropical self-sacrifice
Irrevocably. — Girls are girls, beside,
Thought I, and like a wedding by one
rule.

You seldom catch these birds except with
chaff:

They feel it almost an immoral thing
To go out and be married in broad day,
Unless some winning special flattery
should 1010

Excuse them to themselves for 't, . . . 'No
one parts

Her hair with such a silver line as you,
One moonbeam from the forehead to the
crown!

Or else . . . 'You bite your lip in such a
way

It spoils me for the smiling of the rest,'
And so on. Then a worthless gaud or
two

To keep for love, — a ribbon for the neck,
Or some glass pin, — they have their weight
with girls.

And Romney sought her many days and
weeks:

He sifted all the refuse of the town, 1020
Explored the trains, inquired among the
ships,

And felt the country through from end to
end;

No Marian! — Though I hinted what I
knew, —

A friend of his had reasons of her own
For throwing back the match — he would
not hear:

The lady had been ailing ever since,
The shock had harmed her. Something in
his tone

Repressed me; something in me shamed my
doubt

To a sigh repressed too. He went on to
say

That, putting questions where his Marian
lodged, 1030

He found she had received for visitors,
Besides himself and Lady Waldemar

And, that once, me — a dubious woman
dressed

Beyond us both: the rings upon her hands
Had dazed the children when she threw
them pence;

'She wore her bonnet as the queen might
hers,

To show the crown,' they said, — 'a scarlet
crown
Of roses that had never been in bud.'

When Romney told me that, — for now and
then

He came to tell me how the search ad-
vanced, 1040

His voice dropped: I bent forward for the
rest:

The woman had been with her, it ap-
peared,

At first from week to week, then day by
day,

And last, 't was sure . . .

I looked upon the ground
To escape the anguish of his eyes, and
asked

As low as when you speak to mourners
new

Of those they cannot bear yet to call dead,
'If Marian had as much as named to him
A certain Rose, an early friend of hers,
A ruined creature.'

'Never.' — Starting up
He strode from side to side about the
room, 1051

Most like some prisoned lion sprung
awake,

Who has felt the desert sting him through
his dreams.

'What was I to her, that she should tell
me aught?

A friend! was I a friend? I see all clear.
Such devils would pull angels out of hea-
ven,

Provided they could reach them; 't is their
pride;

And that's the odds 'twixt soul and body
plague!

The veriest slave who drops in Cairo's
street

Cries "Stand off from me" to the passen-
gers; 1060

While these blotched souls are eager to
infect,

And blow their bad breath in a sister's
face

As if they got some ease by it.'

I broke through.
'Some natures catch no plagues. I've read
of babes

Found whole and sleeping by the spotted
breast

Of one a full day dead. I hold it true,

As I'm a woman and know womanhood,
That Marian Erle, however lured from
place,
Deceived in way, keeps pure in aim and
heart
As snow that's drifted from the garden-
bank 1070
To the open road.'

'T was hard to hear him laugh.
'The figure's happy. Well—a dozen
carts

And trampers will secure you presently
A fine white snow-drift. Leave it there,
your snow:

'T will pass for soot ere sunset. Pure in
aim?

She's pure in aim, I grant you,—like my-
self,

Who thought to take the world upon my
back

To carry it o'er a chasm of social ill,
And end by letting slip through impotence
A single soul, a child's weight in a soul, 1080
Straight down the pit of hell! yes, I and
she

Have reason to be proud of our pure aims.'
Then softly, as the last repenting drops
Of a thunder-shower, he added, 'The poor
child,

Poor Marian! 't was a luckless day for her
When first she chanced on my philan-
thropy.'

He drew a chair beside me, and sat down;
And I, instinctively, as women use
Before a sweet friend's grief,—when, in
his ear,

They hum the tune of comfort though
themselves 1090

Most ignorant of the special words of such,
And quiet so and fortify his brain
And give it time and strength for feeling
out

To reach the availing sense beyond that
sound,—

Went murmuring to him what, if written
here,

Would seem not much, yet fetched him
better help

Than peradventure if it had been more.

I've known the pregnant thinkers of our
time,

And stood by breathless, hanging on their
lips,

When some chromatic sequence of fine
thought 1100

In learned modulation phrased itself
To an un conjectured harmony of truth:

And yet I've been more moved, more
raised, I say,

By a simple word . . . a broken easy
thing

A three-years' infant might at need repeat,
A look, a sigh, a touch upon the palm,
Which meant less than 'I love you,' than
by all

The full-voiced rhetoric of those master-
mouths.

'Ah, dear Aurora,' he began at last,
His pale lips fumbling for a sort of smile,
'Your printer's devils have not spoilt
your heart: 1111

That's well. And who knows but, long
years ago

When you and I talked, you were some-
what right

In being so peevish with me? You, at
least,

Have ruined no one through your dreams.
Instead,

You've helped the facile youth to live
youth's day

With innocent distraction, still perhaps
Suggestive of things better than your
rhymes.

The little shepherd-maiden, eight years
old, 1119

I've seen upon the mountains of Vaucluse,
Asleep i' the sun, her head upon her knees,
The flocks all scattered,—is more laudable
Than any sheep-dog, trained imperfectly,
Who bites the kids through too much zeal.'
'I look

As if I had slept, then?'

He was touched at once
By something in my face. Indeed 't was
sure

That he and I,—despite a year or two
Of younger life on my side, and on his
The heaping of the years' work on the
days,

The three-hour speeches from the member's
seat, 1130

The hot committees in and out of doors,
The pamphlets, 'Arguments,' 'Collective
Views,'

Tossed out as straw before sick houses,
just

To show one's sick and so be trod to dirt
And no more use, — through this world's
underground,

The burrowing, groping effort, whence the
arm

And heart come torn, — 't was sure that he
and I

Were, after all, unequally fatigued;
That he, in his developed manhood, stood
A little sunburnt by the glare of life, ¹¹⁴⁰
While I . . . it seemed no sun had shone
on me,

So many seasons I had missed my Springs.
My cheeks had pined and perished from
their orbs,

And all the youth-blood in them had grown
white

As dew on autumn cyclamens: alone
My eyes and forehead answered for my
face.

He said, 'Aurora, you are changed — are
ill!'

'Not so, my cousin, — only not asleep,'
I answered, smiling gently. 'Let it be.
You scarcely found the poet of Vacluse
As drowsy as the shepherds. What is
art ¹¹⁵¹

But life upon the larger scale, the higher,
When, graduating up in a spiral line
Of still expanding and ascending gyres,
It pushes toward the intense significance
Of all things, hungry for the Infinite?
Art's life, — and where we live, we suffer
and toil.'

He seemed to sift me with his painful
eyes.

'You take it gravely, cousin; you refuse
Your dreamland's right of common, and
green rest. ¹¹⁶⁰

You break the mythic turf where danced
the nymphs,

With crooked ploughs of actual life, — let
in

The axes to the legendary woods,
To pay the poll-tax. You are fallen in-
deed

On evil days, you poets, if yourselves
Can praise that art of yours no otherwise;
And, if you cannot, . . . better take a
trade

And be of use: 'twere cheaper for your
youth.'

'Of use!' I softly echoed, 'there's the
point

We sweep about for ever in argument, ¹¹⁷⁰
Like swallows which the exasperate, dying
year

Sets spinning in black circles, round and
round,

Preparing for far flights o'er unknown seas.
And we, where tend we?'

'Where?' he said, and sighed.
'The whole creation, from the hour we are
born,

Perplexes us with questions. Not a stone
But cries behind us, every weary step,
'Where, where?' I leave stones to reply
to stones.

Enough for me and for my fleshly heart
To hearken the invocations of my kind, ¹¹⁸⁰
When men catch hold upon my shuddering
nerves

And shriek "What help? what hope?
what bread i' the house,

What fire i' the frost?" There must be
some response,

Though mine fail utterly. This social
Sphinx

Who sits between the sepulchres and stews,
Makes mock and mow against the crystal
heavens,

And bullies God, — exacts a word at least
From each man standing on the side of
God,

However paying a sphinx-price for it.
We pay it also if we hold our peace, ¹¹⁹⁰

In pangs and pity. Let me speak and die.
Alas, you'll say I speak and kill instead.'

I pressed in there. 'The best men, doing
their best,

Know peradventure least of what they do:
Men usefulest i' the world are simply used;

The nail that holds the wood must pierce it
first,

And He alone who wields the hammer sees
The work advanced by the earliest blow.
Take heart.'

'Ah, if I could have taken yours!' he
said,

'But that's past now.' Then rising, — 'I
will take ¹²⁰⁰

At least your kindness and encouragement.
I thank you. Dear, be happy. Sing your
songs,

If that's your way! but sometimes slum-
ber too,

Nor tire too much with following, out of
 breath,
 The rhymes upon your mountains of De-
 light.
 Reflect, if Art be in truth the higher life,
 You need the lower life to stand upon
 In order to reach up unto that higher;
 And none can stand a-tiptoe in the place
 He cannot stand in with two stable feet. ¹²¹⁰
 Remember then! — for Art's sake, hold
 your life.'

We parted so. I held him in respect.
 I comprehended what he was in heart
 And sacrificial greatness. Ay, but he
 Supposed me a thing too small, to deign to
 know:
 He blew me, plainly, from the crucible
 As some intruding, interrupting fly,
 Not worth the pains of his analysis
 Absorbed on nobler subjects. Hurt a fly!
 He would not for the world: he's pitiful ¹²²⁰
 To flies even. 'Sing,' says he, 'and tease
 me still,
 If that's your way, poor insect.' That's
 your way!

FIFTH BOOK

Aurora Leigh, be humble. Shall I hope
 To speak my poems in mysterious tune
 With man and nature? — with the lava-
 lymph
 That trickles from successive galaxies
 Still drop by drop adown the finger of
 God
 In still new worlds? — with summer-days
 in this
 That scarce dare breathe they are so beau-
 tiful?
 With spring's delicious trouble in the
 ground,
 Tormented by the quickened blood of roots,
 And softly pricked by golden crocus-sheaves
 In token of the harvest-time of flowers? ¹¹
 With winters and with autumns, — and be-
 yond
 With the human heart's large seasons, when
 it hopes
 And fears, joys, grieves, and loves? — with
 all that strain
 Of sexual passion, which devours the flesh
 In a sacrament of souls? with mother's
 breasts

Which, round the new-made creatures
 hanging there,
 Throb luminous and harmonious like pure
 spheres? —

With multitudinous life, and finally
 With the great escapings of ecstatic souls, ²⁰
 Who, in a rush of too long prisoned flame,
 Their radiant faces upward, burn away
 This dark of the body, issuing on a world
 Beyond our mortal? — can I speak my
 verse

So plainly in tune to these things and the
 rest

That men shall feel it catch them on the
 quick

As having the same warrant over them
 To hold and move them if they will or no,
 Alike imperious as the primal rhythm
 Of that theurgic nature? — I must fail, ³⁰
 Who fail at the beginning to hold and move
 One man, — and he my cousin, and he my
 friend,

And he born tender, made intelligent,
 Inclined to ponder the precipitous sides
 Of difficult questions; yet, obtuse to me,
 Of me, incurious! likes me very well,
 And wishes me a paradise of good,
 Good looks, good means, and good digestion,
 — ay,

But otherwise evades me, puts me off
 With kindness, with a tolerant gentleness, —
 Too light a book for a grave man's read-
 ing! Go, 41

Aurora Leigh: be humble.

There it is,

We women are too apt to look to one,
 Which proves a certain impotence in art.
 We strain our natures at doing something
 great,

Far less because it's something great to do,
 Than haply that we, so, commend ourselves
 As being not small, and more appreciable
 To some one friend. We must have medi-
 ators

Betwixt our highest conscience and the
 judge; 50

Some sweet saint's blood must quicken in
 our palms,

Or all the life in heaven seems slow and
 cold:

Good only being perceived as the end of
 good,

And God alone pleased, — that's too poor,
 we think,

And not enough for us by any means.

Ay — Romney, I remember, told me once
We miss the abstract when we comprehend.

We miss it most when we aspire, — and fail.

Yet, so, I will not. — This vile woman's
way

Of trailing garments shall not trip me up:
I'll have no traffic with the personal
thought 61

In Art's pure temple. Must I work in
vain,

Without the approbation of a man?
It cannot be; it shall not. Fame itself,
That approbation of the general race,
Presents a poor end (though the arrow
speed

Shot straight with vigorous finger to the
white),

And the highest fame was never reached
except

By what was aimed above it. Art for art,
And good for God Himself, the essential
Good! 70

We'll keep our aims sublime, our eyes
erect,

Although our woman-hands should shake
and fail;

And if we fail . . . But must we? —
Shall I fail?

The Greeks said grandly in their tragic
phrase,

'Let no one be called happy till his death.'
To which I add, — Let no one till his
death

Be called unhappy. Measure not the work
Until the day's out and the labor done,
Then bring your gauges. If the day's
work's scant,

Why, call it scant; affect no compromise;
And, in that we have nobly striven at
least, 81

Deal with us nobly, women though we be,
And honor us with truth if not with praise.

My ballads prospered; but the ballad's
race

Is rapid for a poet who bears weights
Of thought and golden image. He can
stand

Like Atlas, in the sonnet, — and support
His own heavens pregnant with dynastic
stars;

But then he must stand still, nor take a
step.

In that descriptive poem called 'The
Hills,' 90

The prospects were too far and indistinct.
'Tis true my critics said 'A fine view,
that!'

The public scarcely cared to climb my book
For even the finest, and the public's right;
A tree's mere firewood, unless human-
ized, —

Which well the Greeks knew when they
stirred its bark

With close-pressed bosoms of subsiding
nymphs,

And made the forest-rivers garrulous
With babble of gods. For us, we are
called to mark

A still more intimate humanity 100

In this inferior nature, or ourselves
Must fall like dead leaves trodden under-
foot

By veritable artists. Earth (shut up
By Adam, like a fakir in a box
Left too long buried) remained stiff and
dry,

A mere dumb corpse, till Christ the Lord
came down,

Unlocked the doors, forced open the blank
eyes,

And used his kingly chrism to straighten
out

The leathery tongue turned back into the
throat;

Since when, she lives, remembers, palpi-
tates 110

In every limb, aspires in every breath,
Embraces infinite relations. Now
We want no half-gods, Panomphæan Joves,
Fauns, Naiads, Tritons, Oreads and the
rest,

To take possession of a senseless world
To unnatural vampire-uses. See the earth,
The body of our body, the green earth,
Indubitably human like this flesh

And these articulated veins through which
Our heart drives blood. There's not a
flower of spring 120

That dies ere June but vaunts itself al-
lied

By issue and symbol, by significance
And correspondence, to that spirit-world
Outside the limits of our space and time,
Whereto we are bound. Let poets give it
voice

With human meanings, — else they miss
the thought,

And henceforth step down lower, stand
confessed

Instructed poorly for interpreters,
Thrown out by an easy cowslip in the
text.

Even so my pastoral failed: it was a book
Of surface-pictures — pretty, cold, and false
With literal transcript, — the worse done,
I think,

For being not ill-done: let me set my
mark ¹³²

Against such doings, and do otherwise.

This strikes me. — If the public whom we
know

Could catch me at such admissions, I
should pass

For being right modest. Yet how proud
we are,

In daring to look down upon ourselves !

The critics say that epics have died out
With Agamemnon and the goat-nursed
gods; ¹⁴⁰

I'll not believe it. I could never deem,
As Payne Knight did (the mythic moun-
taineer

Who travelled higher than he was born to
live,

And showed sometimes the goitre in his
throat

Discoursing of an image seen through fog),
That Homer's heroes measured twelve feet
high.

They were but men: — his Helen's hair
turned gray

Like any plain Miss Smith's who wears a
front;

And Hector's infant whimpered at a plume
As yours last Friday at a turkey-cock. ¹⁵⁰

All actual heroes are essential men,

And all men possible heroes: every age,

Heroic in proportions, double-faced,
Looks backward and before, expects a
morn

And claims an epos.

Ay, but every age
Appears to souls who live in 't (ask Car-
lyle)

Most unheroic. Ours, for instance, ours:

The thinkers scout it, and the poets abound
Who scorn to touch it with a finger-tip:

A pewter age, — mixed metal, silver-
washed; ¹⁶⁰

An age of scum, spooned off the richer
past,

An age of patches for old gaberdines,
An age of mere transition, meaning nought
Except that what succeeds must shame it
quite

If God please. That 's wrong thinking, to
my mind,

And wrong thoughts make poor poems.

Every age,
Through being beheld too close, is ill-dis-
cerned

By those who have not lived past it.
We'll suppose

Mount Athos carved, as Alexander
schemed,

To some colossal statue of a man. ¹⁷⁰
The peasants, gathering brushwood in his
ear,

Had guessed as little as the browsing goats
Of form or feature of humanity

Up there, — in fact, had travelled five
miles off

Or ere the giant image broke on them,
Full human profile, nose and chin distinct,
Mouth, muttering rhythms of silence up
the sky

And fed at evening with the blood of suns;
Grand torso, — hand, that flung perpetu-
ally

The largesse of a silver river down ¹⁸⁰
To all the country pastures. 'Tis even
thus

With times we live in, — evermore too
great

To be apprehended near.

But poets should
Exert a double vision; should have eyes
To see near things as comprehensively
As if afar they took their point of sight,
And distant things as intimately deep
As if they touched them. Let us strive
for this.

I do distrust the poet who discerns
No character or glory in his times, ¹⁹⁰
And trundles back his soul five hundred
years,

Past moat and drawbridge, into a castle-
court,

To sing — oh, not of lizard or of toad
Alive i' the ditch there, — 't were excus-
able,

But of some black chief, half knight, half
sheep-lifter,

Some beauteous dame, half chattel and
half queen,

As dead as must be, for the greater part,

The poems made on their chivalric bones;
And that's no wonder: death inherits
death.

Nay, if there's room for poets in this
world 200

A little overgrown (I think there is),
Their sole work is to represent the age,
Their age, not Charlemagne's, — this live,
throbbing age,

That brawls, cheats, maddens, calculates,
aspires,

And spends more passion, more heroic
heat,

Betwixt the mirrors of its drawing-rooms,
Than Roland with his knights at Ronces-
valles.

To flinch from modern varnish, coat or
founce,

Cry out for togas and the picturesque,
Is fatal, — foolish too. King Arthur's
self 210

Was commonplace to Lady Guenever;
And Camelot to minstrels seemed as flat
As Fleet Street to our poets.

Never flinch,

But still, unscrupulously epic, catch
Upon the burning lava of a song
The full-veined, heaving, double-breasted
Age:

That, when the next shall come, the men
of that

May touch the impress with reverent hand,
and say

'Behold, — behold the paps we all have
sucked !

This bosom seems to beat still, or at
least 220

It sets ours beating: this is living art,
Which thus presents and thus records true
life.'

What form is best for poems? Let me
think

Of forms less, and the external. Trust
the spirit,

As sovran nature does, to make the form;
For otherwise we only imprison spirit
And not embody. Inward evermore
To outward, — so in life, and so in art
Which still is life.

Five acts to make a play.

And why not fifteen? why not ten? or
seven? 230

What matter for the number of the leaves,

Supposing the tree lives and grows?
exact

The literal unities of time and place,
When 't is the essence of passion to ignore
Both time and place? Absurd. Keep
up the fire,

And leave the generous flames to shape
themselves.

'T is true the stage requires obsequiousness
To this or that convention; 'exit' here
And 'enter' there; the points for clap-
ping, fixed,

Like Jacob's white-peeled rods before the
rams, 240

And all the close-curved imagery clipped
In manner of their fleece at shearing-time.

Forget to prick the galleries to the heart
Precisely at the fourth act, — culminate

Our five pyramidal acts with one act
more, —

We're lost so: Shakespeare's ghost could
scarcely plead

Against our just damnation. Stand aside;
We'll muse for comfort that, last cen-
tury,

On this same tragic stage on which we
have failed,

A wigless Hamlet would have failed the
same. 250

And whosoever writes good poetry,
Looks just to art. He does not write for
you

Or me, — for London or for Edinburgh;
He will not suffer the best critic known

To step into his sunshine of free thought
And self-absorbed conception and exact

An inch-long swerving of the holy lines.

If virtue done for popularity
Defiles like vice, can art, for praise or hire,

Still keep its splendor and remain pure
art? 260

Eschew such serfdom. What the poet
writes,

He writes: mankind accepts it if it suits,
And that's success: if not, the poem's

passed
From hand to hand, and yet from hand to
hand

Until the unborn snatch it, crying out
In pity on their fathers' being so dull,

And that's success too.

I will write no plays;
Because the drama, less sublime in this,

Makes lower appeals, submits more me-
nially,
Adopts the standard of the public taste ²⁷⁰
To chalk its height on, wears a dog-chain
round
Its regal neck, and learns to carry and
fetch
The fashions of the day to please the day,
Fawns close on pit and boxes, who clap
hands
Commending chiefly its docility
And humor in stage-tricks, — or else indeed
Gets hissed at, howled at, stamped at like
a dog,
Or worse, we'll say. For dogs, unjustly
kicked,
Yell, bite at need; but if your dramatist
(Being wronged by some five hundred no-
bodies ²⁸⁰
Because their grosser brains most naturally
Misjudge the fineness of his subtle wit)
Shows teeth an almond's breadth, protests
the length
Of a modest phrase, — 'My gentle coun-
trymen,
There's something in it haply of your
fault,' —
Why then, besides five hundred nobodies,
He'll have five thousand and five thousand
more
Against him, — the whole public, — all the
hoofs
Of King Saul's father's asses, in full drove,
And obviously deserve it. He appealed
To these, — and why say more if they con-
demn, ²⁹¹
Than if they praise him? — Weep, my
Æschylus,
But low and far, upon Sicilian shores!
For since 'twas Athens (so I read the
myth)
Who gave commission to that fatal weight
The tortoise, cold and hard, to drop on thee
And crush thee, — better cover thy bald
head;
She'll hear the softest hum of Hyblan
bee
Before thy loudest protestation!
Then
The risk's still worse upon the modern
stage. ³⁰⁰
I could not, for so little, accept success,
Nor would I risk so much, in ease and
calm,
For manifest gains: let those who prize,

Pursue them: I stand off. And yet, forbid
That any irreverent fancy or conceit
Should litter in the Drama's throne-room
where
The rulers of our art, in whose full veins
Dynastic glories miugle, sit in strength
And do their kingly work, — conceive, com-
mand, ³⁰⁹
And, from the imagination's crucial heat,
Catch up their men and women all a-flame
For action, all alive and forced to prove
Their life by living out heart, brain, and
nerve,
Until mankind makes witness, 'These be
men
As we are,' and vouchsafes the greeting
due
To Imogen and Juliet — sweetest kin
On art's side.
'Tis that, honoring to its worth
The drama, I would fear to keep it down
To the level of the footlights. Dies no
more
The sacrificial goat, for Bacchus slain, ³²⁰
His filmed eyes fluttered by the whirling
white
Of choral vestures, — troubled in his blood,
While tragic voices that clanged keen as
swords,
Leapt high together with the altar-flame
And made the blue air wink. The waxen
mask,
Which set the grand still front of Themis'
son
Upon the puckered visage of a player, —
The buskin, which he rose upon and moved,
As some tall ship first conscious of the wind
Sweeps slowly past the piers, — the mouth-
piece, where ³³⁰
The mere man's voice with all its breaths
and breaks
Went sheathed in brass, and clashed on
even heights
Its phrased thunders, — these things are no
more,
Which once were. And concluding, which
is clear,
The growing drama has outgrown such toys
Of simulated stature, face, and speech,
It also peradventure may outgrow
The simulation of the painted scene,
Boards, actors, prompters, gaslight, and
costume,
And take for a worthier stage the soul it-
self, ³⁴⁰

Its shifting fancies and celestial lights,
With all its grand orchestral silences
To keep the pauses of its rhythmic sounds.

Alas, I still see something to be done,
And what I do falls short of what I see,
Though I waste myself on doing. Long
green days,
Worn bare of grass and sunshine, — long
calm nights
From which the silken sleeps were fretted
out,

Be witness for me, with no amateur's
Irreverent haste and busy idleness ³⁵⁰
I set myself to art! What then? what's
done?

What's done, at last?

Behold, at last, a book.

If life-blood's necessary, which it is, —
(By that blue vein athrob on Mahomet's
brow,

Each prophet-poet's book must show man's
blood!)

If life-blood's fertilizing, I wrung mine
On every leaf of this, — unless the drops
Slid heavily on one side and left it dry.
That chances often: many a fervid man
Writes books as cold and flat as graveyard
stones ³⁶⁰

From which the lichen's scraped; and if
Saint Preux

Had written his own letters, as he might,
We had never wept to think of the little
mole

'Neath Julie's drooping eyelid. Passion is
But something suffered, after all.

While Art

Sets action on the top of suffering:
The artist's part is both to be and do,
Transfixing with a special, central power
The flat experience of the common man,
And turning outward, with a sudden
wrench, ³⁷⁰

Half agony, half ecstasy, the thing
He feels the inmost, — never felt the less
Because he sings it. Does a torch less
burn

For burning next reflectors of blue steel,
That *he* should be the colder for his place
'Twixt two incessant fires, — his personal
life's

And that intense refraction which burns
back

Perpetually against him from the round
Of crystal conscience he was born into

If artist-born? O sorrowful great gift ³⁸⁰
Conferred on poets, of a twofold life,
When one life has been found enough for
pain!

We, staggering 'neath our burden as mere
men,
Being called to stand up straight as demi-
gods,

Support the intolerable strain and stress
Of the universal, and send clearly up,
With voices broken by the human sob,
Our poems to find rhymes among the
stars!

But soft, — a 'poet' is a word soon said,
A book's a thing soon written. Nay, in-
deed, ³⁹⁰

The more the poet shall be questionable,
The more unquestionably comes his book.
And this of mine — well, granting to my-
self

Some passion in it, — furrowing up the
flats,

Mere passion will not prove a volume
worth

Its gall and rags even. Bubbles round a
keel

Mean nought, excepting that the vessel
moves.

There's more than passion goes to make a
man

Or book, which is a man too.

I am sad. ³⁹⁹

I wonder if Pygmalion had these doubts
And feeling the hard marble first relent,
Grow supple to the straining of his arms,
And tingle through its cold to his burning
lip,

Supposed his senses mocked, supposed the
toil

Of stretching past the known and seen to
reach

The archetypal Beauty out of sight,
Had made his heart beat fast enough for
two,

And with his own life dazed and blinded
him!

Not so; Pygmalion loved, — and whoso
loves

Believes the impossible.

But I am sad: ⁴¹⁰

I cannot thoroughly love a work of mine,
Since none seems worthy of my thought
and hope

More highly mated. He has shot them
down,

My Phœbus Apollo, soul within my soul,
 Who judges, by the attempted, what's attained,
 And with the silver arrow from his height
 Has struck down all my works before my face
 While I said nothing. Is there aught to say?
 I called the artist but a greateden man.
 He may be childless also, like a man. 420

I labored on alone. The wind and dust
 And sun of the world beat blistering in my face;
 And hope, now for me, now against me,
 dragged
 My spirits onward, as some fallen balloon,
 Which, whether caught by blossoming tree
 or bare,
 Is torn alike. I sometimes touched my aim,
 Or seemed, — and generous souls cried out
 'Be strong,
 Take courage; now you're on our level, —
 now!
 The next step saves you!' I was flushed
 with praise, 429
 But, pausing just a moment to draw breath,
 I could not choose but murmur to myself
 'Is this all? all that's done? and all
 that's gained?
 If this then be success, 't is dismaller
 Than any failure.'

O my God, my God,
 O supreme Artist, who as sole return
 For all the cosmic wonder of thy work,
 Demandest of us just a word . . . a name,
 'My Father!' thou hast knowledge, only
 thou,
 How dreary 't is for women to sit still,
 On winter nights by solitary fires, 440
 And hear the nations praising them far off,
 Too far! ay, praising our quick sense of
 love,
 Our very heart of passionate womanhood,
 Which could not beat so in the verse with-
 out
 Being present also in the unknissed lips
 And eyes undried because there's none to
 ask
 The reason they grew moist.

To sit alone
 And think for comfort how, that very
 night,
 Affianced lovers, leaning face to face

With sweet half-listenings for each other's
 breath, 450
 Are reading haply from a page of ours,
 To pause with a thrill (as if their cheeks
 had touched)
 When such a stanza, level to their mood,
 Seems floating their own thought out — 'So
 I feel
 For thee,' — 'And I, for thee: this poet
 knows
 What everlasting love is!' — how, that
 night,
 Some father, issuing from the misty roads
 Upon the luminous round of lamp and
 hearth
 And happy children, having caught up
 first
 The youngest there until it shrink and
 shriek 460
 To feel the cold chin prick its dimples
 through
 With winter from the hills, may throw it
 the lap
 Of the eldest (who has learnt to drop her
 lids
 To hide some sweetness newer than last
 year's)
 Our book and cry, . . . 'Ah you, you care
 for rhymes;
 So here be rhymes to pore on under trees,
 When April comes to let you! I've been
 told
 They are not idle as so many are,
 But set hearts beating pure as well as fast.
 'T is yours, the book; I'll write your name
 in it, 470
 That so you may not lose, however lost
 In poet's lore and charming reverie,
 The thought of how your father thought of
 you
 In riding from the town.'
 To have our books
 Appraised by love, associated with love,
 While *we* sit loveless! is it hard, you
 think?
 At least 't is mournful. Fame, indeed,
 't was said,
 Means simply love. It was a man said
 that:
 And then, there's love and love: the love
 of all
 (To risk in turn a woman's paradox) 480
 Is but a small thing to the love of one.
 You bid a hungry child be satisfied
 With a heritage of many corn-fields: nay,

He says he's hungry, — he would rather
 have
 That little barley-cake you keep from
 him
 While reckoning up his harvests. So with
 us
 (Here, Romney, too, we fail to generalize):
 We're hungry.
 Hungry! but it's pitiful
 To wail like unweaned babes and suck
 our thumbs
 Because we're hungry. Who, in all this
 world ⁴⁹⁰
 (Wherein we are haply set to pray and
 fast
 And learn what good is by its opposite),
 Has never hungered? Woe to him who has
 found
 The meal enough! if Ugolino's full,
 His teeth have crunched some foul unnatural
 thing,
 For here satiety proves penury
 More utterly irremediable. And since
 We needs must hunger, — better, for man's
 love,
 Than God's truth! better, for companions
 sweet,
 Than great convictions! let us bear our
 weights, ⁵⁰⁰
 Preferring dreary hearths to desert souls.
 Well, well! they say we're envious, we
 who rhyme;
 But I, because I am a woman perhaps
 And so rhyme ill, am ill at envying.
 I never envied Graham his breadth of
 style,
 Which gives you, with a random smutch or
 two
 (Near-sighted critics analyze to smutch),
 Such delicate perspectives of full life:
 Nor Belmore, for the unity of aim
 To which he cuts his cedarn poems, fine ⁵¹⁰
 As sketchers do their pencils: nor Mark
 Gage,
 For that caressing color and trancing tone
 Whereby you're swept away and melted
 in
 The sensual element, which with a back
 wave
 Restores you to the level of pure souls
 And leaves you with Plotinus. None of
 these,
 For native gifts or popular applause,
 I've envied; but for this, — that when by
 chance

Says some one, — 'There goes Belmore, a
 great man!
 He leaves clean work behind him, and re-
 quires ⁵²⁰
 No sweeper up of the chips,' . . . a girl I
 know,
 Who answers nothing, save with her brown
 eyes,
 Smiles unaware as if a guardian saint
 Smiled in her: — for this, too, — that Gage
 comes home
 And lays his last book's prodigal review
 Upon his mother's knee, where, years ago,
 He laid his childish spelling-book and
 learned
 To chirp and peck the letters from her
 mouth,
 As young birds must. 'Well done,' she
 murmured then;
 She will not say it now more wonder-
 ingly: ⁵³⁰
 And yet the last 'Well done' will touch
 him more,
 As catching up to-day and yesterday
 In a perfect chord of love: and so, Mark
 Gage,
 I envy you your mother! — and you, Gra-
 ham,
 Because you have a wife who loves you so,
 She half forgets, at moments, to be proud
 Of being Graham's wife, until a friend ob-
 serves,
 'The boy here has his father's massive
 brow
 Done small in wax . . . if we push back the
 curls.'
 Who loves me? Dearest father, — mother
 sweet, — ⁵⁴⁰
 I speak the names out sometimes by my-
 self,
 And make the silence shiver. They sound
 strange,
 As Hindostance to an Ind-born man
 Accustomed many years to English
 speech;
 Or lovely poet-words grown obsolete,
 Which will not leave off singing. Up in
 heaven
 I have my father, — with my mother's
 face
 Beside him in a blotch of heavenly light;
 No more for earth's familiar, household
 use,
 No more. The best verse written by this
 hand ⁵⁵⁰

Can never reach them where they sit, to
seem

Well done to *them*. Death quite unfellows
us,

Sets dreadful odds betwixt the live and
dead,

And makes us part as those at Babel did
Through sudden ignorance of a common
tongue.

A living Cæsar would not dare to play
At bowls with such as my dead father is.

And yet this may be less so than appears,
This change and separation. Sparrows
five

For just two farthings, and God cares for
each. 560

If God is not too great for little cares,
Is any creature, because gone to God?
I've seen some men, veracious, nowise
mad,

Who have thought or dreamed, declared
and testified

They heard the Dead a-ticking like a
clock

Which strikes the hours of the eternities,
Beside them, with their natural ears, — and
known

That human spirits feel the human way
And hate the unreasoning awe which waves
them off

From possible communion. It may be. 570
At least, earth separates as well as heaven.
For instance, I have not seen Romney
Leigh

Full eighteen months . . . add six, you get
two years.

They say he's very busy with good
works, —

Has parted Leigh Hall into almshouses.
He made one day an almshouse of his
heart,

Which ever since is loose upon the latch
For those who pull the string. — I never
did.

It always makes me sad to go abroad,
And now I'm sadder that I went to-
night 580

Among the lights and talkers at Lord
Howe's.

His wife is gracious, with her glossy
braids,

And even voice, and gorgeous eyeballs,
calm

As her other jewels. If she's somewhat
cold,

Who wonders, when her blood has stood so
long

In the ducal reservoir she calls her line
By no means arrogantly? she's not proud;
Not prouder than the swan is of the lake
He has always swum in; — 't is her ele-
ment;

And so she takes it with a natural
grace, 590

Ignoring tadpoles. She just knows per-
haps

There *are* who travel without outriders,
Which is n't her fault. Ah, to watch her
face,

When good Lord Howe expounds his the-
ories

Of social justice and equality!

'T is curious, what a tender, tolerant bend
Her neck takes: for she loves him, likes his
talk,

'Such clever talk — that dear, odd Alger-
non!'

She listens on, exactly as if he talked
Some Scandinavian myth of Lemures, 600
Too pretty to dispute, and too absurd.

She's gracious to me as her husband's
friend,

And would be gracious were I not a Leigh,
Being used to smile just so, without her
eyes,

On Joseph Strangways the Leeds mesmer-
ist,

And Delia Dobbs the lecturer from 'the
States'

Upon the 'Woman's question.' Then, for
him,

I like him; he's my friend. And all the
rooms

Were full of crinkling silks that swept
about

The fine dust of most subtle courtesies. 610
What then? — why then, we come home to
be sad.

How lovely One I love not looked to-
night!

She's very pretty, Lady Waldemar.
Her maid must use both hands to twist
that coil

Of tresses, then be careful lest the rich
Bronze rounds should slip: — she missed,
though, a gray hair,

A single one, — I saw it; otherwise

The woman looked immortal. How they
told,

Those alabaster shoulders and bare breasts,
On which the pearls, drowned out of sight
in milk, ⁶²⁰

Were lost, excepting for the ruby-clasp !
They split the amaranth velvet-bodice
down

To the waist or nearly, with the audacious
press

Of full-breathed beauty. If the heart
within

Were half as white ! — but, if it were, per-
haps

The breast were closer covered and the
sight

Less respectable by half, too.

I heard

The young man with the German student's
look —

A sharp face, like a knife in a cleft stick,
Which shot up straight against the parting
line ⁶³⁰

So equally dividing the long hair, —
Say softly to his neighbor (thirty-five
And mediæval), 'Look that way, Sir
Blaise.

She's Lady Waldemar — to the left — in
red —

Whom Romney Leigh, our ablest man just
now,

Is soon about to marry.'

Then replied

Sir Blaise Delorme, with quiet, priestlike
voice,

Too used to syllable damnations round
To make a natural emphasis worth while:
'Is Leigh your ablest man ? the same, I
think, ⁶⁴⁰

Once jilted by a recreant pretty maid
Adopted from the people ? Now, in
change,

He seems to have plucked a flower from
the other side

Of the social hedge.'

'A flower, a flower,' exclaimed
My German student, — his own eyes full-
blown

Bent on her. He was twenty, certainly.

Sir Blaise resumed with gentle arrogance,
As if he had dropped his alms into a hat
And gained the right to counsel, — 'My
young friend,

I doubt your ablest man's ability ⁶⁵⁰

To get the least good or help meet for
him,

For pagan phalanstery or Christian home,
From such a flowery creature.'

'Beautiful !'

My student murmured rapt, — 'Mark how
she stirs !

Just waves her head, as if a flower indeed,
Touched far off by the vain breath of our
talk.'

At which that bilious Grimwald (he who
writes

For the Renovator), who had seemed ab-
sorbed

Upon the table-book of autographs ⁶⁵⁹
(I dare say mentally he crunched the bones
Of all those writers, wishing them alive
To feel his tooth in earnest), turned short
round

With low carnivorous laugh, — 'A flower,
of course !

She neither sews nor spins, — and takes no
thought

Of her garments . . . falling off.'

The student flinched ;

Sir Blaise, the same ; then both, drawing
back their chairs

As if they spied black-beetles on the floor,
Pursued their talk, without a word being
thrown

To the critic.

Good Sir Blaise's brow is high
And noticeably narrow : a strong wind ⁶⁷⁰

You fancy, might unroof him suddenly,
And blow that great top attic off his head
So piled with feudal relics. You admire
His nose in profile, though you miss his
chin ;

But, though you miss his chin, you seldom
miss

His ebony cross worn innermost (carved
For penance by a saintly Styrian monk
Whose flesh was too much with him), slip-
ping through

Some unaware unbuttoned casualty
Of the under-waistcoat. With an absent
air ⁶⁸⁰

Sir Blaise sat fingering it and speaking
low,

While I, upon the sofa, heard it all.

'My dear young friend, if we could bear
our eyes,

Like blesseddest Saint Lucy, on a plate,

They would not trick us into choosing
wives,

As doublets, by the color. Otherwise
Our fathers chose, — and therefore, when
they had hung

Their household keys about a lady's waist,
The sense of duty gave her dignity;
She kept her bosom holy to her babes, 690
And, if a moralist reproved her dress,
'T was "Too much starch!" — and not
"Too little lawn!"'

'Now, pshaw!' returned the other in a
heat,

A little fretted by being called 'young
friend,'

Or so I took it, — 'for Saint Lucy's sake,
If she's the saint to swear by, let us leave
Our fathers, — plagued enough about our
sons!'

(He stroked his beardless chin) 'yes,
plagued, sir, plagued:

The future generations lie on us
As heavy as the nightmare of a seer; 700

Our meat and drink grow painful prophecy:
I ask you, — have we leisure, if we liked,
To hollow out our weary hands to keep
Your intermittent rushlight of the past
From draughts in lobbies? Prejudice of
sex

And marriage-law . . . the socket drops
them through

While we two speak, — however may protest

Some over-delicate nostrils like your own,
'Gainst odors thence arising.'

'You are young,'
Sir Blaise objected.

'If I am,' he said 710
With fire, — 'though somewhat less so than
I seem,

The young run on before, and see the thing
That's coming. Reverence for the young,
I cry.

In that new church for which the world's
near ripe,

You'll have the younger in the Elder's
chair,

Presiding with his ivory front of hope
O'er foreheads clawed by cruel carrion-birds
Of life's experience.'

'Pray your blessing, sir,'
Sir Blaise replied good-humoredly, — 'I
plucked 719

A silver hair this morning from my beard,

Which left me your inferior. Would I
were

Eighteen and worthy to admonish you!
If young men of your order run before
To see such sights as sexual prejudice
And marriage-law dissolved, — in plainer
words,

A general concubinage expressed
In a universal pruriency, — the thing
Is scarce worth running fast for, and you'd
gain

By loitering with your elders.'

'Ah,' he said,
'Who, getting to the top of Pisgah-hill, 730
Can talk with one at bottom of the view,
To make it comprehensible? Why, Leigh
Himself, although our ablest man, I said,
Is scarce advanced to see as far as this,
Which some are: he takes up imperfectly
The social question — by one handle —
leaves'

The rest to trail. A Christian socialist
Is Romney Leigh, you understand.'

'Not I.
I disbelieve in Christian-pagans, much
As you in women-fishes. If we mix 740
Two colors, we lose both, and make a third
Distinct from either. Mark you! to mis-
take

A color is the sign of a sick brain,
And mine, I thank the saints, is clear and
cool:

A neutral tint is here impossible.
The church, — and by the church I mean,
of course,

The catholic, apostolic, mother-church, —
Draws lines as plain and straight as her own
walls,

Inside of which are Christians, obviously.
And outside . . . dogs.'

'We thank you. Well I know
The ancient mother-church would fain still
bite, 751

For all her toothless gums, — as Leigh him-
self

Would fain be a Christian still, for all his
wit.

Pass that; you two may settle it, for me.
You're slow in England. In a month I
learnt

At Göttingen enough philosophy
To stock your English schools for fifty
years;

Pass that, too. Here alone, I stop you
short,

—Supposing a true man like Leigh could stand

Unequal in the stature of his life ⁷⁶⁰
To the height of his opinions. Choose a wife

Because of a smooth skin? — not he, not he!

He'd rail at Venus' self for creaking shoes,
Unless she walked his way of righteousness:
And if he takes a Venus Meretrix
(No imputation on the lady there),
Be sure that, by some sleight of Christian art,

He has metamorphosed and converted her
To a Blessed Virgin.'

'Soft!' Sir Blaise drew breath
As if it hurt him, — 'Soft! no blasphemy,
I pray you!'

'The first Christians did the thing:
Why not the last?' asked he of Göttingen,
With just that shade of sneering on the lip
Compensates for the lagging of the beard, —
'And so the case is. If that fairest fair
Is talked of as the future wife of Leigh,
She's talked of too, at least as certainly,
As Leigh's disciple. You may find her name

On all his missions and commissions,
schools,

Asylums, hospitals, — he had her down, ⁷⁸⁰
With other ladies whom her starry lead
Persuaded from their spheres, to his
country-place

In Shropshire, to the famed phalanstery
At Leigh Hall, christianized from Fourier's
own

(In which he has planted out his sapling
stocks

Of knowledge into social nurseries),
And there, they say, she has tarried half a
week,

And milked the cows, and churned, and
pressed the curd,

And said "my sister" to the lowest drab ⁷⁸⁰
Of all the assembled castaways; such girls!
Ay, sided with them at the washing-tub —
Conceive, Sir Blaise, those naked perfect
arms,

Round glittering arms, plunged elbow-deep
in suds,

Like wild swans hid in lilies all a-shake.'

Lord Howe came up. 'What, talking
poetry

So near the image of the unfavorable Muse?

That's you, Miss Leigh: I've watched you
half an hour

Precisely as I watched the statue called
A Pallas in the Vatican; — you mind
The face, Sir Blaise? — intensely calm and
sad, ⁸⁰⁰

As wisdom cut it off from fellowship, —
But *that* spoke louder. Not a word from
you!

And these two gentlemen were bold, I
marked,

And unabashed by even your silence.'

'Ah,'
Said I, 'my dear Lord Howe, you shall not
speak

To a printing woman who has lost her place
(The sweet safe corner of the household
fire

Behind the heads of children), compliments,
As if she were a woman. We who have
clipt ⁸⁰⁹

The curls before our eyes may see at least
As plain as men do. Speak out, man to
man;

No compliments, beseech you.'

'Friend to friend,
Let that be. We are sad to-night, I saw
(— Good night, Sir Blaise! ah, Smith — he
has slipped away),

I saw you across the room, and stayed,
Miss Leigh,

To keep a crowd of lion-hunters off,
With faces toward your jungle. There
were three;

A spacious lady, five feet ten and fat,
Who has the devil in her (and there's
room)

For walking to and fro upon the earth, ⁸²⁰
From Chippewa to China; she requires
Your autograph upon a tinted leaf
'Twixt Queen Pomare's and Emperor Sou-
louque's.

Pray give it; she has energies, though
fat:

For me, I'd rather see a rick on fire
Than such a woman angry. Then a youth
Fresh from the backwoods, green as the
underboughs,

Asks modestly, Miss Leigh, to kiss your
shoe,

And adds, he has an epic in twelve parts,
Which when you've read, you'll do it for
his boot: ⁸³⁰

All which I saved you, and absorb next
week

Both manuscript and man, — because a
lord

Is still more potent than a poetess
With any extreme republican. Ah, ah,
You smile, at last, then.'

'Thank you.'

'Leave the smile.

I'll lose the thanks for't, — ay, and throw
you in

My transatlantic girl, with golden eyes,
That draw you to her splendid whiteness
as

The pistil of a water-lily draws,
Adust with gold. Those girls across the
sea 840

Are tyrannously pretty, — and I swore
(She seemed to me an innocent, frank
girl)

To bring her to you for a woman's kiss,
Not now, but on some other day or week:
— We'll call it perjury; I give her up.'

'No, bring her.'

'Now,' said he, 'you make it hard
To touch such goodness with a grimy palm.
I thought to tease you well, and fret you
cross,

And steel myself, when rightly vexed with
you,

For telling you a thing to tease you
more.' 850

'Of Romney?'

'No, no; nothing worse,' he cried,
'Of Romney Leigh than what is buzzed
about, —

That *he* is taken in an eye-trap too,
Like many half as wise. The thing I
mean

Refers to you, not him.'

'Refers to me.'

He echoed, — 'Me! You sound it like a
stone

Dropped down a dry well very listlessly
By one who never thinks about the toad
Alive at the bottom. Presently perhaps
You'll sound your "me" more proudly —
till I shrink.' 860

'Lord Howe's the toad, then, in this
question?'

'Brief,

We'll take it graver. Give me sofa-room,
And quiet hearing. You know Eglinton,
John Eglinton, of Eglinton in Kent?'

'Is *he* the toad? — he's rather like the
snail,

Known chiefly for the house upon his back:
Divide the man and house — you kill the
man;

That's Eglinton of Eglinton, Lord Howe.'

He answered grave. 'A reputable man,
An excellent landlord of the olden
stamp, 870

If somewhat slack in new philanthropies,
Who keeps his birthdays with a tenants'
dance,

Is hard upon them when they miss the
church

Or hold their children back from cate-
chism,

But not ungentle when the aged poor
Pick sticks at hedge-sides: nay, I've heard
him say

"The old dame has a twinge because she
stoops;

That's punishment enough for felony."'

'O tender-hearted landlord! may I take
My long lease with him, when the time
arrives 880

For gathering winter-fagots!'

'He likes art,
Buys books and pictures . . . of a certain
kind;

Neglects no patent duty; a good son' . . .

'To a most obedient mother. Born to
wear

His father's shoes, he wears her husband's
too:

Indeed I've heard it's touching. Dear
Lord Howe,

You shall not praise *me* so against your
heart,

When I'm at worst for praise and fag-
ots.'

'Be

Less bitter with me, for . . . in short,' he
said,

'I have a letter, which he urged me so 890
To bring you . . . I could scarcely choose
but yield;

Insisting that a new love, passing through
The hand of an old friendship, caught
from it

Some reconciling odor.'

'Love, you say?'

My lord, I cannot love: I only find

The rhyme for love, — and that 's not love,
my lord.

Take back your letter.'

'Pause: you 'll read it first?'

'I will not read it: it is stereotyped;
The same he wrote to, — anybody's name,
Anne Blythe the actress, when she died so
true,

900

A duchess fainted in a private box:
Pauline the dancer, after the great *pas*
In which her little feet winked overhead
Like other fire-flies, and amazed the pit:
Or Baldinacci, when her F in alt
Had touched the silver tops of heaven it-
self

With such a pungent spirit-dart, the
Queen

Laid softly, each to each, her white-gloved
palms,

And sighed for joy: or else (I thank your
friend)

Aurora Leigh, — when some indifferent
rhymes,

910

Like those the boys sang round the holy ox
On Memphis-highway, chance perhaps to
set

Our Apis-public lowing. Oh, he wants,
Instead of any worthy wife at home,
A star upon his stage of Eglinton?
Advise him that he is not overshrewd
In being so little modest: a dropped star
Makes bitter waters, says a Book I've
read, —

And there's his unread letter.'

'My dear friend,'

Lord Howe began . . .

In haste I tore the phrase.

'You mean your friend of Eglinton, or
me?'

921

'I mean you, you,' he answered with some
fire.

'A happy life means prudent compromise;
The tare runs through the farmer's gar-
nered sheaves,

And though the gleaner's apron holds
pure wheat

We count her poorer. Tare with wheat,
we cry,

And good with drawbacks. You, you love
your art,

And, certain of vocation, set your soul
On utterance. Only, in this world we have
made

(They say God made it first, but if He
did

930

'T was so long since, and, since, we have
spoiled it so,

He scarce would know it, if He looked this
way,

From hells we preach of, with the flames
blown out),

— In this bad, twisted, topsy-turvy world
Where all the heaviest wrongs get upper-
most, —

In this uneven, unfostering England here,
Where ledger-strokes and sword-strokes
count indeed,

But soul-strokes merely tell upon the flesh
They strike from, — it is hard to stand for
art,

Unless some golden tripod from the sea 940
Be fished up, by Apollo's divine chance,

To throne such feet as yours, my prophet-
ess,

At Delphi. Think, — the god comes down
as fierce

As twenty bloodhounds, shakes you, stran-
gles you,

Until the oracular shriek shall ooze in
froth!

At best 't is not all ease, — at worst too
hard:

A place to stand on is a 'vantage gained,
And here's your tripod. To be plain, dear
friend,

You're poor, except in what you richly
give;

949

You labor for your own bread painfully
Or ere you pour our wine. For art's sake,
pause.'

I answered slow, — as some wayfaring man,
Who feels himself at night too far from
home,

Makes steadfast face against the bitter
wind.

'Is art so less a thing than virtue is,
That artists first must cater for their ease
Or ever they make issue past themselves
To generous use? Alas, and is it so

That we, who would be somewhat clean,
must sweep

Our ways as well as walk them, and no
friend

960

Confirm us nobly, — "Leave results to
God,

But you, be clean?" What! "prudent
compromise

Makes acceptable life," you say instead,
You, you, Lord Howe? — in things indif-
ferent, well.

For instance, compromise the wheaten
bread

For rye, the meat for lentils, silk for serge,
And sleep on down, if needs, for sleep on
straw;

But there, end compromise. I will not
bate

One artist-dream on straw or down, my
lord,

Nor pinch my liberal soul, though I be
poor, ⁹⁷⁰

Nor cease to love high, though I live thus
low.'

So speaking, with less anger in my voice
Than sorrow, I rose quickly to depart;

While he, thrown back upon the noble
shame

Of such high-stumbling natures, murmured
words,

The right words after wrong ones. Ah,
the man

Is worthy, but so given to entertain
Impossible plans of superhuman life, —

He sets his virtues on so raised a shelf,
To keep them at the grand millennial height,

He has to mount a stool to get at them;
And, meantime, lives on quite the common

way, ⁹⁸²
With everybody's morals.

As we passed,
Lord Howe insisting that his friendly arm

Should oar me across the sparkling brawl-
ing stream

Which swept from room to room, — we
fell at once

On Lady Waldemar. 'Miss Leigh,' she
said,

And gave me such a smile, so cold and
bright,

As if she tried it in a 'tiring glass
And liked it, 'all to-night I've strained at

you ⁹⁹⁰
As babes at baubles held up out of reach

By spiteful nurses ("Never snatch," they
say),

And there you sat, most perfectly shut in
By good Sir Blaise and clever Mister Smith

And then our dear Lord Howe! at last
indeed

I almost snatched. I have a world to
speak

About your cousin's place in Shropshire,
where

I've been to see his work . . . our work, —
you heard

I went? . . . and of a letter yesterday,
In which if I should read a page or two

You might feel interest, though you're
locked of course ¹⁰⁰¹

In literary toil. — You'll like to hear
Your last book lies at the phalanstery,

As judged innocuous for the elder girls
And younger women who still care for

books.
We all must read, you see, before we live,

Till slowly the ineffable light comes up
And, as it deepens, drowns the written

word, —
So said your cousin, while we stood and

felt ¹⁰⁰⁹
A sunset from his favorite beech-tree seat,

He might have been a poet if he would,
But then he saw the higher thing at once

And climbed to it. I think he looks well
now,

Has quite got over that unfortunate . . .
Ah, ah . . . I know it moved you. Ten-

der-heart!
You took a liking to the wretched girl.

Perhaps you thought the marriage suit-
able,

Who knows? a poet hankers for romance,
And so on. As for Romney Leigh, 't is

sure
He never loved her, — never. By the

way, ¹⁰²⁰
You have not heard of *her*? . . . quite

out of sight,
And out of saving? lost in every sense?'

She might have gone on talking half an
hour

And I stood still, and cold, and pale, I
think,

As a garden-statue a child pelts with snow
For pretty pastime. Every now and then

I put in 'yes' or 'no,' I scarce knew
why;

The blind man walks wherever the dog
pulls,

And so I answered. Till Lord Howe broke
in:

'What penance takes the wretch who in-
terrupts ¹⁰³⁰

The talk of charming women? I, at last,
Must brave it. Pardon, Lady Waldemar,

The lady on my arm is tired, unwell,
 And loyally I 've promised she shall say
 No harder word this evening than . . .
 good-night;
 The rest her face speaks for her.' — Then
 we went.

And I breathe large at home. I drop my
 cloak,
 Unclass my girdle, loose the band that
 ties
 My hair . . . now could I but unloose my
 soul !
 We are sepulchred alive in this close
 world, 1040
 And want more room.

 The charming woman there —
 This reckoning up and writing down her
 talk

Affects me singularly. How she talked
 To pain me ! woman's spite. — You wear
 steel-mail:

A woman takes a housewife from her
 breast

And plucks the delicatest needle out
 As 't were a rose, and pricks you carefully
 'Neath nails, 'neath eyelids, in your nos-
 trils, — say,

A beast would roar so tortured, — but a
 man,

A human creature, must not, shall not
 flinch, 1050

No, not for shame.

 What vexes, after all,
 Is just that such as she, with such as I,
 Knows how to vex. Sweet heaven, she
 takes me up

As if she had fingered me and dog-eared
 me

And spelled me by the fireside half a life !
 She knows my turns, my feeble points. —

 What then ?

The knowledge of a thing implies the
 thing;

Of course, she found *that* in me, she saw
 that,

Her pencil underscored *this* for a fault,
 And I, still ignorant. Shut the book up,
 — close ! 1060

And crush that beetle in the leaves.

 O heart,

At last we shall grow hard too, like the
 rest,

And call it self-defence because we are
 soft.

And after all, now . . . why should I be
 pained

That Romney Leigh, my cousin, should
 espouse

This Lady Waldemar ? And, say, she
 held

Her newly-blossomed gladness in my
 face, . . .

'T was natural surely, if not generous,
 Considering how, when winter held her
 fast,

I helped the frost with mine, and pained
 her more 1070

Than she pains me. Pains me ! — but
 wherefore pained ?

'T is clear my cousin Romney wants a
 wife, —

So, good ! — The man's need of the wo-
 man, here,

Is greater than the woman's of the man,
 And easier served; for where the man dis-
 cerns

A sex (ah, ah, the man can generalize,
 Said he), we see but one, ideally

And really: where we yearn to lose our-
 selves

And melt like white pearls in another's
 wine,

He seeks to double himself by what he
 loves, 1080

And make his drink more costly by our
 pearls.

At board, at bed, at work and holiday,
 It is not good for man to be alone,

And that's his way of thinking, first and
 last,

And thus my cousin Romney wants a
 wife.

But then my cousin sets his dignity
 On personal virtue. If he understands

By love, like others, self-aggrandizement,
 It is that he may verily be great

By doing rightly and kindly. Once he
 thought, 1090

For charitable ends set duly forth
 In Heaven's white judgment-book, to

marry . . . ah,
 We'll call her name Aurora Leigh, al-
 though

She's changed since then ! — and once, for
 social ends,

Poor Marian Erle, my sister Marian Erle,
 My woodland sister, sweet maid Marian,

Whose memory moans on in me like the
 wind

Through ill-shut casements, making me
more sad

Than ever I find reasons for. Alas,
Poor pretty plaintive face, embodied ghost !
He finds it easy then, to clap thee off ¹¹⁰¹
From pulling at his sleeve and book and
pen, —

He locks thee out at night into the cold
Away from butting with thy horny eyes
Against his crystal dreams, that now he's
strong
To love anew ? that Lady Waldemar
Succeeds my Marian ?

After all, why not ?
He loved not Marian, more than once he
loved

Aurora. If he loves at last that Third,
Albeit she prove as slippery as spilt oil ¹¹¹⁰
On marble floors, I will not augur him
Ill-luck for that. Good love, howe'er ill-
placed,

Is better for a man's soul in the end,
Than if he loved ill what deserves love
well.

A pagan, kissing for a step of Pan
The wild-goat's hoof-print on the loamy
down,

Exceeds our modern thinker who turns
back

The strata . . . granite, limestone, coal,
and clay,
Concluding coldly with 'Here's law !
where's God ?'

And then at worst, — if Romney loves her
not, — ¹¹²⁰

At worst — if he's incapable of love,
Which may be — then indeed, for such a
man

Incapable of love, she's good enough;
For she, at worst too, is a woman still
And loves him . . . as the sort of woman
can.

My loose long hair began to burn and
creep,

Alive to the very ends, about my knees:
I swept it backward as the wind sweeps
flame,

With the passion of my hands. Ah, Rom-
ney laughed

One day . . . (how full the memories come
up !)

— 'Your Florence fire-flies live on in your
hair,' ¹¹³⁰

He said, 'it gleams so.' Well, I wrung
them out,

My fire-flies; made a knot as hard as life
Of those loose, soft, impracticable curls,
And then sat down and thought . . . 'She
shall not think

Her thought of me,' — and drew my desk
and wrote.

'Dear Lady Waldemar, I could not speak
With people round me, nor can sleep to-
night

And not speak, after the great news I
heard

Of you and of my cousin. May you be ¹¹⁴⁰
Most happy; and the good he meant the
world

Replenish his own life. Say what I say,
And let my word be sweeter for your
mouth,

As you are *you* . . . I only Aurora Leigh.'
That's quiet, guarded: though she hold it
up

Against the light, she'll not see through it
more

Than lies there to be seen. So much for
pride;

And now for peace, a little. Let me stop
All writing back . . . 'Sweet thanks, my
sweetest friend,

You've made more joyful my great joy
itself.' ¹¹⁵⁰

— No, that's too simple ! she would twist
it thus,

'My joy would still be as sweet as thyme
in drawers,

However shut up in the dark and dry;
But violets, aired and dewed by love like
yours,

Out-smell all thyme: we keep that in our
clothes,

But drop the other down our bosoms till
They smell like —' . . . ah, I see her
writing back

Just so. She'll make a nosegay of her
words,

And tie it with blue ribbons at the end
To suit a poet; — pshaw !

And then we'll have
The call to church, the broken, sad, bad
dream ¹¹⁶¹

Dreamed out at last, the marriage-vow
complete

With the marriage breakfast; praying in
white gloves,

Drawn off in haste for drinking pagan
toasts
In somewhat stronger wine than any sipped
By gods since Bacchus had his way with
grapes.

A postscript stops all that and rescues me.
'You need not write. I have been over-
worked,

And think of leaving London, England
even,

And hastening to get nearer to the sun ¹¹⁷⁰
Where men sleep better. So, adieu.'—I
fold

And seal,—and now I'm out of all the
coil;

I breathe now, I spring upward like a
branch

The ten-years school-boy with a crooked
stick

May pull down to his level in search of
nuts,

But cannot hold a moment. How we
twang

Back on the blue sky, and assert our
height,

While he stares after! Now, the wonder
seems

That I could wrong myself by such a
doubt.

We poets always have uneasy hearts, ¹¹⁸⁰
Because our hearts, large-rounded as the
globe,

Can turn but one side to the sun at once.

We are used to dip our artist-hands in gall
And potash, trying potentialities

Of alternated color, till at last

We get confused, and wonder for our skin
How nature tinged it first. Well—here's
the true

Good flesh-color; I recognize my hand,—
Which Romney Leigh may clasp as just a
friend's, ¹¹⁸⁹

And keep his clean.

And now, my Italy.

Alas, if we could ride with naked souls
And make no noise and pay no price at all,

I would have seen thee sooner, Italy,
For still I have heard thee crying through

my life,

Thou piercing silence of ecstatic graves,

Men call that name!

But even a witch to-day
Must melt down golden pieces in the nard

Wherewith to anoint her broomstick ere
she rides;

And poets evermore are scant of gold,
And if they find a piece behind the
door ¹²⁰⁰

It turns by sunset to a withered leaf.
The Devil himself scarce trusts his pa-
tent

Gold-making art to any who make rhymes,
But culls his Faustus from philosophers
And not from poets. 'Leave my Job,'
said God;

And so the Devil leaves him without
pence,

And poverty proves plainly special grace.
In these new, just, administrative times
Men clamor for an order of merit: why?
Here's black bread on the table and no
wine! ¹²¹⁰

At least I am a poet in being poor,
Thank God. I wonder if the manuscript
Of my long poem, if 't were sold outright,
Would fetch enough to buy me shoes to go
Afoot (thrown in, the necessary patch
For the other side the Alps)? It cannot
be.

I fear that I must sell this residue
Of my father's books, although the Elze-
virs

Have fly-leaves overwritten by his hand
In faded notes as thick and fine and
brown ¹²²⁰

As cobwebs on a tawny monument
Of the old Greeks—*conferenda hæc cum*
his—

Corruptè citat—lege potiùs,

And so on, in the scholar's regal way
Of giving judgment on the parts of speech,
As if he sat on all twelve thrones up-piled,
Arraigning Israel. Ay, but books and
notes

Must go together. And this Proclus too,
In these dear quaint contracted Grecian
types,

Fantastically crumpled like his thoughts ¹²³⁰
Which would not seem too plain; you go
round twice

For one step forward, then you take it back
Because you're somewhat giddy; there's
the rule

For Proclus. Ah, I stained this middle
leaf

With pressing in 't my Florence iris-bell,
Long stalk and all: my father chided me

For that stain of blue blood, — I recollect
The peevish turn his voice took, 'Silly
girls,

Who plant their flowers in our philosophy
To make it fine, and only spoil the book !
No more of it, Aurora.' Yes — no more !
Ah, blame of love, that's sweeter than all
praise 1242

Of those who love not ! 't is so lost to
me,

I cannot, in such beggared life, afford
To lose my Proclus, — not for Florence
even.

The kissing Judas, Wolff, shall go instead,
Who builds us such a royal book as this
To honor a chief-poet, folio-built,
And writes above 'The house of Nobody !'
Who floats in cream, as rich as any sucked
From Juno's breasts, the broad Homeric
lines, 1251

And, while with their spondaic prodigious
mouths

They lap the lucent margins as babe-gods,
Proclaims them bastards. Wolff's an
atheist:

And if the Iliad fell out, as he says,
By mere fortuitous concourse of old
songs,

Conclude as much too for the universe.

That Wolff, those Platos: sweep the upper
shelves

As clean as this, and so I am almost rich,
Which means, not forced to think of being
poor 1260

In sight of ends. To-morrow: no delay.
I'll wait in Paris till good Carrington
Dispose of such and, having chaffered for
My book's price with the publisher, direct
All proceeds to me. Just a line to ask
His help.

And now I come, my Italy,
My own hills ! Are you 'ware of me, my
hills,
How I burn toward you ? do you feel to-
night

The urgency and yearning of my soul,
As sleeping mothers feel the sucking babe
And smile ? — Nay, not so much as when
in heat 1271

Vain lightnings catch at your inviolate
tops

And tremble while ye are steadfast. Still
ye go

Your own determined, calm, indifferent
way

Toward sunrise, shade by shade, and light
by light,

Of all the grand progression nought left
out,

As if God verily made you for yourselves
And would not interrupt your life with
ours.

SIXTH BOOK

The English have a scornful insular way
Of calling the French light. The levity
Is in the judgment only, which yet stands,
For say a foolish thing but oft enough
(And here's the secret of a hundred
creeds,

Men get opinions as boys learn to spell,
By reiteration chiefly), the same thing
Shall pass at last for absolutely wise,
And not with fools exclusively. And so
We say the French are light, as if we
said 10

The cat mews or the milch-cow gives us
milk:

Say rather, cats are milked and milch-cows
mew;

For what is lightness but inconsequence,
Vague fluctuation 'twixt effect and cause
Compelled by neither ? Is a bullet light
That dashes from the gun-mouth, while
the eye

Winks and the heart beats one, to flatten
itself

To a wafer on the white speck on a wall
A hundred paces off ? Even so direct,
So sternly undivertible of aim, 20
Is this French people.

All, idealists
Too absolute and earnest, with them all
The idea of a knife cuts real flesh;
And still, devouring the safe interval
Which Nature placed between the thought
and act

With those two fiery and impatient souls,
They threaten conflagration to the world,
And rush with most unscrupulous logic
on

Impossible practice. Set your orators
To blow upon them with loud windy
mouths, 30

Through watchword phrases, jest or senti-
ment,

Which drive our burly brutal English
 mobs

Like so much chaff, whichever way they
 blow, —

This light French people will not thus be
 driven.

They turn indeed, — but then they turn
 upon

Some central pivot of their thought and
 choice,

And veer out by the force of holding fast.
That's hard to understand, for English-
 men

Unused to abstract questions, and untrained
To trace the involutions, valve by valve, 40
In each orb'd bulb-root of a general truth,
And mark what subtly fine integument
Divides opposed compartments. Freedom's
 self

Comes concrete to us, to be understood,
Fixed in a feudal form incarnately
To suit our ways of thought and rever-
 ence,

The special form, with us, being still the
 thing.

With us, I say, though I'm of Italy
By mother's birth and grave, by father's
 grave

And memory; let it be — a poet's heart 50
Can swell to a pair of nationalities,
However ill-lodged in a woman's breast.

And so I am strong to love this noble
 France,

This poet of the nations, who dreams on
And wails on (while the household goes to
 wreck)

For ever, after some ideal good, —
Some equal poise of sex, some unvowed
 love

Inviolate, some spontaneous brotherhood,
Some wealth that leaves none poor and
 finds none tired,

Some freedom of the many that respects 60
The wisdom of the few. Heroic dreams!
Sublime, to dream so; natural, to wake:
And sad, to use such lofty scaffoldings,
Erected for the building of a church,
To build instead a brothel or a prison —
May God save France!

And if at last she sighs
Her great soul up into a great man's face,
To flush his temples out so gloriously
That few dare carp at Cæsar for being
 bald,

What then? — this Cæsar represents, not
 reigns, 70

And is no despot, though twice absolute:
This Head has all the people for a heart;
This purple 's lined with the democracy, —
Now let him see to it! for a rent within
Would leave irreparable rags without.

A serious riddle: find such anywhere
Except in France; and when 't is found in
 France,

Be sure to read it rightly. So, I mused
Up and down, up and down, the terraced
 streets,

The glittering boulevards, the white colon-
 nades 80

Of fair fantastic Paris who wears trees
Like plumes, as if man made them, spire
 and tower

As if they had grown by nature, tossing
 up

Her fountains in the sunshine of the
 squares,

As if in beauty's game she tossed the dice,
Or blew the silver down-balls of her
 dreams

To sow futurity with seeds of thought
And count the passage of her festive hours.

The city swims in verdure, beautiful
As Venice on the waters, the sea-swan. 90

What bosky gardens dropped in close-
 walled courts

Like plums in ladies' laps who start and
 laugh:

What miles of streets that run on after
 trees,

Still carrying all the necessary shops,
Those open caskets with the jewels seen!

And trade is art, and art's philosophy,
In Paris. There's a silk for instance, there,
As worth an artist's study for the folds
As that bronze opposite! nay, the bronze
 has faults, 99

Art 's here too artful, — conscious as a maid
Who leans to mark her shadow on the wall
Until she lose a vantage in her step.

Yet Art walks forward, and knows where to
 walk;

The artists also are idealists,
Too absolute for nature, logical
To austerity in the application of
The special theory, — not a soul content
To paint a crooked pollard and an ass,
As the English will because they find it so

And like it somehow. — There the old
 Tuileries 110
 Is pulling its high cap down on its eyes,
 Confounded, conscience-stricken, and
 amazed

By the apparition of a new fair face
 In those devouring mirrors. Through the
 grate

Within the gardens, what a heap of babes,
 Swept up like leaves beneath the chestnut-
 trees

From every street and alley of the town,
 By ghosts perhaps that blow too bleak this
 way

A-looking for their heads! dear pretty
 babes,

I wish them luck to have their ball-play
 out 120

Before the next change. Here the air is
 thronged

With statues poised upon their columns
 fine,

As if to stand a moment were a feat,
 Against that blue! What squares, — what
 breathing-room

For a nation that runs fast, — ay, runs
 against

The dentist's teeth at the corner in pale
 rows,

Which grin at progress, in an epigram.

I walked the day out, listening to the chink
 Of the first Napoleon's bones in his second
 grave,

By victories guarded 'neath the golden
 dome 130

That caps all Paris like a bubble. 'Shall
 These dry bones live?' thought Louis
 Philippe once,

And lived to know. Herein is argument
 For kings and politicians, but still more
 For poets, who bear buckets to the well
 Of ampler draught.

These crowds are very good
 For meditation (when we are very strong)
 Though love of beauty makes us timorous,
 And draws us backward from the coarse
 town-sights

To count the daisies upon dappled fields 140
 And hear the streams bleat on among the
 hills

In innocent and indolent repose,
 While still with silken elegiac thoughts
 We wind out from us the distracting world
 And die into the chrysalis of a man,

And leave the best that may, to come of us,
 In some brown moth. I would be bold and
 bear

To look into the swarthiest face of things,
 For God's sake who has made them.

Six days' work;
 The last day shutting 'twixt its dawn and
 eve 150

The whole work bettered of the previous
 five!

Since God collected and resumed in man
 The firmaments, the strata, and the lights,
 Fish, fowl, and beast, and insect, — all
 their trains

Of various life caught back upon his arm,
 Reorganized, and constituted MAN,
 The microcosm, the adding up of works, —
 Within whose fluttering nostrils, then at
 last

Consummating Himself the Maker sighed,
 As some strong winner at the foot-race
 sighs 160

Touching the goal.

Humanity is great;
 And, if I would not rather pore upon
 An ounce of common, ugly, human dust,
 An artisan's palm or a peasant's brow,
 Unsmooth, ignoble, save to me and God,
 Than track old Nilus to his silver roots,
 Or wait on all the changes of the moon
 Among the mountain-peaks of Thessaly
 (Until her magic crystal round itself
 For many a witch to see in) — set it down
 As weakness, — strength by no means.

How is this, 171
 That men of science, osteologists
 And surgeons, beat some poets in respect
 For nature, — count nought common or
 unclean,

Spend raptures upon perfect specimens
 Of indurated veins, distorted joints,
 Or beautiful new cases of curved spine,
 While we, we are shocked at nature's fall-
 ing off,

We dare to shrink back from her warts
 and blains,

We will not, when she sneezes, look at
 her, 180

Not even to say 'God bless her'? That's
 our wrong;

For that, she will not trust us often with
 Her larger sense of beauty and desire,
 But tethers us to a lily or a rose
 And bids us diet on the dew inside,

Left ignorant that the hungry beggar-boy
(Who stares unseen against our absent
eyes,

And wonders at the gods that we must
be,

To pass so careless for the oranges !)
Bears yet a breastful of a fellow-world ¹⁹⁰
To this world, undisparaged, undespoiled,
And (while we scorn him for a flower or
two,

As being, Heaven help us, less poetical)
Contains himself both flowers and firma-
ments

And surging seas and aspectable stars
And all that we would push him out of
sight

In order to see nearer. Let us pray
God's grace to keep God's image in repute,
That so, the poet and philanthropist
(Even I and Romney) may stand side by
side, ²⁰⁰

Because we both stand face to face with
men,

Contemplating the people in the rough,
Yet each so follow a vocation, his
And mine.

I walked on, musing with myself
On life and art, and whether after all
A larger metaphysics might not help
Our physics, a completer poetry
Adjust our daily life and vulgar wants
More fully than the special outside plans,
Phalansteries, material institutes, ²¹⁰
The civil conscriptions and lay monasteries
Preferred by modern thinkers, as they
thought

The bread of man indeed made all his life,
And washing seven times in the 'People's
Baths'

Were sovereign for a people's leprosy,
Still leaving out the essential prophet's
word

That comes in power. On which, we thun-
der down,

We prophets, poets, — Virtue's in the
word !

The maker burnt the darkness up with
his,

To inaugurate the use of vocal life; ²²⁰
And, plant a poet's word even, deep enough
In any man's breast, looking presently
For offshoots, you have done more for the
man

Than if you dressed him in a broadcloth
coat

And warmed his Sunday pottage at your
fire.

Yet Romney leaves me . . .

God ! what face is that ?

O Romney, O Marian !

Walking on the quays
And pulling thoughts to pieces leisurely,
As if I caught at grasses in a field ²²⁹
And bit them slow between my absent lips
And shred them with my hands . . .

What face is that ?

What a face, what a look, what a likeness !
Full on mine

The sudden blow of it came down, till all
My blood swam, my eyes dazzled. Then
I sprang . . .

It was as if a meditative man
Were dreaming out a summer afternoon
And watching gnats a-prick upon a pond,
When something floats up suddenly, out
there,

Turns over . . . a dead face, known once
alive . . .

So old, so new ! it would be dreadful now
To lose the sight and keep the doubt of
this: ²⁴¹

He plunges — ha ! he has lost it in the
splash.

I plunged — I tore the crowd up, either
side,

And rushed on, forward, forward, after
her.

Her ? whom ?

A woman sauntered slow in front,
Munching an apple, — she left off amazed
As if I had snatched it: that's not she, at
least.

A man walked arm-linked with a lady
veiled,

Both heads dropped closer than the need
of talk: ²⁵⁰

They started; he forgot her with his face,
And she, herself, and clung to him as if
My look were fatal. Such a stream of
folk,

And all with cares and business of their
own !

I ran the whole quay down against their
eyes;

No Marian; nowhere Marian. Almost,
now,

I could call Marian, Marian, with the
shriek

Of desperate creatures calling for the
Dead.

Where is she, was she? was she any-
where?

I stood still, breathless, gazing, straining
out

In every uncertain distance, till at last 260

A gentleman abstracted as myself
Came full against me, then resolved the
clash

In voluble excuses, — obviously
Some learned member of the Institute
Upon his way there, walking, for his
health

While meditating on the last 'Discourse';
Pinching the empty air 'twixt finger and
thumb,

From which the snuff being ousted by that
shock

Defiled his snow-white waistcoat duly
pricked

At the button-hole with honorable red; 270
'Madame, your pardon,' — there he
swerved from me

A metre, as confounded as he had heard
That Dumas would be chosen to fill up
The next chair vacant, by his 'men *in us*.'
Since when was genius found respectable?
It passes in its place, indeed, — which
means

The seventh floor back, or else the hospital:
Revolving pistols are ingenious things,
But prudent men (Academicians are)
Scarce keep them in the cupboard next the
prunes. 280

And so, abandoned to a bitter mirth,
I loitered to my inn. O world, O world,
O jurists, rhymers, dreamers, what you
please,

We play a weary game of hide-and-seek!
We shape a figure of our fantasy,
Call nothing something, and run after it
And lose it, lose ourselves too in the search,
Till clash against us comes a somebody
Who also has lost something and is lost,
Philosopher against philanthropist, 290
Academician against poet, man
Against woman, against the living the
dead, —

Then home, with a bad headache and worse
jest!

To change the water for my heliotropes
And yellow roses. Paris has such flowers;

But England, also. 'T was a yellow rose,
By that south window of the little house,
My cousin Romney gathered with his hand
On all my birthdays for me, save the last;
And then I shook the tree too rough, too
rough, 300

For roses to stay after.

Now, my maps.

I must not linger here from Italy
Till the last nightingale is tired of song,
And the last fire-fly dies off in the maize.
My soul's in haste to leap into the sun
And scorch and seethe itself to a finer
mood,

Which here, in this chill north, is apt to
stand

Too stiffly in former moulds.

That face persists,

It floats up, it turns over in my mind,
As like to Marian as one dead is like 310
The same alive. In very deed a face
And not a fancy, though it vanished so;
The small fair face between the darks of
hair,

I used to liken, when I saw her first,
To a point of moonlit water down a well:
The low brow, the frank space between the
eyes,

Which always had the brown, pathetic
look

Of a dumb creature who had been beaten
once

And never since was easy with the world.
Ah, ah — now I remember perfectly 320
Those eyes, to-day, — how overlarge they
seemed,

As if some patient, passionate despair
(Like a coal dropped and forgot on tapes-
try,

Which slowly burns a widening circle out)
Had burnt them larger, larger. And those
eyes,

To-day, I do remember, saw me too,
As I saw them, with conscious lids astrain
In recognition. Now a fantasy,
A simple shade or image of the brain,
Is merely passive, does not retro-act, 330
Is seen, but sees not.

'T was a real face,

Perhaps a real Marian.

Which being so,

I ought to write to Romney, 'Marian's
here;

Be comforted for Marian.'

My pen fell,

My hands struck sharp together, as hands
do
Which hold at nothing. Can I write to
him
A half-truth? can I keep my own soul
blind
To the other half, . . . the worse? What
are our souls,
If still, to run on straight a sober pace
Nor start at every pebble or dead leaf, ³⁴⁰
They must wear blinkers, ignore facts, sup-
press
Six tenths of the road? Confront the
truth, my soul!
And oh, as truly as that was Marian's face,
The arms of that same Marian clasped a
thing
. . . Not hid so well beneath the scanty
shawl,
I cannot name it now for what it was.

A child. Small business has a castaway
Like Marian with that crown of prosper-
ous wives
At which the gentlest she grows arrogant
And says 'My child.' Who finds an
emerald ring ³⁵⁰
On a beggar's middle finger and requires
More testimony to convict a thief?
A child's too costly for so mere a wretch;
She filched it somewhere, and it means,
with her,
Instead of honor, blessing, merely shame.

I cannot write to Romney, 'Here she is,
Here's Marian found! I'll set you on her
track:
I saw her here, in Paris, . . . and her
child.
She put away your love two years ago,
But, plainly, not to starve. You suffered
then; ³⁶⁰
And, now that you've forgot her utterly
As any last year's annual, in whose place
You've planted a thick-flowering ever-
green,
I choose, being kind, to write and tell you
this
To make you wholly easy — she's not
dead,
But only . . . damned.'

Stop there: I go too fast;
I'm cruel like the rest, — in haste to
take
The first stir in the arras for a rat,

And set my barking, biting thoughts
upon 't.
— A child! what then? Suppose a neigh-
bor's sick, ³⁷⁰
And asked her, 'Marian, carry out my
child
In this Spring air,' — I punish her for
that?
Or say, the child should hold her round the
neck
For good child-reasons, that he liked it so
And would not leave her — she had win-
ning ways —
I brand her therefore that she took the
child?

Not so.
I will not write to Romney Leigh,
For now he's happy, — and she may in-
deed
Be guilty, — and the knowledge of her
fault
Would drizzle his smooth time. But I,
whose days ³⁸⁰
Are not so fine they cannot bear the rain,
And who moreover having seen her face
Must see it again, . . . *will* see it, by my
hopes
Of one day seeing heaven too. The police
Shall track her, hound her, ferret their own
soil;
We'll dig this Paris to its catacombs
But certainly we'll find her, have her out,
And save her, if she will or will not —
child
Or no child, — if a child, then one to
save!

The long weeks passed on without conse-
quence. ³⁹⁰
As easy find a footstep on the sand
The morning after spring-tide, as the trace
Of Marian's feet between the incessant
surfs
Of this live flood. She may have moved
this way, —
But so the star-fish does, and crosses out
The dent of her small shoe. The foiled
police
Renounced me. 'Could they find a girl
and child,
No other signalment but girl and child?
No data shown but noticeable eyes ³⁹⁹
And hair in masses, low upon the brow,
As if it were an iron crown and pressed?
Friends heighten, and suppose they specify:

Why, girls with hair and eyes are every-
where

In Paris; they had turned me up in vain
No Marian Erle indeed, but certainly
Mathildes, Justines, Victoires, . . . or, if
I sought

The English, Betsis, Saras, by the score.
They might as well go out into the fields
To find a speckled bean, that's somehow
specked,

And somewhere in the pod.' — They left
me so. ⁴¹⁰

Shall I leave Marian? have I dreamed a
dream?

— I thank God I have found her! I must
say

'Thank God,' for finding her, although 't is
true

I find the world more sad and wicked for 't.
But she —

I'll write about her, presently.
My hand's a-tremble, as I had just caught
up

My heart to write with, in the place of it.
At least you'd take these letters to be
writ

At sea, in storm! — wait now . . .
A simple chance

Did all. I could not sleep last night, and,
tired ⁴²⁰

Of turning on my pillow and harder
thoughts,

Went out at early morning, when the air
Is delicate with some last starry touch,
To wander through the Market-place of
Flowers

(The prettiest haunt in Paris), and make
sure

At worst that there were roses in the
world.

So wandering, musing, with the artist's eye
That keeps the shade-side of the thing it
loves,

Half-absent, whole-observing, while the
crowd

Of young, vivacious, and black-braided
heads ⁴³⁰

Dipped, quick as finches in a blossomed
tree,

Among the nose-gays, cheapening this and
that

In such a cheerful twitter of rapid
speech, —

My heart leapt in me, startled by a voice

That slowly, faintly, with long breaths
that marked

The interval between the wish and word,
Inquired in stranger's French, 'Would
that be much,

That branch of flowering mountain-gorse?'
— 'So much?

Too much for me, then!' turning the face
round

So close upon me that I felt the sigh ⁴⁴⁰
It turned with.

'Marian, Marian!' — face to face —
'Marian! I find you. Shall I let you go?'

I held her two slight wrists with both my
hands;

'Ah Marian, Marian, can I let you go?'

— She fluttered from me like a cyclamen,
As white, which taken in a sudden wind
Beats on against the palisade. — 'Let pass,'
She said at last. 'I will not,' I replied;

'I lost my sister Marian many days,
And sought her ever in my walks and
prayers, ⁴⁵⁰

And, now I find her . . . do we throw
away

The bread we worked and prayed for, —
crumble it

And drop it, . . . to do even so by thee
Whom still I've hungered after more than
bread,

My sister Marian? — can I hurt thee,
dear?

Then why distrust me? Never tremble
so.

Come with me rather where we'll talk and
live,

And none shall vex us. I've a home for
you

And me and no one else.' . . .

She shook her head.

'A home for you and me and no one else

Ill suits one of us: I prefer to such, ⁴⁶¹
A roof of grass on which a flower might
spring,

Less costly to me than the cheapest here;
And yet I could not, at this hour, afford

A like home even. That you offer yours,
I thank you. You are good as heaven it-
self —

As good as one I knew before. . . . Fare-
well.'

I loosed her hands: — 'In *his* name, no fare-
well!'

(She stood as if I held her.) 'For his
sake,

For his sake, Romney's! by the good he meant,
 Ay, always! by the love he pressed for
 once, —

And by the grief, reproach, abandonment,
 He took in change' . . .

'He? — Romney! who grieved him?
 Who had the heart for 't? what reproach
 touched him?

Be merciful, — speak quickly.'

'Therefore come,'
 I answered with authority. — 'I think
 We dare to speak such things and name
 such names

In the open squares of Paris!'

Not a word
 She said, but in a gentle humbled way
 (As one who had forgot herself in grief)
 Turned round and followed closely where

I went,
 As if I led her by a narrow plank
 Across devouring waters, step by step;
 And so in silence we walked on a mile.

And then she stopped: her face was white
 as wax.

'We go much farther?'

'You are ill,' I asked,
 'Or tired?'

She looked the whiter for her smile.
 'There's one at home,' she said, 'has need
 of me

By this time, — and I must not let him
 wait.'

'Not even,' I asked, 'to hear of Romney
 Leigh?'

'Not even,' she said, 'to hear of Mister
 Leigh.'

'In that case,' I resumed, 'I go with you,
 And we can talk the same thing there as
 here.

None waits for me: I have my day to
 spend.'

Her lips moved in a spasm without a
 sound, —

But then she spoke. 'It shall be as you
 please;

And better so — 'tis shorter seen than
 told:

And though you will not find me worth
 your pains,

That, even, may be worth some pains to
 know

For one as good as you are.'

Then she led
 The way, and I, as by a narrow plank
 Across devouring waters, followed her,
 Stepping by her footsteps, breathing by her
 breath,

And holding her with eyes that would not
 slip;

And so, without a word, we walked a mile,
 And so, another mile, without a word.

Until the peopled streets being all dis-
 missed,

House-rows and groups all scattered like a
 flock,

The market-gardens thickened, and the
 long

White walls beyond, like spiders' outside
 threads,

Stretched, feeling blindly toward the coun-
 try-fields,

Through half-built habitations and half-dug
 Foundations, — intervals of trenchant
 chalk

That bit betwixt the grassy uneven turfs
 Where goats (vine-tendrils trailing from
 their mouths)

Stood perched on edges of the cellarage
 Which should be, staring as about to leap
 To find their coming Bacchus. All the
 place

Seemed less a cultivation than a waste.

Men work here, only, — scarce begin to
 live:

All's sad, the country struggling with the
 town,

Like an untamed hawk upon a strong man's
 fist,

That beats its wings and tries to get away,
 And cannot choose be satisfied so soon

To hop through court-yards with its right
 foot tied,

The vintage plains and pastoral hills in
 sight.

We stopped beside a house too high and
 slim

To stand there by itself, but waiting till
 Five others, two on this side, three on
 that,

Should grow up from the sullen second
 floor

They pause at now, to build it to a row.

The upper windows partly were unglazed
Meantime, — a meagre, unripe house: a
line

Of rigid poplars elbowed it behind,
And, just in front, beyond the lime and
bricks

That wronged the grass between it and the
road,

A great acacia with its slender trunk
And overpoise of multitudinous leaves
(In which a hundred fields might spill their
dew

And intense verdure, yet find room
enough) ⁵⁴⁰

Stood reconciling all the place with green.
I followed up the stair upon her step.

She hurried upward, shot across a face,
A woman's, on the landing, — 'How now,
now!

Is no one to have holidays but you?
You said an hour, and stayed three hours, I
think,

And Julie waiting for your betters here?
Why if he had waked he might have waked,
for me.'

— Just murmuring an excusing word, she
passed

And shut the rest out with the chamber-
door, ⁵⁵⁰

Myself shut in beside her.

'T was a room
Scarce larger than a grave, and near as
bare;

Two stools, a pallet-bed; I saw the room:
A mouse could find no sort of shelter in 't,
Much less a greater secret; curtainless, —
The window fixed you with its torturing
eye,

Defying you to take a step apart
If peradventure you would hide a thing.

I saw the whole room, I and Marian there
Alone.

Alone? She threw her bonnet off,
Then, sighing as 't were sighing the last
time, ⁵⁶¹

Approached the bed, and drew a shawl
away:

You could not peel a fruit you fear to
bruise

More calmly and more carefully than so, —
Nor would you find within, a rosier flushed
Pomegranate —

There he lay upon his back,
The yearling creature, warm and moist with
life

To the bottom of his dimples, — to the
ends

Of the lovely tumbled curls about his
face;

For since he had been covered over-
much ⁵⁷⁰

To keep him from the light-glare, both his
cheeks

Were hot and scarlet as the first live rose
The shepherd's heart-blood ebbed away
into

The faster for his love. And love was
here

As instant; in the pretty baby-mouth,
Shut close as if for dreaming that it
sucked,

The little naked feet, drawn up the way
Of nestled birdlings; everything so soft
And tender, — to the tiny holdfast hands,
Which, closing on a finger into sleep, ⁵⁸⁰
Had kept the mould of 't.

While we stood there dumb,
For oh, that it should take such innocence
To prove just guilt, I thought, and stood
there dumb, —

The light upon his eyelids pricked them
wide,

And, staring out at us with all their blue,
As half perplexed between the angelhood
He had been away to visit in his sleep,
And our most mortal presence, gradually
He saw his mother's face, accepting it
In change for heaven itself with such a
smile ⁵⁹⁰

As might have well been learnt there, —
never moved,

But smiled on, in a drowse of ecstasy,
So happy (half with her and half with
heaven)

He could not have the trouble to be stirred,
But smiled and lay there. Like a rose, I
said?

As red and still indeed as any rose,
That blows in all the silence of its leaves,
Content in blowing to fulfil its life.

She leaned above him (drinking him as
wine)

In that extremity of love, 't will pass ⁶⁰⁰
For agony or rapture, seeing that love
Includes the whole of nature, rounding it
To love . . . no more, — since more can
never be

Than just love. Self-forgot, cast out of
self,

And drowning in the transport of the sight,
 Her whole pale passionate face, mouth,
 forehead, eyes,
 One gaze, she stood: then, slowly as he smiled
 She smiled too, slowly, smiling unaware,
 And drawing from his countenance to hers
 A fainter red, as if she watched a flame ⁶¹⁰
 And stood in it aglow. 'How beautiful,'
 Said she.

I answered, trying to be cold.
 (Must sin have compensations, was my thought,
 As if it were a holy thing like grief?
 And is a woman to be fooled aside
 From putting vice down, with that woman's toy
 A baby?) — 'Ay! the child is well enough,'
 I answered. 'If his mother's palms are clean
 They need be glad of course in clasping such;
 But if not, I would rather lay my hand, ⁶²⁰
 Were I she, on God's brazen altar-bars
 Red-hot with burning sacrificial lambs,
 Than touch the sacred curls of such a child.'

She plunged her fingers in his clustering locks,
 As one who would not be afraid of fire;
 And then with indrawn steady utterance said,
 'My lamb, my lamb! although, through such as thou,
 The most unclean got courage and approach
 To God, once, — now they cannot, even with men,
 Find grace enough for pity and gentle words.' ⁶³⁰

'My Marian,' I made answer, grave and sad,
 'The priest who stole a lamb to offer him,
 Was still a thief. And if a woman steals
 (Through God's own barrier-hedges of true love,
 Which fence out license in securing love)
 A child like this, that smiles so in her face,
 She is no mother, but a kidnapper,
 And he's a dismal orphan, not a son,
 Whom all her kisses cannot feed so full
 He will not miss hereafter a pure home ⁶⁴⁰

To live in, a pure heart to lean against,
 A pure good mother's name and memory
 To hope by, when the world grows thick
 and bad
 And he feels out for virtue.'

'Oh,' she smiled
 With bitter patience, 'the child takes his chance;
 Not much worse off in being fatherless
 Than I was, fathered. He will say, belike,
 His mother was the saddest creature born;
 He'll say his mother lived so contrary
 To joy, that even the kindest, seeing her, ⁶⁵⁰
 Grew sometimes almost cruel: he'll not say
 She flew contrarious in the face of God
 With bat-wings of her vices. Stole my child, —
 My flower of earth, my only flower on earth,
 My sweet, my beauty!' . . . Up she snatched the child,
 And, breaking on him in a storm of tears,
 Drew out her long sobs from their shivering roots,
 Until he took it for a game, and stretched
 His feet and flapped his eager arms like wings
 And crowed and gurgled through his infant laugh: ⁶⁶⁰
 'Mine, mine,' she said. 'I have as sure a right
 As any glad proud mother in the world,
 Who sets her darling down to cut his teeth
 Upon her church-ring. If she talks of law,
 I talk of law! I claim my mother-dues
 By law, — the law which now is paramount, —
 The common law, by which the poor and weak
 Are trodden underfoot by vicious men,
 And loathed for ever after by the good.
 Let pass! I did not filch, — I found the child.' ⁶⁷⁰
 'You found him, Marian?'
 'Ay, I found him where
 I found my curse, — in the gutter, with my shame!
 What have you, any of you, to say to that,
 Who all are happy, and sit safe and high,
 And never spoke before to arraign my right
 To grief itself? What, what, . . . being beaten down

By hoofs of maddened oxen into a ditch,
Half-dead, whole mangled, when a girl at
last

Breathes, sees . . . and finds there, bedded
in her flesh

Because of the extremity of the shock, 680
Some coin of price ! . . . and when a good
man comes

(That's God ! the best men are not quite
as good)

And says " I dropped the coin there: take
it you,

And keep it, — it shall pay you for the
loss," —

You all put up your finger — " See the
thief !

Observe what precious thing she has come
to filch.

How bad those girls are ! " Oh, my flower,
my pet,

I dare forget I have you in my arms
And fly off to be angry with the world,
And fright you, hurt you with my tempers,
till 690

You double up your lip ? Why, that in-
deed

Is bad: a naughty mother ! "

' You mistake, '

I interrupted; ' if I loved you not,
I should not, Marian, certainly be here. '

' Alas, ' she said, ' you are so very good;
And yet I wish indeed you had never come
To make me sob until I vex the child.

It is not wholesome for these pleasure-plats
To be so early watered by our brine.

And then, who knows ? he may not like
me now 700

As well, perhaps, as ere he saw me fret, —
One's ugly fretting ! he has eyes the same

As angels, but he cannot see as deep,
And so I've kept for ever in his sight

A sort of smile to please him, — as you
place

A green thing from the garden in a cup,
To make believe it grows there. Look,
my sweet,

My cowslip-ball ! we've done with that
cross face,

And here's the face come back you used
to like.

Ah, ah ! he laughs ! he likes me. Ah,
Miss Leigh, 710

You're great and pure; but were you
purer still, —

As if you had walked, we'll say, no other-
where

Than up and down the New Jerusalem,
And held your trailing lutestring up your-
self

From brushing the twelve stones, for fear
of some

Small speck as little as a needle-prick,
White stitched on white, — the child
would keep to me,

Would choose his poor lost Marian, like me
best,

And, though you stretched your arms, cry
back and cling,

As we do when God says it's time to die
And bids us go up higher. Leave us,

then; 721

We two are happy. Does he push me off ?
He's satisfied with me, as I with him. '

' So soft to one, so hard to others ! Nay, '
I cried, more angry that she melted me,

' We make henceforth a cushion of our
faults

To sit and practise easy virtues on ?
I thought a child was given to sanctify

A woman, — set her in the sight of all
The clear-eyed heavens, a chosen minister

To do their business and lead spirits up 731
The difficult blue heights. A woman lives,

Not bettered, quickened toward the truth
and good

Through being a mother ? . . . then she's
none ! although

She damps her baby's cheeks by kissing
them,

As we kill roses. '

' Kill ! O Christ, ' she said,
And turned her wild sad face from side to
side

With most despairing wonder in it,
' What,

What have you in your souls against me
then,

All of you ? am I wicked, do you think ?
God knows me, trusts me with the child;

but you, 741

You think me really wicked ? '

' Complaisant, '
I answered softly, ' to a wrong you've
done,

Because of certain profits, — which is
wrong

Beyond the first wrong, Marian. When
you left

The pure place and the noble heart, to
take

The hand of a seducer' . . .

'Whom? whose hand?

I took the hand of' . . .

Springing up erect,
And lifting up the child at full arm's
length,

As if to bear him like an oriflamme 750

Unconquerable to armies of reproach, —

'By *him*,' she said, 'my child's head and
its curls,

By these blue eyes no woman born could
dare

A perjury on, I make my mother's oath,
That if I left that Heart, to lighten it,
The blood of mine was still, except for
grief!

No cleaner maid than I was took a step
To a sadder end, — no matron-mother now
Looks backward to her early maidenhood
Through chaster pulses. I speak steadily;
And if I lie so, . . . if, being fouled in
will 761

And paltered with in soul by devil's lust,
I dared to bid this angel take my part, . . .
Would God sit quiet, let us think, in hea-
ven,

Nor strike me dumb with thunder? Yet
I speak:

He clears me therefore. What, "seduced"
's your word!

Do wolves seduce a wandering fawn in
France?

Do eagles, who have pinched a lamb with
claws,

Seduce it into carrion? So with me.

I was not ever, as you say, seduced, 770
But simply, murdered.'

There she paused, and sighed
With such a sigh as drops from agony
To exhaustion, — sighing while she let the
babe

Slide down upon her bosom from her
arms,

And all her face's light fell after him
Like a torch quenched in falling. Down
she sank,

And sat upon the bedside with the child.

But I, convicted, broken utterly,
With woman's passion clung about her
waist

And kissed her hair and eyes, — 'I have
been wrong, 780

Sweet Marian' . . . (weeping in a tender
rage) . . .

'Sweet holy Marian! And now, Marian,
now,

I'll use your oath although my lips are
hard,

And by the child, my Marian, by the child,
I swear his mother shall be innocent

Before my conscience, as in the open Book
Of Him who reads for judgment. Inno-
cent,

My sister! let the night be ne'er so dark
The moon is surely somewhere in the sky;

So surely is your whiteness to be found 790
Through all dark facts. But pardon, par-
don me,

And smile a little, Marian, — for the child,
If not for me, my sister.'

The poor lip

Just motioned for the smile and let it go:

And then, with scarce a stirring of the
mouth,

As if a statue spoke that could not breathe,
But spoke on calm between its marble
lips, —

'I'm glad, I'm very glad you clear me so.
I should be sorry that you set me down

With harlots, or with even a better name
Which misbecomes his mother. For the
rest, 801

I am not on a level with your love,
Nor ever was, you know, — but now am
worse,

Because that world of yours has dealt with
me

As when the hard sea bites and chews a
stone

And changes the first form of it. I've
marked

A shore of pebbles bitten to one shape
From all the various life of madrepores;

And so, that little stone, called Marian
Erle,

Picked up and dropped by you and another
friend, 810

Was ground and tortured by the incessant
sea

And bruised from what she was, — changed!
death's a change,

And she, I said, was murdered; Marian's
dead.

What can you do with people when they
are dead

But, if you are pious, sing a hymn and go;
Or, if you are tender, heave a sigh and go;

But go by all means, — and permit the
 grass
 To keep its green feud up 'twixt them and
 you ?
 Then leave me, — let me rest. I'm dead,
 I say,
 And if, to save the child from death as
 well, 820
 The mother in me has survived the rest,
 Why, that's God's miracle you must not
 tax,
 I'm not less dead for that: I'm nothing
 more
 But just a mother. Only for the child
 I'm warm, and cold, and hungry, and
 afraid,
 And smell the flowers a little and see the
 sun,
 And speak still, and am silent, — just for
 him !
 I pray you therefore to mistake me not
 And treat me haply as I were alive;
 For though you ran a pin into my soul, 830
 I think it would not hurt nor trouble me.
 Here's proof, dear lady, — in the market-
 place
 But now, you promised me to say a word
 About . . . a friend, who once, long years
 ago,
 Took God's place toward me, when He
 leans and loves
 And does not thunder, . . . whom at last
 I left,
 As all of us leave God. You thought per-
 haps
 I seemed to care for hearing of that friend ?
 Now, judge me ! we have sat here half an
 hour
 And talked together of the child and me,
 And I not asked as much as 'What's the
 thing' 841
 "You had to tell me of the friend . . . the
 friend ?"
 He's sad, I think you said, — he's sick per-
 haps ?
 'T is nought to Marian if he's sad or sick.
 Another would have crawled beside your
 foot
 And prayed your words out. Why, a beast,
 a dog,
 A starved cat, if he had fed it once with
 milk,
 Would show less hardness. But I'm dead,
 you see,
 And that explains it.'

Poor, poor thing, she spoke
 And shook her head, as white and calm as
 frost 850
 On days too cold for raining any more,
 But still with such a face, so much alive,
 I could not choose but take it on my arm
 And stroke the placid patience of its
 cheeks, —
 Then told my story out, of Romney Leigh,
 How, having lost her, sought her, missed
 her still,
 He, broken-hearted for himself and her,
 Had drawn the curtains of the world awhile
 As if he had done with morning. There I
 stopped,
 For when she gasped, and pressed me with
 her eyes, 860
 'And now . . . how is it with him ? tell
 me now,'
 I felt the shame of compensated grief,
 And chose my words with scruple — slowly
 stepped
 Upon the slippery stones set here and there
 Across the sliding water. 'Certainly,
 As evening empties morning into night,
 Another morning takes the evening up
 With healthful, providential interchange;
 And, though he thought still of her —'
 'Yes, she knew,
 She understood: she had supposed in-
 deed 870
 That, as one stops a hole upon a flute,
 At which a new note comes and shapes the
 tune,
 Excluding her would bring a worthier
 in,
 And, long ere this, that Lady Waldemar
 He loved so' . . .
 'Loved,' I started, — 'loved her so !
 Now tell me' . . .
 'I will tell you,' she replied:
 'But since we're taking oaths, you'll
 promise first
 That he in England, he, shall never learn
 In what a dreadful trap his creature here,
 Round whose unworthy neck he had meant
 to tie 880
 The honorable ribbon of his name,
 Fell unaware and came to butchery:
 Because, — I know him, — as he takes to
 heart
 The grief of every stranger, he's not like
 To banish mine as far as I should choose
 In wishing him most happy. Now he
 leaves

To think of me, perverse, who went my way,
Unkind, and left him,—but if once he knew . . .

Ah, then, the sharp nail of my cruel wrong
Would fasten me for ever in his sight, ⁸⁹⁰
Like some poor curious bird, through each spread wing
Nailed high up over a fierce hunter's fire,
To spoil the dinner of all tenderer folk
Come in by chance. Nay, since your Marian's dead,
You shall not hang her up, but dig a hole
And bury her in silence! ring no bells.'

I answered gayly, though my whole voice wept,
'We'll ring the joy-bells, not the funeral-bells,
Because we have her back, dead or alive.'

She never answered that, but shook her head;
Then low and calm, as one who, safe in heaven, ⁹⁰⁰
Shall tell a story of his lower life,
Unmoved by shame or anger,—so she spoke.

She told me she had loved upon her knees,
As others pray, more perfectly absorbed
In the act and inspiration. She felt his
For just his uses, not her own at all,—
His stool, to sit on or put up his foot,
His cup, to fill with wine or vinegar,
Whichever drink might please him at the chance, ⁹¹⁰
For that should please her always: let him write

His name upon her . . . it seemed natural;
It was most precious, standing on his shelf,
To wait until he chose to lift his hand.
Well, well,—I saw her then, and must have seen
How bright her life went floating on her love,
Like wicks the housewives send afloat on oil
Which feeds them to a flame that lasts the night.

To do good seemed so much his business,
That, having done it, she was fain to think,
Must fill up his capacity for joy. ⁹²¹
At first she never mooted with herself
If he was happy, since he made her so,

Or if he loved her, being so much beloved.
Who thinks of asking if the sun is light,
Observing that it lightens? who's so bold
To question God of his felicity?

Still less. And thus she took for granted first

What first of all she should have put to proof,

And sinned against him so, but only so.
'What could you hope,' she said, 'of such as she?'

You take a kid you like, and turn it out ⁹³¹
In some fair garden: though the creature's fond

And gentle, it will leap upon the beds
And break your tulips, bite your tender trees;

The wonder would be if such innocence
Spoiled less: a garden is no place for kids.'

And, by degrees, when he who had chosen her
Brought in his courteous and benignant friends

To spend their goodness on her, which she took ⁹⁴⁰

So very gladly, as a part of his,—
By slow degrees it broke on her slow sense

That she too in that Eden of delight
Was out of place, and, like the silly kid,
Still did most mischief where she meant most love.

A thought enough to make a woman mad
(No beast in this but she may well go mad),

That saying, 'I am thine to love and use'
May blow the plague in her protesting breath

To the very man for whom she claims to die,— ⁹⁵⁰

That, clinging round his neck, she pulls him down

And drowns him,—and that, lavishing her soul,

She hales perdition on him. 'So, being mad,'

Said Marian . . .

'Ah—who stirred such thoughts, you ask?

Whose fault it was, that she should have such thoughts?

None's fault, none's fault. The light comes, and we see:

But if it were not truly for our eyes,

There would be nothing seen, for all the
light.

And so with Marian: if she saw at last,
The sense was in her,—Lady Walde-
mar

960

Had spoken all in vain else.'

'O my heart,
O prophet in my heart,' I cried aloud,
'Then Lady Waldemar spoke!'

'Did she speak,'

Mused Marian softly, 'or did she only
sign?

Or did she put a word into her face
And look, and so impress you with the
word?

Or leave it in the foldings of her gown,
Like rosemary smells a' movement will
shake out

When no one's conscious? who shall say,
or guess?

One thing alone was certain—from the
day

970

The gracious lady paid a visit first,
She, Marian, saw things different,—felt
distrust

Of all that sheltering roof of circumstance
Her hopes were building into with clay
nests:

Her heart was restless, pacing up and
down

And fluttering, like dumb creatures before
storms,

Not knowing wherefore she was ill at
ease.'

'And still the lady came,' said Marian
Erle,

'Much oftener than *he* knew it Mister
Leigh.

979

She bade me never tell him she had come,
She liked to love me better than he knew,
So very kind was Lady Waldemar:

And every time she brought with her more
light,

And every light made sorrow clearer . . .
Well,

Ah, well! we cannot give her blame for
that;

'T would be the same thing if an angel
came,

Whose right should prove our wrong. And
every time

The lady came, she looked more beautiful
And spoke more like a flute among green
trees,

Until at last, as one, whose heart being
sad

990

On hearing lovely music, suddenly
Dissolves in weeping, I brake out in tears
Before her, asked her counsel,—“Had I
erred

In being too happy? would she set me
straight?

For she, being wise and good and born
above

The flats I had never climbed from, could
perceive

If such as I might grow upon the hills;
And whether such poor herb sufficed to
grow,

For Romney Leigh to break his fast
upon't,—

Or would he pine on such, or haply
starve?”

1000

She wrapped me in her generous arms at
once,

And let me dream a moment how it feels
To have a real mother, like some girls:

But when I looked, her face was younger
. . . ay,

Youth's too bright not to be a little hard,
And beauty keeps itself still uppermost,
That's true!—Though Lady Waldemar
was kind

She hurt me, hurt, as if the morning-sun
Should smite us on the eyelids when we
sleep,

And wake us up with headache. Ay, and
soon

1010

Was light enough to make my heart ache
too:

She told me truths I asked for,—'t was my
fault,—

“That Romney could not love me, if he
would,

As men call loving: there are bloods that
flow

Together like some rivers and not mix,
Through contraries of nature. He in-
deed

Was set to wed me, to espouse my class,
Act out a rash opinion,—and, once wed,
So just a man and gentle could not
choose

But make my life as smooth as marriage-
ring,

1020

Bespeak me mildly, keep me a cheerful
house,

With servants, brooches, all the flowers I
liked,

And pretty dresses, silk the whole year
 round " . . .
 At which I stopped her, — "This for me.
 And now
 For *him*." — She hesitated, — truth grew
 hard;
 She owned "'T was plain a man like Romney
 Leigh
 Required a wife more level to himself.
 If day by day he had to bend his height
 To pick up sympathies, opinions, thoughts,
 And interchange the common talk of
 life ¹⁰³⁰
 Which helps a man to live as well as
 talk,
 His days were heavily taxed. Who buys
 a staff
 To fit the hand, that reaches but the knee ?
 He 'd feel it bitter to be forced to miss
 The perfect joy of married suited pairs,
 Who, bursting through the separating
 hedge
 Of personal dues with that sweet eglan-
 tine
 Of equal love, keep saying, 'So *we* think,
 It strikes *us*, — that's *our* fancy'" — When
 I asked
 If earnest will, devoted love, employed ¹⁰⁴⁰
 In youth like mine, would fail to raise me
 up
 As two strong arms will always raise a
 child
 To a fruit hung overhead, she sighed and
 sighed . . .
 "That could not be," she feared. "You
 take a pink,
 You dig about its roots and water it
 And so improve it to a garden-pink,
 But will not change it to a heliotrope,
 The kind remains. And then, the harder
 truth —
 This Romney Leigh, so rash to leap a
 pale,
 So bold for conscience, quick for martyr-
 dom, ¹⁰⁵⁰
 Would suffer steadily and never flinch,
 But suffer surely and keenly, when his
 class
 Turned shoulder on him for a shameful
 match,
 And set him up as nine-pin in their talk
 To bowl him down with jestings." — There,
 she paused.
 And when I used the pause in doubting
 that

We wronged him after all in what we
 feared —
 "Suppose such things could never touch
 him more
 In his high conscience (if the things should
 be)
 Than, when the queen sits in an upper
 room ¹⁰⁶⁰
 The horses in the street can spatter her !" —
 A moment, hope came, — but the lady
 closed
 That door and nicked the lock and shut it
 out,
 Observing wisely that "the tender heart
 Which made him over-soft to a lower
 class,
 Would scarcely fail to make him sensitive
 To a higher, — how they thought and what
 they felt."

'Alas, alas !' said Marian, rocking slow
 The pretty baby who was near asleep,
 The eyelids creeping over the blue balls, —
 'She made it clear, too clear — I saw the
 whole !' ¹⁰⁷¹
 And yet who knows if I had seen my
 way
 Straight out of it by looking, though 't was
 clear,
 Unless the generous lady, 'ware of this,
 Had set her own house all afire for me
 To light me forwards ? Leaning on my
 face
 Her heavy agate eyes which crushed my
 will,
 She told me tenderly (as when men come
 To a bedside to tell people they must die),
 "She knew of knowledge, — ay, of know-
 ledge knew, ¹⁰⁸⁰
 That Romney Leigh had loved *her* for-
 merly.
 And *she* loved *him*, she might say, now the
 chance
 Was past, — but that, of course, he never
 guessed, —
 For something came between them, some-
 thing thin
 As a cobweb, catching every fly of doubt
 To hold it buzzing at the window-pane
 And help to dim the daylight. Ah, man's
 pride
 Or woman's — which is greatest ? most
 averse
 To brushing cobwebs ? Well, but she and
 he

Remained fast friends; it seemed not more
than so, ¹⁰⁹⁰
Because he had bound his hands and could
not stir.

An honorable man, if somewhat rash;
And she, not even for Romney, would she
spill

A blot . . . as little even as a tear . . .
Upon his marriage-contract, — not to gain
A better joy for two than came by that:
For, though I stood between her heart and
heaven,

She loved me wholly.”’

Did I laugh or curse?
I think I sat there silent, hearing all,
Ay, hearing double, — Marian’s tale, at
once, ¹¹⁰⁰

And Romney’s marriage vow, ‘*I’ll keep to
THEE,*’

Which means that woman-serpent. Is it
time

For church now?

‘Lady Waldemar spoke more,’
Continued Marian, ‘but, as when a soul
Will pass out through the sweetness of a
song

Beyond it, voyaging the uphill road,
Even so mine wandered from the things I
heard

To those I suffered. It was afterward
I shaped the resolution to the act.
For many hours we talked. What need to
talk? ¹¹¹⁰

The fate was clear and close; it touched
my eyes;

But still the generous lady tried to keep
The case afloat, and would not let it go,
And argued, struggled upon Marian’s side,
Which was not Romney’s! though she
little knew

What ugly monster would take up the
end, —

What griping death within the drowning
death

Was ready to complete my sum of death.’

I thought, — Perhaps he’s sliding now the
ring ¹¹¹⁹

Upon that woman’s finger . . .

She went on:
‘The lady, failing to prevail her way,
Uppgathered my torn wishes from the
ground

And pieced them with her strong benevo-
lence;

And, as I thought I could breathe freer
air

Away from England, going without pause,
Without farewell, just breaking with a
jerk

The blossomed offshoot from my thorny
life, —

She promised kindly to provide the means,
With instant passage to the colonies

And full protection, — “would commit me
straight ¹¹³⁰

To one who once had been her waiting-
maid

And had the customs of the world, intent
On changing England for Australia
Herself, to carry out her fortune so.”

For which I thanked the Lady Waldemar,
As men upon their death-beds thank last
friends

Who lay the pillow straight: it is not much,
And yet ’t is all of which they are capa-
ble,

This lying smoothly in a bed to die.

And so, ’t was fixed; — and so, from day to
day, ¹¹⁴⁰

The woman named came in to visit me.’

Just then the girl stopped speaking, — sat
erect,

And stared at me as if I had been a ghost
(Perhaps I looked as white as any ghost),
With large-eyed horror. ‘Does God
make,’ she said,

‘All sorts of creatures really, do you
think?

Or is it that the Devil slavers them

So excellently, that we come to doubt

Who’s stronger, He who makes, or he who
mars?

I never liked the woman’s face or voice ¹¹⁵⁰

Or ways: it made me blush to look at
her;

It made me tremble if she touched my
hand;

And when she spoke a fondling word I
shrank

As if one hated me who had power to hurt;
And, every time she came, my veins ran
cold

As somebody were walking on my grave.
At last I spoke to Lady Waldemar:

“Could such an one be good to trust?” I
asked.

Whereat the lady stroked my cheek and
laughed

Her silver laugh (one must be born to
 laugh, 1160
 To put such music in it), — “Foolish girl,
 Your scattered wits are gathering wool
 beyond
 The sheep-walk reaches ! — leave the thing
 to me.”
 And therefore, half in trust, and half in
 scorn
 That I had heart still for another fear
 In such a safe despair, I left the thing.

‘The rest is short. I was obedient:
 I wrote my letter which delivered *him*
 From Marian to his own prosperities,
 And followed that bad guide. The lady ?
 — hush, 1170

I never blame the lady. Ladies who
 Sit high, however willing to look down,
 Will scarce see lower than their dainty
 feet;

And Lady Waldemar saw less than I
 With what a Devil’s daughter I went forth
 Along the swine’s road, down the preci-
 pice,

In such a curl of hell-foam caught and
 choked,

No shriek of soul in anguish could pierce
 through

To fetch some help. They say there’s
 help in heaven

For all such cries. But if one cries from
 hell . . . 1180

What then ? — the heavens are deaf upon
 that side.

‘A woman . . . hear me, let me make it
 plain, . . .

A woman . . . not a monster . . . both
 her breasts

Made right to suckle babes . . . she took
 me off

A woman also, young and ignorant
 And heavy with my grief, my two poor
 eyes

Near washed away with weeping, till the
 trees,

The blessed unaccustomed trees and fields
 Ran either side the train like stranger
 dogs

Unworthy of any notice, — took me off 1190
 So dull, so blind, so only half-alive,

Not seeing by what road, nor by what
 ship,

Nor toward what place, nor to what end of
 all.

Men carry a corpse thus, — past the door-
 way, past

The garden-gate, the children’s playground,
 up

The green lane, — then they leave it in the
 pit,

To sleep and find corruption, cheek to
 cheek

With him who stinks since Friday.

‘But suppose;
 To go down with one’s soul into the grave,
 To go down half-dead, half-alive, I say, 1200
 And wake up with corruption, . . . cheek
 to cheek

With him who stinks since Friday ! There
 it is

And that’s the horror of ’t, Miss Leigh.

‘You feel ?
 You understand ? — no, do not look at me,
 But understand. The blank, blind, weary
 way,

Which led, where’er it led, away at least;
 The shifted ship, to Sydney or to France,

Still bound, wherever else, to another
 land;

The swooning sickness on the dismal sea,
 The foreign shore, the shameful house, the
 night, 1210

The feeble blood, the heavy-headed
 grief, . . .

No need to bring their damnable drugged
 cup,

And yet they brought it. Hell’s so prodig-
 al

Of devil’s gifts, hunts liberally in packs,
 Will kill no poor small creature of the
 wilds

But fifty red wide throats must smoke at
 it,

As HIS at me . . . when waking up at
 last . . .

I told you that I waked up in the grave.

‘Enough so ! — it is plain enough so.
 True,

We wretches cannot tell out all our wrong
 Without offence to decent happy folk. 1221

I know that we must scrupulously hint
 With half-words, delicate reserves, the
 thing

Which no one scrupled we should feel in
 full.

Let pass the rest, then; only leave my
oath
Upon this sleeping child, — man's violence,
Not man's seduction, made me what I am,
As lost as . . . I told *him* I should be
lost.
When mothers fail us, can we help our-
selves ?
That's fatal ! — And you call it being lost,
That down came next day's noon and
caught me there, ¹²³¹
Half-gibbering and half-raving on the
floor,
And wondering what had happened up in
heaven,
That suns should dare to shine when God
Himself
Was certainly abolished.

‘I was mad,
How many weeks, I know not, — many
weeks.
I think they let me go when I was mad,
They feared my eyes and loosed me, as
boys might
A mad dog which they had tortured. Up
and down
I went, by road and village, over tracts ¹²⁴⁰
Of open foreign country, large and strange,
Crossed everywhere by long thin poplar-
lines
Like fingers of some ghastly skeleton
Hand
Through sunlight and through moonlight
evermore
Pushed out from hell itself to pluck me
back,
And resolute to get me, slow and sure;
While every roadside Christ upon his
cross
Hung reddening through his gory wounds
at me,
And shook his nails in anger, and came
down
To follow a mile after, wading up ¹²⁵⁰
The low vines and green wheat, crying
“Take the girl !
She's none of mine from henceforth.”
Then I knew
(But this is somewhat dimmer than the
rest)
The charitable peasants gave me bread
And leave to sleep in straw: and twice they
tied,
At parting, Mary's image round my
neck —

How heavy it seemed ! as heavy as a
stone;
A woman has been strangled with less
weight:
I threw it in a ditch to keep it clean
And ease my breath a little, when none
looked; ¹²⁶⁰
I did not need such safeguards: — brutal
men
Stopped short, Miss Leigh, in insult, when
they had seen
My face, — I must have had an awful
look.
And so I lived: the weeks passed on, — I
lived.
’T was living my old tramp-life o'er again,
But, this time, in a dream, and hunted
round
By some prodigious Dream-fear at my
back,
Which ended yet: my brain cleared pre-
sently;
And there I sat, one evening, by the road,
I, Marian Erle, myself, alone, undone, ¹²⁷⁰
Facing a sunset low upon the flats
As if it were the finish of all time,
The great red stone upon my sepulchre,
Which angels were too weak to roll away.

SEVENTH BOOK

‘The woman's motive ? shall we daub our-
selves
With finding roots for nettles ? ’t is soft
clay
And easily explored. She had the means,
The moneys, by the lady's liberal grace,
In trust for that Australian scheme and
me,
Which so, that she might clutch with both
her hands
And chink to her naughty uses undisturbed,
She served me (after all it was not
strange,
’T was only what my mother would have
done)
A motherly, right damnable good turn. ¹⁰
‘Well, after. There are nettles every-
where,
But smooth green grasses are more com-
mon still;
The blue of heaven is larger than the
cloud;

A miller's wife at Clichy took me in
And spent her pity on me, — made me
calm

And merely very reasonably sad.
She found me a servant's place in Paris,
where

I tried to take the cast-off life again,
And stood as quiet as a beaten ass
Who, having fallen through overloads,
stands up ²⁰

To let them charge him with another pack.

• A few months, so. My mistress, young
and light,

Was easy with me, less for kindness than
Because she led, herself, an easy time
Betwixt her lover and her looking-glass,
Scarce knowing which way she was praised
the most.

She felt so pretty and so pleased all day
She could not take the trouble to be cross,
But sometimes, as I stooped to tie her
shoe,

Would tap me softly with her slender
foot ³⁰

Still restless with the last night's dancing
in 't,

And say "Fie, pale-face ! are you English
girls

All grave and silent ? mass-book still, and
Lent ?

And first - communion pallor on your
cheeks,

Worn past the time for 't ? little fool, be
gay !"

At which she vanished like a fairy,
through

A gap of silver laughter.

‘ Came an hour
When all went otherwise. She did not
speak,

But clenched her brows, and clipped me
with her eyes

As if a viper with a pair of tongs, ⁴⁰
Too far for any touch, yet near enough

To view the writhing creature, — then at
last,

"Stand still there, in the holy Virgin's
name,

Thou Marian; thou 'rt no reputable girl,
Although sufficient dull for twenty saints !

I think thou mock'st me and my house,"
she said;

"Confess thou 'lt be a mother in a month,
Thou mask of saintship."

‘ Could I answer her ?

The light broke in so. It meant *that* then,
that ?

I had not thought of that, in all my
thoughts, ⁵⁰

Through all the cold, dumb aching of my
brow,

Through all the heaving of impatient life
Which threw me on death at intervals, —
through all

The upbreak of the fountains of my heart
The rains had swelled too large: it could
mean *that* ?

Did God make mothers out of victims,
then,

And set such pure amens to hideous deeds ?
Why not ? He overblows an ugly grave

With violets which blossom in the spring.
And I could be a mother in a month ? ⁶⁰

I hope it was not wicked to be glad.

I lifted up my voice and wept, and
laughed,

To heaven, not her, until it tore my throat.
"Confess, confess !" — what was there to
confess,

Except man's cruelty, except my wrong ?

Except this anguish, or this ecstasy ?

This shame or glory ? The light woman
there

Was small to take it in: an acorn-cup

Would take the sea in sooner.

“ Good,” she cried;
“ Unmarried and a mother, and she
laughs !” ⁷⁰

These unchaste girls are always impudent.
Get out, intriguer ! leave my house and
trot.

I wonder you should look me in the face,
With such a filthy secret."

‘ Then I rolled
My scanty bundle up and went my way,
Washed white with weeping, shuddering
head and foot

With blind hysteric passion, staggering
forth

Beyond those doors. 'T was natural of
course

She should not ask me where I meant to
sleep;

I might sleep well beneath the heavy
Seine, ⁸⁰

Like others of my sort; the bed was laid
For us. But any woman, womanly,
Had thought of him who should be in a
month,

The sinless babe that should be in a month,
And if by chance he might be warmer
housed
Than underneath such dreary dripping
eaves.'

I broke on Marian there. 'Yet she herself,

A wife, I think, had scandals of her own, —
A lover not her husband.'

'Ay,' she said,
'But gold and meal are measured otherwise;
I learnt so much at school,' said Marian

Erle.

'O crooked world,' I cried, 'ridiculous
If not so lamentable! 'Tis the way
With these light women of a thrifty vice,
My Marian, — always hard upon the rent
In any sister's virtue! while they keep
Their own so darned and patched with
perfidy,

That, though a rag itself, it looks as well
Across a street, in balcony or coach,
As any perfect stuff might. For my
part,

I'd rather take the wind-side of the stews
Than touch such women with my finger-
end!

They top the poor street-walker by their
lie

And look the better for being so much
worse:

The devil's most devilish when respect-
able.

But you, dear, and your story.'

'All the rest
Is here,' she said, and signed upon the
child.

'I found a mistress-sempstress who was
kind

And let me sew in peace among her girls.
And what was better than to draw the
threads

All day and half the night for him and
him?

And so I lived for him, and so he lives,
And so I know, by this time, God lives
too.'

She smiled beyond the sun and ended so,
And all my soul rose up to take her part
Against the world's successes, virtues,
fames.

'Come with me, sweetest sister,' I re-
turned,

'And sit within my house and do me good
From henceforth, thou and thine! ye are
my own

From henceforth. I am lonely in the
world,

And thou art lonely, and the child is half
An orphan. Come, — and henceforth thou
and I

Being still together will not miss a friend,
Nor be a father, since two mothers shall
Make that up to him. I am journeying
south,

And in my Tuscan home I'll find a niche
And set thee there, my saint, the child and
thee,

And burn the lights of love before thy
face,

And ever at thy sweet look cross myself
From mixing with the world's prosperi-
ties;

That so, in gravity and holy calm,
We two may live on toward the truer
life.'

She looked me in the face and answered
not,

Nor signed she was unworthy, nor gave
thanks,

But took the sleeping child and held it
out

To meet my kiss, as if requiting me
And trusting me at once. And thus, at
once,

I carried him and her to where I live;
She's there now, in the little room, asleep,
I hear the soft child-breathing through the
door,

And all three of us, at to-morrow's break,
Pass onward, homeward, to our Italy.

Oh, Romney Leigh, I have your debts to
pay,

And I'll be just and pay them.

But yourself!

To pay your debts is scarcely difficult,
To buy your life is nearly impossible,
Being sold away to Lamia. My head aches,
I cannot see my road along this dark;
Nor can I creep and grope, as fits the dark,
For these foot-catching robes of woman-
hood:

A man might walk a little . . . but I! —
He loves

The Lamia-woman, — and I, write to him

What stops his marriage, and destroys his peace, —

Or what perhaps shall simply trouble him,
Until she only need to touch his sleeve
With just a finger's tremulous white flame,
Saying 'Ah, — Aurora Leigh! a pretty tale,

A very pretty poet! I can guess
The motive' — then, to catch his eye in hers

And vow she does not wonder, — and they two ¹⁶⁰

To break in laughter as the sea along
A melancholy coast, and float up higher,
In such a laugh, their fatal weeds of love!
Ay, fatal, ay. And who shall answer me
Fate has not hurried tides, — and if to-night

My letter would not be a night too late,
An arrow shot into a man that's dead,
To prove a vain intention? Would I show

The new wife vile, to make the husband mad?

No, Lamia! shut the shutters, bar the doors ¹⁷⁰

From every glimmer on thy serpent-skin!
I will not let thy hideous secret out
To agonize the man I love — I mean
The friend I love . . . as friends love.

It is strange,
To-day while Marian told her story like
To absorb most listeners, how I listened chief

To a voice not hers, nor yet that enemy's,
Nor God's in wrath, . . . but one that mixed with mine

Long years ago among the garden trees,
And said to *me*, to *me* too, 'Be my wife, ¹⁸⁰
Aurora.' It is strange with what a swell
Of yearning passion, as a snow of ghosts
Might beat against the impervious door of heaven,

I thought, 'Now, if I had been a woman, such

As God made women, to save men by love, —

By just my love I might have saved this man,

And made a nobler poem for the world
Than all I have failed in.' But I failed besides

In this; and now he's lost! through me alone!

And, by my only fault, his empty house ¹⁹⁰

Sucks in, at this same hour, a wind from hell

To keep his hearth cold, make his case-ments creak

For ever to the tune of plague and sin —
O Romney, O my Romney, O my friend,
My cousin and friend! my helper, when I would,

My love, that might be! mine!

Why, how one weeps
When one's too weary! Were a witness by,

He'd say some folly . . . that I loved the man,

Who knows? . . . and make me laugh again for scorn. ¹⁹⁹

At strongest, women are as weak in flesh,
As men, at weakest, vilest, are in soul:
So, hard for women to keep pace with men!
As well give up at once, sit down at once,
And weep as I do. Tears, tears! *why* we weep?

'T is worth inquiry? — that we've shamed a life,

Or lost a love, or missed a world, perhaps?

By no means. Simply, that we've walked too far,

Or talked too much, or felt the wind i' the east, —

And so we weep, as if both body and soul
Broke up in water — this way.

Poor mixed rags
Forsooth we're made of, like those other dolls ²¹¹

That lean with pretty faces into fairs.

It seems as if I had a man in me,
Despising such a woman.

Yet indeed,
To see a wrong or suffering moves us all
To undo it though we should undo ourselves,

Ay, all the more, that we undo ourselves;
That's womanly, past doubt, and not ill-moved.

A natural movement therefore, on my part,

To fill the chair up of my cousin's wife, ²²⁰
And save him from a devil's company!

We're all so, — made so — 't is our woman's trade

To suffer torment for another's ease.

The world's male chivalry has perished out,

But women are knights-errant to the last;

And if Cervantes had been Shakespeare
too,
He had made his Don a Donna.

So it clears,
And so we rain our skies blue.

Put away
This weakness. If, as I have just now
said,

A man's within me, — let him act him-
self,

Ignoring the poor conscious trouble of
blood ²³⁰

That's called the woman merely. I will
write

Plain words to England, — if too late, too
late,

If ill-accounted, then accounted ill;

We'll trust the heavens with something.

'Dear Lord Howe,
You'll find a story on another leaf

Of Marian Erle, — what noble friend of
yours

She trusted once, through what flagitious
means,

To what disastrous ends; — the story's
true.

I found her wandering on the Paris quays,
A babe upon her breast, — unnatural, ²⁴¹

Unseasonable outcast on such snow

Unthawed to this time. I will tax in this
Your friendship, friend, if that convicted
She

Be not his wife yet, to denounce the facts
To himself, — but, otherwise, to let them
pass

On tip-toe like escaping murderers,
And tell my cousin merely — Marian lives,

Is found, and finds her home with such a
friend,

Myself, Aurora. Which good news, "She's
found," ²⁵⁰

Will help to make him merry in his love:
I send it, tell him, for my marriage-gift,

As good as orange-water for the nerves,
Or perfumed gloves for headache, —

though aware

That he, except of love, is scarcely sick:
I mean the new love this time, . . . since

last year.

Such quick forgetting on the part of men !
Is any shrewder trick upon the cards

To enrich them ? pray instruct me how 't is
done:

First, clubs, — and while you look at clubs,
't is spades; ²⁶⁰

That's prodigy. The lightning strikes a
man,

And when we think to find him dead and
charred . . .

Why, there he is on a sudden, playing
pipes

Beneath the splintered elm-tree ! Crime
and shame

And all their hoggerly trample your smooth
world,

Nor leave more foot-marks than Apollo's
kine

Whose hoofs were muffled by the thieving
god

In tamarisk leaves and myrtle. I'm so
sad,

So weary and sad to-night, I'm somewhat
sour, —

Forgive me. To be blue and shrew at
once ²⁷⁰

Exceeds all toleration except yours,
But yours, I know, is infinite. Farewell.

To-morrow we take train for Italy.
Speak gently of me to your gracious wife,

As one, however far, shall yet be near
In loving wishes to your house.'

I sign.
And now I loose my heart upon a page,
This —

'Lady Waldemar, I'm very glad
I never liked you; which you knew so
well

You spared me, in your turn, to like me
much: ²⁸⁰

Your liking surely had done worse for me
Than has your loathing, though the last
appears

Sufficiently unscrupulous to hurt,
And not afraid of judgment. Now, there's
space

Between our faces, — I stand off, as if
I judged a stranger's portrait and pro-
nounced

Indifferently the type was good or bad.
What matter to me that the lines are false,

I ask you ? did I ever ink my lips
By drawing your name through them as a
friend's, ²⁹⁰

Or touch your hands as lovers do ? Thank
God

I never did: and since you're proved so
vile,

Ay, vile, I say, — we'll show it pre-
sently, —

I'm not obliged to nurse my friend in you,

Or wash out my own blots, in counting
yours,
Or even excuse myself to honest souls
Who seek to press my lip or clasp my
palm,—

“Alas, but Lady Waldemar came first !”

‘Tis true, by this time you may near me
so

That you’re my cousin’s wife. You’ve
gambled deep 300

As Lucifer, and won the morning star
In that case,—and the noble house of
Leigh

Must henceforth with its good roof shelter
you:

I cannot speak and burn you up between
Those rafters, I who am born a Leigh,—
nor speak

And pierce your breast through Romney’s,
I who live,

His friend and cousin,—so, you’re safe.
You two

Must grow together like the tares and wheat
Till God’s great fire.—But make the best
of time. 309

‘And hide this letter: let it speak no more
Than I shall, how you tricked poor Marian
Erle,

And set her own love digging its own grave
Within her green hope’s pretty garden-
ground,—

Ay, sent her forth with some one of your
sort

To a wicked house in France, from which
she fled

With curses in her eyes and ears and
throat,

Her whole soul choked with curses,—mad
in short,

And madly scouring up and down for weeks
The foreign hedgeless country, lone and
lost,— 319

So innocent, male-fiends might slink within
Remote hell-corners, seeing her so defiled.

‘But you,—you are a woman and more
bold.

To do you justice, you’d not shrink to
face . . .

We’ll say, the unfledged life in the other
room,

Which, treading down God’s corn, you trod
in sight

Of all the dogs, in reach of all the guns,—
Ay, Marian’s babe, her poor unfathered
child,

Her yearling babe !—you’d face him when
he wakes

And opens up his wonderful blue eyes:
You’d meet them and not wink perhaps,
nor fear 330

God’s triumph in them and supreme revenge
When righting his creation’s balance-scale
(You pulled as low as Tophet) to the top
Of most celestial innocence. For me,
Who am not as bold, I own those infant
eyes

Have set me praying.

‘While they look at heaven,
No need of protestation in my words
Against the place you’ve made them ! let
them look.

They’ll do your business with the heavens,
be sure: 339

I spare you common curses.

‘Ponder this;
If haply you’re the wife of Romney Leigh
(For which inheritance beyond your birth
You sold that poisonous porridge called
your soul),

I charge you, be his faithful and true
wife !

Keep warm his hearth and clean his board,
and, when

He speaks, be quick with your obedience;
Still grind your paltry wants and low
desires

To dust beneath his heel; though, even
thus,

The ground must hurt him,—it was writ
of old, 349

“Ye shall not yoke together ox and ass,”
The nobler and ignobler. Ay, but you

Shall do your part as well as such ill
things

Can do aught good. You shall not vex
him,—mark,

You shall not vex him, jar him when he’s
sad,

Or cross him when he’s eager. Under-
stand

To trick him with apparent sympathies,
Nor let him see thee in the face too near
And unlearn thy sweet seeming. Pay the
price

Of lies, by being constrained to lie on still:
’Tis easy for thy sort: a million more 360

Will scarcely damn thee deeper.

‘Doing which
 You are very safe from Marian and myself;
 We’ll breathe as softly as the infant here,
 And stir no dangerous embers. Fail a point,
 And show our Romney wounded, ill-con-
 tent,
 Tormented in his home, we open mouth,
 And such a noise will follow, the last
 trump’s
 Will scarcely seem more dreadful, even to
 you;
 You’ll have no pipers after: Romney will
 (I know him) push you forth as none of his,
 All other men declaring it well done, 371
 While women, even the worst, your like,
 will draw
 Their skirts back, not to brush you in the
 street,
 And so I warn you. I’m . . . Aurora
 Leigh.’

The letter written, I felt satisfied.
 The ashes, smouldering in me, were thrown
 out
 By handfuls from me: I had writ my heart
 And wept my tears, and now was cool and
 calm;
 And, going straightway to the neighboring
 room,
 I lifted up the curtains of the bed 380
 Where Marian Erle, the babe upon her arm,
 Both faces leaned together like a pair
 Of folded innocences self-complete,
 Each smiling from the other, smiled and
 slept.
 There seemed no sin, no shame, no wrath,
 no grief.
 I felt she too had spoken words that night,
 But softer certainly, and said to God,
 Who laughs in heaven perhaps that such
 as I
 Should make ado for such as she. — ‘De-
 filed’ 389
 I wrote? ‘defiled’ I thought her? Stoop,
 Stoop lower, Aurora! get the angels’ leave
 To creep in somewhere, humbly, on your
 knees,
 Within this round of sequestration white
 In which they have wrapped earth’s found-
 lings, heaven’s elect.

The next day we took train to Italy
 And fled on southward in the roar of steam.
 The marriage-bells of Romney must be
 loud,

To sound so clear through all: I was not
 well,
 And truly, though the truth is like a jest,
 I could not choose but fancy, half the
 way, 400
 I stood alone i’ the belfry, fifty bells
 Of naked iron, mad with merriment
 (As one who laughs and cannot stop him-
 self),
 All clanking at me, in me, over me,
 Until I shrieked a shriek I could not hear,
 And swooned with noise, — but still, along
 my swoon,
 Was ’ware the baffled changes backward
 rang
 Prepared, at each emerging sense, to beat
 And crash it out with clangor. I was
 weak;
 I struggled for the posture of my soul 410
 In upright consciousness of place and time,
 But evermore, ’twixt waking and asleep,
 Slipped somehow, staggered, caught at
 Marian’s eyes
 A moment (it is very good for strength
 To know that some one needs you to be
 strong),
 And so recovered what I called myself,
 For that time.

I just knew it when we swept
 Above the old roofs of Dijon: Lyons
 dropped
 A spark into the night, half trodden out
 Unseen. But presently the winding Rhone
 Washed out the moonlight large along his
 banks 421
 Which strained their yielding curves out
 clear and clean
 To hold it, — shadow of town and castle
 blurred
 Upon the hurrying river. Such an air
 Blew thence upon the forehead — half an
 air
 And half a water — that I leaned and
 looked,
 Then, turning back on Marian, smiled to
 mark
 That she looked only on her child, who
 slept,
 His face toward the moon too.

So we passed
 The liberal open country and the close, 430
 And shot through tunnels, like a lightning-
 wedge
 By great Thor-hammers driven through
 the rock,

Which, quivering through the intestine
blackness, splits,

And lets it in at once: the train swept in
Athrob with effort, trembling with resolve,
The fierce denouncing whistle wailing on
And dying off smothered in the shuddering
dark,

While we, self-awed, drew troubled
breath, oppressed

As other Titans underneath the pile
And nightmare of the mountains. Out, at
last, ⁴⁴⁰

To catch the dawn afloat upon the land!
— Hills, slung forth broadly and gauntly
everywhere,

Not cramped in their foundations, pushing
wide

Rich outspreads of the vineyards and the
corn

(As if they entertained i' the name of
France),

While down their straining sides streamed
manifest

A soil as red as Charlemagne's knightly
blood,

To consecrate the verdure. Some one
said

'Marseilles!' And lo, the city of Mar-
seilles,

With all her ships behind her, and be-
yond, ⁴⁵⁰

The scimitar of ever-shining sea
For right-hand use, bared blue against the
sky!

That night we spent between the purple
heaven

And purple water: I think Marian slept;
But I, as a dog awatch for his master's
foot,

Who cannot sleep or eat before he hears,
I sat upon the deck and watched the night
And listened through the stars for Italy.
Those marriage-bells I spoke of sounded
far,

As some child's go-cart in the street be-
neath ⁴⁶⁰

To a dying man who will not pass the
day,

And knows it, holding by a hand he loves.
I too sat quiet, satisfied with death,
Sat silent: I could hear my own soul
speak,

And had my friend, — for Nature comes
sometimes

And says, 'I am ambassador for God.'
I felt the wind soft from the land of souls;
The old miraculous mountains heaved in
sight,

One straining past another along the shore,
The way of grand dull Odyssean ghosts, ⁴⁷⁰
Athirst to drink the cool blue wine of
seas

And stare on voyagers. Peak pushing
peak

They stood: I watched, beyond that Tyr-
ian belt

Of intense sea betwixt them and the ship,
Down all their sides the misty olive-woods
Dissolving in the weak, congenial moon
And still disclosing some brown convent
tower

That seems as if it grew from some brown
rock,

Or many a little lighted village, dropped
Like a fallen star upon so high a point, ⁴⁸⁰
You wonder what can keep it in its place
From sliding headlong with the waterfalls
Which powder all the myrtle and orange
groves

With spray of silver. Thus my Italy
Was stealing on us. Genoa broke with
day,

The Doria's long pale palace striking out,
From green hills in advance of the white
town,

A marble finger dominant to ships,
Seen glimmering through the uncertain
gray of dawn.

And then I did not think, 'My Italy,' ⁴⁹⁰
I thought 'My father!' O my father's
house,

Without his presence! — Places are too
much,

Or else too little, for immortal man —
Too little, when love's May o'ergrows
the ground;

Too much, when that luxuriant robe of
green

Is rustling to our ankles in dead leaves.

'T is only good to be or here or there,
Because we had a dream on such a stone,
Or this or that, — but, once being wholly
waked

And come back to the stone without the
dream, ⁵⁰⁰

We trip upon't, — alas, and hurt our-
selves;

Or else it falls on us and grinds us flat,

The heaviest gravestone on this burying
earth.

— But while I stood and mused, a quiet
touch

Fell light upon my arm, and, turning
round,

A pair of moistened eyes convicted mine.

‘What, Marian! is the babe astir so soon?’

‘He sleeps,’ she answered; ‘I have crept
up thrice,

And seen you sitting, standing, still at
watch.

I thought it did you good till now, but
now’ . . . 510

‘But now,’ I said, ‘you leave the child
alone.’

‘And you’re alone,’ she answered, — and
she looked

As if I too were something. Sweet the
help

Of one we have helped! Thanks, Marian,
for such help.

I found a house at Florence on the hill
Of Belosguardo. ’Tis a tower which
keeps

A post of double observation o’er
That valley of Arno (holding as a hand
The outspread city) straight toward Fie-
sole 519

And Mount Morello and the setting sun,
The Vallombrosan mountains opposite,
Which sunrise fills as full as crystal cups
Turned red to the brim because their wine
is red.

No sun could die nor yet be born unseen
By dwellers at my villa: morn and eve
Were magnified before us in the pure
Illimitable space and pause of sky,
Intense as angels’ garments blanched with
God,

Less blue than radiant. From the outer
wall

Of the garden, drops the mystic floating
gray 530

Of olive-trees (with interruptions green
From maize and vine), until ’t is caught
and torn

Upon the abrupt black line of cypresses
Which signs the way to Florence. Beauti-
ful

The city lies along the ample vale,
Cathedral, tower and palace, piazza and
street,

The river trailing like a silver cord

Through all, and curling loosely, both be-
fore

And after, over the whole stretch of land
Sown whitely up and down its opposite
slopes 540

With farms and villas.

Many weeks had passed,
No word was granted. — Last, a letter
came

From Vincent Carrington: — ‘My dear
Miss Leigh,

You’ve been as silent as a poet should,
When any other man is sure to speak.

If sick, if vexed, if dumb, a silver piece
Will split a man’s tongue, — straight he
speaks and says

“Received that cheque.” But you! . . .

I send you funds
To Paris, and you make no sign at all.

Remember, I’m responsible and wait 550
A sign of you, Miss Leigh.

‘Meantime your book
Is eloquent as if you were not dumb;
And common critics, ordinarily deaf
To such fine meanings, and, like deaf men,
loth

To seem deaf, answering chance-wise, yes
or no,

“It must be” or “it must not” (most pro-
nounced

When least convinced), pronounce for once
aright:

You’d think they really heard, — and so
they do . . .

The burr of three or four who really hear
And praise your book aright: Fame’s
smallest trump 560

Is a great ear-trumpet for the deaf as
posts,

No other being effective. Fear not, friend;
We think here you have written a good
book,

And you, a woman! It was in you, — yes,
I felt ’t was in you: yet I doubted half

If that od-force of German Reichenbach,
Which still from female finger-tips burns
blue,

Could strike out as our masculine white
heats

To quicken a man. Forgive me. All my
heart

Is quick with yours since, just a fortnight
since, 570

I read your book and loved it.

‘Will you love

My wife, too? Here's my secret I might keep
 A month more from you! but I yield it up
 Because I know you'll write the sooner for't,
 Most women (of your height even) counting love
 Life's only serious business. Who's my wife
 That shall be in a month? you ask, nor guess?
 Remember what a pair of topaz eyes
 You once detected, turned against the wall,
 That morning in my London painting-room;
 The face half-sketched, and slurred; the eyes alone!
 But you . . . you caught them up with yours, and said
 "Kate Ward's eyes, surely." — Now I own the truth:
 I had thrown them there to keep them safe from Jove,
 They would so naughtily find out their way
 To both the heads of both my Danaës
 Where just it made me mad to look at them.
 Such eyes! I could not paint or think of eyes
 But those, — and so I flung them into paint
 And turned them to the wall's care. Ay, but now
 I've let them out, my Kate's: I've painted her
 (I change my style and leave mythologies),
 The whole sweet face; it looks upon my soul
 Like a face on water, to beget itself.
 A half-length portrait, in a hanging cloak
 Like one you wore once; 't is a little frayed, —
 I pressed too for the nude harmonious arm;
 But she, she'd have her way, and have her cloak —
 She said she could be like you only so,
 And would not miss the fortune. Ah, my friend,
 You'll write and say she shall not miss your love
 Through meeting mine? in faith, she would not change.
 She has your books by heart more than my words,

And quotes you up against me till I'm pushed
 Where, three months since, her eyes were: nay, in fact,
 Nought satisfied her but to make me paint
 Your last book folded in her dimpled hands
 Instead of my brown palette as I wished,
 And, grant me, the presentment had been newer;
 She'd grant me nothing: I compounded for
 The naming of the wedding-day next month,
 And gladly too. 'T is pretty to remark
 How women can love women of your sort,
 And tie their hearts with love-knots to your feet,
 Grow insolent about you against men,
 And put us down by putting up the lip,
 As if a man — there *are* such, let us own,
 Who write not ill — remains a man, poor wretch,
 While you! — Write weaker than Aurora Leigh,
 And there'll be women who believe of you
 (Besides my Kate) that if you walked on sand
 You would not leave a foot-print.
 'Are you put
 To wonder by my marriage, like poor Leigh?
 "Kate Ward!" he said. "Kate Ward!" he said anew.
 "I thought" . . . he said, and stopped — "I did not think" . . .
 And then he dropped to silence.
 'Ah, he's changed.
 I had not seen him, you're aware, for long,
 But went of course. I have not touched on this
 Through all this letter — conscious of your heart,
 And writing lightlier for the heavy fact,
 As clocks are voluble with lead.
 'How poor,
 To say I'm sorry! dear Leigh, dearest Leigh.
 In those old days of Shropshire — pardon me —
 When he and you fought many a field of gold
 On what you should do, or you should not do,
 Make bread or verses (it just came to that),

I thought you'd one day draw a silken
 peace
 Through a golden ring. I thought so:
 foolishly,
 The event proved; for you went more
 opposite
 To each other, month by month, and year
 by year,
 Until this happened. God knows best, we
 say,
 But hoarsely. When the fever took him
 first.

Just after I had writ to you in France,
 They tell me, Lady Waldemar mixed drinks
 And counted grains, like any salaried nurse,
 Excepting that she wept too. Then Lord
 Howe,
 You're right about Lord Howe, Lord
 Howe's a trump,
 And yet, with such in his hand, a man like
 Leigh

May lose as *he* does. There's an end to all,
 Yes, even this letter, though this second
 sheet
 May find you doubtful. Write a word for
 Kate:

She reads my letters always, like a wife,
 And if she sees her name I'll see her smile
 And share the luck. So, bless you, friend
 of two!

I will not ask you what your feeling is
 At Florence with my pictures; I can hear
 Your heart a-flutter over the snow-hills:
 And, just to pace the Pitti with you once,
 I'd give a half-hour of to-morrow's walk
 With Kate . . . I think so. Vincent Car-
 rington.'

The noon was hot; the air scorched like the
 sun,
 And was shut out. The closed persiani
 threw
 Their long-scored shadows on my villa-floor,
 And interlined the golden atmosphere
 Straight, still, — across the pictures on the
 wall,

The statuette on the console (of young Love
 And Psyche made one marble by a kiss),
 The low couch where I leaned, the table
 near,

The vase of lilies Marian pulled last night
 (Each green leaf and each white leaf ruled
 in black

As if for writing some new text of fate),
 And the open letter, rested on my knee,

But there the lines swerved, trembled,
 though I sat
 Untroubled, plainly, reading it again,
 And three times. Well, he's married;
 that is clear.

No wonder that he's married, nor much
 more

That Vincent's therefore 'sorry.' Why, of
 course

The lady nursed him when he was not well,
 Mixed drinks, — unless nepenthe was the
 drink

'T was scarce worth telling. But a man in
 love

Will see the whole sex in his mistress' hood,
 The prettier for its lining of fair rose,
 Although he catches back and says at last,
 'I'm sorry.' Sorry. Lady Waldemar
 At prettiest, under the said hood, pre-
 served

From such a light as I could hold to her
 face

To flare its ugly wrinkles out to shame,
 Is scarce a wife for Romney, as friends
 judge,

Aurora Leigh or Vincent Carrington,
 That's plain. And if he's 'conscious of
 my heart' . . .

It may be natural, though the phrase is
 strong

(One's apt to use strong phrases, being in
 love);

And even that stuff of 'fields of gold,' 'gold
 rings,'

And what he 'thought,' poor Vincent, what
 he 'thought,'

May never mean enough to ruffle me.

— Why, this room stifles. Better burn than
 choke;

Best have air, air, although it comes with
 fire,

Throw open blinds and windows to the noon,
 And take a blister on my brow instead
 Of this dead weight! best, perfectly be
 stunned

By those insufferable cicale, sick

And hoarse with rapture of the summer-
 heat,

That sing, like poets, till their hearts break,
 — sing

Till men say 'It's too tedious.'

Books succeed,
 And lives fail. Do I feel it so, at last?

Kate loves a worn-out cloak for being like
 mine,

While I live self-despised for being myself,
And yearn toward some one else, who yearns
away

From what he is, in his turn. Strain a
step

For ever, yet gain no step? Are we such,
We cannot, with our admirations even, 711
Our tip-toe aspirations, touch a thing
That's higher than we? is all a dismal flat,
And God alone above each, as the sun
O'er level lagunes, to make them shine and
stink —

Laying stress upon us with immediate flame,
While we respond with our miasmal fog,
And call it mounting higher because we
grow
More highly fatal?

Tush, Aurora Leigh!
You wear your sackcloth looped in Cæsar's
way, 720
And brag your failings as mankind's. Be
still.

There is what's higher, in this very world,
Than you can live, or catch at. Stand
aside

And look at others — instance little Kate!
She'll make a perfect wife for Carrington.
She always has been looking round the
earth

For something good and green to alight
upon

And nestle into, with those soft-winged
eyes,

Subsiding now beneath his manly hand
'Twixt trembling lids of inexpressive joy.
I will not scorn her, after all, too much,
That so much she should love me: a wise
man 732

Can pluck a leaf, and find a lecture in 't;
And I, too, . . . God has made me, — I've
a heart

That's capable of worship, love, and loss;
We say the same of Shakespeare's. I'll
be meek

And learn to reverence, even this poor
myself.

The book, too — pass it. 'A good book,'
says he,

'And you a woman.' I had laughed at
that, 739

But long since. I'm a woman, it is true;
Alas, and woe to us, when we feel it most!
Then, least care have we for the crowns
and goals

And compliments on writing our good
books.

The book has some truth in it, I believe,
And truth outlives pain, as the soul does
life.

I know we talk our Phædons to the end,
Through all the dismal faces that we make,
O'erwrinkled with dishonoring agony
From decomposing drugs. I have written
truth,

And I a woman, — feebly, partially, 750
Inaply in presentation, Romney'll add,
Because a woman. For the truth itself,
That's neither man's nor woman's, but just
God's,

None else has reason to be proud of truth:
Himself will see it sifted, disenthralled,
And kept upon the height and in the light,
As far as and no farther than 't is truth;
For, now He has left off calling firma-
ments .

And strata, flowers and creatures, very
good, 759

He says it still of truth, which is his own.

Truth, so far, in my book; the truth which
draws

Through all things upwards — that a two-
fold world

Must go to a perfect cosmos. Natural
things

And spiritual, — who separates those two
In art, in morals, or the social drift,
Tears up the bond of nature and brings
death,

Paints futile pictures, writes unreal verse,
Leads vulgar days, deals ignorantly with
men,

Is wrong, in short, at all points. We di-
vide

This apple of life, and cut it through the
pips: 770

The perfect round which fitted Venus'
hand

Has perished as utterly as if we ate
Both halves. Without the spiritual, ob-
serve,

The natural's impossible — no form,
No motion: without sensuous, spiritual
Is inappreciable, — no beauty or power:
And in this twofold sphere the twofold
man

(For still the artist is intensely a man)
Holds firmly by the natural, to reach
The spiritual beyond it, — fixes still 780

The type with mortal vision, to pierce
 through,
 With eyes immortal, to the antitype
 Some call the ideal, — better called the
 real,
 And certain to be called so presently
 When things shall have their names. Look
 long enough
 On any peasant's face here, coarse and
 lined,
 You 'll catch Antinous somewhere in that
 clay,
 As perfect featured as he yearns at Rome
 From marble pale with beauty; then per-
 sist, 789
 And, if your apprehension's competent,
 You 'll find some fairer angel at his back,
 As much exceeding him as he the boor,
 And pushing him with empyreal disdain
 For ever out of sight. Ay, Carrington
 Is glad of such a creed; an' artist must,
 Who paints a tree, a leaf, a common stone,
 With just his hand, and finds it suddenly
 A-piece with and conterminous to his soul.
 Why else do these things move him, leaf
 or stone?
 The bird's not moved that pecks at a
 spring-shoot; 800
 Nor yet the horse, before a quarry agraze:
 But man, the twofold creature, appre-
 hends
 The twofold manner, in and outwardly,
 And nothing in the world comes single to
 him,
 A mere itself, — cup, column, or candle-
 stick,
 All patterns of what shall be in the Mount;
 The whole temporal show related royally,
 And built up to eterne significance
 Through the open arms of God. 'There's
 nothing great
 Nor small,' has said a poet of our day, 810
 Whose voice will ring beyond the curfew
 of eve
 And not be thrown out by the matin's bell:
 And truly, I reiterate, nothing's small!
 No lily-muffled hum of a summer-bee,
 But finds some coupling with the spinning
 stars;
 No pebble at your foot, but proves a
 sphere;
 No chaffinch, but implies the cherubim;
 And (glancing on my own thin, veined
 wrist)
 In such a little tremor of the blood

The whole strong clamor of a vehement
 soul 820
 Doth utter itself distinct. Earth's
 crammed with heaven,
 And every common bush afire with God;
 But only he who sees, takes off his shoes —
 The rest sit round it and pluck black-
 berries,
 And daub their natural faces unaware
 More and more from the first similitude.
 Truth, so far, in my book! a truth which
 draws
 From all things upward. I, Aurora, still
 Have felt it hound me through the wastes
 of life
 As Jove did Io; and, until that Hand 830
 Shall overtake me wholly and on my head
 Lay down its large unfluctuating peace,
 The feverish gad-fly pricks me up and
 down.
 It must be. Art's the witness of what
 Is
 Behind this show. If this world's show
 were all,
 Then imitation would be all in Art;
 There, Jove's hand gripes us! — For we
 stand here, we,
 If genuine artists, witnessing for God's
 Complete, consummate, undivided work;
 That every natural flower which grows on
 earth 840
 Implies a flower upon the spiritual side,
 Substantial, archetypal, all aglow
 With blossoming causes, — not so far
 away,
 But we, whose spirit-sense is somewhat
 cleared,
 May catch at something of the bloom and
 breath, —
 Too vaguely apprehended, though indeed
 Still apprehended, consciously or not,
 And still transferred to picture, music,
 verse,
 For thrilling audient and beholding souls
 By signs and touches which are known to
 souls. 850
 How known, they know not, — why, they
 cannot find,
 So straight call out on genius, say 'A man
 Produced this,' when much rather they
 should say
 'T is insight and he saw this.' Thus is Art
 Self-magnified in magnifying a truth

Which, fully recognized, would change the world

And shift its morals. If a man could feel,
Not one day, in the artist's ecstasy,
But every day, feast, fast, or working-day,
The spiritual significance burn through ⁸⁶⁰
The hieroglyphic of material shows,
Henceforward he would paint the globe
with wings,

And reverence fish and fowl, the bull, the tree,

And even his very body as a man —
Which now he counts so vile, that all the towns

Make offal of their daughters for its use,
On summer-nights, when God is sad in heaven

To think what goes on in his recreant world

He made quite other; while that moon He made

To shine there, at the first love's covenant, ⁸⁷⁰

Shines still, convictive as a marriage-ring
Before adulterous eyes.

How sure it is,
That, if we say a true word, instantly
We feel 't is God's, not ours, and pass it on

Like bread at sacrament we taste and pass
Nor handle for a moment, as indeed

We dared to set up any claim to such !
And I — my poem, — let my readers talk.

I'm closer to it — I can speak as well:
I'll say with Romney, that the book is

weak, ⁸⁸⁰
The range uneven, the points of sight obscure,

The music interrupted.

Let us go.
The end of woman (or of man, I think)
Is not a book. Alas, the best of books
Is but a word in Art, which soon grows cramped,

Stiff, dubious-statured with the weight of years,

And drops an accent or digamma down
Some cranny of unfathomable time,
Beyond the critic's reaching. Art itself,
We've called the larger life, must feel the soul ⁸⁹⁰

Live past it. For more's felt than is perceived,

And more's perceived than can be interpreted,

And Love strikes higher with his lambent flame

Than Art can pile the fagots.

Is it so ?
When Jove's hand meets us with composing touch,

And when at last we are hushed and satisfied,

Then Io does not call it truth, but love ?
Well, well ! my father was an Englishman:

My mother's blood in me is not so strong
That I should bear this stress of Tuscan noon ⁹⁰⁰

And keep my wits. The town, there, seems to seethe

In this Medæan boil-pot of the sun,
And all the patient hills are bubbling round

As if a prick would leave them flat.
Does heaven

Keep far off, not to set us in a blaze ?
Not so, — let drag your fiery fringes, heaven,

And burn us up to quiet. Ah, we know
Too much here, not to know what's best

for peace;
We have too much light here, not to want

more fire
To purify and end us. We talk, talk, ⁹¹⁰

Conclude upon divine philosophies,
And get the thanks of men for hopeful

books,
Whereat we take our own life up, and . . .

psaw !
Unless we piece it with another's life

(A yard of silk to carry out our lawn)
As well suppose my little handkerchief

Would cover Samminiato, church and all,
If out I threw it past the cypresses,

As, in this ragged, narrow life of mine,
Contain my own conclusions.

But at least
We'll shut up the persiani and sit down,

And when my head's done aching, in the cool, ⁹²²

Write just a word to Kate and Carrington.
May joy be with them ! she has chosen

well,
And he not ill.

I should be glad, I think,
Except for Romney. Had *he* married

Kate,
I surely, surely, should be very glad.

This Florence sits upon me easily,

With native air and tongue. My graves
are calm,
And do not too much hurt me. Marian's
good, ⁹³⁰
Gentle and loving,—lets me hold the
child,
Or drags him up the hills to find me
flowers
And fill these vases ere I'm quite
awake,—

My grandiose red tulips, which grow wild,
Or Dante's purple lilies, which he blew
To a larger bubble with his prophet
breath,
Or one of those tall flowering reeds that
stand

In Arno, like a sheaf of sceptres left
But some remote dynasty of dead gods
To suck the stream for ages and get
green, ⁹⁴⁰

And blossom wheresoe'er a hand divine
Had warmed the place with ichor. Such
I find

At early morning laid across my bed,
And wake up pelted with a childish laugh
Which even Marian's low precipitous
'hush'

Has vainly interposed to put away,—
While I, with shut eyes, smile and motion
for

The dewy kiss that's very sure to come
From mouth and cheeks the whole child's
face at once ⁹⁴⁹

Dissolved on mine,—as if a nosegay burst
Its string with the weight of roses over-
blown,

And dropped upon me. Surely I should be
glad.

The little creature almost loves me now,
And calls my name, 'Alola,' stripping off
The r's like thorns, to make it smooth
enough

To take between his dainty, milk-fed lips,
God love him! I should certainly be glad,
Except, God help me, that I'm sorrowful
Because of Romney.

Romney, Romney! Well,
This grows absurd!—too like a tune that
runs ⁹⁶⁰

I' the head, and forces all things in the
world,

Wind, rain, the creaking gnat, or stuttering
fly,

To sing itself and vex you,—yet perhaps
A paltry tune you never fairly liked,

Some 'I'd be a butterfly,' or 'C'est
l'amour:'

We're made so,—not such tyrants to our-
selves

But still we are slaves to nature. Some of
us

Are turned, too, overmuch like some poor
verse

With a trick of ritournelle: the same thing
goes ⁹⁶⁹

And comes back ever.

Vincent Carrington

Is 'sorry,' and I'm sorry; but *he's* strong
To mount from sorrow to his heaven of
love,

And when he says at moments, 'Poor, poor
Leigh,

Who'll never call his own so true a heart,
So fair a face even,'—he must quickly lose
The pain of pity, in the blush he makes

By his very pitying eyes. The snow, for
him,

Has fallen in May and finds the whole
earth warm,

And melts at the first touch of the green
grass.

But Romney,—he has chosen, after all. ⁹⁸⁰
I think he had as excellent a sun

To see by, as most others, and perhaps
Has scarce seen really worse than some of
us.

When all's said. Let him pass. I'm not
too much

A woman, not to be a man for once

And bury all my Dead like Alaric,
Depositing the treasures of my soul

In this drained watercourse, then letting flow
The river of life again with commerce-ships
And pleasure-barges full of silks and songs.
Blow, winds, and help us.

Ah, we mock ourselves

With talking of the winds; perhaps as
much ⁹⁹²

With other resolutions. How it weighs,
This hot, sick air! and how I covet here
The Dead's provision on the river-couch,
With silver curtains drawn on tinkling
rings!

Or else their rest in quiet crypts,—laid by
From heat and noise;—from those cicale,
say,

And this more vexing heart-beat.

So it is:

•We covet for the soul, the body's part, ¹⁰⁰⁰
To die and rot. Even so, Aurora, ends

Our aspiration who bespoke our place
So far in the east. The occidental flats
Had fed us fatter, therefore? we have
climbed

Where herbage ends? we want the beast's
part now

And tire of the angel's? — Men define a man,
The creature who stands frontward to the
stars,

The creature who looks inward to himself,
The tool-wright, laughing creature. 'Tis
enough:

We'll say instead, the inconsequent crea-
ture, man, 1010

For that's his specialty. What creature else
Conceives the circle, and then walks the
square?

Loves things proved bad, and leaves a thing
proved good?

You think the bee makes honey half a year,
To loathe the comb in winter and desire

The little ant's food rather? But a man —
Note men! — they are but women after all,
As women are but Auroras! — there are
men

Born tender, apt to pale at a trodden worm,
Who paint for pastime, in their favorite
dream, 1020

Spruce auto-vestments flowered with crocus-
flames.

There are, too, who believe in hell, and lie;
There are, too, who believe in heaven, and
fear:

There are, who waste their souls in working
out

Life's problem on these sands betwixt two
tides,

Concluding, — 'Give us the oyster's part,
in death.'

Alas, long-suffering and most patient God,
Thou needst be surelier God to bear with
us

Than even to have made us! thou aspire,
aspire

From henceforth for me! thou who hast
thyself 1030

Endured this fleshhood, knowing how as a
soaked

And sucking vesture it can drag us down
And choke us in the melancholy Deep,
Sustain me, that with thee I walk these
waves,

Resisting! — breathe me upward, thou in
me

Aspiring who art the way, the truth, the
life, —

That no truth henceforth seem indifferent,
No way to truth laborious, and no life,
Not even this life I live, intolerable!

The days went by. I took up the old days,
With all their Tuscan pleasures worn and
spoiled, 1041

Like some lost book we dropped in the long
grass

On such a happy summer afternoon
When last we read it with a loving friend,
And find in autumn when the friend is gone,
The grass cut short, the weather changed,
too late,

And stare at, as at something wonderful
For sorrow, — thinking how two hands be-
fore

Had held up what is left to only one,
And how we smiled when such a vehement
nail 1050

Impressed the tiny dint here which pre-
sents

This verse in fire forever. Tenderly
And mournfully I lived. I knew the birds
And insects, — which looked fathered by
the flowers

And emulous of their hues: I recognized
The moths, with that great overpoise of
wings

Which make a mystery of them how at all
They can stop flying: butterflies, that bear
Upon their blue wings such red embers
round,

They seem to scorch the blue air into holes
Each flight they take: and fireflies, that
supsire 1061

In short soft lapses of transported flame
Across the tingling Dark, while overhead
The constant and inviolable stars

Outburn those light-of-love: melodious
owls

(If music had but one note and was sad,
'T would sound just so), and all the silent
swirl

Of bats that seem to follow in the air
Some grand circumference of a shadowy
dome

To which we are blind: and then the night-
ingales, 1070

Which pluck our heart across a garden-
wall

(When walking in the town) and carry it
So high into the bowery almond-trees

We tremble and are afraid, and feel as if
The golden flood of moonlight unaware
Dissolved the pillars of the steady earth
And made it less substantial. And I knew
The harmless opal snakes, the large-
mouthed frogs

(Those noisy vaunters of their shallow
streams);

And lizards, the green lightnings of the
wall,

Which, if you sit down quiet, nor sigh loud,
Will flatter you and take you for a stone,
And flash familiarly about your feet
With such prodigious eyes in such small
heads! —

I knew them (though they had somewhat
dwindled from

My childish imagery), and kept in mind
How last I sat among them equally,
In fellowship and mateship, as a child
Feels equal still toward insect, beast, and
bird,

Before the Adam in him has forgone ¹⁰⁹⁰
All privilege of Eden, — making friends
And talk with such a bird or such a goat,
And buying many a two-inch-wide rush-
cage

To let out the caged cricket on a tree,
Saying 'Oh my dear grillino, were you
cramped?

And are you happy with the ilex-leaves?
And do you love me who have let you
go?

Say *yes* in singing, and I'll understand.'

But now the creatures all seemed farther
off,

No longer mine, nor like me, only *there*, ¹¹⁰⁰
A gulf between us. I could yearn indeed,
Like other rich men, for a drop of dew
To cool this heat, — a drop of the early
dew,

The irrecoverable child-innocence
(Before the heart took fire and withered
life)

When childhood might pair equally with
birds;

But now . . . the birds were grown too
proud for us,

Alas, the very sun forbids the dew.

And I, I had come back to an empty nest,
Which every bird's too wise for. How I
heard ¹¹¹⁰

My father's step on that deserted ground,
His voice along that silence, as he told

The names of bird and insect, tree and
flower,

And all the presentations of the stars
Across Valdarno, interposing still
My child,' 'my child.' When fathers say
'my child,'

'Tis easier to conceive the universe,
And life's transitions down the steps of
law.

I rode once to the little mountain-house
As fast as if to find my father there, ¹¹²⁰
But, when in sight of 't, within fifty yards,
I dropped my horse's bridle on his neck
And paused upon his flank. The house's
front

Was cased with lingots of ripe Indian
corn

In tessellated order and device
Of golden patterns, not a stone of wall
Uncovered, — not an inch of room to grow
A vine-leaf. The old porch had disap-
peared;

And right in the open doorway sat a girl
At plaiting straws, her black hair strained
away ¹¹³⁰

To a scarlet kerchief caught beneath her
chin

In Tuscan fashion, — her full ebon eyes,
Which looked too heavy to be lifted so,
Still dropped and lifted toward the mul-
berry-tree

On which the lads were busy with their
staves

In shout and laughter, stripping every
bough

As bare as winter, of those summer leaves
My father had not changed for all the
silk

In which the ugly silkworms hide them-
selves.

Enough. My horse recoiled before my
heart; ¹¹⁴⁰

I turned the rein abruptly. Back we went
As fast, to Florence.

That was trial enough
Of graves. I would not visit, if I could,
My father's, or my mother's any more,
To see if stone cutter or lichen beat
So early in the race, or throw my flowers,
Which could not out-smell heaven or
sweeten earth.

They live too far above, that I should
look

So far below to find them: let me think

That rather they are visiting my grave, ¹¹⁵⁰
 Called life here (undeveloped yet to life),
 And that they drop upon me, now and
 then,
 For token or for solace, some small weed
 Least odorous of the growths of paradise,
 To spare such pungent scents as kill with
 joy.

My old Assunta, too, was dead, was dead —
 O land of all men's past ! for me alone,
 It would not mix its tenses. I was past,
 It seemed, like others, — only not in
 heaven. ¹¹⁵⁹

And many a Tuscan eve I wandered down
 The cypress alley like a restless ghost
 That tries its feeble ineffectual breath
 Upon its own charred funeral-brands put
 out

Too soon, where black and stiff stood up
 the trees

Against the broad vermilion of the skies.
 Such skies ! — all clouds abolished in a
 sweep

Of God's skirt, with a dazzle to ghosts and
 men,

As down I went, saluting on the bridge
 The hem of such before 't was caught
 away

Beyond the peaks of Lucca. Under-
 neath, ¹¹⁷⁰

The river, just escaping from the weight
 Of that intolerable glory, ran
 In acquiescent shadow murmurously;
 While, up beside it, streamed the festa-
 folk

With fellow-murmurs from their feet and
 fans,

And *issimo* and *ino* and sweet poise
 Of vowels in their pleasant scandalous
 talk;

Returning from the grand-duke's dairy-
 farm

Before the trees grew dangerous at eight
 (For 'trust no tree by moonlight,' Tus-
 cans say), ¹¹⁸⁰

To eat their ice at Donay's tenderly, —
 Each lovely lady close to a cavalier
 Who holds her dear fan while she feeds
 her smile

On meditative spoonfuls of vanille
 And listens to his hot-breathed vows of
 love

Enough to thaw her cream and scorch his
 beard.

'T was little matter. I could pass them
 by
 Indifferently, not fearing to be known.
 No danger of being wrecked upon a friend,
 And forced to take an iceberg for an
 isle ! ¹¹⁹⁰

The very English, here, must wait and
 learn

To hang the cobweb of their gossip out
 To catch a fly. I'm happy. It's sub-
 lime,

This perfect solitude of foreign lands !
 To be, as if you had not been till then,
 And were then, simply that you chose to
 be:

To spring up, not be brought forth from
 the ground,

Like grasshoppers at Athens, and skip
 thrice

Before a woman makes a pounce on you
 And plants you in her hair ! — possess,
 yourself, ¹²⁰⁰

A new world all alive with creatures new,
 New sun, new moon, new flowers, new
 people — ah,

And be possessed by none of them ! no
 right

In one, to call your name, inquire your
 where,

Or what you think of Mister Someone's
 book,

Or Mister Other's marriage or decease,
 Or how's the headache which you had last
 week,

Or why you look so pale still, since it's
 gone ?

— Such most surprising riddance of one's
 life

Comes next one's death; 't is disembodi-
 ment ¹²¹⁰

Without the pang. I marvel, people
 choose

To stand stock-still like fakirs, till the
 moss

Grows on them and they cry out, self-ad-
 mired,

'How verdant and how virtuous !' Well,
 I'm glad;

Or should be, if grown foreign to myself
 As surely as to others.

Musing so,
 I walked the narrow unrecognized streets,
 Where many a palace-front peers gloomily
 Through stony visors iron-barred (pre-
 pared

Alike, should foe or lover pass that
 way, 1220
 For guest or victim), and came wandering
 out
 Upon the churches with mild open doors
 And plaintive wail of vespers, where a
 few,
 Those chiefly women, sprinkled round in
 blots
 Upon the dusky pavement, knelt and
 prayed
 Toward the altar's silver glory. Oft a ray
 (I liked to sit and watch) would tremble
 out,
 Just touch some face more lifted, more in
 need
 (Of course a woman's), — while I dreamed
 a tale
 To fit its fortunes. There was one who
 looked 1230
 As if the earth had suddenly grown too
 large
 For such a little humpbacked thing as
 she;
 The pitiful black kerchief round her neck
 Sole proof she had had a mother. One,
 again,
 Looked sick for love, — seemed praying
 some soft saint
 To put more virtue in the new fine scarf
 She spent a fortnight's meals on, yester-
 day,
 That cruel Gigi might return his eyes
 From Giuliana. There was one, so old,
 So old, to kneel grew easier than to
 stand, — 1240
 So solitary, she accepts at last
 Our Lady for her gossip, and frets on
 Against the sinful world which goes its
 rounds
 In marrying and being married, just the
 same
 As when 't was almost good and had the
 right
 (Her Gian alive, and she herself eighteen).
 'And yet, now even, if Madonna willed,
 She'd win a tern in Thursday's lottery
 And better all things. Did she dream for
 nought,
 That, boiling cabbage for the fast-day's
 soup, 1250
 It smelt like blessed entrails? such a
 dream
 For nought? would sweetest Mary cheat
 her so,

And lose that certain candle, straight and
 white
 As any fair grand-duchess in her teens,
 Which otherwise should flare here in a
 week?
Benigna sis, thouauteous Queen of
 Heaven!'

I sat there musing, and imagining
 Such utterance from such faces: poor
 blind souls
 That writhe toward heaven along the
 devil's trail, —
 Who knows, I thought, but He may stretch
 his hand 1260
 And pick them up? 't is written in the
 Book
 He heareth the young ravens when they
 cry,
 And yet they cry for carrion. — O my God,
 And we, who make excuses for the rest,
 We do it in our measure. Then I knelt,
 And dropped my head upon the pavement
 too,
 And prayed, since I was foolish in desire
 Like other creatures, craving offal-food,
 That He would stop his ears to what I
 said,
 And only listen to the run and beat 1270
 Of this poor, passionate, helpless blood —
 And then
 I lay, and spoke not: but He heard in
 heaven.

So many Tuscan evenings passed the same.
 I could not lose a sunset on the bridge,
 And would not miss a vigil in the church,
 And liked to mingle with the outdoor crowd
 So strange and gay and ignorant of my
 face,
 For men you know not are as good as trees.
 And only once, at the Santissima,
 I almost chanced upon a man I knew, 1280
 Sir Blaise Delorme. He saw me certainly,
 And somewhat hurried, as he crossed him-
 self,
 The smoothness of the action, — then half
 bowed,
 But only half, and merely to my shade,
 I slipped so quick behind the porphyry
 plinth
 And left him dubious if 't was really I
 Or peradventure Satan's usual trick
 To keep a mounting saint uncanonized.
 But he was safe for that time, and I too;

The argent angels in the altar-flare ¹²⁹⁰
 Absorbed his soul next moment. The good
 man !

In England we were scarce acquaintances,
 That here in Florence he should keep my
 thought

Beyond the image on his eye, which came
 And went: and yet his thought disturbed
 my life:

For, after that, I oftener sat at home
 On evenings, watching how they fined them-
 selves

With gradual conscience to a perfect night,
 Until the moon, diminished to a curve,
 Lay out there like a sickle for his hand ¹³⁰⁰
 Who cometh down at last to reap the earth.
 At such times, ended seemed my trade of
 verse;

I feared to jingle bells upon my robe
 Before the four-faced silent cherubim.
 With God so near me, could I sing of God ?
 I did not write, nor read, nor even think,
 But sat absorbed amid the quickening
 glooms,

Most like some passive broken lump of salt
 Dropped in by chance to a bowl of oenomel,
 To spoil the drink a little and lose itself, ¹³¹⁰
 Dissolving slowly, slowly, until lost.

EIGHTH BOOK

One eve it happened, when I sat alone,
 Alone, upon the terrace of my tower,
 A book upon my knees to counterfeit
 The reading that I never read at all,
 While Marian, in the garden down below,
 Kneelt by the fountain I could just hear
 thrill

The drowsy silence of the exhausted day,
 And peeled a new fig from that purple heap
 In the grass beside her, turning out the red
 To feed her eager child (who sucked at it ¹⁰
 With vehement lips across a gap of air
 As he stood opposite, face and curls a-flame
 With that last sun-ray, crying 'Give me,
 give,'

And stamping with imperious baby-feet,
 We're all born princes) — something star-
 tled me,

The laugh of sad and innocent souls, that
 breaks

Abruptly, as if frightened at itself.

'Twas Marian laughed. I saw her glance
 above

In sudden shame that I should hear her
 laugh,

And straightway dropped my eyes upon my
 book, ²⁰

And knew, the first time, 't was Boccaccio's
 tale,

The Falcon's, of the lover who for love
 Destroyed the best that loved him. Some
 of us

Do it still, and then we sit and laugh no
 more.

Laugh *you*, sweet Marian, — you've the
 right to laugh,

Since God Himself is for you, and a child !
 For me there's somewhat less, — and so I
 sigh.

The heavens were making room to hold the
 night,

The sevenfold heavens unfolding all their
 gates

To let the stars out slowly (prophesied ³⁰
 In close-approaching advent, not discerned),
 While still the cue-owls from the cypresses
 Of the Poggio called and counted every
 pulse

Of the skyeey palpitation. Gradually
 The purple and transparent shadows slow
 Had filled up the whole valley to the brim,
 And flooded all the city, which you saw
 As some drowned city in some enchanted
 sea,

Cut off from nature, — drawing you who
 gaze,

With passionate desire, to leap and plunge ⁴⁰
 And find a sea-king with a voice of waves,
 And treacherous soft eyes, and slippery
 locks

You cannot kiss but you shall bring away
 Their salt upon your lips. The duomo bell
 Strikes ten, as if it struck ten fathoms
 down,

So deep; and twenty churches answer it
 The same, with twenty various instances.
 Some gaslights tremble along squares and
 streets;

The Pitti's palace-front is drawn in fire;
 And, past the quays, Maria Novella Place, ⁵⁰
 In which the mystic obelisks stand up
 Triangular, pyramidal, each based
 Upon its four-square brazen tortoises,
 To guard that fair church, Buonarroti's
 Bride,

That stares out from her large blind dial-
 eyes,

(Her quadrant and armillary dials, black
With rhythms of many suns and moons) in
vain

Inquiry for so rich a soul as his.

Methinks I have plunged, I see it all so
clear . . .

And, O my heart, . . . the sea-king !

In my ears
The sound of waters. There he stood, my
king ! 61

I felt him, rather than beheld him. Up

I rose, as if he were my king indeed,

And then sat down, in trouble at myself,

And struggling for my woman's empery.

'T is pitiful; but women are so made:

We'll die for you perhaps, — 't is proba-
ble;

But we'll not spare you an inch of our full
height:

We'll have our whole just stature, — five
feet four,

Though laid out in our coffins: pitiful. 70

— 'You, Romney ! — Lady Waldemar is
here ?'

He answered in a voice which was not his.

'I have her letter; you shall read it soon.

But first, I must be heard a little, I,
Who have waited long and travelled far for
that,

Although you thought to have shut a tedi-
ous book

And farewell. Ah, you dog-eared such a
page,

And here you find me.'

Did he touch my hand,
Or but my sleeve ? I trembled, hand and
foot, —

He must have touched me. — 'Will you
sit ?' I asked, 80

And motioned to a chair; but down he sat,

A little slowly, as a man in doubt,

Upon the couch beside me, — couch and
chair

Being wheeled upon the terrace.

'You are come,
My cousin Romney ? — this is wonderful.
But all is wonder on such summer-nights;
And nothing should surprise us any more,
Who see that miracle of stars. Behold.'

I signed above, where all the stars were
out,

As if an urgent heat had started there 90

A secret writing from a sombre page,
A blank, last moment, crowded suddenly
With hurrying splendors.

'Then you do not know' —

He murmured.

'Yes, I know,' I said, 'I know.

I had the news from Vincent Carrington.

And yet I did not think you'd leave the
work

In England, for so much even, — though
of course

You'll make a work-day of your holiday,

And turn it to our Tuscan people's use, —

Who much need helping since the Aus-
trian boar 100

(So bold to cross the Alp to Lombardy

And dash his brute front unabashed against
The steep snow-bosses of that shield of
God

Who soon shall rise in wrath and shake it
clear)

Came hither also, raking up our grape

And olive gardens with his tyrannous tusk,

And rolling on our maize with all his
swine.'

'You had the news from Vincent Carring-
ton,'

He echoed, — picking up the phrase be-
yond,

As if he knew the rest was merely talk 110

To fill a gap and keep out a strong wind;

'You had, then, Vincent's personal news ?'

'His own,'

I answered. 'All that ruined world of
yours

Seems crumbling into marriage. Carring-
ton

Has chosen wisely.'

'Do you take it so ?'

He cried, 'and is it possible at last' . . .

He paused there, — and then, inward to
himself,

'Too much at last, too late ! — yet cer-
tainly' . . .

(And there his voice swayed as an Alpine
plank

That feels a passionate torrent under-
neath) 120

'The knowledge, had I known it first or
last,

Could scarce have changed the actual case
for me.

And best for *her* at this time.'

Nay, I thought,

He loves Kate Ward, it seems, now, like a man,
 Because he has married Lady Waldemar!
 Ah, Vincent's letter said how Leigh was moved
 To hear that Vincent was betrothed to Kate.
 With what cracked pitchers go we to deep wells
 In this world! Then I spoke, — 'I did not think,
 My cousin, you had ever known Kate Ward.'

130

'In fact, I never knew her. 'Tis enough
 That Vincent did, and therefore chose his wife
 For other reasons than those topaz eyes
 We've heard of. Not to undervalue them,
 For all that. One takes up the world with eyes.'

— Including Romney Leigh, I thought again,
 Albeit he knows them only by repute.
 How vile must all men be since *he's* a man.

138

His deep pathetic voice, as if he guessed
 I did not surely love him, took the word;
 'You never got a letter from Lord Howe
 A month back, dear Aurora?'

'None,' I said.

'I felt it was so,' he replied: 'yet, strange!
 Sir Blaise Delorme has passed through
 Florence?'

'Ay,
 By chance I saw him in Our Lady's church
 (I saw him, mark you, but he saw not me),
 Clean-washed in holy water from the count
 Of things terrestrial, — letters, and the rest;
 He had crossed us out together with his sins.

Ay, strange; but only strange that good
 Lord Howe
 Preferred him to the post because of pauls.
 For me I'm sworn to never trust a man —
 At least with letters.'

150

'There were facts to tell,
 To smooth with eye and accent. Howe
 supposed . . .

Well, well, no matter! there was dubious
 need;
 You heard the news from Vincent Carrington.

And yet perhaps you had been startled less
 To see me, dear Aurora, if you had read
 That letter.'

— Now he sets me down as vexed.
 I think I've draped myself in woman's
 pride
 To a perfect purpose. Oh, I'm vexed, it
 seems!

160

My friend Lord Howe deposes his friend
 Sir Blaise

To break as softly as a sparrow's egg
 That lets a bird out tenderly, the news
 Of Romney's marriage to a certain saint;
 To *smooth with eye and accent*, — indicate
 His possible presence. Excellently well
 You've played your part, my Lady Walde-
 mar, —

As I've played mine.

'Dear Romney,' I began,
 'You did not use, of old, to be so like
 A Greek king coming from a taken Troy,
 'Twas needful that precursors spread your
 path

With three-piled carpets, to receive your
 foot

And dull the sound of 't. For myself, be
 sure,

Although it frankly grinds the gravel here,
 I still can bear it. Yet I'm sorry too
 To lose this famous letter, which Sir Blaise
 Has twisted to a lighter absently
 To fire some holy taper: dear Lord Howe
 Writes letters good for all things but to
 lose;

180

And many a flower of London gossipy
 Has dropped wherever such a stem broke
 off.

Of course I feel that, lonely among my
 vines,

Where nothing's talked of, save the blight
 again,

And no more Chianti! Still the letter's
 use

As preparation . . . Did I start, indeed?
 Last night I started at a cockchafer,
 And shook a half-hour after. Have you
 learnt

No more of women, 'spite of privilege,
 Than still to take account too seriously
 Of such weak flutterings? Why, we like
 it, sir,

We get our powers and our effects that way:

The trees stand stiff and still at time of frost,

If no wind tears them; but, let summer come,

When trees are happy, — and a breath avails

To set them trembling through a million leaves

In luxury of emotion. Something less

It takes to move a woman: let her start

And shake at pleasure, — nor conclude at yours,

The winter's bitter, — but the summer's green.' 200

He answered: 'Be the summer ever green
With you, Aurora! — though you sweep
your sex

With somewhat bitter gusts from where
you live

Above them, — whirling downward from
your heights

Your very own pine-cones, in a grand dis-
dain

Of the lowland burrs with which you scatter
them.

So high and cold to others and yourself,

A little less to Romney were unjust,

And thus, I would not have you. Let it
pass:

I feel content so. You can bear indeed 210

My sudden step beside you: but for me,

'T would move me sore to hear your
softened voice, —

Aurora's voice, — if softened unaware

In pity of what I am.'

Ah friend, I thought,

As husband of the Lady Waldemar

You're granted very sorely pitiable!

And yet Aurora Leigh must guard her
voice

From softening in the pity of your case,

As if from lie or license. Certainly 219

We'll soak up all the slush and soil of life

With softened voices, ere we come to you.

At which I interrupted my own thought

And spoke out calmly, 'Let us ponder,
friend,

Whate'er our state we must have made it
first;

And though the thing displease us, ay,
perhaps

Displease us warrantably, never doubt
That other states, thought possible once,
and then

Rejected by the instinct of our lives,

If then adopted had displeased us more

Than this in which the choice, the will, the
love, 230

Has stamped the honor of a patent act

From henceforth. What we choose may
not be good,

But, that we choose it, proves it good for us

Potentially, fantastically, now

Or last year, rather than a thing we saw,

And saw no need for choosing. Moths
will burn

Their wings, — which proves that light is
good for moths,

Who else had flown not where they agonize.'

'Ay, light is good,' he echoed, and there
paused;

And then abruptly, . . . 'Marian. Ma-
rian's well?' 240

I bowed my head but found no word.

'T was hard

To speak of her to Lady Waldemar's

New husband. How much did he know,
at last?

How much! how little! — He would take
no sign,

But straight repeated, — 'Marian. Is she
well?'

'She's well,' I answered.

She was there in sight

An hour back, but the night had drawn her
home,

Where still I heard her in an upper room,

Her low voice singing to the child in bed,

Who, restless with the summer-heat and
play 250

And slumber snatched at noon, was long
sometimes

In falling off, and took a score of songs

And mother-hushes ere she saw him sound.

'She's well,' I answered.

'Here?' he asked.

'Yes, here.'

He stopped and sighed. 'That shall be
presently,

But now this must be. I have words to
say,

And would be alone to say them, I with
you,
And no third troubling.'

'Speak then,' I returned,
'She will not vex you.'

At which, suddenly
He turned his face upon me with its
smile 260

As if to crush me. 'I have read your
book,
Aurora.'

'You have read it,' I replied,
'And I have writ it, — we have done with
it.

And now the rest ?'

'The rest is like the first,'
He answered, — 'for the book is in my
heart,

Lives in me, wakes in me, and dreams in
me:

My daily bread tastes of it, — and my
wine

Which has no smack of it, I pour it out,
It seems unnatural drinking.'

Bitterly
I took the word up; 'Never waste your
wine. 270

The book lived in me ere it lived in you;
I know it closer than another does,

And how it's foolish, feeble, and afraid,
And all unworthy so much compliment.

Beseech you, keep your wine, — and, when
you drink,

Still wish some happier fortune to a friend,
Than even to have written a far better
book.'

He answered gently, 'That is consequent:
The poet looks beyond the book he has
made,

Or else he had not made it. If a man 280
Could make a man, he'd henceforth be a
god

In feeling what a little thing is man:
It is not my case. And this special book,
I did not make it, to make light of it:

It stands above my knowledge, draws me
up;

'T is high to me. It may be that the
book

Is not so high, but I so low, instead;
Still high to me. I mean no compliment:

I will not say there are not, young or
old,

Male writers, ay, or female, let it pass, 290

Who 'll write us richer and completer
books.

A man may love a woman perfectly,
And yet by no means ignorantly maintain
A thousand women have not larger eyes:
Enough that she alone has looked at him
With eyes that, large or small, have won
his soul.

And so, this book, Aurora, — so, your
book.'

'Alas,' I answered, 'is it so, indeed ?'
And then was silent.

'Is it so, indeed,'
He echoed, 'that *alas* is all your word ?' 300
I said, 'I'm thinking of a far-off June,
When you and I, upon my birthday once,
Discours'd of life and art, with both un-
tried.

I'm thinking, Romney, how 't was morn-
ing then,

And now 't is night.'

'And now,' he said, 't is night.'

'I'm thinking,' I resumed, 't is some-
what sad,

That if I had known, that morning in the
dew,

My cousin Romney would have said such
words

On such a night at close of many years,
In speaking of a future book of mine 310

It would have pleased me better as a hope,
Than as an actual grace it can at all:

That's sad, I'm thinking.'

'Ay,' he said, 't is night.'

'And there,' I added lightly, 'are the
stars !

And here, we'll talk of stars and not of
books.'

'You have the stars,' he murmured, — 'it
is well:

Be like them ! shine, Aurora, on my dark,
Though high and cold and only like a star,
And for this short night only, — you, who
keep 319

The same Aurora of the bright June day
That withered up the flowers before my
face,

And turned me from the garden evermore
Because I was not worthy. Oh, deserved,

Deserved ! that I, who verily had not
learnt

God's lesson half, attaining as a dunce

To obliterate good words with fractious
thumbs
And cheat myself of the context, — *I* should
push

Aside, with male ferocious impudence,
The world's Aurora who had conned her
part

On the other side the leaf! ignore her so,
Because she was a woman and a queen,
And had no beard to bristle through her
song,

My teacher, who has taught me with a
book,

My Miriam whose sweet mouth, when
nearly drowned

I still heard singing on the shore! De-
served,

That here I should look up unto the stars
And miss the glory' . . .

'Can I understand?'

I broke in. 'You speak wildly, Romney
Leigh,

Or I hear wildly. In that morning-time
We recollect, the roses were too red, 340

The trees too green, reproach too natural
If one should see not what the other saw:
And now, it's night, remember; we have
shades

In place of colors; we are now grown cold,
And old, my cousin Romney. Pardon
me, —

I'm very happy that you like my book,
And very sorry that I quoted back

A ten years' birthday. 'Twas so mad a
thing

In any woman, I scarce marvel much
You took it for a venturesome piece of spite,
Provoking such excuses as indeed 351
I cannot call you slack in.'

'Understand,'

He answered sadly, 'something, if but
so.

This night is softer than an English day,
And men may well come hither when
they're sick,

To draw in easier breath from larger air.
'Tis thus with me; I come to you, — to
you

My Italy of women, just to breathe
My soul out once before you, ere I go,
As humble as God makes me at the last 360
(I thank Him), quite out of the way of
men

And yours, Aurora, — like a punished
child,

His cheeks all blurred with tears and
naughtiness,

To silence in a corner. I am come
To speak, beloved' . . .

'Wisely, cousin Leigh,
And worthily of us both!'

'Yes, worthily,
For this time I must speak out and con-
fess

That I, so truculent in assumption once,
So absolute in dogma, proud in aim,
And fierce in expectation, — I, who felt 370
The whole world tugging at my skirts for
help,

As if no other man than I could pull,
Nor woman but I led her by the hand,
Nor cloth hold but I had it in my coat,
Do know myself to-night for what I was
On that June day, Aurora. Poor bright
day,

Which meant the best . . . a woman and a
rose,

And which I smote upon the cheek with
words

Until it turned and rent me! Young you
were,

That birthday, poet, but you talked the
right: 380

While I . . . I built up follies like a wall
To intercept the sunshine and your face.
Your face! that's worse.'

'Speak wisely, cousin Leigh.'

'Yes, wisely, dear Aurora, though too late:
But then, not wisely. I was heavy then,
And stupid, and distracted with the cries
Of tortured prisoners in the polished brass
Of that Phalarian bull, society,
Which seems to bellow bravely like ten
bulls,

But, if you listen, moans and cries instead
Despairingly, like victims tossed and
gored 391

And trampled by their hoofs. I heard the
cries

Too close: I could not hear the angels lift
A fold of rustling air, nor what they said
To help my pity. I beheld the world
As one great famishing carnivorous
mouth, —

A huge, deserted, callow, blind bird Thing,
With piteous open beak that hurt my
heart,

Till down upon the filthy ground I dropped,
And tore the violets up to get the worms.

Worms, worms, was all my cry: an open
mouth, 401

A gross want, bread to fill it to the lips,
No more. That poor men narrowed their
demands

To such an end, was virtue, I supposed,
Adjudicating that to see it so
Was reason. Oh, I did not push the case
Up higher, and ponder how it answers
when

The rich take up the same cry for them-
selves,

Professing equally, — “An open mouth,
A gross need, food to fill us, and no more.”
Why that’s so far from virtue, only vice 411
Can find excuse for’t! that makes liber-
tines,

And slurs our cruel streets from end to
end

With eighty thousand women in one smile,
Who only smile at night beneath the gas.
The body’s satisfaction and no more,
Is used for argument against the soul’s,
Here too; the want, here too, implies the
right.

— How dark I stood that morning in the
sun,

My best Aurora (though I saw your eyes),
When first you told me . . . oh, I recol-
lect 421

The sound, and how you lifted your small
hand,

And how your white dress and your bur-
nished curls

Went greatening round you in the still
blue air,

As if an inspiration from within
Had blown them all out when you spoke
the words,

Even these, — “You will not compass your
poor ends

Of barley-feeding and material ease,
Without the poet’s individualism
To work your universal. It takes a soul
To move a body, — it takes a high-souled
man 431

To move the masses, even to a cleaner
style:

It takes the ideal, to blow an inch inside
The dust of the actual: and your Fouriers
failed,

Because not poets enough to understand
That life develops from within.” I say
Your words, — I could say other words of
yours,

For none of all your words will let me go;
Like sweet verbena which, being brushed
against,

Will hold us three hours after by the smell
In spite of long walks upon windy hills. 441
But these words dealt in sharper per-
fume, — these

Were ever on me, stinging through my
dreams,

And saying themselves for ever o’er my acts
Like some unhappy verdict. That I failed,
Is certain. Styte or no styte, to contrive
The swine’s propulsion toward the precipice,
Proved easy and plain. I subtly organized
And ordered, built the cards up high and
higher,

Till, some one breathing, all fell flat again;
In setting right society’s wide wrong, 451
Mere life’s so fatal. So I failed indeed
Once, twice, and oftener, — hearing through
the rents

Of obstinate purpose, still those words of
yours,
“*You will not compass your poor ends, not
you!*”

But harder than you said them; every time
Still farther from your voice, until they
came

To overerow me with triumphant scorn
Which vexed me to resistance. Set down
this

For condemnation, — I was guilty here; 460
I stood upon my deed and fought my doubt,
As men will, — for I doubted, — till at last
My deed gave way beneath me suddenly
And left me what I am: — the curtain
dropped,

My part quite ended, all the footlights
quenched,

My own soul hissing at me through the
dark,

I ready for confession, — I was wrong,
I’ve sorely failed, I’ve slipped the ends of
life, 463

I yield, you have conquered.’

‘Stay,’ I answered him;
‘I’ve something for your hearing, also. I
Have failed too.’

‘You!’ he said, ‘you’re very great;
The sadness of your greatness fits you well:
As if the plume upon a hero’s casque
Should nod a shadow upon his victor face.’

I took him up austere, — ‘You have read
My book, but not my heart; for recollect,

'Tis writ in Sanscrit, which you bungle at.
 I've surely failed, I know, if failure means
 To look back sadly on work gladly done, —
 To wander on my Mountains of Delight, ⁴⁸⁰
 So called (I can remember a friend's words
 As well as you, sir), weary and in want
 Of even a sheep-path, thinking bitterly . . .
 Well, well ! no matter. I but say so much,
 To keep you, Romney Leigh, from saying
 more,

And let you feel I am not so high indeed,
 That I can bear to have you at my foot, —
 Or safe, that I can help you. That June
 day,

Too deeply sunk in craterous sunsets now
 For you or me to dig it up alive, — ⁴⁹⁰
 To pluck it out all bleeding with spent flame
 At the roots, before those moralizing stars
 We have got instead, — that poor lost day,
 you said

Some words as truthful as the thing of
 mine

You cared to keep in memory; and I hold
 If I, that day, and being the girl I was,
 Had shown a gentler spirit, less arrogance,
 It had not hurt me. You will scarce
 mistake

The point here: I but only think, you see,
 More justly, that's more humbly, of my-
 self, ⁵⁰⁰

Than when I tried a crown on and sup-
 posed . . .

Nay, laugh, sir, — I'll laugh with you ! —
 pray you, laugh,

I've had so many birthdays since that day
 I've learnt to prize mirth's opportunities,
 Which come too seldom. Was it you who
 said

I was not changed ? the same Aurora ?
 Ah,

We could laugh there, too ! Why, Ulysses'
 dog

Knew *him*, and wagged his tail and died:
 but if

I had owned a dog, I too, before my Troy,
 And if you brought him here, . . . I war-
 rant you ⁵¹⁰

He'd look into my face, bark lustily,
 And live on stontly, as the creatures will
 Whose spirits are not troubled by long
 loves.

A dog would never know me, I'm so
 changed,

Much less a friend . . . except that you're
 misled

By the color of the hair, the trick of the
 voice,
 Like that Aurora Leigh's.'

'Sweet trick of voice !
 I would be a dog for this, to know it at
 last,

And die upon the falls of it. O love,
 O best Aurora ! are you then so sad ⁵²⁰
 You scarcely had been sadder as my wife ?'

'Your wife, sir ! I must certainly be
 changed,

If I, Aurora, can have said a thing
 So light, it catches at the knightly spurs
 Of a noble gentleman like Romney Leigh,
 And trips him from his honorable sense
 Of what befits' . . .

'You wholly misconceive,'
 He answered.

I returned, — 'I'm glad of it.
 But keep from misconception, too, your-
 self:

I am not humbled to so low a point, ⁵³⁰
 Not so far saddened. If I am sad at all,
 Ten layers of birthdays on a woman's head
 Are apt to fossilize her girlish mirth,
 Though ne'er so merry: I'm perforce more
 wise,

And that, in truth, means sadder. For the
 rest,

Look here, sir: I was right upon the whole
 That birthday morning. 'Tis impossible
 To get at men excepting through their
 souls,

However open their carnivorous jaws;
 And poets get directlier at the soul ⁵⁴⁰
 Than any of your æconomists — for which
 You must not overlook the poet's work
 When scheming for the world's necessi-
 ties.

The soul's the way. Not even Christ
 Himself

Can save man else than as He holds man's
 soul;

And therefore did He come into our flesh,
 As some wise hunter creeping on his knees,
 With a torch, into the blackness of a cave,
 To face and quell the beast there — take
 the soul,

And so possess the whole man, body and
 soul. ⁵⁵⁰

I said, so far, right, yes: not farther,
 though:

We both were wrong that June day —
 both as wrong

As an east wind had been. I who talked
of art,
And you who grieved for all men's griefs
. . . what then ?

We surely made too small a part for God
In these things. What we are, imports us
more

Than what we eat ; and life, you've
granted me,

Develops from within. But innermost
Of the inmost, most interior of the interne,
God claims his own, Divine humanity ⁵⁶⁰
Renewing nature, or the piercingest verse
Pressed in by subtlest poet, still must keep
As much upon the outside of a man

As the very bowl in which he dips his
beard.

— And then, . . . the rest ; I cannot surely
speak :

Perhaps I doubt more than you doubted
then,

If I the poet's veritable charge
Have borne upon my forehead. If I have,
It might feel somewhat liker to a crown,
The foolish green one even.— Ah, I
think, ⁵⁷⁰

And chiefly when the sun shines, that I've
failed.

But what then, Romney ? Though we
fail indeed,

You . . . I . . . a score of such weak
workers, . . . He

Fails never. If He cannot work by us,
He will work over us. Does He want a
man,

Much less a woman, think you ? Every
time

The star winks there, so many souls are
born,

Who all shall work too. Let our own be
calm :

We should be ashamed to sit beneath those
stars, ⁵⁷⁹

Impatient that we're nothing.'

'Could we sit
Just so for ever, sweetest friend,' he said,
'My failure would seem better than suc-
cess.

And yet indeed your book has dealt with
me

More gently, cousin, than you ever will !

Your book brought down entire the bright
June day,

And set me wandering in the garden-walks,
And let me watch the garland in a place

You blushed so . . . nay, forgive me, do
not stir, —

I only thank the book for what it taught,
And what permitted. Poet, doubt your-
self, ⁵⁹⁰

But never doubt that you're a poet to me
From henceforth. You have written poems,
sweet,

Which moved me in secret, as the sap is
moved

In still March-branches, signless as a stone :
But this last book o'ercame me like soft
rain

Which falls at midnight, when the tight-
ened bark

Breaks out into unhesitating buds
And sudden protestations of the spring.

In all your other books, I saw but *you* :

A man may see the moon so, in a pond, ⁶⁰⁰
And not be nearer therefore to the moon,

Nor use the sight . . . except to drown
himself :

And so I forced my heart back from the
sight,

For what had *I*, I thought, to do with
her,

Aurora . . . Romney ? But, in this last
book,

You showed me something separate from
yourself,

Beyond you, and I bore to take it in

And let it draw me. You have shown me
truths,

O June-day friend, that help me now at
night,

When June is over ! truths not yours, in-
deed, ⁶¹⁰

But set within my reach by means of you,
Presented by your voice and verse the way
To take them clearest. Verily I was
wrong ;

And verily many thinkers of this age,

Ay, many Christian teachers, half in
heaven,

Are wrong in just my sense who under-
stood

Our natural world too insularly, as if
No spiritual counterpart completed it,
Consummating its meaning, rounding all
To justice and perfection, line by line, ⁶²⁰
Form by form, nothing single nor alone,
The great below clenched by the great
above,

Shade here authenticating substance there,
The body proving spirit, as the effect

The cause: we meantime being too grossly
apt

To hold the natural, as dogs a bone
(Though reason and nature beat us in the
face),

So obstinately, that we 'll break our teeth
Or ever we let go. For everywhere
We're too materialistic, — eating clay ⁶³⁰
(Like men of the west) instead of Adam's
corn

And Noah's wine — clay by handfuls, clay
by lumps,

Until we're filled up to the throat with
clay,

And grow the grimy color of the ground
On which we are feeding. Ay, materialist
The age's name is. God Himself, with
some,

Is apprehended as the bare result
Of what his hand materially has made,
Expressed in such an algebraic sign
Called God — that is, to put it otherwise, ⁶⁴⁰
They add up nature to a nought of God
And cross the quotient. There are many
even,

Whose names are written in the Christian
Church

To no dishonor, diet still on mud
And splash the altars with it. You might
think

The clay Christ laid upon their eyelids
when,

Still blind, He called them to the use of
sight,

Remained there to retard its exercise
With clogging incrustations. Close to
heaven,

They see for mysteries, through the open
doors, ⁶⁵⁰

Vague puffs of smoke from pots of earthen-
ware,

And fain would enter, when their time
shall come,

With quite another body than Saint Paul
Has promised — husk and chaff, the whole
barley-corn

Or where's the resurrection ?'

'Thus it is,'

I sighed. And he resumed with mournful
face,

'Beginning so, and filling up with clay
The wards of this great key, the natural
world,

And fumbling vainly therefore at the lock
Of the spiritual, we feel ourselves shut in

With all the wild-beast roar of struggling
life, ⁶⁶¹

The terrors and compunctions of our souls,
As saints with lions, — we who are not
saints,

And have no heavenly lordship in our stare
To awe them backward. Ay, we are
forced, so pent,

To judge the whole too partially, . . . con-
found

Conclusions. Is there any common phrase
Significant, with the adverb heard alone,
The verb being absent, and the pronoun
out ?

But we, distracted in the roar of life, ⁶⁷⁰
Still insolently at God's adverb snatch,
And bruit against Him that his thought is
void,

His meaning hopeless, — cry, that every-
where

The government is slipping from his hand,
Unless some other Christ (say Romney
Leigh)

Come up and toil and moil and change the
world,

Because the First has proved inadequate,
However we talk bigly of his work
And piously of his person. We blaspheme
At last, to finish our doxology, ⁶⁸⁰
Despairing on the earth for which He died.'

'So now,' I asked, 'you have more hope
of men ?'

'I hope,' he answered. 'I am come to
think

That God will have his work done, as you
said,

And that we need not be disturbed too
much

For Romney Leigh or others having failed
With this or that quack nostrum — recipes
For keeping summits by annulling depths,
For wrestling with luxurious lounging
sleeves,

And acting heroism without a scratch, ⁶⁹⁰
We fail, — what then ? Aurora, if I
smiled

To see you, in your lovely morning-pride,
Try on the poet's wreath which suits the
noon

(Sweet cousin, walls must get the weather
stain

Before they grow the ivy !), certainly
I stood myself there worthier of contempt,

Self-rated, in disastrous arrogance,
As competent to sorrow for mankind,
And even their odds. A man may well
despair 699

Who counts himself so needful to success.
I failed: I throw the remedy back on God,
And sit down here beside you, in good
hope.'

'And yet take heed,' I answered, 'lest we
lean

Too dangerously on the other side,
And so fail twice. Be sure, no earnest
work

Of any honest creature, howbeit weak,
Imperfect, ill-adapted, fails so much,
It is not gathered as a grain of sand
To enlarge the sum of human action used
For carrying out God's end. No creature
works 710

So ill, observe, that therefore he's cash-
iered.

The honest, earnest man must stand and
work,

The woman also — otherwise she drops
At once below the dignity of man,
Accepting serfdom. Free men freely
work.

Whoever fears God, fears to sit at ease.'

He cried: 'True. After Adam, work was
curse:

The natural creature labors, sweats, and
frets. 718

But, after Christ, work turns to privilege,
And henceforth, one with our humanity,
The Six-day Worker working still in us
Has called us freely to work on with Him
In high companionship. So, happiest!
I count that heaven itself is only work
To a surer issue. Let us work, indeed,
But no more work as Adam, — nor as
Leigh

Erewhile, as if the only man on earth,
Responsible for all the thistles blown
And tigers couchant, struggling in amaze
Against disease and winter, snarling on 730
For ever that the world's not paradise.
O cousin, let us be content, in work,
To do the thing we can, and not presume
To fret because it's little. 'T will employ
Seven men, they say, to make a perfect
pin:

Who makes the head, content to miss the
point;

Who makes the point, agreed to leave the
join:

And if a man should cry "I want a pin,
And I must make it straightway, head and
point,"

His wisdom is not worth the pin he wants.
Seven men to a pin, — and not a man too
much! 741

Seven generations, haply, to this world,
To right it visibly a finger's breadth,
And mend its rents a little. Oh, to storm
And say "This world here is intolerable;
I will not eat this corn, nor drink this wine,
Nor love this woman, flinging her my soul
Without a bond for 't as a lover should,
Nor use the generous leave of happiness
As not too good for using generously" —
(Since virtue kindles at the touch of joy
Like a man's cheek laid on a woman's
hand, 752

And God, Who knows it, looks for quick
returns

From joys) — to stand and claim to have a
life

Beyond the bounds of the individual man,
And raze all personal cloisters of the soul
To build up public stores and magazines,
As if God's creatures otherwise were lost,
The builder surely saved by any means!
To think, — I have a pattern on my nail, 760
And I will carve the world new after it
And solve so these hard social questions —
nay,

Impossible social questions, since their
roots

Strike deep in Evil's own existence here,
Which God permits because the question's
hard

To abolish evil nor attain free-will.
Ay, hard to God, but not to Romney Leigh!
For Romney has a pattern on his nail
(Whatever may be lacking on the Mount),
And, not being over-nice to separate 770
What's element from what's convention,
hastes

By line on line to draw you out a world,
Without your help indeed, unless you take
His yoke upon you, and will learn of him,
So much he has to teach! so good a world!
The same the whole creation's groaning
for!

No rich nor poor, no gain nor loss nor
stint;

No pottage in it able to exclude
A brother's birthright, and no right of birth

The pottage — both secured to every man,
 And perfect virtue dealt out like the rest
 Gratuitously, with the soup at six, ⁷⁸²
 To whoso does not seek it.'

'Softly, sir,'

I interrupted, — 'I had a cousin once
 I held in reverence. If he strained too
 wide,

It was not to take honor, but give help;
 The gesture was heroic. If his hand
 Accomplished nothing . . . (well, it is not
 proved)

That empty hand thrown impotently out
 Were sooner caught, I think, by One in
 heaven, ⁷⁹⁰

Than many a hand that reaped a harvest in,
 And keeps the scythe's glow on it. Pray
 you, then,

For my sake merely, use less bitterness
 In speaking of my cousin.'

'Ah,' he said,

'Aurora! when the prophet beats the ass,
 The angel intercedes.' He shook his head —
 'And yet to mean so well and fail so foul,
 Expresses ne'er another beast than man;
 The antithesis is human. Hearken, dear;
 There's too much abstract willing, pur-
 posing, ⁸⁰⁰

In this poor world. We talk by aggre-
 gates,
 And think by systems, and, being used to
 face

Our evils in statistics, are inclined
 To cap them with unreal remedies
 Drawn out in haste on the other side the
 slate.'

'That's true,' I answered, fain to throw up
 thought

And make a game of't. 'Yes, we gener-
 alize

Enough to please you. If we pray at all,
 We pray no longer for our daily bread, ⁸⁰⁹
 But next centenary's harvests. If we give,
 Our cup of water is not tendered till
 We lay down pipes and found a Company
 With Branches. Ass or angel, 't is the
 same:

A woman cannot do the thing she ought,
 Which means whatever perfect thing she
 can,

In life, in art, in science, but she fears
 To let the perfect action take her part,
 And rest there: she must prove what she
 can do

Before she does it, prate of woman's rights,

Of woman's mission, woman's function, till
 The men (who are prating too on their side)
 cry, ⁸²¹

"A woman's function plainly is . . . to
 talk."

Poor souls, they are very reasonably vexed;
 They cannot hear each other talk.'

'And you,

An artist, judge so?'

'I, an artist — yes:

Because, precisely, I'm an artist, sir,
 And woman, if another sat in sight,
 I'd whisper, — Soft, my sister! not a word!
 By speaking we prove only we can speak,
 Which he, the man here, never doubted.

What ⁸³⁰

He doubts is, whether we can *do* the thing
 With decent grace we've not yet done at
 all.

Now, do it; bring your statue, — you have
 room!

He'll see it even by the starlight here;
 And if 't is e'er so little like the god
 Who looks out from the marble silently
 Along the track of his own shining dart
 Through the dusk of ages, there's no need
 to speak;

The universe shall henceforth speak for
 you,

And witness, "She who did this thing was
 born ⁸⁴⁰

To do it — claims her license in her work."
 And so with more works. Whoso cures the
 plague,

Though twice a woman, shall be called a
 leech:

Who rights a land's finances is excused
 For touching coppers, though her hands be
 white.

But we, we talk!'

'It is the age's mood,'

He said; 'we boast, and do not. We put
 up

Hostelry signs where'er we lodge a day, —
 Some red colossal cow with mighty paps
 A Cyclops' fingers could not strain to
 milk, — ⁸⁵⁰

Then bring out presently our saucerful
 Of curds. We want more quiet in our
 works,

More knowledge of the bounds in which we
 work;

More knowledge that each individual man
 Remains an Adam to the general race,
 Constrained to see, like Adam, that he keep

His personal state's condition honestly,
Or vain all thoughts of his to help the
world,
Which still must be developed from its
one

If bettered in its many. We indeed, ⁸⁶⁰
Who think to lay it out new like a park,
We take a work on us which is not man's,
For God alone sits far enough above
To speculate so largely. None of us
(Not Romney Leigh) is mad enough to
say,

We'll have a grove of oaks upon that slope
And sink the need of acorns. Government,
If veritable and lawful, is not given
By imposition of the foreign hand,
Nor chosen from a pretty pattern-book ⁸⁷⁰
Of some domestic idealogue who sits
And coldly chooses empire, where as well
He might republic. Genuine government
Is but the expression of a nation, good
Or less good—even as all society,
Howe'er unequal, monstrous, crazed and
cursed,

Is but the expression of men's single lives,
The loud sum of the silent units. What,
We'd change the aggregate and yet retain
Each separate figure? whom do we cheat
by that? ⁸⁸⁰
Now, not even Romney.'

'Cousin, you are sad.
Did all your social labor at Leigh Hall,
And elsewhere, come to nought, then?'

'It was nought,'
He answered mildly. 'There is room, in-
deed,
For statues still in this large world of
God's,

But not for vacuums; so I am not sad—
Not sadder than is good for what I am.
My vain phalanstery dissolved itself;
My men and women of disordered lives
I brought in orderly to dine and sleep,
Broke up those waxen masks I made them
wear, ⁸⁹¹

With fierce contortions of the natural face,
And cursed me for my tyrannous con-
straint

In forcing crooked creatures to live
straight;

And set the country hounds upon my back
To bite and tear me for my wicked deed
Of trying to do good without the church
Or even the squires, Aurora. Do you
mind

Your ancient neighbors? The great book-
club teems

With "sketches," "summaries," and "last
tracts" but twelve, ⁹⁰⁰

On socialistic troublers of close bonds
Betwixt the generous rich and grateful
poor.

The vicar preached from "Revelations"
(till

The doctor woke), and found me with "the
frogs"

On three successive Sundays; ay, and
stopped

To weep a little (for he's getting old)
That such perdition should o'ertake a
man

Of such fair acres—in the parish, too!
He printed his discourses "by request,"

And if your book shall sell as his did,
then ⁹¹⁰

Your verses are less good than I suppose.
The women of the neighborhood subscribed,
And sent me a copy, bound in scarlet silk,
Tooled edges, blazoned with the arms of
Leigh:

I own that touched me.'

'What, the pretty ones?
Poor Romney!'

'Otherwise the effect was small:
I had my windows broken once or twice
By liberal peasants naturally incensed
At such a vexer of Arcadian peace,
Who would not let men call their wives
their own ⁹²⁰

To kick like Britons, and made obstacles
When things went smoothly as a baby
drugged,

Toward freedom and starvation—bring-
ing down

The wicked London tavern-thieves and
drabs

To affront the blessed hillside drabs and
thieves

With mended morals, quotha—fine new
lives!—

My windows paid for't. I was shot at,
once,

By an active poacher who had hit a hare
From the other barrel (tired of springe-
ing game

So long upon my acres, undisturbed, ⁹³⁰
And restless for the country's virtue—yet

He missed me); ay, and pelted very oft
In riding through the village. "There he
goes

Who 'd drive away our Christian gentle-
folk,
To catch us undefended in the trap
He baits with poisonous cheese, and lock
us up
In that pernicious prison of Leigh Hall
With all his murderers! Give another
name
And say Leigh Hell, and burn it up with
fire."
And so they did, at last, Aurora.'

'Did?'

'You never heard it, cousin? Vincent's
news 941
Came stinted, then.'
'They did? they burnt Leigh Hall?'

'You're sorry, dear Aurora? Yes, indeed,
They did it perfectly: a thorough work,
And not a failure, this time. Let us grant
'Tis somewhat easier, though, to burn a
house
Than build a system; yet that 's easy too
In a dream. Books, pictures — ay, the
pictures! What,
You think your dear Vandykes would give
them pause?
Our proud ancestral Leighs, with those
peaked beards, 950
Or bosoms white as foam thrown up on
rocks
From the old-spent wave. Such calm de-
fiant looks
They flared up with! now nevermore to
twit
The bones in the family vault with ugly
death.
Not one was rescued, save the Lady Maud,
Who threw you down, that morning you
were born,
The undeniable lineal mouth and chin
To wear for ever for her gracious sake,
For which good deed I saved her; the rest
went:
And you, you're sorry, cousin. Well, for
me, 960
With all my phalansterians safely out
(Poor hearts, they helped the burners, it
was said,
And certainly a few clapped hands and
yelled),
The ruin did not hurt me as it might —
As when for instance I was hurt one day
A certain letter being destroyed. In fact,

To see the great house flare so . . . oaken
floors
Our fathers made so fine with rushes once
Before our mothers furbished them with
trains,
Carved wainscots, panelled walls, the fa-
vorite slide 970
For draining off a martyr (or a rogue),
The echoing galleries, half a half-mile
long,
And all the various stairs that took you
up
And took you down, and took you round
about
Upon their slippery darkness, recollect,
All helping to keep up one blazing jest!
The flames through all the casements
pushing forth,
Like red-hot devils crinkled into snakes,
All signifying "Look you, Romney Leigh,
We save the people from your saving,
here, 980
Yet so as by fire! we make a pretty show
Besides — and that's the best you've ever
done."
— To see this, almost moved myself to
clap!
The "vale et plaudere" came too with effect
When in the roof fell, and the fire that
paused,
Stunned momentarily beneath the stroke of
slates
And tumbling rafters, rose at once and
roared,
And wrapping the whole house (which dis-
appeared
In a mounting whirlwind of dilated flame),
Blew upward, straight, its drift of fiery
chaff 990
In the face of Heaven, which blenched,
and ran up higher.'

'Poor Romney!'
'Sometimes when I dream,' he said,
'I hear the silence after, 't was so still.
For all those wild beasts, yelling, cursing
round,
Were suddenly silent, while you counted
five,
So silent, that you heard a young bird fall
From the top nest in the neighboring rook-
ery,
Through edging over-rashly toward the
light.
The old rooks had already fled too far

To hear the screech they fled with, though
 you saw 1000
 Some flying still, like scatterings of dead
 leaves
 In autumn-gusts, seen dark against the
 sky, —
 All flying, — ousted, like the House of
 Leigh.'

'Dear Romney !'

 'Evidently 't would have been
 A fine sight for a poet, sweet, like you,
 To make the verse blaze after. I myself,
 Even I, felt something in the grand old
 trees,
 Which stood that moment like brute Druid
 gods
 Amazed upon the rim of ruin, where,
 As into a blackened socket, the great
 fire 1010
 Had dropped, still throwing up splinters
 now and then
 To show them gray with all their centu-
 ries,
 Left there to witness that on such a day
 The House went out.'

 'Ah !'

 'While you counted five,
 I seemed to feel a little like a Leigh, —
 But then it passed, Aurora. A child cried,
 And I had enough to think of what to do
 With all those houseless wretches in the
 dark,
 And ponder where they'd dance the next
 time, they 1019
 Who had burnt the viol.'

 'Did you think of that ?
 Who burns his viol will not dance, I know,
 To cymbals, Romney.'

 'O my sweet, sad voice !'
 He cried, — 'O voice that speaks and over-
 comes !
 The sun is silent, but Aurora speaks.'

'Alas,' I said, 'I speak I know not what:
 I'm back in childhood, thinking as a child,
 A foolish fancy — will it make you smile ?
 I shall not from the window of my room
 Catch sight of those old chimneys any
 more.'

'No more,' he answered. 'If you pushed
 one day 1030
 Through all the green hills to our fathers'
 house,

You'd come upon a great charred circle,
 where
 The patient earth was singed an acre
 round;

With one stone stair, symbolic of my life,
 Ascending, winding, leading up to nought !
 'T is worth a poet's seeing. Will you go ?'

I made no answer. Had I any right
 To weep with this man, that I dared to
 speak ?

A woman stood between his soul and mine,
 And waved us off from touching ever-
 more, 1040

With those unclean white hands of hers.
 Enough.

We had burnt our viols, and were silent.

 So,
 The silence lengthened till it pressed. I
 spoke,

To breathe: 'I think you were ill after-
 ward.'

'More ill,' he answered, 'had been scarcely
 ill.

I hoped this feeble fumbling at life's knot
 Might end concisely, — but I failed to die,
 As formerly I failed to live, — and thus
 Grew willing, having tried all other ways,
 To try just God's. Humility's so good,
 When pride's impossible. Mark us, how
 we make 1051

Our virtues, cousin, from our worn-out sins,
 Which smack of them from henceforth.
 Is it right,

For instance, to wed here while you love
 there ?

And yet because a man sins once, the sin
 Cleaves to him, in necessity to sin,
 That if he sin not so to damn himself,
 He sins so, to damn others with himself:
 And thus, to wed here, loving there, be-
 comes

A duty. Virtue buds a dubious leaf 1060
 Round mortal brows; your ivy's better,
 dear.

— Yet she, 't is certain, is my very wife,
 The very lamb left mangled by the wolves
 Through my own bad shepherding: and
 could I choose

But take her on my shoulder past this
 stretch

Of rough, uneasy wilderness, poor lamb,
 Poor child, poor child ? — Aurora, my
 beloved,

I will not vex you any more to-night,
But, having spoken what I came to say,
The rest shall please you. What she can,
in me — 1070

Protection, tender liking, freedom, ease —
She shall have surely, liberally, for her
And hers, Aurora. Small amends they 'll
make

For hideous evils which she had not known
Except by me, and for this imminent loss,
This forfeit presence of a gracious friend,
Which also she must forfeit for my sake,
Since, . . . drop your hand in mine a
moment, sweet,

We 're parting ! — Ah, my snowdrop, what
a touch,

As if the wind had swept it off ! You
grudge 1080

Your gelid sweetness on my palm but so,
A moment ? Angry, that I could not
bear

You . . . speaking, breathing, living, side
by side

With some one called my wife . . . and
live, myself ?

Nay, be not cruel — you must understand !
Your lightest footfall on a floor of mine
Would shake the house, my lintel being
uncrossed

'Gainst angels: henceforth it is night with
me,

And so, henceforth, I put the shutters up:
Auroras must not come to spoil my dark.'

He smiled so feebly, with an empty hand
Stretched sideway from me — as indeed he
looked 1092

To any one but me to give him help;
And, while the moon came suddenly out
full,

The double-rose of our Italian moons,
Sufficient plainly for the heaven and earth
(The stars struck dumb and washed away
in dews

Of golden glory, and the mountains steeped
In divine languor), he, the man, appeared
So pale and patient, like the marble man 1100
A sculptor puts his personal sadness in
To join his grandeur of ideal thought,
As if his mallet struck me from my height
Of passionate indignation, I who had risen
Pale, doubting paused . . . Was Romney
mad indeed ?

Had all this wrong of heart made sick the
brain ?

Then quiet, with a sort of tremulous pride,
'Go, cousin,' I said coldly; 'a farewell
Was sooner spoken 'twixt a pair of friends
In those old days, than seems to suit you
now. 1110

Howbeit, since then, I 've writ a book or
two,

I 'm somewhat dull still in the manly art
Of phrase and metaphrase. Why, any man
Can carve a score of white Loves out of
snow,

As Buonarroti in my Florence there,
And set them on the wall in some safe
shade,

As safe, sir, as your marriage ! very good;
Though if a woman took one from the ledge
To put it on the table by her flowers

And let it mind her of a certain friend, 1120
'T would drop at once (so better), would
not bear

Her nail-mark even, where she took it up
A little tenderly, — so best, I say:
For me, I would not touch the fragile thing
And risk to spoil it half an hour before
The sun shall shine to melt it: leave it
there.

I 'm plain at speech, direct in purpose:
when

I speak, you 'll take the meaning as it is,
And not allow for puckerings in the silk
By clever stitches. I 'm a woman, sir — 1130
I use the woman's figures naturally,
As you the male license. So, I wish you
well.

I 'm simply sorry for the griefs you 've had,
And not for your sake only, but mankind's.
This race is never grateful: from the first,
One fills their cup at supper with pure wine,
Which back they give at cross-time on a
sponge,
In vinegar and gall.'

'If gratefuller,'
He murmured, 'by so much less pitiable !
God's self would never have come down to
die, 1140

Could man have thanked Him for it.'

'Happily
'T is patent that, whatever,' I resumed,
'You suffered from this thanklessness of
men,

You sink no more than Moses' bulrush-boat
When once relieved of Moses, — for you 're
light,

You 're light, my cousin ! which is well for
you,

And manly. For myself, now mark me,
 sir,
 They burnt Leigh Hall; but if, consummated
 To devils, heightened beyond Lucifers,
 They had burnt, instead, a star or two of
 those 1150
 We saw above there just a moment back,
 Before the moon abolished them, — destroyed
 And riddled them in ashes through a sieve
 On the head of the foundering universe —
 what then ?
 If you and I remained still you and I,
 It could not shift our places as mere friends,
 Nor render decent you should toss a phrase
 Beyond the point of actual feeling ! Nay,
 You shall not interrupt me: as you said,
 We're parting. Certainly, not once nor
 twice 1160
 To-night you've mocked me somewhat, or
 yourself,
 And I, at least, have not deserved it so
 That I should meet it unsurprised. But
 now,
 Enough: we're parting . . . parting.
 Cousin Leigh,
 I wish you well through all the acts of life
 And life's relations, wedlock not the least,
 And it shall "please me," in your words, to
 know
 You yield your wife protection, freedom,
 ease,
 And very tender liking. May you live
 So happy with her, Romney, that your
 friends 1170
 Shall praise her for it ! Meantime some of
 us
 Are wholly dull in keeping ignorant
 Of what she has suffered by you, and what
 debt
 Of sorrow your rich love sits down to pay:
 But if 't is sweet for love to pay its debt,
 'T is sweeter still for love to give its gift,
 And you, be liberal in the sweeter way,
 You can, I think. At least, as touches me,
 You owe her, cousin Romney, no amends:
 She is not used to hold my gown so fast, 1180
 You need entreat her now to let it go;
 The lady never was a friend of mine,
 Nor capable — I thought you knew as
 much —
 Of losing for your sake so poor a prize
 As such a worthless friendship. Be content,

Good cousin, therefore, both for her and
 you !
 I'll never spoil your dark, nor dull your
 noon,
 Nor vex you when you're merry, or at rest:
 You shall not need to put a shutter up
 To keep out this Aurora, — though your
 north 1190
 Can make Auroras which vex nobody,
 Scarce known from night, I fancied ! let
 me add,
 My larks fly higher than some windows.
 Well,
 You've read your Leighs. Indeed, 't would
 shake a house,
 If such as I came in with outstretched hand,
 Still warm and thrilling from the clasp of
 one . . .
 Of one we know, . . . to acknowledge,
 palm to palm,
 As mistress there, the Lady Waldemar.'
 'Now God be with us' . . . with a sudden
 clash
 Of voice he interrupted. 'What name's
 that ? 1200
 You spoke a name, Aurora.'
 'Pardon me;
 I would that, Romney, I could name your
 wife
 Nor wound you, yet be worthy.'
 'Are we mad ?'
 He echoed. 'Wife ! mine ! Lady Waldemar !
 I think you said my wife.' He sprang to
 his feet,
 And threw his noble head back toward the
 moon
 As one who swims against a stormy sea,
 Then laughed with such a helpless, hopeless
 scorn,
 I stood and trembled.
 'May God judge me so,'
 He said at last, — 'I came convicted here,
 And humbled sorely if not enough. I
 came, 1211
 Because this woman from her crystal soul
 Had shown me something which a man
 calls light:
 Because too, formerly, I sinned by her
 As then and ever since I have, by God,
 Through arrogance of nature, — though I
 loved . . .
 Whom best, I need not say, since that is
 writ
 Too plainly in the book of my misdeeds:

And thus I came here to abase myself,
And fasten, kneeling, on her regent brows
A garland which I startled thence one
day 1221

Of her beautiful June-youth. But here
again

I'm baffled, — fail in my abasement as
My aggrandizement: there 's no room left
for me

At any woman's foot who misconceives
My nature, purpose, possible actions.
What!

Are you the Aurora who made large my
dreams

To frame your greatness? you conceive so
small?

You stand so less than woman through
being more

And lose your natural instinct (like a
beast) 1230

Through intellectual culture? since indeed
I do not think that any common she
Would dare adopt such monstrous forger-
ies

For the legible life signature of such
As I, with all my blots — with all my
blots!

At last, then, peerless cousin, we are
peers —

At last we're even. Ay, you've left your
height,

And here upon my level we take hands,
And here I reach you to forgive you, sweet,
And that's a fall, Aurora. Long ago 1240

You seldom understood me, — but before,
I could not blame you. Then, you only
seemed

So high above, you could not see below;
But now I breathe, — but now I pardon!
— nay,

We're parting. Dearest, men have burnt
my house,

Maligned my motives; but not one, I
swear,

Has wronged my soul as this Aurora has
Who called the Lady Waldemar my wife.

'Not married to her! yet you said' . . .

'Again?

Nay, read the lines' (he held a letter out)
'She sent you through me.'

By the moonlight there
I tore the meaning out with passionate
haste 1252

Much rather than I read it. Thus it ran.

NINTH BOOK

Even thus. I pause to write it out at
length,
The letter of the Lady Waldemar.

'I prayed your cousin Leigh to take you
this:

He says he'll do it. After years of love,
Or what is called so, when a woman frets
And fools upon one string of a man's name,
And fingers it for ever till it breaks, —

He may perhaps do for her such a thing,
And she accept it without detriment
Although she should not love him any
more. 10

And I, who do not love him, nor love
you,

Nor you, Aurora, — choose you shall re-
pent

Your most ungracious letter and confess,
Constrained by his convictions (he's con-
vinced),

You've wronged me foully. Are you made
so ill,

You woman, to impute such ill to me?
We both had mothers, — lay in their bosom
once.

And after all, I thank you, Aurora Leigh,
For proving to myself that there are things
I would not do — not for my life, nor
him,

Though something I have somewhat over-
done, — 21

For instance, when I went to see the gods
One morning on Olympus, with a step
That shook the thunder from a certain
cloud,

Committing myself vilely. Could I think,
The Muse I pulled my heart out from my
breast

To soften, had herself a sort of heart,
And loved my mortal? He at least loved
her, —

I heard him say so: 't was my recompense,
When, watching at his bedside fourteen
days, 30

He broke out ever like a flame at whiles
Between the heats of fever, — "Is it thou?
Breathe closer, sweetest mouth!" and
when at last,

The fever gone, the wasted face extinct,
As if it irked him much to know me there,
He said "'T was kind, 't was good, 't was
womanly,"

(And fifty praises to excuse no love);
 "But was the picture safe he had ventured
 for?"

And then, half wandering, "I have loved
 her well,

Although she could not love me." — "Say,
 instead,"

I answered, "she does love you." — "T was
 my turn

To rave: I would have married him so
 changed,

Although the world had jeered me properly
 For taking up with Cupid at his worst,

The silver quiver worn off on his hair.
 "No, no," he murmured; "no, she loves me
 not;

Aurora Leigh does better: bring her book
 And read it softly, Lady Waldemar,

Until I thank your friendship more for
 that

Than even for harder service." So I
 read

Your book, Aurora, for an hour that day:
 I kept its pauses, marked its emphasis;

My voice, impaled upon its hooks of rhyme,
 Not once would writhe, nor quiver, nor

revolt;
 I read on calmly, — calmly shut it up,

Observing, "There's some merit in the
 book;

And yet the merit in 't is thrown away,
 As chances still with women if we write

Or write not: we want string to tie our
 flowers,

So drop them as we walk, which serves to
 show

The way we went. Good morning, Mister
 Leigh;

You'll find another reader the next time.
 A woman who does better than to love,

I hate; she will do nothing very well:
 Male poets are preferable, straining less

And teaching more." I triumphed o'er
 you both,

And left him.

'When I saw him afterward
 I had read your shameful letter, and my
 heart.

He came with health recovered, strong
 though pale,

Lord Howe and he, a courteous pair of
 friends,

To say what men dare say to women, when
 Their debtors. But I stopped them with

a word,

And proved I had never trodden such a
 road

To carry so much dirt upon my shoe.
 Then, putting into it something of disdain,

I asked, forsooth, his pardon, and my own,
 For having done no better than to love,

And that not wisely, — though 't was long
 ago,

And had been mended radically since.
 I told him, as I tell you now, Miss Leigh,

And proved, I took some trouble for his
 sake

(Because I knew he did not love the girl)
 To spoil my hands with working in the
 stream

Of that poor bubbling nature, — till she
 went,

Consigned to one I trusted, my own maid
 Who once had lived full five months in my
 house

(Dressed hair superbly), with a lavish
 purse,

To carry to Australia, where she had left
 A husband, said she. If the creature lied,

The mission failed: we all do fail and
 lie

More or less — and I'm sorry — which is
 all

Expected from us when we fail the most
 And go to church to own it. What I
 meant,

Was just the best for him, and me, and
 her . . .

Best even for Marian! — I am sorry for 't,
 And very sorry. Yet my creature said

She saw her stop to speak in Oxford Street
 To one . . . no matter! I had sooner cut

My hand off (though 't were kissed the
 hour before,

And promised a duke's troth-ring for the
 next)

Than crush her silly head with so much
 wrong.

Poor child! I would have mended it
 with gold,

Until it gleamed like Saint Sophia's dome
 When all the faithful troop to morning
 prayer:

But he, he nipped the bud of such a thought
 With that cold Leigh look which I fancied
 once,

And broke in, "Henceforth she was called
 his wife:

His wife required no succor: he was bound
 To Florence, to resume this broken bond;

Enough so. Both were happy, he and
Howe, 110
To acquit me of the heaviest charge of
all "—

— At which I shot my tongue against my
fly
And struck him: "Would he carry — he
was just —

A letter from me to Aurora Leigh,
And ratify from his authentic mouth
My answer to her accusation ? " — "Yes,
If such a letter were prepared in time."
— He's just, your cousin, — ay, abhor-
rently:

He'd wash his hands in blood, to keep
them clean. 119

And so, cold, courteous, a mere gentleman,
He bowed, we parted.

'Parted. Face no more,
Voice no more, love no more ! — wiped
wholly out

Like some ill scholar's scrawl from heart
and slate, —

Ay, spit on, and so wiped out utterly
By some coarse scholar ! I have been too
coarse,

Too human. Have we business, in our
rank,

With blood i' the veins ? I will have
henceforth none,

Not even to keep the color at my lip.

A rose is pink and pretty without blood:
Why not a woman ? When we've played
in vain 130

The game, to adore, — we have resources
still,

And can play on at leisure, being adored:
Here's Smith already swearing at my feet
That I'm the typic She. Away with
Smith ! —

Smith snacks of Leigh, — and henceforth
I'll admit

No socialist within three crinolines,
To live and have his being. But for you,
Though insolent your letter and absurd,
And though I hate you frankly, — take my
Smith !

For when you have seen this famous mar-
riage tied, 140

A most unspotted Erle to a noble Leigh
(His love astray on one he should not love),
Howbeit you may not want his love, be-
ware,

You'll want some comfort. So I leave you
Smith,

Take Smith ! — he talks Leigh's subjects,
somewhat worse;

Adopts a thought of Leigh's, and dwindles
it;

Goes leagues beyond, to be no inch behind;
Will mind you of him, as a shoe-string
may

Of a man: and women, when they are
made like you,

Grow tender to a shoe-string, footprint
even, 150

Adore averted shoulders in a glass,
And memories of what, present once, was
loathed.

And yet, you loathed not Romney, —
though you played

At "fox and goose" about him with your
soul;

Pass over fox, you rub out fox, — ignore
A feeling, you eradicate it, — the act's
Identical.

'I wish you joy, Miss Leigh;
You've made a happy marriage for your
friend,

And all the honor well-assorted love
Derives from you who love him, whom he
loves ! 160

You need not wish *me* joy to think of it;
I have so much. Observe, Aurora Leigh,
Your droop of eyelid is the same as his,
And, but for you, I might have won his
love,

And, to you, I have shown my naked heart;
For which three things, I hate, hate, hate
you. Hush !

Suppose a fourth ! — I cannot choose but
think

That, with him, I were virtuouser than you
Without him: so I hate you from this
gulf

And hollow of my soul, which opens out 170
To what, except for you, had been my
heaven,

And is, instead, a place to curse by ! LOVE.'

An active kind of curse. I stood there
cursed,

Confounded. I had seized and caught the
sense

Of the letter, with its twenty stinging
snakes,

In a moment's sweep of eyesight, and I
stood

Dazed. — 'Ah ! not married.'

'You mistake,' he said:

'I'm married. Is not Marian Erle my wife?

As God sees things, I have a wife and child;
And I, as I'm a man who honors God, ¹⁸⁰
Am here to claim them as my child and wife.'

I felt it hard to breathe, much less to speak.
Nor word of mine was needed. Some one
else

Was there for answering. 'Romney,' she
began,

'My great good angel, Romney.'

Then at first,
I knew that Marian Erle was beautiful.
She stood there, still and pallid as a saint,
Dilated, like a saint in ecstasy,
As if the floating moonshine interposed
Betwixt her foot and the earth, and raised
her up ¹⁹⁰

To float upon it. 'I had left my child,
Who sleeps,' she said, 'and having drawn
this way,

I heard you speaking, . . . friend! — Con-
firm me now.

You take this Marian, such as wicked men
Have made her, for your honorable wife?'

The thrilling, solemn, proud, pathetic voice.
He stretched his arms out toward that
thrilling voice,

As if to draw it on to his embrace.

— 'I take her as God made her, and as men
Must fail to unmake her, for my honored
wife.' ²⁰⁰

She never raised her eyes, nor took a step,
But stood there in her place, and spoke
again.

— 'You take this Marian's child, which is
her shame

In sight of men and women, for your child,
Of whom you will not ever feel ashamed?'

The thrilling, tender, proud, pathetic voice.
He stepped on toward it, still with out-
stretched arms,

As if to quench upon his breast that voice.
— 'May God so father me, as I do him,
And so forsake me, as I let him feel ²¹⁰
He's orphaned haply. Here I take the
child

To share my cup, to slumber on my knee,
To play his loudest gambol at my foot,
To hold my finger in the public ways,

Till none shall need inquire "Whose child
is this?"

The gesture saying so tenderly "My
own."'

She stood a moment silent in her place;
Then turning toward me very slow and
cold:—

'And you,—what say you?—will you
blame me much,

If, careful for that outcast child of mine, ²²⁰
I catch this hand that's stretched to me and
him,

Nor dare to leave him friendless in the
world

Where men have stoned me? Have I not
the right

To take so mere an aftermath from life,
Else found so wholly bare? Or is it wrong
To let your cousin, for a generous bent,
Put out his ungloved fingers among briars
To set a tumbling bird's nest somewhat
straight?

You will not tell him, though we're in-
nocent,

We are not harmless, . . . and that both
our harms ²³⁰

Will stick to his good, smooth, noble life
like burrs,

Never to drop off though he shakes the
cloak?

You've been my friend: you will not now
be his?

You've known him that he's worthy of a
friend,

And you're his cousin, lady, after all,
And therefore more than free to take his
part,

Explaining, since the nest is surely spoilt
And Marian what you know her—though
a wife,

The world would hardly understand her
case

Of being just hurt and honest; while, for
him, ²⁴⁰

'T would ever twit him with his bastard
child

And married harlot. Speak, while yet
there's time.

You would not stand and let a good man's
dog

Turn round and rend him, because his, and
reared

Of a generous breed,—and will you let his
act,

Because it's generous? Speak. I'm bound
to you,
And I'll be bound by only you, in this.'

The thrilling, solemn voice, so passionless,
Sustained, yet low, without a rise or fall,
As one who had authority to speak, ²⁵⁰
And not as Marian.

I looked up to feel
If God stood near me, and beheld his
heaven

As blue as Aaron's priestly robe appeared
To Aaron when he took it off to die.

And then I spoke: 'Accept the gift, I say,
My sister Marian, and be satisfied.

The hand that gives has still a soul behind
Which will not let it quail for having
given,

Though foolish worldlings talk they know
not what —

Of what they know not. Romney's strong
enough ²⁶⁰

For this: do you be strong to know he's
strong:

He stands on Right's side; never flinch for
him,

As if he stood on the other. You'll be
bound

By me? I am a woman of repute;
No fly-blow gossip ever specked my life;
My name is clean and open as this hand,
Whose glove there's not a man dares blab
about

As if he had touched it freely. Here's
my hand

To clasp your hand, my Marian, owned as
pure! ²⁶⁹

As pure — as I'm a woman and a Leigh! —
And, as I'm both, I'll witness to the world
That Romney Leigh is honored in his
choice

Who chooses Marian for his honored wife.'

Her broad wild woodland eyes shot out a
light,

Her smile was wonderful for rapture.
'Thanks,

My great Aurora.' Forward then she
sprang,

And dropping her impassioned spaniel head
With all its brown abandonment of curls

On Romney's feet, we heard the kisses
drawn

Through sobs upon the foot, upon the
ground — ²⁸⁰

'O Romney! O my angel! O unchanged
Though since we've parted I have passed
the grave!

But Death itself could only better *thee*,
Not change thee! — *Thee* I do not thank
at all:

I but thank God who made thee what thou
art,

So wholly godlike.'

When he tried in vain
To raise her to his embrace, escaping
thence

As any leaping fawn from a huntsman's
grasp,

She bounded off and 'lighted beyond reach,
Before him, with a staglike majesty ²⁹⁰

Of soft, serene defiance, — as she knew
He could not touch her, so was tolerant

He had cared to try. She stood there with
her great

Drowned eyes, and dripping cheeks, and
strange, sweet smile

That lived through all, as if one held a
light

Across a waste of waters — shook her
head

To keep some thoughts down deeper in
her soul, —

Then, white and tranquil like a summer-
cloud

Which, having rained itself to a tardy
peace,

Stands still in heaven as if it ruled the
day, ³⁰⁰

Spoke out again, — 'Although, my gener-
ous friend,

Since last we met and parted you're un-
changed,

And having promised faith to Marian Erle,
Maintain it, as she were not changed at
all;

And though that's worthy, though that's
full of balm

To any conscious spirit of a girl
Who once has loved you as I loved you
once —

Yet still it will not make her . . . if she's
dead,

And gone away where none can give or
take

In marriage — able to revive, return ³¹⁰

And wed you — will it, Romney? Here's
the point,

My friend, we'll see it plainer: you and I
Must never, never, never join hands so.

Nay, let me say it — for I said it first
 To God, and placed it, rounded to an oath,
 Far, far above the moon there, at his feet,
 As surely as I wept just now at yours —
 We never, never, never join hands so.
 And now, be patient with me; do not
 think

I'm speaking from a false humility. ³²⁰
 The truth is, I am grown so proud with
 grief,

And He has said so often through his
 nights

And through his mornings, "Weep a little
 still,

Thou foolish Marian, because women must,
 But do not blush at all except for sin" —

That I, who felt myself unworthy once
 Of virtuous Romney and his high-born
 race,

Have come to learn, — a woman, poor or
 rich,

Despised or honored, is a human soul, ³²⁹

And what her soul is, that she is herself,
 Although she should be spit upon of men,
 As is the pavement of the churches here,
 Still good enough to pray in. And being
 chaste

And honest, and inclined to do the right,
 And love the truth, and live my life out
 green

And smooth beneath his steps, I should not
 fear

To make him thus a less uneasy time
 Than many a happier woman. Very proud
 You see me. Pardon, that I set a trap

To hear a confirmation in your voice, ³⁴⁰
 Both yours and yours. It is so good to
 know

'Twas really God who said the same be-
 fore;

And thus it is in heaven, that first God
 speaks,

And then his angels. Oh, it does me
 good,

It wipes me clean and sweet from devil's
 dirt,

That Romney Leigh should think me wor-
 thy still

Of being his true and honorable wife !

Henceforth I need not say, on leaving
 earth,

I had no glory in it. For the rest, ³⁴⁹
 The reason's ready (master, angel, friend,
 Be patient with me) wherefore you and I
 Can never, never, never join hands so.

I know you'll not be angry like a man
 (For *you* are none) when I shall tell the
 truth,

Which is, I do not love you, Romney
 Leigh,

I do not love you. Ah well ! catch my
 hands,

Miss Leigh, and burn into my eyes with
 yours —

I swear I do not love him. Did I once ?
 'Tis said that women have been bruised to
 death

And yet, if once they loved, that love of
 theirs ³⁶⁰

Could never be drained out with all their
 blood:

I've heard such things and pondered.
 Did I indeed

Love once; or did I only worship ? Yes,
 Perhaps, O friend, I set you up so high
 Above all actual good or hope of good
 Or fear of evil, all that could be mine,

I haply set you above love itself,
 And out of reach of these poor woman's
 arms,

Angelic Romney. What was in my
 thought ?

To be your slave, your help, your toy, your
 tool. ³⁷⁰

To be your love . . . I never thought of
 that:

To give you love . . . still less. I gave
 you love ?

I think I did not give you anything;
 I was but only yours — upon my knees,
 All yours, in soul and body, in head and
 heart,

A creature you had taken from the ground
 Still crumbling through your fingers to
 your feet

To join the dust she came from. Did I
 love,

Or did I worship ? judge, Aurora Leigh !
 But, if indeed I loved, 't was long ago — ³⁸⁰
 So long ! before the sun and moon were
 made,

Before the hells were open, — ah, before
 I heard my child cry in the desert night,
 And knew he had no father. It may be
 I'm not as strong as other women are,
 Who, torn and crushed, are not undone
 from love:

It may be I am colder than the dead,
 Who, being dead, love always. But for
 me,

Once killed, this ghost of Marian loves no more,

No more . . . except the child ! . . . no more at all. ³⁹⁰

I told your cousin, sir, that I was dead;
And now, she thinks I'll get up from my grave,

And wear my chin-cloth for a wedding-veil,
And glide along the churchyard like a bride

While all the dead keep whispering through the withes,

"You would be better in your place with us,

You pitiful corruption !" At the thought,
The damps break out on me like leprosy
Although I'm clean. Ay, clean as Marian Erle !

As Marian Leigh, I know, I were not clean: ⁴⁰⁰

Nor have I so much life that I should love,
Except the child. Ah God ! I could not bear

To see my darling on a good man's knees,
And know, by such a look, or such a sigh,
Or such a silence, that he thought sometimes,

"This child was fathered by some cursèd wretch" . . .

For, Romney, angels are less tender-wise
Than God and mothers: even *you* would think

What *we* think never. He is ours, the child;

And we would sooner vex a soul in heaven ⁴¹⁰

By coupling with it the dead body's thought,
It left behind it in a last month's grave,
Than, in my child, see other than . . . my child.

We only never call him fatherless
Who has God and his mother. O my babe,

My pretty, pretty blossom, an ill wind
Once blew upon my breast ! can any think
I'd have another — one called happier,
A fathered child, with father's love and race

That's worn as bold and open as a smile, ⁴²⁰
To vex my darling when he's asked his name

And has no answer ? What ! a happier child

Than mine, my best — who laughed so loud to-night

He could not sleep for pastime ? Nay, I swear,

By life and love, that, if I lived like some,
And loved like . . . *some*, ay, loved you,
Romney Leigh,

As some love (eyes that have wept so much, see clear),

I've room for no more children in my arms,

My kisses are all melted on one mouth,
I would not push my darling to a stool ⁴³⁰
To dandle babies. Here's a hand shall keep

For ever clean without a marriage-ring,
To tend my boy until he cease to need
One steady finger of it, and desert
(Not miss) his mother's lap, to sit with men.

And when I miss him (not he me), I'll come

And say "Now give me some of Romney's work,

To help your outcast orphans of the world
And comfort grief with grief." For you, meantime,

Most noble Romney, wed a noble wife, ⁴⁴⁰
And open on each other your great souls —
I need not farther bless you. If I dared
But strain and touch her in her upper sphere,

And say "Come down to Romney — pay my debt !"

I should be joyful with the stream of joy
Sent through me. But the moon is in my face . . .

I dare not — though I guess the name he loves;

I'm learned with my studies of old days,
Remembering how he crushed his underlip

When some one came and spoke, or did not come. ⁴⁵⁰

Aurora, I could touch her with my hand,
And fly because I dare not.'

She was gone.

He smiled so sternly that I spoke in haste.
'Forgive her — she sees clearly for herself:

Her instinct's holy.'

'I forgive !' he said,

'I only marvel how she sees so sure,
While others' . . . there he paused —
then hoarse, abrupt,

'Aurora ! you forgive us, her and me ?

For her, the thing she sees, poor, loyal
child,

If once corrected by the thing I know, ⁴⁶⁰
Had been unspoken, since she loves you
well,

Has leave to love you:—while for me,
alas!

If once or twice I let my heart escape
This night, . . . remember, where hearts
slip and fall,

They break beside: we're parting—part-
ing—ah!

You do not love, that you should surely
know

What that word means. Forgive, be tol-
erant:

It had not been, but that I felt myself
So safe in impuissance and despair,
I could not hurt you though I tossed my
arms ⁴⁷⁰

And sighed my soul out. The most utter
wretch

Will choose his postures when he comes to
die,

However in the presence of a queen;
And you'll forgive me some unseemly
spasms

Which meant no more than dying. Do you
think

I had ever come here in my perfect mind
Unless I had come here in my settled
mind

Bound Marian's, bound to keep the bond
and give

My name, my house, my hand, the things I
could,

To Marian? For even *I* could give as
much: ⁴⁸⁰

Even I, affronting her exalted soul
By a supposition that she wanted these,
Could act the husband's coat and hat set
up

To creak i' the wind and drive the world-
crows off

From pecking in her garden. Straw can
fill

A hole to keep out vermin. Now, at last,
I own heaven's angels round her life suffice
To fight the rats of our society

Without this Romney: I can see it at last;
And here is ended my pretension which ⁴⁹⁰

The most pretended. Over-proud of
course,

Even so!—but not so stupid . . . blind
. . . that I,

Whom thus the great Taskmaster of the
world

Has set to meditate mistaken work,
My dreary face against a dim blank wall
Throughout man's natural lifetime—could
pretend

Or wish . . . O love, I have loved you! O
my soul,

I have lost you!—but I swear by all your-
self,

And all you might have been to me these
years,

If that June morning had not failed my
hope— ⁵⁰⁰

I'm not so bestial, to regret that day—
This night—this night, which still to you
is fair!

Nay, not so blind, Aurora. I attest
Those stars above us which I cannot
see' . . .

'You cannot' . . .

'That if Heaven itself should stoop,
Re-mix the lots, and give me another
chance,

I'd say "No other!"—I'd record my
blank.

Aurora never should be wife of mine."

'Not see the stars?'

'T is worse still, not to see,
To find your hand, although we're parting,
dear. ⁵¹⁰

A moment let me hold it ere we part;
And understand my last words—these, at
last!

I would not have you thinking when I'm
gone

That Romney dared to hanker for your
love

In thought or vision, if attainable
(Which certainly for me it never was),
And wished to use it for a dog-to-day
To help the blind man stumbling. God
forbid!

And now I know He held you in his palm,
And kept you open-eyed to all my
faults, ⁵²⁰

To save you at last from such a dreary
end.

Believe me, dear, that, if I had known like
Him

What loss was coming on me, I had done
As well in this as He has.—Farewell,
you

Who are still my light, — farewell ! How late it is :

I know that, now. You 've been too patient, sweet.

I will but blow my whistle toward the lane,

And some one comes — the same who brought me here.

Get in — Good-night.'

'A moment. Heavenly Christ ! A moment. Speak once, Romney. 'Tis not true. 530

I hold your hands, I look into your face — You see me ?'

'No more than the blessed stars. Be blessed too, Aurora. Nay, my sweet, You tremble. Tender-hearted ! Do you mind

Of yore, dear, how you used to cheat old John,

And let the mice out slyly from his traps, Until he marvelled at the soul in mice Which took the cheese and left the snare ? The same

Dear soft heart always ! 'T was for this I grieved

Howe's letter never reached you. Ah, you had heard 540

Of illness — not the issue, not the extent: My life, long sick with tossings up and down,

The sudden revulsion in the blazing house, The strain and struggle both of body and soul,

Which left fire running in my veins for blood,

Scarce lacked that thunderbolt of the falling beam

Which nicked me on the forehead as I passed

The gallery-door with a burden. Say heaven's bolt,

Not William Erle's, not Marian's father's, — tramp

And poacher, whom I found for what he was, 550

And, eager for her sake to rescue him, Forth swept from the open highway of the world,

Road-dust and all — till, like a woodland boar

Most naturally unwilling to be tamed, He notched me with his tooth. But not a word

To Marian ! and I do not think, besides,

He turned the tilting of the beam my way ; And if he laughed, as many swear, poor wretch, 558

Nor he nor I supposed the hurt so deep. We 'll hope his next laugh may be merrier,

In a better cause.'

'Blind, Romney ?'

'Ah, my friend, You 'll learn to say it in a cheerful voice ; I, too, at first desponded. To be blind, Turned out of nature, mulcted as a man, Refused the daily largesse of the sun To humble creatures ! When the fever's heat

Dropped from me, as the flame did from my house,

And left me ruined like it, stripped of all The hues and shapes of aspectable life, A mere bare blind stone in the blaze of day, 570

A man, upon the outside of the earth, As dark as ten feet under, in the grave, — Why, that seemed hard.'

'No hope ?'

'A tear ! you weep, Divine Aurora ? tears upon my hand !

I've seen you weeping for a mouse, a bird, —

But, weep for me, Aurora ? Yes, there's hope.

Not hope of sight, — I could be learned, dear,

And tell you in what Greek and Latin name

The visual nerve is withered to the root, Though the outer eyes appear indifferent, 580

Unspotted in their crystals. But there's hope.

The spirit, from behind this dethroned sense,

Sees, waits in patience till the walls break up

From which the bas-relief and fresco have dropped:

There's hope. The man here, once so arrogant

And restless, so ambitious, for his part, Of dealing with statistically packed Disorders (from a pattern on his nail), And packing such things quite another way, —

Is now contented. From his personal loss 590

He has come to hope for others when they
lose,
And wear a gladder faith in what we
gain . . .

Through bitter experience, compensation
sweet,

Like that tear, sweetest. I am quiet now,
As tender surely for the suffering world,
But quiet, — sitting at the wall to learn,
Content henceforth to do the thing I can:
For, though as powerless, said I, as a
stone,

A stone can still give shelter to a worm,
And it is worth while being a stone for
that: 600

There 's hope, Aurora.'

'Is there hope for me ?
For me ? — and is there room beneath the
stone

For such a worm ? — And if I came and
said . . .

What all this weeping scarce will let me
say,

And yet what women cannot say at all
But weeping bitterly . . . (the pride keeps
up,

Until the heart breaks under it) . . . I
love, —

I love you, Romney' . . .

'Silence !' he exclaimed.
'A woman's pity sometimes makes her
mad. 609

A man's distraction must not cheat his soul
To take advantage of it. Yet, 't is hard
Farewell, Aurora.'

'But I love you, sir;
And when a woman says she loves a man,
The man must hear her, though he love her
not,

Which . . . hush ! . . . he has leave to
answer in his turn;

She will not surely blame him. As for
me,

You call it pity, — think I 'm generous ?
'T were somewhat easier, for a woman
proud

As I am, and I 'm very vilely proud,
To let it pass as such, and press on you 620
Love born of pity, — seeing that excellent
loves

Are born so, often, nor the quicker
die, —

And this would set me higher by the head
Than now I stand. No matter: let the
truth

Stand high; Aurora must be humble: no,
My love 's not pity merely. Obviously
I 'm not a generous woman, never was,
Or else, of old, I had not looked so near
To weights and measures, grudging you the
power

To give, as first I scorned your power to
judge 630

For me, Aurora. I would have no gifts,
Forsooth, but God's, — and I would use
them too

According to my pleasure and my choice,
As He and I were equals, you below,
Excluded from that level of interchange
Admitting benefaction. You were wrong
In much ? you said so. I was wrong in
most.

Oh, most ! You only thought to rescue
men

By half-means, half-way, seeing half their
wants,

While thinking nothing of your personal
gain. 640

But I, who saw the human nature broad
At both sides, comprehending too the soul's,
And all the high necessities of Art,
Betrayed the thing I saw, and wronged my
own life

For which I pleaded. Passioned to exalt
The artist's instinct in me at the cost
Of putting down the woman's, I forgot
No perfect artist is developed here
From any imperfect woman. Flower from
root,

And spiritual from natural, grade by
grade 650

In all our life. A handful of the earth
To make God's image ! the despised poor
earth,

The healthy, odorous earth, — I missed
with it

The divine Breath that blows the nostrils
out

To ineffable inflatus, — ay, the breath
Which love is. Art is much, but Love is
more.

O Art, my Art, thou 'rt much, but Love is
more !

Art symbolizes heaven, but Love is God
And makes heaven. I, Aurora, fell from
mine.

I would not be a woman like the rest, 660
A simple woman who believes in love
And owns the right of love because she
loves,

And, hearing she's beloved, is satisfied
With what contents God: I must analyze,

Confront, and question; just as if a fly
Refused to warm itself in any sun
Till such was in *Leone*: I must fret,
Forsooth, because the month was only
May,

Be faithless of the kind of proffered love,
And captious, lest it miss my dignity, 670
And scornful, that my lover sought a wife
To use . . . to use! O Romney, O my
love,

I am changed since then, changed wholly, —
for indeed

If now you'd stoop so low to take my
love

And use it roughly, without stint or spare,
As men use common things with more
behind

(And, in this, ever would be more behind)
To any mean and ordinary end, —
The joy would set me like a star, in heaven,

So high up, I should shine because of
height 680

And not of virtue. Yet in one respect,
Just one, beloved, I am in nowise changed:
I love you, loved you . . . loved you first
and last,

And love you on for ever. Now I know
I loved you always, Romney. She who
died

Knew that, and said so; Lady Waldemar
Knows that; . . . and Marian. I had known
the same,

Except that I was prouder than I knew,
And not so honest. Ay, and, as I live,
I should have died so, crushing in my
hand 690

This rose of love, the wasp inside and all,
Ignoring ever to my soul and you
Both rose and pain—except for this great
loss,

This great despair—to stand before your
face

And know you do not see me where I stand.
You think, perhaps, I am not changed from
pride

And that I chiefly bear to say such words,
Because you cannot shame me with your
eyes?

O calm, grand eyes, extinguished in a
storm,

Blown out like lights o'er melancholy seas,

Though shrieked for by the shipwrecked, —
O my Dark, 701

My Cloud, — to go before me every day
While I go ever toward the wilderness, —
I would that you could see me bare to the
soul!

If this be pity, 't is so for myself,
And not for Romney! *he* can stand alone;
A man like *him* is never overcome:
No woman like me counts him pitiable
While saints applaud him. He mistook the
world;

But I mistook my own heart, and that
slip

Was fatal. Romney, — will you leave me
here? 711

So wrong, so proud, so weak, so unconsoled,
So mere a woman! — and I love you so,
I love you, Romney' —

Could I see his face,
I wept so? Did I drop against his breast,
Or did his arms constrain me? were my
cheeks

Hot, overflowed, with my tears — or his?
And which of our two large explosive hearts
So shook me? That, I know not. There
were words

That broke in utterance . . . melted, in the
fire, — 720

Embrace, that was convulsion, . . . then a
kiss

As long and silent as the ecstatic night,
And deep, deep, shuddering breaths, which
meant beyond

Whatever could be told by word or kiss.
But what he said . . . I have written day
by day,

With somewhat even writing. Did I think
That such a passionate rain would intercept
And dash this last page? What he said,
indeed,

I fain would write it down here like the
rest,

To keep it in my eyes, as in my ears, 730
The heart's sweet scripture, to be read at
night

When weary, or at morning when afraid,
And lean my heaviest oath on when I swear
That, when all's done, all tried, all counted
here,

All great arts, and all good philosophies,
This love just puts its hand out in a dream
And straight outstretches all things.

What he said,
I fain would write. But if an angel spoke

In thunder, should we haply know much
 more
 Than that it thundered? If a cloud came
 down 740
 And wrapped us wholly, could we draw its
 shape,
 As if on the outside and not overcome?
 And so he spake. His breath against my
 face
 Confused his words, yet made them more
 intense
 (As when the sudden finger of the wind
 Will wipe a row of single city-lamps
 To a pure white line of flame, more lumi-
 nous
 Because of obliteration), more intense,
 The intimate presence carrying in itself
 Complete communication, as with souls 750
 Who, having put the body off, perceive
 Through simply being. Thus, 't was granted
 me
 To know he loved me to the depth and
 height
 Of such large natures, ever competent,
 With grand horizons by the sea or land,
 To love's grand sunrise. Small spheres
 hold small fires,
 But he loved largely, as a man can love
 Who, baffled in his love, dares live his
 life,
 Accept the ends which God loves, for his
 own,
 And lift a constant aspect.

From the day

I brought to England my poor searching
 face 761
 (An orphan even of my father's grave),
 He had loved me, watched me, watched his
 soul in mine,
 Which in me grew and heightened into
 love.
 For he, a boy still, had been told the tale
 Of how a fairy bride from Italy
 With smells of oleanders in her hair,
 Was coming through the vines to touch his
 hand;
 Whereat the blood of boyhood on the palm
 Made sudden heats. And when at last I
 came, 770
 And lived before him — lived, and rarely
 smiled —
 He smiled and loved me for the thing I
 was,
 As every child will love the year's first
 flower

(Not certainly the fairest of the year,
 But, in which, the complete year seems to
 blow),
 The poor sad snowdrop, — growing between
 drifts,
 Mysterious medium 'twixt the plant and
 frost,
 So faint with winter while so quick with
 spring,
 And doubtful if to thaw itself away
 With that snow near it. Not that Romney
 Leigh 780
 Had loved me coldly. If I thought so
 once,
 It was as if I had held my hand in fire
 And shook for cold. But now I under-
 stood,
 For ever, that the very fire and heat
 Of troubling passion in him burned him
 clear,
 And shaped, to dubious order, word and
 act:
 That, just because he loved me over all,
 All wealth, all lands, all social privilege,
 To which chance made him unexpected heir,
 And, just because on all these lesser gifts, 790
 Constrained by conscience and the sense of
 wrong,
 He had stamped with steady hand God's
 arrow-mark
 Of dedication to the human need,
 He thought it should be so too, with his
 love.
 He, passionately loving, would bring down
 His love, his life, his best (because the
 best),
 His bride of dreams, who walked so still
 and high
 Through flowery poems as through mea-
 dow-grass,
 The dust of golden lilies on her feet,
 That *she* should walk beside him on the
 rocks 800
 In all that clang and hewing out of men,
 And help the work of help which was his
 life,
 And prove he kept back nothing, — not his
 soul.
 And when I failed him, — for I failed him,
 I,
 And when it seemed he had missed my
 love, he thought
 'Aurora makes room for a working-noon,'
 And so, self-girded with torn strips of
 hope,

Took up his life as if it were for death
(Just capable of one heroic aim),
And threw it in the thickest of the
world, — 810

At which men laughed as if he had drowned
a dog.

No wonder, — since Aurora failed him
first!

The morning and the evening made his
day.

But oh, the night! oh, bitter-sweet! oh,
sweet!

O dark, O moon and stars, O ecstasy
Of darkness! O great mystery of love,
In which absorbed, loss, anguish, treason's
self

Enlarges rapture, — as a pebble dropped
In some full wine-cup overbrims the wine!
While we two sat together, leaned that
night 820

So close my very garments crept and
thrilled

With strange electric life, and both my
cheeks

Grew red, then pale, with touches from my
hair

In which his breath was, — while the gold-
en moon

Was hung before our faces as the badge
Of some sublime inherited despair,
Since ever to be seen by only one, —

A voice said, low and rapid as a sigh,
Yet breaking, I felt conscious, from a
smile,

'Thank God, who made me blind, to make
me see! 830

Shine on, Aurora, dearest light of souls,
Which rul'st for evermore both day and
night!

I am happy.'

I flung closer to his breast,
As sword that, after battle, flings to
sheath;

And, in that hurtle of united souls,
The mystic motions which in common
moods

Are shut beyond our sense, broke in on
us,

And, as we sat, we felt the old earth spin,
And all the starry turbulence of worlds
Swing round us in their audient circles,
till, 840

If that same golden moon were overhead
Or if beneath our feet, we did not know.

And then calm, equal, smooth with weights
of joy,

His voice rose, as some chief musician's
song

Amid the old Jewish temple's Selah-pause,
And bade me mark how we two met at
last

Upon this moon-bathed promontory of
earth,

To give up much on each side, then take
all.

'Beloved,' it sang, 'we must be here to
work; 849

And men who work can only work for men,
And, not to work in vain, must comprehend
Humanity and so work humanly,
And raise men's bodies still by raising souls,
As God did first.'

'But stand upon the earth,'
I said, 'to raise them (this is human too,
There's nothing high which has not first
been low;

My humbleness, said One, has made me
great!)

As God did last.'

'And work all silently
And simply,' he returned, 'as God does all;
Distort our nature never for our work, 860
Nor count our right hands stronger for
being hoofs.

The man most man, with tenderest human
hands,

Works best for men, — as God in Naza-
reth.'

He paused upon the word, and then re-
sumed:

'Fewer programmes, we who have no pre-
science.

Fewer systems, we who are held and do
not hold.

Less mapping out of masses to be saved,
By nations or by sexes. Fourier's void,
And Comte absurd, — and Cabet puerile.
Subsist no rules of life outside of life, 870
No perfect manners without Christian
souls:

The Christ Himself had been no Lawgiver
Unless He had given the life, too, with the
law.'

I echoed thoughtfully: 'The man, most
man,

Works best for men, and, if most man
indeed,

He gets his manhood plainest from his soul:

While obviously this stringent soul itself
Obeys the old law of development,
The Spirit ever witnessing in ours,
And Love, the soul of soul, within the soul,
Evolving it sublimely. First, God's love.' ⁸⁸⁰

'And next,' he smiled, 'the love of wedded souls,
Which still presents that mystery's counterpart.

Sweet shadow-rose, upon the water of life,
Of such a mystic substance, Sharon gave
A name to ! human, vital, fructuous rose,
Whose calyx holds the multitude of leaves,
Loves filial, loves fraternal, neighbor-loves
And civic — all fair petals, all good scents,
All reddened, sweetened from one central
Heart !' ⁸⁹⁰

'Alas,' I cried, 'it was not long ago
You swore this very social rose smelt ill.'

'Alas,' he answered, 'is it a rose at all ?
The filial's thankless, the fraternal's hard,
The rest is lost. I do but stand and think,
Across the waters of a troubled life
This Flower of Heaven so vainly overhangs,
What perfect counterpart would be in
sight

If tanks were clearer. Let us clean the
tubes,
And wait for rains. O poet, O my love, ⁹⁰⁰
Since I was too ambitious in my deed
And thought to distance all men in success
(Till God came on me, marked the place,
and said

"Ill-doer, henceforth keep within this line,
Attempting less than others," — and I
stand

And work among Christ's little ones, content),

Come thou, my compensation, my dear
sight,

My morning-star, my morning, — rise and
shine,

And touch my hills with radiance not their
own.

Shine out for two, Aurora, and fulfil ⁹¹⁰

My falling-short that must be ! work for
two,

As I, though thus restrained, for two shall
love !

Gaze on, with inscient vision toward the
sun,

And, from his visceral heat, pluck out the
roots

Of light beyond him. Art's a service, —
mark:

A silver key is given to thy clasp,
And thou shalt stand unwearied, night and
day,

And fix it in the hard, slow-turning wards,
To open, so, that intermediate door

Betwixt the different planes of sensuous
form ⁹²⁰

And form insensuous, that inferior men
May learn to feel on still through these to
those,

And bless thy ministration. The world
waits

For help. Beloved, let us love so well,
Our work shall still be better for our
love,

And still our love be sweeter for our work,
And both commended, for the sake of each,
By all true workers and true lovers born.

Now press the clarion on thy woman's lip
(Love's holy kiss shall still keep conse-
crate) ⁹³⁰

And breathe thy fine keen breath along the
brass,

And blow all class-walls level as Jericho's
Past Jordan, — crying from the top of
souls,

To souls that, here assembled on earth's
flats,

They get them to some purer eminence
Than any hitherto beheld for clouds !

What height we know not, — but the way
we know,

And how by mounting ever we attain,
And so climb on. It is the hour for souls,

That bodies, leavened by the will and love,
Be lightened to redemption. The world's
old, ⁹⁴¹

But the old world waits the time to be
renewed,

Toward which, new hearts in individual
growth

Must quicken, and increase to multitude
In new dynasties of the race of men ;

Developed whence, shall grow spontane-
ously

New churches, new æconomies, new laws,
Admitting freedom, new societies

Excluding falsehood: HE shall make all
new.'

My Romney! — Lifting up my hand in
 his, 950
 As wheeled by Seeing spirits toward the
 east,
 He turned instinctively, where, faint and far,
 Along the tingling desert of the sky,
 Beyond the circle of the conscious hills,
 Were laid in jasper-stone as clear as glass
 The first foundations of that new, near
 Day
 Which should be builded out of heaven to
 God.

He stood a moment with erected brows,
 In silence, as a creature might who
 gazed, —
 Stood calm, and fed his blind, majestic
 eyes 960
 Upon the thought of perfect noon: and
 when
 I saw his soul saw, — ‘Jasper first,’ I
 said;
 ‘And second, sapphire; third, chalced-
 ony;
 The rest in order: — last, an amethyst.’

POEMS BEFORE CONGRESS

The small volume entitled *Poems before Congress* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1860) which appeared about a year before Mrs. Browning's death, was the last of her published works to receive her personal supervision. Of the eight pieces which it contains, the first, *Napoleon III. in Italy*, is much the longest and most elaborate; but all are distinctly and even fiercely controversial: — *sir-ventes*, the Troubadours would have called them, rather than songs; and the entire volume a pamphlet, rather than a collection of poems. They were sharply criticised, at the time of their appearance, for their passionate one-sidedness and reckless glorification of the French emperor; while their severe strictures on the vacillating, and, indeed, hardly ingenious policy of England toward Italy in her hour of supreme struggle, were bitterly resented by Mrs. Browning's fellow-countrymen. No apology for the vehemence of these indignant cries, need, however, be offered here,

other than the author's own rather haughty one, prefixed to the first edition of the *Poems before Congress* and dated Rome, February, 1860. ‘These poems were written under the pressure of the events they indicate, after a residence in Italy of so many years that the present triumph of great principles is heightened, to the writer's feelings, by the disastrous issue of the last movement witnessed from “Casa Guidi windows” in 1849. Yet if the verses should appear to English readers too pungently rendered to admit of a patriotic respect to the English sense of things, I will not excuse myself on such grounds, nor on the ground of my attachment to the Italian people, and my admiration for their heroic constancy and union. What I have written has simply been written, because I love truth and justice, *quand même*, “more than Plato and Plato's country, more than Dante and Dante's country,” more even than Shakespeare, and Shakespeare's country.’

NAPOLÉON III. IN ITALY

I

EMPEROR, Emperor!
 From the centre to the shore,
 From the Seine back to the Rhine,
 Stood eight millions up and swore
 By their manhood's right divine
 So to elect and legislate,
 This man should renew the line
 Broken in a strain of fate
 And leagued kings at Waterloo,
 When the people's hands let go. 10
 Emperor
 Evermore.

II

With a universal shout
 They took the old regalia out
 From an open grave that day;
 From a grave that would not close,
 Where the first Napoleon lay
 Expectant, in repose,
 As still as Merlin, with his conquering face
 Turned up in its unquenchable appeal 20
 To men and heroes of the advancing
 race, —
 Prepared to set the seal
 Of what has been on what shall be.
 Emperor
 Evermore.

III

The thinkers stood aside
 To let the nation act.
 Some hated the new-constituted fact
 Of empire, as pride treading on their
 pride.
 Some quailed, lest what was poisonous in
 the past ³⁰
 Should graft itself in that Druidic bough
 On this green Now.
 Some cursed, because at last
 The open heavens to which they had looked
 in vain
 For many a golden fall of marvellous rain
 Were closed in brass; and some
 Wept on because a gone thing could not
 come;
 And some were silent, doubting all things
 for
 That popular conviction, — evermore
 Emperor. ⁴⁰

IV

That day I did not hate
 Nor doubt, nor quail nor curse.
 I, reverencing the people, did not bate
 My reverence of their deed and oracle,
 Nor vainly prate
 Of better and of worse
 Against the great conclusion of their will.
 And yet, O voice and verse,
 Which God set in me to acclaim and sing
 Conviction, exaltation, aspiration, ⁵⁰
 We gave no music to the patent thing,
 Nor spared a holy rhythm to throb and
 swim
 About the name of him
 Translated to the sphere of domination
 By democratic passion!
 I was not used, at least,
 Nor can be, now or then,
 To stroke the ermine beast
 On any kind of throne
 (Though builded by a nation for its
 own), ⁶⁰
 And swell the surging choir for kings of
 men —
 ‘Emperor
 Evermore.’

V

But now, Napoleon, now
 That, leaving far behind the purple throng
 Of vulgar monarchs, thou

Tread'st higher in thy deed
 Than stair of throne can lead,
 To help in the hour of wrong
 The broken hearts of nations to be
 strong, — ⁷⁰
 Now, lifted as thou art
 To the level of pure song,
 We stand to meet thee on these Alpine
 snows!
 And while the palpitating peaks break
 out
 Ecstatic from somnambular repose
 With answers to the presence and the
 shout,
 We, poets of the people, who take part
 With elemental justice, natural right,
 Join in our echoes also, nor refrain. ⁷⁹
 We meet thee, O Napoleon, at this height
 At last, and find thee great enough to
 praise,
 Receive the poet's chrism, which smells
 beyond
 The priest's, and pass thy ways; —
 An English poet warns thee to maintain
 God's word, not England's: — let his truth
 be true
 And all men liars! with his truth respond
 To all men's lie. Exalt the sword and smite
 On that long anvil of the Apennine
 Where Austria forged the Italian chain in
 view
 Of seven consenting nations, sparks of fine
 Admonitory light, ⁹¹
 Till men's eyes wink before convictions
 new.
 Flash in God's justice to the world's amaze,
 Sublime Deliverer! — after many days
 Found worthy of the deed thou art come to
 do —
 Emperor
 Evermore.

VI

But Italy, my Italy,
 Can it last, this gleam?
 Can she live and be strong, ¹⁰⁰
 Or is it another dream
 Like the rest we have dreamed so long?
 And shall it, must it be,
 That after the battle-cloud has broken
 She will die off again
 Like the rain,
 Or like a poet's song
 Sung of her, sad at the end

Because her name is Italy, —
 Die and count no friend ?
 Is it true, — may it be spoken, —
 That she who has lain so still,
 With a wound in her breast,
 And a flower in her hand,
 And a grave-stone under her head,
 While every nation at will
 Beside her has dared to stand,
 And flout her with pity and scorn,
 Saying, 'She is at rest,
 She is fair, she is dead,
 And, leaving room in her stead
 To Us who are later born,
 This is certainly best !'
 Saying, 'Alas, she is fair,
 Very fair, but dead, — give place,
 And so we have room for the race.'
 — Can it be true, be true,
 That she lives anew ?
 That she rises up at the shout of her sons,
 At the trumpet of France,
 And lives anew ? — is it true
 That she has not moved in a trance,
 As in Forty-eight ?
 When her eyes were troubled with blood
 Till she knew not friend from foe,
 Till her hand was caught in a strait
 Of her cerement and baffled so
 From doing the deed she would ;
 And her weak foot stumbled across
 The grave of a king,
 And down she dropt at heavy loss,
 And we gloomily covered her face and
 said,
 'We have dreamed the thing ;
 She is not alive, but dead.'

VII

Now, shall we say
 Our Italy lives indeed ?
 And if it were not for the beat and bray
 Of drum and trump of martial men,
 Should we feel the underground heave and
 strain,
 Where heroes left their dust as a seed
 Sure to emerge one day ?
 And if it were not for the rhythmic march
 Of France and Piedmont's double hosts,
 Should we hear the ghosts
 Thrill through ruined aisle and arch,
 Throb along the frescoed wall,
 Whisper an oath by that divine
 They left in picture, book, and stone,
 That Italy is not dead at all ?

Ay, if it were not for the tears in our
 eyes,
 These tears of a sudden passionate joy,
 Should we see her arise
 From the place where the wicked are over-
 thrown,
 Italy, Italy — loosed at length
 From the tyrant's thrall,
 Pale and calm in her strength ?
 Pale as the silver cross of Savoy
 When the hand that bears the flag is brave,
 And not a breath is stirring, save
 What is blown
 Over the war-trump's lip of brass,
 Ere Garibaldi forces the pass !

VIII

Ay, it is so, even so.
 Ay, and it shall be so.
 Each broken stone that long ago
 She flung behind her as she went
 In discouragement and bewilderment
 Through the cairns of Time, and missed
 her way
 Between to-day and yesterday,
 Up springs a living man.
 And each man stands with his face in the
 light
 Of his own drawn sword,
 Ready to do what a hero can.
 Wall to sap, or river to ford,
 Cannon to front, or foe to pursue,
 Still ready to do, and sworn to be true,
 As a man and a patriot can.
 Piedmontese, Neapolitan,
 Lombard, Tuscan, Romagnole,
 Each man's body having a soul, —
 Count how many they stand,
 All of them sons of the land,
 Every live man there
 Allied to a dead man below,
 And the dearest with blood to spare
 To quicken a living hand
 In case it should ever be slow.
 Count how many they come
 To the beat of Piedmont's drum,
 With faces keener and grayer
 Than swords of the Austrian slayer,
 All set against the foe.
 'Emperor
 Evermore.'

IX

Out of the dust where they ground them ;
 Out of the holes where they dogged them ;

Out of the hulks where they wound them
 In iron, tortured and flogged them; 208
 Out of the streets where they chased them,
 Taxed them, and then bayoneted them;
 Out of the homes where they spied on them
 (Using their daughters and wives);
 Out of the church where they fretted
 them,
 Rotted their souls and debased them,
 Trained them to answer with knives,
 Then cursed them all at their prayers! —
 Out of cold lands, not theirs,
 Where they exiled them, starved them, lied
 on them;

Back they come like a wind, in vain
 Cramped up in the hills, that roars its
 road 220

The stronger into the open plain,
 Or like a fire that burns the hotter
 And longer for the crust of cinder,
 Serving better the ends of the potter;
 Or like a restrained word of God,
 Fulfilling itself by what seems to hinder.
 'Emperor
 Evermore.'

X

Shout for France and Savoy!
 Shout for the helper and doer. 230
 Shout for the good sword's ring,
 Shout for the thought still truer.
 Shout for the spirits at large
 Who passed for the dead this spring,
 Whose living glory is sure.
 Shout for France and Savoy!
 Shout for the council and charge!
 Shout for the head of Cavour;
 And shout for the heart of a King
 That's great with a nation's joy! 240
 Shout for France and Savoy!

XI

Take up the child, Macmahon, though
 Thy hand be red
 From Magenta's dead,
 And riding on, in front of the troop,
 In the dust of the whirlwind of war
 Through the gate of the city of Milan, stoop
 And take up the child to thy saddle-bow,
 Nor fear the touch as soft as a flower of
 his smile as clear as a star!
 Thou hast a right to the child, we say, 250
 Since the women are weeping for joy as
 they
 Who, by thy help and from this day,

Shall be happy mothers indeed.
 They are raining flowers from terrace and
 roof:

Take up the flower in the child.
 While the shout goes up of a nation freed
 And heroically self-reconciled,
 Till the snow on that peaked Alp aloof
 Starts, as feeling God's finger anew,
 And all those cold white marble fires 260
 Of mounting saints on the Duomo-spires
 Flicker against the Blue.
 'Emperor
 Evermore.'

XII

Ay, it is He,
 Who rides at the King's right hand!
 Leave room to his horse and draw to the
 side,

Nor press too near in the ecstasy
 Of a newly delivered impassioned land:
 He is moved, you see, 270
 He who has done it all.
 They call it a cold stern face;
 But this is Italy

Who rises up to her place! —
 For this he fought in his youth,
 Of this he dreamed in the past;
 The lines of the resolute mouth
 Tremble a little at last.
 Cry, he has done it all!
 'Emperor 280
 Evermore.'

XIII

It is not strange that he did it,
 Though the deed may seem to strain
 To the wonderful, unpermitted,
 For such as lead and reign.
 But he is strange, this man:
 The people's instinct found him
 (A wind in the dark that ran
 Through a chink where was no door),
 And elected him and crowned him 290
 Emperor
 Evermore.

XIV

Autocrat? let them scoff,
 Who fail to comprehend
 That a ruler incarnate of
 The people must transcend
 All common king-born kings;
 These subterranean springs
 A sudden outlet winning

Have special virtues to spend. 300
 The people's blood runs through him,
 Dilates from head to foot,
 Creates him absolute,
 And from this great beginning
 Evokes a greater end
 To justify and renew him —
 Emperor
 Evermore.

XV

What ! did any maintain
 That God or the people (think !) 310
 Could make a marvel in vain ? —
 Out of the water-jar there
 Draw wine that none could drink ?
 Is this a man like the rest,
 This miracle, made unaware
 By a rapture of popular air,
 And caught to the place that was best ?
 You think he could barter and cheat
 As vulgar diplomates use,
 With the people's heart in his breast ? 320
 Prate a lie into shape
 Lest truth should cumber the road ;
 Play at the fast and loose
 Till the world is strangled with tape ;
 Maim the soul's complete
 To fit the hole of a toad ;
 And filch the dogman's meat
 To feed the offspring of God ?

XVI

Nay, but he, this wonder,
 He cannot palter nor prate, 330
 Though many around him and under,
 With intellects trained to the curve,
 Distrust him in spirit and nerve
 Because his meaning is straight.
 Measure him ere he depart
 With those who have governed and led ;
 Larger so much by the heart,
 Larger so much by the head.
 Emperor
 Evermore. 340

XVII

He holds that, consenting or dissident,
 Nations must move with the time ;
 Assumes that crime with a precedent
 Doubles the guilt of the crime ;
 — Denies that a slaver's bond,
 Or a treaty signed by knaves
 (*Quorum magna pars* and beyond

Was one of an honest name)
 Gives an inexpugnable claim
 To abolish men into slaves. 350
 Emperor
 Evermore.

XVIII

He will not swagger nor boast
 Of his country's meeds, in a tone
 Missuiting a great man most
 If such should speak of his own ;
 Nor will he act, on her side,
 From motives baser, indeed,
 Than a man of a noble pride
 Can avow for himself at need ; 360
 Never, for lucre or laurels,
 Or custom, though such should be rife,
 Adapting the smaller morals
 To measure the larger life.
 He, though the merchants persuade,
 And the soldiers are eager for strife,
 Finds not his country in quarrels
 Only to find her in trade, —
 While still he accords her such honor
 As never to flinch for her sake 370
 Where men put service upon her,
 Found heavy to undertake
 And scarcely like to be paid :
 Believing a nation may act
 Unselfishly — shiver a lance
 (As the least of her sons may, in fact)
 And not for a cause of finance.
 Emperor
 Evermore.

XIX

Great is he 380
 Who uses his greatness for all.
 His name shall stand perpetually
 As a name to applaud and cherish,
 Not only within the civic wall
 For the loyal, but also without
 For the generous and free.
 Just is he,
 Who is just for the popular due
 As well as the private debt.
 The praise of nations ready to perish 390
 Fall on him, — crown him in view
 Of tyrants caught in the net,
 And statesmen dizzy with fear and doubt !
 And though, because they are many,
 And he is merely one,
 And nations selfish and cruel
 Heap up the inquisitor's fuel

To kill the body of high intents,
 And burn great deeds from their place,
 Till this, the greatest of any, 400
 May seem imperfectly done;
 Courage, whoever circumvents !
 Courage, courage, whoever is base !
 The soul of a high intent, be it known,
 Can die no more than any soul
 Which God keeps by Him under the throne;
 And this, at whatever interim,
 Shall live, and be consummated
 Into the being of deeds made whole.
 Courage, courage ! happy is he, 410
 Of whom (himself among the dead
 And silent) this word shall be said:
 — That he might have had the world with
 him,
 But chose to side with suffering men,
 And had the world against him when
 He came to deliver Italy.
 Emperor
 Evermore.

THE DANCE

Mrs. Browning told Mrs. Jameson in a letter dated Rome, February 22, 1860, that the heroine of the poem called 'The Dance' was a certain Madame de Laiatico.

I

You remember down at Florence our Cas-
 cine,
 Where the people on the feast-days walk
 and drive,
 And, through the trees, long-drawn in
 many a green way,
 O'er-roofing hum and murmur like a
 hive,
 The river and the mountains look alive ?

II

You remember the piazzone there, the
 stand-place
 Of carriages abrim with Florence Beau-
 ties,
 Who lean and melt to music as the band
 plays,
 Or smile and chat with some one who
 afoot is,
 Or on horseback, in observance of male
 duties ?

III

'T is so pretty, in the afternoons of summer,
 So many gracious faces brought to-
 gether !
 Call it rout, or call it concert, they have
 come here,
 In the floating of the fan and of the
 feather,
 To reciprocate with beauty the fine
 weather.

IV

While the flower-girls offer nosegays (be-
 cause *they* too
 Go with other sweets) at every carriage-
 door;
 Here, by shake of a white finger, signed
 away to
 Some next buyer, who sits buying score
 on score,
 Piling roses upon roses evermore.

V

And last season, when the French camp
 had its station
 In the meadow-ground, things quickened
 and grew gayer
 Through the mingling of the liberating
 nation
 With this people; groups of Frenchmen
 everywhere,
 Strolling, gazing, judging lightly — 'who
 was fair.'

VI

Then the noblest lady present took upon her
 To speak nobly from her carriage for
 the rest:
 'Pray these officers from France to do us
 honour
 By dancing with us straightway.' The
 request
 Was gravely apprehended as addressed.

VII

And the men of France, bareheaded, bow-
 ing lowly,
 Led out each a proud signora to the
 space
 Which the startled crowd had rounded for
 them — slowly,
 Just a touch of still emotion in his face,
 Not presuming, through the symbol, on
 the grace.

VIII

There was silence in the people: some lips
trembled,
But none jested. Broke the music, at a
glance:
And the daughters of our princes, thus as-
sembled,
Stepped the measure with the gallant
sons of France,
Hush! it might have been a Mass, and
not a dance.

IX

And they danced there till the blue that
over-skied us
Swooned with passion, though the foot-
ing seemed sedate;
And the mountains, heaving mighty hearts
beside us,
Sighed a rapture in a shadow, to di-
late,
And touch the holy stone where Dante
sate.

X

Then the sons of France, bareheaded, lowly
bowing,
Led the ladies back where kinsmen of
the south
Stood, received them; till, with burst of
overflowing
Feeling — husbands, brothers, Florence's
male youth,
Turned and kissed the martial strangers
mouth to mouth.

XI

And a cry went up, a cry from all that
people!
— You have heard a people cheering,
you suppose,
For the Member, mayor . . . with chorus
from the steeple?
This was different: scarce as loud, per-
haps (who knows?),
For we saw wet eyes around us ere the
close.

XII

And we felt as if a nation, too long borne
in
By hard wrongers, — comprehending in
such attitude

That God had spoken somewhere since the
morning,
That men were somehow brothers, by no
platitude, —
Cried exultant in great wonder and free
gratitude.

A TALE OF VILLAGRANCA

TOLD IN TUSCANY

First printed in the *Athenæum*, September
24, 1859.

I

My little son, my Florentine,
Sit down beside my knee,
And I will tell you why the sign
Of joy which flushed our Italy
Has faded since but yesternight;
And why your Florence of delight
Is mourning as you see.

II

A great man (who was crowned one
day)
Imagined a great Deed:
He shaped it out of cloud and clay,
He touched it finely till the seed
Possessed the flower: from heart and brain
He fed it with large thoughts humane,
To help a people's need.

III

He brought it out into the sun —
They blessed it to his face:
'O great pure Deed, that hast undone
So many bad and base!
O generous Deed, heroic Deed,
Come forth, be perfected, succeed,
Deliver by God's grace.'

IV

Then sovereigns, statesmen, north and
south,
Rose up in wrath and fear,
And cried, protesting by one mouth,
'What monster have we here?
A great Deed at this hour of day?
A great just Deed — and not for pay?
Absurd, — or insincere.'

V

'And if sincere, the heavier blow
 In that case we shall bear,
 For where 's our blessed "status quo,"
 Our holy treaties, where, —
 Our rights to sell a race, or buy,
 Protect and pillage, occupy,
 And civilize despair?'

VI

Some muttered that the great Deed meant
 A great pretext to sin;
 And others, the pretext, so lent,
 Was heinous (to begin).
 Volcanic terms of 'great' and 'just'?
 Admit such tongues of flame, the crust
 Of time and law falls in.

VII

A great Deed in this world of ours?
 Unheard of the pretence is:
 It threatens plainly the great Powers;
 Is fatal in all senses.
 A just Deed in the world? — call out
 The rifles! be not slack about
 The national defences.

VIII

And many murmured, 'From this source
 What red blood must be poured!'
 And some rejoined, 'T is even worse;
 What red tape is ignored!'
 All cursed the Doer for an evil
 Called here, enlarging on the Devil, —
 There, monkeying the Lord!

IX

Some said it could not be explained,
 Some, could not be excused;
 And others, 'Leave it unrestrained,
 Gehenna's self is loosed.'
 And all cried, 'Crush it, maim it, gag it!
 Set dog-toothed lies to tear it ragged,
 Truncated and traduced!'

X

But HE stood sad before the sun
 (The peoples felt their fate).
 'The world is many, — I am one;
 My great Deed was too great.
 God's fruit of justice ripens slow:
 Men's souls are narrow, let them grow.
 My brothers, we must wait.'

XI

The tale is ended, child of mine,
 Turned graver at my knee.
 They say your eyes, my Florentine,
 Are English: it may be.
 And yet I've marked as blue a pair
 Following the doves across the square
 At Venice by the sea.

XII

Ah child! ah child! I cannot say
 A word more. You conceive
 The reason now, why just to-day
 We see our Florence grieve.
 Ah child, look up into the sky!
 In this low world, where great Deeds
 die,
 What matter if we live?

A COURT LADY

We have Mrs. Browning's word for it, that
 the Court Lady was a type, not an individual.
 Quite a number of the *grandes dames* of Milan
 in 1859 indulged in the sincere, if slightly
 theatrical, display of patriotism here described.

HER hair was tawny with gold, her eyes
 with purple were dark,
 Her cheeks' pale opal burnt with a red
 and restless spark.

Never was lady of Milan nobler in name
 and in race;
 Never was lady of Italy fairer to see in
 the face.

Never was lady on earth more true as
 woman and wife,
 Larger in judgment and instinct, prouder
 in manners and life.

She stood in the early morning, and said to
 her maidens 'Bring
 That silken robe made ready to wear at the
 Court of the King.

'Bring me the clasps of diamond, lucid,
 clear of the mote,
 Clasp me the large at the waist, and clasp
 me the small at the throat.

'Diamonds to fasten the hair, and diamonds
to fasten the sleeves,
Laces to drop from their rays, like a powder
of snow from the eaves.'

Gorgeous she entered the sunlight which
gathered her up in a flame,
While, straight in her open carriage, she
to the hospital came.

In she went at the door, and gazing from
end to end,

'Many and low are the pallets, but each is
the place of a friend.'

Up she passed through the wards, and
stood at a young man's bed:
Bloody the band on his brow, and livid the
droop of his head.

'Art thou a Lombard, my brother?
Happy art thou,' she cried,
And smiled like Italy on him: he dreamed
in her face and died. 20

Pale with his passing soul, she went on
still to a second:

He was a grave hard man, whose years by
dungeons were reckoned.

Wounds in his body were sore, wounds in
his life were sorer.

'Art thou a Romagnole?' Her eyes
drove lightnings before her.

'Austrian and priest had joined to double
and tighten the cord

Able to bind thee, O strong one, — free by
the stroke of a sword.

'Now be grave for the rest of us, using
the life overcast

To ripen our wine of the present (too new)
in glooms of the past.'

Down she stepped to a pallet where lay a
face like a girl's,

Young, and pathetic with dying, — a deep
black hole in the curls. 30

'Art thou from Tuscany, brother? and
seest thou, dreaming in pain,

Thy mother stand in the piazza, searching
the list of the slain?'

Kind as a mother herself, she touched his
cheeks with her hands:

'Blessed is she who has borne thee, al-
though she should weep as she
stands.'

On she passed to a Frenchman, his arm
carried off by a ball:

Kneeling, — 'O more than my brother!
how shall I thank thee for all?

'Each of the heroes around us has fought
for his land and line,

But thou hast fought for a stranger, in hate
of a wrong not thine.

'Happy are all free peoples, too strong to
be dispossessed.

But blessed are those among nations who
dare to be strong for the rest!' 40

Ever she passed on her way, and came to a
couch where pined

One with a face from Venetia, white with
a hope out of mind.

Long she stood and gazed, and twice she
tried at the name,

But two great crystal tears were all that
faltered and came.

Only a tear for Venice? — she turned as in
passion and loss,

And stooped to his forehead and kissed it,
as if she were kissing the cross.

Faint with that strain of heart she moved
on then to another,

Stern and strong in his death. 'And dost
thou suffer, my brother?'

Holding his hands in hers: — 'Out of the
Piedmont lion

Cometh the sweetness of freedom! sweet-
est to live or to die on.' 50

Holding his cold rough hands, — 'Well,
oh well have ye done

In noble, noble Piedmont, who would not
be noble alone.'

Back he fell while she spoke. She rose to
her feet with a spring, —

'That was a Piedmontese! and this is the
Court of the King.'

AN AUGUST VOICE

'Una voce augusta.' — MONITORE TOSCANO.

I

YOU 'LL take back your Grand-duke ?
 I made the treaty upon it.
 Just venture a quiet rebuke;
 Dall' Ongaro write him a sonnet;
 Ricasoli gently explain
 Some need of the constitution:
 He 'll swear to it over again,
 Providing an 'easy solution.'
 You 'll call back the Grand-duke.

II

You 'll take back your Grand-duke ?
 I promised the Emperor Francis
 To argue the case by his book,
 And ask you to meet his advances.
 The Ducal cause, we know
 (Whether you or he be the wronger),
 Has very strong points; — although
 Your bayonets, there, have stronger.
 You 'll call back the Grand-duke.

III

You 'll take back your Grand-duke ?
 He is not pure altogether.
 For instance, the oath which he took
 (In the Forty-eight rough weather)
 He 'd 'nail your flag to his mast,'
 Then softly scuttled the boat you
 Hoped to escape in at last,
 And both by a 'Proprio motu.'
 You 'll call back the Grand-duke.

IV

You 'll take back your Grand-duke ?
 The scheme meets nothing to shock it
 In this smart letter, look,
 We found in Radetsky's pocket;
 Where his Highness in sprightly style
 Of the flower of his Tuscans wrote,
 'These heads be the hottest in file;
 Pray shoot them the quickest.' Quote,
 And call back the Grand-duke.

V

You 'll take back your Grand-duke ?
 There *are* some things to object to.
 He cheated, betrayed, and forsook,
 Then called in the foe to protect you.
 He taxed you for wines and for meats
 Throughout that eight years' pastime

Of Austria's drum in your streets —
 Of course you remember the last time
 You called back your Grand-duke ?

VI

You 'll take back the Grand-duke ?
 It is not race he is poor in,
 Although he never could brook
 The patriot cousin at Turin.
 His love of kin you discern,
 By his hate of your flag and me —
 So decidedly apt to turn
 All colors at the sight of the Three.
 You 'll call back the Grand-duke.

VII

You 'll take back your Grand-duke ?
 'T was weak that he fled from the Pitti;
 But consider how little he shook
 At thought of bombarding your city !
 And, balancing that with this,
 The Christian rule is plain for us;
 . . . Or the Holy Father's Swiss
 Have shot his Perugians in vain for us.
 You 'll call back the Grand-duke.

VIII

Pray take back your Grand-duke.
 — I, too, have suffered persuasion.
 All Europe, raven and rook,
 Screeched at me armed for your nation.
 Your cause in my heart struck spurs;
 I swept such warnings aside for you:
 My very child's eyes, and Hers,
 Grew like my brother's who died for
 you.

You 'll call back the Grand-duke ?

IX

You 'll take back your Grand-duke ?
 My French fought nobly with reason, —
 Left many a Lombardy nook
 Red as with wine out of season.
 Little we grudged what was done there,
 Paid freely your ransom of blood:
 Our heroes stark in the sun there
 We would not recall if we could.
 You 'll call back the Grand-duke ?

X

You 'll take back your Grand-duke ?
 His son rode fast as he got off
 That day on the enemy's hook,
 When *I* had an epaulet shot off.
 Though splashed (as I saw him afar — no,

(Near) by those ghastly rains,
The mark, when you've washed him in
Arno,
Will scarcely be larger than Cain's.
You'll call back the Grand-duke ?

XI

You'll take back your Grand-duke ?
'T will be so simple, quite beautiful:
The shepherd recovers his crook,
. . . If you should be sheep, and dutiful.
I spoke a word worth chalking
On Milan's wall — but stay,
Here's Poniatowsky talking, —
You'll listen to *him* to-day,
And call back the Grand-duke.

XII

You'll take back your Grand-duke ?
Observe, there's no one to force it, —
Unless the Madonna, Saint Luke
Drew for you, choose to endorse it.
I charge you, by great Saint Martino
And prodigies quickened by wrong,
Remember your Dead on Ticino;
Be worthy, be constant, be strong —
Bah ! — call back the Grand-duke !!

CHRISTMAS GIFTS

ὥς βασιλεῖ, ὥς θεῷ, ὥς νεκρῷ.
— GREGORY NAZIANZEN.

I

THE Pope on Christmas Day
Sits in Saint Peter's chair;
But the peoples murmur and say
'Our souls are sick and forlorn,
And who will show us where
Is the stable where Christ was born ?'

II

The star is lost in the dark;
The manger is lost in the straw,
The Christ cries faintly . . . hark ! . . .
Through bands that swaddle and stran-
gle —
But the Pope in the chair of awe
Looks down the great quadrangle.

III

The Magi kneel at his foot,
Kings of the East and West,

But, instead of the angels (mute
Is the 'Peace on earth' of their song),
The peoples, perplexed and opprest,
Are sighing 'How long, how long ?'

IV

And, instead of the kine, bewilder in
Shadow of aisle and dome,
The bear who tore up the children,
The fox who burnt up the corn,
And the wolf who suckled at Rome
Brothers to slay and to scorn.

V

Cardinals left and right of him,
Worshippers round and beneath,
The silver trumpets at sight of him
Thrill with a musical blast:
But the people say through their teeth,
'Trumpets ? we wait for the Last !'

VI

He sits in the place of the Lord,
And asks for the gifts of the time;
Gold, for the haft of a sword
To win back Romagna averse,
Incense, to sweeten a crime,
And myrrh, to embitter a curse.

VII

Then a king of the West said 'Good ! —
I bring thee the gifts of the time;
Red, for the patriot's blood,
Green, for the martyr's crown,
White, for the dew and the rime,
When the morning of God comes down,

VIII

— O mystic tricolor bright !
The Pope's heart quailed like a man's;
The cardinals froze at the sight,
Bowing their tonsures hoary:
And the eyes in the peacock-fans
Winked at the alien glory.

IX

But the peoples exclaimed in hope,
'Now blessed be he who has brought
These gifts of the time to the Pope,
When our souls were sick and forlorn.
— And *here* is the star we sought,
To show us where Christ was born !'

ITALY AND THE WORLD

I

FLORENCE, Bologna, Parma, Modena:

When you named them a year ago,
So many graves reserved by God, in a
Day of Judgment, you seemed to know,
To open and let out the resurrection.

II

And meantime (you made your reflection
If you were English), was nought to be
done

But sorting sabres, in predilection
For all those martyrs dead and gone,
Till the new earth and heaven made ready.

III

And if your politics were not heady,
Violent, . . . 'Good,' you added, 'good
In all things! Mourn on sure and steady.
Churchyard thistles are wholesome food
For our European wandering asses.

IV

'The date of the resurrection passes
Human foreknowledge: men unborn
Will gain by it (even in the lower classes),
But none of these. It is not the morn
Because the cock of France is crowing.

V

'Cocks crow at midnight, seldom knowing
Starlight from dawn-light! 't is a mad
Poor creature.' Here you paused, and
growing
Scornful, — suddenly, let us add,
The trumpet sounded, the graves were
open.

VI

Life and life and life! agropo in
The dusk of death, warm hands, stretched
out
For swords, proved more life still to hope
in,
Beyond and behind. Arise with a shout,
Nation of Italy, slain and buried!

VII

Hill to hill and turret to turret
Flashing the tricolor, — newly created
Beautiful Italy, calm, unhurried,
Rise heroic and renovated,
Rise to the final restitution.

VIII

Rise; prefigure the grand solution
Of earth's municipal, insular schisms, —
Statesmen draping self-love's conclusion
In cheap vernacular patriotisms,
Unable to give up Judea for Jesus.

IX

Bring us the higher example; release us
Into the larger coming time:
And into Christ's broad garment piece
us
Rags of virtue as poor as crime,
National selfishness, civic vaunting.

X

No more Jew nor Greek then, — taunting
Nor taunted; — no more England nor
France!
But one confederate brotherhood planting
One flag only, to mark the advance,
Onward and upward, of all humanity.

XI

For civilization perfected
Is fully developed Christianity.
'Measure the frontier,' shall it be said,
'Count the ships,' in national vanity?
— Count the nation's heart-beats sooner.

XII

For, though behind by a cannon or
schooner,
That nation still is predominant
Whose pulse beats quickest in zeal to
oppugn or
Succor another, in wrong or want,
Passing the frontier in love and abhor-
rence.

XIII

Modena, Parma, Bologna, Florence,
Open us out the wider way!
Dwarf in that chapel of old Saint Lawrence
Your Michel Angelo's giant Day,
With the grandeur of this Day breaking
o'er us!

XIV

Ye who, restrained as an ancient chorus,
Mute while the coryphæus spake,
Hush your separate voices before us,
Sink your separate lives for the sake
Of one sole Italy's living for ever!

XV

Givers of coat and cloak too, — never
 Grudging that purple of yours at the
 best, —
 By your heroic will and endeavor
 Each sublimely dispossessed,
 That all may inherit what each surrenders!

XVI

Earth shall bless you, O noble emenders
 On egotist nations! Ye shall lead
 The plough of the world, and sow new
 splendors
 Into the furrow of things for seed, —
 Ever the richer for what ye have given.

XVII

Lead us and teach us, till earth and heaven
 Grow larger around us and higher above.
 Our sacrament-bread has a bitter leaven;
 We bait our traps with the name of love,
 Till hate itself has a kinder meaning.

XVIII

Oh, this world: this cheating and screen-
 ing
 Of cheats! this conscience for candle-
 wicks,
 Not beacon-fires! this overweening
 Of underhand diplomatical tricks,
 Dared for the country while scorned for
 the counter!

XIX

Oh, this envy of those who mount here,
 And oh, this malice to make them trip!
 Rather quenching the fire there, drying
 the fount here,
 To frozen body and thirsty lip,
 Than leave to a neighbor their ministra-
 tion.

XX

I cry aloud in my poet-passion,
 Viewing my England o'er Alp and sea.
 I loved her more in her ancient fashion:
 She carries her rifles too thick for me
 Who spares them so in the cause of a bro-
 ther.

XXI

Suspicion, panic? end this pother.
 The sword, kept sheathless at peace-
 time, rusts.
 None fears for himself while he feels for
 another:

The brave man either fights or trusts,
 And wears no mail in his private chamber.

XXII

Beautiful Italy! golden amber
 Warm with the kisses of lover and
 traitor!
 Thou who hast drawn us on to remember,
 Draw us to hope now: let us be greater
 By this new future than that old story.

XXIII

Till truer glory replaces all glory,
 As the torch grows blind at the dawn of
 day;
 And the nations, rising up, their sorry
 And foolish sins shall put away,
 As children their toys when the teacher
 enters.

XXIV

Till Love's one centre devour these centres
 Of many self-loves; and the patriot's
 trick
 To better his land by egotist ventures,
 Defamed from a virtue, shall make men
 sick,
 As the scalp at the belt of some red hero.

XXV

For certain virtues have dropped to zero,
 Left by the sun on the mountain's dewy
 side;
 Churchman's charities, tender as Nero,
 Indian suttee, heathen suicide,
 Service to rights divine, proved hollow:

XXVI

And Heptarchy patriotisms must follow. —
 National voices, distinct yet dependent,
 Enspiring each other, as swallow does
 swallow,
 With circles still widening and ever as-
 cendant,
 In multi-form life to united progression, —

XXVII

These shall remain. And when, in the ses-
 sion
 Of nations, the separate language is
 heard,
 Each shall aspire, in sublime indiscretion,
 To help with a thought or exalt with a
 word
 Less her own than her rival's honor.

XXVIII

Each Christian nation shall take upon
her

The law of the Christian man in vast:
The crown of the getter shall fall to the
donor,

And last shall be first while first shall be
last,

And to love best shall still be, to reign un-
surpassed.

A CURSE FOR A NATION

PROLOGUE

I HEARD an angel speak last night,

And he said 'Write !

Write a Nation's curse for me,
And send it over the Western Sea.'

I faltered, taking up the word:

'Not so, my lord !

If curses must be, choose another
To send thy curse against my brother.

'For I am bound by gratitude,

By love and blood,

To brothers of mine across the sea,
Who stretch out kindly hands to me.'

'Therefore,' the voice said, 'shalt thou
write

My curse to-night.

From the summits of love a curse is driven,
As lightning is from the tops of heaven.'

'Not so,' I answered. 'Evermore

My heart is sore

For my own land's sins: for little feet
Of children bleeding along the street:

'For parked-up honors that gainsay

The right of way:

For almsgiving through a door that is
Not open enough for two friends to kiss:

'For love of freedom which abates

Beyond the Straits:

For patriot virtue starved to vice on
Self-praise, self-interest, and suspicion:

'For an oligarchic parliament,

And bribes well-meant.

What curse to another land assign,
When heavy-souled for the sins of mine ?'

'Therefore,' the voice said, 'shalt thou
write

My curse to-night.

Because thou hast strength to see and hate
A foul thing done *within* thy gate.'

'Not so,' I answered once again.

'To curse, choose men.

For I, a woman, have only known
How the heart melts and the tears run
down.'

'Therefore,' the voice said, 'shalt thou
write

My curse to-night.

Some women weep and curse, I say
(And no one marvels), night and day.

'And thou shalt take their part to-night,
Weep and write.

A curse from the depths of womanhood
Is very salt, and bitter, and good.'

So thus I wrote, and mourned indeed,

What all may read.

And thus, as was enjoined on me,
I send it over the Western Sea.

THE CURSE

I

BECAUSE ye have broken your own chain
With the strain

Of brave men climbing a Nation's height,
Yet thence bear down with brand and thong
On souls of others, — for this wrong

This is the curse. Write.

Because yourselves are standing straight
In the state

Of Freedom's foremost acolyte,
Yet keep calm footing all the time
On writhing bond-slaves, — for this crime

This is the curse. Write.

Because ye prosper in God's name,
With a claim

To honor in the old world's sight,
Yet do the fiend's work perfectly
In strangling martyrs, — for this lie

This is the curse. Write.

II

Ye shall watch while kings conspire
Round the people's smouldering fire,

And, warm for your part,
Shall never dare — O shame!
To utter the thought into flame
Which burns at your heart.

This is the curse. Write.

Ye shall watch while nations strive
With the bloodhounds, die or survive,

Drop faint from their jaws,
Or throttle them backward to death;
And only under your breath
Shall follow the cause.

This is the curse. Write.

Ye shall watch while strong men draw
The nets of feudal law

To strangle the weak;
And, counting the sin for a sin,
Your soul shall be sadder within
Than the word ye shall speak.

This is the curse. Write.

When good men are praying erect
That Christ may avenge his elect

And deliver the earth,
The prayer in your ears, said low,

Shall sound like the tramp of a foe
That's driving you forth.

This is the curse. Write.

When wise men give you their praise,
They shall pause in the heat of the phrase,
As if carried too far.

When ye boast your own charters kept
true,

Ye shall blush; for the thing which ye
do

Derides what ye are.

This is the curse. Write.

When fools cast taunts at your gate,
Your scorn ye shall somewhat abate

As ye look o'er the wall;
For your conscience, tradition, and name
Explode with a deadlier blame

Than the worst of them all.

This is the curse. Write.

Go, wherever ill deeds shall be done,
Go, plant your flag in the sun

Beside the ill-doers!

And recoil from clenching the curse
Of God's witnessing Universe

With a curse of yours.

This is the curse. Write.

LAST POEMS

TO 'GRATEFUL FLORENCE,'

TO THE MUNICIPALITY, HER REPRESENTATIVE,
AND TO TOMMASEO, ITS SPOKESMAN,

MOST GRATEFULLY

The last winter of Mrs. Browning's life was passed at No. 16 Via Felice, now the Via Sistina, Rome. She died in Florence on the evening of June 29, 1861, leaving behind her a short list of unpublished poems which she herself had drawn up, doubtless with a view to another volume. A few of these had already appeared in periodicals. One, 'De Profundis,' had been written twenty years before. These poems her husband brought out in London in the ensuing February (London, Chapman and Hall, 193 Piccadilly, 1862), adding the translations which here accompany them; concerning which last he says: 'They were intended

many years ago to accompany and explain certain engravings after ancient Gems, in the projected works of a friend by whose kindness they are now recovered; but as two of the original series (the "Adonis of Bion and the "Song to the Rose" from Achilles Tatius) have subsequently appeared, it is presumed that the remainder may not improperly follow. A single recent version (from Heine) is added.'

The words 'grateful Florence,' '*grata Firenze*,' in the dedication to this last volume, are a quotation from the memorial tablet to Mrs. Browning's memory, inserted in the wall of Casa Guidi by the municipality of Florence.

LITTLE MATTIE

First printed in the *Cornhill Magazine*, June, 1861.

I

DEAD ! Thirteen a month ago !
 Short and narrow her life's walk ;
 Lover's love she could not know
 Even by a dream or talk :
 Too young to be glad of youth,
 Missing honor, labor, rest,
 And the warmth of a babe's mouth
 At the blossom of her breast.
 Must you pity her for this
 And for all the loss it is, 10
 You, her mother, with wet face,
 Having had all in your case ?

II

Just so young but yesternight,
 Now she is as old as death.
 Meek, obedient in your sight,
 Gentle to a beck or breath
 Only on last Monday ! Yours,
 Answering you like silver bells
 Lightly touched ! An hour matures : 20
 You can teach her nothing else.
 She has seen the mystery hid
 Under Egypt's pyramid :
 By those eyelids pale and close
 Now she knows what Rhamses knows.

III

Cross her quiet hands, and smooth
 Down her patient locks of silk,
 Cold and passive as in truth
 You your fingers in spilt milk
 Drew along a marble floor ;
 But her lips you cannot wring 30
 Into saying a word more,
 ' Yes,' or ' No,' or such a thing :
 Though you call and beg and wreak
 Half your soul out in a shriek,
 She will lie there in default
 And most innocent revolt.

IV

Ay, and if she spoke, maybe
 She would answer, like the Son,
 ' What is now 'twixt thee and me ?'
 Dreadful answer ! better none. 40

Yours on Monday, God's to-day !
 Yours, your child, your blood, your
 heart,
 Called . . . you called her, did you say,
 ' Little Mattie ' for your part ?
 Now already it sounds strange,
 And you wonder, in this change,
 What He calls his angel-creature,
 Higher up than you can reach her.

V

'T was a green and easy world
 As she took it ; room to play 50
 (Though one's hair might get uncured
 At the far end of the day).
 What she suffered she shook off
 In the sunshine ; what she sinned
 She could pray on high enough
 To keep safe above the wind.
 If reproved by God or you,
 'T was to better her, she knew ;
 And if crossed, she gathered still
 'T was to cross out something ill. 60

VI

You, you had the right, you thought,
 To survey her with sweet scorn,
 Poor gay child, who had not caught
 Yet the octave-stretch forlorn
 Of your larger wisdom ! Nay,
 Now your places are changed so,
 In that same superior way
 She regards you dull and low
 As you did herself exempt
 From life's sorrows. Grand contempt 70
 Of the spirits risen awhile,
 Who look back with such a smile !

VII

There 's the sting of 't. That, I think,
 Hurts the most a thousandfold !
 To feel sudden, at a wink,
 Some dear child we used to scold,
 Praise, love both ways, kiss and tease,
 Teach and tumble as our own,
 All its curls about our knees,
 Rise up suddenly full-grown. 80
 Who could wonder such a sight
 Made a woman mad outright ?
 Show me Michael with the sword
 Rather than such angels, Lord !

A FALSE STEP

SWEET, thou hast trod on a heart.

Pass; there's a world full of men;
And women as fair as thou art
Must do such things now and then.

Thou hast only stepped unaware, —
Malice, not one can impute;
And why should a heart have been there
In the way of a fair woman's foot?

It was not a stone that could trip,
Nor was it a thorn that could rend:
Put up thy proud under-lip!
'T was merely the heart of a friend.

And yet peradventure one day
Thou, sitting alone at the glass,
Remarking the bloom gone away,
Where the smile in its dimplement was,

And seeking around thee in vain
From hundreds who flattered before,
Such a word as 'Oh, not in the main
Do I hold thee less precious, but
more!' . . .

Thou'lt sigh, very like, on thy part,
'Of all I have known or can know,
I wish I had only that Heart
I trod upon ages ago!'

VOID IN LAW

I

SLEEP, little babe, on my knee,
Sleep, for the midnight is chill,
And the moon has died out in the tree,
And the great human world goeth ill.
Sleep, for the wicked agree:
Sleep, let them do as they will.
Sleep.

II

Sleep, thou hast drawn from my breast
The last drop of milk that was good;
And now, in a dream, suck the rest,
Lest the real should trouble thy blood.
Suck, little lips dispossessed,
As we kiss in the air whom we would.
Sleep.

III

O lips of thy father! the same,
So like! Very deeply they swore
When he gave me his ring and his name,
To take back, I imagined, no more!
And now is all changed like a game,
Though the old cards are used as of
yore?
Sleep.

IV

'Void in law,' said the Courts. Some-
thing wrong
In the forms? Yet, 'Till death part us
two,
I, James, take thee, Jessie,' was strong,
And ONE witness competent. True
Such a marriage was worth an old song,
Heard in Heaven though, as plain as the
New.
Sleep.

V

Sleep, little child, his and mine!
Her throat has the antelope curve,
And her cheek just the color and line
Which fade not before him nor swerve:
Yet *she* has no child! — the divine
Seal of right upon loves that deserve.
Sleep.

VI

My child! though the world take her part,
Saying 'She was the woman to choose;
He had eyes, was a man in his heart,' —
We twain the decision refuse:
We . . . weak as I am, as thou art, . . .
Cling on to him, never to loose.
Sleep.

VII

He thinks that, when done with this place,
All's ended! he'll new-stamp the ore?
Yes, Cæsar's — but not in our case.
Let him learn we are waiting before
The grave's mouth, the heaven's gate, God's
face,
With implacable love evermore.
Sleep.

VIII

He's ours, though he kissed her but now,
He's ours, though she kissed in reply:
He's ours, though himself disavow,

And God's universe favor the lie;
Ours to claim, ours to clasp, ours below,
Ours above, . . . if we live, if we die.
Sleep.

IX

Ah baby, my baby, too rough
Is my lullaby? What have I said?
Sleep! When I've wept long enough
I shall learn to weep softly instead,
And piece with some alien stuff
My heart to lie smooth for thy head.
Sleep.

X

Two souls met upon thee, my sweet;
Two loves led thee out to the sun:
Alas, pretty hands, pretty feet,
If the one who remains (only one)
Set her grief at thee, turned in a heat
To thine enemy, — were it well done?
Sleep.

XI

May He of the manger stand near
And love thee! An infant He came
To his own who rejected Him here,
But the Magi brought gifts all the same.
I hurry the cross on my Dear!
My gifts are the griefs I declaim!
Sleep.

LORD WALTER'S WIFE

This poem, to Mrs. Browning's deep chagrin,
was rejected (with a thousand apologies) by
Thackeray, as editor of the *Cornhill Magazine*,
on account of the *risqué* character of its subject.

'BUT why do you go?' said the lady,
while both sat under the yew,
And her eyes were alive in their depth, as
the kraken beneath the sea-blue.

'Because I fear you,' he answered; — 'be-
cause you are far too fair,
And able to strangle my soul in a mesh of
your gold-colored hair.'

'Oh, that,' she said, 'is no reason! Such
knots are quickly undone,
And too much beauty, I reckon, is nothing
but too much sun.'

'Yet farewell so,' he answered; — 'the
sunstroke's fatal at times.
I value your husband, Lord Walter, whose
gallop rings still from the limes.'

'Oh, that,' she said, 'is no reason. You
smell a rose through a fence:
If two should smell it, what matter? who
grumbles, and where's the pre-
sence?' 10

'But I,' he replied, 'have promised another,
when love was free,
To love her alone, alone, who alone and
afar loves me.'

'Why, that,' she said, 'is no reason.
Love's always free, I am told.
Will you vow to be safe from the head-
ache on Tuesday, and think it will
hold?'

'But you,' he replied, 'have a daughter, a
young little child, who was laid
In your lap to be pure; so I leave you:
the angels would make me afraid.'

'Oh, that,' she said, 'is no reason. The
angels keep out of the way;
And Dora, the child, observes nothing, al-
though you should please me and
stay.'

At which he rose up in his anger, — 'Why,
now, you no longer are fair!
Why, now, you no longer are fatal, but
ugly and hateful, I swear.' 20

At which she laughed out in her scorn:
'These men! Oh, these men over-
nice,
Who are shocked if a color not virtuous is
frankly put on by a vice.'

Her eyes blazed upon him — 'And you!
You bring us your vices so near
That we smell them! You think in our
presence a thought 't would defame
us to hear!'

'What reason had you, and what right, —
I appeal to your soul from my life, —
To find me too fair as a woman? Why,
sir, I am pure, and a wife.'

'Is the day-star too fair up above you ? It
burns you not. Dare you imply
I brushed you more close than the star does,
when Walter had set me as high ?

'If a man finds a woman too fair, he means
simply adapted too much
To uses unlawful and fatal. The praise ! —
shall I thank you for such ? 30

'Too fair ? — not unless you misuse us !
and surely if, once in a while,
You attain to it, straightway you call us no
longer too fair, but too vile.

'A moment, — I pray your attention ! — I
have a poor word in my head
I must utter, though womanly custom
would set it down better unsaid.

'You grew, sir, pale to impertinence, once
when I showed you a ring.
You kissed my fan when I dropped it. No
matter ! — I've broken the thing.

'You did me the honor, perhaps, to be
moved at my side now and then
In the senses — a vice, I have heard, which
is common to beasts and some men.

'Love's a virtue for heroes ! — as white as
the snow on high hills,
And immortal as every great soul is that
struggles, endures, and fulfils. 40

'I love my Walter profoundly, — you,
Maude, though you faltered a week,
For the sake of . . . what was it — an eye-
brow ? or, less still, a mole on a
cheek ?

'And since, when all's said, you're too
noble to stoop to the frivolous cant
About crimes irresistible, virtues that swindle,
betray, and supplant,

'I determined to prove to yourself that,
whate'er you might dream or avow
By illusion, you wanted precisely no more
of me than you have now.

'There ! Look me full in the face ! — in
the face. Understand, if you can,
That the eyes of such women as I am are
clean as the palm of a man.

'Drop his hand, you insult him. Avoid us
for fear we should cost you a scar —
You take us for harlots, I tell you, and not
for the women we are. 50

'You wronged me: but then I considered
. . . there's Walter ! And so at
the end
I vowed that he should not be mulcted, by
me, in the hand of a friend.

'Have I hurt you indeed ? We are quits
then. Nay, friend of my Walter,
be mine !
Come, Dora, my darling, my angel, and
help me to ask him to dine.'

BIANCA AMONG THE NIGHTINGALES

I

THE cypress stood up like a church
That night we felt our love would hold,
And saintly moonlight seemed to search
And wash the whole world clean as gold;
The olives crystallized the vales'
Broad slopes until the hills grew strong:
The fireflies and the nightingales
Throbbled each to either, flame and song.
The nightingales, the nightingales !

II

Upon the angle of its shade
The cypress stood, self-balanced high;
Half up, half down, as double-made,
Along the ground, against the sky;
And *we*, too ! from such soul-height went
Such leaps of blood, so blindly driven,
We scarce knew if our nature meant
Most passionate earth or intense heaven.
The nightingales, the nightingales !

III

We paled with love, we shook with love,
We kissed so close we could not vow;
Till Giulio whispered 'Sweet, above
God's Ever guaranties this Now.'
And through his words the nightingales
Drove straight and full their long clear
call
Like arrow, through heroic mails,
And love was awful in it all.
The nightingales, the nightingales !

IV

O cold white moonlight of the north,
Refresh these pulses, quench this hell !
O coverture of death drawn forth
Across this garden-chamber . . . well !
But what have nightingales to do
In gloomy England, called the free . . .
(Yes, free to die in ! . . .) when we two
Are sundered, singing still to me ?
And still they sing, the nightingales !

V

I think I hear him, how he cried
'My own soul's life!' between their
notes.
Each man has but one soul supplied,
And that's immortal. Though his
throat's
On fire with passion now, to *her*
He can't say what to me he said !
And yet he moves her, they aver.
The nightingales sing through my
head, —
The nightingales, the nightingales !

VI

He says to her what moves her most.
He would not name his soul within
Her hearing, — rather pays her cost
With praises to her lips and chin.
Man has but one soul, 't is ordained,
And each soul but one love, I add;
Yet souls are damned and love's profaned;
These nightingales will sing me mad !
The nightingales, the nightingales !

VII

I marvel how the birds can sing.
There's little difference, in their view,
Betwixt our Tuscan trees that spring
As vital flames into the blue,
And dull round blots of foliage meant,
Like saturated sponges here
To suck the fogs up. As content
Is he too in this land, 't is clear.
And still they sing, the nightingales.

VIII

My Native Florence ! dear, forgone !
I see across the Alpine ridge
How the last feast-day of Saint John
Shot rockets from Carraia bridge.
The luminous city, tall with fire,
Trode deep down in that river of ours,
While many a boat with lamp and choir

Skimmed birdlike over glittering towers.
I will not hear these nightingales.

IX

I seem to float, *we* seem to float
Down Arno's stream in festive guise;
A boat strikes flame into our boat,
And up that lady seems to rise
As then she rose. The shock had flashed
A vision on us ! What a head,
What leaping eyeballs ! — beauty dashed
To splendor by a sudden dread.
And still they sing, the nightingales.

X

Too bold to sin, too weak to die;
Such women are so. As for me,
I would we had drowned there, he and I,
That moment, loving perfectly.
He had not caught her with her loosed
Gold ringlets . . . rarer in the
south . . .
Nor heard the 'Grazie tanto' bruised
To sweetness by her English mouth.
And still they sing, the nightingales.

XI

She had not reached him at my heart
With her fine tongue, as snakes indeed
Kill flies; nor had I, for my part,
Yearned after, in my desperate need,
And followed him as he did her
To coasts left bitter by the tide,
Whose very nightingales, elsewhere
Delighting, torture and deride !
For still they sing, the nightingales.

XII

A worthless woman; mere cold clay
As all false things are: but so fair,
She takes the breath of men away
Who gaze upon her unaware.
I would not play her larcenous tricks
To have her looks ! She lied and stole,
And spat into my love's pure pyx
The rank saliva of her soul.
And still they sing, the nightingales.

XIII

I would not for her white and pink,
Though such he likes — her grace of
limb,
Though such he has praised — nor yet, I
think,
For life itself, though spent with him,

Commit such sacrilege, affront
 God's nature which is love, intrude
 'Twixt two affianced souls, and hunt
 Like spiders, in the altar's wood.
 I cannot bear these nightingales.

XIV

If she chose sin, some gentler guise
 She might have sinned in, so it seems:
 She might have pricked out both my eyes,
 And I still seen him in my dreams!
 — Or drugged me in my soup or wine,
 Nor left me angry afterward:
 To die here with his hand in mine,
 His breath upon me, were not hard.
 (Our Lady hush these nightingales!)

XV

But set a spring for *him*, 'mio ben,'
 My only good, my first last love! —
 Though Christ knows well what sin is, when
 He sees some things done they must
 move
 Himself to wonder. Let her pass.
 I think of her by night and day.
 Must *I* too join her . . . out, alas! . . .
 With Giulio, in each word I say?
 And evermore the nightingales!

XVI

Giulio, my Giulio! — sing they so,
 And you be silent? Do I speak,
 And you not hear? An arm you throw
 Round some one, and I feel so weak?
 — Oh, owl-like birds! They sing for spite,
 They sing for hate, they sing for doom,
 They'll sing through death who sing
 through night,
 They'll sing and stun me in the tomb —
 The nightingales, the nightingales!

MY KATE

I

SHE was not as pretty as women I know,
 And yet all your best made of sunshine and
 snow
 Drop to shade, melt to nought in the long-
 trodden ways,
 While she's still remembered on warm and
 cold days —

My Kate.

II

Her air had a meaning, her movements a
 grace;
 You turned from the fairest to gaze on her
 face:
 And when you had once seen her forehead
 and mouth,
 You saw as distinctly her soul and her
 truth —

My Kate.

III

Such a blue inner light from her eyelids
 outbroke,
 You looked at her silence and fancied she
 spoke:
 When she did, so peculiar yet soft was
 the tone,
 Though the loudest spoke also, you heard
 her alone —

My Kate.

IV

I doubt if she said to you much that could
 act
 As a thought or suggestion: she did not
 attract
 In the sense of the brilliant or wise: I
 infer
 'T was her thinking of others made you
 think of her —

My Kate.

V

She never found fault with you, never im-
 plied
 Your wrong by her right; and yet men at
 her side
 Grew nobler, girls purer, as through the
 whole town
 The children were gladder that pulled at
 her gown —

My Kate.

VI

None knelt at her feet confessed lovers in
 thrall;
 They knelt more to God than they used, —
 that was all:
 If you praised her as charming, some asked
 what you meant,
 But the charm of her presence was felt
 when she went —

My Kate.

VII

The weak and the gentle, the ribald and rude,
 She took as she found them, and did them all good;
 It always was with her — see what you have!
 She has made the grass greener even here
 . . . with her grave —
 My Kate.

VIII

My dear one! — when thou wast alive with the rest,
 I held thee the sweetest and loved thee the best;
 And now thou art dead, shall I not take thy part
 As thy smiles used to do for thyself, my sweet Heart —
 My Kate?

A SONG FOR THE RAGGED SCHOOLS OF LONDON

WRITTEN IN ROME

The 'Song for the Ragged Schools' was written in 1854 for the table at a Charity Bazaar in London presided over by Mrs. Browning's sister, Arabella Moulton Barrett, afterward Mrs. Surtees Cook. Mr. Browning also contributed a poem called 'The Twins,' and the two were printed with the names of husband and wife, in a thin pamphlet, price 6d.

I AM listening here in Rome.
 'England's strong,' say many speakers,
 'If she winks, the Czar must come,
 Prow and topsail, to the breakers.'

'England's rich in coal and oak,'
 Adds a Roman, getting moody;
 'If she shakes a travelling cloak,
 Down our Appian roll the scudi.'

'England's righteous,' they rejoice:
 'Who shall grudge her exaltations,
 When her wealth of golden coin
 Works the welfare of the nations?'

I am listening here in Rome.
 Over Alps a voice is sweeping —
 'England's cruel, sa'e us some
 Of these victims in her keeping!'

As the cry beneath the wheel
 Of an old triumphant Roman
 Cleft the people's shouts like steel,
 While the show was spoilt for no man, 20

Comes that voice. Let others shout,
 Other poets praise my land here:
 I am sadly sitting out,
 Praying, 'God forgive her grandeur.'

Shall we boast of empire, where
 Time with ruin sits commissioned?
 In God's liberal blue air
 Peter's dome itself looks wizened;

And the mountains, in disdain,
 Gather back their lights of opal 30
 From the dumb despondent plain
 Heaped with jawbones of a people.

Lordly English, think it o'er,
 Cæsar's doing is all undone!
 You have cannons on your shore,
 And free Parliaments in London;

Princes' parks, and merchants' homes,
 Tents for soldiers, ships for seamen, —
 Ay, but ruins worse than Rome's
 In your pauper men and women. 40

Women leering through the gas
 (Just such bosoms used to nurse you),
 Men, turned wolves by famine — pass!
 Those can speak themselves, and curse
 you.

But these others — children small,
 Spilt like blots about the city,
 Quay, and street, and palace-wall —
 Take them up into your pity!

Ragged children with bare feet,
 Whom the angels in white raiment 50
 Know the names of, to repeat
 When they come on you for payment.

Ragged children, hungry-eyed,
 Huddled up out of the coldness
 On your doorsteps, side by side,
 Till your footman damns their boldness.

In the alleys, in the squares,
 Begging, lying little rebels;
 In the noisy thoroughfares,
 Struggling on with piteous trebles. 60

Patient children — think what pain
 Makes a young child patient — ponder !
 Wronged too commonly to strain
 After right, or wish, or wonder.

Wicked children, with peaked chins,
 And old foreheads ! there are many
 With no pleasures except sins,
 Gambling with a stolen penny.

Sickly children, that whine low
 To themselves and not their mothers, 70
 From mere habit, — never so
 Hoping help or care from others.

Healthy children, with those blue
 English eyes, fresh from their Maker,
 Fierce and ravenous, staring through
 At the brown loaves of the baker.

I am listening here' in Rome,
 And the Romans are confessing,
 'English children pass in bloom
 All the prettiest made for blessing. 80

'*Angli angeli !*' (resumed
 From the mediæval story)
 'Such rose angelhoods, emplumed
 In such ringlets of pure glory !'

Can we smooth down the bright hair,
 O my sisters, calm, unthrilled in
 Our heart's pulses ? Can we bear
 The sweet looks of our own children,

While those others, lean and small,
 Seurf and mildew of the city, 90
 Spot our streets, convict us all
 Till we take them into pity ?

'Is it our fault ?' you reply,
 'When, throughout civilization,
 Every nation's empery
 Is asserted by starvation ?

'All these mouths we cannot feed,
 And we cannot clothe these bodies.'
 Well, if man's so hard indeed,
 Let them learn at least what God is ! 100

Little outcasts from life's fold,
 The grave's hope they may be joined in,
 By Christ's covenant consoled
 For our social contract's grinding.

If no better can be done,
 Let us do but this, — endeavor
 That the sun behind the sun
 Shine upon them while they shiver !

On the dismal London flags,
 Through the cruel social juggle, 110
 Put a thought beneath their rags
 To ennoble the heart's struggle.

O my sisters, not so much
 Are we asked for — not a blossom
 From our children's nosegay, such
 As we gave it from our bosom, —

Not the milk left in their cup,
 Not the lamp while they are sleeping,
 Not the little cloak hung up
 While the coat's in daily keeping, — 120

But a place in RAGGED SCHOOLS,
 Where the outcasts may to-morrow
 Learn by gentle words and rules
 Just the uses of their sorrow.

O my sisters ! children small,
 Blue-eyed, wailing through the city —
 Our own babes cry in them all:
 Let us take them into pity.

MAY'S LOVE

I

You love all, you say,
 Round, beneath, above me:
 Find me then some way
 Better than to love me,
 Me, too, dearest May !

II

O world-kissing eyes
 Which the blue heavens melt to;
 I, sad, otherwise,
 Loathe the sweet looks dealt to
 All things — men and flies.

III

You love all, you say:
 Therefore, Dear, abate me
 Just your love, I pray !
 Shut your eyes and hate me —
 Only *me* — fair May !

AMY'S CRUELTY

FAIR Amy of the terraced house,
Assist me to discover
Why you who would not hurt a mouse
Can torture so your lover.

You give your coffee to the cat,
You stroke the dog for coming,
And all your face grows kinder at
The little brown bee's humming.

But when *he* haunts your door . . . the town
Marks coming and marks going . . .
You seem to have stitched your eyelids
down
To that long piece of sewing !

You never give a look, not you,
Nor drop him a 'Good morning,'
To keep his long day warm and blue,
So fretted by your scorning.

She shook her head — 'The mouse and bee
For crumb or flower will linger:
The dog is happy at my knee,
The cat purrs at my finger.

'But *he* . . . to *him*, the least thing given
Means great things at a distance;
He wants my world, my sun, my heaven,
Soul, body, whole existence.

'They say love gives as well as takes;
But I'm a simple maiden, —
My mother's first smile when she wakes
I still have smiled and prayed in.

'I only know my mother's love
Which gives all and asks nothing;
And this new loving sets the groove
Too much the way of loathing.

'Unless he gives me all in change,
I forfeit all things by him:
The risk is terrible and strange —
I tremble, doubt, . . . deny him.

'He 's sweetest friend or hardest foe,
Best angel or worst devil;
I either hate or . . . love him so,
I can't be merely civil !

'You trust a woman who puts forth
Her blossoms thick as summer's ?

You think she dreams what love is worth,
Who casts it to new-comers ?

'Such love 's a cowslip-ball to fling,
A moment's pretty pastime;
I give . . . all me, if anything,
The first time and the last time.

'Dear neighbor of the trellised house,
A man should murmur never,
Though treated worse than dog and mouse,
Till doated on for ever !'

MY HEART AND I

I

ENOUGH ! we 're tired, my heart and I.
We sit beside the headstone thus,
And wish that name were carved for us.
The moss reprints more tenderly
The hard types of the mason's knife,
As heaven's sweet life renews earth's life
With which we 're tired, my heart and I.

II

You see we 're tired, my heart and I.
We dealt with books, we trusted men,
And in our own blood drenched the
pen,
As if such colors could not fly.
We walked too straight for fortune's end,
We loved too true to keep a friend;
At last we 're tired, my heart and I.

III

How tired we feel, my heart and I !
We seem of no use in the world;
Our fancies hang gray and uncurled
About men's eyes indifferently;
Our voice which thrilled you so, will
let
You sleep; our tears are only wet:
What do we here, my heart and I ?

IV

So tired, so tired, my heart and I !
It was not thus in that old time
When Ralph sat with me 'neath the lime
To watch the sunset from the sky.
'Dear love, you're looking tired,' he
said;
I, smiling at him, shook my head:
'T is now we 're tired, my heart and I.

V

So tired, so tired, my heart and I !
 Though now none takes me on his arm
 To fold me close and kiss me warm
 Till each quick breath end in a sigh
 Of happy languor. Now, alone,
 We lean upon this graveyard stone,
 Uncheered, unkissed, my heart and I.

VI

Tired out we are, my heart and I.
 Suppose the world brought diadems
 To tempt us, crusted with loose gems
 Of powers and pleasures ? Let it try.
 We scarcely care to look at even
 A pretty child, or God's blue heaven,
 We feel so tired, my heart and I.

VII

Yet who complains ? My heart and I ?
 In this abundant earth no doubt
 Is little room for things worn out:
 Disdain them, break them, throw them by !
 And if before the days grew rough
 We *once* were loved, used, — well
 enough,
 I think, we've fared, my heart and I.

THE BEST THING IN THE WORLD

WHAT'S the best thing in the world ?
 June-rose, by May-dew impearled;
 Sweet south-wind, that means no rain;
 Truth, not cruel to a friend;
 Pleasure, not in haste to end;
 Beauty, not self-decked and curled
 Till its pride is over-plain;
 Light, that never makes you wink;
 Memory, that gives no pain;
 Love, when, *so*, you're loved again.
 What's the best thing in the world ?
 — Something out of it, I think.

WHERE'S AGNES ?

I

NAY, if I had come back so,
 And found her dead in her grave,
 And if a friend I know
 Had said, 'Be strong, nor rave:
 She lies there, dead below:

II

'I saw her, I who speak,
 White, stiff, the face one blank:
 The blue shade came to her cheek
 Before they nailed the plank,
 For she had been dead a week.'

III

Why, if he had spoken so,
 I might have believed the thing,
 Although her look, although
 Her step, laugh, voice's ring
 Lived in me still as they do.

IV

But dead that other way,
 Corrupted thus and lost ?
 That sort of worm in the clay ?
 I cannot count the cost,
 That I should rise and pay.

V

My Agnes false ? such shame ?
 She ? Rather be it said
 That the pure saint of her name
 Has stood there in her stead,
 And tricked you to this blame.

VI

Her very gown, her cloak
 Fell chastely: no disguise,
 But expression ! while she broke
 With her clear gray morning-eyes
 Full upon me and then spoke.

VII

She wore her hair away
 From her forehead, — like a cloud
 Which a little wind in May
 Peels off finely: disallowed
 Though bright enough to stay.

VIII

For the heavens must have the place
 To themselves, to use and shine in,
 As her soul would have her face
 To press through upon mine, in
 That orb of angel grace.

IX

Had she any fault at all,
 'T was having none, I thought too —
 There seemed a sort of thrill;
 As she felt her shadow ought to
 Fall straight upon the wall.

X

Her sweetness strained the sense
Of common life and duty;
And every day's expense
Of moving in such beauty
Required, almost, defence.

XI

What good, I thought, is done
By such sweet things, if any ?
This world smells ill ; the sun
Though the garden-flowers are many,
She is only one.

XII

Can a voice so low and soft
Take open actual part
With Right, — maintain aloft
Pure truth in life or art,
Vexed always, wounded oft ? —

XIII

She fit, with that fair pose
Which melts from curve to curve,
To stand, run, work with those
Who wrestle and deserve,
And speak plain without glose ?

XIV

But I turned round on my fear
Defiant, disagreeing —
What if God has set her here
Less for action than for Being ? —
For the eye and for the ear.

XV

Just to show what beauty may,
Just to prove what music can, —
And then to die away
From the presence of a man,
Who shall learn, henceforth, to pray ?

XVI

As a door, left half ajar
In heaven, would make him think
How heavenly-different are
Things glanced at through the chink,
Till he pined from near to far.

XVII

That door could lead to hell ?
That shining merely meant

Damnation ? What ! *She* fell
Like a woman, who was sent
Like an angel, by a spell ?

XVIII

She, who scarcely trod the earth,
Turned mere dirt ? My Agnes, —
mine !
Called so ! felt of too much worth
To be used so ! too divine
To be breathed near, and so forth !

XIX

Why, I dared not name a sin
In her presence : I went round,
Clipped its name and shut it in
Some mysterious crystal sound, —
Changed the dagger for the pin.

XX

Now you name herself *that word* ?
O my Agnes ! O my saint !
Then the great joys of the Lord
Do not last ? Then all this paint
Runs off nature ? leaves a board ?

XXI

Who's dead here ? No, not *she* :
Rather I ! or whence this damp
Cold corruption's misery ?
While my very mourners stamp
Closer in the clods on me.

XXII

And my mouth is full of dust
Till I cannot speak and curse —
Speak and damn him . . . ' Blame 's un-
just ' ?
Sin blots out the universe,
All because *she* would and must ?

XXIII

She, my white rose, dropping off
The high rose-tree branch ! and not
That the night-wind blew too rough,
Or the noon-sun burnt too hot,
But, that being a rose — 't was enough !

XXIV

Then henceforth may earth grow trees !
No more roses ! — hard straight lines
To score lies out ! none of these
Fluctuant curves, but firs and pines,
Poplars, cedars, cypresses !

DE PROFUNDIS

It was commonly supposed, at the time of its publication, that the poem 'De Profundis' was called forth by the death of Mrs. Browning's sister Henrietta, — Mrs. Surtees Cook, — which occurred only a few months before her own. In reality it had been written not long after the tragic death by drowning at Torquay, of her brother Edward, on July 11, 1840. The difficulty which Mrs. Browning experienced, for many years, about making any allusion to that sharp calamity, which nearly cost her her own life, doubtless caused her to withhold from publication almost to the last these peculiarly intimate verses.

I

THE face which, duly as the sun,
Rose up for me with life begun,
To mark all bright hours of the day
With hourly love, is dimmed away, —
And yet my days go on, go on.

II

THE tongue which, like a stream, could
run
Smooth music from the roughest stone,
And every morning with 'Good day'
Make each day good, is hushed away, —
And yet my days go on, go on.

III

THE heart which, like a staff, was one
For mine to lean and rest upon,
The strongest on the longest day
With steadfast love, is caught away, —
And yet my days go on, go on.

IV

And cold before my summer's done,
And deaf in Nature's general tune,
And fallen too low for special fear,
And here, with hope no longer here, —
While the tears drop, my days go on.

V

THE world goes whispering to its own,
'This anguish pierces to the bone;'
And tender friends go sighing round,
'What love can ever cure this wound?'
My days go on, my days go on.

VI

THE past rolls forward on the sun
And makes all night. O dreams begun,

Not to be ended! Ended bliss,
And life that will not end in this!
My days go on, my days go on.

VII

Breath freezes on my lips to moan:
As one alone, once not alone,
I sit and knock at Nature's door,
Heart-bare, heart-hungry, very poor,
Whose desolated days go on.

VIII

I knock and cry, — Undone, undone!
Is there no help, no comfort, — none?
No gleaning in the wide wheat-plains
Where others drive their loaded wains?
My vacant days go on, go on.

IX

This Nature, though the snows be down,
Thinks kindly of the bird of June:
The little red hip on the tree
Is ripe for such. What is for me,
Whose days so wintery go on?

X

No bird am I, to sing in June,
And dare not ask an equal boon.
Good nests and berries red are Nature's
To give away to better creatures, —
And yet my days go on, go on.

XI

I ask less kindness to be done, —
Only to loose these pilgrim-shoon,
(Too early worn and grimed) with sweet
Cool deathly touch to these tired feet.
Till days go out which now go on.

XII

Only to lift the turf unmown
From off the earth where it has grown,
Some cubit-space, and say 'Behold,
Creep in, poor Heart, beneath that fold,
Forgetting how the days go on.'

XIII

What harm would that do? Green anon
The sward would quicken, overshone
By skies as blue; and crickets might
Have leave to chirp there day and night
While my new rest went on, went on.

XIV

From gracious Nature have I won
Such liberal bounty ? may I run
So, lizard-like, within her side,
And there be safe, who now am tried
By days that painfully go on ?

XV

— A Voice reproves me thereupon,
More sweet than Nature's when the drone
Of bees is sweetest, and more deep
Than when the rivers overleap
The shuddering pines, and thunder on.

XVI

God's Voice, not Nature's ! Night and
noon
He sits upon the great white throne
And listens for the creatures' praise.
What babble we of days and days ?
The Day-spring He, whose days go on.

XVII

He reigns above, He reigns alone;
Systems burn out and leave his throne;
Fair mists of seraphs melt and fall
Around Him, changeless amid all, —
Ancient of Days, whose days go on.

XVIII

He reigns below, He reigns alone,
And, having life in love forgone
Beneath the crown of sovran thorns,
He reigns the Jealous God. Who mourns
Or rules with Him, while days go on ?

XIX

By anguish which made pale the sun,
I hear Him charge his saints that none
Among his creatures anywhere
Blaspheme against Him with despair,
However darkly days go on.

XX

Take from my head the thorn-wreath
brown !
No mortal grief deserves that crown.
O supreme Love, chief misery,
The sharp regalia are for THEE
Whose days eternally go on !

XXI

For us, — whatever's undergone,
Thou knowest, wildest what is done.

Grief may be joy misunderstood;
Only the Good discerns the good.
I trust Thee while my days go on.

XXII

Whatever's lost, it first was won;
We will not struggle nor impugn.
Perhaps the cup was broken here,
That Heaven's new wine might show more
clear.
I praise Thee while my days go on.

XXIII

I praise Thee while my days go on;
I love Thee while my days go on:
Through dark and dearth, through fire and
frost,
With emptied arms and treasure lost,
I thank Thee while my days go on.

XXIV

And having in thy life-depth thrown
Being and suffering (which are one),
As a child drops his pebble small
Down some deep well, and hears it fall
Smiling — so I. THY DAYS GO ON.

A MUSICAL INSTRUMENT

First printed in the *Cornhill Magazine*, July,
1860.

I

WHAT was he doing, the great god Pan,
Down in the reeds by the river ?
Spreading ruin and scattering ban,
Splashing and paddling with hoofs of a
goat,
And breaking the golden lilies afloat
With the dragon-fly on the river.

II

He tore out a reed, the great god Pan,
From the deep cool bed of the river:
The limpid water turbidly ran,
And the broken lilies a-dying lay,
And the dragon-fly had fled away,
Ere he brought it out of the river.

III

High on the shore sat the great god Pan
While turbidly flowed the river;
And hacked and hewed as a great god can,

With his hard bleak steel at the patient
reed,
Till there was not a sign of the leaf indeed
To prove it fresh from the river.

IV

He cut it short, did the great god Pan,
(How tall it stood in the river!)
Then drew the pith, like the heart of a
man,
Steadily from the outside ring,
And notched the poor dry empty thing
In holes, as he sat by the river.

V

'This is the way,' laughed the great god
Pan
(Laughed while he sat by the river),
'The only way, since gods began
To make sweet music, they could succeed.'
Then, dropping his mouth to a hole in the
reed,
He blew in power by the river.

VI

Sweet, sweet, sweet, O Pan!
Piercing sweet by the river!
Blinding sweet, O great god Pan!
The sun on the hill forgot to die,
And the lilies revived, and the dragon-fly
Came back to dream on the river.

VII

Yet half a beast is the great god Pan,
To laugh as he sits by the river,
Making a poet out of a man:
The true gods sigh for the cost and pain, —
For the reed which grows nevermore again
As a reed with the reeds in the river.

FIRST NEWS FROM VILLA- FRANCA

I

PEACE, peace, peace, do you say?
What! — with the enemy's guns in our
ears?
With the country's wrong not rendered
back?
What! — while Austria stands at bay
In Mantua, and our Venice bears
The cursed flag of the yellow and
black?

II

Peace, peace, peace, do you say?
And this the Mincio? Where's the
fleet,
And where's the sea? Are we all
blind
Or mad with the blood shed yesterday,
Ignoring Italy under our feet,
And seeing things before, behind?

III

Peace, peace, peace, do you say?
What! — uncontested, undenied?
Because we triumph, we succumb?
A pair of Emperors stand in the way
(One of whom is a man, beside),
To sign and seal our cannons dumb?

IV

No, not Napoleon! — he who mused
At Paris, and at Milan spake,
And at Solferino led the fight:
Not he we trusted, honored, used
Our hopes and hearts for . . . till they
break
Even so, you tell us . . . in his sight.

V

Peace, peace, is still your word?
We say you lie then! — that is plain.
There is no peace, and shall be none.
Our very Dead would cry 'Absurd!'
And clamor that they died in vain,
And whine to come back to the sun.

VI

Hush! more reverence for the Dead!
They've done the most for Italy
Evermore since the earth was fair.
Now would that *we* had died instead,
Still dreaming peace meant liberty,
And did not, could not, mean despair.

VII

Peace, you say? — yes, peace, in truth!
But such a peace as the ear can achieve
'Twixt the rifle's click and the rush of
the ball,
'Twixt the tiger's spring and the crunch of
the tooth,
'Twixt the dying atheist's negative
And God's Face — waiting, after all!

KING VICTOR EMANUEL ENTER-
ING FLORENCE, APRIL, 1860

I

KING of us all, we cried to thee, cried to thee,
Trampled to earth by the beasts impure,
Dragged by the chariots which shame as they roll:
The dust of our torment far and wide to thee
Went up, dark'ning thy royal soul.
Be witness, Cavour,
That the King was sad for the people in thrall,
This King of us all !

II

King, we cried to thee ! Strong in reply-
ing,
Thy word and thy sword sprang rapid and sure,
Cleaving our way to a nation's place.
Oh, first soldier of Italy ! — crying
Now grateful, exultant, we look in thy face.
Be witness, Cavour,
That, freedom's first soldier, the freed
should call
First King of them all !

III

This is our beautiful Italy's birthday;
High-thoughted souls, whether many or fewer,
Bring her the gift, and wish her the good,
While Heaven presents on this sunny earthday
The noble King to the land renewed:
Be witness, Cavour !
Roar, cannon-mouths ! Proclaim, install
The King of us all !

IV

Grave he rides through the Florence gate-
way,
Clenching his face into calm, to immure
His struggling heart till it half disap-
pears;
If he relaxed for a moment, straightway
He would break out into passionate
tears —

Be witness, Cavour !
While rings the cry without interval,
'Live, King of us all !'

V

Cry, free peoples ! Honor the nation
By crowning the true man — and none is truer:
Pisa is here, and Livorno is here,
And thousands of faces, in wild exultation,
Burn over the windows to feel him near —
(Be witness, Cavour !)
Burn over from terrace, roof, window and wall,
On this King of us all.

VI

Grave ! A good man's ever the graver
For bearing a nation's trust secure;
And *he*, he thinks of the Heart, beside,
Which broke for Italy, failing to save her,
And pining away by Oporto's tide:
Be witness, Cavour,
That he thinks of his vow on that royal
pall,
This King of us all.

VII

Flowers, flowers, from the flowery city !
Such innocent thanks for a deed so pure,
As, melting away for joy into flowers,
The nation invites him to enter his Pitti
And evermore reign in this Florence of ours.
Be witness, Cavour !
He'll stand where the reptiles were used
to crawl,
This King of us all.

VIII

Grave, as the manner of noble men is —
Deeds unfinished will weigh on the doer:
And, baring his head to those crape-
veiled flags,
He bows to the grief of the South and Venice.
Oh, riddle the last of the yellow to rags,
And swear by Cavour
That the King shall reign where the ty-
rants fall,
True King of us all !

THE SWORD OF CASTRUCCIO CASTRACANI

'Questa è per me.' — KING VICTOR EMANUEL.

I

WHEN Victor Emanuel the King
Went down to his Lucca that day,
The people, each vaunting the thing
As he gave it, gave all things away, —
In a burst of fierce gratitude, say,
As they tore out their hearts for the King.

II

— Gave the green forest-walk on the wall,
With the Apennine blue through the
trees;
Gave the palaces, churches, and all
The great pictures which burn out of
these;
But the eyes of the King seemed to
freeze
As he gazed upon ceiling and wall.

III

'Good,' said the King as he passed.
Was he cold to the arts? — or else coy
To possession? or crossed, at the last
(Whispered some), by the vote in Savoy?
Shout! Love him enough for his joy!
'Good,' said the King as he passed.

IV

He, travelling the whole day through
flowers
And protesting amenities, found
At Pistoia, betwixt the two showers
Of red roses, the 'Orphans' (renowned
As the heirs of Puccini) who wound
With a sword through the crowd and the
flowers.

V

'T is the sword of Castruccio, O King, —
In that strife of intestinal hate,
Very famous! Accept what we bring,
We who cannot be sons, by our fate,
Rendered citizens by thee of late,
And endowed with a country and king.

VI

'Read! Puccini has willed that this
sword
(Which once made in an ignorant feud
Many orphans) remain in our ward

Till some patriot its pure civic blood
Wipe away in the foe's and make good,
In delivering the land by the sword.'

VII

Then the King exclaimed 'This is for me!'
And he dashed out his hand on the hilt,
While his blue eye shot fire openly,
And his heart overboiled till it spilt
A hot prayer, — 'God! the rest as Thou
wilt!
But grant me this! — *This is for me.*'

VIII

O Victor Emanuel, the King,
The sword is for *thee*, and the deed,
And nought for the alien, next spring,
Nought for Hapsburg and Bourbon
agreed —
But, for us, a great Italy freed,
With a hero to head us, — our King!

SUMMING UP IN ITALY

(INSCRIBED TO INTELLIGENT PUBLICS
OUT OF IT)

I

OBSERVE how it will be at last,
When our Italy stands at full stature,
A year ago tied down so fast
That the cord cut the quick of her na-
ture!
You'll honor the deed and its scope,
Then, in logical sequence upon it,
Will use up the remnants of rope
By hanging the men who have done it.

II

The speech in the Commons, which hits you
A sketch off, how dungeons must feel, —
The official despatch, which commits you
From stamping out groans with your
heel, —
Suggestions in journal or book for
Good efforts, — are praised as is meet:
But what in this world can men look for,
Who only achieve and complete?

III

True, you've praise for the fireman who
sets his
Brave face to the axe of the flame,

Disappears in the smoke, and then fetches
 A babe down, or idiot that's lame, —
 For the boor even, who rescues through
 pity
 A sheep from the brute who would kick
 it:
 But saviours of nations ! — 't is pretty,
 And doubtful: they *may* be so wicked :

IV

Azeglio, Farini, Mamiani,
 Ricasoli, — doubt by the dozen ! —
 here's
 Pepoli too, and Cipriani,
 Imperial cousins and cozeners —
 Arese, Laiatico, — courtly
 Of manners, if stringent of mouth:
 Garibaldi ! we'll come to him shortly
 (As soon as he *ends* in the South).

V

Napoleon — as strong as ten armies,
 Corrupt as seven devils — a fact
 You accede to, then seek where the harm
 is
 Drained off from the man to his act,
 And find — a free nation ! Suppose
 Some hell-brood in Eden's sweet green-
 ery,
 Convoked for creating — a rose !
 Would it suit the infernal machinery ?

VI

Cavour, — to the despot's desire,
 Who his own thought so craftily mar-
 ries —
 What is he but just a thin wire
 For conducting the lightning from Paris ?
 Yes, write down the two as compeers,
 Confessing (you would not permit a lie)
 He bore up his Piedmont ten years
 Till she suddenly smiled and was Italy.

VII

And the King, with that 'stain on his
 scutcheon,'
 Savoy — as the calumny runs;
 (If it be not his blood, — with his clutch on
 The sword, and his face to the guns.)
 O first, where the battle-storm gathers,
 O loyal of heart on the throne,
 Let those keep the 'graves of their fa-
 thers'
 Who quail, in a nerve, from their own !

VIII

For *thee* — through the dim Hades-por-
 tal
 The dream of a voice — 'Blessed thou
 Who hast made all thy race twice im-
 mortal !
 No need of the sepulchres now !
 — Left to Bourbons and Hapsburgs, who
 fester
 Above-ground with worm-eaten souls,
 While the ghost of some pale feudal jester
 Before them strews treaties in holes.'

IX

But hush ! — am I dreaming a poem
 Of Hades, Heaven, Justice ? Not I;
 I began too far off, in my proem,
 With what men believe and deny:
 And on earth, whatsoever the need is
 (To sum up as thoughtful reviewers),
 The moral of every great deed is —
 The virtue of slandering the doers.

‘DIED . . .’

(*The Times* Obituary)

I

WHAT shall we add now ? He is dead.
 And I who praise and you who blame,
 With wash of words across his name,
 Find suddenly declared instead —
 'On Sunday, third of August, dead.'

II

Which stops the whole we talked to-
 day.
 I, quickened to a plausible glance
 At his large general tolerance
 By common people's narrow way,
 Stopped short in praising. Dead, they
 say.

III

And you, who had just put in a sort
 Of cold deduction — 'rather, large
 Through weakness of the continent
 marge,
 Than greatness of the thing contained' —
 Broke off. Dead ! — there, you stood re-
 strained.

IV

As if we had talked in following one
Up some long gallery. 'Would you
choose

An air like that? The gait is loose —
Or noble? Sudden in the sun
An oubliette winks. Where is he? Gone.

V

Dead. Man's 'I was' by God's 'I am' —
All hero-worship comes to that.

High heart, high thought, high fame, as
flat

As a gravestone. Bring your *Jacet jam* —
The epitaph's an epigram.

VI

Dead. There's an answer to arrest
All carping. Dust's his natural place?

He'll let the flies buzz round his face
And, though you slander, not protest?
— From such an one, exact the Best?

VII

Opinions gold or brass are null.

We chuck our flattery or abuse,
Called Cæsar's due, as Charon's dues,
I' the teeth of some dead sage or fool,
To mend the grinning of a skull.

VIII

Be abstinent in praise and blame.

The man's still mortal, who stands first,
And mortal only, if last and worst.
Then slowly lift so frail a fame,
Or softly drop so poor a shame.

THE FORCED RECRUIT

SOLFERINO, 1859

First printed in the *Cornhill Magazine*, Oc-
tober, 1860.

IN the ranks of the Austrian you found
him,

He died with his face to you all;
Yet bury him here where around him
You honor your bravest that fall.

Venetian, fair-featured and slender,
He lies shot to death in his youth,
With a smile on his lips over-tender
For any mere soldier's dead mouth.

No stranger, and yet not a traitor,
Though alien the cloth on his breast,
Underneath it how seldom a greater
Young heart has a shot sent to rest!

By your enemy tortured and goaded
To march with them, stand in their file,
His musket (see) never was loaded,
He facing your guns with that smile!

As orphans yearn on to their mothers,
He yearned to your patriot bands; —
'Let me die for our Italy, brothers,
If not in your ranks, by your hands!

'Aim straightly, fire steadily! spare me
A ball in the body which may
Deliver my heart here, and tear me
This badge of the Austrian away!'

So thought he, so died he this morning.
What then? many others have died.
Ay, but easy for men to die scorning
The death-stroke, who fought side by
side —

One tricolor floating above them;
Struck down 'mid triumphant acclaims
Of an Italy rescued to love them
And blazon the brass with their names.

But he, — without witness or honor,
Mixed, shamed in his country's regard,
With the tyrants who march in upon
her,
Died faithful and passive: 't was hard.

'T was sublime. In a cruel restriction
Cut off from the guerdon of sons,
With most filial obedience, conviction,
His soul kissed the lips of her guns.

That moves you? Nay, grudge not to show
it,

While digging a grave for him here:
The others who died, says your poet,
Have glory, — let *him* have a tear.

GARIBALDI

I

HE bent his head upon his breast
Wherein his lion-heart lay sick: —

'Perhaps we are not ill-repaid;
Perhaps this is not a true test;
Perhaps this was not a foul trick;
Perhaps none wronged, and none be-
trayed.

II

'Perhaps the people's vote which here
United, there may disunite,
And both be lawful as they think;
Perhaps a patriot statesman, dear
For chartering nations, can with right
Disfranchise those who hold the ink.

III

'Perhaps men's wisdom is not craft;
Men's greatness, not a selfish greed;
Men's justice, not the safer side;
Perhaps even women, when they laughed,
Wept, thanked us that the land was
freed,
Not wholly (though they kissed us) lied.

IV

'Perhaps no more than this we meant,
When up at Austria's guns we flew,
And quenched them with a cry apiece,
Italia! — Yet a dream was sent . . .
The little house my father knew,
The olives and the palms of Nice.'

V

He paused, and drew his sword out slow,
Then pored upon the blade intent,
As if to read some written thing;
While many murmured, — 'He will go
In that despairing sentiment
And break his sword before the King.'

VI

He poring still upon the blade,
His large lid quivered, something fell.
'Perhaps,' he said, 'I was not born
With such fine brains to treat and
trade, —
And if a woman knew it well,
Her falsehood only meant her scorn.

VII

'Yet through Varese's cannon-smoke
My eye saw clear: men feared this man
At Como, where this sword could seal
Death's protocol with every stroke:

And now . . . the drop there scarcely
can
Impair the keenness of the steel.

VIII

'So man and sword may have their use;
And if the soil beneath my foot
In valor's act is forfeited,
I'll strike the harder, take my dues
Out nobler, and all loss confute
From ampler heavens above my head.

IX

'My King, King Victor, I am thine !
So much Nice-dust as what I am
(To make our Italy) must cleave.
Forgive that.' Forward with a sign
He went.

You've seen the telegram ?
Palermo's taken, we believe.

ONLY A CURL

I

FRIENDS of faces unknown and a land
Unvisited over the sea,
Who tell me how lonely you stand
With a single gold curl in the hand
Held up to be looked at by me, —

II

While you ask me to ponder and say
What a father and mother can do,
With the bright fellow-locks put away
Out of reach, beyond kiss, in the clay
Where the violets press nearer than you:

III

Shall I speak like a poet, or run
Into weak woman's tears for relief ?
Oh, children ! — I never lost one, —
Yet my arm's round my own little son,
And Love knows the secret of Grief.

IV

And I feel what it must be and is,
When God draws a new angel so
Through the house of a man up to his,
With a murmur of music you miss,
And a rapture of light you forgo.

V

How you think, staring on at the door,
Where the face of your angel flashed in,

That its brightness, familiar before,
Burns off from you ever the more
For the dark of your sorrow and sin.

VI

'God lent him and takes him,' you sigh;
— Nay, there let me break with your
pain:
God's generous in giving, say I, —
And the thing which He gives, I deny
That He ever can take back again.

VII

He gives what He gives. I appeal
To all who bear babes — in the hour
When the veil of the body we feel
Rent round us, — while torments reveal
The motherhood's advent in power,

VIII

And the babe cries! — has each of us
known
By apocalypse (God being there
Full in nature) the child is our own,
Life of life, love of love, moan of moan,
Through all changes, all times, every-
where.

IX

He's ours and for ever. Believe,
O father! — O mother, look back
To the first love's assurance! To give
Means with God not to tempt or deceive
With a cup thrust in Benjamin's sack.

X

He gives what He gives. Be content!
He resumes nothing given, — be sure!
God lend? Where the usurers lent
In his temple, indignant He went
And scourged away all those impure.

XI

He lends not; but gives to the end,
As He loves to the end. If it seem
That He draws back a gift, comprehend
'T is to add to it rather, — amend,
And finish it up to your dream, —

XII

Or keep, — as a mother will toys
Too costly, though given by herself,
Till the room shall be stiller from noise,

And the children more fit for such joys,
Kept over their heads on the shelf.

XIII

So look up, friends! you, who indeed
Have possessed in your house a sweet
piece
Of the Heaven which men strive for, must
need
Be more earnest than others are, — speed
Where they loiter, persist where they
cease.

XIV

You know how one angel smiles there:
Then weep not. 'T is easy for you
To be drawn by a single gold hair
Of that curl, from earth's storm and de-
spair,
To the safe place above us. Adieu.

A VIEW ACROSS THE ROMAN CAMPAGNA

1861

I

OVER the dumb Campagna-sea,
Out in the offing through mist and rain,
Saint Peter's Church heaves silently
Like a mighty ship in pain,
Facing the tempest with struggle and
strain.

II

Motionless waifs of ruined towers,
Soundless breakers of desolate land:
The sullen surf of the mist devours
That mountain-range upon either hand,
Eaten away from its outline grand.

III

And over the dumb Campagna-sea
Where the ship of the Church heaves on
to wreck,
Alone and silent as God must be,
The Christ walks. Ay, but Peter's neck
Is stiff to turn on the foundering deck.

IV

Peter, Peter! if such be thy name,
Now leave the ship for another to steer,
And proving thy faith evermore the same,

Come forth, tread out through the dark
and drear,
Since He who walks on the sea is here.

V

Peter, Peter! He does not speak;
He is not as rash as in old Galilee:
Safer a ship, though it toss and leak,
Than a reeling foot on a rolling sea!
And he's got to be round in the girth,
thinks he.

VI

Peter, Peter! He does not stir;
His nets are heavy with silver fish;
He reckons his gains, and is keen to in-
fer
— 'The broil on the shore, if the Lord
should wish;
But the sturgeon goes to the Cæsar's
dish.'

VII

Peter, Peter! thou fisher of men,
Fisher of fish wouldst thou live instead?
Haggling for pence with the other Ten,
Cheating the market at so much a head,
Gripping the Bag of the traitor Dead?

VIII

At the triple crow of the Gallic cock
Thou weep'st not, thou, though thine
eyes be dazed:
What bird comes next in the tempest-
shock?
— Vultures! see, — as when Romulus
gazed, —
To inaugurate Rome for a world
amazed!

THE KING'S GIFT

I

TERESA, ah, Teresita!
Now what has the messenger brought her,
Our Garibaldi's young daughter,
To make her stop short in her sing-
ing?
Will she not once more repeat a
Verse from that hymn of our hero's,
Setting the souls of us ringing?
Break off the song where the tear rose?
Ah, Teresita!

II

A young thing, mark, is Teresa:
Her eyes have caught fire, to be sure, in
That necklace of jewels from Turin,
Till blind their regard to us men is.
But still she remembers to raise a
Sly look to her father, and note —
'Could she sing on as well about Ven-
ice,
Yet wear such a flame at her throat?
Decide for Teresa.'

III

Teresa, ah, Teresita!
His right hand has paused on her head —
'Accept it, my daughter,' he said;
'Ay, wear it, true child of thy mother!
Then sing, till all start to their feet, a
New verse ever bolder and freer!
King Victor's no king like another,
But verily noble as *we* are,
Child, Teresita!'

PARTING LOVERS

SIENA, 1860

I

I LOVE thee, love thee, Giulio;
Some call me cold, and some demure;
And if thou hast ever guessed that so
I loved thee . . . well, the proof was
poor
And no one could be sure.

II

Before thy song (with shifted rhymes
To suit my name) did I undo
The persian? If it stirred sometimes,
Thou hast not seen a hand push through
A foolish flower or two.

III

My mother listening to my sleep,
Heard nothing but a sigh at night, —
The short sigh rippling on the deep,
When hearts run out of breath and sight
Of men, to God's clear light.

IV

When others named thee, — thought thy
brows
Were straight, thy smile was tender —
'Here

He comes between the vineyard-rows !
 I said not 'Ay,' nor waited, Dear,
 To feel thee step too near.

V

I left such things to bolder girls, —
 Olivia or Clotilda. Nay,
 When that Clotilda, through her curls,
 Held both thine eyes in hers one day,
 I marvelled, let me say.

VI

I could not try the woman's trick:
 Between us straightway fell the blush
 Which kept me separate, blind and sick.
 A wind came with thee in a flush,
 As blown through Sinai's bush.

VII

But now that Italy invokes
 Her young men to go forth and chase
 The foe or perish, — nothing chokes
 My voice, or drives me from the place.
 I look thee in the face.

VIII

I love thee ! It is understood,
 Confest: I do not shrink or start.
 No blushes ! all my body's blood
 Has gone to greaten this poor heart.
 That, loving, we may part.

IX

Our Italy invokes the youth
 To die if need be. Still there's room,
 Though earth is strained with dead in
 truth:
 Since twice the lilies were in bloom
 They have not grudged a tomb.

X

And many a plighted maid and wife
 And mother, who can say since then
 'My country,' — cannot say through life
 'My son,' 'my spouse,' 'my flower of
 men,'
 And not weep dumb again.

XI

Heroic males the country bears, —
 But daughters give up more than sons:
 Flags wave, drums beat, and unawares

You flash your souls out with the guns,
 And take your Heaven at once.

XII

But we ! — we empty heart and home
 Of life's life, love ! We bear to think
 You're gone, — to feel you may not
 come, —
 To hear the door-latch stir and clink,
 Yet no more you ! . . . nor sink.

XIII

Dear God ! when Italy is one,
 Complete, content from bound to bound,
 Suppose, for my share, earth's undone
 By one grave in 't — as one small wound
 Will kill a man, 't is found.

XIV

What then ? If love's delight must end,
 At least we 'll clear its truth from flaws.
 I love thee, love thee, sweetest friend !
 Now take my sweetest without pause,
 And help the nation's cause.

XV

And thus, of noble Italy
 We 'll both be worthy ! Let her show
 The future how we made her free,
 Not sparing life . . . nor Giulio,
 Nor this . . . this heartbreak ! Go.

MOTHER AND POET

TURIN, AFTER NEWS FROM GAETA, 1861

The mother was Laura Savio of Turin, both
 poet and patriot, whose two sons were killed at
 Ancona and Gaeta.

I

DEAD ! One of them shot by the sea in the
 east,
 And one of them shot in the west by the
 sea.
 Dead ! both my boys ! When you sit at
 the feast
 And are wanting a great song for Italy
 free,
 Let none look at me !

II

Yet I was a poetess only last year,
 And good at my art, for a woman, men
 said;

But *this* woman, *this*, who is agonized here,
— The east sea and west sea rhyme on in
her head
For ever instead.

III

What art can a woman be good at? Oh,
vain!
What art is she good at, but hurting her
breast
With the milk-teeth of babes, and a smile
at the pain?
Ah boys, how you hurt! you were strong
as you pressed,
And I proud, by that test.

IV

What art's for a woman? To hold on her
knees
Both darlings! to feel all their arms
round her throat,
Cling, strangle a little! to sew by degrees
And 'broider the long-clothes and neat
little coat;
To dream and to doat.

V

To teach them . . . It stings there! *I*
made them indeed
Speak plain the word *country*. *I* taught
them, no doubt,
That a country's a thing men should die
for at need.
I prated of liberty, rights, and about
The tyrant cast out.

VI

And when their eyes flashed . . . O my
beautiful eyes! . . .
I exulted; nay, let them go forth at the
wheels
Of the guns, and denied not. But then the
surprise
When one sits quite alone! Then one
weeps, then one kneels!
God, how the house feels!

VII

At first, happy news came, in gay letters
moiled
With my kisses, — of camp-life and
glory, and how
They both loved me; and, soon coming
home to be spoiled

In return would fan off every fly from my
brow
With their green laurel-bough.

VIII

Then was triumph at Turin: 'Ancona was
free!'
And some one came out of the cheers in
the street,
With a face pale as stone, to say something
to me.
My Guido was dead! I fell down at his
feet,
While they cheered in the street.

IX

I bore it; friends soothed me; my grief
looked sublime
As the ransom of Italy. One boy re-
mained
To be leant on and walked with, recalling
the time
When the first grew immortal, while
both of us strained
To the height he had gained.

X

And letters still came, shorter, sadder,
more strong,
Writ now but in one hand, 'I was not to
faint, —
One loved me for two — would be with me
ere long:
And *Viva l' Italia!* — he died for, our
saint,
Who forbids our complaint.'

XI

My Nanni would add, 'he was safe, and
aware
Of a presence that turned off the balls, —
was imprest
It was Guido himself, who knew what I
could bear,
And how 't was impossible, quite dis-
possessed
To live on for the rest.'

XII

On which, without pause, up the telegraph-
line
Swept smoothly the next news from
Gaeta: — *Shot*.
Tell his mother. Ah, ah, 'his,' 'their' mother,
— not 'mine,'

No voice says 'My mother' again to me.
What!
You think Guido forgot?

XIII

Are souls straight so happy that, dizzy
with Heaven,
They drop earth's affections, conceive
not of woe?
I think not. Themselves were too lately
forgiven
Through THAT Love and Sorrow which
reconciled so
The Above and Below.

XIV

O Christ of the five wounds, who look'dst
through the dark
To the face of thy mother! consider, I
pray,
How we common mothers stand desolate,
mark,
Whose sons, not being Christs, die with
eyes turned away,
And no last word to say!

XV

Both boys dead? but that's out of nature.
We all
Have been patriots, yet each house must
always keep one.
'T were imbecile, hewing out roads to a
wall;
And, when Italy's made, for what end
is it done
If we have not a son?

XVI

Ah, ah, ah! when Gaeta's taken, what
then?
When the fair wicked queen sits no more
at her sport
Of the fire-balls of death crashing souls
out of men?
When the guns of Cavalli with final re-
tort
Have cut the game short?

XVII

When Venice and Rome keep their new
jubilee,
When your flag takes all heaven for its
white, green, and red,
When *you* have your country from moun-
tain to sea,

When King Victor has Italy's crown on
his head,
(And *I* have my Dead) —

XVIII

What then? Do not mock me. Ah, ring
your bells low,
And burn your lights faintly! *My*
country is *there*,
Above the star pricked by the last peak of
snow:
My Italy's *THERE*, with my brave civic
Pair,
To disfranchise despair!

XIX

Forgive me. Some women bear children
in strength,
And bite back the cry of their pain in
self-scorn;
But the birth-pangs of nations will wring
us at length
Into wail such as this — and we sit on
forlorn
When the man-child is born.

XX

Dead! One of them shot by the sea in
the east,
And one of them shot in the west by
the sea.
Both! both my boys! If in keeping the
feast
You want a great song for your Italy
free,
Let none look at *me*!

NATURE'S REMORSES

ROME, 1861

I

HER soul was bred by a throne, and fed
From the sucking-bottle used in her
race
On starch and water (for mother's
milk
Which gives a larger growth instead),
And, out of the natural liberal grace,
Was swaddled away in violet silk.

II

And young and kind, and royally blind,
Forth she stepped from her palace-door

On three-piled carpet of compliments,
Curtains of incense drawn by the wind
In between her for evermore
And daylight issues of events.

III

On she drew, as a queen might do,
To meet a Dream of Italy, —
Of magical town and musical wave,
Where even a god, his amulet blue
Of shining sea, in an ecstacy
Dropt and forgot in a Nereid's cave.

IV

Down she goes, as the soft wind blows,
To live more smoothly than mortals
can,
To love and to reign as queen and
wife,
To wear a crown that smells of a rose,
And still, with a sceptre as light as a fan,
Beat sweet time to the song of life.

V

What is this? As quick as a kiss
Falls the smile from her girlish mouth!
The lion-people has left its lair,
Roaring along her garden of bliss,
And the fiery underworld of the South
Scorched a way to the upper air.

VI

And a fire-stone ran in the form of a man,
Burningly, boundingly, fatal and fell,
Bowling the kingdom down! Where
was the King?
She had heard somewhat, since life began,
Of terrors on earth and horrors in hell,
But never, never of such a thing.

VII

You think she dropped when her dream
was stopped,
When the blotch of Bourbon blood inlay,
Lividly rank, her new lord's cheek?
Not so. Her high heart overtopped
The royal part she had come to play.
Only the men in that hour were weak.

VIII

And twice a wife by her ravaged life,
And twice a queen by her kingdom lost,
She braved the shock and the counter-
shock
Of hero and traitor, bullet and knife,

While Italy pushed, like a vengeful
ghost,
That son of the Cursed from Gaeta's
rock.

IX

What will ye give her, who could not de-
liver,
German Princesses? A laurel-wreath
All over-scored with your signatures,
Graces, Serenities, Highnesses ever?
Mock her not, fresh from the truth of
Death,
Conscious of dignities higher than
yours.

X

What will ye put in your casket shut,
Ladies of Paris, in sympathy's name?
Guizot's daughter, what have you
brought her?
Withered immortelles, long ago cut
For guilty dynasties perished in shame,
Putrid to memory, Guizot's daughter?

XI

Ah poor queen! so young and serene!
What shall we do for her, now hope's
done,
Standing at Rome in these ruins old,
She too a ruin and no more a queen?
Leave her that diadem made by the
sun
Turning her hair to an innocent gold.

XII

Ay! bring close to her, as 't were a rose,
to her,
Yon free child from an Apennine city
Singing for Italy, — dumb in the
place!
Something like solace, let us suppose, to her
Given, in that homage of wonder and
pity,
By his pure eyes to her beautiful face.

XIII

Nature, excluded, savagely brooded;
Ruined all queendom and dogmas of
state:
Then, in reaction remorseful and mild,
Rescues the womanhood, nearly eluded,
Shows her what's sweetest in womanly
fate —
Sunshine from Heaven, and the eyes
of a child.

THE NORTH AND THE SOUTH

THE LAST POEM

ROME, MAY, 1861

The occasion of Mrs. Browning's last poem was a visit of the Danish novelist Hans Christian Andersen to Rome in the spring of 1861.

I

'Now give us lands where the olives grow,'
Cried the North to the South,
'Where the sun with a golden mouth can
blow
Blue bubbles of grapes down a vineyard-
row !'
Cried the North to the South.

'Now give us men from the sunless plain,'
Cried the South to the North,
'By need of work in the snow and the rain,
Made strong, and brave by familiar pain !'
Cried the South to the North.

II

'Give lucider hills and intenser seas,'
Said the North to the South.
'Since ever by symbols and bright degrees
Art, childlike, climbs to the dear Lord's
knees,'
Said the North to the South.

'Give strenuous souls for belief and prayer,'
Said the South to the North,
'That stand in the dark on the lowest stair,
While affirming of God, "He is certainly
there,"'
Said the South to the North.

III

'Yet oh for the skies that are softer and
higher !'
Sighed the North to the South;
For the flowers that blaze, and the trees
that aspire,
And the insects made of a song or a
fire !'
Sighed the North to the South.

'And oh for a seer to discern the same !'
Sighed the South to the North;
'For a poet's tongue of baptismal flame,
To call the tree or the flower by its
name !'
Sighed the South to the North.

IV

The North sent therefore a man of men
As a grace to the South;
And thus to Rome came Andersen.
— 'Alas, but must you take him again ?'
Said the South to the North.

TRANSLATIONS

PROMETHEUS BOUND

The translation which follows of the *Prometheus Bound* of Æschylus is the revised version first published by Mrs. Browning among the *Poems of 1850*. She herself called it a retranslation rather than a revision, and was very severe in her own strictures on the earlier version which had been published without her name, along with a few occasional pieces in 1833. The present is undoubtedly a much better piece

of work than the ambitious first attempt, which the author wished to have it entirely supersede. Yet a certain special interest will always attach to the previous rendering as having been the one which Robert and Elizabeth Browning discussed so fully in some of the earlier letters of their famous correspondence. (Vide *Letters of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, vol. i. pp. 34-46.)

PERSONS

PROMETHEUS.

OCEANUS.

HERMES.

HEPHAËSTUS.

Io, daughter of Inachus.

STRENGTH and FORCE.

Chorus of Sea Nymphs.

SCENE. — STRENGTH and FORCE, HEPHÆSTUS and PROMETHEUS, at the Rocks.

Strength. We reach the utmost limit of
the earth,

The Scythian track, the desert without man.
And now, Hephæstus, thou must needs fulfil
The mandate of our Father, and with links
Indissoluble of adamantine chains
Fasten against this beetling precipice
This guilty god. Because he filched away

Thine own bright flower, the glory of plastic fire,
And gifted mortals with it, — such a sin
It doth behove he expiate to the gods, 10
Learning to accept the empery of Zeus
And leave off his old trick of loving man.

Hephaestus. O Strength and Force, for you, our Zeus's will
Presents a deed for doing, no more ! —
but I,
I lack your daring, up this storm-rent
chasm

To fix with violent hands a kindred god,
Howbeit necessity compels me so
That I must dare it, and our Zeus commands

With a most inevitable word. Ho, thou !
High-thoughted son of Themis who is sage !
Thee loth, I loth must rivet fast in chains 21
Against this rocky height unclomb by man,
Where never human voice nor face shall
find

Out thee who lov'st them, and thy beauty's
flower,
Scorched in the sun's clear heat, shall fade
away.

Night shall come up with garniture of
stars

To comfort thee with shadow, and the sun
Disperse with retriect beams the morning-
frosts,

But through all changes sense of present
woe

Shall vex thee sore, because with none of
them 30

There comes a hand to free. Such fruit is
plucked

From love of man ! and in that thou, a
god,

Didst brave the wrath of gods and give
away

Undue respect to mortals, for that crime
Thou art adjudged to guard this joyless
rock,

Erect, unslumbering, bending not the knee,
And many a cry and unavailing moan
To utter on the air. For Zeus is stern,
And new-made kings are cruel.

Strength. Be it so.
Why loiter in vain pity ? Why not hate 40
A god the gods hate ? one too who betrayed
Thy glory unto men ?

Hephaestus. An awful thing
Is kinship joined to friendship.

Strength. Grant it be ;

Is disobedience to the Father's word
A possible thing ? Dost quail not more for
that ?

Hephaestus. Thou, at least, art a stern
one: ever bold.

Strength. Why, if I wept, it were no
remedy ;

And do not thou spend labor on the air
To bootless uses.

Hephaestus. Cursed handicraft !
I curse and hate thee, O my craft !

Strength. Why hate
Thy craft most plainly innocent of all 51
These pending ills ?

Hephaestus. I would some other hand
Were here to work it !

Strength. All work hath its pain,
Except to rule the gods. There is none
free

Except King Zeus.

Hephaestus. I know it very well:

I argue not against it.

Strength. Why not, then,
Make haste and lock the fetters over HIM
Lest Zeus behold thee lagging ?

Hephaestus. Here be chains.
Zeus may behold these.

Strength. Seize him: strike amain:
Strike with the hammer on each side his
hands — 60

Rivet him to the rock.

Hephaestus. The work is done,
And thoroughly done.

Strength. Still faster grapple him ;
Wedge him in deeper: leave no inch to
stir.

He's terrible for finding a way out
From the irremediable.

Hephaestus. Here's an arm, at least,
Grappled past freeing.

Strength. Now then, buckle me
The other securely. Let this wise one
learn

He's duller than our Zeus.

Hephaestus. Oh, none but he
Accuse me justly.

Strength. Now, straight through
the chest,

Take him and bite him with the clenching
tooth 70

Of the adamantine wedge, and rivet him.

Hephaestus. Alas, Prometheus, what thou
sufferest here

I sorrow over.

Strength. Dost thou flinch again

And breathe groans for the enemies of
Zeus ?

Beware lest thine own pity find thee out.

Hephestus. Thou dost behold a spectacle
that turns

The sight o' the eyes to pity.

Strength. I behold

A sinner suffer his sin's penalty.

But lash the thongs about his sides.

Hephestus. So much,

I must do. Urge no farther than I must. 80

Strength. Ay, but I *will* urge!— and,
with shout on shout,

Will hound thee at this quarry. Get thee
down

And ring amain the iron round his legs.

Hephestus. That work was not long
doing.

Strength. Heavily now

Let fall the strokes upon the perforant
gyves:

For He who rates the work has a heavy
hand.

Hephestus. Thy speech is savage as thy
shape.

Strength. Be thou

Gentle and tender ! but revile not me

For the firm will and the untruckling
hate.

Hephestus. Let us go. He is netted
round with chains. 90

Strength. Here, now, taunt on ! and hav-
ing spoiled the gods

Of honors, crown withal thy mortal men

Who live a whole day out. Why how could
they

Draw off from thee one single of thy
griefs ?

Methinks the Dæmons gave thee a wrong
name,

'Prometheus,' which means Providence, —
because

Thou dost thyself need providence to see

Thy roll and ruin from the top of doom.

Prometheus (alone). O holy Æther, and
swift-winged Winds,

And River-wells, and laughter innumer-
ous 100

Of yon sea-waves ! Earth, mother of us
all,

And all-viewing cyclic Sun, I cry on you, —

Behold me, a god, what I endure from
gods !

Behold, with throe on throe,
How, wasted by this woe,

I wrestle down the myriad years of time !

Behold, how fast around me,

The new King of the happy ones sublime
Has flung the chain he forged, has shamed
and bound me !

Woe, woe ! to-day's woe and the coming
morrow's 110

I cover with one groan. And where is
found me

A limit to these sorrows ?

And yet what word do I say ? I have fore-
known

Clearly all things that should be ; nothing
done

Comes sudden to my soul ; and I must bear
What is ordained with patience, being aware

Necessity doth front the universe

With an invincible gesture. Yet this
curse

Which strikes me now, I find it hard to
brave 119

In silence or in speech. Because I gave
Honor to mortals, I have yoked my soul

To this compelling fate. Because I stole
The secret fount of fire, whose bubbles

went

Over the ferule's brim, and manward
sent

Art's mighty means and perfect rudi-
ment,

That sin I expiate in this agony,

Hung here in fetters, 'neath the blanch-
ing sky.

Ah, ah me ! what a sound,

What a fragrance sweeps up from a pinion
unseen

Of a god, or a mortal, or nature between, 130
Sweeping up to this rock where the earth

has her bound,

To have sight of my pangs or some guer-
don obtain.

Lo, a god in the anguish, a god in the
chain !

The god, Zeus hateth sore

And his gods hate again,

As many as tread on his glorified floor,
Because I loved mortals too much ever-
more.

Alas me ! what a murmur and motion I
hear,

As of birds flying near !

And the air undersings 140

The light stroke of their wings —

And all life that approaches I wait for in
fear.

Chorus of Sea Nymphs, 1st Strophe.

Fear nothing! our troop
 Floats lovingly up
 With a quick-oaring stroke
 Of wings steered to the rock,
 Having softened the soul of our father
 below.
 For the gales of swift-bearing have sent me
 a sound,
 And the clank of the iron, the malleted
 blow,
 Smote down the profound 150
 Of my caverns of old,
 And struck the red light in a blush from
 my brow, —
 Till I sprang up unsandalled, in haste to
 behold,
 And rushed forth on my chariot of wings
 manifold.

Prometheus. Alas me! — alas me!
 Ye offspring of Tethys who bore at her
 breast
 Many children, and eke of Oceanus, he
 Coiling still around earth with perpetual
 unrest!

Behold me and see
 How transfixed with the fang 160
 Of a fetter I hang
 On the high-jutting rocks of this fissure
 and keep
 An uncoveted watch o'er the world and the
 deep.

Chorus, 1st Antistrophe.

I behold thee, Prometheus; yet now, yet
 now,
 A terrible cloud whose rain is tears
 Sweeps over mine eyes that witness how
 Thy body appears
 Hung awaste on the rocks by infrangible
 chains:
 For new is the Hand, new the rudder that
 steers
 The ship of Olympus through surge and
 wind — 170
 And of old things passed, no track is be-
 hind.

Prometheus. Under earth, under Hades
 Where the home of the shade is,
 All into the deep, deep Tartarus,
 I would he had hurled me adown.
 I would he had plunged me, fastened thus
 In the knotted chain with the savage clang,

All into the dark where there should be
 none,
 Neither god nor another, to laugh and
 see.

But now the winds sing through and
 shake 180
 The hurtling chains wherein I hang,
 And I, in my naked sorrows, make
 Much mirth for my enemy.

Chorus, 2d Strophe.

Nay! who of the gods hath a heart so
 stern
 As to use thy woe for a mock and
 mirth?
 Who would not turn more mild to
 learn
 Thy sorrows? who of the heaven and
 earth

Save Zeus? But he
 Right wrathfully
 Bears on his sceptral soul unbent 190
 And rules thereby the heavenly seed,
 Nor will he pause till he content
 His thirsty heart in a finished deed;
 Or till Another shall appear,
 To win by fraud, to seize by fear
 The hard-to-be-captured government.

Prometheus. Yet even of me he shall
 have need,
 That monarch of the blessed seed,
 Of me, of me, who now am cursed
 By his fetters dire, — 200
 To wring my secret out withal
 And learn by whom his sceptre shall
 Be filched from him — as was, at first,
 His heavenly fire.
 But he never shall enchant me
 With his honey-lipped persuasion;
 Never, never shall he daunt me
 With the oath and threat of passion
 Into speaking as they want me,
 Till he loose this savage chain, 210
 And accept the expiation
 Of my sorrow, in his pain.

Chorus, 2d Antistrophe.

Thou art, sooth, a brave god,
 And, for all thou hast borne
 From the stroke of the rod,
 Nought relaxest from scorn.
 But thou speakest unto me
 Too free and unworn;
 And a terror strikes through me

And festers my soul 220
And I fear, in the roll
Of the storm, for thy fate
In the ship far from shore :

Since the son of Saturnus is hard in his hate
And unmoved in his heart evermore.

Prometheus. I know that Zeus is stern ;
I know he metes his justice by his will ;
And yet, his soul shall learn
More softness when once broken by this
ill :

And curbing his unconquerable vaunt 230
He shall rush on in fear to meet with me
Who rush to meet with him in agony,
To issues of harmonious covenant.

Chorus. Remove the veil from all things
and relate

The story to us, — of what crime accused,
Zeus smites thee with dishonorable pangs.
Speak : if to teach us do not grieve thy-
self.

Prometheus. The utterance of these
things is torture to me,
But so, too, is their silence; each way lies
Woe strong as fate.

When gods began with wrath,
And war rose up between their starry
brows, 241

Some choosing to cast Chronos from his
throne

That Zeus might king it there, and some
in haste

With opposite oaths that they would have
no Zeus

To rule the gods forever, — I, who brought
The counsel I thought meetest, could not
move

The Titans, children of the Heaven and
Earth,

What time, disdaining in their rugged souls
My subtle machinations, they assumed
It was an easy thing for force to take 250

The mastery of fate. My mother, then,
Who is called not only Themis but Earth
too,

(Her single beauty joys in many names)
Did teach me with reiterant prophecy
What future should be, and how conquer-
ing gods

Should not prevail by strength and vio-
lence

But by guile only. When I told them so,
They would not deign to contemplate the
truth

On all sides round ; whereat I deemed it
best

To lead my willing mother upwardly 260
And set my Themis face to face with Zeus
As willing to receive her. Tartarus,
With its abysmal cloister of the Dark,
Because I gave that counsel, covers up
The antique Chronos and his siding hosts,
And, by that counsel helped, the king of
gods

Hath recompensed me with these bitter
pangs :

For kingship wears a cancer at the heart, —
Distrust in friendship. Do ye also ask
What crime it is for which he tortures
me ? 270

That shall be clear before you. When at
first

He filled his father's throne, he instantly
Made various gifts of glory to the gods
And dealt the empire out. Alone of men,
Of miserable men, he took no count,
But yearned to sweep their track off from
the world

And plant a newer race there. Not a god
Resisted such desire except myself.

I dared it ! I drew mortals back to light,
From meditated ruin deep as hell ! 280
For which wrong, I am bent down in these
pangs

Dreadful to suffer, mournful to behold,
And I, who pitied man, am thought my-
self

Unworthy of pity ; while I render out
Deep rhythms of anguish 'neath the harping
hand

That strikes me thus — a sight to shame
your Zeus !

Chorus. Hard as thy chains and cold as
all these rocks

Is he, Prometheus, who withholds his heart
From joining in thy woe. I yearned before
To fly this sight ; and, now I gaze on
it, 290

I sicken inwards.

Prometheus. To my friends, indeed,
I must be a sad sight.

Chorus. And didst thou sin
No more than so ?

Prometheus. I did restrain besides
My mortals from premeditating death.

Chorus. How didst thou medicine the
plague-fear of death ?

Prometheus. I set blind Hopes to inhabit
in their house.

Chorus. By that gift thou didst help thy
mortals well.

Prometheus. I gave them also fire.

Chorus. And have they now,
Those creatures of a day, the red-eyed
fire?

Prometheus. They have: and shall learn
by it many arts. ³⁰⁰

Chorus. And truly for such sins Zeus
tortures thee

And will remit no anguish? Is there
set

No limit before thee to thine agony?

Prometheus. No other: only what seems
good to HIM.

Chorus. And how will it seem good?
what hope remains?

Seest thou not that thou hast sinned? But
that thou hast sinned

It glads me not to speak of, and grieves
thee:

Then let it pass from both, and seek thy-
self

Some outlet from distress.

Prometheus. It is in truth
An easy thing to stand aloof from pain ³¹⁰
And lavish exhortation and advice

On one vexed sorely by it. I have known
All in prevision. By my choice, my
choice,

I freely sinned — I will confess my sin —
And helping mortals, found my own de-
spair.

I did not think indeed that I should pine
Beneath such pangs against such skyey
rocks,

Doomed to this drear hill and no neighbor-
ing

Of any life: but mourn not ye for griefs
I bear to-day: hear rather, drooping down
To the plain, how other woes creep on to
me, ³²¹

And learn the consummation of my doom.
Beseech you, nymphs, beseech you, grieve
for me

Who now am grieving; for Grief walks the
earth,

And sits down at the foot of each by
turns.

Chorus. We hear the deep clash of thy
words,

Prometheus, and obey.

And I spring with a rapid foot away
From the rushing ear and the holy air,
The track of birds; ³³⁰

And I drop to the rugged ground and
there

Await the tale of thy despair.

OCEANUS enters.

Oceanus. I reach the bourn of my weary
road,

Where I may see and answer thee,
Prometheus, in thine agony.

On the back of the quick-winged bird I
glode,

And I bridled him in

With the will of a god.

Behold, thy sorrow aches in me

Constrained by the force of kin. ³⁴⁰

Nay, though that tie were all undone,

For the life of none beneath the sun

Would I seek a larger benison

Than I seek for thine.

And thou shalt learn my words are
truth, —

That no fair parlance of the mouth

Grows falsely out of mine.

Now give me a deed to prove my faith;

For no faster friend is named in breath

Than I, Oceanus, am thine. ³⁵⁰

Prometheus. Ha! what has brought thee?

Hast thou also come

To look upon my woe? How hast thou
dared

To leave the depths called after thee, the
caves

Self-hewn and self-roofed with spontaneous
rock,

To visit earth, the mother of my chain?

Hast come indeed to view my doom and
mourn

That I should sorrow thus? Gaze on, and
see

How I, the fast friend of your Zeus, —
how I

The erector of the empire in his hand,

Am bent beneath that hand, in this despair.

Oceanus. Prometheus, I behold: and I
would fain ³⁶¹

Exhort thee, though already subtle enough,
To a better wisdom. Titan, know thy-
self,

And take new softness to thy manners
since

A new king rules the gods. If words like
these,

Harsh words and trenchant, thou wilt fling
abroad,

Zeus haply, though he sit so far and high,

May hear thee do it, and so, this wrath of
 his
 Which now affects thee fiercely, shall ap-
 pear
 A mere child's sport at vengeance.
 Wretched god, 370
 Rather dismiss the passion which thou
 hast,
 And seek a change from grief. Perhaps I
 seem
 To address thee with old saws and outworn
 sense, —
 Yet such a curse, Prometheus, surely waits
 On lips that speak too proudly : thou, mean-
 time,
 Art none the meeker, nor dost yield a jot
 To evil circumstance, preparing still
 To swell the account of grief with other
 griefs
 Than what are borne. Beseech thee, use
 me then
 For counsel : do not spurn against the
 pricks, — 380
 Seeing that who reigns, reigns by cruelty
 Instead of right. And now, I go from
 hence,
 And will endeavor if a power of mine
 Can break thy fetters through. For thee,
 — be calm,
 And smooth thy words from passion.
 Knowest thou not
 Of perfect knowledge, thou who knowest
 too much,
 That where the tongue wags, ruin never
 lags ?
Prometheus. I gratulate thee who hast
 shared and dared
 All things with me, except their penalty.
 Enough so ! leave these thoughts. It can-
 not be 390
 That thou shouldst move HIM. He may not
 be moved ;
 And thou, beware of sorrow on this road.
Oceanus. Ay ! ever wiser for another's
 use
 Than thine ! the event, and not the pro-
 phecy,
 Attests it to me. Yet where now I rush,
 Thy wisdom hath no power to drag me
 back ;
 Because I glory, glory, to go hence
 And win for thee deliverance from thy
 pangs,
 As a free gift from Zeus.

Prometheus.

Why there, again,

I give thee gratulation and applause. 400
 Thou lackest no goodwill. But, as for
 deeds,
 Do nought ! 't were all done vainly ; help-
 ing nought,
 Whatever thou wouldst do. Rather take
 rest
 And keep thyself from evil. If I grieve,
 I do not therefore wish to multiply
 The griefs of others. Verily, not so !
 For still my brother's doom doth vex my
 soul, —
 My brother Atlas, standing in the west,
 Shouldering the column of the heaven and
 earth,
 A difficult burden ! I have also seen, 410
 And pitied as I saw, the earth-born one,
 The inhabitant of old Cilician caves,
 The great war-monster of the hundred
 heads,
 (All taken and bowed beneath the violent
 Hand,)
 Typhon the fierce, who did resist the
 gods,
 And, hissing slaughter from his dreadful
 jaws,
 Flash out ferocious glory from his eyes
 As if to storm the throne of Zeus. Where-
 at,
 The sleepless arrow of Zeus flew straight at
 him,
 The headlong bolt of thunder breathing
 flame, 420
 And struck him downward from his emi-
 nence
 Of exultation ; through the very soul,
 It struck him, and his strength was with-
 ered up
 To ashes, thunder-blasted. Now he lies
 A helpless trunk supinely, at full length
 Beside the strait of ocean, spurred into
 By roots of Ætna ; high upon whose tops
 Hephæstus sits and strikes the flashing
 ore.
 From thence the rivers of fire shall burst
 away
 Hereafter, and devour with savage jaws 430
 The equal plains of fruitful Sicily,
 Such passion he shall boil back in hot
 darts
 Of an insatiate fury and sough of flame,
 Fallen Typhon, — howsoever struck and
 charred
 By Zeus's bolted thunder. But for thee,
 Thou art not so unlearned as to need

My teaching — let thy knowledge save thyself.

I quaff the full cup of a present doom,
And wait till Zeus hath quenched his will in wrath.

Oceanus. Prometheus, art thou ignorant of this, 440

That words do medicine anger?

Prometheus. If the word
With seasonable softness touch the soul
And, where the parts are ulcerous, sear them not

By any rudeness.

Oceanus. With a noble aim
To dare as nobly — is there harm in that?
Dost thou discern it? Teach me.

Prometheus. I discern
Vain aspiration, unresultive work.

Oceanus. Then suffer me to bear the
brunt of this!

Since it is profitable that one who is wise
Should seem not wise at all.

Prometheus. And such would seem 450

My very crime.

Oceanus. In mine thine argument
Sends me back home.

Prometheus. Lest any lament for me
Should cast thee down to hate.

Oceanus. The hate of him
Who sits a new king on the absolute throne?

Prometheus. Beware of him, lest thine
heart grieve by him.

Oceanus. Thy doom, Prometheus, be my
teacher!

Prometheus. Go.
Depart — beware — and keep the mind
thou hast.

Oceanus. Thy words drive after, as I rush
before.

Lo! my four-footed bird sweeps smooth
and wide

The flats of air with balanced pinions,
glad 460

To bend his knee at home in the ocean-
stall.

[*OCEANUS departs.*]

Chorus, 1st Strophe.

I moan thy fate, I moan for thee,
Prometheus! From my eyes too ten-
der,

Drop after drop incessantly

The tears of my heart's pity render

My cheeks wet from their fountains
free;

Because that Zeus, the stern and cold,
Whose law is taken from his breast,
Uplifts his sceptre manifest
Over the gods of old. 470

1st Antistrophe.

All the land is moaning
With a murmured plaint to-day;

All the mortal nations
Having habitations

In the holy Asia

Are a dirge entoning
For thine honor and thy brothers',
Once majestic beyond others

In the old belief, —

Now are groaning in the groaning 480
Of thy deep-voiced grief.

2d Strophe.

Mourn the maids inhabitant

Of the Colchian land,

Who with white, calm bosoms stand

In the battle's roar:

Mourn the Scythian tribes that haunt
The verge of earth, Mæotis' shore.

2d Antistrophe.

Yea! Arabia's battle-crown,

And dwellers in the beetling town

Mount Caucasus sublimely nears, — 490

An iron squadron, thundering down

With the sharp-prowed spears.

But one other before, have I seen to re-
main

By invincible pain

Bound and vanquished, — one Titan! 't was
Atlas, who bears

In a curse from the gods, by that strength
of his own

Which he evermore wears,
The weight of the heaven on his shoulder
alone,

While he sighs up the stars;
And the tides of the ocean wail bursting their
bars, — 500

Murmurs still the profound,
And black Hades roars up through the
chasm of the ground,
And the fountains of pure-running rivers
moan low

In a pathos of woe.

Prometheus. Beseech you, think not I am
silent thus

Through pride or scorn. I only gnaw my
heart

With meditation, seeing myself so wronged.
For see — their honors to these new-made
gods,

What other gave but I, and dealt them out
With distribution? Ay — but here I am
dumb! 510

For here, I should repeat your knowledge
to you,

If I spake aught. List rather to the deeds
I did for mortals; how, being fools before,
I made them wise and true in aim of soul.

And let me tell you — not as taunting men,
But teaching you the intention of my gifts,
How, first beholding, they beheld in vain,
And hearing, heard not, but, like shapes in
dreams,

Mixed all things wildly down the tedious
time,

Nor knew to build a house against the
sun 520

With wickered sides, nor any woodcraft
knew,

But lived, like silly ants, beneath the
ground

In hollow caves unsunned. There, came to
them

No steadfast sign of winter, nor of spring
Flower-perfumed, nor of summer full of
fruit,

But blindly and lawlessly they did all
things,

Until I taught them how the stars do rise
And set in mystery, and devised for them
Number, the inducer of philosophies,

The synthesis of Letters, and, beside, 530
The artificer of all things, Memory,

That sweet Muse-mother. I was first to
yoke

The servile beasts in couples, carrying
An heirdom of man's burdens on their backs.

I joined to chariots, steeds, that love the
bit

They champ at — the chief pomp of golden
ease.

And none but I originated ships,
The seaman's chariots, wandering on the
brine

With linen wings. And I — oh, miser-
able! —

Who did devise for mortals all these arts,
Have no device left now to save myself 541
From the woe I suffer.

Chorus.

Most unseemly woe

Thou sufferest, and dost stagger from the
sense

Bewildered! like a bad leech falling sick
Thou art faint at soul, and canst not find
the drugs

Required to save thyself.

Prometheus. Hearken the rest,
And marvel further, what more arts and
means

I did invent, — this, greatest: if a man
Fell sick, there was no cure, nor esculent
Nor chrisim nor liquid, but for lack of
drugs 550

Men pined and wasted, till I showed them
all

Those mixtures of emollient remedies
Whereby they might be rescued from dis-
ease.

I fixed the various rules of mantic art,
Discerned the vision from the common
dream,

Instructed them in vocal auguries
Hard to interpret, and defined as plain
The wayside omens, — flights of crook-
clawed birds, —

Showed which are, by their nature, fortu-
nate,

And which not so, and what the food of
each, 560

And what the hates, affections, social needs,
Of all to one another, — taught what
sign

Of visceral lightness, colored to a shade,
May charm the genial gods, and what fair
spots

Commend the lung and liver. Burning so
The limbs encased in fat, and the long
chine,

I led my mortals on to an art abstruse,
And cleared their eyes to the image in the
fire,

Erst filmed in dark. Enough said now of
this.

For the other helps of man hid under-
ground, 570

The iron and the brass, silver and gold,
Can any dare affirm he found them out
Before me? none, I know! unless he
choose

To lie in his vault. In one word learn the
whole, —

That all arts came to mortals from Prome-
theus.

Chorus. Give mortals now no inexpedient
help,

Neglecting thine own sorrow. I have hope still

To see thee, breaking from the fetter here,

Stand up as strong as Zeus.

Prometheus. This ends not thus,
The oracular fate ordains. I must be bowed 580

By infinite woes and pangs, to escape this chain.

Necessity is stronger than mine art.

Chorus. Who holds the helm of that Necessity ?

Prometheus. The threefold Fates and the unforgetting Furies.

Chorus. Is Zeus less absolute than these are ?

Prometheus. Yea,
And therefore cannot fly what is ordained.

Chorus. What is ordained for Zeus, except to be

A king forever ?

Prometheus. 'T is too early yet

For thee to learn it: ask no more.

Chorus. Perhaps
Thy secret may be something holy ?

Prometheus. Turn
To another matter: this, it is not time 591

To speak abroad, but utterly to veil

In silence. For by that same secret kept,
I 'scape this chain's dishonor and its woe.

Chorus, 1st Strophe.

Never, oh never

May Zeus, the all-giver,

Wrestle down from his throne

In that might of his own

To antagonize mine !

Nor let me delay 600

As I bend on my way

Toward the gods of the shrine

Where the altar is full

Of the blood of the bull,

Near the tossing brine

Of Ocean my father.

May no sin be sped in the word that is said,

But my vow be rather

Consummated,

Nor evermore fail, nor evermore pine. 610

1st Antistrophe.

'T is sweet to have

Life lengthened out

With hopes proved brave

By the very doubt,

Till the spirit enfold

Those manifest joys which were foretold.

But I thrill to behold

Thee, victim doomed,

By the countless cares

And the drear despairs 620

Forever consumed, —

And all because thou, who art fearless now

Of Zeus above,

Didst overflow for mankind below

With a free-souled, reverent love.

Ah friend, behold and see !

What's all the beauty of humanity ?

Can it be fair ?

What's all the strength ? is it strong ?

And what hope can they bear, 630

These dying livers — living one day long ?

Ah, seest thou not, my friend,

How feeble and slow

And like a dream, doth go

This poor blind manhood, drifted from its end ?

And how no mortal wranglings can confuse

The harmony of Zeus ?

Prometheus, I have learnt these things

From the sorrow in thy face.

Another song did fold its wings 640

Upon my lips in other days,

When round the bath and round the bed

The hymeneal chant instead

I sang for thee, and smiled, —

And thou didst lead, with gifts and vows,

Hesione, my father's child,

To be thy wedded spouse.

Io enters.

Io. What land is this ? what people is here ?

And who is he that writhes, I see,

In the rock-hung chain ? 650

Now what is the crime that hath brought thee to pain ?

Now what is the laud — make answer free —
Which I wander through, in my wrong and fear ?

Ah ! ah ! ah me !

The gad-fly stingeth to agony !

O Earth, keep off that phantasm pale

Of earth-born Argus ! — ah ! — I quail

When my soul descries

That herdsman with the myriad eyes

Which seem, as he comes, one crafty
 eye. ⁶⁶⁰
 Graves hide him not, though he should
 die,
 But he doggeth me in my misery
 From the roots of death, on high — on
 high —
 And along the sands of the siding deep,
 All famine-worn, he follows me,
 And his waxen reed doth undersound
 The waters round
 And giveth a measure that giveth sleep.

Woe, woe, woe !
 Where shall my weary course be done ? ⁶⁷⁰
 What wouldst thou with me, Saturn's son ?
 And in what have I sinned, that I should
 go
 Thus yoked to grief by thine hand forever ?
 Ah ! ah ! dost vex me so
 That I madden and shiver
 Stung through with dread ?
 Flash the fire down to burn me !
 Heave the earth up to cover me !
 Plunge me in the deep, with the salt waves
 over me,
 That the sea-beasts may be fed ! ⁶⁸⁰
 O king, do not spurn me
 In my prayer !
 For this wandering, everlonger, ever-
 more,
 Hath overworn me,
 And I know not on what shore
 I may rest from my despair.

Chorus. Hearest thou what the ox-horned
 maiden saith ?

Prometheus. How could I choose but
 hearken what she saith,
 The frenzied maiden ? — Inachus's child ? —
 Who love-warms Zeus's heart, and now is
 lashed ⁶⁹⁰
 By Herè's hate along the unending ways ?

Io. Who taught thee to articulate that
 name, —
 My father's ? Speak to his child
 By grief and shame defiled !
 Who art thou, victim, thou who dost ac-
 claim
 Mine anguish in true words on the wide
 air,
 And callest too by name the curse that came
 From Herè unaware,

To waste and pierce me with its maddening
 goad ?

Ah — ah — I leap ⁷⁰⁰
 With the pang of the hungry — I bound on
 the road —

I am driven by my doom —
 I am overcome
 By the wrath of an enemy strong and
 deep !

Are any of those who have tasted pain,
 Alas ! as wretched as I ?
 Now tell me plain, doth aught remain
 For my soul to endure beneath the sky ?
 Is there any help to be holpen by ?
 If knowledge be in thee, let it be said ! ⁷¹⁰
 Cry aloud — cry
 To the wandering, woeful maid !

Prometheus. Whatever thou wouldst learn
 I will declare, —
 No riddle upon my lips, but such straight
 words
 As friends should use to each other when
 they talk.
 Thou seest Prometheus, who gave mortals
 fire.

Io. O common Help of all men, known of
 all,
 O miserable Prometheus, — for what cause
 Dost thou endure thus ?

Prometheus. I have done with wail
 For my own griefs, but lately.

Io. Wilt thou not ⁷²⁰
 Vouchsafe the boon to me ?

Prometheus. Say what thou wilt,
 For I vouchsafe all.

Io. Speak then, and reveal
 Who shut thee in this chasm.

Prometheus. The will of Zeus,
 The hand of his Hephæstus.

Io. And what crime
 Dost expiate so ?

Prometheus. Enough for thee I have told
 In so much only.

Io. Nay, but show besides
 The limit of my wandering, and the
 time

Which yet is lacking to fulfil my grief.

Prometheus. Why, not to know were bet-
 ter than to know ⁷²⁹
 For such as thou.

Io. Beseech thee, blind me not
 To that which I must suffer.

Prometheus. If I do,
 The reason is not that I grudge a boon.

Io. What reason, then, prevents thy speaking out ?

Prometheus. No grudging ; but a fear to break thine heart.

Io. Less care for me, I pray thee. Certainly

I count for advantage.

Prometheus. Thou wilt have it so, and therefore I must speak. Now hear —

Chorus. Not yet. Give half the guerdon my way. Let us learn First, what the curse is that befell the maid, —

Her own voice telling her own wasting woes : 740

The sequence of that anguish shall await The teaching of thy lips.

Prometheus. It doth behove That thou, Maid *Io*, shouldst vouchsafe to these

The grace they pray, — the more, because they are called

Thy father's sisters : since to open out And mourn out grief where it is possible To draw a tear from the audience, is a work That pays its own price well.

Io. I cannot choose But trust you, nymphs, and tell you all ye ask,

In clear words — though I sob amid my speech 750

In speaking of the storm-curse sent from Zeus,

And of my beauty, from what height it took Its swoop on me, poor wretch ! left thus deformed

And monstrous to your eyes. For evermore Around my virgin-chamber, wandering went The nightly visions which entreated me With syllabled smoothsweetness. — 'Bless-ed maid,

Why lengthen out thy maiden hours when fate

Permits the noblest spousal in the world ? When Zeus burns with the arrow of thy love 760

And fain would touch thy beauty ? — Maiden, thou

Despise not Zeus ! depart to Lerne's mead That's green around thy father's flocks and stalls,

Until the passion of the heavenly Eye Be quenched in sight.' Such dreams did all night long

Constrain me — me, unhappy ! — till I dared

To tell my father how they trod the dark With visionary steps. Whereat he sent His frequent heralds to the Pythian fane, And also to Dodona, and inquired 770 How best, by act or speech, to please the gods.

The same returning brought back oracles Of doubtful sense, indefinite response, Dark to interpret ; but at last there came To Inachus an answer that was clear, Thrown straight as any bolt, and spoken out —

This — 'he should drive me from my home and land,

And bid me wander to the extreme verge Of all the earth — or, if he willed it not, Should have a thunder with a fiery eye 780 Leap straight from Zeus to burn up all his race

To the last root of it.' By which Loxian word

Subdued, he drove me forth and shut me out, He loth, me loth, — but Zeus's violent bit Compelled him to the deed : when instantly My body and soul were changed and distraught,

And, horned as ye see, and spurred along By the fanged insect, with a maniac leap I rushed on to Cenehrea's limpid stream And Lerne's fountain-water. There, the earth-born, 790

The herdsman Argus, most immitigable Of wrath, did find me out, and track me out With countless eyes set staring at my steps : And though an unexpected sudden doom Drew him from life, I, curse-tormented still, Am driven from land to land before the scourge

The gods hold o'er me. So thou hast heard the past,

And if a bitter future thou canst tell, Speak on. I charge thee, do not flatter me Through pity, with false words ; for, in my mind, 800

Deceiving works more shame than torturing doth.

Chorus.

Ah ! silence here !
Nevermore, nevermore
Would I languish for
The stranger's word
To thrill in mine ear —

Nevermore for the wrong and the woe and the fear

So hard to behold,
So cruel to bear,
Piercing my soul with a double-edged
sword 810

Of a sliding cold.
Ah Fate ! ah me !
I shudder to see
This wandering maid in her agony.

Prometheus. Grief is too quick in thee and
fear too full :

Be patient till thou hast learnt the rest.

Chorus. Speak : teach.
To those who are sad already, it seems
sweet,
By clear foreknowledge to make perfect,
pain.

Prometheus. The boon ye asked me first
was lightly won, —

For first ye asked the story of this maid's
grief 820

As her own lips might tell it. Now re-
mains

To list what other sorrows she so young
Must bear from Herè. Inachus's child,
O thou ! drop down thy soul my weighty
words,

And measure out the landmarks which are
set

To end thy wandering. Toward the orient
sun

First turn thy face from mine and journey
on

Along the desert flats till thou shalt come
Where Scythia's shepherd peoples dwell
aloft,

Perched in wheeled wagons under woven
roofs, 830

And twang the rapid arrow past the bow —
Approach them not; but siding in thy course
The rugged shore-rocks resonant to the sea,
Depart that country. On the left hand
dwell

The iron-workers, called the Chalybes,
Of whom beware, for certes they are un-
couth

And nowise bland to strangers. Reaching so
The stream Hybristes (well the *scorner*
called),

Attempt no passage, — it is hard to pass, —
Or ere thou come to Caucasus itself, 840
That highest of mountains, where the river
leaps

The precipice in his strength. Thou must
toil up

Those mountain-tops that neighbor with
the stars,
And tread the south way, and draw near, at
last,

The Amazonian host that hateth man,
Inhabitants of Themiscyra, close
Upon Thermodon, where the sea's rough jaw
Doth gnash at Salmydessa and provide
A cruel host to seamen, and to ships 849

A stepdame. They with unreluctant hand
Shall lead thee on and on, till thou arrive
Just where the ocean-gates show narrowest
On the Cimmerian isthmus. Leaving which,
Behoves thee swim with fortitude of soul
The strait Mæotis. Ay, and evermore
That traverse shall be famous on men's lips,
That strait, called Bosphorus, the horned
one's road,

So named because of thee, who so wilt go
From Europe's plain to Asia's continent,
How think ye, nymphs ? the king of gods
appears 860

Impartial in ferocious deeds ? Behold !
The god desirous of this mortal's love
Hath cursed her with these wanderings.

Ah, fair child,
Thou hast met a bitter groom for bridal
troth !

For all thou yet hast heard can only prove
The incomplete prelude of thy doom.

Io. Ah, ah !

Prometheus. Is't thy turn, now, to shriek
and moan ?

How wilt thou, when thou hast hearkened
what remains ?

Chorus. Besides the grief thou hast told
can aught remain ?

Prometheus. A sea — of foredoomed evil
worked to storm. 870

Io. What boots my life, then ? why not
cast myself

Down headlong from this miserable rock,
That, dashed against the flats, I may re-
deem

My soul from sorrow ? Better once to die
Than day by day to suffer.

Prometheus. Verily,

It would be hard for thee to bear my woe
For whom it is appointed not to die.

Death frees from woe; but I before me see
In all my far prevision not a bound
To all I suffer, ere that Zeus shall fall 880
From being a king.

Io. And can it ever be
That Zeus shall fall from empire ?

Prometheus. Thou, methinks,
Wouldst take some joy to see it.

Io. Could I choose ?
I who endure such pangs now, by that god !

Prometheus. Learn from me, therefore,
that the event shall be.

Io. By whom shall his imperial sceptred
hand

Be emptied so ?

Prometheus. Himself shall spoil himself,
Through his idiotic counsels.

Io. How ? declare :
Unless the word bring evil.

Prometheus. He shall wed ;
And in the marriage-bond be joined to
grief. 890

Io. A heavenly bride — or human ?
Speak it out

If it be utterable.

Prometheus. Why should I say which ?
It ought not to be uttered, verily.

Io. Then
It is his wife shall tear him from his throne ?

Prometheus. It is his wife shall bear a son
to him,

More mighty than the father.

Io. From this doom
Hath he no refuge ?

Prometheus. None: or ere that I,
Loosed from these fetters —

Io. Yea — but who shall loose
While Zeus is adverse ?

Prometheus. One who is born of thee:
It is ordained so.

Io. What is this thou sayest ?
A son of mine shall liberate thee from woe ?

Prometheus. After ten generations, count
three more, 902

And find him in the third.

Io. The oracle
Remains obscure.

Prometheus. And search it not, to learn
Thine own griefs from it.

Io. Point me not to a good,
To leave me straight bereaved.

Prometheus. I am prepared
To grant thee one of two things.

Io. But which two ?
Set them before me; grant me power to
choose.

Prometheus. I grant it; choose now: shall
I name aloud

What griefs remain to wound thee, or what
hand 910

Shall save me out of mine ?

Chorus. Vouchsafe, O god,
The one grace of the twain to her who prays;
The next to me; and turn back neither
prayer

Dishonor'd by denial. To herself
Recount the future wandering of her feet;
Then point me to the looser of thy chain,
Because I yearn to know him.

Prometheus. Since ye will,
Of absolute will, this knowledge, I will set
No contrary against it, nor keep back

A word of all ye ask for. *Io,* first 920
To thee I must relate thy wandering course

Far winding. As I tell it, write it down
In thy soul's book of memories. When
thou hast past

The reflux bound that parts two conti-
nents,

Track on the footsteps of the orient sun
In his own fire, across the roar of seas, —

Fly till thou hast reached the Gorgonæan
flats

Beside Cisthené. There, the Phorcides,
Three ancient maidens, live, with shape of
swan,

One tooth between them, and one common
eye: 930

On whom the sun doth never look at all
With all his rays, nor evermore the moon

When she looks through the night. Anear
to whom

Are the Gorgon sisters three, encllothed with
wings,

With twisted snakes for ringlets, man-ab-
horred:

There is no mortal gazes in their face
And gazing can breathe on. I speak of such

To guard thee from their horror. Ay, and
list

Another tale of a dreadful sight; beware
The Griffins, those unbarking dogs of Zeus,

Those sharp-mouthed dogs ! — and the Ari-
maspian host 941

Of one-eyed horsemen, habiting beside
The river of Pluto that runs bright with
gold:

Approach them not, beseech thee ! Pre-
sently

Thou'lt come to a distant land, a dusky tribe
Of dwellers at the fountain of the Sun,

Whence flows the river Æthiops; wind along
Its banks and turn off at the cataracts,

Just as the Nile pours from the Bybline hills
His holy and sweet wave; his course shall

guide 950

Thine own to that triangular Nile-ground
Where, Io, is ordained for thee and thine
A lengthened exile. Have I said in this
Aught darkly or incompletely? — now repeat

The question, make the knowledge fuller !
Lo,

I have more leisure than I covet, here.

Chorus. If thou canst tell us aught that's
left untold,

Or loosely told, of her most dreary flight,
Declare it straight: but if thou hast uttered
all,

Grant us that latter grace for which we
prayed, 960

Remembering how we prayed it.

Prometheus. She has heard
The uttermost of her wandering. There it
ends.

But that she may be certain not to have
heard

All vainly, I will speak what she endured
Ere coming hither, and invoke the past
To prove my prescience true. And so — to
leave

A multitude of words and pass at once
To the subject of thy course — when thou
hadst gone

To those Molossian plains which sweep
around

Dodona shouldering Heaven, whereby the
fane 970

Of Zeus Thesprotian keepeth oracle,
And, wonder past belief, where oaks do
wave

Articulate adjurations — (ay, the same
Saluted thee in no perplexed phrase
But clear with glory, noble wife of Zeus
That shouldst be, — there some sweetness
took thy sense !)

Thou didst rush further onward, stung along
The ocean-shore, toward Rhea's mighty bay
And, tost back from it, wast tost to it again
In stormy evolution: — and, know well, 980
In coming time that hollow of the sea
Shall bear the name Ionian and present
A monument of Io's passage through
Unto all mortals. Be these words the signs
Of my soul's power to look beyond the veil
Of visible things. The rest, to you and her
I will declare in common audience, nymphs,
Returning thither where my speech brake
off.

There is a town Canobus, built upon
The earth's fair margin at the mouth of Nile

And on the mound washed up by it; Io,
there 991
Shall Zeus give back to thee thy perfect
mind,

And only by the pressure and the touch
Of a hand not terrible; and thou to Zeus
Shalt bear a dusky son who shall be called
Thence, Epaphus, *Touched*. That son shall
pluck the fruit

Of all that land wide-watered by the flow
Of Nile; but after him, when counting out
As far as the fifth full generation, then
Full fifty maidens, a fair woman-race, 1000
Shall back to Argos turn reluctantly,
To fly the proffered nuptials of their kin,
Their father's brothers. These being pas-
sion-struck,

Like falcons bearing hard on flying doves,
Shall follow, hunting at a quarry of love
They should not hunt; till envious Heaven
maintain

A curse betwixt that beauty and their de-
sire,

And Greece receive them, to be overcome
In murderous woman-war, by fierce red
hands 1009

Kept savage by the night. For every wife
Shall slay a husband, dyeing deep in blood
The sword of a double edge — (I wish in-
deed

As fair a marriage-joy to all my foes !)
One bride alone shall fail to smite to death
The head upon her pillow, touched with
love,

Made impotent of purpose and impelled
To choose the lesser evil, — shame on her
cheeks,

Than blood-guilt on her hands : which bride
shall bear

A royal race in Argos. Tedious speech
Were needed to relate particulars 1020
Of these things; 't is enough that from her
seed

Shall spring the strong He, famous with the
bow,

Whose arm shall break my fetters off. Be-
hold,

My mother Themis, that old Titaness,
Delivered to me such an oracle, —
But how and when, I should be long to
speak,

And thou, in hearing, wouldst not gain at
all.

Io. Eleleu, eleleu !
How the spasm and the pain

And the fire on the brain 1030
 Strike, burning me through !
 How the sting of the curse, all aflame as it
 flew,
 Pricks me onward again !
 How my heart in its terror is spurning my
 breast,
 And my eyes, like the wheels of a chariot,
 roll round !
 I am whirled from my course, to the east,
 to the west,
 In the whirlwind of frenzy all madly in-
 wound —
 And my mouth is unbridled for anguish and
 hate,
 And my words beat in vain, in wild storms
 of unrest,
 On the sea of my desolate fate. 1040
[Io rushes out.]

Chorus. — Strophe.

Oh, wise was he, oh, wise was he
 Who first within his spirit knew
 And with his tongue declared it true
 That love comes best that comes unto
 The equal of degree !
 And that the poor and that the low
 Should seek no love from those above,
 Whose souls are fluttered with the flow
 Of airs about their golden height,
 Or proud because they see arow 1050
 Ancestral crowns of light.

Antistrophe.

Oh, never, never may ye, Fates,
 Behold me with your awful eyes
 Lift mine too fondly up the skies
 Where Zeus upon the purple waits !
 Nor let me step too near — too near
 To any suitor, bright from heaven :
 Because I see, because I fear
 This loveless maiden vexed and lad
 By this fell curse of Herè, driven 1060
 On wanderings dread and drear.

Epode.

Nay, grant an equal troth instead
 Of nuptial love, to bind me by !
 It will not hurt, I shall not dread
 To meet it in reply.
 But let not love from those above
 Revert and fix me, as I said,
 With that inevitable Eye !
 I have no sword to fight that fight,
 I have no strength to tread that path,
 I know not if my nature hath 1071

The power to bear, I cannot see
 Whither from Zeus's infinite
 I have the power to flee.

Prometheus. Yet Zeus, albeit most abso-
 lute of will,
 Shall turn to meekness, — such a marriage-
 rite
 He holds in preparation, which anon
 Shall thrust him headlong from his gerent
 seat
 Adown the abysmal void, and so the curse
 His father Chronos muttered in his fall, 1080
 As he fell from his ancient throne and
 cursed,
 Shall be accomplished wholly. No escape
 From all that ruin shall the filial Zeus
 Find granted to him from any of his gods,
 Unless I teach him. I the refuge know,
 And I, the means. Now, therefore, let him sit
 And brave the imminent doom, and fix his
 faith
 On his supernal noises, hurtling on
 With restless hand the bolt that breathes
 out fire;
 For these things shall not help him, none
 of them, 1090
 Nor hinder his perdition when he falls
 To shame, and lower than patience: such a
 foe
 He doth himself prepare against himself,
 A wonder of unconquerable hate,
 An organizer of sublimer fire
 Than glares in lightnings, and of grander
 sound
 Than aught the thunder rolls, out-thunder-
 ing it,
 With power to shatter in Poseidon's fist
 The trident-spear which, while it plagues
 the sea,
 Doth shake the shores around it. Ay, and
 Zeus, 1100
 Precipitated thus, shall learn at length
 The difference betwixt rule and servitude.
Chorus. Thou makest threats for Zeus of
 thy desires.
Prometheus. I tell you, all these things
 shall be fulfilled.
 Even so as I desire them.
Chorus. Must we then
 Look out for one shall come to master Zeus ?
Prometheus. These chains weigh lighter
 than his sorrows shall.
Chorus. How art thou not afraid to utter
 such words ?

Prometheus. What should I fear who cannot die ?

Chorus. But he

Can visit thee with dreader woe than death's.

Prometheus. Why, let him do it ! I am here, prepared 1111

For all things and their pangs.

Chorus. The wise are they

Who reverence Adrasteia.

Prometheus. Reverence thou,

Adore thou, flatter thou, whomever reigns,

Whenever reigning ! but for me, your Zeus

Is less than nothing. Let him act and reign

His brief hour out according to his will —

He will not, therefore, rule the gods too long.

But lo ! I see that courier-god of Zeus,

That new-made menial of the new-crowned

king : 1120

He doubtless comes to announce to us something new.

HERMES enters.

Hermes. I speak to thee, the sophist, the talker-down

Of scorn by scorn, the sinner against gods,

The reverence of men, the thief of fire, —

I speak to thee and adjure thee ! Zeus re-

quires

Thy declaration of what marriage-rite

Thus moves thy vaunt and shall hereafter cause

His fall from empire. Do not wrap thy speech

In riddles, but speak clearly ! Never cast

Ambiguous paths, Prometheus, for my feet,

Since Zeus, thou mayst perceive, is scarcely won 1131

To mercy by such means.

Prometheus. A speech well-mouthed

In the utterance, and full-minded in the sense,

As doth befit a servant of the gods !

New gods, ye newly reign, and think forsooth

Ye dwell in towers too high for any dart

To carry a wound there ! — have I not stood by

While two kings fell from thence ? and shall I not

Behold the third, the same who rules you now,

Fall, shamed to sudden ruin ? — Do I seem

To tremble and quail before your modern gods ? 1141

Far be it from me ! — For thyself, depart,

Re-tread thy steps in haste. To all thou hast asked

I answer nothing.

Hermes. Such a wind of pride

Impelled thee of yore full-sail upon these rocks.

Prometheus. I would not barter — learn thou soothly that ! —

My suffering for thy service. I maintain

It is a nobler thing to serve these rocks

Than live a faithful slave to father Zeus.

Thus upon scorners I retort their scorn. 1150

Hermes. It seems that thou dost glory in thy despair.

Prometheus. I glory ? would my foes did glory so,

And I stood by to see them ! — naming whom,

Thou art not unremembered.

Hermes. Dost thou charge

Me also with the blame of thy mischance ?

Prometheus. I tell thee I loathe the universal gods,

Who for the good I gave them rendered back

The ill of their injustice.

Hermes. Thou art mad —

Thou art raving, Titan, at the fever-height.

Prometheus. If it be madness to abhor my foes, 1160

May I be mad !

Hermes. If thou wert prosperous

Thou wouldst be unendurable.

Prometheus. Alas !

Hermes. Zeus knows not that word.

Prometheus. But maturing Time

Teaches all things.

Hermes. Howbeit, thou hast not learnt

The wisdom yet, thou needest.

Prometheus. If I had,

I should not talk thus with a slave like thee.

Hermes. No answer thou vouchsafest, I believe,

To the great Sire's requirement.

Prometheus. Verily

I owe him grateful service, — and should pay it.

Hermes. Why, thou dost mock me, Titan, as I stood 1170

A child before thy face.

Prometheus. No child, forsooth,

But yet more foolish than a foolish child,

If thou expect that I should answer aught

Thy Zeus can ask. No torture from his hand

Nor any machination in the world

Shall force mine utterance ere he loose, him-
self,

These cankerous fetters from me. For the
rest,

Let him now hurl his blanching lightnings
down,

And with his white-winged snows and mut-
terings deep 1179

Of subterranean thunders mix all things,
Confound them in disorder. None of this
Shall bend my sturdy will and make me
speak

The name of his dethroner who shall come.

Hermes. Can this avail thee? Look to it!

Prometheus. Long ago

It was looked forward to, precounselled of.

Hermes. Vain god, take righteous cour-
age! dare for once

To apprehend and front thine agonies

With a just prudence.

Prometheus. Vainly dost thou chafe

My soul with exhortation, as yonder sea

Goes beating on the rock. Oh, think no
more 1190

That I, fear-struck by Zeus to a woman's
mind,

Will supplicate him, loathèd as he is,

With feminine upliftings of my hands,

To break these chains. Far from me be the
thought!

Hermes. I have indeed, methinks, said
much in vain,

For still thy heart beneath my showers of
prayers

Lies dry and hard — nay, leaps like a young
horse

Who bites against the new bit in his teeth,
And tugs and struggles against the new-
tried rein, —

Still fiercest in the feeblest thing of all, 1200
Which sophism is; since absolute will dis-
joined

From perfect mind is worse than weak.
Behold,

Unless my words persuade thee, what a blast
And whirlwind of inevitable woe

Must sweep persuasion through thee! For
at first

The Father himself split up this jut of rock

With the great thunder and the bolted
flame

And hide thy body where a hinge of stone

Shall catch it like an arm; and when thou
hast passed 1209

A long black time within, thou shalt come out

To front the sun while Zeus's wingèd hound,
The strong carnivorous eagle, shall wheel
down

To meet thee, self-called to a daily feast,
And set his fierce beak in thee and tear off
The long rags of thy flesh and batten deep
Upon thy dusky liver. Do not look

For any end moreover to this curse

Or ere some god appear, to accept thy pangs

On his own head vicarious, and descend

With unreluctant step the darks of hell 1220

And gloomy abysses around Tartarus.

Then ponder this — this threat is not a
growth

Of vain invention; it is spoken and meant;

King Zeus's mouth is impotent to lie,

Consummating the utterance by the act;

So, look to it, thou! take heed, and never-
more

Forget good counsel, to indulge self-will.

Chorus. Our Hermes suits his reasons to
the times;

At least I think so, since he bids thee
drop

Self-will for prudent counsel. Yield to him!

When the wise err, their wisdom makes
their shame. 1231

Prometheus. Unto me the foreknower,
this mandate of power

He cries, to reveal it.

What's strange in my fate, if I suffer from
hate

At the hour that I feel it?

Let the locks of the lightning, all bristling
and whitening,

Flash, coiling me round,

While the æther goes surging 'neath thun-
der and scourging

Of wild winds unbound!

Let the blast of the firmament whirl from its
place 1240

The earth rooted below,

And the brine of the ocean, in rapid emotion,
Be driven in the face

Of the stars up in heaven, as they walk to
and fro!

Let him hurl me anon into Tartarus — on —
To the blackest degree,

With Necessity's vortices strangling me
down;

But he cannot join death to a fate meant
for me!

Hermes. Why, the words that he speaks
and the thoughts that he thinks

Are maniacal! — add,

1250

If the Fate who hath bound him should
loose not the links,

He were utterly mad.

Then depart ye who groan with him,
Leaving to moan with him, —

Go in haste ! lest the roar of the thunder
anearing

Should blast you to idiocy, living and hear-
ing.

Chorus. Change thy speech for another,
thy thought for a new,

If to move me and teach me indeed be
thy care !

For thy words swerve so far from the loyal
and true

That the thunder of Zeus seems more easy
to bear. 1260

How ! couldst teach me to venture such
vileness ? behold !

I *choose*, with this victim, this anguish
foretold !

I recoil from the traitor in hate and dis-
dain,

And I know that the curse of the treason is
worse

Than the pang of the chain.

Hermes. Then remember, O nymphs,
what I tell you before,

Nor, when pierced by the arrows that Até
will throw you,

Cast blame on your fate and declare ever-
more

That Zeus thrust you on anguish he did
not foreshow you.

Nay, verily, nay ! for ye perish anon 1270

For your deed — by your choice. By no
blindness of doubt,

No abruptness of doom, but by madness
alone,

In the great net of Até, whence none com-
eth out,

Ye are wound and undone.

Prometheus. Ay ! in act now, in word now
no more,

Earth is rocking in space.

And the thunders crash up with a roar
upon roar,

And the eddying lightnings flash fire in
my face,

And the whirlwinds are whirling the dust
round and round,

And the blasts of the winds universal leap
free 1280

And blow each upon each with a passion of
sound,

And æther goes mingling in storm with
the sea.

Such a curse on my head, in a manifest
dread,

From the hand of your Zeus has been
hurtled along.

O my mother's fair glory ! O Æther, en-
ringing

All eyes with the sweet common light of
thy bringing !

Dost see how I suffer this wrong ?

A LAMENT FOR ADONIS

FROM THE GREEK OF BION

I

I MOURN for Adonis — Adonis is dead,

Fair Adonis is dead and the Loves are
lamenting.

Sleep, Cypris, no more on thy purple-
strewed bed:

Arise, wretch stoled in black; beat thy
breast unrelenting,

And shriek to the worlds, 'Fair Adonis is
dead !'

II

I mourn for Adonis — the Loves are la-
menting,

He lies on the hills in his beauty and
death;

The white tusk of a boar has transpierced
his white thigh.

Cytherea grows mad at his thin gasping
breath,

While the black blood drips down on the
pale ivory, 10

And his eyeballs lie quenched with the
weight of his brows,

The rose fades from his lips, and upon them
just parted

The kiss dies the goddess consents not
to lose,

Though the kiss of the Dead cannot make
her glad-hearted:

He knows not who kisses him dead in the
dews.

III

I mourn for Adonis — the Loves are la-
menting.

Deep, deep in the thigh is Adonis's
wound,

But a deeper, is Cypris's bosom presenting.
 The youth lieth dead while his dogs howl
 around,
 And the nymphs weep aloud from the
 mists of the hill, ²⁰
 And the poor Aphrodité, with tresses un-
 bound,
 All dishevelled, unsandaled, shrieks mourn-
 ful and shrill
 Through the dusk of the groves. The
 thorns, tearing her feet,
 Gather up the red flower of her blood which
 is holy,
 Each footstep she takes; and the valleys
 repeat
 The sharp cry she utters and draw it out
 slowly.
 She calls on her spouse, her Assyrian, on
 him
 Her own youth, while the dark blood
 spreads over his body,
 The chest taking hue from the gash in
 the limb, ²⁹
 And the bosom, once ivory, turning to ruddy.

IV

Ah, ah, Cytherea ! the Loves are lamenting.
 She lost her fair spouse and so lost her
 fair smile:
 When he lived she was fair, by the whole
 world's consenting,
 Whose fairness is dead with him: woe
 worth the while !
 All the mountains above and the oaklands
 below
 Murmur, ah, ah, Adonis ! the streams
 overflow
 Aphrodité's deep wail ; river-fountains in
 pity
 Weep soft in the hills, and the flowers as
 they blow
 Redden outward with sorrow, while all hear
 her go
 With the song of her sadness through
 mountain and city. ⁴⁰

V

Ah, ah, Cytherea ! Adonis is dead,
 Fair Adonis is dead — Echo answers,
 Adonis !
 Who weeps not for Cypris, when bowing
 her head
 She stares at the wound where it gapes
 and astonies ?
 — When, ah, ah ! — she saw how the blood
 ran away

And empurpled the thigh, and, with wild
 hands flung out,
 Said with sobs: ' Stay, Adonis ! unhappy
 one, stay,
 Let me feel thee once more, let me ring
 thee about
 With the clasp of my arms, and press kiss
 into kiss !
 Wait a little, Adonis, and kiss me again,
 For the last time, beloved, — and but so
 much of this ⁵¹
 That the kiss may learn life from the
 warmth of the strain !
 — Till thy breath shall exude from thy soul
 to my mouth,
 To my heart, and, the love-charm I once
 more receiving
 May drink thy love in it and keep of a
 truth
 That one kiss in the place of Adonis the
 living.
 Thou fliest me, mournful one, fliest me far,
 My Adonis, and seekest the Acheron
 portal, —
 To Hell's cruel King goest down with a scar,
 While I weep and live on like a wretched
 immortal, ⁶⁰
 And follow no step ! O Persephoné, take
 him,
 My husband ! — thou 'rt better and
 brighter than I,
 So all beauty flows down to thee: *I* cannot
 make him
 Look up at my grief; there's despair in
 my cry,
 Since I wail for Adonis who died to me —
 died to me —
 Then, I fear *thee* ! — Art thou dead, my
 Adored ?
 Passion ends like a dream in the sleep
 that's denied to me,
 Cypris is widowed, the Loves seek their
 lord
 All the house through in vain. Charm of
 cestus has ceased
 With thy clasp ! O too bold in the hunt
 past preventing, ⁷⁰
 Ay, mad, thou so fair, to have strife with a
 beast !'
 Thus the goddess wailed on — and the
 Loves are lamenting.

VI

Ah, ah, Cytherea ! Adonis is dead.
 She wept tear after tear with the blood
 which was shed,

And both turned into flowers for the earth's
garden-close,
Her tears, to the windflower; his blood, to
the rose.

VII

I mourn for Adonis — Adonis is dead.
Weep no more in the woods, Cytherea,
thy lover!

So, well: make a place for his corse in thy
bed,

With the purples thou sleepest in, under
and over. 80

He's fair though a corse — a fair corse,
like a sleeper.

Lay him soft in the silks he had pleasure
to fold

When, beside thee at night, holy dreams
deep and deeper

Enclosed his young life on the couch
made of gold.

Love him still, poor Adonis; cast on him
together

The crowns and the flowers: since he
died from the place,

Why, let all die with him; let the blossoms
go wither,

Rain myrtles and olive-buds down on his
face.

Rain the myrrh down, let all that is best
fall a-pining,

Since the myrrh of his life from thy
keeping is swept. 90

Pale he lay, thine Adonis, in purples reclin-
ing;

The Loves raised their voices around him
and wept.

They have shorn their bright curls off to
cast on Adonis;

One treads on his bow, — on his arrows,
another, —

One breaks up a well-feathered quiver, and
one is

Bent low at a sandal, untying the strings,
And one carries the vases of gold from
the springs,

While one washes the wound, — and behind
them a brother

Fans down on the body sweet air with
his wings.

VIII

Cytherea herself now the Loves are lament-
ing. 100

Each torch at the door Hymenæus blew
out;

And, the marriage-wreath dropping its
leaves as repenting,

No more 'Hymen, Hymen,' is chanted
about,

But the *ai ai* instead — 'Ai alas!' is begun
For Adonis, and then follows 'Ai Hy-
menæus!'

The Graces are weeping for Cinyris's son,
Sobbing low each to each, 'His fair eyes
cannot see us!'

Their wail strikes more shrill than the sad-
der Dione's.

The Fates mourn aloud for Adonis, Adonis,
Deep chanting; he hears not a word that
they say: 110

He *would* hear, but Persephoné has him
in keeping.

— Cease moan, Cytherea! leave pomps for
to-day,

And weep new when a new year refits
thee for weeping.

SONG OF THE ROSE

ATTRIBUTED TO SAPPHO

FROM 'ACHILLES TATIUS'

If Zeus chose us a King of the flowers in
his mirth,

He would call to the Rose and would
royally crown it;

For the Rose, ho, the Rose! is the grace
of the earth,

Is the light of the plants that are grow-
ing upon it:

For the Rose, ho, the Rose! is the eye of
the flowers,

Is the blush of the meadows that feel
themselves fair,

Is the lightning of beauty that strikes
through the bowers

On pale lovers who sit in the glow un-
aware.

Ho, the Rose breathes of love! ho, the
Rose lifts the cup

To the red lips of Cypris invoked for a
guest!

Ho, the Rose, having curled its sweet
leaves for the world,

Takes delight in the motion its petals
keep up,

As they laugh to the wind as it laughs from
the west!

FROM THEOCRITUS

THE CYCLOPS

(IDYL XI)

AND so an easier life our Cyclops drew,
 The ancient Polyphemus, who in youth
 Loved Galatea while the manhood grew
 Adown his cheeks and darkened round
 his mouth.
 No jot he cared for apples, olives, roses;
 Love made him mad: the whole world
 was neglected,
 The very sheep went backward to their
 closes
 From out the fair green pastures, self-
 directed.
 And singing Galatea, thus, he wore
 The sunrise down along the weedy shore, 10
 And pined alone, and felt the cruel
 wound
 Beneath his heart, which Cypris' arrow
 bore,
 With a deep pang; but, so, the cure was
 found;
 And sitting on a lofty rock he cast
 His eyes upon the sea, and sang at last: —
 'O whitest Galatea, can it be
 That thou shouldst spurn me off who love
 thee so?
 More white than curds, my girl, thou art to
 see,
 More meek than lambs, more full of leaping
 glee
 Than kids, and brighter than the early
 glow 20
 On grapes that swell to ripen, — sour like
 thee!
 Thou comest to me with the fragrant
 sleep,
 And with the fragrant sleep thou goest
 from me;
 Thou fliest . . . fliest, as a frightened
 sheep
 Flies the gray wolf! — yet Love did over-
 come me,
 So long; — I loved thee, maiden, first of
 all
 When down the hills (my mother fast
 beside thee)
 I saw thee stray to pluck the summer-
 fall
 Of hyacinth bells, and went myself to
 guide thee:

And since my eyes have seen thee, they can
 leave thee 30
 No more, from that day's light! But thou
 . . . by Zeus,
 Thou wilt not care for *that*, to let it grieve
 thee!
 I know thee, fair one, why thou springest
 loose
 From my arm round thee. Why? I tell
 thee, Dear!
 One shaggy eyebrow draws its smudging
 road
 Straight through my ample front, from ear
 to ear, —
 One eye rolls underneath; and yawning,
 broad
 Flat nostrils feel the bulging lips too near.
 Yet . . . ho, ho! — *I*, — whatever I ap-
 pear, —
 Do feed a thousand oxen! When I have
 done, 40
 I milk the cows, and drink the milk that's
 best!
 I lack no cheese, while summer keeps the
 sun;
 And after, in the cold, it's ready prest!
 And then, I know to sing, as there is none
 Of all the Cyclops can, . . . a song of thee,
 Sweet apple of my soul, on love's fair tree,
 And of myself who love thee . . . till the
 West
 Forgets the light, and all but I have rest.
 I feed for thee, besides, eleven fair does,
 And all in fawn; and four tame whelps
 of bears. 50
 Come to me, Sweet! thou shalt have all of
 those
 In change for love! I will not halve the
 shares.
 Leave the blue sea, with pure white arms
 extended
 To the dry shore; and, in my cave's re-
 cess,
 Thou shalt be gladder for the noonlight
 ended, —
 For here be laurels, spiral cypresses,
 Dark ivy, and a vine whose leaves enfold
 Most luscious grapes; and here is water
 cold,
 The wooded Ætna pours down through
 the trees
 From the white snows, — which gods were
 scarce too bold 60
 To drink in turn with nectar. Who with
 these

Would choose the salt wave of the luke-
 warm seas ?
 Nay, look on me ! If I am hairy and
 rough,
 I have an oak's heart in me; there's a
 fire
 In these gray ashes which burns hot
 enough;
 And when I burn for *thee*, I grudge the
 pyre
 No fuel . . . not my soul, nor this one
 eye, —
 Most precious thing I have, because
 thereby
 I see thee, Fairest ! Out, alas ! I wish
 My mother had borne me finned like a
 fish,
 That I might plunge down in the ocean near
 thee,
 And kiss thy glittering hand between the
 weeds,
 If still thy face were turned; and I would
 bear thee
 Each lily white, and poppy fair that
 bleeds
 Its red heart down its leaves ! — one gift,
 for hours
 Of summer, — one, for winter; since, to
 cheer thee,
 I could not bring at once all kinds of flow-
 ers.
 Even now, girl, now, I fain would learn to
 swim,
 If stranger in a ship sailed nigh, I
 wis, —
 That I may know how sweet a thing it is
 To live down with you in the Deep and
 Dim !
 Come up, O Galatea, from the ocean,
 And, having come, forget again to go !
 As I, who sing out here my heart's emo-
 tion,
 Could sit for ever. Come up from be-
 low !
 Come, keep my flocks beside me, milk my
 kine, —
 Come, press my cheese, distract my whey
 and curd !
 Ah, mother ! she alone . . . that mother
 of mine . . .
 Did wrong me sore ! I blame her ! —
 Not a word
 Of kindly intercession did she address
 Thine ear with for my sake; and ne'er the-
 less

She saw me wasting, wasting, day by
 day:
 Both head and feet were aching, I will
 say,
 All sick for grief, as I myself was sick.
 O Cyclops, Cyclops, whither hast thou
 sent
 Thy soul on fluttering wings ? If thou
 wert bent
 On turning bowls, or pulling green and
 thick
 The sprouts to give thy lambkins, — thou
 wouldst make thee
 A wiser Cyclops than for what we take
 thee.
 Milk dry the present ! Why pursue too
 quick
 That future which is fugitive aright ?
 Thy Galatea thou shalt haply find, —
 Or else a maiden fairer and more kind;
 For many girls do call me through the
 night,
 And, as they call, do laugh out silverly.
 I, too, am something in the world, I
 see !'

While thus the Cyclops love and lambs did
 fold,
 Ease came with song he could not buy with
 gold.

FROM APULEIUS

PSYCHE GAZING ON CUPID

(METAMORPH., LIB. IV.)

THEN Psyche, weak in body and soul, put
 on
 The cruelty of Fate, in place of strength:
 She raised the lamp to see what should be
 done,
 And seized the steel, and was a man at
 length
 In courage, though a woman ! Yes, but
 when
 The light fell on the bed whereby she
 stood
 To view the '*beast*' that lay there, —
 certes, then,
 She saw the gentlest, sweetest beast in
 wood —
 Even Cupid's self, the beauteous god !
 more beauteous

For that sweet sleep across his eyelids
dim.
The light, the lady carried as she viewed,
Did blush for pleasure as it lighted
him,
The dagger trembled from its aim undute-
ous;
And *she* . . . oh, *she* — amazed and soul-
distraught,
And fainting in her whiteness like a veil,
Slid down upon her knees, and, shudder-
ing, thought
To hide — though in her heart — the
dagger pale!
She would have done it, but her hands did
fail
To hold the guilty steel, they shivered
so, —
And feeble, exhausted, unawares she took
To gazing on the god, — till, look by look,
Her eyes with larger life did fill and
glow.
She saw his golden head alight with
curls, —
She might have guessed their brightness
in the dark
By that ambrosial smell of heavenly
mark!
She saw the milky brow, more pure than
pearls,
The purple of the cheeks, divinely sun-
dered
By the globed ringlets, as they glided
free,
Some back, some forwards, — all so radi-
antly,
That, as she watched them there, she
never wondered
To see the lamplight, where it touched
them, tremble:
On the god's shoulders, too, she marked
his wings
Shine faintly at the edges and resemble
A flower that's near to blow. The poet
sings
And lover sighs, that Love is fugitive;
And certes, though these pinions lay re-
posing,
The feathers on them seemed to stir and
live
As if by instinct, closing and unclosing.
Meantime the god's fair body slumbered
deep,
All worthy of Venus, in his shining
sleep;

While at the bed's foot lay the quiver,
bow,
And darts, — his arms of godhead. Psyche
gazed
With eyes that drank the wonders in, —
said, — 'Lo,
Be these my husband's arms?' — and
straightway raised
An arrow from the quiver-case, and
tried
Its point against her finger, — trembling
till
She pushed it in too deeply (foolish
bride!)
And made her blood some dewdrops small
distil,
And learnt to love Love, of her own good-
will.

PSYCHE WAFTED BY ZEPHYRUS

(METAMORPH., LIB. IV.)

WHILE Psyche wept upon the rock forsaken,
Alone, despairing, dreading, — gradu-
ally
By Zephyrus she was enwrap and taken
Still trembling, — like the lilies planted
high, —
Through all her fair white limbs. Her
vesture spread,
Her very bosom eddying with sur-
prise, —
He drew her slowly from the mountain-
head,
And bore her down the valleys with wet
eyes,
And laid her in the lap of a green dell
As soft with grass and flowers as any
nest,
With trees beside her, and a limpid well:
Yet Love was not far off from all that
Rest.

PSYCHE AND PAN

(METAMORPH., LIB. V.)

THE gentle River, in her Cupid's honor,
Because he used to warm the very wave,
Did ripple aside, instead of closing on
her,

And cast up Psyche, with a reflueuce
brave,
Upon the flowery bank, — all sad and sin-
ning.

Then Pan, the rural god, by chance was
leaning

Along the brow of waters as they wound,
Kissing the reed-nymph till she sank to
ground,

And teaching, without knowledge of the
meaning,

To run her voice in music after his
Down many a shifting note; (the goats
around,

In wandering pasture and most leaping
bliss,

Drawn on to crop the river's flowery
hair).

And as the hoary god beheld her there,
The poor, worn, fainting Psyche! —
knowing all

The grief she suffered, he did^d gently
call

Her name, and softly comfort her de-
spair: —

‘O wise, fair lady, I am rough and rude
And yet experienced through my weary
age!

And if I read aright, as soothsayer
should,

Thy faltering steps of heavy pilgrimage,
Thy paleness, deep as snow we cannot see

The roses through, — thy sighs of quick
returning,

Thine eyes that seem, themselves, two souls
in mourning, —

Thou lovest, girl, too well, and bitterly!
But hear me: rush no more to a headlong
fall:

Seek no more deaths! leave wail, lay
sorrow down,

And pray the sovran god; and use withal
Such prayer as best may suit a tender
youth,

Well-pleased to bend to flatteries from thy
mouth,

And feel them stir the myrtle of his
crown.’

—So spake the shepherd-god; and an-
swer none

Gave Psyche in return: but silently
She did him homage with a bended knee,
And took the onward path. —

PSYCHE PROPITIATING CERES

(METAMORPH., LIB. VI.)

THEN mother Ceres from afar beheld her,
While Psyche touched, with reverent
fingers meek,

The temple's scythes; and with a cry com-
pelled her: —

‘O wretched Psyche, Venus roams to
seek

Thy wandering footsteps round the weary
earth,

Anxious and maddened, and adjures thee
forth

To accept the imputed pang, and let her
wreak

Full vengeance with full force of deity!

Yet *thou*, forsooth, art in my temple
here,

Touching my scythes, assuming my degree,
And daring to have thoughts that are not
fear!

—But Psyche clung to her feet, and as
they moved

Rained tears along their track, tear
dropped on tear,

And drew the dust on in her trailing locks,
And still, with passionate prayer, the

charge disproved: —

‘Now, by thy right hand's gathering from
the shocks

Of golden corn, — and by thy gladsome
rites

Of harvest, — and thy consecrated sights
Shut safe and mute in chests, — and by the

course

Of thy slave-dragons, — and the driving
force

Of ploughs along Sicilian glebes pro-
found, —

By thy swift chariot, — by thy steadfast
ground, —

By all those nuptial torches that departed
With thy lost daughter, — and by those

that shone

Back with her, when she came again glad-
hearted, —

And by all other mysteries which are
done

In silence at Eleusis, — I beseech thee,

O Ceres, take some pity, and abstain

From giving to my soul extremest pain
Who am the wretched Psyche! Let me
teach thee

A little mercy, and have thy leave to spend

A few days only in thy garnered corn,
Until that wrathful goddess, at the end,
Shall feel her hate grow mild the longer borne, —

Or till, alas ! — this faintness at my breast
Pass from me, and my spirit apprehend
From life-long woe a breath-time hour of rest !

— But Ceres answered ‘ I am moved indeed
By prayers so moist with tears, and would defend

The poor beseecher from more utter need:
But where old oaths, anterior ties, commend,

I cannot fail to a sister, lie to a friend,
As Venus is to *me*. Depart with speed !’

PSYCHE AND THE EAGLE

(METAMORPH., LIB. VI.)

BUT sovran Jove’s rapacious Bird, the regal
High percher on the lightning, the great eagle,

Drove down with rushing wings; and, — thinking how,

By Cupid’s help, he bore from Ida’s brow
A cup-boy for his master, — he inclined
To yield, in just return, an influence kind;
The god being honored in his lady’s woe.
And thus the Bird wheeled downward from the track,

Gods follow gods in, to the level low
Of that poor face of Psyche left in wrack.
— ‘ Now fie, thou simple girl !’ the Bird began;

‘ For if thou think to steal and carry back
A drop of holiest stream that ever ran,
No simpler thought, methinks, were found in man.

What ! know’st thou not these Stygian waters be

Most holy, even to Jove ? that as, on earth,
Men swear by gods, and by the thunder’s worth,

Even so the heavenly gods do utter forth
Their oaths by Styx’s flowing majesty ?
And yet, one little urnful, I agree
To grant thy need !’ Whereat, all hastily,

He takes it, fills it from the willing wave,
And bears it in his beak, incarnadined

By the last Titan-prey he screamed to have;

And, striking calmly out, against the wind,
Vast wings on each side, — there, where Psyche stands,

He drops the urn down in her lifted hands.

PSYCHE AND CERBERUS

(METAMORPH., LIB. VI.)

A MIGHTY dog with three colossal necks,
And heads in grand proportion; vast as fear,

With jaws that bark the thunder out that breaks

In most innocuous dread for ghosts anear,
Who are safe in death from sorrow: he reclines

Across the threshold of queen Proserpine’s
Dark-sweeping halls, and, there, for Pluto’s spouse,

Doth guard the entrance of the empty house.

When Psyche threw the cake to him, once amain

He howled up wildly from his hunger-pain,
And was still, after. —

PSYCHE AND PROSERPINE

(METAMORPH., LIB. VI.)

THEN Psyche entered in to Proserpine
In the dark house, and straightway did decline

With meek denial the luxurious seat,
The liberal board for welcome strangers spread,

But sat down lowly at the dark queen’s feet,

And told her tale, and brake her oaten bread.

And when she had given the pyx in humble duty,

And told how Venus did entreat the queen

To fill it up with only one day’s beauty
She used in Hades, star-bright and serene,

To beautify the Cyprian, who had been
All spoilt with grief in nursing her sick boy, —

Then Proserpine, in malice and in joy,
Smiled in the shade and took the pyx,
and put

A secret in it; and so, filled and shut,
Gave it again to Psyche. Could she tell
It held no beauty, but a dream of hell?

PSYCHE AND VENUS

(METAMORPH., LIB. VI.)

AND Psyche brought to Venus what was
sent

By Pluto's spouse; the paler, that she went
So low to seek it, down the dark descent.

MERCURY CARRIES PSYCHE TO OLYMPUS

(METAMORPH., LIB. VI.)

THEN Jove commanded the god Mercury
To float up Psyche from the earth. And
she

Sprang at the first word, as the fountain
springs,
And shot up bright and rustling through
his wings.

MARRIAGE OF PSYCHE AND CUPID

(METAMORPH., LIB. VI.)

AND Jove's right hand approached the
ambrosial bowl

To Psyche's lips, that scarce dared yet
to smile, —

'Drink, O my daughter, and acquaint thy
soul

With deathless uses, and be glad the
while!

No more shall Cupid leave thy lovely side;
Thy marriage-joy begins for never-end-
ing.'

While yet he spake, — the nuptial feast
supplied, —

The bridegroom on the festive couch
was bending

O'er Psyche in his bosom — Jove, the
same,

On Juno, and the other deities,

Alike ranged round. The rural cup-boy
came

And poured Jove's nectar out with shin-
ing eyes,

While Bacchus, for the others, did as much,
And Vulcan spread the meal; and all
the Hours

Made all things purple with a sprinkle
of flowers,

Or roses chiefly, not to say the touch
Of their sweet fingers; and the Graces
glided

Their balm around, and the Muses, through
the air,

Struck out clear voices, which were still
divided

By that divinest song Apollo there
Intoned to his lute; while Aphrodite fair
Did float her beauty along the tune, and
play

The notes right with her feet. And
thus, the day

Through every perfect mood of joy was
carried.

The Muses sang their chorus; Satyrus
Did blow his pipes; Pan touched his reed;
— and thus

At last were Cupid and his Psyche married.

FROM NONNUS

HOW BACCHUS FINDS ARIADNE SLEEPING

(DIONYSIACA, LIB. XLVII.)

WHEN Bacchus first beheld the desolate
And sleeping Ariadne, wonder straight
Was mixed with love in his great golden
eyes;

He turned to his Bacchantes in surprise,
And said with guarded voice, — 'Hush!
strike no more

Your brazen cymbals; keep those voices
still

Of voice and pipe; and since ye stand
before

Queen Cypri, let her slumber as she
will!

And yet the cestus is not here in proof.

A Grace, perhaps, whom sleep has stolen
aloof:

In which case, as the morning shines in
view,

Wake this Aglaia ! — yet in Naxos, who
Would veil a Grace so ? Hush ! And if
that she

Were Hebe, which of all the gods can be
The pourer-out of wine ? or if we think
She's like the shining moon by ocean's
brink,

The guide of herds, — why, could she sleep
without

Endymion's breath on her cheek ? or if I
doubt

Of silver-footed Thetis, used to tread
These shores, — even *she* (in reverence be
it said) 20

Has no such rosy beauty to dress deep
With the blue waves. The Loxian god-
dess might

Repose so from her hunting-toil aright
Beside the sea, since toil gives birth to
sleep,

But who would find her with her tunic
loose,

Thus ? Stand off, Thracian ! stand off !
Do not leap,

Not this way ! Leave that piping, since
I choose,

O dearest Pan, and let Athenè rest !
And yet if she be Pallas . . . truly
guessed . . .

Her lance is — where ? her helm and ægis
— where ?' 30

— As Bacchus closed, the miserable Fair
Awoke at last, sprang upward from the
sands,

And gazing wild on that wild throng that
stands

Around, around her, and no Theseus
there ! —

Her voice went moaning over shore and
sea,

Beside the halcyon's cry ; she called her
love ;

She named her hero, and raged madden-
ingly

Against the brine of waters ; and, above,
Sought the ship's track, and cursed the
hours she slept ;

And still the chiefest execration swept 40
Against queen Paphia, mother of the ocean ;
And cursed and prayed by times in her
emotion

The winds all round. . . .

Her grief did make her glorious ; her de-
spair

Adorned her with its weight. Poor wail-
ing child !

She looked like Venus when the goddess
smiled

At liberty of godship, debonair ;
Poor Ariadne ! and her eyelids fair
Hid looks beneath them lent her by Per-
suasion.

And every Grace, with tears of Love's own
passion 50

She wept long ; then she spake : — ' Sweet
sleep did come

While sweetest Theseus went. Oh, glad
and dumb,

I wish he had left me still ! for in my sleep
I saw his Athens, and did gladly keep
My new bride-state within my Theseus'
hall ;

And heard the pomp of Hymen, and the
call

Of " Ariadne, Ariadne," sung
In choral joy ; and there, with joy I hung
Spring-blossoms round love's altar ! — ay,
and wore

A wreath myself ; and felt *him* evermore 60
Oh, evermore beside me, with his mighty
Grave head bowed down in prayer to
Aphroditè !

Why, what a sweet, sweet dream ! *He*
went with it,

And left me here unwedded where I sit !
Persuasion help me ! The dark night did
make me

A brideship, the fair morning takes away ;
My Love had left me when the Hour did
wake me ;

And while I dreamed of marriage, as I
say,

And blest it well, my blessed Theseus left
me :

And thus the sleep, I loved so, has bereft
me. 70

Speak to me, rocks, and tell my grief to-
day,

Who stole my love of Athens ?' . . .

HOW BACCHUS COMFORTS ARIADNE

(DIONYSIACA, LIB. XLVII.)

THEN Bacchus' subtle speech her sorrow
crossed : —

' O maiden, dost thou mourn for having
lost

The false Athenian heart ? and dost thou
 still
 Take thought of Theseus, when thou mayst
 at will
 Have Bacchus for a husband ? Bacchus
 bright !
 A god in place of mortal ! Yes, and
 though
 The mortal youth be charming in thy sight,
 That man of Athens cannot strive be-
 low,
 In beauty and valor, with my deity !
 Thou 'lt tell me of the labyrinthine
 dweller,
 The fierce man-bull he slew: I pray thee,
 be,
 Fair Ariadne, the true deed's true teller,
 And mention thy clue's help ! because, for-
 sooth,
 Thine armed Athenian hero had not
 found
 A power to fight on that prodigious
 ground,
 Unless a lady in her rosy youth
 Had lingered near him: not to speak the
 truth
 Too definitely out till names be known —
 Like Paphia's — Love's — and Ariadne's
 own.
 Thou wilt not say that Athens can com-
 pare
 With Æther, nor that Minos rules like
 Zeus,
 Nor yet that Gnosus has such golden
 air
 As high Olympus. Ha ! for noble use
 We came to Naxos ! Love has well in-
 tended
 To change thy bridegroom ! Happy thou,
 defended
 From entering in thy Theseus' earthly
 hall,
 That thou mayst hear the laughter rise
 and fall
 Instead, where Bacchus rules ! Or wilt
 thou choose
 A still-surpassing glory ? — take it all, —
 A heavenly house, Kronion's self for kin, —
 A place where Cassiopea sits within
 Inferior light, for all her daughter's sake,
 Since Perseus, even amid the stars, must
 take
 Andromeda in chains æthereal !
 But *I* will wreath thee, sweet, an astral
 crown,

And as my queen and spouse thou shalt be
 known —
 Mine, the crown-lover's !' Thus, at length,
 he proved
 His comfort on her; and the maid was
 moved;
 And casting Theseus' memory down the
 brine,
 She straight received the troth of her di-
 vine
 Fair Bacchus; Love stood by to close the
 rite;
 The marriage-chorus struck up clear and
 light,
 Flowers sprouted fast about the chamber
 green,
 And with spring-garlands on their heads, I
 ween,
 The Orchomenian dancers came along
 And danced their rounds in Naxos to the
 song.
 A Hamadryad sang a nuptial dit
 Right shrilly: and a Naiad sat beside
 A fountain, with her bare foot shelving it,
 And hymned of Ariadne, beauteous bride,
 Whom thus the god of grapes had dei-
 fied.
 Ortygia sang out, louder than her wont,
 An ode which Phœbus gave her to be
 tried,
 And leapt in chorus, with her steadfast
 front,
 While prophet Love, the stars have called
 a brother,
 Burnt in his crown, and twined in one
 another
 His love-flower with the purple roses, given
 In type of that new crown assigned in
 heaven.

FROM HESIOD

BACCHUS AND ARIADNE

(THEOG. 947.)

THE golden-haired Bacchus did espouse
 That fairest Ariadne, Minos' daughter,
 And made her wifehood blossom in the
 house;
 Where such protective gifts Kronion
 brought her,
 Nor Death nor Age could find her when
 they sought her.

FROM EURIPIDES

AURORA AND TITHONUS

(TROADES, ANTISTROPHE, 853)

LOVE, Love, who once didst pass the Dardan
portals,
Because of Heavenly passion !
Who once didst lift up Troy in exulta-
tion,
To mingle in thy bond the high Im-
mortals ! —
Love, turned from his own name
To Zeus's shame,
Can help no more at all.
And Eos' self, the fair, white-steeded
Morning, —
Her light which blesses other lands, return-
ing,
Has changed to a gloomy pall !
She looked across the land with eyes of
amber, —
She saw the city's fall, —
She who, in pure embraces,
Had held there, in the hymeneal cham-
ber,
Her children's father, bright Tithonus old,
Whom the four steeds with starry brows
and paces
Bore on, snatched upward, on the car of
gold,
And with him, all the land's full hope of
joy !
The love-charms of the gods are vain for
Troy.

FROM HOMER

HECTOR AND ANDROMACHE

(ILIAD, LIB. VI.)

SHE rushed to meet him: the nurse follow-
ing
Bore on her bosom the unsaddened child,
A simple babe, prince Hector's well-loved
son,
Like a star shining when the world is dark.
Seamandrius, Hector called him; but the
rest
Named him Astyanax, the city's prince,
Because that Hector only had saved Troy.
He, when he saw his son, smiled silently;

While, dropping tears, Andromache
pressed on,
And clung to his hand, and spake, and
named his name. 10

'Hector, my best one, — thine own noble-
ness
Must needs undo thee. Pity hast thou none
For this young child, and this most sad
myself,
Who soon shall be thy widow — since
that soon
The Greeks will slay thee in the general
rush —
And then, for me, what refuge, 'reft of thee,
But to go graveward? Then, no comfort
more
Shall touch me, as in the old sad times thou
know'st —
Grief only — grief ! I have no father now,
No mother mild ! Achilles the divine, 20
He slew my father, sacked his lofty Thebes,
Cilicia's populous city, and slew its king,
Eëtion — father ! — did not spoil the corse,
Because the Greek revered him in his soul,
But burnt the body with its dædal arms,
And poured the dust out gently. Round
that tomb
The Oreads, daughters of the goat-nursed
Zeus,
Tripped in a ring, and planted their green
elms.
There were seven brothers with me in the
house,
Who all went down to Hades in one day, —
For he slew all, Achilles the divine, 31
Famed for his swift feet, — slain among
their herds
Of cloven-footed bulls and flocking sheep !
My mother too, who queened it o'er the
woods
Of Hippoplacia, he, with other spoil,
Seized, — and, for golden ransom, freed too
late, —
Since, as she went home, arrowy Artemis
Met her and slew her at my father's door.
But — oh my Hector, — thou art still to me
Father and mother ! — yes, and brother
dear, 40
O thou, who art my sweetest spouse be-
side !
Come now, and take me into pity ! Stay
I' the town here with us ! Do not make
thy child
An orphan, nor a widow thy poor wife !

Call up the people to the fig-tree, where
The city is most accessible, the wall
Most easy of assault ! — for thrice thereby
The boldest Greeks have mounted to the
breach, —

Both Ajaxes, the famed Idomeneus,
Two sons of Atreus, and the noble one ⁵⁰
Of Tydeus, — whether taught by some
wise seer,

Or by their own souls prompted and in-
spired.'

Great Hector answered : — ' Lady, for these
things

It is my part to care. And I fear most
My Trojans, and their daughters, and their
wives,

Who through their long veils would glance
scorn at me

If, coward-like, I shunned the open war.
Nor doth my own soul prompt me to that
end !

I learnt to be a brave man constantly,
And to fight foremost where my Trojans
fight, ⁶⁰

And vindicate my father's glory and
mine —

Because I know, by instinct and my soul,
The day comes that our sacred Troy must
fall,

And Priam and his people. Knowing
which,

I have no such grief for all my Trojans'
sake,

For Hecuba's, for Priam's, our old king,
Not for my brothers', who so many and
brave

Shall bite the dust before our enemies, —
As, sweet for thee ! — to think some mailed
Greek

Shall lead thee weeping and deprive thy
life ⁷⁰

Of the free sun-sight — that, when gone
away

To Argos, thou shalt throw the distaff there,
Not for thy uses — or shalt carry instead
Upon thy loathing brow, as heavy as doom,
The water of Greek wells — Messeis' own,
Or Hyperea's ! — that some stander-by,
Marking my tears fall, shall say, " This is
She,

The wife of that same Hector who fought
best

Of all the Trojans, when all fought for
Troy " —

Ay ! — and, so speaking, shall renew thy
pang ⁸⁰
That, 'reft of Him so named, thou shouldst
survive

To a slave's life ! But earth shall hide
my corse

Ere that shriek sound, wherewith thou art
dragged from Troy.'

Thus Hector spake, and stretched his arms
to his child.

Against the nurse's breast, with childly
cry,

The boy clung back, and shunned his
father's face,

And feared the glittering brass and waving
hair

Of the high helmet, nodding horror down.
The father smiled, the mother could not
choose

But smile too. Then he lifted from his
brow ⁹⁰

The helm, and set it on the ground to
shine :

Then, kissed his dear child — raised him
with both arms,

And thus invoked Zeus and the general
gods : —

' Zeus, and all godships ! grant this boy of
mine

To be the Trojans' help, as I myself, —
To live a brave life and rule well in
Troy !

Till men shall say, " The son exceeds the
sire

By a far glory." Let him bring home
spoil

Heroic, and make glad his mother's heart.'

With which prayer, to his wife's extended
arms ¹⁰⁰

He gave the child; and she received him
straight

To her bosom's fragrance — smiling up her
tears.

Hector gazed on her till his soul was
moved;

Then softly touched her with his hand and
spake.

' My best one — 'ware of passion and ex-
cess

In any fear. There's no man in the world
Can send me to the grave apart from
fate, —

And no man . . . Sweet, I tell thee . . .
 can fly fate —
 No good nor bad man. Doom is self-ful-
 filled.
 But now, go home, and ply thy woman's
 task 110
 Of wheel and distaff! bid thy maidens
 haste
 Their occupation. War's a care for men —
 For all men born in Troy, and chief for
 me.
 Thus spake the noble Hector, and resumed
 His crested helmet, while his spouse went
 home;
 But as she went, still looked back lov-
 ingly,
 Dropping the tears from her reverted face.

THE DAUGHTERS OF PANDARUS

(*ODYSS., LIB. XX.*)

AND so these daughters fair of Pandarus
 The whirlwinds took. The gods had
 slain their kin:
 They were left orphans in their father's
 house.
 And Aphroditè came to comfort them
 With incense, luscious honey, and fragrant
 wine;
 And Herè gave them beauty of face and
 soul
 Beyond all women; purest Artemis
 Endowed them with her stature and white
 grace;
 And Pallas taught their hands to flash
 along
 Her famous looms. Then, bright with
 deity,
 Toward far Olympus, Aphroditè went
 To ask of Zeus (who has his thunder-
 joys
 And his full knowledge of man's mingled
 fate)
 How best to crown those other gifts with
 love
 And worthy marriage: but, what time she
 went,
 The ravishing Harpies snatched the maids
 away,
 And gave them up, for all their loving
 eyes,
 To serve the Furies who hate constantly.

ANOTHER VERSION

So the storms bore the daughters of Pan-
 darus out into thrall —
 The gods slew their parents; the orphans
 were left in the hall.
 And there, came, to feed their young lives,
 Aphroditè divine,
 With the incense, the sweet-tasting honey,
 the sweet-smelling wine;
 Herè brought them her wit above woman's,
 and beauty of face;
 And pure Artemis gave them her stature,
 that form might have grace:
 And Athenè instructed their hands in her
 works of renown;
 Then, afar to Olympus, divine Aphroditè
 moved on:
 To complete other gifts, by uniting each
 girl to a mate,
 She sought Zeus, who has joy in the thun-
 der and knowledge of fate,
 Whether mortals have good chance or ill.
 But the Harpies a-late
 In the storm came, and swept off the maid-
 ens, and gave them to wait,
 With that love in their eyes, on the Furies
 who constantly hate.

FROM ANACREON

ODE TO THE SWALLOW

THOU indeed, little Swallow,
 A sweet yearly comer,
 Art building a hollow
 New nest every summer,
 And straight dost depart
 Where no gazing can follow,
 Past Memphis, down Nile!
 Ah! but Love all the while
 Builds his nest in my heart,
 Through the cold winter-weeks:
 And as one Love takes flight,
 Comes another, O Swallow,
 In an egg warm and white,
 And another is callow.
 And the large gaping beaks
 Chirp all day and all night:
 And the Loves who are older
 Help the young and the poor Loves,
 And the young Loves grown bolder
 Increase by the score Loves —

Why, what can be done ?
 If a noise comes from one
 Can I bear all this rout of a hundred and
 more Loves ?

FROM HEINE

THE LAST TRANSLATION

ROME, 1860

I

I

OUT of my own great woe
 I make my little songs,
 Which rustle their feathers in throngs
 And beat on her heart even so.

II

They found the way, for their part,
 Yet come again, and complain:
 Complain, and are not fain
 To say what they saw in her heart.

II

I

Art thou indeed so adverse ?
 Art thou so changed indeed ?
 Against the woman who wrongs me
 I cry to the world in my need.

II

O recreant lips unthankful,
 How could ye speak evil, say,
 Of the man who so well has kissed you
 On many a fortunate day ?

III

I

My child, we were two children,
 Small, merry by childhood's law;
 We used to crawl to the hen-house
 And hide ourselves in the straw.

II

We crowed like cocks, and whenever
 The passers near us drew —
 Cock-a-doodle ! they thought
 'T was a real cock that crew.

III

The boxes about our courtyard
 We carpeted to our mind,
 And lived there both together —
 Kept house in a noble kind.

IV

The neighbor's old cat often
 Came to pay us a visit;
 We made her a bow and curtsey,
 Each with a compliment in it.

V

After her health we asked
 Our care and regard to evince —
 (We have made the very same speeches
 To many an old cat since).

VI

We also sat and wisely
 Discoursed, as old folk do,
 Complaining how all went better
 In those good times we knew, —

VII

How love and truth and believing
 Had left the world to itself,
 And how so dear was the coffee,
 And how so rare was the pelf.

VIII

The children's games are over,
 The rest is over with youth —
 The world, the good games, the good times,
 The belief, and the love, and the truth.

IV

I

Thou lovest me not, thou lovest me not !
 'T is scarcely worth a sigh:
 Let me look in thy face, and no king in his
 place
 Is a gladder man than I.

II

Thou hatest me well, thou hatest me
 well —
 Thy little red mouth has told:
 Let it reach me a kiss, and, however it
 is,
 My child, I am well consoled.

30

40

10

20

50

V

I

My own sweet Love, if thou in the grave,
 The darksome grave, wilt be,
 Then will I go down by the side, and
 grave
 Love-room for thee and me.

II

I kiss and caress and press thee wild,
 Thou still, thou cold, thou white !
 I wail, I tremble, and weeping mild,
 Turn to a corpse at the right.

III

The Dead stand up, the midnight calls,
 They dance in airy swarms —
 We two keep still where the grave-shade
 falls,
 And I lie on in thine arms.

IV

The Dead stand up, the Judgment-day 70
 Bids such to weal or woe —
 But nought shall trouble us where we stay
 Embraced and embracing below.

VI

I

The years they come and go,
 The races drop in the grave,
 Yet never the love doth so
 Which here in my heart I have.

II

Could I see thee but once, one day,
 And sink down so on my knee,
 And die in thy sight while I say,
 'Lady, I love but thee !'

APPENDIX

I. JUVENILIA

I

THE BATTLE OF MARATHON

On October 5, 1843, Elizabeth Barrett wrote as follows to Mr. R. H. Horne, who had requested biographical details for the sketch which he wished to embody in *A New Spirit of the Age*, concerning her first considerable poetical production: 'My great epic of eleven or twelve years old, in four books, and called *The Battle of Marathon*, and of which fifty copies were printed because papa was bent upon spoiling me, is simply Pope's Homer done over again, or rather undone; for although a curious production for a child, it gives evidence only of an imitative faculty, and an ear, and a good deal of reading in a peculiar direction.' This privately printed edition dedicated to the father of the poetess (LONDON: printed for W. Lindsell, 87 Wimpole St., Cavendish Square, 1820) was first reprinted for publication in London in 1891.

BOOK I

THE war of Greece with Persia's haughty King,
No vulgar strain, eternal Goddess, sing!
What dreary ghosts to glutt'd Pluto fled,
What nations suffered, and what heroes bled:
Sing Asia's powerful Prince, who envious saw
The fame of Athens, and her might in war;
And scorns her power, at Cytherea's call
Her ruin plans, and meditates her fall;
How Athens, blinded to the approaching chains
By Vulcan's artful spouse, unmoved remains;
Deceived by Venus thus, unconquered Greece
Forgot her glories in the lap of peace;
While Asia's realms, and Asia's lord prepare
T' ensnare her freedom, by the wiles of war:
Hippias t' exalt upon th' Athenian throne,
Where once Pisistratus his father shone.
For yet her son Æneas' wrongs impart
Revenge and grief to Cytherea's heart;
And still from smoking Troy's once sacred wall,
Does Priam's reeking shade for vengeance call.
Minerva saw, and Paphia's Queen defied,
A boon she begged, nor Jove the boon denied;

That Greece should rise, triumphant o'er her foe,
Disarm th' invaders, and their power o'erthrow.
Her prayer obtained, the blue-eyed Goddess flies
As the fierce eagle, thro' the radiant skies.
To Aristides then she stood confessed,
Shews Persia's arts, and fires his warlike breast:
Then pours celestial ardor o'er his frame
And points the way to glory and to fame.
Awe struck the Chief, and swells his troubled soul,
In pride and wonder thoughts progressive roll.
He inly groaned and smote his laboring breast,
At once by Pallas, and by care oppress.
Inspired he moved, earth echoed where he trod,
All full of Heaven, all burning with the God.
Th' Athenians viewed with awe the mighty man,
To whom the Chief impassioned thus began:
'Hear, all ye Sons of Greece! Friends, Fathers, hear!
The Gods command it, and the Gods revere!
No madness mine, for mark, oh favored Greeks!
That by my mouth the martial Goddess speaks!
This know, Athenians, that proud Persia now
Prepares to twine thy laurels on her brow;
Behold her princely Chiefs their weapons wield
By Venus fired, and shake the brazen shield.
I hear their shouts that echo to the skies,
I see their lances blaze, their banners rise,
I hear the clash of arms, the battle's roar,
And all the din and thunder of the war!
I know that Greeks shall purchase just renown,
And fame impartial, shall Athena crown.
Then Greeks, prepare your arms! award the yoke,
Thus Jove commands'—sublime the hero spoke;
The Greeks assent with shouts, and rend the skies
With martial clamor, and tumultuous cries.
So struggling winds with rage indignant sweep
The azure waters of the silent deep,
Sudden the seas rebelling, frightful rise,
And dash their foaming surges to the skies;
Burst the firm sand, and boil with dreadful roar,

Lift their black waves, and combat with the shore.

So each brave Greek in thought aspires to fame,
Stung by his words, and dread of future shame ;

Glory's own fires within their bosom rise
And shouts tumultuous thunder to the skies.

But Love's celestial Queen resentful saw
The Greeks (by Pallas warned) prepare for war ;

Th' indignant Goddess of the Paphian bower
Deceives Themistocles with heavenly power ; 70
The hero rising spoke, ' Oh rashly blind,
What sudden fury thus has seized thy mind ?
Boy as thou art, such empty dreams beware !
Shall we, for griefs and wars unsought, pre-
pare ?

The will of mighty Jove, whate'er it be,
Obey, and own th' Omnipotent decree.
If our disgrace and fall the fates employ,
Why did we triumph o'er perfidious Troy ?
Why, say, oh Chief, in that eventful hour
Did Grecian heroes crush Dardanian power ? '
Him eyeing sternly, thus the Greek replies, 81
Renowned for truth, and as Minerva wise,
' Oh Son of Greece, no heedless boy am I,
Despised in battle's toils, nor first to fly,
Nor dreams or phrenzy call my words astray,
The heaven-sent mandate pious I obey.
If Pallas did not all my words inspire,
May heaven pursue me with unceasing ire !
But if (oh grant my prayer, almighty Jove)
I hear a mandate from the Courts above, 90
Then thro' yon heaven, let awful thunder roar
Till Greeks believe my mission, and adore !'

He ceased — and thro' the host one murmur
ran,

With eyes transfixed upon the godlike man.
But hark ! o'er earth expands the solemn
sound,

It lengthening grows — heaven's azure vaults
resound,
While peals of thunder beat the echoing
ground.

Prostrate, croun'd, divine Themistocles
Embraced the hero's hands, and clasped his
knees :

' Behold me here,' (the awe-struck Chieftain
cries 100

While tears repentant glisten in his eyes,)
' Behold me here, thy friendship to entreat,
Themistocles, a suppliant at thy feet.
Before no haughty despot's royal throne
This knee has bent — it bends to thee alone
Thy mission to adore, thy truth to own. }
Behold me Jove, and witness what I swear
By all on earth I love, by all in heav'n I fear,
Some fiend inspired my words, of dark design,
Some fiend concealed beneath a robe di-
vine ; 110

Then aid me in my prayer, ye Gods above,
Bid Aristides give me back his love !'
He spake and wept ; benign the godlike man
Felt tears descend and paused, then thus be-
gan,

' Thrice worthy Greek, for this shall we con-
tend ?

Ah no ! I feel thy worth, thou more than
friend,

Pardon sincere, Themistocles, receive ;
The heart declares 'tis easy to forgive.'
He spake divine, his eye with Pallas burns,
He spoke and sighed, and sighed and wept by
turns. 120

Themistocles beheld the Chief oppress,
Awe-struck he paused, then rushed upon his
breast,

Whom sage Miltiades with joy addressed.
' Hero of Greece, worthy a hero's name
Adored by Athens, fav'rite child of fame !
Glory's own spirit does with truth combine
To form a soul, so godlike, so divine !
Oh Aristides rise, our Chief ! to save
The fame, the might of Athens from the
grave.

Nor then refuse thy noble arm to lend 130
To guard Athena, and her state defend.
First I, obedient, 'custom'd homage pay
To own a hero's and a leader's sway.'
He said, and would have knelt ; the man
divine

Perceived his will, and stayed the Sire's de-
sign.

' Not mine, oh Sage, to lead this gallant band,'
He generous said, and grasped his aged hand,
' Proud as I am in glory's arms to rise,
Athenian Greeks, to shield your liberties,
Yet 'tis not mine to lead your powerful
state, 140

Enough it is to tempt you to be great ;
Be't for Miltiades, experienced sage,
To curb your ardor, and restrain your rage,
Your souls to temper — by his skill prepare
To succor Athens, and conduct the war.
More fits my early youth to purchase fame,
By deeds in arms t' immortalize my name.'
Firmly he spake, his words the Greek inspire,
And all were hushed to listen and admire.
The Sage thus — ' Most Allied to Gods ! the
fame, 150

The pride, the glory of the Grecian name,
E'en by thee, Chief, I swear, to whom is given
The sacred mandate of yon marble heaven —
To lead, not undeserving of thy love,
T' avert the yoke, if so determines Jove.'
Amidst the host imagination rose
And paints the combat, but disdains the woes.
And heaven-born fancy, with dishevelled hair,
Points to the ensanguined field, and victory
there.

But soon, too soon, these empty dreams are
driven 160
Forth from their breasts — but soothing hope
is given,
Hope sprung from Jove, man's sole, and en-
vied heav'n.

Then all his glory, Aristides felt,
And begged the Chieftain's blessing as he
knelt : .

Miltiades his pious arms outspread,
Called Jove's high spirit on the hero's head,
Nor called unheard — sublime in upper air

The bird of Jove appeared to bless his prayer.
Lightning he breathed, not harsh, not fiercely
bright,

But one pure stream of heaven-collected light:
Jove's sacred smile lulls every care to rest, 171
Calms every woe, and gladdens every breast.
But what shrill blast thus bursts upon the ear;
What banners rise, what heralds' forms ap-
pear?

That haughty mien, and that commanding face
Bespeak them Persians, and of noble race;
One on whose hand Darius' signet beamed,
Superior to the rest, a leader seemed,
With brow contracted, and with flashing eye
Thus threatening spoke, in scornful majesty:
'Know Greeks that I, a sacred herald, bring
The awful mandate of the Persian King, 182
To force allegiance from the Sons of Greece.
Then earth and water give, nor scorn his peace.
For, if for homage, back reproof I bear,
To meet his wrath, his vengeful wrath, prepare,
For not in vain ye scorn his dread command
When Asia's might comes thundering in his
hand.'

To whom Miltiades with kindling eye,
'We scorn Darius, and his threats defy; 190
And now, prond herald, shall we stoop to
shame?

Shall Athens tremble at a tyrant's name?
Persian away! such idle dreams forbear,
And shun our anger and our vengeance fear.'
'Oh! vain thy words,' the herald fierce began;
'Thrice vain thy dotaged words, oh powerless
man,

Sons of a desert, hoping to withstand
All the joint forces of Darius' hand,
Fools, fools, the King of millions to defy,
For freedom's empty name, to ask to die! 200
Yet stay, till Persia's powers their banners
rear,

Then shall ye learn our forces to revere,
And ye, oh impotent, shall deign to fear!'
To whom great Aristides: rising ire
Boiled in his breast, and set his soul on fire:
'Oh wretch accurst,' the hero cried, 'to seek
T' insult experienced age, t' insult a Greek!
Inglorious slave! whom truth and heaven deny,
Unfit to live, yet more unfit to die: }

But, trained to pass the goblet at the board 210
And servile kiss the footsteps of thy lord,
Whose wretched life no glorious deeds beguile,
Who lives upon the semblance of a smile,
Die! thy base shade to gloomy regions fled,
Join there the shivering phantoms of the dead.
Base slave, return to dust' — his victim then
In fearful accents cried, 'Oh best of men,
Most loved of Gods, most merciful, most just,
Behold me humbled, grovelling in the dust:
Not mine th' offence, the mandate stern I
bring 220

From great Darius, Asia's tyrant King.
Oh strike not, Chief, not mine the guilt, not
mine,
Ah o'er those brows severe, let mercy shine,
So dear to heav'n, of origin divine! }
Tributes, lands, gold, shall wealthy Persia
give,

All, and yet more, but bid me, wretched, live!'
He trembling, thus persuades with fond en-
treat

And nearer prest, and clasped the hero's feet.
Forth from the Grecian's breast, all rage is
driv'n, 229

He lifts his arms, his eyes, his soul to heav'n.
'Hear, Jove omnipotent, all wise, all great,
To whom all fate is known; whose will is fate;
Hear thou all-seeing one, hear Sire divine,
Teach me thy will, and be thy wisdom mine!
Behold this suppliant! life or death decree;
Be thine the judgment, for I bend to thee.'
And thus the Sire of Gods and men replies,
While pealing thunder shakes the groaning
skies.

The awful voice thro' spheres unknown was
driv'n

Resounding thro' the dark'ning realms of hea-
ven. 240

Aloft in air sublime the echo rode,
And earth resounds the glory of the God:
'Son of Athena, let the coward die,
And his pale ghost, to Pluto's empire fly;
Son of Athena, our command obey,
Know thou our night, and then adore our
sway.'

Th' Almighty spake — the heavens convulsive
start,

From the black clouds the whizzing lightnings
dart

And dreadful dance along the troubled sky
Struggling with fate in awful mystery. 250
The hero heard, and Jove his breast inspired
Nor now by pity touched, but anger fired;
While his big heart within his bosom burns,
Off from his feet the clinging slave he spurns.
Vain were his cries, his prayers 'gainst fate
above,

Jove wills his fall, and who can strive with
Jove?

To whom the hero — 'Hence to Pluto's sway,
To realms of night, ne'er lit by Cynthia's ray,
Hence, from yon gulph the earth and water
bring

And crown with victory your mighty King.'
He said — and where the gulph of death ap-
peared 261

Where raging waves, with rocks sublimely
reared,
He hurled the wretch at once of hope be-
reaved;

Struggling he fell, the roaring flood received.
E'en now for life his shrieks, his groans im-
plore,

And now death's latent agony is o'er,
He struggling sinks, and sinks to rise no more. }
The train amaz'd, behold their herald die,
And Greece in arms — they tremble and they
fly;

So some fair herd upon the verdant mead 270
See by the lion's jaws their foremost bleed,
Fearful they fly, lest what revolving fate
Had doomed their leader, should themselves
await.

Then shouts of glorious war, and fame resound,
Athena's brazen gates receive the lofty sound.

But she whom Paphia's radiant climes adore
 From her own bower the work of Pallas saw :
 Tumultuous thoughts within her bosom rise,
 She calls her car, and at her will it flies.
 Th' eternal car with gold celestial burns, 280
 Its polished wheel on brazen axle turns :
 This to his spouse by Vulcan's self was given
 An offering worthy of the forge of heav'n.
 The Goddess mounts the seat, and seized the
 reins,

The doves celestial cut the aerial plains,
 Before the sacred birds and car of gold
 Self-moved the radiant gates of heav'n unfold.
 She then dismounts, and thus to mighty Jove
 Begins the Mother and the Queen of Love.
 'And is it thus, oh Sire, that fraud should
 spring 290

From the pure breast of heaven's eternal King ?
 Was it for this, Saturnius' word was given
 That Greece should fall 'mong nations curst of
 heaven ?

Thou swore by hell's black flood, and heaven
 above,

Is this, oh say, is this the faith of Jove ?
 Behold stern Pallas, Athens' Sons alarms,
 Darius' herald crushed, and Greece in arms.
 E'en now behold her crested streamers fly,
 Each Greek resolved to triumph or to die : 299
 Ah me unhappy ! when shall sorrow cease ;
 Too well I know the fatal might of Greece ;
 Was 't not enough, imperial Troy should fall,
 That Argive hands should raze the god-built
 wall ?

Was 't not enough Anchises' Son should roam
 Far from his native shore and much loved home ?
 All this unconscious of thy fraud I bore,
 For thou, oh Sire, t' allay my vengeance, swore
 That Athens towering in her might should fall
 And Rome should triumph on her prostrate
 wall ;

But oh, if haughty Greece should captive bring
 The great Darius, Persia's mighty King, 311
 What power her pride, what power her might
 shall move ?

Not e'en the Thunderer, not eternal Jove,
 E'en to thy heav'n shall rise her towering fame,
 And prostrate nations will adore her name.
 Rather on me thy instant vengeance take
 Than all should fall for Cytherea's sake !
 Oh ! hurl me flaming in the burning lake, }
 Transfix me there unknown to Olympian calm,
 Launch thy red bolt, and bare thy crimson arm.
 I'd suffer all — more — bid my woes increase 321
 To hear but one sad groan from haughty Greece.
 She thus her grief with fruitless rage expressed,
 And pride and anger swelled within her breast.
 But he whose thunders awe the troubled sky
 Thus mournful spake, and curbed the rising
 sigh :

'And it is thus celestial pleasures flow ?
 E'en here shall sorrow reach and mortal woe ?
 Shall strife the heavenly powers for ever move
 And e'en insult the sacred ear of Jove ? 330
 Know, oh rebellious, Greece shall rise sublime
 In fame the first, nor, daughter, mine the crime,
 In valor foremost, and in virtue great,
 Fame's highest glories shall attend her state.

So fate ordains, nor all my boasted power
 Can raise those virtues, or those glories low'r :
 But rest secure, destroying time must come
 And Athens' self must own imperial Rome.
 Then the great Thunderer, and with visage mild,
 Shook his ambrosial curls before his child, 340
 And bending awful gave the eternal nod ;
 Heav'n quaked, and fate adored the parent
 God.

Joy seized the Goddess of the smiles and loves,
 Nor longer, care, her heavenly bosom moves.
 Hope rose, and o'er her soul its powers dis-
 played,

Nor checked by sorrow, nor by grief dismayed.
 She thus — 'Oh thou, whose awful thunders roll
 Thro' heaven's etherial vaults and shake the
 Pole,

Eternal Sire, so wonderfully great,
 To whom is known the secret page of fate, 350
 Say, shall great Persia, next to Rome most dear
 To Venus' breast, shall Persia learn to fear ?
 Say, shall her fame, and princely glories cease ?
 Shall Persia, servile, own the sway of Greece ?'

To whom the Thunderer bent his brow divine
 And thus in accents heavenly and benign ;
 'Daughter, not mine the secrets to relate,
 The mysteries of all-revolving fate. 358
 But ease thy breast ; enough for thee to know,
 What powerful fate decrees, will Jove bestow !'
 He then her griefs, and anxious woes beguiled,
 And in his sacred arms embraced his child.
 Doubt clouds the Goddess' breast — she calls
 her car,

And lightly sweeps the liquid fields of air.
 When sable night midst silent nature springs,
 And o'er Athena shakes her drowsy wings,
 The Paphian Goddess from Olympus flies,
 And leaves the starry senate of the skies ;
 To Athens' heaven-blest towers, the Queen re-
 pairs

To raise more sufferings, and to cause more
 cares ; 370

The Pylian Sage she moved so loved by fame,
 In face, in wisdom, and in voice the same.
 Twelve Chiefs in sleep absorbed and grateful
 rest

She first beheld, and them she thus address.
 'Immortal Chiefs,' the fraudulent Goddess cries,
 While all the hero kindled in her eyes,
 'For you, these aged arms did I employ,
 For you, we razed the sacred walls of Troy,
 And now for you, my shivering shade is driven
 From Pluto's dreary realms by urgent Heaven ;
 Then, oh be wise, nor tempt th' unequal fight
 In open fields, but wait superior might 382
 Within immortal Athens' sacred wall,
 There strive, there triumph, nor there fear to
 fall ;

To own the Thunderer's sway, then Greeks pre-
 pare.'

Benign she said, and melted into air.

BOOK II

When from the briny deep, the orient morn
 Exalts her purple light, and beams unshorn ;
 And when the flaming orb of infant day 389

Glare o'er the earth, and re-illumes the sky ;
 The twelve deceived, with souls on fire arose,
 While the false vision fresh in memory glows ;
 The Senate first they sought, whose lofty wall
 Midst Athens rises, and o'er shadows all ;
 The pride of Greece, it lifts its front sublime
 Unbent amidst the ravages of time :
 High on their towering seats, the heroes found
 The Chiefs of Athens solemn ranged around ;
 One of the twelve, the great Clombrotus, then,
 Renowned for piety, and loved by men : 400
 'Assembled heroes, Chief to Pallas dear,
 All great in battle, and in virtue, hear !
 When night with sable wings extended rose
 And wrapt our weary limbs in sweet repose,
 I and my friends, Cydoon famed in song,
 Thelon the valiant, Heracles the strong,
 Cleon and Thermosites, in battle great
 By Pallas loved, and blest by partial fate,
 To us and other six, while day toils steep
 Our eyes in happy dreams, and grateful 410
 sleep,
 The Pylion Sage appeared, but not as when
 On Troy's last dust he stood, the pride of
 men ;
 Driven from the shore of Acheron he came
 From lower realms to point the path to fame,
 "Oh glorious Chiefs," the sacred hero said,
 "For you and for your fame, all Troy has
 bled ;
 Hither for you, my shivering shade is driv'n
 From Pluto's dreary realms by urgent Heav'n ;
 Then oh be wise, nor tempt th' unequal fight
 In open field, but wait superior might 420
 Within immortal Athens' sacred wall ;
 There strive, there triumph, nor there fear to
 fall !
 To own the Thunderer's sway, then Greeks
 prepare."
 Benign he said, and melted into air.
 "Leave us not thus," I cried, "Oh Pylion
 Sage,
 Experienced Nestor, famed for reverend age,
 Say first, great hero, shall the trump of fame
 Our glory publish, or disclose our shame ?
 Oh what are Athens' fates ?" In vain I said ;
 E'en as I spoke the shadowy Chief had fled. 430
 Then here we flew, to own the vision's sway
 And heaven's decrees to adore and to obey.
 He thus — and as before the blackened skies,
 Sound the hoarse breezes, murmuring as they
 rise,
 So thro' th' assembled Greeks, one murmur
 rose,
 One long dull echo lengthening as it goes.
 Then all was hushed in silence — breathless
 awe
 Opprest each tongue, and trembling they
 adore.
 But now uprising from th' astonished Chiefs,
 Divine Miltiades exposed his griefs. 440
 For well the godlike warrior Sage had seen
 The frauds deceitful of the Paphian Queen,
 And feared for Greece, for Greece to whom
 is given
 Eternal fame, the purest gift of heaven.
 And yet he feared — the pious hero rose

Majestic in his sufferings, in his woes ;
 Grief clammed his tongue, but soon his spirit
 woke,
 Words burst aloft, and all the Patriot spoke.
 'Oh Athens, Athens ! all the snares I view ;
 Thus shalt thou fall, and fall inglorious
 too ! 450
 Are all thy boasted dignities no more ?
 Is all thy might, are all thy glories o'er ?
 Oh woe on woe, unutterable grief !
 Not Nestor's shade, that cursed phantom
 chief,
 But in that reverend air, that lofty mien,
 Behold the frauds of Love's revengeful Queen.
 Not yet, her thoughts does vengeance cease t'
 employ ;
 Her son Æneas' wrongs, and burning Troy
 Not yet forgotten lie within her breast,
 Nor soothed by time, nor by despair de-
 prest. 460
 Greeks still extolled by glory and by fame,
 For yet, oh Chiefs ! ye bear a Grecian name,
 If in these walls, these sacred walls we wait
 The might of Persia, and the will of fate,
 Before superior force will Athens fall
 And one o'erwhelming ruin bury all.
 Then in the open plain your might essay,
 Rush on to battle, crush Darius' sway ;
 The frauds of Venus, warrior Greeks, beware,
 Disdain the Persian foes, nor stoop to fear.' 470
 This said, Clombrotus him indignant heard,
 Nor felt his wisdom, nor his wrath he feared,
 With rage the Chief, the godlike Sage beheld,
 And passion in his stubborn soul rebelled.
 'Thrice impious man,' th' infuriate Chieftain
 cries,
 (Flames black and fearful, flashing from his
 eyes.)
 'Where lies your spirit, Greeks ? and can ye
 bow
 To this proud upstart of your power so low ?
 What ! does his aspect awe ye ! is his eye
 So full of haughtiness and majesty ? 480
 Behold the impious soul, that dares defy
 The power of Gods and Sovereign of the sky !
 And can your hands no sacred weapon wield,
 To crush the tyrant, and your country shield ?
 On, Greeks ! — your sons, your homes, your
 country free
 From such usurping Chiefs and tyranny !'
 He said, and grasped his weapon — at his
 words
 Beneath the horizon gleamed ten thousand
 swords,
 Ten thousand swords e'en in one instant raised,
 Sublime they danced aloft, and midst the Senate
 blazed. 490
 Nor wisdom checked, nor gratitude repress,
 They rose, and flashed before the Sage's
 breast.
 With pride undaunted, greatness unsubdued,
 Gainst him in arms, the impetuous Greeks he
 viewed,
 Unarmed, unawed, before th' infuriate bands,
 Nor begged for life, nor stretched his suppliant
 hands.
 He stood astounded, riveted, oppressed

By grief unspeakable, which swelled his breast;
 Life, feeling, being, sense forgotten lie,
 Buried in one wide waste of misery. 500
 Can this be Athens! this her Senate's pride?
 He asked but gratitude, — was this denied?
 Tho' Europe's homage at his feet were hurled
 Athens forsakes him — Athens was his world.
 Unutterable woe! by anguish stung
 All his full soul rushed heaving to his tongue,
 And thoughts of power, of fame, of greatness
 o'er,
 He cried 'Athenians!' and he could no more.
 Awed by that voice of agony, that word,
 Hushed were the Greeks, and sheathed the
 obedient sword, 510
 They stood abashed — to them the ancient
 Chief
 Began — and thus relieved his swelling grief:
 'Athenians! warrior Greeks! my words reverse!
 Strike me, but listen — bid me die, but hear!
 Hear not Clombrotus, when he bids you wait,
 At Athens' walls, Darius and your fate;
 I feel that Pallas' self, my soul inspires
 My mind she strengthens, and my bosom fires;
 Strike, Greeks! but hear me; think not to
 this heart
 Yon thirsty swords, one breath of fear impart!
 Such slavish, low born thoughts, to Greeks un-
 known, 521
 A Persian feels, and cherishes alone!
 Hear me, Athenians! hear me, and believe,
 See Greece mistaken! e'en the Gods deceive.
 But fate yet wavers — yet may wisdom move
 These threatening woes and thwart the Queen
 of Love.
 Obey my counsels, and invoke for aid
 The cloud-compelling God, and blue-eyed
 maid;
 I fear not for myself the silent tomb,
 Death lies in every shape, and death must
 come. 530
 But ah! ye mock my truth, traduce my fame,
 Ye blast my honor, stigmatize my name!
 Ye call me tyrant when I wish thee free,
 Usurper, when I live but, Greece, for thee!
 And thou the Chief — and boding silence
 drowned
 Each clam'rous tongue, and sullen reigned
 around.
 'Oh Chief!' great Aristides first began,
 'Mortal yet perfect, godlike and yet man!
 Boast of ungrateful Greece! my prayer attend,
 Oh! be my Chieftain, Guardian, Father,
 Friend! 540
 And ye, oh Greeks! impetuous and abhorred,
 Again presumptuous, lift the rebel sword,
 Again your weapons raise, in hateful ire,
 To crush the Leader, Hero, Patriot, Sire!
 Not such was Greece, when Greeks united
 stood
 To hate perfidious Troy in hostile blood,
 Not such were Greeks inspired by glory; then
 As Gods they conquered, now they're less
 than men!
 Degenerate race! now lost to once loved fame,
 Traitors to Greece, and to the Grecian name!

Who now your honors, who your praise will
 seek? 551
 Who now shall glory in the name of Greek?
 But since such discords your base souls divide,
 Procure the lots, let Jove and Heaven decide.'
 To him Clombrotus thus admiring cries,
 'Thy thoughts how wondrous, and thy words
 how wise!
 So let it be, avert the threatened woes,
 And Jove be present, and the right disclose;
 But give me, Sire of Gods and powers above,
 The heavenly vision, and my truth to prove! 560
 Give me t' avenge the breach of all thy laws,
 T' avenge myself, then aid my righteous cause!
 If this thou wilt, I'll to thine altars lead
 Twelve bulls which to thy sacred name shall
 bleed,
 Six snow-white heifers of a race divine
 Prostrate shall fall, and heap the groaning
 shrine.
 Nor this the most — six rams that fearless
 stray
 Untouched by man, for thee this arm shall
 slay.'
 Thus prayed the Chief, with shouts the hea-
 vens resound;
 Jove weighs the balance and the lots go
 round! 570
 Declare, oh muse! for to thy piercing eyes
 The book of fate irrevocably lies;
 What lots leapt forth, on that eventful day
 Who won, who lost, all seeing Goddess, say!
 First great Clombrotus all his fortune tried
 And strove with fate, but Jove his prayer de-
 nied.
 Infuriate to the skies his arms are driven,
 And raging thus upbraids the King of Heaven.
 'Is this the virtue of the blest abodes,
 And this the justice of the God of Gods? 580
 Can he who hurls the bolt, and shakes the
 sky
 The prayer of truth, unblemished truth, deny?
 Has he no faith by whom the clouds are riven,
 Who sits superior on the throne of Heaven?
 No wonder earth-born men are prone to fall
 In sin, or listen to dishonor's call,
 When Gods, th' immortal Gods, transgress the
 laws
 Of truth, and sin against a righteous cause.'
 Furious he said, by anger's spirit fired,
 Then sullen from the Senate walls retired. 590
 'T is now Miltiades' stern fate to dare,
 But first he lifts his pious soul in prayer.
 'Daughter of Jove!' the mighty Chief began,
 'Without thy wisdom, frail and weak is man.
 A phantom Greece adores; oh show thy power,
 And prove thy love in this eventful hour!
 Crown all thy glory, all thy might declare!
 The Chieftain prayed, and Pallas heard his
 prayer.
 Swayed by the presence of the power divine,
 The fated lot, Miltiades, was thine! 600
 That hour the swelling trump of partial fame
 Diffused eternal glory on thy name!
 'Daughter of Jove,' he cries, 'unconquered
 maid!
 Thy power I own, and I confess thy aid,

For this twelve ewes upon thy shrine shall
 smoke
 Of milk-white fleece, the comeliest of their
 flock,
 While hecatombs and generous sacrifice
 Shall fume and blacken half th' astonished
 skies,
 And thus the Chief — the shouting Greeks ad-
 mire,
 While truth's bright spirit sets their souls on
 fire. 610
 Then thus Themistocles, 'Ye Grecian host,
 Not now the time for triumph or for boast.
 Now, Greeks! for graver toils your minds pre-
 pare,
 Not for the strife, but council of the war.
 Behold the sacred herald! sent by Greece
 To Sparta's vales now hushed in leagues of
 peace;
 Her Chiefs, to aid the common cause, t' im-
 plore,
 And bid Darius shun the Argive shore;
 Behold him here! then let the leader Greek
 Command the bearer of our hopes to speak.'
 And thus the Sage, 'Where'er the herald
 stands, 621
 Bid him come forth, 'tis Athens' Chief com-
 mands,
 And bid him speak with freedom uncontrolled,
 His thoughts deliver and his charge unfold.'
 He said and sat — the Greeks impatient wait
 The will of Sparta, and Athena's fate.
 Silent they sat — so ere the whirlwinds rise
 Ere billows foam and thunder to the skies,
 Nature in death-like calm her breath suspends,
 And hushed in silent awe, th' approaching
 storm attends. 630
 Now midst the Senate's walls the herald
 stands:
 'Ye Greeks,' he said, and stretched his sacred
 hands,
 'Assembled heroes, ye Athenian bands,
 And thou beloved of Jove, our Chief, oh Sage,
 Renowned for wisdom, as renowned for age,
 And all ye Chiefs in battle rank divine!
 No joyful mission swayed by Pallas mine.
 The hardy Spartans, with one voice declare
 Their will to aid our freedom and our war,
 Instant they armed, by zeal and impulse
 driven, 640
 But on the plains of the mysterious heaven
 Comets and fires were writ — and awful sign,
 And dreadful omen of the wrath divine:
 While threatened plagues upon their shores ap-
 pear,
 They curb their valor, all subdued by fear;
 The oracles declare the will above,
 And of the sister and the wife of Jove,
 That not until the moon's bright course was
 o'er
 The Spartan warriors should desert their shore.
 Threats following threats succeed the mandate
 dire, 650
 Plagues to themselves, and to their harvest
 fire.
 The Spartan Chiefs desist, their march delay
 To wait th' appointed hour and heaven obey.

Grief smote my heart, my hopes and mission
 vain;
 Their town I quitted for my native plain,
 And when an eminence I gained, in woe
 I gazed upon the verdant fields below,
 Where nature's ample reign extending wide,
 Displays her graces with commanding pride;
 Where cool Eurotas winds her limpid floods 660
 Thro' verdant valleys, and thro' shady woods;
 And crowned in majesty o'ertowering all
 In bright effulgence, Sparta's lofty wall.
 To these I looked farewell, and humbled,
 bowed
 In chastened sorrow, to the thundering God.
 'Twas thus I mused, when from a verdant
 grove
 That wafts delicious perfume from above,
 The monster Pan his form gigantic reared,
 And dreadful to my awe-struck sight appeared.
 I hailed the God who reigns supreme below,
 Known by the horns that started from his
 brow; 671
 Up to the hips a goat, but man's his face
 Tho' grim, and stranger to celestial grace.
 Within his hand a shepherd's crook he bore
 The gift of Dian, on th' Arcadian shore;
 Before th' immortal power I, fearing, bowed
 Congealed with dread, and thus addressed the
 God:
 "Comes Hermes' Son, as awful as his Sire,
 To vent upon the Greeks immortal ire?
 Is't not enough, the mandate stern I bring 680
 From Sparta's Chiefs, and Sparta's royal King,
 That heaven enjoins them to refrain from fight
 Till Dian fills again her horns with light?
 Then vain their aid, ere then may Athens fall
 And Persia's haughty Chiefs invest her wall."
 I said and sighed, the God in accents mild
 My sorrow thus and rigid griefs beguiled:
 "Not to destroy I come, oh chosen Greek.
 Not Athens' fall, but Athens' fame I seek.
 Then give again to honor and to fame 690
 My power despised, and my forgotten name.
 At Sparta's doom, no longer, Chief, repine,
 But learn submission to the will divine;
 Behold e'en now, within this fated hour
 On Marathonian plains, the Persian power!
 E'en Hippias' self inspires th' embattled host,
 Th' Athenian's terror, as the Persian's boast.
 Bid Athens rise and glory's powers attest.
 Enough — no more — the fates conceal the rest."
 He said, his visage burned with heavenly
 light; 700
 He spoke and, speaking, vanished from my
 sight;
 And awed, I sought where those loved walls
 invite.
 But think not, warrior Greeks, the fault is
 mine,
 If Athens fall — it is by wrath divine.
 I vainly, vainly grieve, the evil springs
 From him — the God of Gods, the King of
 Kings!
 The Herald said, and bent his sacred head,
 While cherished hope from every bosom fled.
 Each dauntless hero, by despair deprest 709
 Felt the deep sorrow, swelling in his breast.

They mourn for Athens, friendless and alone ;
Cries followed cries, and groan succeeded groan.
Th' Athenian matrons, startled at the sound,
Rush from their looms and anxious crowd
around.

They ask the cause, the fatal cause is known
By each fond sigh, and each renewing groan.
While in their arms some infant love they bear
At once for which they joy, for which they fear.
Hushed on its mother's breast, the cherished
child

Unconscious midst the scene of terror smiled ;
On rush the matrons, they despairing seek
Miltiades, adored by every Greek ;
Him found at length, his counsels they entreat,
Hang on his knees and clasp his sacred feet.
Their babes before him on the ground they
throw

In all the maddening listlessness of woe.
First Deloepia, of the matrons chief,
Thus vents her bursting soul in frantic grief,
While her fond babe she holds aloft in air ;
Thus her roused breast prefers a mother's
prayer :

' Oh Son of Cimon, for the Grecians raise
To heaven, thy fame, thy honor, and thy praise.
Thus — thus — shall Athens and her heroes fall,
Shall thus one ruin seize and bury all ?
Say, shall these babes be strangers then to fame,
And be but Greeks in spirit and in name ?
Oh first, ye Gods ! and hear a mother's prayer,
First let them glorious fall in ranks of war !
If Asia triumph, then shall Hippas reign
And Athens' free-born Sons be slaves again !
Oh Son of Cimon ! let thy influence call
The souls of Greeks to triumph or to fall !
And guard their own, their children's, country's
name,

From foul dishonor, and eternal shame !'
Thus thro' her griefs, the love of glory broke,
The mother wept, but 't was the Patriot spoke :
And as before the Greek she bowed with
grace,

The lucid drops bedewed her lovely face.
Their shrieks and frantic cries the matrons
cease,

And death-like silence awes the Sons of
Greece.

Thrice did the mighty Chief of Athens seek
To curb his feelings and essay to speak,
'T was vain — the ruthless sorrow wrung his
breast,

His mind disheartened, and his soul opprest.
He thus — while o'er his cheek the moisture
stole,

' Retire ye matrons, nor unman my soul !
Tho' little strength this aged arm retains,
My swelling soul Athena's foe disdains ;
Hushed be your griefs, to heav'n for victory
cry,

Assured we'll triumph, or with freedom
die.

And ye, oh Chiefs, when night disowns her
sway

And pensive Dian yields her power to day,
To quit these towers for Marathon prepare,
And brave Darius in the ranks of war.

For yet may Jove protect the Grecian name
And crown, in unborn ages, Athens' fame.'
He said — and glowing with the warlike fire,
And cheered by hope, the Godlike Chiefs re-
tire.

Now Cynthia rules the earth, the flaming God
In ocean sinks, green Neptune's old abode ;
Black Erebus on drowsy pinions springs,
And o'er Athena cowers his sable wings.

BOOK III

When from the deep the hour's eternal sway
Impels the coursers of the flaming day,
The long haired Greeks, with brazen arms pre-
pare,

Their freedom to preserve and wage the war.
First Aristides from the couch arose,
While his great mind with all Minerva glows ;
His mighty limbs, his golden arms invest,
The cuirass blazes on his ample breast,
The glittering cuisses both his legs enfold,
And the huge shield's on fire with burnished
gold ;

His hands two spears uphold of equal size,
And fame's bright glories kindle in his eyes ;
Upon his helmet, plumes of horse hair nod,
And forth he moved, majestic as a God !
Upon his snorting steed the warrior sprung,
The courser neighed, the brazen armor rung ;
From heaven's ethereal heights the martial
maid

With conscious pride, the hero's might sur-
veyed.

Him as she eyed, she shook the gorgon shield ;
' Henceforth to me,' she cried, ' let all th' im-
mortals yield.

Let monster Mars, the Latian regions own,
For Attica, Minerva stands alone.'
And now, th' unconquered Chief of Justice
gains

The Senate's walls, and there the steed de-
tains,

Whence he dismounts — Miltiades he seeks,
Beloved of Jove, the leader of the Greeks,
Nor sought in vain ; there clad in armor bright
The Chieftain stood, all eager for the fight.

Within his aged hands two lances shine,
The helmet blazed upon his brows divine,
And as he bends beneath th' unequal weight
Youth smiles again, when with gigantic might
His nervous limbs, immortal arms could wield,
Crush foe on foe, and raging, heap the field.
Yet tho' such days were past, and ruthless age
Transformed the warrior to the thoughtful
sage ;

Tho' the remorseless hand of silent time
Impaired each joint, and stiffened every
limb ;

Yet thro' his breast, the fire celestial stole,
Throbb'd in his veins, and kindled in his soul.
In thought, the Lord of Asia threatens no more,
And Hippas bites the dust, mid seas of gore.
Him as he viewed, the youthful hero's breast
Heaved high with joy, and thus the Sage ad-
dressed :

'Chief, best beloved of Pallas,' he began,
 'In fame allied to Gods, oh wondrous man!
 Behold Apollo gilds th' Athenian wall,
 Our freedom waits, and fame and glory call 820
 To battle! Asia's King and myriads dare,
 Swell the loud trumpet, and swell the din of war.'

He said impatient; then the warrior sage
 Began, regardless of the fears of age:
 'Not mine, oh youth, with caution to control
 The fire and glory of thy eager soul;
 So was I wont in brazen arms to shine,
 Such strength, and such impatient fire were mine.'

He said, and bade the trumpet's peals rebound,
 High, and more high, the echoing war notes sound: 830

Sudden one general shout the din replies,
 A thousand lances blazing as they rise,
 And Athens' banners wave, and float along }
 the skies.

So from the marsh, the cranes embodied fly,
 Clap their glad wings, and cut the liquid sky.
 With thrilling cries they mount their joyful way.

Vig'rous they spring, and hail the new born day.

So rose the shouting Greeks, inspired by fame,
 T' assert their freedom, and maintain their name.

First came Themistocles in arms renowned, 840
 Whose steed impatient, tore the trembling ground.

High o'er his helmet snowy plumes arise
 And shade that brow, which Persia's might defies;

A purple mantle graceful waves behind,
 Nor hides his arms but floats upon the wind.
 His mighty form two crimson belts unfold
 Rich in embroidery, and stiff with gold.
 Callimachus the Polemarch next came,
 The theme of general praise and general fame.
 Cynagirus, who e'en the Gods would dare, 850
 Heap ranks on ranks and thunder thro' the war;
 His virtues godlike; man's his strength surpassed.

In battle foremost, and in flight the last:
 His ponderous helm 's a shaggy lion's hide.
 And the huge war axe clattered at his side,
 The mighty Chief, a brazen chariot bore.
 While fame and glory hail him and adore.
 Antenor next his aid to Athens gave,
 Like Paris youthful, and like Hector brave;
 Cleon, Minerva's priest, experienced sage, 860
 Advanced in wisdom, as advanced in age.
 Aggregoras, Delenus' favorite child;
 The parent's cares, the glorious son beguiled.
 But now he leaves his sire to seek his doom,
 His country's freedom, or a noble tomb.
 And young Aratus moved with youthful pride,
 And heart elated at the hero's side.
 Next thou, Cleones, thou triumphant moved
 By Athens honored, by the Greeks beloved:
 And Sthenelus the echoing pavements trod,
 From youth devoted to the martial God. 871
 Honor unspotted crowned the hero's name,
 Unbounded virtue, and unbounded fame.

Such heroes shone the foremost of the host,
 All Athens' glory, and all Athens' boast.
 Behind a sable cloud of warriors rise
 With ponderous arms, and shouting rend the skies.

These bands with joy Miltiades inspire,
 Fame fills his breast, and sets his soul on fire.
 Aloft he springs into the gold-wrought car, 880
 While the shrill blast resounds, to war! to war!
 The coursers plunge as conscious of their load
 And proudly neighing, feel they bear a God.
 The snow white steeds by Pallas' self were given,

Which sprung from the immortal breed of heaven.

The car was wrought of brass and burnished gold,

And divers figures on its bulk were told,
 Of heroes who in plunging to the fight
 Shrouded Troy's glories in eternal night:

Of fierce Pelides, who relenting gave, 890
 At Priam's prayer, to Hector's corpse a grave;
 Here Spartan Helen flies her native shore,
 To bid proud Troy majestic stand no more;
 There Hector clasps his consort to his breast,
 Consols his sufferings, tho' himself oppressed;
 And there he rushes to the embattled field
 For victory or death, nor e'en in death to yield:
 Here Ilium prostrate feels the Argive ire.
 Her heroes perished, and her towers on fire.

And here old Priam breathes his last drawn sigh, 900

And feels 't is least of all his griefs to die.
 There his loved sire, divine Æneas bears,
 And leaves his own with all a patriot's tears;
 While in one hand he holds his weeping boy,
 And looks his last on lost unhappy Troy.
 The warrior seized the reins, the impatient steeds

Foam at the mouth and spring where glory leads.

The gates, the heroes pass, th' Athenian dames
 Bend from their towers, and bid them save from flames

Their walls, their infant heirs, and fill the skies 910

With shouts, entreaties, prayers, and plaintive cries:

Echo repeats their words, the sounds impart
 New vigor to each Greek's aspiring heart.

Forward with shouts they press, and hastening on

Try the bold lance and dream of Marathon.
 Meanwhile the Persians on th' embattled plain

Prepare for combat, and the Greeks disdain.
 Twice twenty sable bulls they daily pay,

Unequalled homage, to the God of day; 919

Such worthy gifts, the wealthy warriors bring,
 And such the offerings of the Persian King;
 While the red wine around his altars flowed
 They beg protection from the flaming God.

But the bright Patron of the Trojan war
 Accepts their offerings, but rejects their prayer:

The power of love alone dares rigid fate,
 To vent on Greece her vengeance and her hate;

Not love for Persia prompts the vengeful dame,
 But hate for Athens, and the Grecian name:

In Phœbus' name, the fraudful Queen receives
The hecatombs, and happy omens gives. 931
And now the heralds with one voice repeat
The will of Datis echoing thro' the fleet,
To council, to convene the Persian train,
That Athens' Chiefs should brave their might
in vain.

The Chiefs and Hippias' self his will obey,
And seek the camp, the heralds lead the way.
There on the couch, their leader Datis sat
In ease luxurious, and in kingly state;
Around his brow, pride deep and scornful
played, 940

A purple robe, his slothful limbs arrayed,
Which o'er his form, its silken draperies fold,
Majestic sweeps the ground, and glows with
gold;

While Artaphernes resting at his side
Surveys th' advancing train with conscious
pride.

The Elder leader, mighty Datis, then,
'Assembled Princes, great and valiant men,
And thou thrice glorious Hippias, loved by
heav'n,

To whom, as to thy Sire, is Athens giv'n;
Behold the Grecian banners float afar, 950
Shouting they hail us, and provoke the war.
Then, mighty Chiefs and Princes, be it yours
To warm and fire the bosoms of our powers,
That when the morn has spread her saffron
light,

The Greeks may own and dread Darius' might;
For know, oh Chiefs, when once proud Athens
falls,

When Persian flames shall reach her haughty
walls,

From her depression, wealth to you shall spring,
And honor, fame, and glory to your King.'

He said; his words the Princes' breasts inspire,
Silent they bend, and with respect retire. 961

And now the Greeks in able marches gain,
By Pallas fired, the Marathonian plain.
Before their eyes th' unbounded ocean rolls
And all Darius' fleet — unawed their souls,
They fix their banners, and the tents they
raise

And in the sun, their polished javelins blaze.
Their leader's self within the brazen car

Their motions orders, and prepares for war;
Their labors o'er, the aged hero calls 970

The Chiefs to council midst the canvas walls,
And then the Sage, 'How great the Persian
host!

But let them not their strength or numbers
boast.

Their slothful minds to love of fame unknown,
Sigh not for war, but for the spoil alone.

Strangers to honor's pure immortal light,
They not as heroes, but as women fight;

Grovelling as proud, and cowardly as vain,
The Greeks they fear, their numbers they dis-
dain.

And now Athenians! fired by glory, rise 980
And lift your fame unsullied to the skies,
Your victim Persia, liberty your prize.

And now twice twenty sable bullocks bring
To heap the altars of the thundering King,

Bid twelve white heifers of gigantic breed
To Jove's great daughter, wise Minerva, bleed,
And then in sleep employ the solemn night
Nor till Apollo reigns, provoke the fight.'
The hero said; the warlike council o'er
They raise the lofty altars on the shore. 990
They pile in heaps the pride of all the wood;
They fall the first, who first in beauty stood:
The pine that soars to heaven, the sturdy
oak,

And cedars crackle at each hero's stroke.
And now two altars stand of equal size
And lift their forms majestic to the skies,
The heroes then twice twenty bullocks bring,
A worthy offering to the thundering King.

The aged leader seized the sacred knife,
Blow followed blow, out gushed the quivering
life; 1000

Thro' their black hides the ruthless steel is
driven

The victims groan — Jove thunders from his
heaven.

And then their bulks upon the pile they lay,
The flames rush upward, and the armies pray.

Driven by the wind, the roaring fires ascend,
And now they hiss in air, and now descend;

With all their sap, the new cut faggots raise
Their flames to heaven, and crackle as they
blaze;

And then the Sage, 'Oh, thou of powers above
The first and mightiest, hear, eternal Jove! 1010

Give us, that Athens in her strength may rise
And lift our fame and freedom to the skies!'

This said, he ceased — th' assembled warriors
pour

The sacred incense, and the God adore;
Then partial Jove propitious heard their
prayer,

Thrice shook the heavens, and thundered thro'
the air;

With joy, the Greeks, the favoring sign in-
spires,

And their breasts glow with all the warlike
fires:

And now twelve heifers white as snow they
lead

To great Minerva's sacred name to bleed. 1020
They fall — their bulks upon the pile are laid

Sprinkled with oil, and quick in flame arrayed.
And now descending midst the darkening skies

Behold the Goddess of the radiant eyes.
The ground she touched, beneath the mighty
load

Earth groaning rocks, and nature hails the
God.

Within her hand her father's lightnings shone,
And shield that blazes near th' eternal throne;

The Greeks with fear, her dauntless form sur-
veyed,

And trembling bowed before the blue-eyed
maid. 1030

Then favoring, thus began the power divine,
While in her eyes celestial glories shine;

'Ye sons of Athens, loved by heaven,' she
cries

'Revered by men, be valiant and be wise.
When morn awakes, Darius' numbers dare,

Clang your loud arms, and rouse the swelling war:
 But first to yon proud fleet a herald send
 To bid the Persians yield, and fight suspend,
 For vainly to their God they suppliant call,
 Jove favors Greece, and Pallas wills their fall.¹⁰⁴⁰
 She said, and thro' the depths of air she flies,
 Mounts the blue heaven, and scales the liquid skies.
 The Greeks rejoicing thank the powers above
 And Jove's great daughter, and eternal Jove.
 And now a herald to the fleet they send
 To bid the Persians yield, and war suspend.
 Thro' the divided troops the herald goes
 Thro' Athens' host, and thro' th' unnumbered foes.
 Before the holy man, the Persian bands
 Reverend give way, and ask what Greece demands:¹⁰⁵⁰
 He tells not all, but that he, chosen, seeks
 Datis their Chief, by order of the Greeks.
 The mission but in part he sage reveals,
 And what his prudence prompts him, he conceals.
 Then to their Chief they lead him, where he sat
 With pomp surrounded, and in gorgeous state;
 Around his kingly couch, his arms were spread
 Flaming in gold, by forge Cyclopean made;
 And then stern Datis frowning thus began,
 'What hopes deceive thee, miserable man?
 What treacherous fate allures thee thus to stray¹⁰⁶¹
 Thro' all our hosts? What Gods beguile the way?
 Think'st thou to 'scape the Persian steel, when Greece
 Our herald crushed, and banished hopes of peace?
 But speak, what will the Greeks? and do they dare
 To prove our might, and tempt th' unequal war?
 Or do they deign to own Darius' sway
 And yield to Persia's might th' embattled day?'
 To whom th' Athenian herald made reply
 'The Greeks disdain your terms, and scorn to fly.¹⁰⁷⁰
 Unknown to heroes and to sons of Greece
 The shameful slavery of a Persian peace;
 Defiance stern, not servile gifts I bring,
 Your bonds detested, and despised your King;
 Of equal size, the Greeks two altars raise
 To Jove's high glory, and Minerva's praise.
 The God propitious heard, and from the skies
 Descends the Goddess of the azure eyes,
 And thus began — "Assembled Greeks, give ear
 Attend my wisdom, nor my glory fear;¹⁰⁸⁰
 When morn awakes, Darius' numbers dare,
 Clang your loud arms, and rouse the swelling war:
 But first to yon proud fleet a herald send
 To bid the Persians yield, and war suspend,
 For vainly to their God they suppliant call,

Jove favors Greece, and Pallas wills their fall.'
 The Goddess spoke; th' Athenians own her sway.
 I seek the fleet, and heaven's command obey.
 The Greeks disdain your millions in the war,
 Nor I, oh Chief, your promised vengeance fear.¹⁰⁹⁰
 Strike! but remember that the God on high
 Who rules the heavens, and thunders thro' the sky,
 Not unrevenged will see his herald slain,
 Nor shall thy threats his anger tempt in vain.'
 And thus the Greek: then Datis thus replies,
 Flames black and fearful scowling from his eyes,
 'Herald away! and Asia's vengeance fear;
 Back to your phrenzied train my mandate bear,
 That Greece and Grecian Gods may threaten in vain,
 We scorn their anger, and their wrath disdain:¹¹⁰⁰
 For he who lights the earth and rules the skies
 With happy omens to our vows replies.
 When morn uprising breathes her saffron light,
 Prepare to dare our millions in the fight.
 Thy life I give, Darius' will to say
 And Asia's hate — hence, Chief, no more, away!'
 He said, and anger filled the Grecian's breast,
 But prudent, he the rising wrath suppressed;
 Indignant, thro' the canvas tents he strode
 And silently invoked the thundering God.¹¹¹⁰
 Fears for his country in his bosom rose,
 As on he wandered midst unnumbered foes;
 He strikes his swelling breast and hastens on
 O'er the wide plains of barren Marathon.
 And now he sees the Grecian banners rise,
 And well-armed warriors blaze before his eyes.
 Then thus he spoke — 'Ye Grecian bands, give ear,
 Ye warrior Chiefs and Attic heroes hear!
 Your will to Asia's other Prince I told,
 All which you bade me, Chieftains, to unfold,¹¹²⁰
 But Pallas' vengeance I denounced in vain,
 Your threats he scorned, and heard with proud disdain.
 The God, he boasts, who lights the earth and skies,
 With happy omens to his vows replies;
 Then when the uprising morn extends her light
 Prepare, ye Greeks, to dare his powers in fight.'
 He said — the Greeks for instant strife declare
 Their will, and arm impatient for the war.
 Then he, their godlike Chief, as Pallas sage,
 'Obey my counsels, and repress your rage,¹¹³⁰
 Ye Greeks,' he cried, 'the sacred night displays
 Her shadowy veil, and earth in gloom arrays;
 Her sable shades, e'en Persia's Chiefs obey,
 And wait the golden mandate of the day:
 Such is the will of Jove, and Gods above,
 And such the order of the loved of Jove.'
 He said — the Greeks their leader's word obey,

They seek their tents, and wait th' approaching day,
O'er either host celestial Somnus reigns,
And solemn silence lulls th' embattled plains. 1140

BOOK IV

And now the morn by Jove to mortals given
With rosy fingers opes the gates of heaven.
The Persian Princes and their haughty Lord
Gird on their arms, and seize the flaming sword:

Forth, forth they rush to tempt the battle's roar,

Earth groans, and shouts rebellowing shake the shore.

As when the storm the heavenly azure shrouds
With sable night, and heaps on clouds, the clouds,

The Persians rose, and crowd th' embattl'd plain

And stretch their warlike millions to the main; 1150

And now th' Athenians throng the fatal field
By fame inspired, and swords and bucklers wield;

In air sublime their floating banners rise,
The lances blaze; the trumpets rend the skies.

And then Miltiades — 'Athenians, hear,
Behold the Persians on the field appear

Dreadful in arms; remember, Greeks, your fame,

Rush to the war, and vindicate your name;
Forward! till low in death the Persians lie,
For freedom triumph or for freedom die.' 1160

He said; his visage glows with heavenly light;
He spoke sublime, and rush'd into the fight.

And now the fury of the way¹ began —
Lance combats lance, and man's opposed to man;

Beneath their footsteps, groans the laboring plain

And shouts re-echoing bellow to the main;
Mars rages fierce; by heroes, heroes die;

Earth rocks, Jove thunders, and the wounded cry.

What mighty Chiefs by Aristides fell,
What heroes perished, heavenly Goddess, tell, 1170

First thou, oh Peleus! felt his conquering hand,

Stretched in the dust and weltering in the sand,

Thro' thy bright shield, the forceful weapon went,

Thyself in arms o'erthrown, thy corslet rent;

Next rash Antennes met an early fate,
And feared, alas! th' unequal foe too late;

And Delucus the sage, and Philo fell,
And Croton sought the dreary gates of hell,

And Mnemon's self with wealth and honor crowned,

Revered for virtue, and for fame renowned; 1180

¹ [So the original; query, *day* or *fray*?]

He, great in battle, feared the hero's hand,
Groaning he fell, and spurned the reeking sand.

But what bold chief thus rashly dares advance?
Tho' not in youth, he shakes the dreadful lance,
Proudly the earth the haughty warrior trod,
He looked a Monarch and he moved a God:
Then on the Greek with rage intrepid flew
And with one blow th' unwary Greek o'er-threw;

That hour, oh Chief, and that eventful day
Had bade thee pass a shivering ghost away,
But Pallas, fearful for her fav'rite's life, 1191
Sudden upraised thee to renew the strife;
Then Aristides with fresh vigor rose,
Shame fired his breast, his soul with anger glows,

With all his force he rushes on the foe,
The warrior bending disappoints the blow,
And thus with rage contemptuous, 'Chieftain, know,

Hippias, the loved of heaven, thine eyes behold,

Renowned for strength of arm, in battle bold,
But tell thy race, and who the man whose might 1200

Dares cope with rebel Athens' King in fight,'
Stung to the soul, 'Oh Slave,' the Greek returns,

While his big heart within his bosom burns,
'Perfidious Prince, to faith and truth unknown;

On Athens' ashes, raise thy tyrant throne,
When Grecia's chiefs, and Grecia's heroes fall,

When Persia's fires invest her lofty wall,
When bought but slaves within her towers remain,

Then, nor till then, shalt thou, oh Hippias, reign,

Then, nor till then, will Athens yield her fame 1210

To foul dishonor, and eternal shame;
Come on! no matter what my race or name;

For this, oh Prince, this truth unerring know,
That in a Greek, you meet a noble foe.'

Furious he said, and on the Prince he sprung
With all his force, the meeting armor rung,

Struggling they raged, and both together fell.
That hour the tyrant's ghost had entered hell,

But partial fate prolonged the Prince's breath,
Renewed the combat, and forbad the death.

Meanwhile the hosts, the present war suspend, 1221

Silent they stand, and heaven's decree attend.
First the bright lance majestic Hippias threw

But erringly the missile weapon flew;
Then Aristides hurled the thirsty dart,

Struck the round shield, and nearly pierced his heart,

But the bright arms, that shone with conscious pride,

Received the blow, and turned the point aside.
And thus, the Greek, 'Whom your enquiring eyes

Behold, oh Prince,' th' Athenian hero cries,
'Is Aristides, called the just, a name 1231

By Athens honored, nor unknown to fame.'

Scared at the sound, and seized by sudden fright,

The Prince starts back, in mean, inglorious flight.
 And now Bellona rages o'er the field,
 All strive elated, all disdain to yield;
 And great Themistocles in arms renowned,
 Stretched heaps of heroes on the groaning ground.
 First by his hand fell Delos' self, divine,
 'The last loved offspring of a noble line, 1240
 Straight thro' his neck the reeking dart was driven,
 Prostrate he sinks, and vainly calls to heaven.
 Next godlike Phanes, midst the Persians just,
 Leucen and mighty Caudos bit the dust;
 And now the Greek, with pride imprudent,
 dares
 Victorious Mandrocles renowned in wars.
 The agile Persian swift avoids the blow
 Furious disarms and grasps th' unequal foe!
 Th' intrepid Greek, with godlike calm awaits
 His instant fall, and dares th' impending fates, 1250
 But great Cynægirus his danger spies
 And lashed his steeds, the ponderous chariot flies,
 Then from its brazen bulk, he leaps to ground,
 Beneath his clanging arms the plains resound,
 And on the Persian rushes fierce, and raised
 The clattering axe on high, which threatening blazed,
 And lopped his head; out spouts the smoking gore
 And the huge trunk rolled bleeding on the shore.
 And then Cynægirus, 'Thus, Persian, go
 And boast thy victory in the shades below, 1260
 A headless form, and tell who bade thee bleed,
 For know a Greek performed the wonderous deed:
 But thou, Themistocles, oh hero! say
 Who bade thee rush, to tempt th' unequal fray?
 But learn from this, thy daring to restrain,
 And seek less mighty foes upon the plain.'
 With secret wrath the youthful hero burned
 And thus impetuous to the Chief returned;
 'Such thoughts as these, unworthy those who dare
 The battle's rage, and tempt the toils of war; 1270
 Heedless of death, and by no fears opprest,
 Conquest my aim, I leave to heaven the rest.'
 He said, and glowed with an immortal light,
 Plunged 'midst the foes, and mingled in the fight.
 Zeno the bravest of the Persian youth
 Renowned for filial piety and truth;
 His mother's only joy; she loved to trace
 His father's features in his youthful face;
 That Sire, in fight o'erwhelmed, mid seas of gore
 Slept unentombed, and cared for fame no more. 1280
 And now as youth in opening manhood glows,
 All his loved father in his visage rose,
 Like him, regardful of his future fame,
 Resolved like him to immortalize his name,

At glory's call, he quits his native shore
 And feeble parent, to return no more;
 Oh! what prophetic griefs her bosom wrung
 When on his neck in agony she hung!
 When on that breast she hid her sorrowing face,
 And feared to take, or shun, the last embrace! 1290
 Unhappy youth! the fates decree thy doom,
 Those flowers, prepared for joy, shall deck thy tomb.
 Thy mother now no more shall hail thy name
 So high enrolled upon the lists of fame,
 Nor check the widow's tear, the widow's sigh,
 For e'en her son, her Zeno's doom to die.
 Zeno, e'en thou! for so the Gods decree,
 A parents' threshold opes no more for thee!
 On him the hero turned his eye severe
 Nor on his visage saw one mark of fear; 1300
 There manly grace improved each separate part,
 And joined by ties of truth, the face and heart.
 The supple javelin then the Grecian tries
 With might gigantic, and the widow defies.
 Its point impetuous, at his breast he flung,
 The brazen shield received, and mocking rung;
 Then Zeno seized the lance, the Chief defied,
 And scoffing, thus began, in youthful pride;
 'Go, mighty Greek! to weaker warriors go,
 And fear this arm, and an unequal foe; 1310
 A mother gave the mighty arms I bear,
 Nor think with such a gift, I cherish fear.'
 He hurled the lance, but Pallas' self was there,
 And turned the point, it passed in empty air.
 With hope renewed, again the hero tries
 His boasted might, the thirsty weapon flies
 In Zeno's breast it sinks, and drank the gore,
 And stretched the hero vanquished on the shore;
 Gasping for utterance, and life, and breath,
 For fame he sighs, nor fears approaching death. 1320
 Themistocles perceived, and bending low
 Thought of his friends, and tears began to flow
 That washed the bleeding bosom of his foe. }
 Young Zeno then, the Grecian hero eyed
 Rejects his offered aid, and all defied,
 Breathed one disdainful sigh, and turned his head and died.
 Such Persians did the godlike warrior slay,
 And bade their groaning spirits pass away.
 Epizelus, the valiant and the strong,
 Thundered in fight, and carried death along;
 Him not a Greek in strength of arms surpassed, 1331
 In battle foremost, but in virtue last.
 He, impious man, to combat dared defy
 The Gods themselves, and senate of the sky,
 E'en earth and heaven, and heaven's eternal sire,
 He mocks his thunders, and disdains his ire.
 But now the retributive hour is come,
 And rigid justice seals the Boaster's doom.
 Thesens he sees, within the fight, revealed
 To him alone — to all the rest concealed. 1340

To punish guilt, he leaves the shades below
 And quits the seat of never ending woe.
 Pale as in death, upon his hands he bore
 Th' infernal serpent of the dreadful shore,
 To stay his progress should he strive to fly
 From Tart'rus far, and gain the upper sky.
 This (dreadful sight!) with slippery sinews
 now

Wreathed round his form, and clasped his
 ghastly brow;
 With horror struck, and seized with sudden
 awe

The Greek beheld, nor mingled in the war. 1350
 Withheld from combat by the force of fear,
 He trembling thus — 'Oh say, what God draws
 near?

But speak thy will, if 't is a God, oh speak!
 Nor vent thy vengeance on a single Greek.'
 Vainly he suppliant said — o'erpowered with
 fright,

And instant from his eyeballs fled the sight;
 Confused, distracted, to the skies he throws
 His frantic arms, and thus bewails his woes:
 'Almighty! thou by whom the bolts are
 driven!'

He said, and cast his sightless balls to
 heav'n, 1360

'Restore my sight, unhappy me, restore
 My own loved offspring, to behold once more!
 So will I honor thy divine abodes,
 And learn how dreadful th' avenging Gods!
 And if — but oh forbid! you mock my prayer
 And cruel fate me ever cursed declare,
 Give me, to yield to fame alone my life
 And fall immortalized, — in glorious strife!'
 He said — the God who thunders thro' the
 air,

Frowns on his sufferings and rejects his
 prayer. 1370

Around his form the dreadful Ægis spread
 And darts fall harmless on his wretched head;
 Condemned by fate in ceaseless pain to groan,
 Friendless, in grief, in agony alone.
 Now Mars and death pervade on every side
 And heroes fall, and swell the crimson tide.
 Not with less force th' Athenian leader shone
 In strife conspicuous, nor to fame unknown,
 Advanced in wisdom, and in honored years,
 He nor for life, but for the battle fears. 1380

Borne swift as winds within the flying car
 Now here, now there, directs the swelling war,
 On every side the foaming coursers guides,
 Here praises valor, and there rashness chides;
 While from his lips persuasive accents flow
 T' inspire th' Athenians, or unman the foe.
 The glorious Greeks rush on, with daring
 might

And shout and thunder, and encrease the fight.
 Nor yet inglorious do the Persians shine,
 In battle's ranks they strength and valor
 join. 1390

Datis himself impels the ponderous car
 Thro' broken ranks, conspicuous in the war,
 In armor sheathed, and terror round him
 spread

He whirls his chariot over heaps of dead;
 Where'er he dreadful rushes, warriors fly,

Ghosts seek their hell, and chiefs and heroes
 die.

All pale with rage he ranks on ranks o'er-
 throws,
 For blood he gasps, and thunders midst his
 foes.

Callimachus the mighty leader found
 In fight conspicuous, bearing death around, 1400
 The lance wheeled instant from the Persian's
 hand

Transfixed the glorious Grecian in the sand.
 Fate ends the hero's life, and stays his breath
 And clouds his eyeballs with the shade of
 death:

Erect in air the cruel javelin stood,
 Pierced thro' his breast, and drank the spouting
 blood.

Released from life's impending woes and care,
 The soul immerges in the fields of air:
 Then, crowned with laurels, seeks the blest
 abodes

Of awful Pluto, and the Stygian floods. 1410

And now with joy great Aristides saw
 Again proud Hippas thundering thro' the war,
 And mocking thus, 'Oh tyrant, now await
 The destined blow, behold thy promised fate!
 Thrice mighty King, obey my javelin's call
 For e'en thy godlike self 's decreed to fall;'
 He said, and hurled the glittering spear on
 high,

The destined weapon hissed along the sky;
 Winged by the hero's all-destroying hand
 It pierced the Prince, and stretched him on
 the sand. 1420

Then thro' the air the awful peals were driven
 And lightnings blazed along the vast of hea-
 ven.

The Persian hosts behold their bulwark die,
 Fear chills 'their hearts, and all their numbers
 fly,

And reached the fleet; the shouting Greeks
 pursue

All Asia's millions, flying in their view.
 On, on, they glorious rush, and side by side
 Yet red with gore, they plunge into the tide;
 For injured freedom's sake, th' indignant main
 With swelling pride receives the crimson
 stain; 1430

The Persians spread the sail, nor dare delay, }
 And suppliant call upon the King of day, }
 But vainly to their Gods the cowards pray.
 Some of the ships th' Athenian warriors stay }
 And fire their bulks; the flames destroying
 rise,

Rushing they swell, and mount into the skies.
 Foremost Cynegirus with might divine,
 While midst the waves his arms majestic
 shine;

With blood-stained hand a Persian ship he
 seized,

The vessel vainly strove to be released; 1440
 With fear the crew the godlike man beheld,
 And pride and shame their troubled bosoms
 swelled.

They loip his limb: then Pallas fires his frame
 With scorn of death, and hope of future fame:
 Then with the hand remaining seized the prize,

A glorious spirit kindling in his eyes.
 Again the Persians wield the unmanly blow
 And wreck their vengeance on a single foe.
 The fainting Greek by loss of blood oppress
 Still feels the patriot rise within his breast. ¹⁴⁵⁰
 Within his teeth the shattered ship he held,
 Nor in his soul one wish for life rebelled.
 But strength decaying, fate suppress his breath,
 And o'er his brows expand the dews of death.
 The Elysium plains his generous spirit trod,
 'He lived a Hero and he died a God.'
 By vengeance fired, the Grecians from the
 deep
 With rage and shouting, scale the lofty ship,
 Then in the briny bosom of the main
 They hurl in heaps the living and the slain.
 Thro' the wide shores resound triumphant
 cries, ¹⁴⁶¹
 Fill all the seas, and thunder thro' the skies.

II

AN ESSAY ON MIND

'My narrow leaves cannot in them containe
 The large discourse.' — *Spenser*.

In 1826, when Elizabeth Barrett was twenty, her first volume of verse was offered to the public under the title of *An Essay on Mind, with Other Poems*. (LONDON. James Duncan.) Nineteen years later she said of it, in deprecation, to Robert Browning, whose growing interest in the poetess disposed him to regard with reverential interest everything that bore her signature, that it was only a 'girlish exercise,' and, 'after all, more printed than published.' This probably means that her father, Mr. Moulton-Barrett, bore more than half the cost of production. In the notes for her biography which Mrs. Browning furnished to Mr. Horne in 1853, she mentions the 'Essay on Mind' as 'long repented of, and worthy of all repentance;' 'and yet,' she adds, 'it is not without traces of an individual thinking and feeling. The bird pecks through the shell in it.' The 'Other Poems' consisted of fourteen miscellaneous pieces, mostly occasional verses or personal tributes, — 'On the Death of Lord Byron,' 'To My Father on his Birthday,' etc., of small intrinsic merit, and no permanent significance.

ANALYSIS OF THE FIRST BOOK

THE poem commences by remarking the desire, natural to the mind, of investigating its own qualities — qualities the more exalted, as their development has seldom been impeded by external circumstances — The various dispositions of different minds are next considered, and are compared to the varieties of scenic nature; inequalities in the spiritual not being more wonderful than inequalities in the natural — Byron and Campbell contrasted — The varieties of

genius having been thus treated, the art of criticism is briefly alluded to, as generally independent of genius, but always useful to its productions — Jeffrey — The various stages of life in which genius appears, and the different causes by which its influence is discovered — Cowley, Alfieri — Allusion to the story of the emotion of Thucydides on hearing Herodotus recite his History at the Olympic Games — The elements of Mind are thus arranged, Invention, Judgment, Memory, and Association — The creations of mind are next noticed, among which we first behold Philosophy — History, Science, and Metaphysics are included in the studies of Philosophy.

Of History, it is observed, that though on a cursory view her task of recalling the past may appear of little avail, it is in reality one of the highest importance — The living are sent for a lesson to the grave — The present state of Rome alluded to; and the future state of England anticipated — Condemnation of those who deprive historical facts of their moral inference, and only make use of their basis to render falsehood more secure — Gibbon — Condemnation of those who would color the political conduct of past ages with their own political feelings — Hume, Mitford — From the writers, we turn to the readers of history — Their extreme scepticism, or credulity — They are recommended to be guided by no faction; but to measure facts by their consistency with reason — to study the personal character and circumstances of an historian, before they give entire credit to his representations — The influence of private feeling and prejudice — Miller — Science is introduced — Apostrophe to man — Episode of Archimedes — Parallel between history and science — The pride of the latter considered most excessive — The risk attending knowledge — Buffon, Leibnitz — The advantageous experience to be derived from the errors of others, illustrated by an allusion to Southey's Hexameters — Utility the object of science — An exclusive attention to parts deprecated, since it is impossible even to have a just idea of PARTS, without acquiring a knowledge of their relative situation in the whole — The extreme difficulty of enlarging the contemplations of a mind long accustomed to contracted views — The scale of knowledge — every science being linked with the one preceding and succeeding — giving and receiving reciprocal support — Why this system is not calculated, as might be conjectured, either to render scientific men superficial, or to intrude on the operations of genius — That the danger of knowledge originates in PARTIAL knowledge — Apostrophe to Newton.

BOOK I

SINCE Spirit first inspir'd, pervaded all,
 And Mind met Matter, at th' Eternal call —
 Since dust weigh'd Genius down, or Genius
 gave
 Th' immortal halo to the mortal's grave;

Th' ambitious soul her essence hath defin'd,
 And Mind hath eulogiz'd the pow'rs of Mind.
 Ere Revelation's holy light began
 To strengthen Nature, and illumine Man —
 When Genius, on Icarian pinions, flew, 9
 And Nature's pencil, Nature's portrait, drew;
 When Reason shudder'd at her own wan beam,
 And Hope turn'd pale beneath the sickly
 gleam —
 Ev'n then hath Mind's triumphant influence
 spoke,
 Dust own'd the spell, and Plato's spirit woke —
 Spread her eternal wings, and rose sublime
 Beyond th' expanse of circumstance and time:
 Blinded, but free, with faith instinctive, soar'd,
 And found her home, where prostrate saints
 ador'd!

Thou thing of light! that warm'st the breasts
 of men,
 Breath'st from the lips, and tremblest from the
 pen! 20
 Thou, form'd at once t' astonish, fire, be-
 guile, —
 With Bacon reason, and with Shakespeare
 smile!

The subtle cause, ethereal essence! say,
 Why dust rules dust, and clay surpasses clay;
 Why a like mass of atoms should combine
 To form a Tully, and a Catiline?
 Or why, with flesh perchance of equal weight,
 One cheers a prize-fight, and one frees a state?
 Why do not I the muse of Homer call,
 Or why, indeed, did Homer sing at all? 30
 Why wrote not Blackstone upon love's delusion,
 Or Moore, a libel on the Constitution?
 Why must the faithful page refuse to tell
 That Dante, Laura sang, and Petrarch, Hell —
 That Tom Paine argued in the throne's de-
 fence —

That Byron nonsense wrote, and Thurlow
 sense —
 That Southey sigh'd with all a patriot's cares,
 While Locke gave utterance to Hexameters?
 Thou thing of light! instruct my pen to find
 Th' unequal pow'rs, the various forms of
 Mind! 40

O'er Nature's changeful face direct your sight;
 View light meet shade, and shade dissolve in
 light!

Mark, from the plain, the cloud-capp'd moun-
 tain soar;

The sullen ocean spurn the desert shore!
 Behold, afar, the playmate of the storm,
 Wild Niagara lifts his awful form —
 Spits his black foam above the madd'ning
 floods,

Himself the savage of his native woods —
 See him, in air, his smoking torrents wheel,
 While the rocks totter, and the forests reel —
 Then, giddy, turn! lo! Shakespeare's Avon
 flows, 51

Charm'd, by the green-sward's kiss, to soft re-
 pose;

With tranquil brow reflects the smile of fame,
 And, 'midst her sedges, sighs her Poet's name.

Thus, in bright sunshine, and alternate storms,
 Is various mind express'd in various forms.
 In equal men, why burns not equal fire?
 Why are not valleys hills, — or mountains
 higher?

Her destin'd way, hath destin'd Nature trod;
 While Matter, Spirit rules, and Spirit, God. 60

Let outward scenes, for inward sense design'd,
 Call back our wand'rings to the world of
 Mind!

Where Reason, o'er her vasty realms, may
 stand,

Convene proud thoughts, and stretch her scep-
 ter'd hand.

Here, classic recollections breathe around;
 Here, living Glory consecrates the ground;
 And here, Mortality's deep waters span
 The shores of Genius, and the paths of Man!

O'er this imagin'd land, your soul direct —
 Mark Byron, the Mont Blanc of intellect, 70
 'Twixt earth and heav'n exalt his brow sub-
 lime,

O'erlook the nations, and shake hands with
 Time!

Stretch'd at his feet do Nature's beauties
 throng,

The flow'rs of love, the gentleness of song;
 Above, the Avalanche's thunder speaks,
 While Terror's spirit walks abroad, and
 shrieks!

To some Utopian strand, some fairy shore,
 Shall soft-eyed Fancy waft her Campbell o'er!
 Wont, o'er the lyre of Hope, his hand to fling,
 And never waken a discordant string; 80
 Who ne'er grows awkward by affecting grace,
 Or 'Common sense confounds with common-
 place;

To bright conception, adds expression chaste,
 And human feeling joins to classic taste.
 For still, with magic art, he knows, and knew,
 To touch the heart, and win the judgment
 too!

Thus, in uncertain radiance, Genius glows,
 And fitful gleams on various mind bestows:
 While Mind, exulting in th' admitted day,
 On various themes, reflects its kindling ray. 90
 Unequal forms receive an equal light;
 And Klopstock wrote what Kepler could not
 write.

Yet Fame hath welcom'd a less noble few,
 And Glory hail'd whom Genius never knew;
 Art labor'd, Nature's birthright, to secure,
 And forg'd, with cunning hand, her signa-
 ture.

The scale of life is link'd by close degrees;
 Motes float in sunbeams, mites never knew;
 Critics seize half the fame which bards re-
 ceive, —

And Shakespeare suffers that his friends may
 live; 100

While Bentley leaves, on stilts, the beaten
 track,

And peeps at glory from some ancient's back.

But, though to hold a lantern to the sun
Be not too wise, and were as well undone —
Though, e'en in this inventive age, alas!
A moral darkness can't be cur'd by gas —
And, though we may not reasonably deem
How poets' craniums can be turn'd by steam —
Yet own we, in our juster reasonings,
That lanterns, gas, and steam, are usef'ul
things — 110

And oft, this truth, Reflection ponders o'er —
Bards would write worse, if critics wrote no
more.

Let Jeffrey's praise, our willing pen, engage,
The letter'd critic of a letter'd age!
Who justly judges, rightfully discerns,
With wisdom teaches, and with candor learns.
His name on Scotia's brightest tablet lives,
And proudly claims the laurel that it gives.

Eternal Genius! fashion'd like the sun,
To make all beautiful thou look'st upon! 120
Prometheus of our earth! whose kindling
smile

May warm the things of clay a little while;
Till, by thy touch inspir'd, thine eyes survey'd,
Thou stoop'st to love the glory thou hast
made;

And weepest, human-like, the mortal's fall,
When, by-and-bye, a breath disperses all.
Eternal Genius! mystic essence! say,
How, on 'the chosen breast,' descends thy
day! 128

Breaks it at once in Thought's celestial dream,
While Nature trembles at the sudden gleam?
Or steals it, gently, like the morning's light,
Shedding, unmark'd, an influence soft and
bright,
Till all the landscape gather on the sight?

As different talents, different breasts, inspire,
So different causes wake the latent fire.
The gentle Cowley of our native clime,
Lisp'd his first accents in Aonian rhyme.
Alfieri's startling muse tun'd not her strings,
And dumbly look'd 'unutterable things'; 139
Till, when six lustrums o'er his head had past,
Conception found expression's voice at last;
Broke the bright light, uprose the smother'd
flame, —

And Mind and Nature own'd their poet's fame!
To some the waving woods, the harp of spring,
A gently-breathing inspiration bring!
Some hear, from Nature's haunts, her whis-
per'd call;
And Mind hath triumph'd by an apple's fall.

Wave Fancy's picturing wand! recall the scene
Which Mind hath hallow'd — where her sons
have been —

Where, 'midst Olympia's concourse, simply
great, 150

Th' historic sage, the son of Lyxes, sate,
Grasping th' immortal scroll — he breath'd no
sound,

But, calm in strength, an instant look'd around,
And rose — the tone of expectation rush'd
Through th' eager throng — he spake, and
Greece was hush'd!

See, in that breathless crowd, Olorus stand,
While one fair boy hangs, list'ning, on his
hand —

The young Thucydides! with upward brow
Of radiance, and dark eye, that beaming now
Full on the speaker, drinks th' inspir'd air —
Gazing entranc'd, and turn'd to marble there!

Yet not to marble — for the wild emotion 162
Is kindling on his cheek, like light on ocean,
Coming to vanish; and his pulses throb
With transport, and the inarticulate sob

Swells to his lip — internal nature leaps
To glorious life, and all th' historian weeps!
The mighty master mark'd the favor'd child —
Did Genius linger there? She did, and smil'd!
Still, on itself, let Mind its eye direct, 170

To view the elements of intellect —
How wild Invention (daring artist!) plies
Her magic pencil, and creating dies;
And Judgment, near the living canvass, stands,
To blend the colors for her airy hands;

While Memory waits, with twilight mists o'er-
cast,
To mete the length'ning shadows of the past:

And bold Association, not untaught,
The links of fact, unites, with links of thought;
Forming th' electric chains, which, mystic, bind
Scholastic learning, and reflective mind. 181

Let reasoning Truth's unerring glance survey
The fair creations of the mental ray;
Her holy lips, with just discernment, teach
The forms, the attributes, the modes of each,
And tell, in simple words, the narrow span
That circles intellect, and fetters man;
Where darkling mists, o'er Time's last foot-
step, creep,
And Genius drops her languid wing — to weep.

See first Philosophy's mild spirit, nigh, 190
Raise the rapt brow, and lift the thoughtful
eye;

Whether the glimmering lamp, that Hist'ry
gave,

Light her enduring steps to some lone grave;
The while she dreams on him, asleep beneath,
And conjures mystic thoughts of life and
death —

Whether, on Science' rushing wings, she sweep
From concave heav'n to earth — and search the
deep;

Shewing the pensile globe attraction's force,
The tides their mistress, and the stars their
course:

Or whether (task with nobler object fraught)
She turn the pow'rs of thinking back on
thought — 201

With mind, delineate mind; and dare define
The point, where human mingles with divine:
Majestic still, her solemn form shall stand,
To shew the beacon on the distant land —
Of thought, and nature, chronicler sublime!
The world her lesson, and her teacher Time!

And when, with half a smile, and half a sigh,
She lifts old History's faded tapestry,
I' the dwelling of past years — she, aye, is seen
Point to the shades, where bright'ning tints had
been — 211

The shapeless forms outworn, and mildew'd
o'er —

And bids us rev'rence what was lov'd before;
Gives the dank wreath and dusty urn to fame,
And lends its ashes — all she can — a name.
Think'st thou, in vain, while pale Time glides
away,

She rakes cold graves, and chronicles their
clay?

Think'st thou, in vain, she counts the boney
things,

Once lov'd as patriots, or obey'd as kings?
Lifts she, in vain, the past's mysterious veil?
Seest thou no moral in her awful tale? 221
Can man, the crumbling pile of nations, scan, —
And is their mystic language mute for man?

Go! let the tomb its silent lesson give,
And let the dead instruct thee how to live!
If Tully's page hath bade thy spirit burn,
And lit the raptur'd cheek — behold his urn!
If Maro's strains, thy soaring fancy, guide,
That hail 'th' eternal city' in their pride —
Then turn to mark, in some reflective hour,
The immortality of mortal pow'r! 231
See the crush'd column, and the ruin'd dome —
'T is all Eternity has left of Rome!
While travell'd crowds, with curious gaze, re-
pair,
To read the littleness of greatness there!

Alas! alas! so, Albion shall decay,
And all my country's glory pass away!
So shall she perish, as the mighty must,
And be Italia's rival — in the dust;
While her ennobled sons, her cities fair, 240
Be dimly thought of 'midst the things that
were!

Alas! alas! her fields of pleasant green,
Her woods of beauty, and each well-known
scene!

Soon, o'er her plains, shall grisly Ruin haste,
And the gay vale become the silent waste!
Ah! soon perchance, our native tongue for-
got —

The land may hear strange words it knoweth
not;

And the dear accents which our bosoms move,
With sounds of friendship, or with tones of
love,

May pass away; or, conn'd on mould'ring
page, 250

Gleam 'neath the midnight lamp, for unborn
sage;

To tell our dream-like tale to future years,
And wake th' historian's smile, and schoolboy's
tears!

Majestic task! to join, though plac'd afar,
The things that have been, with the things that
are!

Important trust! the awful dead, to scan,

And teach mankind to moralize from man!
Stupendous charge! when, on the record true,
Depend the dead, and hang the living too!
And, oh! thrice impious he, who dares abuse
That solemn charge, and good and ill con-
fuse! 261

Thrice guilty he who, false with 'words of
sooth,'

Would pay, to Prejudice, his debt to Truth;
The hallow'd page of fleeting Time prophane,
And prove to Man that man has liv'd in vain;
Pass the cold grave, with colder jestings, by;
And use the truth to illustrate a lie!

Let Gibbon's name be trac'd, in sorrow,
here, —

Too great to spurn, too little to revere!
Who follow'd Reason, yet forgot her laws, 270
And found all causes, but the 'great first
Cause:'

The paths of time, with guideless footsteps,
trod;

Blind to the light of nature and of God;
Deaf to the voice, amid the past's dread hour,
Which sounds his praise, and chronicles his
pow'r!

In vain for him was Truth's fair tablet spread,
When Prejudice, with jaundiced organs, read.
In vain for us the polish'd periods flow,
The fancy kindles, and the pages glow;
When one bright hour, and startling transport
past, 280

The musing soul must turn — to sigh at last.
Still let the page be luminous and just,
Nor private feeling war with public trust;
Still let the pen from narrowing views forbear,
And modern faction ancient freedom spare.
But, ah! too oft th' historian bends his mind
To flatter party — not to serve mankind;
To make the dead, in living feuds, engage,
And give all time, the feelings of his age.
Great Hume hath stoop'd, the Stuarts' fame,
t' increase; 290
And ultra Mitford soar'd to libel Greece!

Yet must the candid muse, impartial, learn
To trace the errors which her eyes discern;
View ev'ry side, investigate each part,
And get the holy scroll of Truth by heart;
No blame misplac'd, and yet no fault forgot —
Like ink employ'd to write with — not to blot.
Hence, while historians, just reproof, incur,
We find some readers, with their authors, err;
And soon discover, that as few excel 300
In reading justly, as in writing well.
For prejudice, or ignorance, is such;
That men believe too little, or too much;
Too apt to cavil, or too glad to trust,
With confidence misplac'd, or blame unjust.

Seek out no faction — no peculiar school —
But lean on Reason, as your safest rule.
Let doubtful facts, with patient hand, be led,
To take their place on this Procrustian bed!
What, plainly, fits not, may be thrown aside, 310
Without the censure of pedantic pride:
For nature still, to just proportion, clings;

And human reason judges natural things.
Moreover, in th' historian's bosom look,
And weigh his feelings ere you trust his book ;
His private friendships, private wrongs, de-
sery,
Where tend his passions, where his int'rests
lie —

And, while his proper faults your mind engage,
Discern the ruling foibles of his age.
Hence, when on deep research, the work you
find 320

A too obtrusive transcript of his mind ;
When you perceive a fact too highly wrought,
Which kindly seems to prove a fav'rite
thought ;

Or some opposing truth trac'd briefly out,
With hand of careless speed — then turn to
doubt !

For private feeling, like the taper, glows,
And here a light, and there a shadow, throws.

If some gay picture, vilely daubed, were seen
With grass of azure, and a sky of green,
Th' impatient laughter we'd suppress in
vain, 330

And deem the painter jesting, or insane.
But, when the sun of blinding prejudice
Glazes in our faces, it deceives our eyes ;
Truth appears falsehood to the dazzled sight,
The comment apes the fact, and black seems
white ;

Commingled hues, their separate colors lost,
Dance wildly on, in bright confusion tost ;
And, midst their drunken whirl, the giddy
eye
Beholds one shapeless blot for earth and sky.

Of such delusions let the mind take heed, 340
And learn to think, or wisely cease to read ;
And, if a style of labor'd grace display
Perverted feelings, in a pleasing way ;
False tints, on real objects, brightly laid,
Facts in disguise, and Truth in masquerade —
If cheating thoughts in beauteous dress appear,
With magic sound, to captivate the ear —
Th' enchanting poison of that page decline,
Or drink Circean draughts — and turn to
swine !

We hail with British pride, and ready
praise, 350
Enlightened Miller of our modern days !
Too firm though temp'rate, liberal though exact,
To give too much to argument or fact,
To love details, and draw no moral thence,
Or seek the comment, and forget the sense,
He leaves all vulgar aims, and strives alone
To find the ways of Truth, and make them
known !

Spirit of life ! for aye, with heav'nly breath,
Warm the dull clay, and cold abodes of death !
Clasp in its urn the consecrated dust, 360
And bind a laurel round the broken bust ;
While mid decaying tombs, thy pensive choice,
Thou bidst the silent utter forth a voice,
To prompt the actors of our busy scene,

And tell what *is*, the tale of what *has been* !
Yet turn, Philosophy ! with brow sublime,
Shall Science follow on the steps of Time !
As, o'er Thought's measureless depths, we
bend to hear

The whispered sound, which stole on Descartes'
ear,

Hallowing the sunny visions of his youth 370
With that eternal mandate, 'Search for
Truth !'

Yes ! search for Truth — the glorious path is
free ;

Mind shews her dwelling — Nature holds the
key —

Yes ! search for Truth — her tongue shall bid
thee scan

The book of knowledge, for the use of Man !

Man ! Man ! thou poor antithesis of power !
Child of all time ! yet creature of an hour !
By turns, camelion of a thousand forms,
The lord of empires, and the food of worms !
The little conqueror of a petty space, 380
The more than mighty, or the worse than
base !

Thou ruin'd landmark, in the desert way,
Betwixt the all of glory, and decay !
Fair beams the torch of Science in thine hand,
And sheds its brightness o'er the glimmering
land ;

While, in thy native grandeur, bold, and free,
Thou bid'st the wilds of nature smile for thee,
And treadest Ocean's paths full royally !
Earth yields her treasures up — celestial air
Receives thy globe of life — when, journeying
there, 390

It bounds from dust, and bends its course on
high,

And walks, in beauty, through the wondering
sky.

And yet, prond clay ! thine empire is a span,
Nor all thy greatness makes thee more than
man !

While Knowledge, Science, only serve t' im-
part

The god thou *would'st* be, and the thing thou
art !

Where stands the Syracusan — while the roar
Of men, and engines, echoes through the
shore ?

Where stands the Syracusan ? haggard Fate,
With ghastly smile, is sitting at the gate ; 400
And Death forgets his silence 'midst the crash
Of rushing ruins — and the torches' flash
Waves redly on the straggling forms that
die ;

And masterless steeds, beneath that gleam,
dart by.

Scared into madness, by the battle cry —
And sounds are hurtling in the angry air,
Of hate, and pain, and vengeance, and de-
spair —

The smothered voice of babes — the long wild
shriek

Of mothers — and the curse the dying speak !

Where stands the Syracusan ? tranquil sage,

He bends, sublime, o'er Science' splendid
page ; 411

Walks the high circuit of extended mind,
Surpasses man, and dreams not of mankind ;
While, on his listless ear, the battle shout
Falls senseless — as if echo breath'd about
The hum of many words, the laughing glee,
Which linger'd there, when Syracuse was free.
Away ! away ! for louder accents fall —
But not the sounds of joy from marble hall !
Quick steps approach — but not of sylphic
feet, 420

Whose echo heralded a smile more sweet,
Coming, all sport, th' indulgent sage, t' up-
braid

For lonely hours, to studious musing, paid —
Be hushed ! Destruction bares the flickering
blade !

He asked to live, th' unfinished lines to fill,
And died — to solve a problem deeper still.
He died, the glorious ! who, with soaring
sight,

Sought some new world, to plant his foot of
might ;

Thereon, in solitary pride, to stand,
And lift our planet, with a master's hand ! 430
He sank in death — Creation only gave
That thorn-encumbered space which forms his
grave —

An unknown grave, till Tully chanced to stray,
And named the spot where Archimedes lay !
Genius ! behold the limit of thy power !
Thou fir'st the soul — but, when life's dream
is o'er,

Giv'st not the silent pulse one throb the more :
And mighty beings come, and pass away,
Like other comets, and like other — clay.

Though analyzing Truth must still divide 440
Historic state, and scientific pride ;
Yet one stale fact, our judging thoughts in-
fer —

Since each is human, each is prone to err !
Oft, in the night of Time, doth History stray,
And lift her lantern, and proclaim it day !
And oft, when day's eternal glories shine,
Doth Science, boasting, cry — 'The light is
mine !'

So hard to bear, with unobstructed sight,
Th' excess of darkness, or th' extreme of light.

Yet, to be just, though faults belong to each,
The themes of one, an humbler moral, teach :
And, 'midst th' historian's eloquence, and
skill, 452

The human chronicler is human still.
If on past power, his eager thoughts be cast,
It brings an awful antidote — 't is past !
If, deathless fame, his ravish'd organs scan,
The deathless fame exists for buried man :
Power, and decay, at once he turns to view ;
And, with the strength, beholds the weakness
too.

Not so, doth Science' musing son aspire ; 460
And pierce creation, with his eye of fire.
Yon mystic pilgrims of the starry way,
No humbling lesson, to his soul, convey ;

No tale of change, their changeless course hath
taught ;

And works divine excite no earthward thought.
And still, he, reckless, builds the splendid
dream ;

And still, his pride increases with his theme ;
And still, the cause is slighted in th' effect ;
And still, self-worship follows self-respect.

Too apt to watch the engines of the scene, 470
And lose the hand, which moves the vast ma-
chine ;

View Matter's form, and not its moving soul ;
Interpret parts, and misconceive the whole :
While, darkly musing 'twixt the earth, and
sky,

His heart grows narrow, as his hopes grow
high ;

And quits, for aye, with unavailing loss,
The sympathies of earth, but not the dross ;
Till Time sweeps down the fabric of his trust ;
And life, and riches, turn to death, and dust.

And such is Man ! 'neath Error's foul as-
saults, 480

His noblest moods beget his grossest faults !
When Knowledge lifts her hues of varied
grace,

The fair exotic of a brighter place,
To keep her stem, from mundane blasts, en-
shrin'd,

He makes a fatal hot-bed of his mind ;
Too oft adapted, in their growth, to spoil
The natural beauties of a generous soil.
Ah ! such is Man ! thus strong, and weak
withal,

His rise oft renders him too prone to fall !
The loftiest hills' fresh tints, the soonest,
fade ; 490

And highest buildings cast the deepest shade !

So Buffon err'd ; amidst his chilling dream,
The judgment grew material as the theme :
Musing on Matter, till he called away
The modes of Mind, to form the modes of
clay ;

And made, confusing each, with judgment
blind,

Mind stoop to dust, and dust ascend to Mind.
So Leibnitz err'd ; when, in the starry hour,
He read no weakness, where was written,
'Power ;'

Beheld the verdant earth, the circling sea ; 500
Nor dreamt so fair a world could cease to
be !

Yea ! but he heard the Briton's awful name,
As, scattering darkness, in his might, he came,
Girded with Truth, and earnest to confute
What gave to Matter, Mind's best attribute.
Sternly they strove — th' unequal race was
run !

The owl met the eagle at the sun !

While such defects, their various forms, un-
fold ;

And rust, so foul, obscures the brightest gold —
Let Science' soaring sons, the ballast, cast, 510
But judge their present errors, by their past.

As some poor wanderer, in the darkness, goes,
When fitful wind, in hollow murmur, blows;
Hailing, with trembling joy, the lightning's
ray,
Which threatens his safety, but illumines his way.

Gross faults buy deep experience. Sages tell
That Truth, like Æsop's fox, is in a well;
And, like the goat, his fable prates about,
Fools must stay in, that wise men may get
out.

What thousand scribblers, of our age, would
choose 520

To throw a toga round the English muse;
Rending her garb of ease, which graceful grew
From Dryden's loom, beprankt with varied
hue!

In that dull aim, by Mind unsanctified,
What thousand Wits would have their wits
belied,

Devoted Southey! if thou had'st not tried!
Use is the aim of Science; this the end
The wise appreciate, and the good commend.
For not, like babes, the flaming torch, we prize,
That sparkling lustre may attract our eyes;
But that, when evening shades impede the
sight, 531

It casts, on objects round, a useful light.

Use is the aim of Science! give again
A golden sentence to the faithful pen —
Dwell not on parts! for parts contract the
mind;

And knowledge still is useless, when confined.
The yearning soul, inclosed in narrow bound,
May be ingenious, but is ne'er profound:
Spoil'd of its strength, the fettered thought
grows tame;

And want of air extinguishes the flame! 540
And as the sun, beheld in mid-day blaze,
Seems turned to darkness, as we strive to
gaze;

So mental vigor, on one object, cast,
That object's self becomes obscured at last.
'Tis easy, as Experience may aver,
To pass from general to particular.

But most laborious to direct the soul
From studying parts, to reason on the whole:
Thoughts, train'd on narrow subjects, to let
fall;

And learn the unison of each with all. 550

In Nature's reign, a scale of life, we find:
A scale of knowledge, we behold, in mind;
With each progressive link, our steps ascend,
And traverse all, before they reach the end;
Searching, while Reason's powers may farther
go,

The things we know not, by the things we
know.

But hold! methinks some sons of Thought
demand,

'Why strive to form the Trajan's vase in
sand?

Are Reason's paths so few, that Mind may call
Her finite energies, to tread them all? 560

Lo! Learning's waves, in bounded channel,
sweep;

When they flow wider, shall they run as deep?
Shall that broad surface, no dull shallow, hide,
Growing dank weeds of superficial pride?
Then Heaven may leave our giant powers
alone;

Nor give each soul a focus of its own!

Genius bestows, in vain, the chosen page,
If all the tome, the minds of all, engage!

Nay! I reply — with free congenial breast,
Let each peruse the part, which suits him
best! 570

But, lest contracting prejudice mislead,
Regard the context, as he turns to read!
Hence, liberal feeling gives th' enlighten'd
soul,

The spirit, with the letter of the scroll.

With what triumphant joy, what glad surprise,
The dull behold the dullness of the wise!

What insect tribes of brainless impudence
Buzz round the carcase of perverted sense!

What railing ideots hunt, from classic school,
Each flimsy sage, and scientific fool, 580

Crying, 'Tis well! we see the blest effect
Of watchful night, and toiling intellect!'

Yet let them pause, and tremble — vainly glad;
For too much learning maketh no man mad!

Too little dims the sight, and leads us o'er
The twilight path, where fools have been be-
fore;

With not enough of Reason's radiance seen,
To track the footsteps, where those fools have
been.

Divinest Newton! if my pen may shew
A name so mighty, in a verse so low, — 590

Still let the sons of Science, joyful, claim
The bright example of that splendid name!

Still let their lips repeat, my page bespeak,
The sage how learned! and the man how
meek!

Too wise, to think his human folly less;
Too great, to doubt his proper littleness;

Too strong, to deem his weakness past away;
Too high in soul, to glory in his clay:

Rich in all nature, but her erring side:
Endow'd with all of Science — but its pride.

ANALYSIS OF THE SECOND BOOK

METAPHYSICS — Address to Metaphysicians
— The most considerable portion of their errors
conceived to arise from difficulties attending
the use of words — That on one hand, thoughts
become obscure without the assistance of lan-
guage, while on the other, language from its
material analogy deteriorates from spiritual
meaning — Allusion to a probable mode of com-
munication between spirits after death — That
a limited respect, though not a servile submis-
sion, is due to verbal distinctions — Clearness
of style peculiarly necessary to Metaphysical
subjects — The graces of Composition not in-

consistent with them — Plato, Bacon, Bolingbroke — The extremes into which Philosophers have fallen with regard to sensation, and reflection — Berkeley, Condillac — That subject briefly considered — Abstractions — Longinus, Burke, Price, Payne Knight — Blind submission to authorities deprecated — The Pythagorean saying opposed, and Cicero's unphilosophical assertion alluded to — That, however, it partakes of injustice to love Truth, and yet refuse our homage to the advocates of Truth — How the names of great writers become endeared to us by early recollections — Description of the School-boy's first intellectual gratifications — That even without reference to the past, some immortal names are entitled to our veneration, since they are connected with Truth — Bacon — Apostrophe to Locke.

Poetry is introduced — More daring than Philosophy, she personifies abstractions, and brings the things unseen before the eye of the Mind — How often reason is indebted to poetic imagery — Irving — The poetry of prose — Plato's ingratitude — Philosophers and Poets contrasted — An attempt to define Poetry — That the passions make use of her language — Nature the poet's study — Shakespeare — Human nature as seen in cities — Scenic nature, and how the mind is affected thereby — That Poetry exists not in the object contemplated, but is created by the contemplating mind — The ideal — Observations on the structure of verse, as adapted to the subject treated — Milton, Horace, Pope — The French Drama — Corneille, Racine — Harmony and chasteness of versification — The poem proceeds to argue, that the muse will refuse her inspiration to a soul unattuned to generous sympathy, unkindled by the deeds of Virtue, or the voice of Freedom — Contemptuous notice of those prompted only by interest to aspire to poetic eminence — What should be the Poet's best guerdon — From the contemplation of motives connected with Freedom, we are led by no unnatural transition to Greece — Her present glorious struggle — Anticipation of her ultimate independence, and the restoration of the Muses to their ancient seats — Allusion to the death of Byron — Reflections on Mortality — The terrors of death as beheld by the light of Nature — The consolations of death as beheld with reference to a future state — Contemplation of the immortality of Mind, and her perfected powers — Conclusion.

BOOK II

But now to higher themes ! no more confin'd 601
To copy Nature, Mind returns to Mind.
We leave the throng, so nobly, and so well,
'Tracing, in Wisdom's book, things visible, —
And turn to things unseen ; where, greatly wrought,
Soul questions soul, and thought revolves on thought.
My spirit loves, my voice shall hail ye, now,

Sons of the patient eye, and passionless brow !
Students sublime ! Earth, man, unmov'd, ye view, 609
Time, circumstance ; for what are they to you ?
What is the crash of worlds, — the fall of kings, —
When worlds and monarchs are such brittle things !
What the tost, shatter'd bark, that blindly dares
A sea of storm ? Ye sketch the wave which bears !
The cause, and not th' effect, your thoughts exact ;
The principle of action, not the act, —
The soul ! the soul ! and, 'midst so grand a task,
Ye call her rushing passions, and ye ask
Whence are ye ? and each mystic thing responds !
I would be all ye are — except those bonds ! 620

Except those bonds ! ev'n here is oft descried
The love to parts, the poverty of pride !
Ev'n here, while Mind, in Mind's horizon, springs,
Her 'native mud' is weighing on her wings !
Ev'n here, while Truth invites the ardent crowd,
Ixion-like, they rush t' embrace a cloud !
Ev'n here, oh ! foul reproach to human wit !
A Hobbes hath reasoned, and Spinoza writ !

Rank pride does much ! and yet we justly cry,
Our greatest errors in our weakness lie. 630
For thoughts uncloth'd by language are, at best,
Obscure ; while grossness injures those expression —
Through words, — in whose analysis, we find
Th' analogies of Matter, not of Mind :
Hence, when the use of words is graceful brought,
As physical dress to metaphysic thought,
The thought, howe'er sublime its pristine state,
Is by th' expression made degenerate ;
Its spiritual essence changed, or cramp'd ; and hence
Some hold by words, who cannot hold by sense ; 640
And leave the thought behind, and take th' attire —
Elijah's mantle — but without his fire !
Yet spurn not words ! 't is needful to confess
They give ideas, a body and a dress !
Behold them traverse Learning's region round,
The vehicles of thought on wheels of sound ;
Mind's winged strength, wherewith the height is won,
Unless she trust their frailty to the sun.
Destroy the body ! — will the spirit stay ?
Destroy the car ! — will Thought pursue her way ? 650
Destroy the wings — let Mind their aid forego !
Do no Icarian billows yawn below ?
Ah ! spurn not words with reckless insolence ;
But still admit their influence with the sense,

And fear to slight their laws! Perchance we find
 No perfect code transmitted to mankind;
 And yet mankind, till life's dark sands are run,
 Prefers imperfect government to none.
 Thus Thought must bend to words!—Some sphere of bliss,
 Ere long, shall free her from th' alloy of this: 660
 Some kindred home for Mind—some holy place,
 Where spirits look on spirits, 'face to face,'—
 Where souls may see, as they themselves are seen,
 And voiceless intercourse may pass between,
 All pure—all free! as light, which doth appear
 In its own essence, incorrupt and clear!
 One service, praise! one age, eternal youth!
 One tongue, intelligence! one subject, truth!

Till then, no freedom, Learning's search affords,
 Of soul from body, or of thought from words. 670
 For thought may lose, in struggling to be hence,
 The gravitating power of Common-sense;
 Through all the depths of space with Phaeton hurl'd,
 T' impair our reason, as he scorch'd our world.
 Hence, this preceptive truth, my page affirms—
 Respect the technicality of terms!
 Yet not in base submission—lest we find
 That, aiding clay, we crouch too low for Mind;
 Too apt conception's essence to forget,
 And place all wisdom in the alphabet. 680

Still let appropriate phrase the sense invest;
 That what is well conceived be well exprest!
 Nor e'er the reader's wearied brain engage,
 In hunting meaning down the mazy page,
 With three long periods tortured into one,
 The sentence ended, with the sense begun;
 Nor in details, which schoolboys know by heart,
 Perplex each turning with the terms of art.
 To understand, we deem no common good;
 And 'tis less easy to be understood. 690
 But let not clearness be your only praise,
 When style may charm a thousand different ways;
 In Plato glow, to life and glory wrought,
 By high companionship with noblest thought;
 In Bacon, warm abstraction with a breath,
 Catch Poesy's bright beams, and smile beneath;
 In St. John roll, a generous stream, along,
 Correctly free, and regularly strong.
 Nor scornful deem the effort out of place,
 With taste to reason, and convince with grace; 700
 But ponder wisely, ere you know, too late,
 Contempt of trifles will not prove us great!
 The Cynics, not their tubs, respect engage;

And dirty tunic never made a sage.
 E'en Cato—had he own'd the Senate's will,
 And wash'd his toga—had been Cato still.
 Justly we censure—yet are free to own,
 That indecision is a crime unknown.
 For, never faltering, seldom reasoning long,
 And still most positive whene'er most wrong,
 No theoretic sage is apt to fare 711
 Like Mah'met's coffin—hung in middle air!
 No! fenc'd by Error's all-sufficient trust,
 These stalk 'in nubibus'—those crawl in dust.
 From their proud height, the first demand to know,
 If spiritual essence should descend more low?
 The last, as vainly, from their dunghill, cry,
 Can body's grossness hope t' aspire more high?
 And while Reflection's empire, these disclose,
 Sensation's sovereign right is told by these. 720
 Lo! Berkeley proves an old hypothesis!
 'Out on the senses!' (he was out of his!)
 'All is idea! and nothing real springs
 But God, and Reason'—(not the right of kings?)
 'Hold!' says Condillac with profound surprise—
 'Why prate of Reason? we have ears and eyes!'

Condillac! while the dangerous periods fall
 Upon thy page, to stamp sensation all;
 While (coldly studious!) thine ingenious scroll
 Endows the mimic statue with a soul 730
 Compos'd of sense—behold the generous bound—
 His piercing eye, his ear awake to sound,
 His scent, most delicate organ! and declare
 What triumph hath the 'Art of thinking' there!
 What Gall, or Spurzheim, on his front hath sought
 The mystic bumps indicative of Thought?
 Or why, if Thought *do* there maintain her throne,
 Will reasoning curs leave logic for a bone?
 Mind is imprison'd in a lonesome tower:
 Sensation is its window—hence herb, flower,
 Landscapes all sun, the rush of thousand springs, 741
 Waft in sweet scents, fair sights, soft murmurings;
 And in her joy, she gazeth—yet ere long,
 Reason awaketh in her, bold and strong,
 And o'er the scene exerting secret laws,
 First seeks th' efficient, then the final cause,
 Abstracts from forms their hidden accidents,
 And marks in outward substance, inward sense.

Our first perceptions formed—we search, to find
 The operations of the forming mind; 750
 And turn within by Reason's certain route,
 To view the shadows of the things without
 Discern'd, retain'd, compar'd, combin'd, and brought
 To mere abstraction, by abstracting Thought.

Hence to discern, retain, compare, connect,
We deem the faculties of Intellect;
The which, mus'd on, exert a new control,
And fresh ideas are open'd on the soul.

Sensation is a stream with dashing spray,
That shoots in idle speed its arrowy way; 760
When lo! the mill arrests its waters' course,
Turning to use their unproductive force:
The cunning wheels by foamy currents sped,
Reflection triumphs, — and mankind is fed!

Since Pope hath shewn, and Learning still
must shew,
'We cannot reason but from what we
know,' —

Unfold the scroll of Thought; and turn to
find

The undecieving signature of Mind!
There, judge her nature by her nature's course,
And trace her actions upwards to their source.
So when the property of Mind we call 771
An essence, or a substance spiritual,
We name her thus, by marking how she clings
Less to the forms than essences of things;
For body clings to body — objects seen
And substance sensible alone have been
Sensation's study; while reflective Mind,
Essence unseen in objects seen may find;
And, tracing whence her known impressions
came,
Give single forms an universal name. 780

So, when particular sounds in concord rise,
Those sounds as *melody*, we generalize;
When pleasing shapes and colors blend, the
soul

Abstracts th' idea of *beauty* from the whole,
Deducting thus, by Mind's enchanting spell,
The intellectual from the sensible.
Hence bold Longinus' splendid periods grew,
'Who was himself the great sublime he
drew:'

Hence Burke, the poet-reasoner, learn'd to
trace

His glowing style of energetic grace: 790
Hence thoughts, perchance, some favor'd
bosoms move,

Which Price might own, and classic Knight
approve!

Go! light a rushlight, ere the day is done,
And call its glimm'ring brighter than the sun!
Go! while the stars in midnight glory beam,
Prefer their cold reflection in the stream!
But be not that dull slave, who only looks
On Reason, 'through the spectacles of books!' —
Rather by Truth determine what is true, —
And reasoning works, through Reason's me-
dium, view; 800

For authors can't monopolize her light:
'T is your's to read, as well as their's to write.
To judge is your's! — then why submissive
call,

'The master said so?' — 't is no rule at all!
Shall passive sufferance e'en to mind belong,
When right divine in man is human wrong?

Shall a high name a low idea enhance,
When all may fail, as some succeed — by
chance?

Shall fix'd chimeras unfix'd reason shock?
And if Locke err, must thousands err with
Locke? 810

Men! claim your charter! spurn th' unjust
control,
And shake the bondage from the free-born
soul!

Go walk the porticoes! and teach your youth
All names are bubbles, but the name of
Truth!

If fools, by chance, attend to Wisdom's rules,
'T is no dishonor to be right with fools,
If human faults to Plato's page belong,
Not ev'n with Plato, willingly go wrong.
But though the judging page declare it well
To love Truth better than the lips which tell;
Yet 't were an error, with injustice class'd, 821
'T adore the former, and neglect the last.'

Oh! beats there, Heav'n! a heart of human
frame,

Whose pulses throb not at some kindling
name?

Some sound, which brings high musings in its
track,

Or calls perchance the days of childhood back,
In its dear echo, — when, without a sigh,
Swift hoop, and bounding ball, were first laid
by,

To clasp in joy, from school-room tyrant, free,
The classic volume on the little knee, 830
And con sweet sounds of dearest minstrelsy,
Or words of sterner lore; the young brow
fraught

With a calm brightness which might mimic
thought,

Leant on the boyish hand — as, all the while,
A half-heav'd sigh, or aye th' unconscious
smile

Would tell how, o'er that page, the soul was
glowing,

In an internal transport, past the knowing!
How feelings, erst unfelt, did then appear,
Give forth a voice, and murmur, 'We are
here!'

As lute-strings, which a strong hand plays
upon; 840

Or Memnon's statue singing 'neath the sun.
Ah me! for such are pleasant memories —
And call the tears of fondness to our eyes
Reposing on this gone-by dream — when thus,
One marbled book was all the world to us;
The gentlest bliss our innocent thoughts could
find —

The happiest cradle of our infant mind!
And though such hours be past, we shall not
less

Think on their joy with grateful tenderness;
And bless the page which bade our reason
wake, — 850

And love the prophet, for his mission's sake.
But not alone doth Memory's smouldering
flame

Reflect a radiance on a glorious name;

For there are names of pride ; and they who
 bear
 Have walked with Truth, and turn'd their
 footsteps where
 We walk not—their beholdings aye have
 been
 O'er Mind's far countries which we have not
 seen—
 Our thoughts are not their thoughts ! — and oft
 we dream
 That light upon the awful brow doth gleam,
 From that high converse ; as when Moses
 trod ⁸⁶⁰
 Towards the people, from the mount of God,
 His lips were silent, but his face was bright,
 And prostrate Israel trembled at the sight.

What tongue can syllable our Bacon's name,
 Nor own a heart exulting in his fame ?
 Where prejudice's wild blasts were wont to
 blow ;
 And waves of ignorance roll'd dark below,
 He raised his sail—and left the coast be-
 hind,—
 Sublime Columbus of the realms of Mind !
 Dared folly's mists, opinion's treacherous
 sands, ⁸⁷⁰
 And walk'd, with godlike step, th' untrodden
 lands !
 But ah ! our Muse of Britain, standing near,
 Hath dimm'd my tablet with a pensive tear !
 Thrice, the proud theme, her free-born voice
 essays,—
 And thrice that voice is faltering in his praise—
 Yea ! till her eyes in silent triumph turn
 To mark afar her Locke's sepulchral urn !
 Oh urn ! where students rapturous vigils keep,
 Where sages envy, and where patriots weep !
 Oh Name ! that bids my glowing spirit
 wake— ⁸⁸⁰
 To freemen's hearts endeared for Freedom's
 sake !
 Oh soul ! too bright in life's corrupting hour,
 To rise by faction, or to crouch to power !
 While radiant Genius lifts her heav'nward
 wing,
 And human bosoms own the Mind I sing ;
 While British writers British thoughts record,
 And England's press is fearless as her sword ;
 While, 'mid the seas which gird our favor'd
 isle,
 She clasps her charter'd rights with conscious
 smile ;
 So long be *thou* her glory, and her guide, ⁸⁹⁰
 Thy page her study, and thy name her pride !
 Oh ! ever thus, immortal Locke, belong,
 First to my heart, as noblest in my song ;
 And since in thee, the muse enraptured find
 A moral greatness, and creating mind,
 Still may thine influence, which with honor'd
 light
 Beams when I read, illumine me as I write !
 The page too guiltless, and the soul too free,
 To call a frown from Truth, or blush from
 thee !
 But where Philosophy would fear to soar, ⁹⁰⁰
 Young Poesy's elastic steps explore !

Her fairy foot, her daring eye pursues
 The light of faith—nor trembles as she views !
 Wont o'er the Psalmist's holy harp to hang,
 And swell the sacred note when Milton sang ;
 Mingling reflection's chords with fancy's lays,
 The tones of music with the voice of praise !

And while Philosophy, in spirit, free,
 Reasons, believes, yet cannot plainly see,
 Poetic Rapture, to her dazzled sight, ⁹¹⁰
 Portrays the shadows of the things of light ;
 Delighting o'er the unseen worlds to roam,
 And waft the pictures of perfection home.
 Thus Reason oft the aid of fancy seeks,
 And strikes Pierian chords—when Irving
 speaks !

Oh ! silent be the withering tongue of those
 Who call each page, bereft of measure, prose ;
 Who deem the Muse possess of such faint
 spells,
 That like poor fools, she glories in her *bells* ;
 Who hear her voice alone in tinkling chime, ⁹²⁰
 And find a line's whole magic in its rhyme ;
 Forgetting, if the gilded shrine be fair,
 What purer spirit may inhabit there !
 For such,—indignant at her questioned might,
 Let Genius cease to charm—and Scott to
 write !

Ungrateful Plato ! o'er thy cradled rest,
 The Muse hath hung, and all her love exprest ;
 Thy first imperfect accents fondly taught,
 And warm'd thy visions with poetic thought !
 Ungrateful Plato ! should her deadliest foe ⁹³⁰
 Be found within the breast she tended so ?
 Spoil'd of her laurels, should she weep to
 find
 The best belov'd become the most unkind ?
 And was it well or generous, Brutus like,
 To pierce the hand that gave the power to
 strike ?

Sages, by reason, reason's powers direct ;
 Bards, through the heart, convince the intel-
 lect.

Philosophy majestic brings to view
 Mind's perfect modes, and fair proportions
 too ;

Enchanting Poesy bestows the while, ⁹⁴⁰
 Upon its sculptured grace, her magic smile,
 Bids the cold form, with living radiance glow,
 And stamps existence on its marble brow !
 For Poesy's whole essence, when defined,
 Is elevation of the reasoning mind,
 When inward sense from Fancy's page is
 taught,

And moral feeling ministers to Thought.
 And hence, the natural passions all agree
 In seeking Nature's language—poetry. ⁹⁴⁹
 When Hope, in soft perspective, from afar,
 Sees lovely scenes more lovely than they are ;
 To deck the landscape, tiptoe Fancy brings
 Her plastic shapes, and bright imaginings.
 Or when man's breast by torturing pangs is
 stung,
 If fearful silence cease t' enchain his tongue,

In metaphor, the feelings seek relief,
And all the soul grows eloquent with grief.

Poetic fire, like Vesta's, pure and bright,
Should draw from Nature's sun, its holy light.
With Nature, should the musing poet roam, 960
And steal instruction from her classic tome;
When 'neath her guidance, least inclin'd to
err —

The ablest painter when he copies *her*.

Beloved Shakespeare! England's dearest
fame!

Dead is the breast that swells not at thy name!
Whether thine Ariel skim the seas along,
Floating on wings ethereal as his song —
Lear rave amid the tempest — or Macbeth
Question the hags of hell on midnight heath —
Immortal Shakespeare! still, thy lips im-
part 970

The noblest comment on the human heart.
And as fair Eve, in Eden newly placed,
Gazed on her form, in limpid waters traced,
And stretch'd her gentle arms, with pleased
surprise,

To meet the image of her own bright eyes —
So Nature, on thy magic page, surveys
Her sportive graces, and untutored ways!
Wondering, the soft reflection doth she see,
Then laughing owns she loves herself in thee!

Shun not the haunts of crowded cities then;
Nor e'er, as man, forget to study men! 981
What though the tumult of the town intrude
On the deep silence, and the lofty mood;
'Twill make thy human sympathies rejoice,
To hear the music of a human voice —
To watch strange brows by various reason
wrought,

To claim the interchange of thought with
thought;

T' associate mind with mind, for Mind's own
weal,

As steel is ever sharpen'd best by steel.

T' impassion'd bards, the scenic world is
dear, — 990

But Nature's glorious masterpiece is here!

All poetry is beauty, but expest

In inward essence, not in outward vest.

Hence lovely scenes, reflective poets find,

Awake their lovelier images in Mind:

Nor doth the pictur'd earth, the bard invite,

The lake of azure, or the heav'n of light,

But that his swelling breast arouses there,

Something less visible, and much more fair!

There is a music in the landscape round, —

A silent voice, that speaks without a sound —

A witching spirit, that reposing near, 1002

Breathes to the heart, but comes not to the ear!

These softly steal, his kindling soul t' embrace,

And natural beauty, gild with moral grace.

Think not, when summer breezes tell their tale,

The poet's thoughts are with the summer gale;

Think not his Fancy builds her elfin dream

On painted floweret, or on sighing stream:

No single objects cause his raptur'd starts, 1010

For Mind is narrow'd, not inspir'd by parts;

But o'er the scene the poet's spirit broods,
To warm the thoughts that form his noblest
moods;

Peopling his solitude with faëry play,
And beckoning shapes that whisper him
away, —

While lilled fields, and hedge-row blossoms
white,

And hills, and glittering streams, are full in
sight —

The forests wave, the joyous sun beguiles,
And all the poetry of Nature smiles!

Such poetry is formed by Mind, and not 1020
By scenic grace of one peculiar spot.

The artist lingers in the moon-lit glade,
And light and shade, with him, are — light and
shade.

The philosophic chymist wandering there,
Dreams of the soil, and nature of the air.

The rustic marks the young herbs' fresh'ning
hue,

And only thinks — his scythe may soon pass
through!

None 'muse on nature with a Poet's eye,'

None read, but Poets, Nature's poetry!

Its characters are trac'd in mystic hand, 1030

And all may gaze, but few can understand.

Nor here alone the Poet's dwelling rear,
Though Beauty's voice perchance is sweetest
here!

Bind not his footsteps to the sylvan scene,
To heathy banks, fair woods, and valleys green,

When Mind is all his own! her dear impress

Shall throw a magic o'er the wilderness,

As o'er the blossoming vale, and aye recall

Its shadowy plane, and silvery waterfall,

Or sleepy crystal pool, reposing by, 1040

To give the earth a picture of the sky!

Such, gazed on by the spirit, are, I ween,

Lovelier than ever prototype was seen;

For Fancy teacheth Memory's hand to trace

Nature's ideal form in Nature's place.

In every theme by lofty Poet sung,

The thought should seem to speak, and not the
tongue.

When godlike Milton lifts th' exalted song,

The subject bears the burning words along —

Resounds the march of Thought, th' o'erflowing
line, 1050

Full cadence, solemn pause, and strength di-
vine!

When Horace chats his neighbor's faults away,

The sportive measures, like his muse, are gay;

For once Good-humor Satire's by-way took,

And all his soul is laughing in his book!

On moral Pope's didactic page is found,

Sound rul'd by sense, and sense made clear by
sound;

The power to reason, and the taste to please,

While, as the subject varies in degrees, 1059

He stoops with dignity, and soars with ease.

Hence let our Poets, with discerning glance,
Forbear to imitate the stage of France.

What though Corneille arouse the thrilling
chords,
And walk with Genius o'er th' inspir'd boards ;
What though his rival bring, with calmer grace,
The classic unities of time and place, —
All polish, and all eloquence — 't were mean
To leave the path of Nature for Racine :
When Nero's parent, 'midst her woe, defines
The wrong that tortures — in two hundred
lines : 1070
Or when Orestes, madden'd by his crime,
Forgets life, joy, and every thing — but rhyme.

While thus to character and nature, true,
Still keep the harmony of verse in view ;
Yet not in changeless concord, — it should
be
Though graceful, nervous, — musical, though
free ;
Not clogg'd by useless drapery, not beset
By the superfluous word, or epithet,
Wherein Conception only dies in state,
As Draco, smother'd by the garments' weight —
But join, Amphion-like, (whose magic fire 1081
Won the deep music of the Maian lyre,
To call Bœotia's city from the ground,)
The just in structure, with the sweet in sound.

Nor this the whole — the poet's classic strain
May flow in smoothest numbers, yet in vain ;
And Taste may please, and Fancy sport awhile,
And yet Aonia's muse refuse to smile !
For lo ! her heavenly lips these words reveal —
'The sage may coldly think, the bard must
feel ! 1090
And if his writings, to his heart untrue,
Would aye the fervent throb it never knew ;
If generous deeds, and Virtue's noblest part,
And Freedom's voice, could never warm that
heart ;
If Interest tax'd the produce of the brain,
And fetter'd Genius follow'd in her train,
Weeping as each unwilling word she spoke, —
Then hush the lute — its master string is
broke !
In vain, the skilful hand may linger o'er —
Concord is dead, and music speaks no more !'

There are, and have been such — they were for-
got 1101
If shame could veil their page, if tears could
blot !
There are, and have been, whose dishonor'd
lay
Aspir'd t' enrapture that the world might —
pay !
Whose life was one long bribe, oft counted
o'er, —
Brib'd to think on, and brib'd to think no
more ;
Brib'd to laugh, weep, nor ask the reason
why ;
Brib'd to tell truth, and brib'd to gild a lie !
Oh Man ! for this, the sensual left behind,
We boast our empire o'er the vast of Mind ?
Oh Mind ! reported valueless, till sold, 1111
Thought dross till metamorphos'd into gold

By Midas' touch — breath'st thou immortal
verse
To throw a ducat in an empty purse —
To walk the market at a belman's cry,
For knaves to sell, and wond'ring fools to
buy ?
Can Heav'n-born bards, undone by lucre's
lust,
Crouch thus, like Heav'n-born ministers, to
dust ?
Alas ! to dust indeed — yet wherefore blame ?
They keep their profits, though they lose their
fame. 1120

Leave to the dross they seek, the grovelling
throng,
And swell with nobler aim th' Aonian song !
Enough for thee uninfluenc'd and unhir'd,
If Truth reward the strain herself inspir'd !
Enough for thee, if grateful Man commend,
If Genius love, and Virtue call thee friend !
Enough for thee, to wake th' exalted mood,
Reprove the erring, and confirm the good ;
Excite the tender smile, the generous tear,
Or rouse the thought to loftiest Nature dear,
Which rapturous greets amidst the fervent
line 1131
Thy name, O Freedom ! glorious Hellas,
thine !

I love my own dear land — it doth rejoice
The soul, to stretch my arms, and lift my
voice,
To tell her of my love ! I love her green
And bowery woods, her hills in mossy sheen,
Her silver running waters — there's no spot
In all her dwelling, which my breast loves
not —
No place not heart-enchanting ! Sunnier skies,
And calmer waves, may meet another's eyes ;
I love the sullen mist, the stormy sea, 1141
The winds of rushing strength which, like the
land, are free !
Such is my love — yet turning thus to thee,
Oh Græcia ! I must hail with hardly less
Of joy, and pride, and deepening tenderness,
And feelings wild, I know not to control,
My other country — country of my soul !
For so, to me, thou art ! my lips have sung
Of thee with childhood's lisp, and harp un-
strung !
In thee, my Fancy's pleasant walks have been,
Telling her tales, while Memory wept be-
tween ! 1151
And now for thee I joy, with heart beguiled,
As if a dying friend looked up, and smiled.

Lo ! o'er Ægea's waves, the shout hath
ris'n !
Lo ! Hope hath burst the fetters of her prison !
And Glory sounds the trump along the shore,
And Freedom walks where Freedom walk'd
before !
Ipsara glimmers with heroic light,
Redd'ning the waves that lash her flaming
height ; 1159
And Egypt hurries from that dark blue sea !

Lo! o'er the cliffs of fam'd Thermopylæ,
 And voiceful Marathon, the wild winds sweep,
 Bearing this message to the brave who sleep —
 'They come! they come! with their embat-
 tled shock,
 From Pelion's steep, and Paros' foam-dash'd
 rock!
 They come from Tempe's vale, and Helicon's
 spring,
 And proud Eurotas' banks, the river king!
 They come from Leuctra, from the waves that
 kiss
 Athena — from the shores of Salamis; ¹¹⁶⁹
 From Sparta, Thebes, Eubœa's hills of blue —
 To live with Hellas — or to sleep with you!'

Smile — smile, beloved land! and though no
 lay
 From Doric pipe, may charm thy glades to-
 day —

Though dear Ionic music murmur not
 Adown the vale — its echo all forgot!
 Yet smile, beloved land! for soon, around,
 Thy silent earth shall utter forth a sound,
 As whilom — and, its pleasant groves among,
 The Grecian voice shall breathe the Grecian
 song,

While the exilèd muse shall 'habit still ¹¹⁸⁰
 The happy haunts of her Parnassian hill.
 Till then, behold the cold dumb sepulchre —
 The ruin'd column — ocean, earth, and air,
 Man, and his wrongs — thou hast Tyrtaeus
 there!

And pardon, if across the heaving main,
 Sound the far melody of minstrel strain,
 In wild and fitful gust from England's shore,
 For *his* immortal sake, who never more
 Shall tread with living foot, and spirit free,
 Her fields, or breathe her passionate poetry —
 The pilgrim bard, who lived, and died for
 thee,

Oh land of Memory! loving thee no less ¹¹⁹²
 Than parent — with the filial tenderness,
 And holy ardor of the Argive son,
 Straining each nerve to bear thy chariot on —
 Till when its wheels the place of glory swept,
 He laid him down before the shrine — and
 slept.

So be it! at his cold unconscious bier,
 We fondly sate, and dropp'd the natural tear —
 Yet wept not wisely, for he sank to rest ¹²⁰⁰
 On the dear earth his waking thoughts loved
 best,

And gently life's last pulses stole away!
 No Moschus sang a requiem o'er his clay,
 But Greece was sad! and breathed above, be-
 low,
 The warrior's sigh, the silence, and the woe!

And is this all? Is this the little sum
 For which we toil — to which our glories come?
 Doth History bend her mouldering pages o'er,
 And Science stretch her bulwark from the
 shore,

And Sages search the mystic paths of Thought,
 And Poets charm with lays that Genius taught —

For this? to labor through their little day, ¹²¹²
 To weep an hour, then want the tear they pay —
 To ask the urn, their death and life to tell,
 When the dull dust would give that tale as
 well!

Man! hast thou seen the gallant vessel sweep,
 Borrowing her moonlight from the jealous deep,
 And gliding with mute foot, and silver wing,
 Over the waters like a soul-mov'd thing?
 Man, hast thou gazed on this — then look'd
 again, ¹²²⁰

And seen no speck on all that desolate main,
 And heard no sound, — except the gurgling
 cry,
 The winds half stifled in their mockery?

Woe unto thee! for, thus, thy course is run,
 And, in the fulness of thy noon-day sun,
 The darkness cometh — yea! thou walk'st
 abroad

In glory, Child of Mind, Creation's Lord —
 And wisdom's music from thy lips hath gush'd!
 Then comes the *Selah!* and the voice is hush'd,
 And the light past! we seek where thou hast
 been ¹²³⁰

In beauty — but thy beauty is not seen!
 We breathe the air thou breath'd'st, we tread
 the spot

Thy feet were wont to tread, but find thee
 not!

Beyond, sits Darkness with her haggard face,
 Brooding fiend-like above thy burying-place —
 Beneath, let wildest Fancy take her fill!
 Shall we seek on? we shudder and are still!
 Yet woe not unto thee, thou child of Earth!
 Though moonlight sleep on thy deserted hearth.
 We will not cry 'Alas!' above thy clay! ¹²⁴⁰
 It was, perchance, thy joyous pride to stray
 On Mind's lone shore, and linger by the
 way:

But now thy pilgrim's staff is laid aside,
 And on thou journeyest o'er the sullen tide,
 To bless thy wearied sight, and glad thine
 heart

With all that Mind's serenest skies impart;
 Where Wisdom suns the day no shades de-
 stroy,

And Learning ends in Truth, as hope in joy:
 While we stand mournful on the desert beach,
 And wait, and wish, thy distant bark, to reach,
 And weep to watch it passing from our sight,
 And sound the gun's salute, and sigh our last
 'good night!' ¹²⁵²

And oh! while thus the spirit glides away, —
 Give to the world its memory with its clay!
 Some page our country's grateful eyes may
 scan;

Some useful truth to bless surviving man;
 Some name to honest bosoms justly dear;
 Some grave t' exalt the thought, and claim the
 tear;

So when the pilgrim Sun is travelling o'er
 The last blue hill, to gild a distant shore, ¹²⁶⁰
 He leaves a freshness in the evening scene,
 That tells Creation where his steps have been!

II. SOME ACCOUNT OF THE GREEK CHRISTIAN POETS

The series of papers on the Greek Christian Poets appeared first in the *Athenæum* between the months of February and August, 1842. They were reprinted along with a second series of papers on the English poets — contributed to the same periodical — in a small separate volume, two years after Mrs. Browning's death. (*The Greek Christian Poets and The English Poets*, by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, London. Chapman and Hall, 1863.) As a mere girl, Miss Barrett had read the Greek Fathers in the original, under the guidance of the blind scholar, Hugh Stuart Boyd, who was deeply versed in them and could repeat from memory pages of their works both in prose and verse. A playful allusion to his especial enthusiasm for Saint Gregory Nazianzen occurs in Mrs. Browning's poem 'Wine of Cyprus,' which was dedicated to Mr. Boyd.

'Do you mind that deed of Atë
Which you bound me to so fast,
Reading "*De Virginitate*,"
From the first line to the last?
How I said, at ending solemn,
As I turned and looked at you,
That Saint Simeon on the column
Had had somewhat less to do?'

The Greek language was a strong intellectual life, stronger than any similar one which has lived in the breath of 'articulately speaking men,' and survived it. No other language has lived so long and died so hard, — pang by pang, each with a dolphin color — yielding reluctantly to that doom of death and silence which must come at last to the speaker and the speech. Wonderful it is to look back fathoms down the great Past, thousands of years away — where whole generations lie unmade to dust — where the sounding of their trumpets, and the rushing of their scythed chariots, and that great shout which brought down the birds stone dead from beside the sun, are more silent than the dog breathing at our feet, or the fly's paces on our window-pane; and yet, from the heart of which silence, to feel words rise up like a smoke — words of men, even words of women, uttered at first, perhaps, in 'excellent low voices,' but audible and distinct to our times, through 'the dreadful pother' of life and death, the hissing of the steam-engine and the cracking of the cerement! It is wonderful to look back and listen. Blind Homer spoke this Greek after blind Demodocus, with a quenchless light about his brows, which he felt through his blindness. Pindar rolled his chariots in it, prolonging the clamor of the games. Sappho's heart beat through it, and heaved up the world's. Æschylus strained it to the stature of his high thoughts. Plato crowned it with his divine peradventures. Aristophanes made it

drunk with the wine of his fantastic merriment. The latter Platonists wove their souls away in it, out of sight of other souls. The first Christians heard in it God's new revelation, and confessed their Christ in it from the suppliant's knee, and presently from the bishop's throne. To all times, and their transitions, the language lent itself. Through the long summer of above two thousand years, from the grasshopper Homer sang of, to that grasshopper of Manuel Phile, which might indeed have been 'a burden,' we can in nowise mistake the chirping of the bloodless, deathless, wondrous creature. It chirps on in Greek still. At the close of that long summer, though Greece lay withered to her root, her academic groves and philosophic gardens all leafless and bare, still from the depth of the desolation rose up the voice —

O cuckoo, shall I call thee bird,
Or but a wandering voice? —

which did not grow hoarse, like other cuckoos, but sang not unsweetly, if more faintly than before. Strangely vital was this Greek language —

Some straggling spirits were behind, to be
Laid out with most thrift on its memory.

It seemed as if nature could not part with so lovely a tune, as if she felt it ringing on still in her head — or as if she hummed it to herself, as the watchman used to do, with 'night wandering round' him, when he watched wearily on the palace roof of the doomed house of Atreus.

But, although it is impossible to touch with a thought the last estate of Greek poetical literature without the wonder occurring of its being still Greek, still poetry, — though we are startled by the phenomenon of lifelike sounds coming up from the ashes of a mighty people — at the aspect of an Alcestis returned from the dead, veiled but identical, — we are forced to admit, after the first pause of admiration, that a change has passed upon the great thing we recognize, a change proportionate to the greatness, and involving a caducity. Therefore, in adventuring some imperfect account of the Greek ecclesiastical poets, it is right to premise it with the full and frank admission, that they are not accomplished poets. — that they do not, in fact, reach with their highest lifted hand, the lowest foot of those whom the world has honored as Greek poets, but who have honored the world more by their poetry. The instrument of the Greek tongue was, at the Christian era, an antique instrument, somewhat worn, somewhat stiff in the playing, somewhat deficient in notes which it had once, somewhat feeble and uncertain in such as it retained. The subtlety of the ancient music, the variety of its cadences, the intersections of sweetness in the rise and fall of melodies, rounded and contained in the unity of its harmony, are as utterly lost to this later period as the digamma was to

an earlier one. We must not seek for them; we shall not find them; their place knows them no more. Not only was there a lack in the instrument, — there was also a deficiency in the players. Thrown aside, after the old flute-story, by a goddess, it was taken up by a mortal hand — by the hand of men gifted and noble in their generation, but belonging to it intellectually, even by their gifts and their nobleness. Another immortal, a true genius, might — nay, would — have asserted himself, and wrung a poem of almost the ancient force from the infirm instrument. It is easy to fancy, and to wish that it had been so — that some martyr or bishop, when bishops were martyrs, and the earth was still warm with the Sacrificial blood, had been called to the utterance of his soul's devotion, with the emphasis of a great poet's power. No one, however, was so called. Of all the names which shall presently be reckoned, and of which it is the object of this sketch to give some account, beseeching its readers to hold several in honorable remembrance, not one can be crowned with a steady hand as a true complete poet's name. Such a crown is a sacred dignity, and, as it should not be touched idly, it must not be used here. A born Warwick could find, here, no head for a crown.

Yet we shall reckon names 'for remembrance,' and speak of things not ignoble — of meek heroic Christians, and heavenward faces washed serene by tears — strong knees bending humbly for the very strength's sake — bright intellects burning often to the winds in fantastic shapes, but oftener still with an honest inward heat, vehement on heart and brain — most eloquent fallible lips that convince us less than they persuade — a divine loquacity of human falsities — poetical souls, that are not souls of poets! Surely not ignoble things! And the reader will perceive at once that the writer's heart is not laid beneath the wheels of a cumbersome ecclesiastical antiquity — that its intent is to love what is lovable, to honor what is honorable, and to kiss both through the dust of centuries, but by no means to recognize a *hierarchy*, whether in the church or in literature.

If, indeed, an opinion on the former relation might be regarded here, it would be well to suggest, that to these 'Fathers,' as we call them filially, with heads turned away, we owe more reverence for the grayness of their beards than theological gratitude for the outstretching of their hands. Devoted and disinterested as many among them were, they, themselves, were at most times evidently and consciously surer of their *love*, in a theologic sense, than of their knowledge in any. It is no place for a reference to religious controversy; and if it were, we are about to consider them simply as poets, without trenching on the very wide ground of their prose works and ecclesiastical opinions. Still one passing remark may be admissible, since the fact is so remarkable — how any body of Christian men can profess to derive their opinions from 'the opinions of the

Fathers,' when *all* bodies might do so equally. These fatherly opinions are, in truth, multi-form, and multitudinous as the fatherly 'sublime gray hairs.' There is not only a fatherly apiece for every child, but, not to speak it unfilially, a piece of every father for every child. Justin Martyr would, of himself, set up a wilderness of sects, besides 'something over' for the future ramifications of each several one. What then should be done with our 'Fathers'? Leave them to perish by the time-Ganges, as old men innocent and decrepit, and worthy of no use or honor? Surely not. We may learn of them, if God will let us, *love*, and love is much — we may learn devotedness of them and warm our hearts by theirs; and this, although we rather distrust them as commentators, and utterly refuse them the reverence of our souls, in the capacity of theological oracles.

Their place in literature, which we have to do with to-day, may be found, perhaps, by a like moderation. That place is not, it has been admitted, of the highest; and that it is not of the lowest the proof will presently be attempted. There is a mid-air kingdom of the birds called *Nephelococcygia*, of which *Aristophanes* tells us something; and we might stand there a moment so as to measure the local adaptitude, putting up the Promethean umbrella to hide us from the 'Gods,' if it were not for the 'men and columns' lower down. But as it is, the very suggestion, if persisted in, would sink all the ecclesiastical antiquity it is desirable to find favor for, to all eternity, in the estimation of the kindest reader. No! the mid-air kingdom of the birds will not serve the wished-for purpose even illustratively, and by grace of the nightingale. 'May the sweet saints pardon us' for wronging them by an approach to such a sense, which, if attained and determined, would have consigned them so certainly to what St. Augustine called — when he was moderate too — *mitissima damnatio*, a very mild species of damnation.

It would be, in fact, a rank injustice to the beauty we are here to recognize, to place these writers in the rank of mediocrities, supposing the harsh sense. They may be called mediocrities as poets among poets, but not so as no poets at all. Some of them may sing before gods and men, and in front of any column, from Trajan's to that projected one in Trafalgar Square, to which is promised the miraculous distinction of making the National Gallery sink lower than we see it now. They may, as a body, sing exultingly, holding the relation of column to gallery, in front of the whole 'corpus' of Latin ecclesiastical poetry, and claim the world's ear and the poet's palm. That the modern Latin poets have been more read by scholars, and are better known by reputation to the general reader, is unhappily true; but the truth involves no good reason why it should be so, nor much marvel that it is so. Besides the greater accessibility of Latin literature, the vicissitude of life is extended to posthumous fame, and Time, who is Justice to the poet, is

sometimes too busy in pulverizing bones to give the due weight to memories. The modern Latin poets, 'elegant,'—which is the critic's word to spend upon them,—elegant as they are occasionally, polished and accurate as they are comparatively, stand cold and lifeless, with statue-eyes, near these good, fervid, faulty Greeks of ours — and we do not care to look again. Our Greeks do, in their degree, claim their ancestral advantage, not the mere advantage of language, — nay, least the advantage of language — a comparative elegance and accuracy of expression being ceded to the Latins — but that higher distinction inherent in brain and breast, of vivid thought and quick sensibility. What if we swamp for a moment the Tertullians and Prudentiuses, and touch, by a permitted anachronism, with one hand VIDA, with the other GREGORY NAZIANZEN, what then? What though the Italian poet be smooth as the Italian Canova — working like him out of stone — smooth and cold, disdaining to ruffle his dactyls with the beating of his pulses — what then? Would we change for him our sensitive Gregory, with all his defects in the glorious 'scientia metrica'? We would not — perhaps we should not, even if those defects were not attributable, as Mr. Boyd, in the preface to his work on the Fathers, most justly intimates, to the changes incident to a declining language.

It is, too, as religious poets that we are called upon to estimate these neglected Greeks — as religious poets, of whom the universal church and the world's literature would gladly embrace more names than can be counted to either. For it is strange that, although Wilhelm Meister's uplooking and downlooking aspects, the reverence to things above and things below, the religious all-clasping spirit, be, and must be, in degree and measure, the grand necessity of every true poet's soul, — of religious poets, strictly so called, the earth is very bare. Religious 'parcel-poets' we have, indeed, more than enough; writers of hymns, translators of scripture into prose, or of prose generally into rhymes, of whose heart-devotion a higher faculty were worthy. Also there have been poets, not a few, singing as if earth were still Eden; and poets, many, singing as if in the first hour of exile, when the echo of the curse was louder than the whisper of the promise. But the right 'genius of Christianity' has done little up to this moment, even for Chateaubriand. We want the touch of Christ's hand upon our literature, as it touched other dead things — we want the sense of the saturation of Christ's blood upon the souls of our poets, that it may cry *through* them in answer to the ceaseless wail of the Sphinx of our humanity, expounding agony into renovation. Something of this has been perceived in art when its glory was at the fullest. Something of a yearning after this may be seen among the Greek Christian poets, something which would have been *much* with a stronger faculty. It will not harm us in any case, as lovers of literature and honest

judges, if we breathe away, or peradventure *besom* away, the thick dust which lies upon their heavy folios, and besom away, or peradventure *breathe* away, the inward intellectual dust, which must be confessed to lie thickly, too, upon the heavy poems, and make our way softly and meekly into the heart of such hidden beauties (hidden and scattered) as our good luck, or good patience, or, to speak more reverently, the intrinsic goodness of the Fathers of Christian Poetry, shall permit us to discover. May gentle readers favor the endeavor, with 'gentle airs,' if any! readers not too proud to sleep, were it only for Homer's sake; nor too passionate, at their worst displeasure, to do worse than growl in their sleeves, after the manner of 'most delicate monsters.' It is not intended to crush this forbearing class with folios nor even with a folio; only to set down briefly in their sight what shall appear to the writer the characteristics of each poet, and to illustrate the opinion by the translation of a few detached passages, or, in certain possible cases, of short entire poems. And so much has been premised, simply that too much be not expected.

It has the look of an incongruity, to begin an account of the Greek Christian poets with a Jew; and EZEKIEL is a Jew in his very name, and a 'poet of the Jews' by profession. Moreover he is wrapt in such a mystery of chronology, that nobody can be quite sure of his not having lived before the Christian era — and one whole whisper establishes him as a unit of the famous seventy or seventy-two, under Ptolemy Philadelphus. Let us waive the chronology in favor of the mystery. He is brought out into light by Clemens Alexandrinus; and being associated with Greek poets, and a writer himself of Greek verses, we may receive him in virtue of the *τοτοτοτοτοτοτοτοτοτιξ*, with little fear, in his case, of implying an injustice in that middle bird-locality of Nephelococcygia. The reader must beware of confounding him with the prophet; and the circumstance of the latter's inspiration is sufficiently distinguishing. Our Greek Ezekiel is, indeed, whatever his chronology may be, no *rates* in the ancient sense. A Greek tragedy (and some fragments of a tragedy are all that we hold of him), by a Jew, and on a Jewish subject, 'The Exodus from Egypt,' may startle the most serene of us into curiosity — with which curiosity begins and ends the only strong feeling we can bring to bear upon the work; since, if the execution of it is somewhat curious too, there is a gentle collateral dulness which effectually secures us from feverish excitement. Moses prologizes after the worst manner of Euripides (worse than the worse), compendiously relating his adventures among the bulrushes and in Pharaoh's household, concluded by his slaying an Egyptian, *because nobody was looking*. So saith the poet. Then follows an interview between the Israelite and Zipporah, and her companions, wherein he puts to her certain geographical questions, and she (as far as we can make out through fragmentary

cracks) rather *brusquely* proposes their mutual marriage; on which subject he does not venture an opinion; but we find him next confiding his dreams in a family fashion to her father, who considers them satisfactory. Here occurs a broad crack down the tragedy — and we are suddenly called to the revelation from the bush by an extraordinarily ordinary dialogue, between Deity and Moses. It is a surprising specimen of the kind of composition adverted to some lines ago, as the translation of Scripture into prose; and the sublime simplicity of the scriptural narrative being thus done (away) into Greek for a certain time, the following reciprocation — to which our old moralities can scarcely do more, or less, than furnish a parallel — prays for an English — exposure. The Divine Being is supposed to address Moses: —

But what is this thou holdest in thine hand? —
Let thy reply be sudden.

Moses. 'Tis my rod —
I chasten with it quadrupeds and men.

Voice from the Bush. Cast it upon the ground — and
straight recoil;

For it shall be, to move thy wonderment,
A terrible serpent.

Moses. It is cast. But THOU,
Be gracious to me, Lord. How terrible!
How monstrous! Oh, be pitiful to me!
I shudder to behold it, my limbs shake.

The reader is already consoled for the destiny which mutilated the tragedy, without requiring the last words of the analysis. Happily characteristic of the 'meekest of men' is Moses's naïve admission of the uses of his rod — to beat men and animals withal — of course 'when nobody is looking.'

CLEMENS ALEXANDRINUS, to whom we owe whatever gratitude is due for our fragmentary Ezekiel, was originally an Athenian philosopher, afterwards a converted Christian, a Presbyter of the Church at Alexandria, and preceptor of the famous Origen. Clemens flourished at the close of the second century. As a prose writer — and we have no prose writings of his, except such as were produced subsequently to his conversion — he is learned and various. His 'Pedagogue' is a wanderer, to universal intents and purposes; and his 'Tapestry,' if the 'Stromata' may be called so, is embroidered in all cross-stitches of philosophy, with not much scruple as to the shading of colors. In the midst of all is something, cyleped a dithyrambic ode, addressed to the Saviour, composite of fantastic epithets in the mode of the old litanies, and almost as bald of merit as the Jew-Greek drama, though Clemens himself (worthier in worthier places) be the poet. Here is the opening, which is less fanciful than what follows it: —

Curb for wild horses,
Wing for bird-courses
Never yet flown!
Helm, safe for weak ones,
Shepherd, bespeak once,
The young lambs thine own.

Rouse up the youth,
Shepherd and feeder,
So let them bless thee,
Praise and confess thee, —
Pure words on pure mouth, —
Christ, the child-leader!
O, the saints' Lord,
All-dominant word!
Holding, by Christdom,
God's highest wisdom!
Column in place
When sorrows seize us, —
Endless in grace
Unto man's race,
Saving one, Jesus!
Pastor and ploughman,
Helm, curb, together, —
Pinion that now can
(Heavenly of feather)
Raise and release us, —
Fisher who catcheth
Those whom he watcheth . . .

It goes on; but we need not do so. 'By the pricking of our thumbs,' we know that the reader has had enough of it.

Passing rapidly into the fourth century, we would offer our earliest homage to Gregory Nazianzen,

That name must ever be to us a friend,

when the two APOLINARI cross our path and intercept the 'all hail.' Apolinarius the grammarian, formerly of Alexandria, held the office of presbyter in the church of Laodiceæ, and his son Apolinarius, an accomplished rhetorician, that of *reader*, an ancient ecclesiastical office, in the same church. This younger Apolinarius was a man of indomitable energies and most practical inferences; and when the edict of Julian forbade to the Christians the study of Grecian letters, he, assisted perhaps by his father's hope and hand, stood strong in the gap, not in the attitude of supplication, not with the gesture of consolation, but in power and sufficiency to fill up the void and baffle the tyrant. Both father and son were in the work, by some testimony; the younger Apolinarius standing out, by all, as the chief worker, and only one in any extensive sense. 'Does Julian deny us Homer?' said the brave man in his armed soul — 'I am Homer!' and straightway he turned the whole Biblical history, down to Saul's accession, into Homeric hexameters, — dividing the work, so as to elench the identity of first and second Homers, into twenty-four books, each superscribed by a letter of the alphabet, and the whole acceptable, according to the expression of Sozomen, *ἀντὶ τῆς Ὀμήρου ποιήσεως*, in the place of Homer's poetry. 'Does Julian deny us Euripides?' said Apolinarius again — 'I am Euripides!' and up he sprang, — as good an Euripides (who can doubt it?) as he ever was a Homer. 'Does Julian forbid us Menander?' — Pindar? — Plato? — I am Menander! — I am Pindar! — I am Plato! And comedies, lyrics, philosophies, flowed fast at the word; and the gospels and epistles adapted themselves naturally to the

rules of Socratic disputation. A brave man, forsooth, was our Apollinarius of Laodicea, and literally a man of men — for observe, says Sozomen, with a venerable innocence, at which the gravest may smile gravely, — as at a doublet worn awry at the Council of Nice, — that the old authors did each man his own work, whereas this Apollinarius did every man's work in addition to his own — and so admirably — intimates the ecclesiastical critic, — that if it were not for the common prejudice in favor of antiquity, no ancient could be missed in the all-comprehensive representativeness of the Laodicean writer. So excellent was his ability, to 'out-brave the stars in several kinds of light,' besides the Cæsar! Whether Julian, naturally mortified to witness this germination of illustrious heads under the very iron of his searing, vowed vengeance against the Hydra-spirit, by the sacred memory of the animation of his own beard, we do not exactly know. To embitter the wrong, Apollinarius sent him a treatise upon truth — a confutation of the pagan doctrine, apart from the scriptural argument, — the Emperor's notice of which is both worthy of his Cæsarship, and a good model-note for all sorts of critical dignities. 'Ανέγνω ἔγνων κατέγνω, is the Greek of it; so that, turning from the letter to catch something of the point, we may write it down — 'I have perused, I have mused, I have abused:' which provoked as imperious a retort — 'Thou mayest have perused, but thou hast not mused; for hadst thou mused, thou wouldst not have abused.' Brave Laodicean!

Apollinarius's laudable *double* of Greek literature has perished, the reader will be concerned to hear, from the face of the earth, being, like other *lusus*, or marvels, or monsters, brief of days. One only tragedy remains, with which the memory of Gregory Nazianzen has been right tragically affronted, and which Gregory, — εἰ τις αἰσθῆται, as he said of Constantine, — would cast off with the scorn and anger befitting an Apollinarian heresy. For Apollinarius, besides being an epist, dramatist, lyricist, philosopher, and rhetorician, was, we are sorry to add, in the eternal bustle of his soul, a heretic, — possibly for the advantage of something additional to do. He not only intruded into the churches hymns which were not authorized, being his own composition — so that reverend brows grew dark to hear women with musical voices sing them softly to the turning of their distaff, — but he fell into the heresy of denying a human soul to the perfect MAN, and of leaving the Divinity in bare combination with the Adamic dust. No wonder that a head so beset with many thoughts and individualities should at last turn round! — that eyes rolling in fifty fine frenzies of twenty-five fine poets should at last turn blind! — that a determination to rival all geniuses should be followed by a disposition more baleful in its exercise, to understand 'all mysteries'! Nothing can be plainer than the step after step, whereby, through excess of vain-glory and morbid mental activity, Apollinarius, the vice-poet of Greece, subsided

into Apollinarius the chief heretic of Christendom.

To go back sighingly to the tragedy, where we shall have to sigh again — the only tragedy left to us of all the tragic works of Apollinarius (but we do not sigh for *that*!) — let no voice ever more attribute it to Gregory Nazianzen. How could Mr. Alfrod do so, however hesitatingly, in his 'Chapters,' attaching to it, without the hesitation, a charge upon the writer, whether Gregory or another man, that *he*, whoever he was, had, of his own free will and choice, destroyed the old Greek originals out of which his tragedy was constructed, and left it a monument of their sacrifice as of the blood on his barbarian hand? The charge passes, not only before a breath, but before its own breath. The tragedy is, in fact, a specimen of *centoism*, which is the adaptation of the phraseology of one work to the construction of another; and we have only to glance at it to perceive the Medæa of Euripides dislocated into the CHRISTUS PATIENS. Instead of the ancient opening —

Oh, would ship Argo had not sailed away
To Colchos by the rough Symplegades!
Nor ever had been felled in Pelion's grove
The pine, hewn for her side! . . .

So she my queen,
Medæa, had not touched this fatal shore,
Soul-struck by love of Jason!

Apollinarius opens it thus —

Oh, would the serpent had not glode along
To Eden's garden-land, — nor ever had
The crafty dragon planted in that grove
A slimy snare! So she, rib-born of man,
The wretched misled mother of our race,
Had dared not to dare on beyond worst daring,
Soul-struck by love of — apples!

'Let us alone for keeping our countenance' — and at any rate we are bound to ask gravely of Mr. Alfrod, is the *Medæa* destroyed? — and if not, did the author of the 'Christus Patiens' destroy his originals? and if not, may we not say of Mr. Alfrod's charge against that author, 'Oh, would he had not made it!' So far from Apollinarius being guilty of destroying his originals, it was his reverence for them which struggled with the edict of the persecutor, and accomplished this dramatic adventure; — and this adventure, the only remaining specimen of his adventurousness, may help us to the secret of his wonderful fertility and omni-representativeness, which is probably this — that the great majority of his works, tragic, comic, lyric, and philosophic, consisted simply of *centos*. Yet we pray for justice to Apollinarius: we pray for honor to his motives and energies. Without pausing to inquire whether it had been better and wiser to let poetry and literature depart at once before the tyranny of the edict, than to drag them back by the hair into attitudes grotesquely ridiculous — better and wiser for the Greek Christian schools to let them forgo altogether the poems of their Euripides, than adapt

to the meek sorrows of the tender Virgin-mother, the bold, bad, cruel frenzy of Medæa, in such verses as these —

She howls out ancient oaths, invokes the faith
Of pledged right-hands, and calls, for witness, God !

— we pray straightforwardly for justice and honor to the motives and energies of Apollinarius. 'Oh, would that' many lived *now* as appreciative of the influences of poetry on our schools and country, as impatient of their contraction, as self-devoted in the great work of extending them ! There remains of his poetical labors, besides the tragedy, a translation of David's Psalms into 'heroic verse,' which the writer of these remarks has not seen, — and of which those critics who desire to deal gently with Apollinarius seem to begin their indulgence by doubting the authenticity.

It is pleasant to turn shortly round, and find ourselves face to face, not with the author of 'Christus Patiens,' but with one antagonistical both to his poetry and his heresy, GREGORY NAZIANZEN. A noble and tender man was this Gregory, and so tender, because so noble ; a man to lose no cubit of his stature for being looked at steadfastly, or struck at reproachfully. 'You may cast me down,' he said, 'from my bishop's throne, but you cannot banish me from before God's.' And bishop as he was, his saintly crown stood higher than his tiara, and his loving martyr-smile, the crown of a nature more benign than his fortune, shone up toward both. Son of the bishop of Nazianzen, and holder of the diocese which was his birthplace, previous to his elevation to the level of the storm in the bishopric of Constantinople, little did he care for bishoprics or high places of any kind, — the desire of his soul being for solitude, quietude, and that silent religion which should 'rather be than seem.' But his father's head bent white before him, even in the chamber of his brother's death, — and Basil, his beloved friend, the 'half of his soul,' pressed on him with the weight of love ; and Gregory, feeling their tears upon his cheeks, did not count his own, but took up the priestly office. Poor Gregory ! not merely as a priest, but as a man, he had a sighing life of it. His student days at Athens, where he and Basil read together poems and philosophies, and holier things, or talked low and *misopogonistically* of their fellow-student Julian's bearded boding smile, were his happiest days. He says of himself,

As many stones
Were thrown at *me*, as other men had flowers.

Nor was persecution the worst evil ; for friend after friend, beloved after beloved, passed away from before his face, and the voice which charmed them living spoke brokenly beside their graves, — his funeral orations marked severally the wounds of his heart, — and his genius served, as genius often does, to lay an emphasis on his grief. The passage we shall

venture to translate is rather a cry than a song —

Where are my winged words ? Dissolved in air.
Where is my flower of youth ? All withered. Where
My glory ? Vanished. Where the strength I knew
From comely limbs ? Disease hath changed it too,
And bent them. Where the riches and the lands ?
GOD HATH THEM ! Yea, and sinners' snatching hands
Have grudged the rest. Where is my father, mother,
And where my blessed sister, my sweet brother ?
Gone to the grave ! — There did remain for me
Alone my fatherland, till destiny,
Maliciously stirring a black tempest, drove
My foot from that last rest. And now I rove
Estranged and desolate a foreign shore,
And drag my mournful life and age all hoar
Throneless and cityless, and childless save
This father-care for children, which I have,
Living from day to day on wandering feet.
Where shall I cast this body ? What will greet
My sorrows with an end ? What gentle ground
And hospitable grave will wrap me round ?
Who last my dying eyelids stoop to close —
Some saint, the Saviour's friend ? or one of those
Who do not know Him ? The air interpose,
And scatter these words too.

The return upon the first thought is highly pathetic ; and there is a restlessness of anguish about the whole passage which consecrates it with the cross of nature. His happy Athenian associations gave a color, unwashed out by tears, to his mind and works. Half apostolical he was, and half scholastical ; and while he mused, on his bishop's throne, upon the mystic tree of twelve fruits, and the shining of the river of life, he carried, as Milton did, with a gentle and not ungraceful distraction, both hands full of green trailing branches from the banks of the Cephissus, nay, from the very plane-tree which Socrates sat under with Phædrus, when they two talked about beauty to the rising and falling of its leaves. As an orator, he was greater, all must feel if some do not think, than his contemporaries ; and the 'golden mouth' might confess it meekly. Erasmus compares him to Isocrates, but the unlikeness is obvious : Gregory was not excellent at an artful blowing of the pipes. He spoke grandly, as the wind does, in gusts ; and, as in a mighty wind, which combines unequal noises, the creaking of trees and rude swinging of doors as well as the sublime sovereign rush along the valleys, we gather the idea, from his eloquence, less of music than of power. Not that he is cold as the wind is — the metaphor goes no further : Gregory cannot be cold, even by disfavor of his antithetic points. He is various in his oratory, full and rapid in allusion, briefly graphic in metaphor, equally sufficient for indignation or pathos, and gifted peradventure with a keener dagger of sarcasm than should hang in a saint's girdle. His orations against Julian have all these characteristics, but they are not poetry, and we must pass down lower, and quite over his beautiful letters, to Gregory the poet.

He wrote *thirty thousand verses*, among the which are several long poems, severally defec-

tive in a defect common but not necessary to short occasional poems, and lamentable anywhere, a want of unity and completeness. The excellences of his prose are transcribed, with whatever faintness, in his poetry — the exaltation, the devotion, the sweetness, the pathos, even to the playing of satirical power about the graver meanings. But although noble thoughts break up the dulness of the ground-work, — although, with the instinct of greater poets, he bares his heart in his poetry, and the heart is worth baring, still monotony of construction without unity of intention is the most wearisome of monotones, and, except in the case of a few short poems, we find it everywhere in Gregory. The lack of variety is extended to the cadences, and the pauses fall stiffly ‘come corpo morto cade.’ Melodious lines we have often: harmonious passages scarcely ever — the music turning heavily on its own axle, as inadequate to living evolution. The poem on his own life (‘De Vitâ suâ’) is, in many places, interesting and affecting, yet faulty with all these faults. The poem on Celibacy, which state is commended by Gregory as becometh a bishop, has occasionally graphic touches, but is dull enough generally to suit the fairest spinster’s view of that melancholy subject. If Hercules could have read it, he must have rested in the middle — from which the reader is entreated to forbear the inference that the poem has not been read through by the writer of the present remarks, seeing that that writer marked the grand concluding moment with a white stone, and laid up the memory of it among the chief triumphs, to say nothing of the fortunate deliverances, *vite sue*. In Gregory’s elegiac poems, our ears, at least, are better contented, because the sequence of pentameter to hexameter necessarily excludes the various cadence which they yearn for under other circumstances. His anacreontics are sometimes nobly written, with a certain brave recklessness, as if the thoughts despised the measure — and we select from this class a specimen of his poetry, both because three of his hymns have already appeared in the ‘Athenæum,’ and because the anacreontic in question includes to a remarkable extent the various qualities we have attributed to Gregory, not omitting that play of satirical humor with which he delights to ripple the abundant flow of his thoughts. The writer, though also a translator, feels less misgiving than usual in offering to the reader, in such English as is possible, this spirited and beautiful poem.

SOUL AND BODY

WHAT wilt thou possess or be ?
O my soul, I ask of thee.
What of great, or what of small,
Counted precious therewithal ?
Be it only rare, and want it,
I am ready, soul, to grant it.
Wilt thou choose to have and hold
Lydian Gyges’ charm of old,
So to rule us with a ring,

Turning round the jewelled thing,
Hidden by its face concealed,
And revealed by its revealed ?
Or preferrest Midas’ fate —
He who died in golden state,
All things being changed to gold ?
Of a golden hunger dying,
Through a surfeit of ‘would I ’-ing !
Wilt have jewels brightly cold,
Or may fertile acres please ?
Or the sheep of many a fold,
Camels, oxen, for the world ?
Nay ! I will not give thee these !
These to take thou hast not will,
These to give I have not skill:
Since I cast earth’s cares abroad,
That day when I turned to God.

Wouldst a throne, a crown sublime,
Bubble blown upon the time ?
So thou mayest sit to-morrow
Looking downward in meek sorrow,
Some one walking by thee scorning
Who adored thee yester morning,
Some malign one ? Wilt be bound
Fast in marriage (joy unsound !)
And be turned round and round
As the time turns ? Wilt thou catch it,
That sweet sickness ? and to match it
Have babies by the hearth, bewildering ?
And if I tell thee the best children
Are none — what answer ?

Wilt thou thunder
Thy rhetorics, move the people under ?
Covetest to sell the laws
With no justice in thy cause,
And bear on, or else be borne,
Before tribunals worthy scorn ?
Wilt thou shake a javelin rather
Breathing war ? or wilt thou gather
Garlands from the wrestler’s ring ?
Or kill beasts for glorying ?
Covetest the city’s shout,
And to be in brass struck out ?
Cravest thou that shade of dreaming,
Passing air of shifting seeming,
Rushing of a pointless arrow,
Clapping echo of a hand ?
What to those who understand
Are to-day’s enjoyments narrow
Which to-morrow go again,
Which are shared with evil men
And of which no man in his dying
Taketgh aught for softer lying ?
What then wouldst thou, if thy mood
Choose not these ? what wilt thou be
O my soul — a deity ?
A God before the face of God,
Standing glorious in His glories,
Choral in His angels’ chorus ?

Go ! upon thy wing arise,
Plumed by quick energies,
Mount in circles up the skies :
And I will bless thy winged passion,
Help with words thine exaltation,
And, like a bird of rapid feather,
Outlaunch thee, Soul, upon the æther.

But thou, O fleshly nature, say,
Thou with odors from the clay,
Since thy presence I must have
As a lady with a slave,
What wouldst thou possess or be,
That thy breath may stay with thee ?
Nay ! I owe thee nought beside,
Though thine hands be open wide.

Would a table suit thy wishes,
Fragrant with sweet oils and dishes
Wrought to subtle niceness? where
Stringed music strokes the air,
And blithe hand-clappings, and the smooth
Fine postures of the tender youth
And virgins wheeling through the dance
With an unveiled countenance, —
Joys for drinkers, who love shame,
And the maddening wine-cup's flame.
Wilt thou such, howe'er decided?
Take them, — and a rope beside!

Nay! this boon I give instead
Unto friend insatiated, —
May some rocky house receive thee,
Self-roofed, to conceal thee chiefly;
Or if labor there must lurk,
Be it by a short day's work!
And for garment, camel's hair,
As the righteous clothed were,
Clothe thee! or the bestial skin
Adam's bareness hid within, —
Or some green thing from the way,
Leaf of herb, or branch of vine,
Swelling, purpling as it may,
Fearless to be drunk for wine!
Spread a table there beneath thee,
Which a sweetness shall upbreathe thee,
And which the dearest earth is giving,
Simple present to all living!
When that we have placed thee near it,
We will feed thee with glad spirit.
Wilt thou eat? soft, take the bread,
Oaten cake, if that bested;
Salt will season all aright,
And thine own good appetite,
Which we measure not, nor fetter:
'Tis an uncooked condiment,
Famine's self the only better.
Wilt thou drink? why, here doth bubble
Wet from a cup unspent,
Followed by no tipsy trouble,
Pleasure sacred from the grape!
Wilt thou have it in some shape
More like luxury? we are
No grudgers of wine-vinegar!
But if all will not suffice thee,
And thou covetest to draw
In that pitcher with a flaw,
Brimful pleasures heaven denies thee —
Go, and seek out, by that sign,
Other help than this of mine!
For me, I have not leisure so
To warm thee, Sweet, my household foe,
Until, like a serpent frozen,
New maddened with the heat, thou loosen
Thy rescued fang within mine heart!
Wilt have measureless delights
Of gold-roofed palaces, and sights
From pictured or from sculptured art,
With motion near their life; and splendor
Of bas-relief, with tracery tender,
And varied and contrasted hues?
Wilt thou have, as nobles use,
Brodered robes to flow about thee?
Jewelled fingers? Need we doubt thee?
Gauds for which the wise will flout thee?
I most, who, of all beauty, know
It must be inward, to be so!
And thus I speak to mortals low,
Living for the hour, and o'er
Its shadow, seeing nothing more;
But for those of nobler bearing,
Who live more worthily of wearing
A portion of the heavenly nature —
To low estate of clayey creature,

See, I bring the beggar's meed,
Nutriment beyond the need!
O, beholder of the Lord,
Prove on me the flaming sword!
Be mine husbandman, to nourish
Holy plants, that words may flourish
Of which mine enemy would spoil me,
Using pleasurehood to foil me!
Lead me closer to the tree
Of all life's eternity;
Which, as I have pondered, is
The knowledge of God's greatness:
Light of One, and shine of Three,
Unto whom all things that be
Flow and tend!

In such a guise,
Whoever on the earth is wise
Will speak unto himself: and who
Such inner converse would eschew, —
We say perforce of that poor wight,
'He lived in vain!' and if aright,
It is not the worst word we might.

AMPHILOCHIUS, bishop of Iconium, was beloved and much appreciated by Gregory, and often mentioned in his writings. Few of the works of Amphilochius are extant, and of these only one is a poem. It is a didactic epistle to Seleucus, 'On the Right Direction of his Studies and Life,' and has been attributed to Gregory Nazianzen by some writers, upon very inadequate evidence, — that adduced (the similar phraseology which conveys, in this poem and a poem of Gregory's, the catalogue of canonical scriptures), being as easily explained by the imitation of one poet, as by the identity of two. They differ, moreover, upon ground more important than phraseology: Amphilochius appearing to reject, or at least to receive doubtfully, Jude's epistle, and the Second of Peter. And there is a harsh force in the whole poem, which does not remind us of our Nazianzen, while it becomes, in the course of dissuading Seleucus from the amusements of the amphitheatre, graphic and effective. We hear, through the description, the grinding of the tigers' teeth, the sympathy of the people with the tigers showing still more savage.

They sit unknowing of these agonies,
Spectators at a show. When a man flies
From a beast's jaw, they groan, as if at least
They missed the ravenous pleasure, like the beast,
And sat there vainly. When, in the next spring,
The victim is attained, and, uttering
The deep roar or quick shriek between the fangs,
Beats on the dust the passion of his pangs,
All pity dieth in that glaring look.
They clap to see the blood run like a brook;
They stare with hungry eyes, which tears should fill,
And cheer the beasts on with their soul's good will;
And wish more victims to their maw, and urge
And lash their fury, as they shared the surge,
Gnashing their teeth, like beasts, on flesh of men.

There is an appalling reality in this picture. The epistle consists of 333 lines, which we mention specifically, because the poet takes advantage of the circumstance to illustrate or enforce an important theological doctrine: —

Three hundred lines, three decads, monads three,
Comprise my poem. *Love the Trinity.*

It would be almost a pain, and quite a regret, to pass from this fourth century without speaking a word which belongs to it — a word which rises to our lips, a word worthy of honor — HELIODORUS. Though a bishop and an imaginative writer, his 'Æthiopica' has no claim on our attention, either by right of Christianity or poetry; and yet we may be pardoned on our part for love's sake, and on account of the false position into which, by negligence of readers or insufficiency of translators, his beautiful romance has fallen, if we praise it heartily and faithfully even here. Our tears praised it long ago, our recollection does so now, and its own pathetic eloquence and picturesque descriptiveness are ripe for any praise. It has, besides, a vivid Arabian Night charm, almost as charming as Scheherazade herself, suggestive of an Arabian Night story drawn out 'in many a winding bout,' and not merely on the ground of extemporaneous loving and methodical (must we say it?) *lying*. In good sooth — no, not in good sooth, but in evil leasing — every hero and heroine of them all, from Abou Hassan to 'the divine Chariclea,' does lie most vehemently and abundantly by gift of nature and choice of author, whether bishop or sultana. 'It is,' as Pepys observes philosophically of the comparative destruction of gin-shops and churches in the Great Fire of London, 'pretty to observe' how they all lie. And although the dearest of story-tellers, our own Chaucer, has told us that 'some leasing is, of which there cometh none advantage to no wight,' even that species is used by them magnanimously in its turn, for the bare glory's sake, and without caring for the 'advantage.' With equal liberality, but more truth, we write down the bishop of Tricca's romance *charming*, and wish the charm of it (however we may be out of place in naming him among poets,) upon any poet who has not yet felt it, and whose eyes, giving honor, may wander over these Remarks. The poor bishop thought as well of his book as we do, perhaps better; for when commanded, under ecclesiastical censure, to burn it or give up his bishopric, he gave up the bishopric. And who blames Heliodorus? He thought well of his romance; he was angry with those who did not; he was weak with the love of it. Let whosoever blames, speak low. Romance-writers are not educated for martyrs, and the exacted martyrdom was very very hard. Think of that English bishop who burnt his hand by an act of volition — only his hand, and which was sure to be burnt afterwards; and how he was praised for it! Heliodorus had to do with a dearer thing — handwriting, not hands. Authors will pardon him, if bishops do not.

NONNUS of Panopolis, the poet of the 'Dionysiaca,' a work of some twenty-two thousand verses, on some twenty-two thousand subjects shaken together, flourished, as people say of many a dry-rooted soul, at the commencement of the fifth century. He was converted from paganism, but we are sorry to make the melancholy addition, that he was never converted

from the 'Dionysiaca.' The only Christian poem we owe to him — a paraphrase, in hexameters, of the apostle John's gospel — does all that a bald verbosity and an obscure tautology can do or undo, to quench the divinity of that divine narrative. The two well-known words, bearing on their brief vibration the whole passion of a world saved through pain from pain, are thus *traded* : —

They answered him
'Come and behold.' Then Jesus himself groaned,
Dropping strange tears from eyes unused to weep.

'Unused to weep!' Was it so of the Man of Sorrows? Oh, obtuse poet! We had translated the opening passage of the Paraphrase, and laid it by for transcription, but are repelled. Enough is said. Nonnus was never converted from the 'Dionysiaca.'

SYNESIUS of Cyrene learnt Plato's philosophy so well of Hypatia of Alexandria at the commencement of the fifth century, or rather before, that, to the obvious honor of that fair and learned teacher, he never, as bishop of Ptolemais, could attain to unlearning it. He did not wish to be bishop of Ptolemais; he had divers objections to the throne and the domination. He loved his dogs, he loved his wife; he loved Hypatia and Plato as well as he loved truth; and he loved beyond all things, under the womanly instruction of the former, to have his own way. He was a poet, too; the chief poet, we do not hesitate to record our opinion, — the chief, for true and natural gifts, of all our Greek Christian poets; and it was his choice to pray lyrically between the dew and the cloud rather than preach dogmatically between the doxies. If Gregory shrank from the episcopal office through a meek self-distrust and a yearning for solitude, Synesius repulsed the invitation to it through an impatience of control over heart and life, and for the earnest joy's sake of thinking out his own thought in the hunting-grounds, with no deacon or disciple astuter than his dog to watch the thought in his face, and trace it backward or forward, as the case might be, into something more or less than what was orthodox. Therefore he, a man of many and wandering thoughts, refused the bishopric, — not weepingly, indeed, as Gregory did, nor feigning madness with another of the 'nolentes episcopari' of that earnest period, — but with a sturdy enunciation of resolve, more likely to be effectual, of keeping his wife by his side as long as he lived, and of doubting as long as he pleased to doubt upon the resurrection of the body. But Synesius was a man of genius, and of all such true energies as are taken for granted in the name; and the very sullenness of his 'nay' being expressive to grave judges of the faithfulness of his 'yea and amen,' he was considered too noble a man not to be made a bishop of in his own despite, and on his own terms. The fact proves the latitude of discipline, and even of doctrine, permitted to the churches of that age; and it does not appear that the church at Ptolemais suffered any wrong as its result, see-

ing that Synesius, recovering from the shock militant of his ordination, in the course of which his ecclesiastical friends had 'laid hands upon him' in the roughest sense of the word, performed his new duties willingly; was no sporting bishop otherwise than as a 'fisher of men' — sent his bow to the dogs, and his dogs to Jericho, that nearest Coventry to Ptolemais, silencing his 'staunch hound's authentic voice,' as soon as ever any importance became attached to the authenticity of his own. And if, according to the bond, he retained his wife and his Platonisms, we may honor him by the inference, that he did so for conscience' sake still more than love's, since the love was inoperative in other matters. For spiritual fervor and exaltation, he has honor among men and angels; and however intent upon spiritualizing away the most glorified material body from 'the heaven of his invention,' he held fast and earnestly, as anybody's clenched hand could a horn of the altar, the Homousion doctrine of the Christian heaven, and other chief doctrines emphasizing the divine sacrifice. But this poet has a higher place among poets than this bishop among bishops; the highest, we must repeat our conviction, of all yet named or to be named by us as 'Greek Christian poets.' Little, indeed, of his poetry has reached us, but this little is great in a nobler sense than of quantity; and when of his odes, Anacreontic for the most part, we cannot say praisefully that 'they smell of Anacreon,' it is because their fragrance is holier and more abiding; it is because the human soul burning in the censor effaces from our spiritual perceptions the attar of a thousand rose-trees whose roots are in Teos. These odes have, in fact, a wonderful rapture and ecstasy. And if we find in them the phraseology of Plato or Plotinus, for he leant lovingly to the later Platonists, — nay, if we find in them oblique references to the out-worn mythology of paganism, even so have we beheld the mixed multitude of unconnected motes wheeling, rising in a great sunshine, as the sunshine were a motive energy, — and even so the burning, adoring poet-spirit sweeps upward the motes of world-fancies (as if, being in the world, their tendency was Godward) upward in a strong stream of sunny light, while she rushes into the presence of 'the Alone.' We say the *spirit* significantly in speaking of this poet's aspiration. His is an ecstasy of abstract intellect, of pure spirit, cold though impetuous; the heart does not beat in it, nor is the human voice heard; the poet is true to the heresy of the ecclesiastic, and there is no resurrection of the body. We shall attempt a translation of the ninth ode, closer if less graceful and polished than Mr. Boyd's, helping our hand to courage by the persuasion that the genius of its poetry must look through the thickest blanket of our dark.

Well-beloved and glory-laden,
Born of Solyma's pure maiden!
I would hymn Thee, blessed Warden,
Driving from Thy Father's garden
Blinking serpent's crafty lust,

With his bruised head in the dust!
Down Thou camest, low as earth,
Bound to those of mortal birth;
Down Thou camest, low as hell,
Where shepherd-Death did tend and keep
A thousand nations like to sheep,
While weak with age old Hades fell
Shivering through his dark to view Thee,
And the Dog did backward yell
With jaws all gory to let through Thee!
So, redeeming from their pain
Choirs of disembodied ones,
Thou didst lead whom Thou didst gather,
Upward in ascent again,
With a great hymn to the Father,
Upward to the pure white thrones!
King, the daemon tribes of air
Shuddered back to feel Thee there!
And the holy stars stood breathless,
Trembling in their chorus deathless;
A low laughter filled æther —
Harmony's most subtle sire
From the seven strings of his lyre
Stroked a measured music hither —
Io pean! victory!
Smiled the star of morning — he
Who smileth to foreshow the day!
Smiled Hesperus the golden,
Who smileth soft for Venus gay!
While that horned glory holden
Brimful from the fount of fire,
The white moon, was leading higher
In a gentle pastoral wise
All the nightly deities!
Yea, and Titan threw abroad
The far shining of his hair
'Neath Thy footsteps holy-fair,
Owning Thee the Son of God;
The Mind artificer of All,
And his own fire's original.

And Thou upon Thy wing of will
Mounting, — Thy God-foot uptill
The neck of the blue firmament, —
Soaring, didst alight content
Where the spirit-spheres were singing,
And the fount of good was springing,
In the silent heaven!
Where Time is not with his tide
Ever running, never weary,
Drawing earth-born things aside
Against the rocks: nor yet are given
The plagues death-bold that ride the dreary
Tost matter-depths. Eternity
Assumes the places which they yield!
Not aged, howso'er she held
Her crown from everlastingly —
At once of youth, at once of eld,
While in that mansion which is hers
To God and gods she ministers!

How the poet rises in his 'singing clothes,' embroidered all over with the mythos and the philosophy! Yet his eye is to the Throne: and we must not call him half a heathen by reason of a Platonic idiosyncrasy, seeing that the esoteric of the most suspicious turnings of his phraseology is 'Glory to the true God.' For another ode, Paris should be here to choose it — we are puzzled among the beautiful. Here is one with a thought in it from Gregory's prose, which belongs to Synesius by right of conquest: —

O my deathless, O my blessed,
Maid-born, glorious son confessed,

O my Christ of Solyma !
 I who earliest learnt to play
 This measure for Thee, fain would bring
 Its new sweet tune to cithern-string —
 Be propitious, O my King !
 Take this music which is mine
 Anthem'd from the songs divine !

We will sing thee, deathless One,
 God himself and God's great Son —
 Of sire of endless generations,
 Son of manifold creations !
 Nature mutually endued,
 Wisdom in infinitude !
 God, before the angels burning —
 Corpse, among the mortals mourning !
 What time Thou wast poured mild
 From an earthy vase defiled,
 Magi with fair arts besprent,
 At Thy new star's orient,
 Trembled inly, wonder'd wild,
 Questioned with their thoughts abroad —
 'What then is the new-born child ?
 Who the hidden God ?
 God, or corpse, or king ?
 Bring your gifts, oh hither bring
 Myrrh for rite — for tribute, gold —
 Frankincense for sacrifice !
 God ! Thine incense take and hold !
 King ! I bring thee gold of price !
 Myrrh with tomb will harmonize !

For Thou, entombed, hast purified
 Earthly ground and rolling tide,
 And the path of dæmon nations,
 And the free air's fluctuations,
 And the depth below the deep !
 Thou God, helper of the dead,
 Low as Hades didst Thou tread !
 Thou King, gracious aspect keep,
 Take this music which is mine,
 Anthem'd from the songs divine.

EUDOCIA — in the twenty-first year of the
 fifth century — wife of Theodosius, and em-
 press of the world, thought good to extend her
 sceptre —

(Hac claritate gemina
 O gloriosa femina !) —

over Homer's poems, and cento-ize them into
 an epic on the Saviour's life. She was the third
 fair woman accused of sacrificing the world for
 an apple, having moved her husband to wrath,
 by giving away his imperial gift of a large one
 to her own philosophic friend Paulinus; and
 being unhappily more learned than her two
 predecessors in the sin, in the course of her
 exile to Jerusalem she took ghostly comfort
 by separating Homer's εἰδωλον from his φρένες.
 There she sat among the ruins of the holy city,
 addressing herself most unholily, with what-
 ever good intentions and delicate fingers, to pull-
 ing Homer's gold to pieces bit by bit, even as
 the ladies of France devoted what remained to
 them of virtuous energy 'pourparfller' under
 the benignant gaze of Louis Quinze. She, too,
 who had no right of the purple to literary in-
 eptitude — she, born no empress of Rome, but
 daughter of Leontius the Athenian, what had
 she to do with Homer, 'parfilant'? Was it
 not enough for Homer that he was turned once,

like her own cast imperial mantle, by Apoli-
 narius into a Jewish epic, but that he must be
 unpicked again by Eudocia for a Christian epic ?
 The reader, who has heard enough of centos,
 will not care to hear how she did it. That she
 did it was too much; and the deed recoiled.
 For mark the poetical justice of her destiny;
 let all readers mark it, and all writers, espe-
 cially female writers, who may be half as
 learned, and not half as fair, — that although
 she wrote many poems, one 'On the Persian
 War,' whose title and merit are recorded, not
 one, except this cento, has survived. The
 obliterative sponge, we hear of in Æschylus,
 has washed out every verse except this cento's
 'damned spot.' This remains. This is called
 Eudocia: this stands for the daughter of Le-
 ontius, and this only in the world. O fair mis-
 chief! she is punished by her hand.

And yet, are we born critics any more than she
 was born an empress, that we should not have
 a heart? and is our heart stone, that it should
 not wax soft within us while the vision is stirred
 'between our eyelids and our eyes,' of this
 beautiful Athenais, baptized once by Christian
 waters, and once by human tears, into Eudocia,
 the imperial mourner? — this learned pupil of
 a learned father, crowned once by her golden
 hair, and once by her golden crown, yet praised
 more for poetry and learning than for beauty
 and greatness by such grave writers as Socrates
 and Evagrius, the ecclesiastical historians? —
 this world's empress, pale with the purple of
 her palaces, an exile even on the throne from
 her Athens, and soon twice an exile, from fa-
 ther's grave and husband's bosom? We relent
 before such a vision. And what if, reluctantly,
 we declare her innocent of the Homeric cento?
 — what if we find her 'a whipping boy' to take
 the blame? — what if we write down a certain
 Proba 'improba,' and bid her bear it? For
 Eudocia, having been once a mark to slander,
 may have been so again; and Falconia Proba,
 having committed centoism upon Virgil, must
 have been capable of anything. The Homeric
 cento has been actually attributed to her by
 certain critics, with whom we would join in all
 earnestness our most sour voices, gladly, for
 Eudocia's sake, who is closely dear to us, and
 not malignly for Proba's, who was 'improba'
 without our help. So shall we impute evil to
 only one woman, and she not an Athenian;
 while our worst wish, even to her, assumes this
 innoxious shape, that she had used a distaff
 rather than a stylus, though herself and the
 yet more 'Sleeping Beauty' had owned one
 horoscope between them! Amen to our wish!
 A busy distaff and a sound sleep to Proba!

And now, that golden-haired, golden-crowned
 daughter of Leontius, for whom neither the
 much learning nor the much sorrow drove Hes-
 perus from her sovran eyes — let her pass on
 unbleached. Be it said of her, softly as she
 goes, by all gentle readers — 'She is innocent,
 whether for centos or for apples! She wrote
 only such Christian Greek poems as Christians
 and poets might rejoice to read, but which

perished with her beauty, as being of one seed with it.'

Midway in the sixth century we encounter PAUL SILENTIARIUS, called so in virtue of the office held by him in the court of Justinian, and chiefly esteemed for his descriptive poem on the Byzantine church of St. Sophia, which, after the Arian conflagration, was rebuilt gorgeously by the emperor. This church was not dedicated to a female saint, according to the supposition of many persons, but to the second person of the Trinity, the *áya σοφία* — holy wisdom; while the poem being recited in the imperial presence, and the poet's gaze often forgetting to rise higher than the imperial smile, Paul Silentiarius dwelt less on the divine dedication and the spiritual uses of the place, than on the glory of the dedicant and the beauty of the structure. We hesitate, moreover, to grant to his poem the praise which has been freely granted to it by more capable critics, of its power to realize this beauty of structure to the eyes of the reader. It is highly elaborate and artistic; but the elaboration and art appear to us architectural far more than picturesque. There is no sequency, no congruity, no keeping, no light and shade. The description has reference to the working as well as to the work, to the materials as well as to the working. The eyes of the reader are suffered to approach the whole only in analysis, or rather in analysis analyzed. Every part, part by part, is recounted to him excellently well — is brought close till he may touch it with his eyelashes; but when he seeks for the general effect, it is in pieces — there is none of it. Byron shows him more in the passing words —

I have beheld Sophia's bright roofs swell
Their glittering mass i' the sun —

than Silentiarius in all his poem. Yet the poem has abundant merit in diction and harmony; and, besides higher noblenesses, the pauses are modulated with an artfulness not commonly attained by these later Greeks, and the ear exults in an unaccustomed rhythmic pomp which the inward critical sense is inclined to murmur at, as an expletive verbosity.

Whoever looketh with a mortal eye
To heaven's emblazoned forms, not steadfastly
With unreverted neck can bear to measure
That meadow-round of star-apparelled pleasure,
But drops his eyelids to the verdant hill,
Yearning to see the river run at will,
With flowers on each side, — and the ripening corn,
And grove thick set with trees, and flocks at morn
Leaping against the dews, — and olives twined,
And green vine-branches, trailing inclined, —
And the blue calmness skimmed by dripping oar
Along the Golden Horn.

But if he bring
His foot across this threshold, never more
Would he withdraw it; fain, with wandering
Moist eyes, and ever-turning head, to stay,
Since all satiety is driven away
Beyond the noble structure. Such a fane
Of blameless beauty hath our Cæsar raised
By God's perfect grace, and not in vain!

O emperor, these labors we have praised,
Draw down the glorious Christ's perpetual smile;
For thou, the high-peaked Ossa didst not pile
Upon Olympus' head, nor Pelion throw
Upon the neck of Ossa, opening so
The æther to the steps of mortals! no!
Having achieved a work more high than hope,
Thou didst not need these mountains as a slope
Whereby to scale the heaven! Wings take thee thither
From purest piety to highest æther.

The following passage, from the same 'Description,' is hard to turn into English, through the accumulative riches of the epithets. Greek words atone for their vainglorious redundancy by their beauty, but we cannot think so of these our own pebbles: —

Who will unclothe me Homer's sounding lips,
And sing the marble me that oversweeps
The mighty walls and pavements spread around
Of this tall temple, which the sun has crowned?
The hammer with its iron tooth was loosed
Into Carystus' summit green, and bruised
The Phrygian shoulder of the dædal stone; —
This marble, colored after roses fused
In a white air, and that, with flowers thereon
Both purple and silver, shining tenderly!
And that which in the broad fair Nile sank low
The barges to their edge, the porphyry's glow
Sown thick with little stars! and thou mayst see
The green stone of Laconia glitter free!
And all the Carian hill's deep bosom brings,
Streaked bow-wise, with a livid white and red, —
And all the Lydian chasm keeps covered,
A hueless blossom with a ruddier one
Soft mingled! all, besides, the Libyan sun
Warms with his golden splendor, till he make
A golden yellow glory for his sake,
Along the roots of the Maurusian height;
And all the Celtic mountains give to sight
From crystal clefts: black marbles dappled fair
With milky distillations here and there!
And all the onyx yields in metal-shine
Of precious greenness! — all that land of thine,
Ætolia, hath on even plains engendered
But not on mountain-tops, — a marble rendered
Here nigh to green, of tints which emeralds use,
Here with a sombre purple in the hues!
Some marbles are like new-dropt snow, and some
Alight with blackness! Beauty's rays have come,
So congregate, beneath this holy dome!

And thus the poet takes us away from the church and dashes our senses and admirations down these marble quarries! Yet it is right for us to admit the miracle of a poem made out of stones! and when he spoke of unclosing Homer's lips on such a subject, he was probably thinking of Homer's ships, and meant to intimate that one catalogue was as good for him as another.

JOHN GEOMETRA arose in no propitious orient probably with the seventh century, although the time of his 'elevation' appears to be uncertain within a hundred years.

He riseth slowly, as his sullen car
Had all the weights of sleep and death hung on it.

Plato, refusing his divine fellowship to any one who was not a geometrician or who was a poet, might have kissed our Johannes, who was

not divine, upon both cheeks, in virtue of his other name and in vice of his verses. He was the author of certain hymns to the Virgin Mary, as accumulative of epithets and admirations as ten of her litanies, inclusive of a pious compliment, which, however geometrically exact in its proportions, sounds strangely.

O health to thee ! new living car of the sky,
 Afire on the wheels of four virtues at once !
 O health to thee ! Seat, than the cherubs more high,
 More pure than the seraphs, *more broad than the thrones !*

Towards the close of the last hymn, the exhausted poet empties back something of the ascription into his own lap, by a remarkable 'mili quoque.'

O health to me, royal one ! if there belong
 Any grace to my singing, that grace is from thee.
 O health to me, royal one ! if in my song
 Thou hast pleasure, oh, thine is the grace of the glee !

We may mark the time of GEORGE PISIDA, about thirty years deep in the seventh century. He has been confounded with the rhetorical archbishop of Nicomedia, but held the office of scevophylax, only lower than the highest, in the metropolitan church of St. Sophia, and was a poet, singing half in the church and half in the court, and considerably nearer to the feet of the Emperor Heraclius than can please us in any measure. Hoping all things, however, in our poetical charity, we are willing to hope even this, — that the man whom Heraclius carried about with him as a singing-man when he went to fight the Persians, and who sang and recited accordingly, and provided notes of admiration for all the imperial notes of interrogation, and gave his admiring poems the appropriate and suggestive name of *acroases* — auscultations, things intended to be heard, — might nevertheless love Heraclius the fighting-man, not slave-wise or flatterer-wise, but man-wise or dog-wise, in good truth, and up to the brim of his praise ; and so hoping, we do not dash the praise down as a libation to the infernal taskmasters. Still it is an impotent conclusion to a free-hearted poet's musing on the 'Six Days' Work,' to wish God's creation under the sceptre of his particular friend ! It looks as if the particular friend had an ear like Dionysius, and the poet — ah, the poet ! — a mark as of a chain upon his brow in the shadow of his court laurel.

We shall not revive the question agitated among his contemporaries, whether Euripides or George Pisida wrote the best iambs ; but that our George knew the secret of beauty, and that, having noble thoughts, he could utter them nobly, is clear, despite of Heraclius. That he is, besides, unequal ; often coldly perplexed when he means to be ingenious, only violent when he seeks to be inspired ; that he premeditates ecstasies, and is inclined to the attitudes of the orators ; in brief, that he 'not only'

(and not seldom) 'sleeps but *snores*' — are facts as true of him as the praise is. His Hexæmeron, to which we referred as his chief work, is rather a meditation or rhythmical speech upon the finished creation, than a retrospection of the six days ; and also there is more of Plato in it than of Moses. It has many fine things, and whole passages of no ordinary eloquence, though difficult to separate and select.

Whatever eyes seek God to view His Light,
 As far as they behold Him close in night !
 Whoever searcheth with insatiate balls
 Th' abyssal glare, or gazeth on Heaven's walls
 Against the fire-disk of the sun, the same
 According to the vision he may claim,
 Is dazzled from his sense. What soul of flame
 Is called sufficient to view onward thus
 The way whereby the sun's light came to us ?

O distant Presence in fixed motion ! Known
 To all men, and inscrutable to one :
 Perceived — uncomprehended ! unexplained
 To all the spirits, yet by each attained,
 Because its God-sight is Thy work ! O Presence,
 Whatever holy greatness of Thine essence
 Lie virtue-hidden, Thou hast given our eyes
 The vision of Thy plastic energies —
 Not shown in angels only (those create
 All fiery-hearted, in a mystic state
 Of bodiless body) but, if order be
 Of natures more sublime than they or we,
 In highest Heaven, or mediate æther, or
 This world now seen, or one that came before
 Or one to come, — quick in Thy purpose, *there !*
 Working in fire and water, earth and air —
 In every tuneful star, and tree, and bird —
 In all the swimming, creeping life unheard,
 In all green herbs, and chief of all, in MAN.

There are other poems of inferior length, 'On the Persian War,' in three books, or, alas, 'auscultations,' — 'The Heracliad,' again on the Persian war, and in two (of course) auscultations again, — 'Against Severus,' 'On the Vanity of Life,' 'The War of the Huns,' and others. From the 'Vanity of Life,' which has much beauty and force, we shall take a last specimen : —

Some yearn to rule the state, to sit above,
 And touch the cares of hate as near as love ;
 Some their own reason for tribunal take,
 And for all thrones the humblest prayers they make ;
 Some love the orator's vain-glorious art, —
 The wise love silence and the hush of heart, —
 Some to ambition's spirit-curse are fain,
 That golden apple with a bloody stain ;
 While some do battle in her face (more rife
 Of noble ends) and conquer strife with strife :
 And while your groaning tables gladden these,
 Satiety's quick chariot to disease,
 Hunger the wise man helps, to water, bread,
 And light wings to the dreams about his head.

The truth becomes presently obvious, that —

The sage o'er all the world his sceptre waves,
 And earth is common ground to thrones and graves.

JOHN DAMASCENUS, to whom we should not give by any private impulse of admiration the

title of Chrysorrhoas, accorded to him by his times, lived at Damascus, his native city, early in the eighth century, holding an unsheathed sword of controversy until the point drew down the lightning. He retired before the affront rather than the injury; and in company with his beloved friend and fellow poet, Cosmas of Jerusalem (whose poetical remains the writer of these Remarks has vainly sought the sight of, and therefore can only, as by hearsay, ascribe some value to them), hid the remnant of his life in the monastery of Saba, where Phocas of the twelfth century looked upon the tomb of either poet. John Damascenus wrote several acrostics on the chief festivals of the churches, which are not much better, although very much longer, than acrostics need be. When he writes out of his heart, without looking to the first letters of his verses, — as indeed, in his Anacreontic his eyes are too dim for iota hunting, — he is another man, and almost a strong man; for the heart being sufficient to speak, we want no Delphic oracle — ‘Pan is not dead.’ In our selection from the Anacreontic hymn, the tears seem to trickle audibly; we welcome them as a Castalia, or, rather, ‘as Siloa’s brook,’ flowing by an oracle more divine than any Grecian one: —

From my lips in their defilement,
From my heart in its beguilement,
From my tongue which speaks not fair,
From my soul stained everywhere,
O my Jesus, take my prayer!
Spurn me not for all it says,
Not for words and not for ways,
Not for shamelessness endured!
Make me brave to speak my mood,
O my Jesus, as I would!
Or teach me, which I rather seek,
What to do and what to speak.

I have sinned more than she,
Who learning where to meet with Thee,
And bringing myrrh, the highest-priced,
Anointed bravely, from her knee,
Thy blessed feet accordingly,
My God, my Lord, my Christ!
As Thou saidest not ‘Depart’
To that suppliant from her heart,
Scorn me not, O Word, that art
The gentlest one of all words said!
But give Thy feet to me instead
That tenderly I may them kiss
And clasp them close, and never miss
With over-dropping tears, as free
And precious as that myrrh could be,
T’ anoint them bravely from my knee!
Wash me with Thy tears: draw nigh me,
That their salt may purify me.
Thou remit my sins who knowest
All the sinning to the lowest —
Knowest all my wounds, and seest
All the stripes Thyself decreest;
Yea, but knowest all my faith,
Seest all my force to death,
Hearest all my wallings low,
That mine evil should be so!
Nothing hidden but appears
In Thy knowledge, O Divine,
O Creator, Saviour mine —
Not a drop of falling tears,

Not a breath of inward moan,
Not a heart-beat — which is gone!

After this deep pathos of Christianity, we dare not say a word; we dare not even praise it as poetry: our heart is stirred, and not ‘idly.’ The only sound which can fitly succeed the cry of the contrite soul is that of Divine condonation or of angelic rejoicing. Let us who are sorrowful still, be silent too.

Although doubts, as broad as four hundred years, separate the earliest and latest period talked of as the age of SIMEON METAPHRASTES by those ‘viri illustrissimi’ the classical critics, we may set him down, without much peril to himself or us, at the close of the tenth century, or very early in the eleventh. He is chiefly known for his ‘Lives of the Saints,’ which have been lifted up as a mark both for honor and dishonor; which Psellus hints at as a favorite literature of the angels, which Leo Allatius exalts as chafing the temper of the heretics, and respecting which we, in an exemplary serenity, shall straightway accede to one half of the opinion of Bellarmine — that the work speaketh not as things actually happened, but as they might have happened — *non ut res gestæ fuerant, sed ut geri potuerant.* Our half of this weighty opinion is the first clause — we demur upon ‘*ut geri potuerant,*’ — and we need not go further than the former to win a light of commentary for the term ‘metaphrases,’ applied to the saintly biographies in otherwise a doubtful sense, and worn obliquely upon the sleeve of the biographer Metaphrastes, in no doubtful token of his skill in metamorphosing things as they were into things as they might have been. And Simeon having received from Constantinople the honor of his birth within her walls, and returning to her the better honor of the distinctions and usefulness of his life, — so writeth Psellus, his encomiast, with a graceful turn of thought, — expired in an ‘odor of sanctity’ befitting the biographer of all the saints, — breathing out from his breathless remains such an incense of celestial sweetness, that if it had not been for the maladroitness of certain unfragrant persons whose desecration of the next tomb acted incessantly as a stopper, the whole earth might at this day be *metaphrased* to our nostrils, as steeped in an attar-gul of Eden or Ede! — we might be dwelling in a phoenix-nest at this day. Through the maladroitness, however, in question, there is lost to us every sweeter influence from the life and death of Simeon Metaphrastes than may result from the lives and deaths of his saints, and from other works of his, whether commentaries, orations, or poems; and we cannot add that the aroma from his writings bears any proportion in value to the fragrance from his sepulchre. Little of his poetry has reached us, and we are satisfied with the limit. There were three Simeons, who did precede our Simeon, as the world knoweth, and whose titles were Stylitæ or Columnari, because it pleased them in their saintly volition to take

the highest place and live out their natural lives supernaturally, each upon the top of a column. Peradventure the columns which our Simeon refused to live upon conspired against his poetry; peradventure it is on their account that we find ourselves between two alphabetic acrostics, written solemnly by his hand, and take up one wherein every alternate line begins with a letter of the alphabet; its companion in the couplet being left to run behind it, out of livery and sometimes out of breath. Will the public care to look upon such a curiosity? Will our verse-writers care to understand what harm may be done by a conspiracy of columns — gods and men quite on one side? And will candid readers care to confess at last, that there is an earnestness in the poem, acrostic as it is — a leaning to beauty's side — which is above the acrosticism? Let us try: —

Ah, tears upon mine eyelids, sorrow on mine heart,
I bring Thee soul-repentance, Creator as Thou art!
Bounding joyous actions, deep as arrows go;
Pleasures self-revolving, issue into woe!
Creatures of our mortal, headlong rush to sin:
I have seen them; of them — ah me, — I have been!
Duly pitying Spirits, from your spirit-frame,
Bring your cloud of weeping, — worthy of the same!
Else I would be bolder; if that light of Thine,
Jesus, quell the evil, let it on me shine!
Fail me truth, is living, less than death forlorn,
When the sinner readeth — 'better be unborn'?
God, I raise toward Thee both eyes of my heart,
With a sharp cry — 'Help me!' — while mine hopes depart.
Help me! Death is bitter, all hearts comprehend;
But I fear beyond it — end beyond the end.
Inwardly behold me, how my soul is black:
Sympathize in gazing, do not spurn me back!
Knowing that Thy pleasure is not to destroy,
That Thou fain wouldst save me — this is all my joy.
Lo, the lion, hunting spirits in their deep,
(Stand beside me!) roareth — (help me!) nears to leap.
Mayst Thou help me, Master! Thou art pure alone,
Thou alone art sinless, one Christ on a throne.
Nightly deeds I loved them, hated day's instead;
Hence this soul-involving darkness on mine head.
O Word, who constrainest things estranged and curst,
If Thy hand can save me, that work were the first!
Pensive o'er my sinning, counting all its ways,
Terrors shake me, waiting adequate dismays.
Quenchless glories many, hast Thou — many a rod —
Thou, too, hast Thy measures. Can I bear Thee,
God?
Rend away my counting from my soul's decline,
Show me of the portion of those saved of Thine!
Slow drops of my weeping to Thy mercy run:
Let its rivers wash me, by that mercy won!
Tell me what is worthy, in our dreary now.
As the future glory? (madness!) what, as Thou?
Union, oh, vouchsafe me to Thy fold beneath,
Lest the wolf across me gnash his gory teeth!
View me, judge me gently! spare me, Master bland
Brightly lift Thine eyelids, kindly stretch Thine hand!
Winged and choral angels! 'twixt my spirit lone,
And all deathly visions, interpose your own!
Yea, my Soul, remember death and woe inwrought —
After-death affliction, wringing earth's to nought!
Zone me, Lord, with graces! Be foundations built
Underneath me; save me! as Thou know'st and wilt!

The omission of our X (in any case too sullen a letter to be employed in the service of an

acrostic) has permitted us to write line for line with the Greek; and we are able to infer to the honor of the Greek poet, that although he did not live upon a column, he was not far below one, in the virtue of self-mortification. We are tempted to accord him some more gracious and serious justice, by breaking away a passage from his 'Planctus Marie,' the lament of Mary on embracing the Lord's body; and giving a moment's insight into a remarkable composition, which, however deprived of its poetical right of measure, is, in fact, nearer to a poem, both in purpose and achievement, than any versified matter we have looked upon from this metaphrastic hand: —

'O, uncovered corse, yet Word of the Living One! self-doomed to be uplifted on the cross for the drawing of all men unto Thee, — what member of Thine hath no wound? O my blessed brows, embraced by the thorn-wreath which is pricking at my heart! O beautiful and priestly One, who hadst not where to lay Thine head and rest, and now wilt lay it only in the tomb, resting *there*; sleeping, as Jacob said, a lion's sleep! O cheeks turned to the smiter! O lips, new hive for bees, yet fresh from the sharpness of vinegar and bitterness of gall! O mouth, wherein was no guile, yet betrayed by the traitor's kiss! O hand, creative of man, yet nailed to the cross, and since stretched out unto Hades, with help for the first transgressor! O feet, once walking on the deep to hallow the waters of nature! O me, my son! . . . Where is thy chorus of sick ones? — those whom Thou didst cure of their diseases, and bring back from the dead? Is none here, but only Nicodemus, to draw the nails from those hands and feet? — none here, but only Nicodemus, to lift Thee from the cross heavily, heavily, and lay Thee in these mother-arms, which bore Thee long ago, in thy babyhood, and were glad *then*? These hands, which swaddled Thee then, let them bind Thy grave-clothes now. And yet, — O bitter funerals! — O Giver of life from the dead, liest Thou dead before mine eyes? Must I, who said "hush" beside Thy cradle, wail this passion upon Thy grave? I, who washed Thee in Thy first bath, must I drop on Thee these hotter tears? I, who raised Thee high in my maternal arms, — but *then* Thou leapedst, — *then* Thou sprangest up in Thy child-play!

It is better to write so than to stand upon a column. And, although the passage does, both generally and specifically, in certain of its ideas, recall the antithetic eloquence of that Gregory Nazianzen before whom this Simeon must be dumb, we have touched his 'oration,' so called, nearer than our subject could permit us to do any of Gregory's, because the 'Planctus' involves an imagined situation, is poetical in its design. Moreover, we must prepare to look downwards; the poets were descending from the gorgeous majesty of the hexameter and the severe simplicity of iambs down through the mediate *versus politici*, a loose metre, adapted to the popular ear, to the lowest deep

of a 'measured prose,'—which has been likened, but which *we* will not liken, to the blank verse of our times. Presently, we may offer an example from Psellus of a prose acrostic—the reader being delighted with the prospect! 'A whole silver threepence, mistress.'

MICHAEL PSELLUS lived midway in the eleventh century, and appears to have been a man of much aspiration toward the higher places of the earth. A senator of no ordinary influence, preceptor of the Emperor Michael previous to that accession, he is supposed to have included in his instructions the advantages of sovereignty, and in his precepts the most subtle means of securing them. We were about to add, that his acquirements as a scholar were scarcely less imperial than those of his pupil as a prince; but the expression might have been inappropriate. There are cases not infrequent, not entirely opposite to the present case, and worthy always of all meditation by such intelligent men as affect extensive acquisition,—when acquirements are not ruled by the man, but rule him. Whatever originates from the mind cannot obstruct her individual faculty; nay, whatever she receives inwardly and marks her power over by creating out of it a *tertium quid*, according to the law of the perpetual generation of spiritual verities, is not obstructive but impulsive to the evolution of faculty; but the erudition, whether it be erudition as the world showed it formerly, or miscellaneous literature, as the world shows it now, the accumulated acquirement of whatever character, which remains *extraneous* to the mind, is and must be in the same degree an obstruction and deformity. How many are there, from Psellus to Bayle, bound hand and foot intellectually with the rolls of their own papyrus—men whose erudition has grown stronger than their souls! How many whom we would gladly see washed in the clean waters of a little ignorance, and take our own part in their refreshment! Not that knowledge is bad, but that wisdom is better; and that it is better and wiser in the sight of the angels of knowledge to think out one true thought with a thrush's song and a green light for all lexicon (or to think it without the light and without the song—because truth is beautiful, where they are not seen or heard)—than to mummy our benumbed souls with the circumvolutions of twenty thousand books. And so Michael Psellus was a learned man.

We have sought earnestly, yet in vain,—and the fact may account for our ill-humor,—a sight of certain iambs upon vices and virtues, and Tantalus and Sphinx, which are attributed to this writer, and cannot be in the moon after all:—earnestly, yet with no fairer encouragement to our desire than what befalls it from his *poems* 'On the Councils,' the first of which, and only the first, through the softness of our charities, we bring to confront the reader:—

Know the holy councils, King, to their utmost number,
Such as roused the impious ones from their world-wide
slumber!

Seven in all those councils were: Nice the first containing,

When the godly master-soul Constantine was reigning,
What time at Byzantium, hallowed with the hyssop,
In heart and word, Metrophanes presided as arch-
bishop!

It cut away Arius' tongue's maniacal delusion,
Which cut off from the Trinity the blessed Homocousion—
Blasphemed (O miserable man!) the maker of the
creature,

And low beneath the Father cast the equal Filial nature.

The prose acrostic, contained in an office written by Psellus to the honor of Simeon, is elaborated on the words 'I sing thee who didst write the metaphrases;' every sentence being insulated, and beginning with a charmed letter.

Say in a dance how we shall go,
Who never could a measure know?

why, thus—(and yet Psellus, who did *know* everything, wrote a synopsis of the metres!)—why, thus:—

'Inspire me, Word of God, with a rhythmetic chant, for I am borne onward to praise Simeon Metaphrastes and Logothetes, as he is fitly called, the man worthy of admiration!

'Solemnly from the heavenly heights did the Blessed Ghost descend on thee, wise one, and finding thine heart pure, rested there, there verily in the body!'

Surely we need not write any more. But Michael Psellus was a very learned man.

JOHN OF EUCHAITA (or Euchania, or Theodoropolis,—the three names do appear through the twilight to belong to one city) was a bishop, probably contemporary with Psellus—is only a poet now: we turn to see the voice which speaks to us. It is a voice with a soul in it, clear and sweet and living: and we who have walked long in the desert, leap up to its sound as to the dim flowing of a stream, and would take a deep breath by its side both for the weariness which is gone and the repose which is coming. But it is a rarer thing than a stream in the desert; it is a voice in the desert—the only voice of a city. The city may have three names, as we have said, or the three names may more fitly appertain to three cities—scholars knit their brows and wax doubtful as they talk; but a city denuded of its multitudes it surely is, ruined even of its ruins it surely is: no exhalation arises from its tombs, the foxes have lost their way to it, the bittern's cry is as dumb as the vanished population—only the Voice remains. John Mauropus, of Euchaita, Euchania, Theodoropolis—one living man among many dead, as the Arabian tale goes of the city of enchantment—one speechful voice among the silent, sole survivor of the breath which maketh words, effluence of the soul replacing the bittern's cry—speak to us! And thou shalt be to us as a poet; we will salute thee by that high name. For have we not stood face to face with Michael Psellus and him of the metaphrases? Surely as a poet may we salute *thee*!

His poetry has, as if in contrast to the scenery of circumstances in which we find it, or to the

fatality of circumstances in which it has *not* been found (and even Mr. Clarke in his learned work upon Sacred Literature, which is, however, incommunicative generally upon sacred poetry, appears unconscious of his being and his bishopric) — his poetry has a character singularly vital, fresh, and serene. There is nothing in it of the rapture of inspiration, little of the operativeness of art — nothing of imagination in a high sense, or of ear-service in any: he is not, he says, of those —

Who rain hard with redundancies of words,
And thunder and lighten out of eloquence.

His Greek being opposed to that of the Silenarii and the Pisidæ by a peculiar simplicity and ease of collocation which the reader feels lightly in a moment, the thoughts move through its transparency with a certain calm nobleness and sweet living earnestness, with holy up-turned eyes and human tears beneath the lids, till the reader feels lovingly too. We startle him from his reverie with an octave note on a favorite literary fashion of the living London, drawn from the voice of the lost city; discovering by that sound the first serial illustrator of pictures by poems, in the person of our Johannes. Here is a specimen from an annual of Euchaita, or Euchania, or Theodoropolis — we may say 'annual' although the pictures were certainly not in a book, but were probably ornaments of the beautiful temple in the midst of the city, concerning which there is a tradition. Here is a specimen selected for love's sake, because it 'illustrates' a portrait of Gregory Nazianzen: —

What meditates thy thoughtful gaze, my father?
To tell me some new truth? Thou canst not so!
For all that mortal hands are weak to gather
Thy blessed books unfolded long ago.

These are striking verses, upon the Blessed among women, weeping: —

O Lady of the passion, dost thou weep?
What help can we then through our tears survey,
If such as thou a cause for wailing keep?
What help, what hope, for us, sweet Lady, say?
'Good man, it doth befit thine heart to lay
More courage next it, having seen me so.
All other hearts find other balm to-day —
The whole world's consolation is my woe!

Would any hear what can be said of a Transfiguration before Raphael's: —

Tremble, spectator, at the vision won thee!
Stand afar off, look downward from the height,
Lest Christ too nearly seen should lighten on thee,
And from thy fleshly eyeballs strike the sight,
As Paul fell ruined by that glory white!
Lo, the disciples prostrate, each apart,
Each impotent to bear the lamping light!
And all that Moses and Elias might,
The darkness caught the grace upon her heart
And gave them strength for! *Thou, if evermore*
A God-voice pierce thy dark, — rejoice, adore!

Our poet was as unwilling a bishop as the most sturdy of the 'nolentes'; and there are poems written both in depreciation of, and in retrospective regret for, the ordaining dignity, marked by noble and holy beauties which we are unwilling to pass without extraction. Still we are constrained for space, and must come at last to his chief individual characteristic — to the gentle humanities which, strange to say, preponderate in the solitary voice — to the familiar smiles and sighs which go up and down in it to our ear. We will take the poem 'To his Old House,' and see how the house survives by his good help, when the sun shines no more on the golden statue of Constantine: —

O be not angry with me, gentle house,
That I have left thee empty and deserted!
Since thou thyself that evil didst arouse,
In being to thy masters so false-hearted,
In loving none of those who did possess thee,
In minst'ring to no one to an end,
In no one's service caring to confess thee,
But loving still the change of friend for friend,
And sending the last, plague-wise, to the door!
And so, or ere thou canst betray and leave me,
I, a wise lord, dismiss thee, servitor,
And antedate the wrong thou mayst achieve me
Against my will, by what my will allows;
Yet not without some sorrow, gentle house!

For oh, beloved house, what time I render
My last look back on thee I grow more tender!
Pleasant possession, hearth for father's age,
Dear gift of buried hands, sole heritage!
My blood is stirred; and love, that learnt its play
From all sweet customs, moves mine heart thy way!
For thou wast all my nurse and helpful creature,
For thou wast all my tutor and my teacher;
In thee through lengthening toils I struggled deep,
In thee I watched all night without its sleep,
In thee I worked the wearier daytime out,
Exalting truth, or trying by a doubt.

And oh, my father's roof, the memory leaves
Such pangs as break mine heart, beloved eaves!
But God's word conquers all.

He is forced to a strange land, reverting with this benediction to the 'dearest house': —

Farewell, farewell, mine own familiar one,
Estranged for evermore from this day's sun,
Fare-thee-well so! Farewell, O second mother,
O nurse and help, — remains there not another!
My bringer-up to some sublimer measure
Of holy childhood and perfected pleasure!
Now other spirits must thou tend and teach,
And minister thy quiet unto each,
For reasoning uses, if they love such use,
But nevermore to me. God keep thee, house,
God keep thee, faithful corner, where I drew
So calm a breath of life! And God keep you,
Kind neighbors! Though I leave you by His grace,
Let no grief bring a shadow to your face;
Because whate'er He willeth to be done
His will makes easy, makes the distant — one,
And soon brings all embraced before His throne!

We pass PHILIP SOLITARIUS, who lived at the close of this eleventh century, even as we have

passed one or two besides of his fellow-poets; because they, having hidden themselves beyond the reach of our eyes and the endeavor of our hands, and we being careful to speak by knowledge rather than by testimony, nothing remains to us but this same silent passing — this regretful one, as our care to do better must testify — albeit our fancy will not, by any means, account them, with all their advantages of absence, 'the best part of the solemnity.'

Early in the twelfth century we are called to the recognition of THEODORE PRODROMUS, theologian, philosopher, and poet. His poems are unequal, consisting principally of a series of tetrastichs (Greek epigrams for lack of point, French epigrams for lack of poetry) upon the Old and New Testaments, and the Life of Chrysostom, — all nearly as bare of the rags of literary merit as might be expected from the design; and three didactic poems upon Love, Providence, and against Bareus the heretic, into which the poet has cast the recollected life of his soul. The soul departs herself as a soul should, with a vivacity and energy which work outward and upward into eloquence. The sentiments are lofty, the expression free; there is an instinct to a middle and an end. Music we miss, even to the elementary melody: the poet thinks his thoughts, and speaks them; not indeed what all poets, so called, do esteem a necessary effort, and indeed what we should thank him for doing; but he *sings* them in nowise, and they are not of that divine order which are crowned by right of their divinity with an inseparable aureole of sweet sound. His poem upon Love, — *φιλία* says the Greek word, but friendship does not answer to it, — is a dialogue between the personification and a stranger. It opens thus dramatically, the stranger speaking: —

Love! Lady diademed with honor, whence
And whither goest thou? Thy look presents
Tears to the lid, thy mien is vext and low,
Thy locks fall wildly from thy drooping brow,

Thy blushes are all pale, thy garb is fit
For mourning in, and shoon and zone are loose!

So changed thou art to sadness every whit,
And all that pomp and purple thou didst use,

That seemly sweet, that new rose on the mouth,
Those fair-smoothed tresses, and that graceful zone,

Bright sandals, and the rest thou haddest on,
Are all departed, gone to nought together!

And now thou walkest mournful in the train
Of mourning women! — where and whence, again?

Love. From earth to God my Father.

Stranger. Dost thou say
That earth of Love is desolated?

Love. Yea!

It so much scorned me.

Stranger. Scorned?

Love. And cast me out

From its door.

Stranger. From its door?

Love. As if without

I had my lot to die!

Love consents to give her confidence to the wondering stranger; whereupon, as they sit in the shadow of a tall pine, she tells a Platonic

story of all the good she had done in heaven before the stars, and the angels, and the throned Triad, and of all her subsequent sufferings on the melancholy and ungrateful earth. The poem, which includes much beauty, ends with a quaint sweetness in the troth-plinging of the stranger and the lady. Mayst thou have been faithful to that oath, O Theodore Prodrumus! but thou didst swear 'too much to be believed — so much.'

The poems 'On Providence' and 'Against Bareus' exceed the 'Love,' perhaps, in power and eloquence to the full measure of the degree in which they fall short of the interest of the latter's design. Whereupon we dedicate the following selection from the 'Providence' to Mr. Carlyle's 'gigmen' and all 'respectable persons': —

Ah me! what tears mine eyes are welling forth,
To witness in this synagogue of earth
Wise men speak wisely while the scoffers sing,
And rich men folly, for much honoring!
Melitus trifles, — Socrates decrees
Our further knowledge! Death to Socrates,
And long life to Melitus! . . .

Chiefdom of evil, gold! blind child of clay,
Gnawing with fixed tooth earth's heart away!
Go! perish from us! oburgation vain
To soulless nature, powerless to contain
One ill unthrusted upon it! Rather perish
That turpitude of crowds, by which they cherish
Bad men for their good fortune, or condemn,
Because of evil fortune, virtuous men!

Oh, for a trumpet mouth! an iron tongue
Sufficient for all speech! foundations hung
High on Parnassus' top to bear my feet!
So from that watch-tower, words which shall be meet,
I may out-thunder to the nations near me —
'Ye worshippers of gold, poor rich men, hear me!
Where do ye wander? — for what object stand?
That gold is earth's ye carry in your hand,
And floweth earthward; bad men have its curse
The most profusely: would yourselves be worse
So to be richer? — better in your purse?
Your royal purple — 't was a dog that found it!
Your pearl of price — a sickened oyster owned it!
Your glittering gems are pebbles, dust-astray;
Your palace pomp was wrought of wood and clay,
Smoothed rock and moulded plinth! earth's clay, earth's
wood,

Earth's common-hearted stones! Is this your mood,
To honor earth, to worship earth, nor blush?'
What dost thou murmur, savage mouth? Hush,
hush,
Thy wrath is vainly breathed. The depth to tread
Of God's deep judgments, was not Paul's, he said.

The 'savage mouth' speaks in power, with whatever harshness: and we are tempted to contrast with this vehement utterance another short poem by the same poet, a little quaint withal, but light, soft, almost tuneful, — as written for a 'Book of Beauty,' and that not of Euchaïta! The subject is 'LIFE.'

Oh, take me, thou mortal, — thy LIFE for thy praise!
Thou hast met, found and seized me, and know'st what
my ways are.

Nor leave me for slackness, nor yield me for pleasure,
 Nor look up too saintly, nor muse beyond measure!
 There's the veil from my head—see the worst of my mourning!
 There are wheels to my feet—have a dread of their turning!
 There are wings round my waist—I may flatter and flee thee!
 There are yokes on my hands—fear the chains I decree thee!
 Hold me! hold a shadow, the winds as they quiver;
 Hold me! hold a dream, smoke, a track on the river.

Oh! take me, thou mortal,—thy Life for thy praiser,
 Thou hast met not, and seized not, nor know'st what my ways are!
 Nay, frown not, and shrink not, nor call me an aspen;
 There's the veil from my head! I have dropped from thy clasping!
 A fall-back within it I soon may afford thee;
 There are wheels to my feet—I may roll back toward thee!
 There are wings round my waist—I may flee back and clip thee!
 There are yokes on my hands—I may soon cease to whip thee!
 Take courage! I rather would hearten than hip thee!

JOHN TZETZA divides the twelfth century with his name, which is not a great one. In addition to an iambic fragment upon education, he has written indefatigably in the metre *politicus*, what must be read, if read at all, with a corresponding energy,—thirteen 'chiliads,' of 'variae historiae,' so called after Ælian's, —Ælian's without the 'honey-tongue,'—very various histories indeed, about crocodiles and flies, and Plato's philosophy and Cleopatra's nails, and Samson and Phidias, and the resurrection from the dead, and the Calydonian boar,—'everything under the sun' being, in fact, their imperfect epitome. The omission is simply POETRY! there is no apparent consciousness of her entity in the mind of this versifier; no aspiration towards her presence, not so much as a sigh upon her absence. We do not, indeed, become aware, in the whole course of this laborious work, of much unfolding of faculty—take it lower than the poetical; of nothing much beyond an occasional dry, sly, somewhat boorish humor, which being good humor besides, would not be a bad thing were its traces only more extended. But the general level of the work is a dull talkativeness, a prosy adversity, who is no 'Daughter of Jove,' and a slumberousness without a dream. We adjudge to our reader the instructive history of the Phoenix.

A phoenix is a single bird and synchronous with nature;
 The peacock cannot equal him in beauty or in stature.
 In radiance he outshines the gold; the world in wonder yieldeth;
 His nest he fixeth in the trees, and all of spices buildeth.
 And when he dies, a little worm, from out his body twining,

Doth generate him back again whene'er the sun is shining.

He lives in Ægypt, and he dies in Æthiopia only, as Asserts Philostratus, who wrote the Life of Apollonius. And (as the wise Ægyptian scribe, the holy scribe, Chæremón,
 Hath entered on these Institutes, all centre their esteem on)
 Seven thousand years and six of age, this phoenix of the story
 Expireth from the fair Nile side, whereby he had his glory.

In the early part of the fourteenth century, MANUEL PHILE, pricked emulously to the heart by the successful labors of Tzetza, embraced into identity with himself the remaining half of Ælian, and developed in his poetical treatise 'On the Properties of Animals,' to which Isachimus Camerarius provided a conclusion—the 'Natural History' of that industrious and amusing Greek-Roman. The Natural History is translated into verse, but by no means glorified; and yet the poet of animals, Phile, has carried away far more of the Ælian honey clinging to the edges of his *patra* than the poet of the Chiliads did ever wot of. What we find in him is not beauty, what we hear in him is not music, but there is an open feeling for the beautiful which stirs at a word, and we have a scarcely confessed contentment in hearkening to those twicetold stories of birds and beasts and fishes, measured out to us in the low monotony of his chanting voice. Our selections shall say nothing of the live grasshopper, called, with the first breath of this paper, an emblem of the vital Greek tongue; because the space left to us closes within our sight, and the science of the age does not thirst to receive, through our hands, the history of grasshoppers, according to Ælian or Phile either. Everybody knows what Phile tells us here, that grasshoppers live upon morning dew, and cannot sing when it is dry. Everybody knows that the lady grasshopper sings not at all. And if the moral, drawn by Phile from this latter fact, of the advantage of silence in the female sex generally, be true and important, it is also too obvious to exact our enforcement of it. Therefore we pass by the grasshopper, and the nightingale too, for all her fantastic song; and hasten to introduce to European naturalists a Philhellenic species of *heron*, which has escaped the researches of Cuvier, and the peculiarities of which may account to the philosophic reader for that instinct of the 'wisdom of our forefathers,' which established an English university in approximation with the Fens. It is earnestly to be hoped that the nice ear in question for the Attic dialect may still be preserved among the herons of Cambridgeshire:—

A Grecian island nourisheth to bless
 A race of herons in all nobleness.
 If some barbarian bark approach the shore,
 They hate, they flee,—no eagle can outsoar!
 But if by chance an Attic voice be wist,
 They grow softhearted straight, philhellenist;

Press on in earnest flocks along the strand,
And stretch their wings out to the comer's hand.
Perhaps he hears them with a gentle mind, —
They love his love, though foreign to their kind !
For so the island giveth winged teachers,
In true love lessons, to all wingless creatures.

He has written, besides, 'A Dialogue between Mind and Philé,' and other poems ; and we cannot part without taking from him a more solemn tone, which may sound as an 'Amen' to the good we have said of him. The following address to the Holy Spirit is concentrated in expression : —

O living Spirit, O falling of God-dew,
O Grace which dost console us and renew,
O vital light, O breath of angelhood,
O generous ministration of things good,
Creator of the visible, and best
Upholder of the great unmanifest
Power infinitely wise, new boon sublime
Of science and of art, constraining might,
In whom I breathe, live, speak, rejoice, and write, —
Be with us in all places, for all time !

'And now,' saith the patientest reader of all, 'you have done. Now we have watched out the whole night of the world with you, by no better light than these poetical rushlights, and the wicks fail, and the clock of the universal hour is near upon the stroke of the seventeenth century, and you have surely done !' Surely *not*, we answer; for we see a hand which the reader sees not, which beckons us over to Crete, and clasps within its shadowy fingers a roll of hymns Anacreontical, written by MAXIMUS MARGUNIUS: and not for the last of our readers would we lose this last of the Greeks, owing him salutation. Yet the hymns have, for the true Anacreontic fragrance, a musty odor, and we have scant praise for them in our nostrils. Their inspiration is from Gregory Nazianzen, whose 'Soul and Body' are renewed in them by a double species of transmigration; and although we kiss the feet of Gregory's high excellences, we cannot admit any one of them to be a safe conductor of poetical inspiration. And, in union with Margunius's plagiaristic tendencies, there is a wearisome lengthiness, harder to bear. He will knit you to the whole length of a 'Honi soit qui mal y pense,' till you fall asleep to the humming of the stitches what time you should be reading the 'moral.' We ourselves once dropped into a 'distraction,' as the French say, — for nothing could be more different from what the English say, than our serene state of self-abnegation, — at the beginning of a house-building by this Maximus Margunius: when, reading on some hundred lines with our bare bodily eyes, and our soul starting up on a sudden to demand a measure of the progress, behold, he was building it still, with trowel in the same hand: it was not forwarder by a brick. The swallows had time to hatch two nestfuls in a chimney while he finished the chimney-pot ! Nevertheless he has moments of earnestness, and they leave beauties in their trace. Let us listen to this extract from his fifth hymn : —

Take me as a hermit lone
With a desert life and moan ;
Only Thou anear to mete
Slow or quick my pulse's beat;
Only Thou, the night to chase
With the sunlight in Thy face !
Pleasure to the eyes may come
From a glory seen afar,
But if life concentrate gloom
Scattered by no little star,
Then, how feeble, God, we are !
Nay, whatever bird there be,
(Æther by his flying stirred),
He, in this thing, must be free —
And I, Saviour, am Thy bird,
Pricking with an open beak
At the words that Thou dost speak !
Leave a breath upon my wings,
That above these nether things
I may rise to where Thou art,
I may flutter next Thine heart !
For if a light within me burn,
It must be darkness in an urn,
Unless, within its crystalline,
That unbeginning light of Thine
Shine ! oh Saviour, let it shine !

He is the last of our Greeks. The light from Troy city, with which all Greek glory began, 'threw three-times six,' said Æschylus, that man with a soul, — beacon after beacon, into the heart of Greece. 'Three-times six,' too, threw the light from Greece, when her own heart-light had gone out like Troy's, onward along the ridges of time. Three-times six — but what faint beacons are the last ! — sometimes only a red brand ; sometimes only a small trembling flame ; sometimes only a white glimmer as of ashes breathed on by the wind ; faint beacons and far ! How far ! We have watched them along the cloudy tops of the great centuries, through the ages dark but for them, — and now stand looking with eyes of farewell upon the last pale sign on the last mist-bound hill. But it is the sixteenth century. Beyond the ashes on the hill a red light is gathering ; above the falling of the dews a great sun is rising : there is a rushing of life and song upward — let it still be UPWARD ! Shakespeare is in the world ! And the Genius of English Poetry, she who only of all the earth is worthy (Goethe's spirit may hear us say so, and smile), stooping, with a royal gesture, to kiss the dead lips of the Genius of Greece, stands up her successor in the universe, by virtue of that chrism, and in right of her own crown.

III. NOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS

[The task of annotating Mrs. Browning's text is greatly simplified by the fact of her constitutional unwillingness to change the form of any thought that she had once expressed fairly to her own satisfaction. It belonged, perhaps, to her very serious conception of the Poet's 'divine mission,' and of her own, as a poet by predestination, however unworthy,

that her thought, as first visibly, and often painfully *enfanté*, seemed to her a species of organism, — which might be clumsy and unfortunate in shape, but which could not be altered without mutilation. She said a good deal about Art, — particularly in her later days, when she lived nearer to the *grand monde* of letters than she had done in her earlier and more productive period. But in truth, she was much more a moralist than an artist, and had very little of the consuming passion for mere beauty, and the unrelenting pursuit of external perfection, which characterized the poets of supremely artistic temperament, like Tennyson and Keats. Even her extensive classical studies, — and they were extensive, though not analytic, nor what would now be considered profound, failed, curiously enough, to develop her sense of form; and Greek was to her, if such a thing be possible, almost too much like a living language. No great writer was ever more humble and reasonable about the intrinsic worth of her own productions than Mrs. Browning; but the words in which she said her say seemed to her essential, and preëminently her own affair; and when once she had called the Seer of Patmos ‘apolyptic John,’ it required a good deal of argument on the part of persons whose judgment she deeply respected to convince her that the adjective would not do. She altered (see note, p. 516), at Wordsworth’s own request, a line in her sonnet on Haydon’s portrait, without very materially improving it; and she made a change also — it may be presumed upon representation — in one of the more dithyrambic stanzas of *Lady Geraldine’s Courtship*. In the earlier editions of that florid poetical romance, we have, as illustrating the extent of the heroine’s landed possessions, and the material interests which she controlled, the statement that —

the resonant steam-eagles

Follow far on the direction of her little dove-like hand.

Both the eagle and the dove were banished subsequently, and the verse now reads —

And the palpitating engines snort in steam across her acres —

which comes a little nearer to scientific truth, no doubt; though it must be confessed that both these attempted impersonations of the locomotive remind the reader unpleasantly of the ear-splitting melodies of the ‘Siren.’

When a fourth edition of *Aurora Leigh* was called for, in January, 1859, two years after its original publication, Robert Browning wrote from Rome to Mr. Ruskin that a corrected edition of *Aurora Leigh* had just been

sent off to London which had cost ‘us’ (Mrs. Browning and himself) ‘a great deal of pains;’ and Mrs. Browning wrote to a friend at the same time that she had ‘dizzied herself with “ifs” and “ands.”’ The labor which irked her so was indeed almost confined to the ‘ifs’ and ‘ands;’ that is to say, to those minute corrections in grammar and punctuation which leave, for the most part, the thought and imagery of a passage unchanged, but which ought, in fairness to the author, to be accepted without question, as annulling the previous reading. Not one of the more important and memorable passages in the poem was noticeably modified. In looking through the letters of both poets for passages calculated to throw light on the origin and growth of Mrs. Browning’s principal works, we find enough and to spare in her own, but are disappointed to discover so little in her husband’s. The slight reference in the note to Ruskin mentioned above is almost solitary; and even there, it will be observed, he speaks in no wise as a critic, but rather as one partner in a firm with unlimited liability. We know, in a general way, how exalted was the rank which Robert Browning assigned to his wife’s genius; that he thought the Portuguese Sonnets the finest written in any language since Shakespeare’s; that it was through the charm and power over him of her earlier writings that he first came to adore her. We have the eloquent dedications of *Men and Women* to her living self, and of the *Ring and the Book* to her memory, and we have the conjecture, not very well supported, however, of Mr. Browning’s biographer that he intended to portray Mrs. Browning in the beautiful character of *Pomphilia*. But for any more specific judgment or intimate commentary, we shall seek the husband’s published correspondence in vain. It is to be remembered, of course, that he himself destroyed, some years before his death, all those letters to members of his own family in which he would have been most likely, perhaps, to speak of his wife’s work without reserve; and also that from the time, beginning with the publication of *Casa Guidi Windows*, when Mrs. Browning’s muse began to occupy itself so much more than formerly with political events, and social and philanthropic speculations, he may purposely have refrained from any allusion to what she published, for the reason that while bating not one jot of his loyal admiration for her character and gifts, he did not always entirely agree with her opinions.]

A ROMANCE OF THE GANGES.

Page 30, line 98. *To the holy house of snow.*

The Hindoo heaven is localized on the summit of Mount Meru — one of the mountains of Himalaya or Himmaleh, which signifies, I be-

lieve, in Sanscrit, the abode of snow, winter, or coldness.

Line 104. *The humming-bird is in the sun.*

Himadeva, the Indian god of love, is imagined to wander through the three worlds, accompanied by the humming-bird, cuckoo, and gentle breezes.

Page 31, line 157. *To cast upon thine hair.*

The casting of rice upon the head, and the fixing of the band or tali about the neck, are parts of the Hindoo marriage ceremonial.

Line 189. *Thy lily hath not changed a leaf.*

The Ganges is represented as a white woman, with a water-lily in her right hand, and in her left a lute.

SOUNDS.

Page 38, line 38. *Like a singing in a dream.*

While floating up bright forms ideal,
Mistress or friend, around me stream;
Half sense-supplied, and half unreal,
Like music mingling with a dream.

— John Kenyon.

I do not doubt that the 'music' of the two concluding lines mingled, though very unconsciously, with my own 'dream' and gave their form and pressure to the above distich. The ideas however being sufficiently distinct, I am satisfied with sending this note to the press after my verses, and with acknowledging another obligation to the valued friend to whom I already owe so many. — 1844.

Page 39, line 107. *As the seer-saint of Patmos, loving John.*

[This line, as first printed in 1838, contained an extraordinary abbreviation: 'As erst in Patmos apolyptic John.' Miss Barrett had to be convinced by Mr. Boyd and others that the word was inadmissible before she substituted the above reading.]

THE VIRGIN MARY TO THE CHILD JESUS.

Page 43, line 37. *As Moses did, and die, — and then live most.*

It is a Jewish tradition that Moses died of the kisses of God's lips.

A DRAMA OF EXILE.

Page 81, line 1023. *Of manhood's curse of labor.*

Adam recognizes in *Aquarius*, the Water-bearer, and *Sagittarius*, the Archer, distinct types of the man bearing and the man combating, — the passive and active forms of human labor. I hope that the preceding zodiacal signs — transferred to the earthly shadow and representative purpose — of Aries, Taurus, Cancer, Leo, Libra, Scorpio, Capricornus, and Pisces, are sufficiently obvious to the reader.

Line 1025. *But look off to those small humanities.*

Her maternal instinct is excited by Gemini.

ON A PORTRAIT OF WORDSWORTH BY B. R. HAYDON.

Page 98. [On October 31st, 1842, Miss Barrett wrote to Hugh Stuart Boyd that she had had

a 'letter from the great poet' and was better pleased with it than were ever 'King John's barons with their charter.' The highly characteristic communication was as follows: —

RYDAL MOUNT: Oct. 26, '42.

DEAR MISS BARRETT, — Through our common friend Mr. Haydon I have received a sonnet which his portrait of me suggested. I should have thanked you sooner for that effusion of a feeling towards myself, with which I am much gratified, but I have been absent from home and much occupied.

The conception of your sonnet is in full accordance with the painter's intended work, and the expression vigorous; yet the word 'ebb,' though I do not myself object to it, nor wish to have it altered, will I fear prove obscure to nine readers out of ten.

A vision free

And noble, Haydon, hath thine art released.

Owing to the want of inflections in our language the construction here is obscure. Would it not be a little [better] thus? — I was going to write a small change in the order of the words, but I find it would not remove the objection. The verse, as I take it, would be somewhat clearer thus, if you would tolerate the redundant syllable: —

By a vision free

And noble, Haydon, is thine art released.

I had the gratification of receiving, a good while ago, two copies of a volume of your writing, which I have read with much pleasure, and beg that the thanks which I charged a friend to offer may be repeated [to] you.

It grieved me much to hear from Mr. Kenyon that your health is so much deranged. But for that cause I should have presumed to call upon you when I was in London last spring.

With every good wish, I remain, dear Miss Barrett, your much obliged

WM. WORDSWORTH.

[Postmark: Ambleside, Oct. 28, 1842.]

Letters of Mrs. Browning, vol. i. p. 113.

A poet whose gravity of spirit had been less profound than Wordsworth's would hardly have known how to suggest alterations in the lines written by another poet on his own personal appearance. It may be added that although Miss Barrett altered the passage criticised by the Laureate, she did not accept his amendment. The lines now read: —

A noble vision free

Our Haydon's hand has flung out from the mist.]

THE LOST BOWER.

Page 150, stanza ix. *Keepers of Piers Plowman's visions through the sunshine and the snow.*

The Malvern Hills of Worcestershire are the scene of Langland's Visions, and thus present the earliest classic ground of English poetry.

THE CRY OF THE CHILDREN.

Page 158, line 115. 'Our Father,' looking upward in the chamber.

A fact rendered pathetically historical by Mr. Horne's report of his Commission. The name of the poet of 'Orion' and 'Cosmo de' Medici' has, however, a change of associations, and comes in time to remind me that we have some noble poetic heat of literature still, — however open to the reproach of being somewhat gelid in our humanity. — 1844.

CROWNED AND BURIED.

Page 162, stanza xviii. *Green watching hills, ye witnessed what was done.*

Written at Torquay.

Stanza xxii. *And grave-deep 'neath the cannon-moulded column.*

It was the first intention to bury him under the column.

L. E. L.'s LAST QUESTION.

Page 179, stanza vi. *Their singer was to be, in darksome death.*

Her lyric on the Polar Star came home with her latest papers.

CATARINA TO CAMOENS.

Page 182, stanza xvi. *Keep my riband, take and keep it.*

She left him the riband from her hair.

Page 188. THE DEAD PAN.

[The subject of 'The Dead Pan' was first suggested to Miss Barrett by John Kenyon's translation of Schiller's *Gods of Greece*. We have seen what importance she attached to its position at the end of the Poems published, in two volumes, in 1844. She wished it to be her last and most emphatic word to the public upon this occasion, for it represented a tremendous intellectual effort on her part, — nothing less than an attempted synthesis of Paganism and Christianity. The poem was, however, criticised with very special severity, not merely for its flagrant faults of rhyme and rhythm, but for the free and, as it seemed to many, irreverent use made, in the concluding stanzas, of the name or names of the Christian Deity. Even Mr. Kenyon remonstrated with the poetess, and begged her to alter or suppress those last verses, but found her intractable and able to defend the faith was in her very passionately. See *Letters of Mrs. Browning*, vol. i. pp. 127-130.]

Page 207. A DEAD ROSE AND OTHER POEMS.

[In October, 1846, only a few weeks after Mrs. Browning's romantic marriage, there appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine* seven poems by her, some of which had been in the editor's hands for a considerable time. It illustrates the excessive tenderness of the bride's filial

conscience, that she was deeply distressed for fear her father should give a too literal interpretation to these poems, and see in some of their expressions a calculated defiance of himself. 'I am so vexed,' she wrote to Miss Mitford on the 9th of November, 'about these poems appearing just now in Blackwood. Papa must think it *impudent* of me. It is unfortunate.' The poems were: 'A Woman's Shortcomings,' 'A Man's Requirements,' 'Maud's Spinning' (published among her poems as 'A Year's Spinning'), 'A Dead Rose,' 'Change upon Change,' and 'Hector in the Garden.' To one who re-reads them now, there seems to be very little in any of these pieces which could have been offensive, even to so morbid and biased a reader as Mr. Moulton-Barrett. The secret of the writer's heart, which already had been confided with magnificent *abandon* to the Portuguese Sonnets, is assuredly not betrayed in these poems.]

Page 214. SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGUESE.

[Miss Barrett's daring innovations in rhyme (they were less frequent and conspicuous in the work of *Mrs. Browning*) were never the result of carelessness. She was always very much grieved at any such suggestion, and, as far as it was in her gentle nature to do so, she resented it. She honestly believed that in making *panther* rhyme with *saunter*, *virtues* with *certes*, and *turret* with *chariot*, she was 'widening the artistic capabilities of the English language.' It was just the species of fond delusion to which an original mind whose early development has been solitary, is especially prone. Yet it is a curious fact that, whenever she was under the stress of an emotion strong enough to make her forget herself, her 'mission' as a poet, and her supposed moral and artistic responsibilities, her versification became almost flawless. It was so in 'Cowper's Grave,' in the matchless Portuguese Sonnets, and even in *Casa Guidi Windows*, which, though weak enough as a political pamphlet, still glows with the fresh inspiration which her sensitive soul inevitably received from its first contact with Italy.]

Page 224. CASA GUIDI WINDOWS.

[There is a singular felicity about the title chosen by Mrs. Browning for her initial poem on Italy. She herself says of *Casa Guidi Windows* that it was 'a meditation and a dream,' and the very name seems to confess a certain superficiality in her first outlook upon that stern secular struggle for national independence, which began in the early years of the nineteenth century, and has hardly reached, even as yet, a securely triumphant conclusion. The events of 1847 and 1848 were a spectacle to the newly arrived poetess; one part only though undoubtedly the most vivid and affecting part of the pageant which all Italy presented to a learned and visionary spectator who had never been out of England before, and who had passed years of her life immured in the dim dungeon of a Lon-

don bedchamber. See *Letters of Mrs. Browning*, vol. i. pp. 386-388.

The second part of the poem, dated two years later than the first, is vaguely denunciatory in tone, and on the whole very despondent concerning the future of Italy. Yet it contains one or two of Mrs. Browning's noblest bits of versification, such as the tribute to Carlo Alberto, and the pathetic passage near the close beginning—

Still graves, where Italy is talked upon!

Still, still, the patriot's tomb, the stranger's hate!

and one does not quite understand upon what grounds the author anticipated for *Casa Guidi Windows* a peculiarly hostile reception in England. 'I have a book coming out,' she wrote to Miss Isa Blagden on May 1, 1851, 'which will prevent everybody else except you from ever speaking to me again!']

Page 225, line 42. *Void at Verona, Juliet's marble trough.*

They show at Verona, as the tomb of Juliet, an empty trough of stone.

Line 73. *And Dawn and Twilight wait in marble scorn.*

These famous statues recline in the Sagrestia Nuova, on the tombs of Giuliano de' Medici, third son of Lorenzo the Magnificent, and Lorenzo of Urbino, his grandson. Strozzi's epigram on the Night, with Michel Angelo's rejoinder, is well known.

Page 228, line 100. *They bade thee build a statue up in snow.*

This mocking task was set by Pietro, the unworthy successor of Lorenzo the Magnificent.

Page 228, lines 256, 257.

Savonarola's soul went out in fire

Upon our Grand-duke's piazza.

Savonarola was burnt for his testimony against papal corruptions as early as March, 1498: and, as late as our own day, it has been a custom in Florence to strew with violets the pavement where he suffered, in grateful recognition of the anniversary.

Page 229, lines 321-323.

Pass

The left stair, where at plague time Machiavel

Saw One with set fair face as in a glass.

See his description of the plague of Florence.

Line 334. *A king stood bare before its sovran grace.*

Charles of Anjou, in his passage through Florence, was permitted to see this picture while yet in Cimabue's 'bottega.' The populace followed the royal visitor, and, from the universal delight and admiration, the quarter of the city in which the artist lived was called 'Borgo Allegri.' The picture was carried in triumph to the church, and deposited there.

Line 363. *Whom Cimabue found among the sheep.*

How Cimabue found Giotto, the shepherd-boy, sketching a ram of his flock upon a stone, is prettily told by Vasari,—who also relates that the elder artist Margheritone died 'infas-tidito' of the successes of the new school.

Page 233, line 625. *Did pile the empty marbles as thy tomb.*

The Florentines, to whom the Ravennese refused the body of Dante (demanded of them 'in a late remorse of love'), have given a cenotaph in this church to their divine poet. Something less than a grave!

Line 630. *Good lovers of our age to track and plough.*

In allusion to Mr. Kirkup's discovery of Giotto's fresco portrait of Dante.

Page 241, line 1179. *From Tuscan Bellosguardo, wide awake.*

Galileo's villa, close to Florence, is built on an eminence called Bellosguardo.

Page 242, line 19. *We poets, wandered round by dreams, who hailed.*

See the opening passage of the *Agamemnon* of Æschylus.

Page 251, line 607. *Even Apollonius might commend this flute.*

Philostratus relates of Apollonius how he objected to the musical instrument of Linus the Rhodian that it could not enrich or beautify. The history of music in our day would satisfy the philosopher on one point at least.

Page 254. AURORA LEIGH.

[The inspiration and the main purport of *Aurora Leigh* were frankly socialistic,—as socialism was understood by disinterested dreamers half a century ago.

The poem, or novel, 'I flatter myself it's a novel,' Mrs. Browning wrote to one friend, was begun under the immediate impulse of certain studies in the works of Louis Blanc, Prudhon, and other theorists which she and her husband had made together and continued with great enthusiasm during the winter of 1855-56, when the Brownings were once more living in Paris. Mr. Browning, to whom solitude, stillness, and reasonably congenial surroundings were essential to composition, was immensely struck by the power of mental abstraction which his wife displayed during that winter of work at high pressure. 'She wrote in pencil,' Robert Browning's biographer tells us, 'as she lay on the sofa in her sitting-room open to interruption from chance visitors, or from her little omnipresent son; simply hiding the paper beside her if any one came in, and taking it up again when she was free. And if this process was conceivable, in the large, comparatively silent spaces of their Italian home, and amidst habits of life which reserved social intercourse to the close of the working-day, it baffles belief when one thinks of it as carried on in the conditions of a Parisian winter, and the little salon of the apartment in the Rue du Colisée, where those months were spent.' (*Life of Robert Browning*, by Mrs. Sutherland-Orr, vol. i. p. 302.)

The villa on Bellosguardo where the final scene of the poem passes was, in the main, the Villa Briochion, which had been taken on a long lease by Miss Isa Blagden, and concerning the view from which Mrs. Browning wrote, after having tea upon the terrace there one day

in early April: 'You seem to be lifted above the world, in a divine ecstasy. Oh, what a vision!' The vision which must indeed haunt the memory of all who have ever seen it, is painted as faithfully as words can paint, in that passage of the seventh book of *Aurora Leigh* which begins,

I found a house in Florence on the hill.

The great popularity of *Aurora Leigh* on its first appearance was apparently due to the fact that, while it embodied some of the most revolutionary sentiments concerning social matters which chanced to be rife at the time, the story was interesting and sensational enough to bear the average reader smoothly and rapidly above the dark places of the intrigue. Nevertheless, the daring character of the plot, and the absolute freedom with which many of the more obscure and painful questions connected with the greatest of social evils were handled, exposed the author once more to ruthless criticism in some highly respectable quarters. But if, in the entire singleness of her intention, Mrs. Browning was amazed and distressed to learn that men of letters who were also men of the world, such as Thackeray, strongly demurred to her experiment, while a cynical recluse like Edward Fitzgerald fiercely condemned, and the editor of the *Tablet* did not hesitate to qualify the poem as 'grossly indecent;' she could comfort herself with the knowledge that her American publisher 'shed tears of sympathy' over the proof, and that to so lofty and uncompromising a moralist as John Ruskin it was 'the finest poem written in any language in this century.']

Page 410. POEMS BEFORE CONGRESS.

[During the decade of suspense and enforced inaction, so trying to all true Italian patriots, which intervened between 1849 and 1859, both Mr. and Mrs. Browning had come to identify themselves much more deeply with the National Cause than they had done when they were newcomers in Tuscany. When that most intemperate of Mrs. Browning's publications the *Poems before Congress* first appeared, about six months after the sharp disappointment of Villafranca, she wrote to her sister-in-law, Miss Sariana Browning, that she and her husband had begun writing on the Italian question together at his suggestion, meaning to publish jointly, but that he subsequently abandoned the project, which she carried on alone.

It is made clear enough by later events and publications of Robert Browning's own that the point where he differed most widely from his wife's conclusions on the Italian question was in his estimate of the character and the mission to Italy of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte. He could not echo the rapture of hero-worship, — the extravagant adulation of that high-strung Ode which stood at the head of the *Poems before Congress*, under the title of 'Napoleon III. and Italy,' but neither would he dissent from his wife before the world. To us, who have long known on

how shallow and unsteady a foundation the imposing fabric of the second French Empire was reared, and how often, when it appeared boldest, the policy of Napoleon III. was merely desperate, it is even more difficult to understand Mrs. Browning's adoring faith in the French Emperor.

Her frenzied devotion withstood even the staggering blow dealt by the summary Peace of Villafranca, and enabled her speedily to rally her hopes, though her health never recovered from that shock. She had an attack of severe illness in consequence; but the moment she was able to hold a pen she wrote from Siena to Miss Browning, that what had so prostrated her was — 'the blow on the heart about the peace after all that excitement and exultation, that walking on the clouds for weeks and months, and then the sudden stroke and fall, and the impotent rage against all the nations of the earth — selfish, inhuman, wicked — who forced the hand of Napoleon, and truncated his great intentions.' (*Letters of Mrs. Browning*, vol. ii. p. 320.)

The truth is that, while Mrs. Browning possessed, as clever women often do, a certain amount of political insight and an enormous capacity for political passion, of sound judgment in matters political she had none whatever: she could do nothing better for her own country, during the sharp, successive agonies of the Crimean War and the Indian Mutiny, when initial mistakes were made, no doubt, but which proved in the end so glorious a vindication of English valor and school of English character, than belabor the home government with the most opprobrious epithets which even her vast vocabulary could furnish. It was all 'dismal' and 'full of horror and despair,' — 'the alliance with France the only consolation' (!) She can even dismiss Florence Nightingale with a cold word of commendation, adding that she does not consider that *the best use to which we can put a gifted and accomplished woman is to make her a hospital nurse!*

We ourselves got, and indeed richly deserved, a sharp taste of Mrs. Browning's denunciatory eloquence in the piece entitled 'A Curse for a Nation,' which stands at the end of the *Poems before Congress*. In the prologue to the 'Curse,' Mrs. Browning seems for a moment almost to confuse herself with 'Apolyptic John.'

'I heard an angel speak last night
And he said "Write!"
Write a Nation's Curse for me
And send it over the Western Sea.'

She begins by protesting her unwillingness.
'Not so, my lord!

for I am bound by gratitude,
By love and blood
To brothers of mine across the sea.'

But the god overpowers the pythoness and the curse follows. No doubt we were in mortal sin when these words were written, and escaped only by a speedy and terrible purgation the greater part of the woes which they denounced.

But the oddest and most inexplicable part of the whole matter is that many people in England, including the astute Mr. Chorley, who himself reviewed the *Poems before Congress* in the *Athenæum*, understood the Curse to be launched against England.]

Page 427. LORD WALTER'S WIFE.

Page 441, stanza vii. *And the King, with that stain on his scutcheon.*

Blue Book: Diplomatical Correspondence.

Page 481. AN ESSAY ON MIND.

Page 483, line 101. *Or peeps at glory from some ancient's back.*

'The reason which the learned Bentley gave his daughter for not himself becoming an original writer, instead of wasting his talents on the works of others, is probably the cause of many not attempting original composition. Bentley seemed embarrassed at her honest question, and remained for a considerable time thoughtful. At length he observed: Child, I am sensible I have not always turned my talents to the proper use for which they were given me; yet I have done something: but the wit and genius of the old authors beguiled me, and as I despaired of raising myself up to their standard upon fair ground, I thought the only chance I had of looking over their heads was to get upon their shoulders.' — *Curiosities of Literature*, vol. i.

Lines 136, 137.

*The gentle Cowley of our native clime
Lisp'd his first accents in Anion rhyme.*

A volume of Cowley's poems was published in his fifteenth year; and contains 'The Tragical History of Pyramus and Thisbe,' written in his tenth.

Lines 138-141.

*Alfieri's startling muse tuned not her strings,
And dumbly look'd 'unutterable things,'
Till when five lustrums o'er his head had past—*

This poet's great mind exhibited no precocity. His 'Cleopatra,' written at the age of twenty-five years, first discovered its author's dramatic genius to himself and to the world.

Lines 156-158.

*See in that breathless crowd Olorus stand,
While one fair boy hangs listening on his hand—
The young Thucydides.*

It is said that Thucydides, in early youth, was present at the Olympic games when Herodotus recited his History; and that a burst of tears spoke his admiration. 'Take care of that boy,' observed the sage, turning to Olorus; 'he will one day make a great man!'

Page 484, line 229. *That hail 'th' eternal city' in their pride.*

'Imperium sine fine dedi,' says Virgil's Jupiter. How little did the writer of those four words dream of their surviving the Glory, whose eternity they were intended to predict! Horace too, in the most exulting of his odes, boldly proclaims that his fame will live as long as

Capitolium
Scandet cum tacitâ virgine Pontifex.

Yes! his fame *will live!* — but where now is the Pontifex, and the silent vestal? where now is the Capitol? Such passages are, to my mind, preëminently more affecting than all the ruins in the world!

Line 291. *And ultra Mitford soar'd to libel Greece.*

Mr. Mitford's acknowledged learning, and accuracy in detail, have a claim on our consideration, which we admit with readiness and pleasure; but prejudices, arising probably from early habits and associations, have deformed his work. He is evidently so afraid of taking the mob for the people, that he constantly takes the people for the mob—a perversion much in vogue among despots of Europe in the nineteenth century. He considers the Athenian Democracy as he would a classical kind of Radicalism; and generously endows Philip of Macedon with a 'right divine,' not only over his own possessions, but over those of his neighbors. Mr. Mitford lets his readers look at facts: but, whether shortsighted as himself or not, he will not allow them to enjoy that privilege unless they make use of his political glasses; which, by the way, are No. 20, — 'ne plus ultra!'

Lines 307-309.

But lean on Reason, as your safest rule!

Let doubtful facts, with patient hand be led

To take their place on this Procrustian bed.

We shall find some clever and animated observations on this subject, in Voltaire's preface to his Charles XII. I should extract them, but the book is too well known for me to doubt their having come to the knowledge of most readers; and a new publication is perhaps the only place in which we are not glad to meet an old acquaintance.

Page 485, line 351. *Enlighten'd Miller of our modern days!*

Those who may think this praise excessive are referred to the *Philosophy of Modern History*, given to the world by Dr. Miller; and thence are requested to judge of the reality of the merit.

Lines 369-371.

*The whisper'd sound which stole on Descartes' ear,
Hallowing the sunny visions of his youth,
With that eternal mandate, 'Search for Truth!'*

'Descartes, when young, and in a country seclusion, his brain exhausted by meditation and his imagination heated to excess, heard a voice in the air, which called him to pursue the search of Truth: he never doubted the vision, and this dream, in the delirium of Genius, charmed him even in his after studies.' — *D'Israeli's Literary Character*.

Page 486, lines 427, 428.

*He died, the glorious! who, with soaring sight,
Sought some new world to plant his foot of might.*

Archimedes wrote to Hiero, that, if he had another world to stand on, he could move this by the power of his machinery. When Cicero stumbled on his grave, he found it, 'Septum undique et vestitum vepribus et dumetis.' What a homily!

Lines 448, 449.

*So hard to bear with unobstructed sight,
Th' excess of darkness, or th' extreme of light.*

Gray ingeniously asks, 'Must I plunge into metaphysics?' (he might in some cases have said history). 'Alas! I cannot see in the dark; Nature has not furnished me with the optics of a cat. Must I pore upon mathematics? Alas! I cannot see in too much light; I am no eagle.'

Lines 492, 493.

*So Buffon erred — amidst his chilling dream
The judgment grew material as the theme.*

Buffon was a materialist upon principle, though a Catholic by observance. Upon reading a poem on the immortality of the soul, he exclaimed, 'Religion would be a noble present if this were true.'

Line 506. *Sternly they strove — th' unequal race was run —*

Leibnitz attacked with violence Sir Isaac Newton's opinion, that the seeds of mortality would be developed in the fabric of the universe if unrenewed by its divine Maker. Such an opinion he considered 'impious;' and, in opposition to it, maintained, that as Creation proceeded from the hand of Perfection, it is perfect — and as perfect, immutable.

Page 487, line 526. *Devoted Southey! if thou had'st not tried.*

Few are ready to bear a more respectful tribute to Dr. Southey's poetical talents than the writer of this Work, who however begs to be allowed to admire his genius, without extending that admiration either to his politics or Hexameters.

Line 535. *Dwell not on parts, for parts contract the mind.*

Lord Bacon thus expresses himself — 'Sciences distinguished have a dependence upon universal knowledge, to be augmented, and rectified by the superior light thereof; as well as the parts and members of a science have upon the maxims of the same science, and the mutual light and consent which one part receiveth of another.' — *Interpretatio Naturæ.*

Line 584. *For too much learning maketh no man mad.*

Perhaps, after all, the great danger of knowing is in not knowing enough; and certainly 'il pie fermo' is not 'il piu basso.' 'It is true,' says Lord Bacon, 'that a little philosophy inclineth men's minds to atheism, but depth in philosophy bringeth their minds about to religion.' This is an acute observation, and if generalized will be found equally so. The errors attending Intellectual Elevation I have alluded to and allowed; but that elevation is only comparative. 'Alps on Alps arise!' and the *ars longa vita brevis* prevents our attaining the topmost height. In our progress towards it then is our risk, lest we rejoice to have gone a yard, without remembering we have a mile to go. Like the princess, in the pretty Arabian tale, who was ascending the mountain in search of her talking bird and golden water, if during

the ascent we turn back to gaze, we are transformed into black stones — capable of impeding others, though not of advancing ourselves.

Line 594. *The sage how learned, and the man how meek!*

The character of Sir Isaac Newton forms a sublime comment on the foregoing note. 'I don't know,' said that greatest and humblest of men, 'what I may seem to the world; but as to myself, I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of Truth lay all undiscovered before me.' — We find the anecdote in Spence.

Page 489, lines 705, 706.

*Ev'n Cato, had he own'd the senate's will,
And wash'd his toga — had been Cato still!*

Plutarch relates that Cato Uticensis was thought to disgrace the Prætorship by the meanness of his dress. To couple 'disgrace' with the name of Cato revolts the soul; and yet who would call his 'exigua toga' a proof of the loftiness of his virtue, or think him less a patriot if he had kept on his shoes?

Lines 723, 724.

*'All is idea, and nothing real springs
But God and Reason!' (not the right of kings?)*

An obvious question. Pyrrho the Elean, founder of the Ideal Philosophy, on the near approach of carts and carriages, did not think it worth while to turn aside or change his posture. Dr. Berkeley, with less consistency but more prudence, found time (and conscience) to write three sermons in vindication of passive obedience.

Lines 729-731.

*'While (coldly studious!) thine ingenious scroll
Endows the mimic statue with a soul,
Compos'd of sense.'*

It is the object of Condillac's work, 'Sur la Sensation,' to prove 'que la reflexion n'est dans son principe que la sensation même,' and that our ideas are only sensation transformed. His statue is very cleverly put together, but is a statue after all.

Line 734. *What triumph hath the 'Art of Thinking' there?*

'L'Art de penser' — title to one of Condillac's works.

Page 490, lines 803, 804.

*To judge is yours — then why submissive call,
'The master said so?'*

An 'argumentum ad verecundiam' used by the Pythagoreans. I so much admire a passage in Plato's Phædo, illustrative of these lines, that the reader must forgive my referring to it. Cebes supports with animation an opinion in opposition to Socrates, who, turning a gratified countenance ('*ἡσθίναί τέ μοι ἔδοξε*,' says the narrator) to his other disciples, benignly observes: 'Cebes always looks into principles; neither will he admit, without examination, the sentiments of any man.'

We find in Dr. Reid the following striking precept, 'Let us, as becomes philosophers, lay aside authority.'

Lines 817, 818.

*If human faults to Plato's page belong,
Not ev'n with Plato willingly go wrong.*

Cicero's assertion, 'errare mehercule malo cum Platone quam cum istis vera sentire,' is more boldly said than singularly thought. How many are there, among the canaille of readers, prepared to praise an inferior volume, with the Waverley magic on its *titlepage*; to commend a commonplace by Rogers or a far-fetched allusion by Moore. Even among the more critical of us, have the names of Scott, and Moore, and Rogers no secret influence? Do we not so devoutly admire the noisy slippered Venus that at length we begin to reverence, abstractedly, the noisy slippers? This is so, and I will not quarrel with it; since to forget the trifling faults of a great writer is the gratitude we owe to his perfections. But what, in subjects of taste and sentiment, may be tolerated as pardonable enthusiasm, must in grave discussion be condemned as unpardonable weakness. If, therefore, we judge Cicero only by the above-cited passage, we shall pronounce him to be a good Platonist (in one sense of the word), but a very bad philosopher. It is not with him, 'Amicus Plato sed magis amica veritas:' he loves truth less than he loves Plato.

Line 841. *Or Memnon's statue singing 'neath the sun.*

The statue of Memnon, the Ethiopian king, was said to utter musical sounds at the rising of the sun. Strabo witnessed this singular phenomenon, but could only explain it by conjecture.

Page 491, lines 872, 873.

*But, ah! our Muse of Britain standing near,
Hath dimm'd my tablet with a pensive tear!*

It is a practice too common, but manifestly unjust, to visit on the memory of distinguished authors their individual failings. I wish therefore to state expressly, that the Muse of Britain is not here supposed to animadvert on Lord Bacon's character as a statesman, with which she has nothing to do in this place. It is with regard to his writings that I cannot avoid expressing a regret — and I do so reverentially — that pages so glorious should be polluted by passages so servile. 'As men, we share his fame;' as Englishmen, we feel his degradation. If, indeed, the *Novum Organum* and *Advancement of Learning* kindled our souls into a less proud consciousness of intellectual dignity, we might better brook hearing a king called 'a mortal god upon earth,' and James the First compared to Solomon. But Lord Bacon first teaches us how high Philosophy can soar, and then how low a philosopher can stoop.

Line 915. *And strikes Pierian chords — when Irving speaks!*

There is a pleasure in being benefited by the labors of Genius: there is a pride in possessing powers capable of benefiting. The pride Mr. Irving may justly feel; and which of his readers, or hearers, cannot boast the pleasure? It gratifies me to be enabled to express in this place my admiration of his talents, and my respect for their direction.

Lines 926, 927.

*Ungrateful Plato! o'er thy cradled rest
The Muse hath hung, and all her love express.*

Plato wrote poetry in his youth; and when indeed did not Plato write poetry? Longinus numbers him among the imitators of Homer —

Πάντων δὲ τούτων μάλιστα ὁ Πλάτων ἀπὸ τοῦ Ὀμηρικοῦ ἐκείνου νόματος εἰς αὐτὸν κυρίας ὄσας παρατρόπας ἀποχευσεύσμενος.

Page 492, lines 972, 973.

*And as fair Eve, in Eden newly placed,
Gaz'd on her form, in limpid waters traced —*

The reader will here perceive an allusion to that beautiful passage in *Paradise Lost*, book the fourth, where Eve describes to Adam her emotions on first beholding her own reflection in 'the clear smooth lake' —

A shape within the watery gleam appeared,
Bending to look on me — I started back —
It started back, etc.

Lines 1022, 1023.

*The artist lingers in the moon-lit glade,
And light and shade, with him, are — light and shade.*

'Quam multa vident Pictores in umbris et eminentia quæ nos non videmus,' is the motto to Mr. Price's admirable essay on the Picturesque. Dugald Stewart proposes its reversion — 'Quam multa videmus nos quæ Pictores non vident,' which if it be as true as ingenious, will go a great way in assisting my position.

Lines 1044, 1045.

—— to trace

Nature's ideal form in Nature's place.

Lord Bacon says of Poetry, that 'it was ever thought to have some participation of divineness, because it doth raise and erect the mind, by submitting the shews of things to the desires of the mind; whereas Reason doth buckle and bow the mind unto the nature of things.' — *Advancement of Learning*, Book 2.

Page 493, lines 1079, 1080.

*Wherein Conception only dies in state,
As Draco smother'd by the garments' weight.*

The Athenian people being accustomed to testify their approbation by the casting of their garments on the approved individual, Draco was honorably smothered through excess of popularity.

Page 494, lines 1182–1184.

—— behold the cold, dumb sepulchre,
*The ruined column — ocean, earth and air,
Man and his wrongs! — thou hast Tyrtaeus there!*
The inspiring effect of the productions of this Greek poet, during the war between the Lacedæmonians and Messenians, is well known.

Line 1197. *He laid him down before the shrine — and slept!*

Herodotus relates of Cleobis and Bito, Argive brothers, that on a festival of Juno they themselves, in default of oxen, drew the chariot of the priestess, their mother, forty-five stadia to the temple. Amidst the shouts of an admiring multitude, their grateful parent asked of the

gods the best boon mortals could receive, where-with to reward the piety of her sons. The young men fell asleep within the temple, and woke no more.

Line 1203. *No Moschus sang a requiem o'er his clay!*

That exquisite effusion of Moschus over the grave of Bion, his 'vatis amici' — his brother in poetry and love — will occur to the reader's recollection.

Line 1229. *Then comes the SELAH — and the voice is hush'd!*

Respecting this Hebrew word, which is found 'seventy times in the Psalms, and three times in Habakkuk,' Calmet observes: 'One conjecture is, that it means the end or a pause, and that the ancient musicians put it occasionally in the margin of their psalters, to shew where a musical pause was to be made, and where the tune ended.'

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