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SANTA BARBARA

PRESENTED BY
MRS. WILLIAM GLASSFORD

P. S. Volume

Number 2.





TY CROWELL & CO.
NEW YORK



LUCILE

BY

OWEN MEREDITH

“Why, let the stricken deer go weep,
The hart ungalled play :
For some must watch, while some must sleep ;
Thus runs the world away.”

Hamlet.

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SANTA BARBARA

DEDICATION.

TO MY FATHER.

I DEDICATE to you a work, which is submitted to the public with a diffidence and hesitation proportioned to the novelty of the effort it represents. For in this poem I have abandoned those forms of verse with which I had most familiarized my thoughts, and have endeavored to follow a path on which I could discover no footprints before me, either to guide or to warn.

There is a moment of profound discouragement which succeeds to prolonged effort; when, the labor which has become a habit having ceased, we miss the sustaining sense of its companionship, and stand, with a feeling of strangeness and embarrassment, before the abrupt and naked result. As regards myself, in the present instance, the force of all such sensations is increased by the circumstances to which I have referred. And in this moment of discouragement and doubt, my heart instinctively turns to you, from whom it has so often sought, from whom it has never failed to receive, support.

I do not inscribe to you this book because it contains anything that is worthy of the beloved and honored name with which I thus seek to associate it; nor yet because I would avail myself of a vulgar pretext to display in public an affection that is best honored by the silence which it renders sacred.

Feelings only such as those with which, in days when there existed for me no critic less gentle than yourself, I brought to you my childish manuscripts; feelings only such as those which have, in later years, associated with your heart all that has moved or occupied my own, — lead me once more to seek assurance from the grasp of that hand which has hitherto been my guide and comfort through the life I owe to you.

And as in childhood, when existence had no toil beyond the day's simple lesson, no ambition beyond the neighboring approval of the night, I brought to you the morning's task for the evening's sanction, so now I bring to you this self-appointed taskwork of maturer years; less confident indeed of your approval, but not less confident of your love; and anxious only to realize your presence between myself and the public, and to mingle with those severer voices to whose final sentence I submit my work the beloved and gracious accents of your own.

OWEN MEREDITH.

CONTENTS.

PART I.

CANTO.	PAGE
I.	5
II.	28
III.	59
IV.	85
V.	102
VI.	126

PART II.

CANTO.	PAGE
I.	167
II.	208
III.	230
IV.	247
V.	274
VI.	296

LUCILE.

PART I.

CANTO I.

I.

LETTER FROM THE COMTESSE DE NEVERS TO LORD
ALFRED VARGRAVE.

“I HEAR from Bigorre you are there. I am told
You are going to marry Miss Darcy. Of old,
So long since you may have forgotten it now
(When we parted as friends, soon mere strangers to
grow),

Your last words recorded a pledge — what you will —
A promise — the time is now come to fulfil.

The letters I ask you, my lord, to return,
I desire to receive from your hand. You discern
My reasons, which, therefore, I need not explain.

The distance to Luchon is short. I remain
A month in these mountains. Miss Darcy, per-
chance,

Will forego one brief page from the summer romance

Of her courtship, and spare you one day from your
place

At her feet, in the light of her fair English face.

I desire nothing more, and trust you will feel

I desire nothing much.

“Your friend always,

“LUCILE.”

II.

Now in May Fair, of course, — in the fair month of
May—

When life is abundant, and busy, and gay :

When the markets of London are noisy about

Young ladies, and strawberries, — “only just out ;”

Fresh strawberries sold under all the house-eaves,

And young ladies on sale for the strawberry-leaves :

When cards, invitations, and three-cornered notes

Fly about like white butterflies — gay little motes

In the sunbeam of Fashion ; and even Blue Books

Take a heavy-wing'd flight, and grow busy as rooks ;

And the postman (that Genius, indifferent and stern,

Who shakes out even-handed to all, from his urn,

Those lots which so often decide if our day

Shall be fretful and anxious, or joyous and gay)

Brings, each morning, more letters of one sort or
other

Than Cadmus, himself, put together, to bother

The heads of Hellenes ; — I say, in the season

Of Fair May, in May Fair, there can be no reason

Why, when quietly munching your dry toast and
butter,

Your nerves should be suddenly thrown in a flutter

At the sight of a neat little letter, address'd
 In a woman's handwriting, containing, half guess'd,
 An odor of violets faint as the Spring,
 And coquettishly seal'd with a small signet-ring.
 But in Autumn, the season of sombre reflection,
 When a damp day, at breakfast, begins with dejection ;

Far from London and Paris, and ill at one's ease,
 Away in the heart of the blue Pyrenees,
 Where a call from the doctor, a stroll to the bath,
 A ride through the hills on a hack like a lath,
 A cigar, a French novel, a tedious flirtation,
 Are all a man finds for his day's occupation,
 The whole case, believe me, is totally changed,
 And a letter may alter the plans we arranged
 Over-night, for the slaughter of time — a wild
 beast,

Which, though classified yet by no naturalist,
 Abounds in these mountains, more hard to ensnare,
 And more mischievous, too, than the Lynx or the
 Bear.

III.

I marvel less, therefore, that, having already
 Torn open this note, with a hand most unsteady,
 Lord Alfred was startled.

The month is September ;
 Time, morning ; the scene at Bigorre ; (pray re-
 member

These facts, gentle reader, because I intend
 To fling all the unities by at the end.)

He walk'd to the window. The morning was chill :

The brown woods were crisp'd in the cold on the
hill :

The sole thing abroad in the streets was the wind :
And the straws on the gust, like the thoughts in his
mind,

Rose, and eddied around and around, as tho' teas-
ing

Each other. The prospect, in truth, was displeasing :
And Lord Alfred, whilst moodily gazing around it,
To himself more than once (vex'd in soul) sigh'd
. " Confound it ! "

IV.

What the thoughts were which led to this bad in-
terjection,

Sir, or madam, I leave to your future detection :
For whatever they were, they were burst in upon,
As the door was burst through, by my lord's Cousin
John.

COUSIN JOHN.

A fool, Alfred, a fool, a most motley fool !

LORD ALFRED.

Who ?

JOHN.

The man who has anything better to do ;
And yet so far forgets himself, so far degrades
His position as Man, to this worst of all trades,
Which even a well-brought-up ape were above,
To travel about with a woman in love, —
Unless she's in love with himself.

ALFRED.

Indeed! why

Are you here then, dear Jack?

JOHN.

Can't you guess it?

ALFRED.

Not I.

JOHN.

Because I *have* nothing that's better to do.
 I had rather be bored, my dear Alfred, by you,
 On the whole (I must own), than be bored by
 myself.

That perverse, imperturbable, golden-hair'd elf—
 Your Will-o'-the-wisp — that has led you and me
 Such a dance through these hills —

ALFRED.

Who, Matilda?

JOHN.

Yes! she,

Of course! who but she could contrive so to keep
 One's eyes, and one's feet too, from falling asleep
 For even one half-hour of the long twenty-four?

ALFRED.

What's the matter?

JOHN.

Why, she is — a matter, the more
 I consider about it, the more it demands
 An attention it does not deserve; and expands
 Beyond the dimensions which ev'n crinoline,

When possess'd by a fair face, and saucy Eighteen,
Is entitled to take in this very small star,
Already too crowded, as *I* think, by far.
You read Malthus and Sadler ?

ALFRED.

Of course.

JOHN.

To what use,

When you countenance, calmly, such monstrous
abuse
Of one mere human creature's legitimate space
In this world ? Mars, Apollo, Virorum ! the case
Wholly passes my patience.

ALFRED.

My own is worse tried.

JOHN.

Yours, Alfred ?

ALFRED.

Read this, if you doubt, and decide

JOHN (*reading the letter*).

" *I hear from Bigorre you are there. I am told
You are going to marry Miss Darcy. Of old —*"
What is this ?

ALFRED.

Read it on to the end, and you'll know.

JOHN (*continues reading*).

" *When we parted, your last words recorded a
vow —
What you will"*



“I hear from Bigorre you are there.”

Hang it! this smells all over, I swear,
Of adventurers and violets. Was it your hair
You promised a lock of?

ALFRED.

Read on. You'll discern.

JOHN (*continues*).

"*Those letters I ask you, my lord, to return.*" . . .
Humph! . . . Letters! . . . the matter is worse
than I guess'd;
I have my misgivings —

ALFRED.

Well, read out the rest,
And advise.

JOHN.

Eh? . . . Where was I?

(*continues*)

"*Miss Darcy, perchance,
Will forego one brief page from the summer ro-
mance
Of her courtship.*" . . .

Egad! a romance, for my part,
I'd forego every page of, and not break my heart!

ALFRED.

Continue

JOHN (*reading*).

"*And spare you one day from your place
At her feet.*" . . .

Pray forgive me the passing grimace.
I wish you had MY place!

(reads)

*“ I trust you will feel
I desire nothing much. Your friend,” . . .*

Bless me! *“ Lucile?”*

The Countess de Nevers ?

ALFRED.

Yes.

JOHN.

What will you do ?

ALFRED.

You ask me just what I would rather ask you.

JOHN.

You can't go.

ALFRED.

I must.

JOHN.

And Matilda ?

ALFRED.

Oh, that

You must manage!

JOHN.

Must I ? I decline it, though, flat.
In an hour the horses will be at the door,
And Matilda is now in her habit. Before
I have finished my breakfast, of course I receive

A message for "*dear Cousin John!*" . . . I must
 leave
 At the jeweller's the bracelet which *you* broke last
 night ;
 I must call for the music. "Dear Alfred is right :
 The black shawl looks best : *will* I change it? Of
 course
 I can just stop, in passing, to order the horse.
 Then Beau has the mumps, or St. Hubert knows
 what ;
Will I see the dog-doctor ?" Hang Beau ! I will *not*.

ALFRED.

Tush, tush ! this is serious.

JOHN.

It is.

ALFRED.

Very well,

You must think —

JOHN.

What excuse will you make, tho'?

ALFRED.

Oh, tell

Mrs. Darcy that . . . lend me your wits, Jack ! . . .
 The deuce !

Can you not stretch your genius to fit a friend's
 use ?

Excuses are clothes which, when ask'd unawares,
 Good Breeding to Naked Necessity spares,
 You must have a whole wardrobe, no doubt.

JOHN.

My dear fellow,
 Matilda is jealous, you know, as Othello.

ALFRED.

You joke.

JOHN.

I am serious. Why go to Luchon ?

ALFRED.

Don't ask me. I have not a choice, my dear John.
 Besides, shall I own a strange sort of desire,
 Before I extinguish forever the fire
 Of youth and romance, in whose shadowy light
 Hope whisper'd her first fairy tales, to excite
 The last spark, till it rise, and fade far in that dawn
 Of my days where the twilights of life were first
 drawn
 By the rosy, reluctant auroras of Love ;
 In short, from the dead Past the gravestone to
 move ;
 Of the years long departed forever to take
 One last look, one final farewell ; to awake
 The Heroic of youth from the Hades of joy,
 And once more be, though but for an hour, Jack —
 a boy !

JOHN.

You had better go hang yourself.

ALFRED.

No! were it but
 To make sure that the Past from the Future is shut,
 It were worth the step back. Do you think we
 should live
 With the living so lightly, and learn to survive
 That wild moment in which to the grave and its
 gloom
 We consign'd our heart's best, if the doors of the
 tomb
 Were not lock'd with a key which Fate keeps for
 our sake?
 If the dead could return or the corpses awake?

JOHN.

Nonsense!

ALFRED.

Not wholly. The man who gets up
 A fill'd guest from the banquet, and drains off his
 cup,
 Sees the last lamp extinguish'd with cheerfulness,
 goes
 Well contented to bed, and enjoys its repose.
 But he who hath suppd at the tables of kings,
 And yet starved in the sight of luxurious things;
 Who hath watch'd the wine flow, by himself but
 half tasted;
 Heard the music, and yet miss'd the tune; who
 hath wasted
 One part of life's grand possibilities; — friend,
 That man will bear with him, be sure, to the end,

A blighted experience, a rancor within :
You may call it a virtue, I call it a sin.

JOHN.

I see you remember the cynical story
Of that wicked old piece Experience — a hoary
Lothario, whom dying, the priest by his bed
(Knowing well the unprincipled life he had led,
And observing, with no small amount of surprise,
Resignation and calm in the old sinner's eyes)
Ask'd if he had nothing that weigh'd on his mind :
“ Well, . . . no,” . . . says Lothario, “ I think
not. I find,
On reviewing my life, which in most things was
pleasant,
I never neglected, when once it was present,
An occasion of pleasing myself. On the whole,
I have naught to regret ; ” . . . and so, smiling, his
soul
Took its flight from this world.

ALFRED.

Well, Regret or Remorse,
Which is best ?

JOHN.

Why, Regret.

ALFRED.

No ; Remorse, Jack, of course ;
For the one is related, be sure, to the other.
Regret is a spiteful old maid : but her brother.

Remorse, though a widower certainly, yet
Has been wed to young Pleasure. Dear Jack, hang
 Regret!

JOHN.

Bref! you mean, then, to go?

ALFRED.

Bref! I do.

JOHN.

One word . . . stay!
 Are you really in love with Matilda?

ALFRED.

Love, eh?

What a question! Of course.

JOHN.

Were you really in love
 With Madame de Nevers?

ALFRED.

What; Lucile? No, by Jove,
 Never *really*.

JOHN.

She's pretty?

ALFRED.

Decidedly so.
 At least, so she was, some ten summers ago.
 As soft, and as sallow as Autumn — with hair
 Neither black, nor yet brown, but that tinge which
 the air

Takes at eve in September, when night lingers lone
Through a vineyard, from beams of a slow-setting
sun.

Eyes — the wistful gazelle's ; the fine foot of a fairy ;
And a hand fit a fay's wand to wave, — white and airy :
A voice soft and sweet as a tune that one knows.
Something in her there was, set you thinking of those
Strange backgrounds of Raphael . . . that hectic
and deep
Brief twilight in which southern suns fall asleep.

JOHN.

Coquette?

ALFRED.

Not at all. 'Twas her one fault. Not she !
I had loved her the better, had she less loved me.
The heart of a man's like that delicate weed
Which requires to be trampled on, boldly indeed,
Ere it give forth the fragrance you wish to extract.
'Tis a simile, trust me, if not new, exact.

JOHN.

Women change so.

ALFRED.

Of course.

JOHN.

And, unless rumor errs,
I believe, that last year, the Comtesse de Nevers *

* O Shakespeare ! how couldst thou ask " What's in a name ? "
'Tis the devil's in it, when a bard has to frame
English rhymes for alliance with names that are French :
And in these rhymes of mine, well I know that I trench

Was at Baden the rage — held an absolute court
Of devoted adorers, and really made sport
Of her subjects.

ALFRED.

Indeed!

JOHN.

When she broke off with you
Her engagement, her heart did not break with it?

ALFRED.

Pooh!

Pray would you have had her dress always in black,
And shut herself up in a convent, dear Jack?
Besides, 'twas my fault the engagement was broken.

JOHN.

Most likely. How was it?

ALFRED.

The tale is soon spoken.
She bored me. I show'd it. She saw it. What
next?
She reproach'd. I retorted. Of course she was
vex'd.

All too far on that license which critics refuse,
With just right, to accord to a well-brought-up Muse.
Yet, tho' faulty the union, in many a line,
'Twi'x my British-born verse and my French heroine,
Since, however auspiciously wedded they be,
There is many a pair that yet cannot agree,
Your forgiveness for this pair, the author invites,
Whom necessity, not inclination, unites.

I was vex'd that she was so. She sulk'd. So did I.
 If I ask'd her to sing, she look'd ready to cry.
 I was contrite, submissive. She soften'd. I
 harden'd.

At noon I was banish'd. At eve I was pardon'd.
 She said I had no heart. I said she had no reason.
 I swore she talk'd nonsense. She sobb'd I talk'd
 treason.

In short, my dear fellow, 'twas time, as you see,
 Things should come to a crisis, and finish. 'Twas
 she

By whom to that crisis the matter was brought.
 She released me. I linger'd. I linger'd, she
 thought,

With too sullen an aspect. This gave me, of course,
 The occasion to fly in a rage, mount my horse,
 And declare myself uncomprehended. And so
 We parted. The rest of the story you know.

JOHN.

No, indeed.

ALFRED.

Well, we parted. Of course we could not
 Continue to meet, as before, in one spot.

You conceive it was awkward? Even Don Ferdi-
 nando

Can do, you remember, no more than he can do.

I think that I acted exceedingly well,

Considering the time when this rupture befell,

For Paris was charming just then. It deranged

All my plans for the winter. I ask'd to be changed —

Wrote for Naples, then vacant — obtain'd it — and
so

Join'd my new post at once ; but scarce reach'd it,
when lo !

My first news from Paris informs me Lucile
Is ill, and in danger. Conceive what I feel.
I fly back. I find her recover'd, but yet
Looking pale. I am seized with a contrite regret ;
I ask to renew the engagement.

JOHN.

And she ?

ALFRED.

Reflects, but declines. We part, swearing to be
Friends ever, friends only. All that sort of thing !
We each keep our letters . . . a portrait . . . a
ring . . .

With a pledge to return them whenever the one
Or the other shall call for them back.

JOHN.

Pray go on.

ALFRED.

My story is finish'd. Of course I enjoin
On Lucile all those thousand good maxims we coin
To supply the grim deficit found in our days,
When love leaves them bankrupt. I preach. She
obeys.

She goes out in the world ; takes to dancing once
more —

A pleasure she rarely indulged in before.

I go back to my post, and collect (I must own 'Tis a taste I had never before, my dear John) Antiques and small Elzevirs. Heigho! now, Jack, You know all.

JOHN (*after a pause*).
You are really resolved to go back?

ALFRED.
Eh, where?

JOHN.
To that worst of all places — the past.
You remember Lot's wife?

ALFRED.
'Twas a promise when last
We parted. My honor is pledged to it.

JOHN.
Well,
What is it you wish me to do?

ALFRED.
You must tell
Matilda, I meant to have call'd — to leave word —
To explain — but the time was so pressing —

JOHN.
My lord,
Your lordship's obedient! I really can't do . . .

ALFRED.
You wish then to break off my marriage?

JOHN.

No, no!

But indeed I can't see why yourself you need take
These letters.

ALFRED.

Not see? would you have me, then, break
A promise my honor is pledged to?

JOHN (*humming*).“*Off, off*

And away! said the stranger” . . .

ALFRED.

Oh, good! oh, you scoff!

JOHN.

At what, my dear Alfred?

ALFRED.

At all things!

JOHN.

Indeed?

ALFRED.

Yes; I see that your heart is as dry as a reed:
That the dew of your youth is rubb'd off you: I see
You have no feeling left in you, even for me!
At honor you jest; you are cold as a stone
To the warm voice of friendship. Belief you have
none;

You have lost faith in all things. You carry a blight
 About with you everywhere. Yes, at the sight
 Of such callous indifference, who could be calm?
 I must leave you at once, Jack, or else the last balm
 That is left me in Gilead you'll turn into gall.
 Heartless, cold, unconcern'd . . .

JOHN.

Have you done? Is that all?
 Well, then, listen to me! I presume when you made
 Up your mind to propose to Miss Darcy, you weigh'd
 All the drawbacks against the equivalent gains,
 Ere you finally settled the point. What remains
 But to stick to your choice? You want money: 'tis
 here.

A settled position: 'tis yours. A career:
 You secure it. A wife, young, and pretty as rich,
 Whom all men will envy you. Why must you itch
 To be running away, on the eve of all this,
 To a woman whom never for once did you miss
 All these years since you left her? Who knows
 what may hap?

This letter — to *me* — is a palpable trap.
 The woman has changed since you knew her. Per-
 chance

She yet seeks to renew her youth's broken romance.
 When women begin to feel youth and their beauty
 Slip from them, they count it a sort of a duty
 To let nothing else slip away unsecured
 Which these, while they lasted, might once have
 procured.

Lucile's a coquette to the end of her fingers,
 I will stake my last farthing. Perhaps the wish
 lingers
 To recall the once reckless, indifferent lover
 To the feet he has left; let intrigue now recover
 What truth could not keep. 'Twere a vengeance,
 no doubt —
 A triumph; — but why must *you* bring it about?
 You are risking the substance of all that you
 schemed
 To obtain; and for what? some mad dream you
 have dream'd.

ALFRED.

But there's nothing to risk. You exaggerate, Jack,
 You mistake. In three days, at the most, I am back.

JOHN.

Ay, but how? . . . discontented, unsettled, upset,
 Bearing with you a comfortless twinge of regret.
 Preoccupied, sulky, and likely enough
 To make your betroth'd break off all in a huff.
 Three days, do you say? But in three days who
 knows
 What may happen? I don't, nor do you, I suppose.

v.

Of all the good things in this good world around us,
 The one most abundantly furnish'd and found us,
 And which, for that reason, we least care about,
 And can best spare our friends, is good counsel, no
 doubt.

But advice, when 'tis sought from a friend (though
 civility
 May forbid to avow it), means mere liability
 In the bill we already have drawn on Remorse,
 Which we deem that a true friend is bound to in-
 dorse.

A mere lecture on debt from that friend is a bore.
 Thus, the better his cousin's advice was, the more
 Alfred Vargrave with angry resentment opposed it.
 And, having the worst of the contest, he closed it
 With so firm a resolve his bad ground to maintain,
 That, sadly perceiving resistance was vain,
 And argument fruitless, the amiable Jack
 Came to terms and assisted his cousin to pack
 A slender valise (the one small condescension
 Which his final remonstrance obtain'd), whose
 dimension
 Excluded large outfits; and, cursing his stars, he
 Shook hands with his friend and return'd to Miss
 Darcy.

VI.

Lord Alfred, when last to the window he turn'd,
 Ere he lock'd up and quitted his chamber, discern'd
 Matilda ride by, with her cheek beaming bright
 In what Virgil has call'd, " Youth's purpureal light "
 (I like the expression, and can't find a better).
 He sigh'd as he look'd at her. Did he regret her?
 In her habit and hat, with her glad golden hair,
 As airy and blithe as a blithe bird in air,
 And her arch rosy lips, and her eager blue eyes,
 With her little impertinent look of surprise,

And her round youthful figure, and fair neck, below
The dark drooping feather, as radiant as snow, —
I can only declare, that if *I* had the chance
Of passing three days in the exquisite glance
Of those eyes, or caressing the hand that now petted
That fine English mare, I should much have
regretted

Whatever might lose me one little half-hour
Of a pastime so pleasant, when once in my power.
For, if one drop of milk from the bright milky Way
Could turn into a woman, 'twould look, I dare say,
Not more fresh than Matilda was looking that day.

VII.

But, whatever the feeling that prompted the sigh
With which Alfred Vargrave now watched her ride
by,
I can only affirm that, in watching her ride,
As he turned from the window he certainly sigh'd.

CANTO II.

I.

LETTER FROM LORD ALFRED VARGRAVE TO
THE COMTESSE DE NEVERS.

BIGORRE, TUESDAY.

“YOUR note, Madam, reach’d me to-day, at Bigorre,
And commands (need I add?) my obedience. Be-
fore

The night I shall be at Luchon — where a line,
If sent to Duval’s, the hotel where I dine,
Will find me, awaiting your orders. Receive
My respects.

“Yours sincerely,

“A. VARGRAVE.

“I leave

In an hour.”

II.

In an hour from the time he wrote this
Alfred Vargrave, in tracking a mountain abyss,
Gave the rein to his steed and his thoughts, and
pursued,

In pursuing his course through the blue solitude,
The reflections that journey gave rise to.

And here

(Because, without some such precaution. I fear



“In tracking a mountain abyss.”



You might fail to distinguish them each from the
 rest
 Of the world they belong to; whose captives are
 drest,
 As our convicts, precisely the same one and all,
 While the coat cut for Peter is pass'd on to Paul)
 I resolve, one by one, when I pick from the mass
 The persons I want, as before you they pass,
 To label them broadly in plain black and white
 On the backs of them. Therefore whilst yet he's in
 sight,
 I first label my hero.

III.

The age is gone o'er
 When a man may in all things be all. We have
 more
 Painters, poets, musicians, and artists, no doubt,
 Than the great Cinquecento gave birth to; but out
 Of a million of mere dilettanti, when, when
 Will a new LEONARDO arise on our ken?
 He is gone with the age which begat him. Our own
 Is too vast, and too complex, for one man alone
 To embody its purpose, and hold it shut close
 In the palm of his hand. There were giants in those
 Irreclaimable days; but in these days of ours,
 In dividing the work, we distribute the powers.
 Yet a dwarf on a dead giant's shoulders sees more
 Than the 'live giant's eyesight availed to explore;
 And in life's lengthen'd alphabet what used to be
 To our sires X Y Z is to us A B C.

A Vanini is roasted alive for his pains,
 But a Bacon comes after and picks up his brains.
 A Bruno is angrily seized by the throttle
 And hunted about by thy ghost, Aristotle,
 Till a More or Lavater step into his place :
 Then the world turns and makes an admiring
 grimace.

Once the men were so great and so few, they appear,
 Through a distant Olympian atmosphere,
 Like vast Caryatids upholding the age.
 Now the men are so many and small, disengage
 One man from the million to mark him, next moment
 The crowd sweeps him hurriedly out of your com-
 ment ;

And since we seek vainly (to praise in our songs)
 'Mid our fellows the size which to heroes belongs,
 We take the whole age for a hero, in want
 Of a better ; and still, in its favor, descant
 On the strength and the beauty which, failing to find
 In any one man, we ascribe to mankind.

IV.

Alfred Vargrave was one of those men who achieve
 So little, because of the much they conceive.
 With irresolute finger he knock'd at each one
 Of the doorways of life, and abided in none.
 His course, by each star that would cross it, was set,
 And whatever he did he was sure to regret.
 That target, discuss'd by the travellers of old,
 Which to one appear'd argent, to one appear'd gold,
 To him, ever lingering on Doubt's dizzy margent,

Appear'd in one moment both golden and argent.
 The man who seeks one thing in life, and but one,
 May hope to achieve it before life be done ;
 But he who seeks all things, wherever he goes,
 Only reaps from the hopes which around him he sows
 A harvest of barren regrets. And the worm
 That crawls on in the dust to the definite term
 Of its creeping existence, and sees nothing more
 Than the path it pursues till its creeping be o'er,
 In its limited vision, is happier far
 Than the Half-Sage, whose course, fix'd by no
 friendly star
 Is by each star distracted in turn, and who knows
 Each will still be as distant wherever he goes.

v.

Both brilliant and brittle, both bold and unstable,
 Indecisive yet keen, Alfred Vargrave seem'd able
 To dazzle, but not to illumine mankind.
 A vigorous, various, versatile mind ;
 A character wavering, fitful, uncertain,
 As the shadow that shakes o'er a luminous 'curtain,
 Vague, fitting, but on it forever impressing
 The shape of some substance at which you stand
 guessing :
 When you said, " All is worthless and weak here,"
 behold !
 Into sight on a sudden there seem'd to unfold
 Great outlines of strenuous truth in the man :
 When you said, " This is genius," the outlines
 grew wan,

And his life, though in all things so gifted and
 skill'd,
 Was, at best, but a promise which nothing fulfill'd.

VI.

In the budding of youth, ere wild winds can deflower
 The shut leaves of man's life, round the germ of his
 power

Yet folded, his life had been earnest. Alas!

In that life one occasion, one moment, there was
 When this earnestness might, with the life-sap of
 youth,

Lusty fruitage have borne in his manhood's full
 growth;

But it found him too soon, when his nature was still
 The delicate toy of too pliant a will,

The boisterous wind of the world to resist,

Or the frost of the world's wintry wisdom.

He miss'd

That occasion, too rathe in its advent.

Since then,

He had made it a law, in his commerce with men,

That intensity in him, which only left sore

The heart it disturb'd, to repel and ignore.

And thus, as some Prince by his subjects deposed,

Whose strength he, by seeking to crush it, disclosed,

In resigning the power he lack'd power to support

Turns his back upon courts, with a sneer at the
 court,

In his converse this man for self-comfort appeal'd

To a cynic denial of all he conceal'd

In the instincts and feelings belied by his words.
Words, however, are things : and the man who ac-
cords

To his language the license to outrage his soul,
Is controll'd by the words he disdains to control.
And, therefore, he seem'd in the deeds of each day,
The light code proclaim'd on his lips to obey ;
And, the slave of each whim, follow'd wilfully aught
That perchance fool'd the fancy, or flatter'd the
thought.

Yet, indeed, deep within him, the spirits of truth,
Vast, vague aspirations, the powers of his youth,
Lived and breathed, and made moan — stirr'd
themselves — strove to start
Into deeds — though deposed, in that Hades, his
heart.

Like those antique Theogonies ruin'd and hurl'd,
Under clefts of the hills, which, convulsing the
world,

Heaved, in earthquake, their heads the rent cav-
erns above,

To trouble at times in the light court of Jove
All its frivolous gods, with an undefined awe,
Of wrong'd rebel powers that own'd not their law.
For his sake, I am fain to believe that, if born
To some lowlier rank (from the world's languid
scorn

Secured by the world's stern resistance) where
strife,

Strife and toil, and not pleasure, gave purpose to life,
He possibly might have contrived to attain

Not eminence only, but worth. So, again,
 Had he been of his own house the first-born, each
 gift
 Of a mind many-gifted had gone to uplift
 A great name by a name's greatest uses.

But there

He stood isolated, opposed, as it were,
 To life's great realities ; part of no plan ;
 And if ever a nobler and happier man
 He might hope to become, that alone could be
 when

With all that is real in life and in men
 What was real in him should have been reconciled :
 When each influence now from experience exiled
 Should have seized on his being, combined with
 his nature,

And form'd, as by fusion, a new human creature :
 As when those airy elements viewless to sight
 (The amalgam of which, if our science be right,
 The germ of this populous planet doth fold)
 Unite in the glass of the chemist, behold !
 Where a void seem'd before, there a substance ap-
 pears,

From the fusion of forces whence issued the spheres !

VII.

But the permanent cause why his life fail'd and
 miss'd
 The full value of life was, — where man should resist
 The world, which man's genius is call'd to com-
 mand,

He gave way, less from lack of the power to with-
stand,
Than from lack of the resolute will to retain
Those strongholds of life which the world strives to
gain.

Let this character go in the old-fashion'd way,
With the moral thereof tightly tack'd to it. Say —
“ Let any man once show the world that he feels
Afraid of its bark, and 'twill fly at his heels :
Let him fearlessly face it, 'twill leave him alone :
But 'twill fawn at his feet if he flings it a bone.”

VIII.

The moon of September, now half at the full,
Was unfolding from darkness and dreamland the
lull

Of the quiet blue air, where the many-faced hills
Watch'd, well-pleas'd, their fair slaves, the light,
foam-footed rills,

Dance and sing down the steep marble stairs of
their courts,

And gracefully fashion a thousand sweet sports,
Lord Alfred (by this on his journeying far)

Was pensively puffing his Lopez cigar,

And brokenly humming an old opera strain,

And thinking, perchance, of those castles in Spain
Which that long rocky barrier hid from his sight ;

When suddenly, out of the neighboring night,

A horseman emerged from a fold of the hill,

And so startled his steed that was winding at will

Up the thin dizzy strip of a pathway which led

O'er the mountain — the reins on its neck, and its
 head
 Hanging lazily forward — that, but for a hand
 Light and ready, yet firm, in familiar command,
 Both rider and horse might have been in a trice
 Hurl'd horribly over the grim precipice.

IX.

As soon as the moment's alarm had subsided,
 And the oath with which nothing can find un-
 provided
 A thoroughbred Englishman, safely exploded,
 Lord Alfred unbent (as Apollo his bow did
 Now and then) his erectness; and looking, not
 ruder
 Than such inroad would warrant, survey'd the in-
 truder,
 Whose arrival so nearly cut short in his glory
 My hero, and finished abruptly this story.

X.

The stranger, a man of his own age or less,
 Well mounted, and simple though rich in his dress,
 Wore his beard and mustache in the fashion of
 France.
 His face, which was pale, gather'd force from the
 glance
 Of a pair of dark, vivid, and eloquent eyes.
 With a gest of apology, touch'd with surprise,
 He lifted his hat, bow'd and courteously made

Some excuse in such well-cadenced French as be-
 tray'd,
 At the first word he spoke, the Parisian.

XI.

I swear

I have wander'd about in the world everywhere ;
 From many strange mouths have heard many
 strange tongues ;
 Strain'd with many strange idioms my lips and my
 lungs ;
 Walk'd in many a far land, regretting my own ;
 In many a language groaned many a groan ;
 And have often had reason to curse those wild
 fellows
 Who built the high house at which Heaven turn'd
 jealous,
 Making human audacity stumble and stammer
 When seized by the throat in the hard gripe of
 Grammar.
 But the language of languages dearest to me
 Is that in which once, *O ma toute chérie*,
 When, together, we bent o'er your nosegay for
 hours,
 You explain'd what was silently said by the flowers,
 And, selecting the sweetest of all, sent a flame
 Through my heart, as, in laughing, you murmur'd
Je t'aime.

XII.

The Italians have voices like peacocks ; the Spanish
 Smell, I fancy, of garlic ; the Swedish and Danish

Have something too Runic, too rough and unshod,
 in
 Their accents for mouths not descended from
 Odin ;
 German gives me a cold in the head, sets me
 wheezing
 And coughing ; and Russian is nothing but sneez-
 ing ;
 But, by Belus and Babel ! I never have heard,
 And I never shall hear (I well know it), one word
 Of that delicate idiom of Paris without
 Feeling morally sure, beyond question or doubt,
 By the wild way in which my heart inwardly flut-
 ter'd
 That my heart's native tongue to my heart had
 been utter'd.
 And whene'er I hear French spoken as I approve
 I feel myself quietly falling in love.

XIII.

Lord Alfred, on hearing the stranger, appeased
 By a something, an accent, a cadence, which pleased
 His ear with that pledge of good breeding which
 tells
 At once of the world in whose fellowship dwells
 The speaker that owns it, was glad to remark
 In the horseman a man one might meet after dark
 Without fear.
 And thus, not disagreeably impress'd,
 As it seem'd, with each other, the two men abreast
 Rode on slowly a moment.

XIV.

STRANGER.

I see, Sir, you are
A smoker. Allow me!

ALFRED.

Pray take a cigar.

STRANGER.

Many thanks! . . . Such cigars are a luxury here.
Do you go to Luchon?

ALFRED.

Yes; and you?

STRANGER.

Yes. I fear,
Since our road is the same, that our journey must be
Somewhat closer than is our acquaintance. You see
How narrow the path is. I'm tempted to ask
Your permission to finish (no difficult task!)
The cigar you have given me (really a prize!)
In your company.

ALFRED.

Charm'd, Sir, to find your road lies
In the way of my own inclinations! Indeed
The dream of your nation I find in this weed.
In the distant Savannahs a talisman grows
That makes all men brothers that use it . . . who
knows?

That blaze which erewhile from the *Boulevard* out-
broke,
It has ended where wisdom begins, Sir, — in smoke.
Messieurs Lopez (whatever your publicists write)
Have done more in their way human kind to unite,
Perchance, than ten Prudhons.

STRANGER.

Yes. Ah, what a scene!

ALFRED.

Humph! Nature is here too pretentious. Her mien
Is too haughty. One likes to be coax'd, not com-
pell'd,
To the notice such beauty resents if withheld.
She seems to be saying too plainly, "Admire me!"
And I answer, "Yes, madam, I do: but you tire
me."

STRANGER.

That sunset, just now though . . .

ALFRED.

A very old trick!
One would think that the sun by this time must be
sick
Of blushing at what, by this time, he must know
Too well to be shocked by — this world.

STRANGER.

Ah, 'tis so
With us all. 'Tis the sinner that best knew the
world

At Twenty, whose lip is, at sixty, most curl'd
With disdain of its follies. You stay at Luchon?

ALFRED.

A day or two only.

STRANGER.

The season is done.

ALFRED.

Already?

STRANGER.

'Twas shorter this year than the last.
Folly soon wears her shoes out. She dances so fast
We are all of us tired.

ALFRED.

You know the place well?

STRANGER.

I have been there two seasons.

ALFRED.

Pray who is the Belle
Of the Baths at this moment?

STRANGER.

The same who has been
The belle of all places in which she is seen ;
The belle of all Paris last winter ; last spring
The belle of all Baden.

ALFRED.

An uncommon thing!

STRANGER.

Sir, an uncommon beauty! . . . I rather should say
An uncommon character. Truly, each day
One meets women whose beauty is equal to hers,
But none with the charm of Lucile de Nevers.

ALFRED.

Madame de Nevers!

STRANGER.

Do you know her?

ALFRED.

I know

Or, rather. I knew her — a long time ago.
I almost forget . . .

STRANGER.

What a wit! what a grace
In her language! her movements! what play in her
face!

And yet what a sadness she seems to conceal!

ALFRED.

You speak like a lover.

STRANGER.

I speak as I feel,
But not like a lover. What interests me so
In Lucile, at the same time forbids me, I know.

To give to that interest, whate'er the sensation,
 The name we men give to an hour's admiration,
 A night's passing passion, an actress's eyes,
 A dancing girl's ankles, a fine lady's sighs.

ALFRED.

Yes, I quite comprehend. But this sadness — this
 shade
 Which you speak of? . . . it almost would make
 me afraid
 Your gay countrymen, Sir, less adroit must have
 grown,
 Since when, as a stripling, at Paris, I own
 I found in them terrible rivals, — if yet
 They have all lack'd the skill to console this regret
 (If regret be the word I should use), or fulfil
 This desire (if desire be the word), which seems
 still
 To endure unappeased. For I take it for granted,
 From all that you say, that the will was not wanted.

XV.

The stranger replied, not without irritation :
 “ I have heard that an Englishman — one of your
 nation
 I presume — and if so, I must beg you, indeed,
 To excuse the contempt which I . . . ”

ALFRED.

Pray, Sir, proceed
 With your tale. My compatriot, what was his
 crime?

STRANGER.

Oh, nothing! His folly was not so sublime
 As to merit that term. If I blamed him just now,
 It was not for the sin, but the silliness.

ALFRED.

How?

STRANGER.

I own I hate Botany. Still, . . . I admit,
 Although I myself have no passion for it,
 And do not understand, yet I cannot despise
 The cold man of science, who walks with his eyes
 All alert through a garden of flowers, and strips
 The lilies' gold tongues, and the roses' red lips,
 With a ruthless dissection; since he, I suppose,
 Has some purpose beyond the mere mischief he
 does

But the stupid and mischievous boy, that uproots
 The exotics, and tramples the tender young shoots,
 For a boy's brutal pastime, and only because
 He knows no distinction 'twixt heartsease and
 haws, —

One would wish, for the sake of each nursling so
 nipp'd,
 To catch the young rascal and have him well
 whipp'd!

ALFRED.

Some compatriot of mine, do I then understand,
 With a cold Northern heart, and a rude English
 hand,
 Has injured your Rosebud of France?

STRANGER.

Sir, I know

But little, or nothing. Yet some faces show
The last act of a tragedy in their regard :
Though the first scenes be wanting, it yet is not
hard

To divine, more or less, what the plot may have
been,

And what sort of actors have pass'd o'er the scene.

And whenever I gaze on the face of Lucile,

With its pensive and passionless languor, I feel

That some feeling hath burnt there . . . burnt out,
and burnt up

Health and hope. So you feel when you gaze
down the cup

Of extinguish'd volcanoes : you judge of the fire

Once there, by the ravage you see ; — the desire,

By the apathy left in its wake, and that sense

Of a moral, immovable, mute impotence.

ALFRED.

Humph! . . . I see you have finished, at last, your
cigar ;

Can I offer another?

STRANGER.

No, thank you. We are
Not two miles from Luchon.

ALFRED.

You know the road well?

STRANGER.

I have often been over it.

XVI.

Here a pause fell
On their converse. Still musingly on, side by side,
In the moonlight, the two men continued to ride
Down the dim mountain pathway. But each for
the rest
Of their journey, although they still rode on abreast,
Continued to follow in silence the train
Of the different feelings that haunted his brain ;
And each, as though roused from a deep revery,
Almost shouted, descending the mountain, to see
Burst at once on the moonlight the silvery Baths,
The long lime-tree alley, the dark gleaming paths,
With the lamps twinkling through them—the
quaint wooden roofs—
The little white houses.

The clatter of hoofs,
And the music of wandering bands, up the walls
Of the steep hanging hill, at remote intervals
Reached them, cross'd by the sound of the clacking
of whips,
And here and there, faintly, through serpentine slips
Of verdant rose-gardens deep-sheltered with screens
Of airy acacias and dark evergreens,
They could mark the white dresses and catch the
light songs
Of the lovely Parisians that wander'd in throngs.
Led by Laughter and Love through the old even-
tide
Down the dream-haunted valley, or up the hill-
side.

XVII.

At length, at the door of the inn l'HÉRISSEON,
(Pray go there, if ever you go to Luchon!)
The two horsemen, well pleased to have reached it,
 alighted
And exchanged their last greetings.

 The Frenchman invited
Lord Alfred to dinner. Lord Alfred declined.
He had letters to write, and felt tired. So he dined
In his own rooms that night.

 With an unquiet eye
He watched his companion depart; nor knew why,
Beyond all accountable reason or measure,
He felt in his breast such a sovran displeasure.
“The fellow's good looking,” he murmur'd at last,
“And yet not a coxcomb.” Some ghost of the past
Vex'd him still.

 “ If he love her,” he thought, “ let him win her.”
Then he turn'd to the future—and order'd his
 dinner.

XVIII.

O hour of all hours, the most bless'd upon earth,
Blessèd hour of our dinners!

 The land of his birth;
The face of his first love; the bills that he owes;
The twaddle of friends and the venom of foes;
The sermon he heard when to church he last went;
The money he borrow'd, the money he spent;—
All of these things, a man, I believe, may forget,
And not be the worse for forgetting; but yet

Never, never, oh never ! earth's luckiest sinner
 Hath unpunish'd forgotten the hour of his dinner !
 Indigestion, that conscience of every bad stomach,
 Shall relentlessly gnaw and pursue him with some
 ache
 Or some pain ; and trouble, remorseless, his best
 ease,
 As the Furies once troubled the sleep of Orestes.

XIX.

We may live without poetry, music, and art :
 We may live without conscience, and live without
 heart ;
 We may live without friends ; we may live without
 books ;
 But civilized man cannot live without cooks.
 He may live without books, — what is knowledge
 but grieving ?
 He may live without hope, — what is hope but de-
 ceiving ?
 He may live without love, — what is passion but
 pining ?
 But where is the man that can live without dining ?

XX.

Lord Alfred found, waiting his coming, a note
 From Lucile.

“ Your last letter has reach'd me,” she wrote.
 “ This evening, alas ! I must go the ball,
 And shall not be at home till too late for your call ;

But to-morrow, at any rate, *sans faute*, at One
 You will find me at home, and will find me alone.
 Meanwhile, let me thank you sincerely, milord,
 For the honor with which you adhere to your word.
 Yes, I thank you, Lord Alfred! To-morrow then.
 "L."

XXI.

I find myself terribly puzzled to tell
 The feelings with which Alfred Vargrave flung down
 This note, as he pour'd out his wine. I must own
 That I think he, himself, could have hardly explain'd
 Those feelings exactly.

"Yes, yes," as he drain'd
 The glass down, he mutter'd, "Jack's right, after all.
 The coquette!"

"Does milord mean to go to the ball?"
 Ask'd the waiter, who linger'd.

"Perhaps. I don't know.
 You may keep me a ticket, in case I should go."

XXII.

Oh, better, no doubt, is a dinner of herbs,
 When season'd by love, which no rancor disturbs,
 And sweeten'd by all that is sweetest in life,
 Than turbot, bisque, ortolans, eaten in strife!
 But if, out of humor, and hungry, alone,
 A man should sit down to a dinner, each one
 Of the dishes of which the cook chooses to spoil
 With a horrible mixture of garlic and oil,
 The chances are ten against one, I must own,
 He gets up as ill-temper'd as when he sat down.

And if any reader this fact to dispute is
 Disposed, I say . . . “*Allium edat cicutis*
Noceatius!”

Over the fruit and the wine
 Undisturb'd the wasp settled. The evening was
 fine.

Lord Alfred his chair by the window had set,
 And languidly lighted his small cigarette.
 The window was open. The warm air without
 Waved the flame of the candles. The moths were
 about.

In the gloom he sat gloomy.

XXIII.

Gay sounds from below
 Floated up like faint echoes of joys long ago,
 And night deepen'd apace; through the dark ave-
 nues
 The lamps twinkled bright; and by threes and by
 twos,
 The idlers of Luchon were strolling at will,
 As Lord Alfred could see from the cool window-sill,
 Where his gaze, as he languidly turn'd it, fell o'er
 His late travelling companion, now passing before
 The inn, at the window of which he still sat,
 In full toilet, — boots varnish'd, and snowy cravat,
 Gayly smoothing and buttoning a yellow kid glove,
 As he turned down the avenue.

Watching above.

From his window, the stranger, who stopp'd as he
 walk'd

To mix with those groups, and now nodded, now
talk'd,
To the young Paris dandies, Lord Alfred discern'd,
By the way hats were lifted, and glances were
turn'd,
That this unknown acquaintance, now bound for
the hall,
Was a person of rank or of fashion ; for all
Whom he bow'd to in passing, or stopped with and
chatter'd,
Walk'd on with a look which implied . . . " I feel
flatter'd ! "

XXIV.

His form was soon lost in the distance and gloom.

XXV.

Lord Alfred still sat by himself in his room.
He had finish'd, one after the other, a dozen
Or more cigarettes. He had thought of his cousin ;
He had thought of Matilda, and thought of Lucile :
He had thought about many things ; thought a
great deal
Of himself, of his past life, his future, his present :
He had thought of the moon, neither full moon nor
crescent ;
Of the gay world, so sad ! life, so sweet and so
sour !
He had thought, too, of glory, and fortune, and
power :

Thought of love, and the country, and sympathy,
and

A poet's asylum in some distant land :

Thought of man in the abstract, and woman, no
doubt,

In particular : also he had thought much about
His digestion, his debts, and his dinner : and last.
He thought that the night would be stupidly pass'd
If he thought any more of such matters at all :
So he rose and resolved to set out for the ball.

XXVI.

I believe, ere he finish'd his tardy toilet,
That Lord Alfred had spoil'd, and flung by in a pet,
Half a dozen white neckcloths, and look'd for the
nonce

Twenty times in the glass, if he look'd in it once.
I believe that he split up, in drawing them on,
Three pair of pale lavender gloves, one by one.
And this is the reason, no doubt, that at last,
When he reach'd the Casino, although he walk'd
fast,

He heard, as he hurriedly enter'd the door,
The church clock strike Twelve.

XXVII.

The last waltz was just o'er.
The chaperons and dancers were all in a flutter.
A crowd block'd the door : and a buzz and a mutter
Went about in the room as a young man, whose face
Lord Alfred had seen ere he enter'd that place,

But a few hours ago, through the perfumed and
 warm
 Flowery porch, with a lady that lean'd on his arm
 Like a queen in a fable of old fairy days,
 Left the ballroom.

XXVIII.

The hubbub of comment and praise
 Reach'd Lord Alfred as just then he enter'd.

“*Ma foi!*”

Said a Frenchman beside him, . . . “That lucky
 Luvois

Has obtained all the gifts of the gods . . . rank
 and wealth,

And good looks, and then such inexhaustible health!
 He that hath shall have more; and this truth, I
 surmise,

Is the cause why, to-night, by the beautiful eyes
 Of *la charmante Lucile* more distinguish'd than all,
 He so gayly goes off with the belle of the ball.”

“Is it true,” asked a lady aggressively fat,
 Who, fierce as a female Leviathan, sat

By another that look'd like a needle, all steel
 And tenuity — “Luvois will marry Lucile?”

The needle seem'd jerk'd by a virulent twitch,
 As though it were bent upon driving a stitch
 Through somebody's character.

“Madam,” replied,

Interposing, a young man who sat by their side,
 And was languidly fanning his face with his hat,

“I am ready to bet my new Tilbury that,

If Luvois has proposed, the Comtesse has refused.”

The fat and thin ladies were highly amused.

“Refused! . . . what! a young Duke, not thirty,
my dear,

With at least half a million (what is it?) a year!”

“That may be,” said the third; “yet I know some
time since

Castelmar was refused, though as rich, and a Prince.

But Luvois, who was never before in his life

In love with a woman who was not a wife,

Is now certainly serious.”

XXIX.

The music once more

Recommenced.

XXX.

Said Lord Alfred, “This ball is a bore!”

And return'd to the inn, somewhat worse than be-
fore.

XXXI.

There, whilst musing he lean'd the dark valley
above,

Through the warm land were wand'ring the spirits
of love.

A soft breeze in the white window drapery stirr'd;

In the blossom'd acacia the lone cricket chirr'd;

The scent of the roses fell faint o'er the night,

And the moon on the mountain was dreaming in
light.

Repose, and yet rapture! that pensive wild nature

Impregnate with passion in each breathing feature!

A stone's throw from thence, through the large
lime-trees peep'd

In a garden of roses, a white chalet, steep'd

In the moonbeams. The windows oped down to
the lawn ;

The casements were open ; the curtains were drawn ;
Lights stream'd from the inside ; and with them the
sound

Of music and song. In the garden, around

A table with fruits, wine, tea, ices, there set,

Half a dozen young men and young women were
met.

Light, laughter, and voices, and music all stream'd
Through the quiet-leaved limes. At the window
there seem'd

For one moment the outline, familiar and fair,

Of a white dress, white neck, and soft dusky hair,

Which Lord Alfred remember'd . . . a moment or so

It hover'd, then pass'd into shadow ; and slow

The soft notes, from a tender piano upflung,

Floated forth, and a voice unforgotten thus sung :—

“ Hear a song that was born in the land of my birth !

The anchors are lifted, the fair ship is free,

And the shout of the mariners floats in its mirth

'Twi'x the light in the sky and the light on the
sea.

“ And this ship is a world. She is freighted with
souls,

She is freighted with merchandise : proudly
she sails

With the Labor that stores, and the Will that
controls
The gold in the ingots, the silk in the bales.

“ From the gardens of Pleasure, where reddens the
rose,
And the scent of the cedar is faint on the air,
Past the harbors of Traffic, sublimely she goes,
Man’s hopes o’er the world of the waters to
bear !

“ Where the cheer from the harbors of Traffic is
heard,
Where the gardens of Pleasure fade fast on the
sight,
O’er the rose, o’er the cedar, there passes a bird ;
’Tis the Paradise Bird, never known to alight.

“ And that bird, bright and bold as a poet’s desire,
Roams her own native heavens, the realms of
her birth.
There she soars like a seraph, she shines like a
fire,
And her plumage hath never been sullied by
earth.

“ And the mariners greet her ; there’s song on each
lip,
For that bird of good omen, and joy in each eye.
And the ship and the bird, and the bird and the
ship,
Together go forth over ocean and sky.

“Fast, fast fades the land! far the rose-gardens flee,
And far fleet the harbors. In regions unknown
The ship is alone on a desert of sea,
And the bird in a desert of sky is alone.

“In those regions unknown, o’er that desert of air,
Down that desert of waters — tremendous in
wrath —
The storm-wind Euroclydon leaps from his lair,
And cleaves, thro’ the waves of the ocean, his
path.

“And the bird in the cloud, and the ship on the
wave,
Overtaken, are beaten about by wild gales;
And the mariners all rush their cargo to save,
Of the gold in the ingots, the silk in the bales.

“Lo! a wonder, which never before hath been
heard,
For it never before hath been given to sight;
On the ship hath descended the Paradise Bird,
The Paradise Bird, never known to alight!

“The bird which the mariners bless’d, when each
lip
Had a song for the omen that gladden’d each
eye;
The bright bird for shelter hath flown to the ship
From the wrath on the sea and the wrath in
the sky.

- “ But the mariners heed not the bird any more.
They are felling the masts— they are cutting
the sails ;
Some are working, some weeping, and some
wrangling o'er
Their gold in the ingots, their silk in the bales.
- “ Souls of men are on board ; wealth of man in the
hold :
And the storm-wind Euroclydon sweeps to his
prey ;
And who heeds the bird ? ‘ Save the silk and
the gold ! ’
And the bird from her shelter the gust sweeps
away !
- “ Poor Paradise Bird ! on her lone flight once more
Back again in the wake of the wind she is
driven—
To be whelmed in the storm, or above it to soar,
And, if rescued from ocean, to vanish in
heaven !
- “ And the ship rides the waters and weathers the
gales :
From the haven she nears the rejoicing is heard.
All hands are at work on the ingots, the bales,
Save a child sitting lonely, who misses—the
Bird ! ”

CANTO III.

I.

WITH stout iron shoes be my Pegasus shod!
 For my road is a rough one: flint, stubble, and
 clod,
 Blue clay, and black quagmire, brambles no few,
 And I gallop up-hill, now.

There's terror that's true
 In that tale of a youth who, one night at a revel,
 Amidst music and mirth lured and wiled by some
 devil,
 Follow'd ever one mask through the mad masquer-
 ade,
 Till, pursued to some chamber deserted ('tis said),
 He unmasked, with a kiss, the strange lady, and
 stood
 Face to face with a Thing not of flesh nor of blood.
 In this Mask of the Passions, call'd Life, there's no
 human
 Emotion, though mask'd, or in man or in woman,
 But, when faced and unmask'd, it will leave us at
 last
 Struck by some supernatural aspect aghast.
 For truth is appalling and eldrich, as seen
 By this world's artificial lamplights, and we screen

From our sight the strange vision that troubles our
life.

Alas! why is Genius forever at strife

With the world, which, despite the world's self, it
ennobles?

Why is it that Genius perplexes and troubles

And offends the effete life it comes to renew?

'Tis the terror of truth! 'tis that Genius is true!

II.

Lucile de Nevers (if her riddle I read)

Was a woman of genius: whose genius, indeed,

With her life was at war. Once, but once, in that
life

The chance had been hers to escape from this
strife

In herself: finding peace in the life of another

From the passionate wants she, in hers, failed to
smother.

But the chance fell too soon, when the crude rest-
less power

Which had been to her nature so fatal a dower,

Only wearied the man it yet haunted and thrall'd:

And that moment, once lost, had been never recall'd.

Yet it left her heart sore: and, to shelter her heart

From approach, she then sought, in that delicate
art

Of concealment, those thousand adroit strategies

Of feminine wit, which repel while they please,

A weapon, at once, and a shield to conceal

And defend all that women can earnestly feel.

Thus, striving her instincts to hide and repress,
She felt frighten'd at times by her very success :
She pined for the hill-tops, the clouds, and the stars :
Golden wires may annoy us as much as steel bars
If they keep us behind prison windows : impassion'd
Her heart rose and burst the light cage she had
 fashion'd
Out of glittering trifles around it.

Unknown

To herself, all her instincts, without hesitation,
Embraced the idea of self-immolation.
The strong spirit in her, had her life been but
 blended
With some man's whose heart had her own compre-
 hended,
All its wealth at his feet would have lavishly thrown.
For him she had struggled and striven alone ;
For him had aspired ; in him had transfused
All the gladness and grace of her nature ; and used
For him only the spells of its delicate power :
Like the ministering fairy that brings from her bower
To some maze all the treasures, whose use the fond
 elf,
More enrich'd by her love, disregards for herself.
But standing apart, as she ever had done,
And her genius, which needed a vent, finding none
In the broad fields of action thrown wide to man's
 power,
She unconsciously made it her bulwark and tower,
And built in it her refuge, whence lightly she hurl'd

Her contempt at the fashions and forms of the
world.

And the permanent cause why she now miss'd and
fail'd

That firm hold upon life she so keenly assail'd,
Was, in all those diurnal occasions that place
Say — the world and the woman opposed face to
face,

Where the woman must yield, she, refusing to stir,
Offended the world, which in turn wounded her.

As before, in the old-fashion'd manner, I fit
To this character, also, its moral: to wit,
Say — the world is a nettle; disturb it, it stings:
Grasp it firmly, it stings not. On one of two
things,

If you would not be stung, it behoves you to settle:
Avoid it, or crush it. She crush'd not the nettle;
For she could not; nor would she avoid it: she
tried

With the weak hand of woman to thrust it aside,
And it stung her. A woman is too slight a thing
To trample the world without feeling its sting.

III.

One lodges but simply at Luchon; yet, thanks
To the season that changes forever the banks
Of the blossoming mountains, and shifts the light
cloud

O'er the valley, and hushes or rouses the loud

Wind that wails in the pines, or creeps murmuring
down

The dark evergreen slopes to the slumbering town,
And the torrent that falls, faintly heard from afar,
And the blue-bells that purple the dapple-gray
scaur,

One sees with each month of the many-faced year
A thousand sweet changes of beauty appear.

The chalet where dwelt the Comtesse de Nevers
Rested half up the base of a mountain of firs,
In a garden of roses, reveal'd to the road,
Yet withdrawn from its noise: 'twas a peaceful
abode.

And the walls, and the roofs, with their gables like
hoods

Which the monks wear, were built of sweet resin-
ous woods.

The sunlight of noon, as Lord Alfred ascended
The steep garden paths, every odor had blended
Of the ardent carnations, and faint heliotropes,
With the balms floated down from the dark wooded
slopes:

A light breeze at the window was playing about,
And the white curtains floated, now in, and now
out.

The house was all hush'd when he rang at the
door,

Which was open'd to him in a moment, or more,
By an old nodding negress, whose sable head shined
In the sun like a cocoa-nut polished in Ind,

'Neath the snowy *foulard* which about it was wound.

IV.

Lord Alfred sprang forward at once, with a bound.
He remembered the nurse of Lucile. The old
dame,

Whose teeth and whose eyes used to beam when he
came,

With a boy's eager step, in the blithe days of yore,
To pass, unannounced, her young mistress's door.

The old woman had fondled Lucile on her knee

When she left, as an infant, far over the sea,

In India, the tomb of a mother, unknown,

To pine, a pale flow'ret, in great Paris town.

She had sooth'd the child's sobs on her breast,
when she read

The letter that told her, her father was dead.

An astute, shrewd adventurer, who, like Ulysses,

Had studied men, cities, laws, wars, the abysses

Of statecraft, with varying fortunes, was he.

He had wander'd the world through, by land and
by sea,

And knew it in most of its phases. Strong will,

Subtle tact, and soft manners, had given him skill

To conciliate Fortune, and courage to brave

Her displeasure. Thrice shipwreck'd, and cast by
the wave

On his own quick resources, they rarely had fail'd

His command: often baffled, he ever prevail'd,

In his combat with fate: to-day flatter'd and fed

By monarchs, to-morrow in search of mere bread.

The offspring of times trouble-haunted, he came

Of a family ruin'd, yet noble in name.

He lost sight of his fortune, at twenty, in France,
And, half statesman, half soldier, and wholly Free-
lance,
Had wander'd in search of it, over the world,
Into India.

But scarce had the nomad unfurl'd
His wandering tent at Mysore, in the smile
Of a Rajah (whose court he controll'd for a while,
And whose council he prompted and govern'd by
stealth) ;
Scarce, indeed, had he wedded an Indian of wealth,
Who died giving birth to this daughter, before
He was borne to the tomb of his wife at Mysore.
His fortune, which fell to his orphan, perchance
Had secured her a home with his sister in France,
A lone woman, the last of the race left. Lucile
Neither felt, nor affected, the wish to conceal
The half-Eastern blood, which appear'd to bequeath
(Reveal'd now and then, though but rarely, beneath
That outward repose that concealed it in her)
A something half wild to her strange character.
The nurse with the orphan, awhile broken-hearted,
At the door of a convent in Paris had parted.
But later, once more, with her mistress she tarried,
When the girl, by that grim maiden aunt, had been
married
To a dreary old Count, who had sullenly died,
With no claim on her tears — she had wept as a
bride.
Said Lord Alfred, “ Your mistress expects me.”

The crone
Oped the drawing-room door, and there left him
alone.

v.

O'er the soft atmosphere of this temple of grace
Rested silence and perfume. No sound reach'd the
place.

In the white curtains waver'd the delicate shade
Of the heaving acacias, through which the breeze
play'd.

O'er the smooth wooden floor, polished dark as a
glass,

Fragrant white Indian matting allowed you to pass.
In light olive baskets, by window and door,
Some hung from the ceiling, some crowding the floor,
Rich wild flowers pluck'd by Lucile from the hill,
Seem'd the room with their passionate presence to
fill :

Blue aconite, hid in white roses, reposed ;
The deep belladonna its vermeil disclosed ;
And the frail saponaire, and the tender blue-bell,
And the purple valerian, — each child of the fell
And the solitude flourish'd, fed fair from the source
Of waters the huntsman scarce heeds in his course
Where the chamois and izard, with delicate hoof,
Pause or flit through the pinnacled silence aloof.

vi.

Here you felt, by the sense of its beauty reposed,
That you stood in a shrine of sweet thoughts
Half unclosed

In the light slept the flowers ; all was pure and at
rest ;

All peaceful ; all modest ; all seem'd self-possess'd,
And aware of the silence. No vestige nor trace
Of a young woman's coquetry troubled the place.
He stood by the window. A cloud pass'd the
sun.

A light breeze uplifted the leaves, one by one.
Just then Lucile enter'd the room, undiscern'd
By Lord Alfred, whose face to the window was
turned,
In a strange revery.

The time was, when Lucile,
In beholding that man, could not help but reveal
The rapture, the fear, which wrench'd out every
nerve
In the heart of the girl from the woman's reserve.
And now — she gazed at him, calm, smiling, — per-
chance
Indifferent.

VII.

Indifferently turning his glance,
Alfred Vargrave encounter'd that gaze unaware.
O'er a bodice snow-white stream'd her soft dusky
hair :
A rose-bud half blown in her hand ; in her eyes
A half-pensive smile.

A sharp cry of surprise
Escaped from his lips : some unknown agitation,
An invincible trouble, a strange palpitation,

Confused his ingenious and frivolous wit ;
 Overtook, and entangled, and paralyzed it.
 That wit so complacent and docile, that ever
 Lightly came at the call of the lightest endeavor,
 Ready coin'd, and availably current as gold,
 Which, secure of its value, so fluently roll'd
 In free circulation from hand on to hand
 For the usage of all, at a moment's command ;
 For once it rebell'd, it was mute and unstirr'd,
 And he looked at Lucile without speaking a word.

VIII.

Perhaps what so troubled him was, that the face
 On whose features he gazed had no more than a
 trace
 Of the face his remembrance had imaged for years.
 Yes ! the face he remember'd was faded with tears :
 Grief had famish'd the figure, and dimmed the dark
 eyes,
 And starved the pale lips, too acquainted with sighs,
 And that tender, and gracious, and fond *coquetterie*
 Of a woman who knows her least ribbon to be
 Something dear to the lips that so warmly caress
 Every sacred detail of her exquisite dress,
 In the careless toilet of Lucile — then too sad
 To care aught to her changeable beauty to add —
 Lord Alfred had never admired before !
 Alas ! poor Lucile, in those weak days of yore,
 Had neglected herself, never heeding, or thinking
 (While the blossom and bloom of her beauty were
 shrinking)

That sorrow can beautify only the heart —
 Not the face — of a woman ; and can but impart
 Its endearment to one that has suffer'd. In truth
 Grief hath beauty for grief ; but gay youth loves
 gay youth.

IX.

The woman that now met, unshrinking, his gaze,
 Seem'd to bask in the silent but sumptuous haze
 Of that soft second summer, more ripe than the
 first,

Which returns when the bud to the blossom hath
 burst

In despite of the stormiest April. Lucile
 Had acquired that matchless unconscious appeal
 To the homage which none but a churl would with-
 hold —

That caressing and exquisite grace — never bold,
 Ever present — which just a few women possess.
 From a healthful repose, undisturb'd by the stress
 Of unquiet emotions, her soft cheek had drawn
 A freshness as pure as the twilight of dawn.
 Her figure, though slight, had revived everywhere
 The luxurious proportions of youth ; and her
 hair —

Once shorn as an offering to passionate love —
 Now floated or rested redundant above
 Her airy pure forehead and throat ; gather'd loose
 Under which, by one violet knot, the profuse
 Milk-white folds of a cool modest garment reposed,
 Rippled faint by the breast they half hid, half dis-
 closed,

And her simple attire thus in all things reveal'd
The fine art which so artfully all things conceal'd.

X.

Lord Alfred, who never conceived that Lucile
Could have look'd so enchanting, felt tempted to
kneel

At her feet, and her pardon with passion implore ;
But the calm smile that met him sufficed to restore
The pride and the bitterness needed to meet
The occasion with dignity due and discreet.

XI.

“Madam,” — thus he began with a voice re-
assured, —

“You see that your latest command has secured
My immediate obedience — presuming I may
Consider my freedom restored from this day.” —

“I had thought,” said Lucile, with a smile gay yet
sad,

“That your freedom from me not a fetter has had.
Indeed! . . . in my chains have you rested till
now?

I had not so flattered myself, I avow !”

“For Heaven's sake, Madam,” Lord Alfred replied,
“Do not jest! has the moment no sadness?” he
sigh'd.

“'Tis an ancient tradition,” she answer'd, “a tale
Often told — a position too sure to prevail
In the end of all legends of love. If we wrote,
When we first love, foreseeing that hour yet remote,

Wherein of necessity each would recall
From the other the poor foolish records of all
Those emotions, whose pain, when recorded,
 seem'd bliss,
Should we write as we wrote? But one thinks not of
 this!

At Twenty (who does not at Twenty?) we write
Believing eternal the frail vows we plight ;
And we smile with a confident pity, above
The vulgar results of all poor human love :
For we deem, with that vanity common to youth,
Because what we feel in our bosoms, in truth,
Is novel to us — that 'tis novel to earth,
And will prove the exception, in durance and worth,
To the great law to which all on earth must incline.
The error was noble, the vanity fine !
Shall we blame it because we survive it? ah, no ;
'Twas the youth of our youth, my lord, is it not so?"

XII.

Lord Alfred was mute. He remember'd her yet
A child — the weak sport of each moment's regret,
Blindly yielding herself to the errors of life,
The deceptions of youth, and borne down by the
 strife
And the tumult of passion ; the tremulous toy
Of each transient emotion of grief or of joy.
But to watch her pronounce the death-warrant of all
The illusions of life — lift, unflinching, the pall
From the bier of the dead Past — that woman so fair,
And so young, yet her own self-survivor ; who there

Traced her life's epitaph with a finger so cold!
'Twas a picture that pain'd his self-love to behold.
He himself knew — none better — the things to be
said

Upon subjects like this. Yet he bow'd down his
head:

And as thus, with a trouble he could not command,
He paused, crumpling the letters he held in his
hand,

“ You know me enough,” she continued, “ or what
I would say is, you yet recollect (do you not,
Lord Alfred?) enough of my nature, to know
That these pledges of what was perhaps long ago
A foolish affection, I do not recall

From those motives of prudence which actuate all
Or most women when their love ceases. Indeed,
If you have such a doubt, to dispel it I need
But remind you that ten years these letters have
rested

Unreclaim'd in your hands.” A reproach seem'd
suggested

By these words. To meet it, Lord Alfred look'd up
(His gaze had been fix'd on a blue Sèvres cup
With a look of profound connoisseurship — a *smile*
Of singular interest and care, all this while.)

He look'd up, and look'd long in the face of Lucile,
To mark if that face by a sign would reveal
At the thought of Miss Darcy the least jealous
pain.

He look'd keenly and long, yet he look'd there in
vain.

“You are generous, Madam,” he murmur’d at last,
 And into his voice a light irony pass’d.
 He had look’d for reproaches, and fully arranged
 His forces. But straightway the enemy changed
 The position.

XIII.

“Come!” gayly Lucile interposed,
 With a smile whose divinely deep sweetness disclosed
 Some depth in her nature he never had known,
 While she tenderly laid her light hand on his own,
 “Do not think I abuse the occasion. We gain
 Justice, judgment, with years, or else years are in
 vain.

From me not a single reproach can you hear.
 I have sinn’d to myself — to the world — nay, I fear
 To you chiefly. The woman who loves should, in-
 deed,

Be the friend of the man that she loves. She
 should heed

Not her selfish and often mistaken desires,
 But his interest whose fate her own interest in-
 spires ;

And rather than seek to allure, for her sake,
 His life down the turbulent, fanciful wake
 Of impossible destinies, use all her art
 That his place in the world find its place in her
 heart.

I, alas! — I perceived not this truth till too late ;
 I tormented your youth, I have darken’d your fate.
 Forgive me the ill I have done for the sake
 Of its long expiation !”

XIV.

Lord Alfred, awake,
Seem'd to wander from dream on to dream. In
that seat
Where he sat as a criminal, ready to meet
His accuser, he found himself turn'd by some
change,
As surprising and all unexpected as strange,
To the judge from whose mercy indulgence was
sought.
All the world's foolish pride in that moment was
naught ;
He felt all his plausible theories posed ;
And, thrill'd by the beauty of nature disclosed
In the pathos of all he had witness'd, his head
He bow'd, and faint words self-reproachfully said,
As he lifted her hand to his lips. 'Twas a hand
White, delicate, dimpled, warm, languid, and bland.
The hand of a woman is often, in youth,
Somewhat rough, somewhat red, somewhat grace-
less, in truth ;
Does its beauty refine, as its pulses grow calm,
Or as Sorrow has cross'd the life-line in the palm?

XV.

The more that he look'd, that he listen'd, the more
He discover'd perfections unnoticed before.
Less salient than once, less poetic, perchance,
This woman who thus had survived the romance
That had made him its hero, and breathed him its
sighs,

Seem'd more charming a thousand times o'er to his
eyes.

Together they talk'd of the years since when last
They parted, contrasting the present, the past.
Yet no memory marr'd their light converse. Lucile
Question'd much, with the interest a sister might
feel,

Of Lord Alfred's new life, — of Miss Darcy — her
face,

Her temper, accomplishments — pausing to trace
The advantage derived from a hymen so fit.
Of herself, she recounted with humor and wit
Her journeys, her daily employments, the lands
She had seen, and the books she had read, and the
hands
She had shaken.

In all that she said there appear'd
An amiable irony. Laughing, she rear'd
The temple of reason, with ever a touch
Of light scorn at her work, reveal'd only so much
As there gleams, in the thyrsus that Bacchanals
bear,

Through the beams of a garland the point of a
spear.

But above, and beneath, and beyond all of this,
To that soul, whose experience had paralyzed
bliss,

A benignant indulgence, to all things resign'd,
A justice, a sweetness, a meekness of mind,
Gave a luminous beauty, as tender and faint
And serene as the halo encircling a saint.

XVI.

Unobserved by Lord Alfred the time fled by.
 To each novel sensation spontaneously
 He abandon'd himself with that ardor so strange
 Which belongs to a mind grown accustom'd to
 change.

He sought, with well-practised and delicate art,
 To surprise from Lucile the true state of her heart ;
 But his efforts were vain, and the woman, as ever,
 More adroit than the man, baffled every endeavor.
 When he deem'd he had touch'd on some chord in
 her being,

At the touch it dissolved, and was gone. Ever
 fleeing

As ever he near it advanced, when he thought
 To have seized, and proceeded to analyze aught
 Of the moral existence, the absolute soul.
 Light as vapor the phantom escaped his control.

XVII.

From the hall, on a sudden, a sharp ring was heard.
 In the passage without a quick footstep there stirr'd :
 At the door knock'd the negress, and thrust in her
 head,

“The Duke de Luvois had just enter'd,” she said,
 “And insisted” —

“The Duke !” cried Lucile (as she spoke,
 The Duke's step, approaching, a light echo woke).
 “Say I do not receive till the evening. Explain,”
 As she glanced at Lord Alfred, she added again,
 “I have business of private importance.”

There came

O'er Lord Alfred at once, at the sound of that
 name,
 An invincible sense of vexation. He turn'd
 To Lucile, and he fancied he faintly discern'd
 On her face an indefinite look of confusion.
 On his mind instantaneously flash'd the conclusion
 That his presence had caused it.

He said, with a sneer

Which he could not repress, "Let not *me* interfere
 With the claims on your time, lady! when you are
 free
 From more pleasant engagements, allow me to see
 And to wait on you later."

The words were not said

Ere he wish'd to recall them. He bitterly read
 The mistake he had made in Lucile's flashing eye.
 Inclining her head, as in haughty reply,
 More reproachful perchance than all utter'd rebuke,
 She said merely, resuming her seat, "Tell the Duke
 He may enter."

And vex'd with his own words and hers,

Alfred Vargrave bow'd low to Lucile de Nevers,
 Pass'd the casement and enter'd the garden. Be-
 fore
 His shadow was fled the Duke stood at the door.

XVIII.

When left to his thoughts in the garden alone,
 Alfred Vargrave stood, strange to himself. With
 dull tone

Of importance, through cities of rose and carnation,
Went the bee on his business from station to station.

The minute mirth of summer was shrill all around ;
Its incessant small voices like stings seem'd to sound
On his sore angry sense. He stood grieving the hot
Solid sun with his shadow, nor stirr'd from the spot.
The last look of Lucile still bewilder'd, perplex'd,
And reproach'd him. The Duke's visit goaded and
vex'd.

He had not yet given the letters. Again
He must visit Lucile. He resolved to remain
Where he was till the Duke went. In short, he
would stay,

Were it only to know when the Duke went away.
But just as he form'd this resolve, he perceived
Approaching towards him, between the thick-leaved
And luxuriant laurels, Lucile and the Duke.
Thus surprised, his first thought was to seek for
some nook

Whence he might, unobserved, from the garden
retreat.

They had not yet seen him. The sound of their
feet

And their voices had warn'd him in time. They
were walking

Towards him. The Duke (a true Frenchman) was
talking

With the action of Talma. He saw at a glance
That they barr'd the sole path to the gateway. No
chance

Of escape save in instant concealment! Deep-
 dipp'd
 In thick foliage, an arbor stood near. In he
 slipp'd,
 Saved from sight, as in front of that ambush they
 pass'd,
 Still conversing. Beneath a laburnum at last
 They paused, and sat down on a bench in the
 shade,
 So close that he could not but hear what they said.

XIX.

LUCILE.

Duke, I scarcely conceive . . .

LUVOIS.

Ah! forgive! . . . I desired
 So deeply to see you to-day. You retired
 So early last night from the ball . . . this whole
 week
 I have seen you pale, silent, preoccupied . . .
 speak,
 Speak, Lucile, and forgive me! . . . I know that I
 am
 A rash fool — but I love you! I love you, Madame.
 More than language can say! Do not deem, O
 Lucile,
 That the love I no longer have strength to conceal
 Is a passing caprice! It is strange to my nature,
 It has made me, unknown to myself, a new creature.

I implore you to sanction and save the new life
Which I lay at your feet with this prayer — Be my
wife!

Stoop, and raise me!

Lord Alfred could scarcely re-
strain

The sudden, acute pang of anger and pain
With which he had heard this. As though to some
wind

The leaves of the hush'd, windless laurels behind
The two thus in converse were suddenly stirr'd.
The sound half betrayed him. They started. He
heard

The low voice of Lucile; but so faint was its tone
That her answer escaped him.

Luvois hurried on,
As though in remonstrance with what had been
spoken.

“Nay, I know it, Lucile! but your heart was not
broken

By the trial in which all its fibres were proved.
Love, perchance, you mistrust, yet you need to be
loved.

You mistake your own feelings. I fear you mistake
What so ill I interpret, those feelings which make
Words like these vague and feeble. Whatever your
heart

May have suffer'd of yore, this can only impart
A pity profound to the love which I feel.

Hush! hush! I know all. Tell me nothing, Lu-
cile.”

“ You know all, Duke ? ” she said ; “ well then,
 know that, in truth,
 I have learn'd from the rude lesson taught to my
 youth

From my own heart to shelter my life ; to mistrust
 The heart of another. We are what we must,
 And not what we would be. I know that one hour
 Assures not another. The will and the power
 Are diverse.”

“ O madam ! ” he answer'd, “ you
 fence

With a feeling you know to be true and intense.
 'Tis not *my* life, Lucile, that I plead for alone :
 If your nature I know, 'tis no less for your own.
 That nature will prey on itself ; it was made
 To influence others. Consider,” he said,
 “ That genius craves power — what scope for it here ?
 Gifts less noble to *me* give command of that sphere
 In which genius *is* power. Such gifts you despise ?
 But you do not disdain what such gifts realize !
 I offer you, Lady, a name not unknown —
 A fortune which worthless, without you, is grown —
 All my life at your feet I lay down — at your feet
 A heart which for you, and you only, can beat.”

LUCILE.

That heart, Duke, that life — I respect both. The
 name
 And position you offer, and all that you claim
 In behalf of their nobler employment, I feel
 To deserve what, in turn, I now ask you —

LUVVOIS.

Lucile!

LUCILE.

I ask you to leave me —

LUVVOIS.

You do not reject?

LUCILE.

I ask you to leave me the time to reflect.

LUVVOIS.

You ask me?

LUCILE.

— The time to reflect.

LUVVOIS.

Say — One word!

May I hope?

The reply of Lucile was not heard
By Lord Alfred; for just then she rose, and moved
on.

The Duke bow'd his lips o'er her hand, and was
gone.

XX.

Not a sound save the birds in the bushes. And
when

Alfred Vargrave reel'd forth to the sunlight again,
He just saw the white robe of the woman recede
As she enter'd the house.

Scarcely conscious indeed
Of his steps, he too follow'd, and enter'd.



“The Duke bowed his lips o’er her hand.”



XXI.

He enter'd

Unnoticed; Lucile never stirr'd: so concentr'd
 And wholly absorb'd in her thoughts she appear'd.
 Her back to the window was turn'd. As he near'd
 The sofa, her face from the glass was reflected.
 Her dark eyes were fix'd on the ground. Pale,
 dejected,
 And lost in profound meditation she seem'd.
 Softly, silently, over her droop'd shoulders stream'd
 The afternoon sunlight. The cry of alarm
 And surprise which escaped her, as now on her arm
 Alfred Vargrave let fall a hand icily cold
 And clammy as death, all too cruelly told
 How far he had been from her thoughts.

XXII.

All his cheek

Was disturb'd with the effort it cost him to speak.
 "It was not my fault. I have heard all," he said.
 "Now the letters—and farewell, Lucile! When
 you wed
 May—"

The sentence broke short, like a weapon
 that snaps
 When the weight of a man is upon it.

"Perhaps,"

Said Lucile (her sole answer reveal'd in the flush
 Of quick color which up to her brow seem'd to rush
 In reply to those few broken words), 'this farewell
 Is our last, Alfred Vargrave, in life. Who can tell?

Let us part without bitterness. Here are your letters.

Be assured I retain you no more in my fetters!" —
She laughed, as she said this, a little sad laugh,
And stretched out her hand with the letters. And
half

Wroth to feel his wrath rise, and unable to trust
His own powers of restraint, in his bosom he thrust
The packet she gave, with a short angry sigh,
Bow'd his head, and departed without a reply.

XXIII.

And Lucile was alone. And the men of the world
Were gone back to the world. And the world's
self was fur'd

Far away from the heart of the woman. Her hand
Droop'd, and from it, unloosed from their frail silken
band,

Fell those early love-letters, strewn, scatter'd, and
shed

At her feet — life's lost blossoms! Dejected, her head
On her bosom was bow'd. Her gaze vaguely stray'd
o'er

Those strewn records of passionate moments no more.
From each page to her sight leapt some words that
belied

The composure with which she that day had denied
Every claim on her heart to those poor perish'd
years.

They avenged themselves now, and she burst into
tears.

CANTO IV.

I.

LETTER FROM COUSIN JOHN TO COUSIN ALFRED.

“BIGORRE, Thursday.

“TIME up, you rascal! Come back, or be hang’d.
Matilda grows peevish. Her mother harangued
For a whole hour this morning about you. The
deuce!

What on earth can I say to you? — nothing’s of use.
And the blame of the whole of your shocking be-
havior

Falls on *me*, sir! Come back, — do you hear? —
or I leave your

Affairs, and abjure you forever. Come back
To your anxious betroth’d; and perplexed

COUSIN JACK.”

II.

Alfred needed, in truth, no entreaties from John
To increase his impatience to fly from Luchon.
All the place was now fraught with sensations of
pain

Which, whilst in it, he strove to escape from in vain.
A wild instinct warn’d him to fly from a place
Where he felt that some fatal event, swift of pace,

Was approaching his life. In despite his endeavor
 To think of Matilda, her image forever
 Was effaced from his fancy by that of Lucile.
 From the ground which he stood on he felt himself
 reel.

Scared, alarm'd by those feelings to which, on the day
 Just before, all his heart had so soon given way,
 When he caught, with a strange sense of fear, for
 assistance,
 And what was, till then, the great fact in existence,
 'Twas a phantom he grasp'd.

III.

Having sent for his guide,
 He order'd his horse, and determin'd to ride
 Back forthwith to Bigorre.

Then, the guide, who well knew
 Every haunt of those hills, said the wild lake of Oo
 Lay a league from Luchon ; and suggested a track
 By the lake to Bigorre, which, transversing the back
 Of the mountain, avoided a circuit between
 Two long valleys ; and thinking, " Perchance change
 of scene
 May create change of thought," Alfred Vargrave
 agreed,
 Mounted horse, and set forth to Bigorre at full
 speed.

IV.

His guide rode beside him.

The king of the guides !
 The gallant Bernard ! ever boldly he rides,

Ever gayly he sings! For to him, from of old,
The hills have confided their secrets, and told
Where the white partridge lies, and the cock o' the
woods ;
Where the izard flits fine through the cold solitudes ;
Where the bear lurks perdu ; and the lynx on his
prey
At nightfall descends, when the mountains are gray ;
Where the sassafras blooms, and the blue-bell is
born,
And the wild rhododendron first reddens at morn ;
Where the source of the waters is fine as a thread ;
How the storm on the wild Maladetta is spread ;
Where the thunder is hoarded, the snows lie asleep,
Whence the torrents are fed, and the cataracts leap ;
And, familiarly known in the hamlets, the vales
Have whisper'd to him all their thousand love-tales ;
He has laugh'd with the girls, he has leap'd with
the boys ;
Ever blithe, ever bold, ever boon, he enjoys
An existence untroubled by envy or strife,
While he feeds on the dews and the juices of life.
And so lightly he sings, and so gayly he rides,
For BERNARD LE SAUTEUR is the king of all guides !

v.

But Bernard found, that day, neither song nor
love-tale,
Nor adventure, nor laughter, nor legend avail
To arouse from his deep and profound revery
Him that silent beside him rode fast as could be.

VI.

Ascending the mountain they slacken'd their pace,
And the marvellous prospect each moment changed
face.

The breezy and pure inspirations of morn
Breathed about them. The scarp'd ravaged moun-
tains, all worn

By the torrents, whose course they watch'd faintly
meander,

Were alive with the diamonded shy salamander.

They paused o'er the bosom of purple abysses,
And wound through a region of green wildernesses ;
The waters went whirling above and around, -

The forests hung heap'd in their shadows profound.

Here the Larboust, and there Aventin, Castellon,
Which the Demon of Tempest, descending upon,

Had wasted with fire, and the peaceful Cazeaux

They mark'd ; and far down in the sunshine below,

Half dipp'd in a valley of airiest blue,

The white happy homes of the valley of Oo,

Where the age is yet golden.

And high overhead

The wrecks of the combat of Titans were spread.

Red granite, and quartz, in the alchemic sun,

Fused their splendors of crimson and crystal in
one ;

And deep in the moss gleam'd the delicate shells,

And the dew linger'd fresh in the heavy harebells ;

The large violet burn'd ; the campanula blue ;

And Autumn's own flower, the saffron, peer'd
through

The red-berried brambles and thick sassafras ;
 And fragrant with thyme was the delicate grass ;
 And high up, and higher, and highest of all,
 The secular phantom of snow !

O'er the wall

Of a gray sunless glen gaping drowsy below,
 That ærial spectre, reveal'd in the glow
 Of the great golden dawn, hovers faint on the eye,
 And appears to grow in, and grow out of, the sky,
 And plays with the fancy, and baffles the sight.
 Only reach'd by the vast rosy ripple of light,
 And the cool star of eve, the Imperial Thing,
 Half unreal, like some mythological king
 That dominates all in a fable of old,
 Takes command of a valley as fair to behold
 As aught in old fables ; and, seen or unseen,
 Dwells aloof over all, in the vast and serene
 Sacred sky, where the footsteps of spirits are furl'd
 'Mid the clouds beyond which spreads the infinite
 world
 Of man's last aspirations, unfathom'd, untrod,
 Save by Even and Morn, and the angels of God.

VII.

Meanwhile, as they journey'd, that serpentine road,
 Now abruptly reversed, unexpectedly show'd
 A gay cavalcade some few feet in advance.
 Alfred Vargrave's heart beat ; for he saw at a glance
 The slight form of Lucile in the midst. His next
 look
 Show'd him, joyously ambling beside her, the Duke.

The rest of the troop which had thus caught his
 ken
 He knew not, nor noticed them (women and men).
 They were laughing and talking together. Soon
 after
 His sudden appearance suspended their laughter.

VIII.

“ You here ! . . . I imagined you far on your way
 To Bigorre ! ” . . . said Lucile. “ What has
 caused you to stay ? ”
 “ I *am* on my way to Bigorre,” he replied,
 “ But since *my* way would seem to be *yours*, let me
 ride
 For one moment beside you.” And then, with a
 stoop
 At her ear, . . . “ and forgive me ! ”

IX.

By this time the troop
 Had regather'd its numbers.
 Lucile was as pale
 As the cloud 'neath their feet, on its way to the
 vale
 The Duke had observed it, nor quitted her side,
 For even one moment, the whole of the ride.
 Alfred smiled, as he thought, “ he is jealous of
 her ! ”
 And the thought of this jealousy added a spur
 To his firm resolution and effort to please.
 He talk'd much ; was witty, and quite at his ease.

X.

After noontide, the clouds, which had traversed
the east

Half the day, gather'd closer, and rose and in-
creased.

The air changed and chill'd. As though out of the
ground,

There ran up the trees a confused hissing sound,
And the wind rose. The guides sniff'd, like
chamois, the air,

And look'd at each other, and halted, and there
Unbuckled the cloaks from the saddles. The
white

Aspens rustled, and turn'd up their frail leaves in
fright.

All announced the approach of the tempest.

Erelong,

Thick darkness descended the mountains among,

And a vivid, vindictive, and serpentine flash

Gored the darkness, and shore it across with a
gash.

The rain fell in large heavy drops. And anon
Broke the thunder.

The horses took fright, every one.

The Duke's in a moment was far out of sight.

The guides whoop'd. The band was obliged to
alight ;

And, dispersed up the perilous pathway, walk'd
blind

To the darkness before from the darkness be-
hind.

XI.

And the Storm is abroad in the mountains!

He fills

The crouch'd hollows and all the oracular hills
With dread voices of power. A roused million or
more

Of wild echoes reluctantly rise from their hoar
Immemorial ambush, and roll in the wake
Of the cloud, whose reflection leaves vivid the lake.
And the wind, that wild robber, for plunder descends
From invisible lands, o'er those black mountain
ends;

He howls as he hounds down his prey; and his
lash

Tears the hair of the timorous wan mountain-ash,
'That clings to the rocks, with her garments all
torn,

Like a woman in fear; then he blows his hoarse
horn

And is off, the fierce guide of destruction and
terror,

Up the desolate heights, 'mid an intricate error
Of mountain and mist.

XII.

There is war in the skies!

Lo! the black-wingèd legions of tempest arise
O'er those sharp splinter'd rocks that are gleaming
below

In the soft light, so fair and so fatal, as though

Some seraph burn'd through them, the thunderbolt
searching
Which the black cloud unbosom'd just now. Lo!
the lurching
And shivering pine-trees, like phantoms, that seem
To waver above, in the dark ; and yon stream,
How it hurries and roars, on its way to the white
And paralyzed lake there, appall'd at the sight
Of the things seen in heaven !

XIII.

Through the darkness and awe
That had gather'd around him, Lord Alfred now
saw,
Reveal'd in the fierce and evanishing glare
Of the lightning that momentarily pulsed through the
air
A woman alone on a shelf of the hill,
With her cheek coldly propp'd on her hand, — and
as still
As the rock that she sat on, which beetled above
The black lake beneath her.

All terror, all love
Added speed to the instinct with which he rush'd
on.
For one moment the blue lightning swathed the
whole stone
In its lurid embrace : like the sleek dazzling snake
That encircles a sorceress, charm'd for her sake
And lull'd by her loveliness ; fawning, it play'd
And caressingly twined round the feet and the head

Of the woman who sat there, undaunted and calm
 As the soul of that solitude, listing the psalm
 Of the plangent and laboring tempests roll slow
 From the caldron of midnight and vapor below.
 Next moment from bastion to bastion, all round,
 Of the siege-circled mountains, there tumbled the
 sound
 Of the battering thunder's indefinite peal,
 And Lord Alfred had sprung to the feet of Lucile.

XIV.

She started. Once more, with its flickering wand,
 The lightning approach'd her. In terror, her hand
 Alfred Vargrave had seized within his: and he felt
 The light fingers, that coldly and lingeringly dwelt
 In the grasp of his own, tremble faintly.

“ See! see!

Where the whirlwind hath stricken and strangled
 yon tree!”

She exclaim'd, . . . “ like the passion that brings
 on its breath,

To the being it embraces, destruction and death!
 Alfred Vargrave, the lightning is round you!”

“ Lucile!

I hear — I see — naught but yourself. I can feel
 Nothing here but your presence. My pride fights
 in vain

With the truth that leaps from me. We two meet
 again

'Neath yon terrible heaven that is watching above
 To avenge if I lie when I swear that I love, —

And beneath yonder terrible heaven, at your feet,
 I humble my head and my heart. I entreat
 Your pardon, Lucile, for the past — I implore
 For the future your mercy — implore it with more
 Of passion than prayer ever breathed. By the
 power

Which invisibly touches us both in this hour,
 By the rights I have o'er you, Lucile, I demand — ”
 “ The rights ! ” . . . said Lucile, and drew from
 him her hand.

“ Yes, the rights ! for what greater to man may
 belong

Than the right to repair in the future the wrong
 To the past ? and the wrong I have done you, of
 yore,

Hath bequeath'd to me all the sad right to restore,
 To retrieve, to amend ! I, who injured your life,
 Urge the right to repair it, Lucile ! Be my wife,
 My guide, my good angel, my all upon earth,
 And accept, for the sake of what yet may give
 worth

To my life, its contrition ! ”

XV.

He paused, for there came
 O'er the cheek of Lucile a swift flush like the flame
 That illumined at moments the darkness o'erhead.
 With a voice faint and marr'd by emotion, she
 said,

“ And your pledge to another ? ”

XVI.

“Hush, hush!” he exclaim’d,
“My honor will live where my love lives, unshamed.
’Twere poor honor indeed, to another to give
That life of which *you* keep the heart. Could I live
In the light of those young eyes, suppressing a lie?
Alas, no! *your* hand holds my whole destiny.
I can never recall what my lips have avow’d;
In your love lies whatever can render me proud.
For the great crime of all my existence hath been
To have known you in vain. And the duty best seen,
And most hallow’d — the duty most sacred and
sweet,
Is that which hath led me, Lucile, to your feet.
O speak! and restore me the blessing I lost
When I lost you — my pearl of all pearls beyond
cost!
And restore to your own life its youth, and restore
The vision, the rapture, the passion of yore!
Ere our brows had been dimm’d in the dust of the
world,
When our souls their white wings yet exulting
unfurl’d!
For your eyes rest no more on the unquiet man,
The wild star of whose course its pale orbit outran,
Whom the formless indefinite future of youth,
With its lying allurements, distracted. In truth
I have wearily wander’d the world, and I feel
That the least of your lovely regards, O Lucile,
Is worth all the world can afford, and the dream
Which, though follow’d forever, forever doth seem

As fleeting, and distant, and dim, as of yore
 When it brooded in twilight, at dawn, on the shore
 Of life's untraversed ocean! I know the sole path
 To repose, which my desolate destiny hath,
 Is the path by whose course to your feet I return.
 And who else, O Lucile, will so truly discern,
 And so deeply revere, all the passionate strength,
 The sublimity in you, as he whom at length
 These have saved from himself, for the truth they
 reveal
 To his worship?"

XVII.

She spoke not; but Alfred could feel
 The light hand and arm, that upon him reposed,
 Thrill and tremble. Those dark eyes of hers were
 half closed.

But, under their languid mysterious fringe,
 A passionate softness was beaming. One tinge
 Of faint inward fire flush'd transparently through
 The delicate, pallid, and pure olive hue
 Of the cheek, half averted and droop'd. The rich
 bosom
 Heaved, as when in the heart of a ruffled rose-
 blossom
 A bee is imprison'd and struggles.

XVIII.

Meanwhile
 The sun, in his setting, sent up the last smile
 Of his power, to baffle the storm. And, behold!
 O'er the mountains embattled, his armies, all gold,

Rose and rested: while far up the dim airy crags,
Its artillery silenced, its banners in rags,
The rear of the tempest its sullen retreat
Drew off slowly, receding in silence, to meet
The powers of the night, which, now gathering afar,
Had already sent forward one bright, signal star.
The curls of her soft and luxuriant hair,
From the dark riding-hat, which Lucile used to wear,
Had escaped; and Lord Alfred now cover'd with
 kisses
The redolent warmth of those long falling tresses.
Neither he, nor Lucile, felt the rain, which not yet
Had ceased falling around them; when, splash'd,
 drench'd, and wet,
The Duc de Luvois down the rough mountain
 course
Approached them as fast as the road, and his horse,
Which was limping, would suffer. The beast had
 just now
Lost his footing, and over the perilous brow
Of the storm-haunted mountain his master had
 thrown;
But the Duke, who was agile, had leap'd to a stone,
And the horse, being bred to the instinct which fills
The breast of the wild mountaineer in these hills,
Had scrambled again to his feet; and now master
And horse bore about them the signs of disaster,
As they heavily footed their way through the mist,
The horse with his shoulder, the Duke with his
 wrist,
Bruised and bleeding.

XIX.

If ever your feet, like my own,
O reader, have traversed these mountains alone,
Have you felt your identity shrink and contract
At the sound of the distant and dim cataract,
In the presence of nature's immensities? Say,
Have you hung o'er the torrent, bedew'd with its
 spray,

And, leaving the rock-way, contorted and roll'd,
Like a huge couchant Typhon, fold heaped over fold,
Track'd the summits from which every step that you
 tread

Rolls the loose stones, with thunder below, to the
 bed

Of invisible waters, whose mystical sound
Fills with awful suggestions the dizzy profound?
And, laboring onwards, at last through a break
In the walls of the world, burst at once on the lake?

If you have, this description I might have withheld.
You remember how strangely your bosom has
 swell'd

At the vision reveal'd. On the overwork'd soil
Of this planet, enjoyment is sharpen'd by toil;
And one seems, by the pain of ascending the
 height,

To have conquer'd a claim of that wonderful sight.

XX.

Hail, virginal daughter of cold Espingo!
Hail, Naiad, whose realm is the cloud and the snow;

For o'er thee the angels have whiten'd their wings,
 And the thirst of the seraphs is quench'd at thy
 springs.

What hand hath, in heaven, upheld thine expanse?
 When the breath of creation first fashion'd fair
 France,

Did the Spirit of Ill, in his downthrow appalling,
 Bruise the world, and thus hollow thy basin while
 falling?

Ere the mammoth was born hath some monster
 unnamed

The base of thy mountainous pedestal framed?

And later, when Power to Beauty was wed,
 Did some delicate fairy embroider thy bed
 With the fragile valerian and wild columbine?

XXI.

But thy secret thou keepest, and I will keep mine;
 For once gazing on thee, it flash'd on my soul,
 All that secret! I saw in a vision the whole
 Vast design of the ages; what was and shall be!
 Hands unseen raised the veil of a great mystery
 For one moment. I saw, and I heard; and my
 heart

Bore witness within me to infinite art,
 In infinite power proving infinite love;
 Caught the great choral chant, mark'd the dread
 pageant move —

The divine Whence and Whither of life! But, O
 daughter

Of Oo, not more safe in the deep silent water

Is thy secret, than mine in my heart. Even so.
 What I then saw and heard, the world never shall
 know.

XXII.

The dimness of eve o'er the valleys had closed,
 The rain had ceased falling, the mountains re-
 posed.

The stars had enkindled in luminous courses
 Their slow-sliding lamps, when, remounting their
 horses,

The riders retraversed that mighty serration
 Of rock-work. Thus left to its own desolation,
 The lake, from whose glimmering limits the last
 Transient pomp of the pageants of sunset had
 pass'd,

Drew into its bosom the darkness, and only
 Admitted within it one image — a lonely
 And tremulous phantom of flickering light
 That follow'd the mystical moon through the night.

XXIII.

It was late when o'er Luchon at last they descended.
 To her chalet, in silence, Lord Alfred attended
 Lucile. As they parted, she whispered him low,
 "You have made to me, Alfred, an offer I know
 All the worth of, believe me. I cannot reply
 Without time for reflection. Good night! — not
 good by."

"Alas! 'tis the very same answer you made
 To the Duc de Luvois but a day since," he said.

“No, Alfred! the very same, no,” she replied.
 Her voice shook. “If you love me, obey me.
 Abide
 My answer to-morrow.”

XXIV.

 Alas, Cousin Jack!
 You Cassandra in breeches and boots! turn your
 back
 To the ruins of Troy. Prophet, seek not for glory
 Amongst thine own people.
 I follow my story.

CANTO V.

I.

Up!—forth again, Pegasus!—“Many’s the slip,”
 Hath the proverb well said, “’twixt the cup and
 the lip!”
 How blest should we be, have I often conceived,
 Had we really achieved what we nearly achieved!
 We but catch at the skirts of the thing we would
 be,
 And fall back on the lap of a false destiny.
 So it will be, so has been, since this world began!
 And the happiest, noblest, and best part of man
 Is the part which he never hath fully play’d out:
 For the first and last word in life’s volume is—
 Doubt.

The face of the most fair to our vision allow'd
 Is the face we encounter and lose in the crowd.
 The thought that most thrills our existence is one
 Which, before we can frame it in language, is gone.

O Horace ! the rustic still rests by the river,
 But the river flows on, and flows past him forever !
 Who can sit down, and say . . . " What I will be,
 I will ? "

Who stand up, and affirm . . . " What I was, I
 am still ? "

Who is it that must not, if question'd, say
 " What

I would have remain'd or become, I am not " ?

We are ever behind, or beyond, or beside
 Our intrinsic existence. Forever at hide
 And seek with our souls. Not in Hades alone
 Doth Sisyphus roll, ever frustrate, the stone,
 Do the Danaïds ply, ever vainly, the sieve.
 Tasks as futile does earth to its denizens give.
 Yet there's none so unhappy, but what he hath been
 Just about to be happy, at some time, I ween ;
 And none so beguiled and defrauded by chance,
 But what once in his life, some minute circumstance
 Would have fully sufficed to secure him the bliss
 Which, missing it then, he forever must miss.
 And to most of us, ere we go down to the grave,
 Life, relenting, accords the good gift we would
 have ;

But, as though by some strange imperfection in fate,
 The good gift, when it comes, comes a moment too
 late.

The Future's great veil our breath fitfully flaps,
And behind it broods ever the mighty Perhaps.
Yet! there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip;
But while o'er the brim of life's beaker I dip,
Though the cup may next moment be shatter'd, the
wine

Spilt, one deep health I'll pledge, and that health
shall be thine,

O being of beauty and bliss! seen and known
In the deeps of my soul, and possess'd there alone!
My days know thee not; and my lips name thee
never.

Thy place in my poor life is vacant forever.

We have met: we have parted. No more is re-
corded

In my annals on earth. This alone was afforded
To the man whom men know me, or deem me, to be.
But, far down, in the depth of my life's mystery,
(Like the siren that under the deep ocean dwells,
Whom the wind as it wails, and the wave as it
swells,

Cannot stir in the calm of her coralline halls,
'Mid the world's adamantine and dim pedestals;
At whose feet sit the sylphs and sea fairies; for
whom

The almondine glimmers, the soft samphires
bloom) —

Thou abidest and reignest forever, O Queen
Of that better world which thou swayest unseen!
My one perfect mistress! my all things in all!
Thee by no vulgar name known to men do I call:

For the Seraphs have named thee to me in my
sleep,

And that name is a secret I sacredly keep.

But, wherever this nature of mine is most fair,

And its thoughts are the purest — belov'd, thou art
there!

And whatever is noblest in aught that I do,

Is done to exalt and to worship thee too.

The world gave thee not to me, no! and the world
Cannot take thee away from me now. I have furl'd

The wings of my spirit above thy bright head;

At thy feet are my soul's immortalities spread.

Thou mightest have been to me much. Thou art
more.

And in silence I worship, in darkness adore.

If life be not that which without us we find —

Chance, accident, merely — but rather the mind,

And the soul which, within us, surviveth these
things,

If our real existence have truly its springs

Less in that which we do than in that which we feel,

Not in vain do I worship, not hopeless I kneel!

For then, though I name thee not mistress or wife,

Thou art mine — and mine only, — O life of my life!

And though many's the slip 'twixt the cup and the
lip,

Yet while o'er the brim of life's beaker I dip,

While there's life on the lip, while there's warmth
in the wine,

One deep health I'll pledge, and that health shall
be thine!

II.

This world, on whose peaceable breast we repose
 Unconvulsed by alarm, once confused in the throes
 Of a tumult divine, sea and land, moist and dry,
 And in fiery fusion commix'd earth and sky.
 Time cool'd it, and calm'd it, and taught it to go
 The round of its orbit in peace, long ago.
 The wind changeth and whirleth continually :
 All the rivers run down and run into the sea :
 The wind whirleth about, and is presently still'd :
 All the rivers run down, yet the sea is not fill'd :
 The sun goeth forth from his chambers ; the sun
 Ariseth, and lo ! he descendeth anon.
 All returns to its place. Use and Habit are powers
 Far stronger than Passion, in this world of ours.
 The great laws of life readjust their infraction,
 And to every emotion appoint a reaction.

III.

Alfred Vargrave had time, after leaving Lucile,
 To review the rash step he had taken, and feel
 What the world would have call'd "*his erroneous*
position."
 Thought obtruded its claim, and enforced recogni-
 tion :
 Like a creditor who, when the gloss is worn out
 On the coat which we once wore with pleasure, no
 doubt,
 Sends us in his account for the garment we bought.
 Ev'ry spendthrift to passion is debtor to thought.

IV.

He felt ill at ease with himself. He could feel
Little doubt what the answer would be from Lucile.
Her eyes, when they parted — her voice, when they
met,

Still enraptured his heart, which they haunted. And
yet,

Though, exulting, he deem'd himself loved, where
he loved,

Through his mind a vague self-accusation there
moved.

O'er his fancy, when fancy was fairest, would rise

The infantine face of Matilda, with eyes

So sad, so reproachful, so cruelly kind,

That his heart fail'd within him. In vain did he
find

A thousand just reasons for what he had done ;

The vision that troubled him would not be gone.

In vain did he say to himself, and with truth,

“ Matilda has beauty, and fortune, and youth ;

And her heart is too young to have deeply involved

All its hopes in the tie which must now be dissolved.

’Twere a false sense of honor in me to suppress

The sad truth which I owe it to her to confess. •

And what reason have I to presume this poor life

Of my own, with its languid and frivolous strife,

And without what alone might endear it to her,

Were a boon all so precious, indeed, to confer,

Its withdrawal can wrong her ?

It is not as though
I were bound to some poor village maiden, I know,

Unto whose simple heart mine were all upon earth,
Or to whose simple fortunes mine own could give
worth.

Matilda, in all the world's gifts, will not miss
Aught that I could procure her. 'Tis best as it is!"

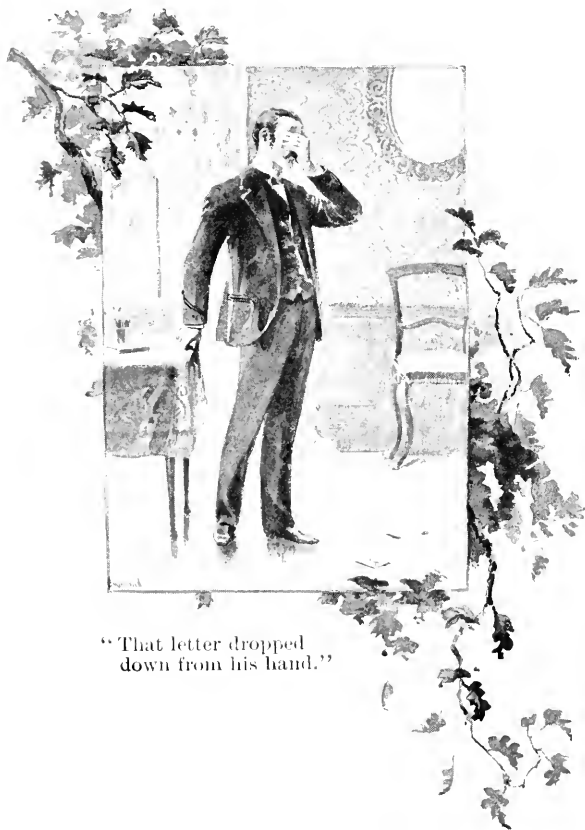
v.

In vain did he say to himself, "When I came
To this fatal spot, I had nothing to blame
Or reproach myself for, in the thoughts of my heart.
I could not foresee that its pulses would start
Into such strange emotion on seeing once more
A woman I left with indifference before.
I believed, and with honest conviction believed,
In my love for Matilda. I never conceived
That another could shake it. I deem'd I had done
With the wild heart of youth, and looked hopefully on
To the soberer manhood, the worthier life,
Which I sought in the love that I vow'd to my wife.
Poor child! she shall learn the whole truth. She
shall know

What I knew not myself but a few days ago.
The world will console her — her pride will support —
Her youth will renew its emotions. In short,
There is nothing in me that Matilda will miss
When once we have parted. 'Tis best as it is!"

vi.

But in vain did he reason and argue. Alas!
He yet felt unconvinced that *'twas* best as it was.



“That letter dropped
down from his hand.”

Out of reach of all reason, forever would rise
 That infantine face of Matilda, with eyes
 So sad, so reproachful, so cruelly kind,
 That they harrow'd his heart and distracted his mind.

VII.

And then, when he turned from these thoughts to
 Lucile,
 Though his heart rose enraptured he could not but
 feel

A vague sense of awe of her nature. Behind
 All the beauty of heart, and the graces of mind,
 Which he saw and revered in her, something un-
 known

And unseen in that nature still troubled his own.
 He felt that Lucile penetrated and prized
 Whatever was noblest and best, though disguised,
 In himself; but he did not feel sure that he knew,
 Or completely possess'd, what, half hidden from
 view,
 Remained lofty and lonely in *her*.

Then, her life,
 So untamed and so free! would she yield as a wife
 Independence, long claimed as a woman? Her name
 So link'd by the world with that spurious fame
 Which the beauty and wit of a woman assert,
 In some measure, alas! to her own loss and hurt
 In the serious thoughts of a man! . . . This reflec-
 tion
 O'er the love which he felt cast a shade of dejec-
 tion,

From which he forever escaped to the thought
 Doubt could reach not . . . "I love her, and all
 else is naught!"

VIII.

His hand trembled strangely in breaking the seal
 Of the letter which reach'd him at last from Lucile.
 At the sight of the very first words that he read,
 That letter dropp'd down from his hand like the dead
 Leaf in autumn, that, falling, leaves naked and bare
 A desolate tree in a wide wintry air.

He pass'd his hand hurriedly over his eyes,
 Bewilder'd, incredulous. Angry surprise
 And dismay, in one sharp moan, broke from him.

Anon

He picked up the page, and read rapidly on.

IX.

THE COMTESSE DE NEVERS TO LORD ALFRED
 VARGRAVE:

"No, Alfred!

If over the present, when last
 We two met, rose the glamour and mist of the past,
 It hath now rolled away, and our two paths are
 plain,
 And those two paths divide us.

"That hand which again
 Mine one moment has clasp'd as the hand of a
 brother,
 That hand and your honor are pledged to another!

Forgive, Alfred Vargrave, forgive me, if yet
 For that moment (now past!) I have made you forget
 What was due to yourself and that other one. Yes,
 Mine the fault, and be mine the repentance. Not
 less,

In now owning this fault, Alfred, let me own, too,
 I foresaw not the sorrow involved in it.

“ True,
 That meeting, which hath been so fatal, I sought,
 I alone! But oh! deem not it was with the thought
 Or your heart to regain, or the past to rëwaken.
 No! believe me, it was with the firm and unshaken
 Conviction, at least, that our meeting would be
 Without peril to *you*, although haply to me
 The salvation of all my existence.

“ I own,
 When the rumor first reach'd me, which lightly
 made known
 To the world your engagement, my heart and my
 mind
 Suffer'd torture intense. It was cruel to find
 That so much of the life of my life, half unknown
 To myself, had been silently settled on one
 Upon whom but to think it would soon be a crime.
 Then I said to myself, ‘ From the thralldom which
 time
 Hath not weaken'd there rests but one hope of es-
 cape.
 That image which Fancy seems ever to shape
 From the solitude left round the ruins of yore,
 Is a phantom. The Being I loved is no more.

What I hear in the silence, and see in the lone
 Void of life, is the young hero born of my own
 Perish'd youth : and his image, serene and sublime,
 In my heart rests unconscious of change and of time.
 Could I see it but once more, as time and as change
 Have made it, a thing unfamiliar and strange,
 See, indeed, that the Being I loved in my youth
 Is no more, and what rests now is only, in truth,
 The hard pupil of life and the world : then, oh,
 then,

I should wake from a dream, and my life be again
 Reconciled to the world ; and, released from regret,
 Take the lot fate accords to my choice.'

“ So we met.

But the danger I did not foresee has occur'd :
 The danger, alas, to yourself ! I have err'd.
 But happy for both that this error hath been
 Discover'd as soon as the danger was seen !
 We meet, Alfred Vargrave, no more. I, indeed,
 Shall be far from Luchon when this letter you read.
 My course is decided : my path I discern :
 Doubt is over ; my future is fix'd now.

“ Return,

O return to the young living love ! Whence, alas !
 If, one moment, you wander'd, think only it was
 More deeply to bury the past love.

“ And, oh !

Believe, Alfred Vargrave, that I, where I go
 On my far distant pathway through life, shall re-
 joice

To treasure in memory all that your voice

Has avow'd to me, all in which others have clothed
 To my fancy with beauty and worth your betrothed !
 In the fair morning light, in the orient dew
 Of that young life, now yours, can you fail to renew
 All the noble and pure aspirations, the truth,
 The freshness, the faith, of your own earnest youth?
 Yes ! *you* will be happy. I, too, in the bliss
 I foresee for you, I shall be happy. And this
 Proves me worthy your friendship. And so—let
 it prove

That I cannot—I do not—respond to your love.
 Yes, indeed ! be convinced that I could not (no, no,
 Never, never !) have render'd you happy. And so,
 Rest assured that, if false to the vows you have
 plighted,
 You would have endured, when the first brief, excited
 Emotion was o'er, not alone the remorse
 Of honor, but also (to render it worse)
 Disappointed affection.

“ Yes, Alfred ; you start?
 But think ! if the world was too much in your heart,
 And too little in mine, when we parted ten years
 Ere this last fatal meeting, that time (ay, and tears !)
 Have but deepen'd the old demarcations which then
 Placed our natures asunder ; and we two again,
 As we then were, would still have been strangely at
 strife.

In that self-independence which is to my life
 Its necessity now, as it once was its pride,
 Had our course through the world been henceforth
 side by side,

I should have revolted forever, and shock'd
Your respect for the world's plausibilities, mock'd,
Without meaning to do so, and outraged, all those
Social creeds which you live by.

“ Oh ! do not suppose
That I blame you. Perhaps it is you that are right.
Best, then, all as it is !

“ Deem these words life's Good-night
To the hope of a moment : no more ! If there fell
Any tear on this page, 'twas a friend's.

“ So farewell
To the past — and to you, Alfred Vargrave.

“ LUCILE.”

X.

So ended that letter.

The room seem'd to reel
Round and round in the mist that was scorching
his eyes
With a fiery dew. Grief, resentment, surprise.
Half choked him ; each word he had read, as it
smote
Down some hope, rose and grasped like a hand at
his throat,
To stifle and strangle him.

Gasping already
For relief from himself, with a footstep unsteady,
He pass'd from his chamber. He felt both op-
press'd
And excited. The letter he thrust in his breast,
And, in search of fresh air and of solitude, pass'd
The long lime-trees of Luchon. His footsteps at last

Reach'd a bare narrow heath by the skirts of a wood :
It was sombre and silent, and suited his mood.
By a mineral spring, long unused, now unknown,
Stood a small ruin'd abbey. He reach'd it, sat
 down
On a fragment of stone, 'mid the wild weed and
 thistle,
And read over again that perplexing epistle.

XI.

In re-reading that letter, there roll'd from his mind
The raw mist of resentment which first made him
 blind
To the pathos breath'd through it. Tears rose in
 his eyes,
And a hope sweet and strange in his heart seem'd
 to rise.
The truth which he saw not the first time he read
That letter, he now saw — that each word betray'd
The love which the writer had sought to conceal.
His love was received not, he could not but feel,
For one reason alone, — that his love was not free.
True! free yet he was not: but could he not be
Free ere long, free as air to revoke that farewell,
And to sanction his own hopes? he had but to tell
The truth to Matilda, and she were the first
To release him: he had but to wait at the worst.
Matilda's relations would probably snatch
Any pretext, with pleasure, to break off a match
In which they had yielded, alone at the whim
Of their spoil'd child, a languid approval to him.

She herself, careless child! was her love for him
 aught

Save the first joyous fancy succeeding the thought

She last gave to her doll? was she able to feel

Such a love as the love he divined in Lucile?

He would seek her, obtain his release, and, oh! then

He had but to fly to Lucile, and again

Claim the love which his heart would be free to
 command.

But to press on Lucile any claim to her hand,

Or even to seek, or to see, her before

He could say, "I am free! free, Lucile, to implore

That great blessing on life you alone can confer,"

'Twere dishonor in him, 'twould be insult to her.

Thus still with the letter outspread on his knee

He follow'd so fondly his own revery,

That he felt not the angry regard of a man

Fix'd upon him; he saw not a face stern and wan

Turn'd towards him; he heard not a footstep that
 pass'd

And repass'd the lone spot where he stood, till at
 last

A hoarse voice aroused him.

He look'd up and saw,

On the bare heath before him, the Duc de Luvois.

XII.

With aggressive ironical tones, and a look

Of concentrated insolent challenge, the Duke

Address'd to Lord Alfred some sneering allusion

To "the doubtless sublime reveries his intrusion

Had, he fear'd, interrupted. Milord would do
 better,
 He fancied, however, to fold up a letter
 The writing of which was too well known, in fact,
 His remark as he pass'd to have failed to attract."

XIII.

It was obvious to Alfred the Frenchman was bent
 Upon picking a quarrel! and doubtless 'twas meant
 From *him* to provoke it by sneers such as these.
 A moment sufficed his quick instinct to seize
 The position. He felt that he could not expose
 His own name, or Lucile's, or Matilda's, to those
 Idle tongues that would bring down upon him the
 ban
 Of the world, if he now were to fight with this man.
 And indeed, when he look'd in the Duke's haggard
 face,
 He was pain'd by the change there he could not but
 trace.
 And he almost felt pity.

He therefore put by
 Each remark from the Duke with some careless
 reply,
 And coldly, but courteously, waving away
 The ill-humor the Duke seem'd resolved to display,
 Rose, and turn'd, with a stern salutation, aside.

XIV.

Then the Duke put himself in the path, made one
 stride

In advance, raised a hand, fix'd upon him his eyes,
And said . . .

“ Hold, Lord Alfred! Away with disguise!
I will own that I sought you, a moment ago,
To fix on you a quarrel. I still can do so
Upon any excuse. I prefer to be frank.
I admit not a rival in fortune or rank
To the hand of a woman, whatever be hers
Or her suitor's. I love the Comtesse de Nevers.
I believed, ere you cross'd me, and still have the
right
To believe, that she would have been mine. To
her sight
You return, and the woman is suddenly changed.
You step in between us: her heart is estranged.
You! who now are betrothed to another, I know:
You! whose name with Lucile's nearly ten years
ago
Was coupled by ties which you broke: you! the
man
I reproach'd on the day our acquaintance began.
You! that left her so lightly, — I cannot believe
That you love, as I love, her: nor can I conceive
You, indeed, have the right so to love her.

Milord,

I will not thus tamely concede at your word,
What, a few days ago, I believed to be mine!
I shall yet persevere: I shall yet be, in fine,
A rival you dare not despise. It is plain
That to settle this contest there can but remain
One way — need I say what it is ? ”

XV.

Not unmoved

With regretful respect for the earnestness proved
 By the speech he had heard, Alfred Vargrave replied
 In words which he trusted might yet turn aside
 The quarrel from which he felt bound to abstain,
 And, with stately urbanity, strove to explain
 To the Duke that he too (a fair rival at worst !)
 Had not been accepted.

XVI.

“ Accepted ! say first
 Are you free to have offer’d ? ”

Lord Alfred was mute.

XVII.

“ Ah, you dare not reply ! ” cried the Duke. “ Why
 dispute,

Why palter with me ? You are silent ! and why ?

Because, in your conscience, you cannot deny

’Twas from vanity, wanton and cruel withal,

And the wish an ascendancy lost to recall,

That you stepp’d in between me and her. If,
 milord,

You be really sincere, I ask only one word.

Say at once you renounce her. At once, on my
 part,

I will ask your forgiveness with all truth of heart,

And there *can* be no quarrel between us. Say on ! ”

Lord Alfred grew gall’d and impatient. This tone

Roused a strong irritation he could not repress.

“ You have not the right, sir,” he said, “ and still less

The power, to make terms and conditions with me.
I refuse to reply."

XVIII.

As diviners may see
Fates they cannot avert in some figure occult,
He foresaw in a moment each evil result
Of the quarrel now imminent.

There, face to face,
'Mid the ruins and tombs of a long-perish'd race,
With, for witness, the stern Autumn Sky overhead,
And beneath them, unnoticed, the graves, and the
dead,

Those two men had met, as it were on the ridge
Of that perilous, narrow, invisible bridge
Dividing the Past from the Future, so small
That if one should pass over, the other must fall.

XIX.

On the ear, at that moment, the sound of a hoof,
Urged with speed, sharply smote; and from under
the roof

Of the forest in view, where the skirts of it verged
On the heath where they stood, at full gallop
emerged

A horseman.

A guide he appear'd, by the sash
Of red silk round the waist, and the long leathern
lash

With a short wooden handle, slung crosswise behind
The short jacket; the loose canvas trouser, confined

By the long boots ; the woollen capote ; and the rein,
A mere hempen cord on a curb.

Up the plain

He wheel'd his horse, white with the foam on his
flank,
Leap'd the rivulet lightly, turn'd sharp from the
bank,
And, approaching the Duke, raised his woollen
capote,
Bow'd low in the selle, and deliver'd a note.

XX.

The two stood astonish'd. The Duke, with a gest
Of apology, turn'd, stretch'd his hand, and pos-
sess'd
Himself of the letter, changed color, and tore
The page open and read.

Ere a moment was o'er

His whole aspect changed. A light rose to his eyes,
And a smile to his lips. While with startled sur-
prise
Lord Alfred yet watch'd him, he turn'd on his heel,
And said gayly, "A pressing request from Lucile!
You are quite right, Lord Alfred! fair rivals at
worst,
Our relative place may perchance be reversed.
You are not accepted, — nor free to propose!
I, perchance, am accepted already ; who knows?
I had warn'd you, milord, I should still persevere.
This letter — but stay! you can read it — look
here!"

XXI.

It was now Alfred's turn to feel roused and enraged.
 But Lucile to himself was not pledged or engaged
 By aught that could sanction resentment. He
 said
 Not a word, but turn'd round, took the letter, and
 read . . .

THE COMTESSE DE NEVERS TO THE DUC DE
 LUVOIS.

“SAINT SAVIOUR.

“Your letter, which follow'd me here, makes me
 stay
 Till I see you again. With no moment's delay
 I entreat, I conjure you, by all that you feel
 Or profess, to come to me directly.

“LUCILE.”

XXII.

“Your letter!” He then had been writing to her!
 Coldly shrugging his shoulders, Lord Alfred said,
 “Sir,
 Do not let me detain you!”

 The Duke smiled and bow'd;
 Placed the note in his bosom; address'd, halt
 aloud,
 A few words to the messenger, . . . “Say your
 despatch
 Will be answer'd ere nightfall;” then glanced at his
 watch,
 And turn'd back to the Baths.

XXIII.

Alfred Vaigrave stood still,
 Torn, distracted in heart, and divided in will.
 He turn'd to Lucile's farewell letter to him,
 And read over her words; rising tears made them
 dim:
 "Doubt is over; my future is fix'd now," they said.
 "My course is decided." Her course? what! to
 wed
 With this insolent rival! With that thought there
 shot
 Through his heart an acute jealous anguish. But
 not
 Even thus could his clear worldly sense quite ex-
 cuse
 Those strange words to the Duke. She was free to
 refuse
 Himself, free the Duke to accept, it was true:
 Even then, though, this eager and strange rendez-
 vous,
 How imprudent! To some unfrequented lone inn,
 And so late (for the night was about to begin) —
 She, companionless there! — had she bidden that
 man?
 A fear, vague, and formless, and horrible, ran
 Through his heart.

XXIV.

At that moment he look'd up, and saw,
 Riding fast through the forest, the Duc de Luvois,
 Who waved his hand to him, and sped out of sight.

The day was descending. He felt 'twould be night
Ere that man reached Saint Saviour.

XXV.

He walk'd on, but not
Back toward Luchon: he walk'd on, but knew not
in what
Direction, nor yet with what object, indeed,
He was walking, but still he walk'd on without
heed.

XXVI.

The day had been sullen; but, towards his decline,
The sun sent a stream of wild light up the pine.
Darkly denting the red light reveal'd at its back,
The old ruin'd abbey rose roofless and black.
The spring that yet oozed through the moss-paven
floor
Had suggested, no doubt, to the monks there, of
yore,
The site of that refuge where back to its God
How many a heart, now at rest 'neath the sod,
Had borne from the world all the same wild unrest
That now prey'd on his own!

XXVII.

By the thoughts in his breast
With varying impulse divided and torn,
He traversed the scant heath, and reach'd the for-
lorn
Autumn woodland, in which but a short while ago
He had seen the Duke rapidly enter; and so

He too enter'd. The light waned around him, and
pass'd
Into darkness. The wrathful, red Occident cast
One glare of vindictive inquiry behind,
As the last light of day from the high wood de-
clined,
And the great forest sigh'd its farewell to the beam,
And far off on the stillness the voice of the stream
Fell faintly.

XXVIII.

O Nature, how fair is thy face,
And how light is thy heart, and how friendless thy
grace!
Thou false mistress of man! thou dost sport with
him lightly
In his hours of ease and enjoyment; and brightly
Dost thou smile to his smile; to his joys thou in-
clinest,
But his sorrows, thou knowest them not, nor
divinest.
While he woos, thou art wanton; thou lettest him
love thee;
But thou art not his friend, for his grief cannot
move thee;
And at last, when he sickens and dies, what dost
thou?
All as gay are thy garments, as careless thy brow,
And thou laughest and toyest with any new comer,
Not a tear more for winter, a smile less for summer!
Hast thou never an anguish to heave the heart
under

That fair breast of thine, O thou feminine wonder!
For all those — the young, and the fair, and the
strong,
Who have loved thee, and lived with thee gayly and
long,
And who now on thy bosom lie dead? and their
deeds
And their days are forgotten! O hast thou no
weeds
And not one year of mourning, — one out of the
many
That deck thy new bridals forever. — nor any
Regrets for thy lost loves, conceal'd from the new,
O thou widow of earth's generations? Go to!
If the sea and the night wind know aught of these
things,
They do not reveal it. We are not thy kings.

CANTO VI.

I.

“THE huntsman has ridden too far on the chase,
And eldrich, and eerie, and strange is the place!
The castle betokens a date long gone by.
He crosses the courtyard with curious eye:
He wanders from chamber to chamber, and yet
From strangeness to strangeness his footsteps are
set;

And the whole place grows wilder and wilder, and
less

Like aught seen before. Each in obsolete dress,
Strange portraits regard him with looks of surprise,
Strange forms from the arras start forth to his eyes ;
Strange epigraphs, blazon'd, burn out of the wall :
The spell of a wizard is over it all.

In her chamber, enchanted, the Princess is sleeping
The sleep which for centuries she has been keeping.
If she smile in her sleep, it must be to some lover
Whose lost golden locks the long grasses now cover :
If she moan in her dream, it must be to deplore
Some grief which the world cares to hear of no more.
But how fair is her forehead, how calm seems her
cheek !

And how sweet must that voice be, if once she
would speak !

He looks and he loves her ; but knows he (not he!)
The clew to unravel this old mystery ?

And he stoops to those shut lips. The shapes on
the wall,

The mute men in armor around him, and all
The weird figures frown, as though striving to say,
' *Halt ! invade not the Past, reckless child of To-
day !*

*And give not, O madman ! the heart in thy breast
To a phantom, the soul of whose sense is possess'd
By an Age not thine own !*

“ But unconscious is he,
And he heeds not the warning, he cares not to see
Aught but *one* form before him !

“Rash, wild words are o’er,
 And the vision is vanish’d from sight evermore!
 And the gray morning sees, as it drearily moves
 O’er a land long deserted, a madman that roves
 Through a ruin, and seeks to recapture a dream.
 Lost to life and its uses, withdrawn from the scheme
 Of man’s waking existence, he wanders apart.”
 And this is an old fairy-tale of the heart.
 It is told in all lands, in a different tongue;
 Told with tears by the old, heard with smiles by the
 young.

And the tale to each heart unto which it is known
 Has a different sense. It has puzzled my own.

II.

Eugène de Luvois was a man who, in part
 From strong physical health, and that vigor of heart
 Which physical health gives, and partly, perchance,
 From a generous vanity native to France,
 With the heart of a hunter, whatever the quarry,
 Pursued it, too hotly impatient to tarry
 Or turn, till he took it. His trophies were trifles:
 But trifler he was not. When rose-leaves it rifles,
 No less than when oak-trees it ruins, the wind
 Its pleasure pursues with impetuous mind.
 Both Eugène de Luvois and Lord Alfred had been
 Men of pleasure: but men’s pleasant vices, which,
 seen
 Floating faint in the sunshine of Alfred’s soft mood,
 Seem’d amiable foibles, by Luvois pursued
 With impetuous passion, seemed semi-Satanic.

Half pleased you see brooks play with pebbles ; in
 panjic

You watch them whirl'd down by the torrent.

In truth,

To the sacred political creed of his youth

The century which he was born to denied

All realization. Its generous pride

To degenerate protest on all things was sunk ;

Its principles each to a prejudice shrunk.

Down the path of a life that led nowhere he trod,

Where his whims were his guides, and his will was
 his god,

And his pastime his purpose.

From boyhood possess'd

Of inherited wealth, he had learned to invest

Both his wealth and those passions wealth frees from
 the cage

Which penury locks, in each vice of an age

All the virtues of which, by the creed he revered,

Were to him illegitimate.

Thus, he appear'd

To the world what the world chose to have him
 appear, —

The frivolous tyrant of Fashion, a mere

Reformer in coats, cards, and carriages ! Still

'Twas the vigor of nature, and tension of will,

That found for the first time — perhaps for the last —

In Lucile what they lacked yet to free from the Past,

Force, and faith, in the Future.

And so, in his mind,

To the anguish of losing the woman was join'd

The terror of missing his life's destination,
Which in her had its mystical representation.

III.

And truly, the thought of it, scaring him, pass'd
O'er his heart, while he now through the twilight
rode fast

As a shade from the wing of some great bird obscene
In a wide silent land may be suddenly seen,
Darkening over the sands, where it startles and
scares

Some traveller stray'd in the waste unawares,
So that thought more than once darken'd over his
heart

For a moment, and rapidly seem'd to depart.
Fast and furious he rode through the thickets which
rose

Up the shaggy hillside: and the quarrelling crows
Clang'd above him, and clustering down the dim air
Dropp'd into the dark woods. By fits here and there
Shepherd fires faintly gleam'd from the valleys. Oh,
how

He envied the wings of each wild bird, as now
He urged the steed over the dizzy ascent
Of the mountain! Behind him a murmur was sent
From the torrent—before him a sound from the
tracts

Of the woodlands that waved o'er the wild cataracts,
And the loose earth and loose stones roll'd
momently down

From the hoofs of his steed to abysses unknown.



“With his horse reeking
white, he at last reached
the door, of a small mountain inn.”

The red day had fallen beneath the black woods,
And the Powers of the night through the vast soli-
tudes

Walk'd abroad and conversed with each other.
The trees

Were in sound and in motion, and mutter'd like seas
In Elfland. The road through the forest was
hollow'd.

On he sped through the darkness, as though he
were follow'd

Fast, fast by the Erl King!

The wild wizard-work

Of the forest at last open'd sharp, o'er the fork
Of a savage ravine, and behind the black stems
Of the last trees, whose leaves in the light gleam'd
like gems,

Broke the broad moon above the voluminous
Rock-chaos, — the Hecate of that Tartarus!
With his horse reeking white, he at last reach'd the
door

Of a small mountain inn, on the brow of a hoar
Craggy promontory, o'er a fissure as grim,
Through which, ever roaring, there leap'd o'er the
limb

Of the rent rock a torrent of water, from sight,
Into pools that were feeding the roots of the night.
A balcony hung o'er the water. Above
In a glimmering casement a shade seem'd to move.
At the door the old negress was nodding her head
As he reach'd it. "My mistress awaits you," she
said.

And up the rude stairway of creaking pine rafter
 He follow'd her silent. A few moments after,
 His heart almost stunned him, his head seem'd to
 reel,
 For a door closed — Luvois was alone with Lucile.

IV.

In a gray travelling dress, her dark hair unconfined
 Streaming o'er it, and tossed now and then by the
 wind
 From the lattice, that waded the dull flame in a spire
 From a brass lamp before her — a faint hectic fire
 On her cheek, to her eyes lent the lustre of fever:
 They seem'd to have wept themselves wider than
 ever,
 Those dark eyes — so dark and so deep!
 " You relent?
 And your plans have been changed by the letter I
 sent?"
 There his voice sank, borne down by a strong in-
 ward strife.

LUCILE.

Your letter! yes, Duke. For it threaten'd man's life —
 Woman's honor.

LUVOIS.

The last, madam. *not?*

LUCILE.

Both. I glance
 At your own words; blush, son of the knighthood
 of France,

As I read them! You say, in this letter . . .

“ I know

Why now you refuse me: 'tis (is it not so?)

For the man who has trifled before, wantonly,

And now trifles again with the heart you deny

*To myself. But he shall not! By man's last wild
law,*

I will seize on the right (the right, Duc de Luvois!)

To avenge for you, woman, the past, and to give

To the future its freedom. That man shall not live

To make you as wretched as you have made me!”

LUVUOIS.

Well, madam, in those words what words do you
see

That threatens the honor of woman?

LUCILE.

See! . . . what,

What word, do you ask? Every word! would you
not,

Had I taken your hand thus, have felt that your
name

Was soil'd and dishonor'd by more than mere shame

If the woman that bore it had first been the cause

Of the crime which in these words is menaced?

You pause!

Woman's honor, you ask? Is there, sir, no dishonor

In the smile of a woman, when men, gazing on her,

Can shudder, and say, “ In that smile is a grave ” ?

No! you can have no cause, Duke, for no right you
have

In the contest you menace. That contest but draws
Every right into ruin. By all human laws
Of man's heart I forbid it, by all sanctities
Of man's social honor!

The Duke droop'd his eyes.

"I obey you," he said, "but let woman beware
How she plays fast and loose thus with human de-
spair,

And the storm in man's heart. Madam, yours was
the right,

When you saw that I hoped, to extinguish hope
quite.

But you should from the first have done this, for I
feel

That you knew from the first that I loved you."

Lucile

This sudden reproach seem'd to startle.

She raised

A slow, wistful regard to his features, and gazed
On them silent awhile. His own looks were down-
cast.

Through her heart, whence its first wild alarm was
now pass'd,

Pity crept, and perhaps o'er her conscience a tear,
Falling softly, awoke it.

However severe,

Were they unjust, these sudden upbraidings, to
her?

Had she lightly misconstrued this man's character,

Which had seem'd, even when most impassion'd it
seem'd,

Too self-conscious to lose all in love? Had she
deem'd

That this airy, gay, insolent man of the world,
So proud of the place the world gave him, held
fur'd

In his bosom no passion which once shaken wide
Might tug, till it snapped, that erect lofty pride?
Were those elements in him, which once roused to
strife

Overthrow a whole nature, and change a whole
life?

There are two kinds of strength. One, the strength
of the river

Which through continents pushes its pathway for-
ever

To fling its fond heart in the sea; if it lose
This, the aim of its life, it is lost to its use,
It goes mad, is diffused into deluge, and dies.

The other, the strength of the sea; which supplies
Its deep life from mysterious sources, and draws
The river's life into its own life, by laws

Which it heeds not. The difference in each case is
this :

The river is lost, if the ocean it miss ;
If the sea miss the river, what matter? The sea
Is the sea still, forever. Its deep heart will be
Self-sufficing, unconscious of loss as of yore ;
Its sources are infinite ; still to the shore,
With no diminution of pride, it will say,

“I am here ; I, the sea ! stand aside, and make way !”
 Was his love, then, the love of the river? and she,
 Had she taken that love for the love of the sea?

v.

At that thought, from her aspect whatever had been
 Stern or haughty departed ; and, humbled in mien,
 She approach'd him and brokenly murmur'd, as
 though

To herself more than him, “ Was I wrong? is it so?
 Hear me, Duke ! you must feel that, whatever you
 deem

Your right to reproach me in this, your esteem
 I may claim on *one* ground — I at least am sincere.
 You say that to me from the first it was clear
 That you loved me. But what if this knowledge
 were known

At a moment in life when I felt most alone,
 And least able to be so? a moment, in fact,
 When I strove from one haunting regret to retract
 And emancipate life, and once more to fulfil
 Woman's destinies, duties, and hopes? would you
 still

So bitterly blame me, Eugène de Luvois,
 If I hoped to see all this, or deem'd that I saw
 For a moment the promise of this in the plighted
 Affection of one who, in nature, united
 So much that from others affection might claim,
 If only affection were free? Do you blame
 The hope of that moment? I deem'd my heart free
 From all, saving sorrow. I deem'd that in me

There was yet strength to mould it once more to
 my will,
 To uplift it once more to my hope. Do you still
 Blame me, Duke, that I did not then bid you refrain
 From hope? alas! I too then hoped!"

LUVOIS.

Oh, again,
 Yet again, say that thrice blessed word! say, Lucile,
 That you then deign'd to hope—

LUCILE.

Yes! to hope I could feel,
 And could give to you, that without which all else
 given
 Were but to deceive, and to injure you even:—
 A heart free from thoughts of another. Say, then,
 Do you blame that one hope?

LUVOIS.

O Lucile!

“Say again,”
 She resumed, gazing down, and with faltering tone,
 “Do you blame me that, when I at last had to own
 To my heart that the hope it had cherish'd was o'er,
 And forever, I said to you then, ‘Hope no more’?
 I myself hoped no more!”

With but ill-suppressed wrath
 The Duke answer'd . . . “What, then! he re-
 crosses your path,

This man, and you have but to see him, despite
Of his troth to another, to take back that light
Worthless heart to your own, which he wrong'd
years ago!"

Lucile faintly, brokenly murmur'd . . . "No! no!
'Tis not that — but alas! — but I cannot conceal
That I have not forgotten the past — but I feel
That I cannot accept all these gifts on your part, —
In return for what . . . ah, Duke, what is it? . . .
a heart

Which is only a ruin!"

With words warm and wild,
"Though a ruin it be, trust me yet to rebuild
And restore it," Luvois cried; "though ruin'd it be,
Since so dear is that ruin, ah, yield it to me!"
He approach'd her. She shrank back. The grief
in her eyes
Answer'd, "No!"

An emotion more fierce seem'd to rise
And to break into flame, as though fired by the light
Of that look, in his heart. He exclaim'd, "Am I
right?

You reject *me*! Accept *him*?"

"I have not done so,"

She said firmly. He hoarsely resumed, "Not yet —
no!

But can you with accents as firm promise me
That you will not accept him?"

"Accept? Is he free?

Free to offer?" she said.

"You evade me, Lucile,"

He replied ; “ ah, you will not avow what you feel !
He might make himself free ? Oh, you blush —
turn away !

Dare you openly look in my face, lady, say !
While you deign to reply to one question from me ?
I may hope not, you tell me : but tell me, may he ?
What ! silent ? I alter my question. If quite
Freed in faith from this troth, might he hope then ? ”
“ He might, ”

She said softly.

VI.

Those two whisper'd words, in his breast,
As he heard them, in one maddening moment re-
least

All that's evil and fierce in man's nature, to crush
And extinguish in man all that's good. In the rush
Of wild jealousy, all the fierce passions that waste
And darken and devastate intellect, chased
From its realm human reason. The wild animal
In the bosom of man was set free. And of all
Human passions the fiercest, fierce jealousy, fierce
As the fire, and more wild than the whirlwind, to
pierce

And to rend, rush'd upon him ; fierce jealousy,
swell'd

By all passions bred from it, and ever impell'd
To involve all things else in the anguish within it,
And on others inflict its own pangs !

At that minute
What pass'd through his mind, who shall say ? who
may tell

The dark thoughts of man's heart, which the red
glare of hell
Can illumine alone ?

He stared wildly around
That lone place, so lonely ! That silence ! no sound
Reach'd that room, through the dark evening air,
save drear
Drip and roar of the cataract ceaseless and near !
It was midnight all round on the weird silent
weather ;
Deep midnight in him ! They two, — alone and
together,
Himself, and that woman defenceless before him !
The triumph and bliss of his rival flash'd o'er him.
The abyss of his own black despair seem'd to ope
At his feet, with that awful exclusion of hope
Which Dante read over the city of doom.
All the Tarquin pass'd into his soul in the gloom,
And uttering words he dared never recall,
Words of insult and menace, he thunder'd down all
The brew'd storm-cloud within him : its flashes
scorch'd blind
His own senses. His spirit was driven on the wind
Of a reckless emotion beyond his control :
A torrent seem'd loosen'd within him. His soul
Surged up from that caldron of passion that hiss'd
And seeth'd in his heart.

VII.

He had thrown, and had miss'd
His last stake.

VIII.

For, transfigured, she rose from the place
Where he rested o'erawed: a saint's scorn on her
face;

Such a dread *vade retro* was written in light
On her forehead, the fiend would himself, at that
sight,

Have sunk back abash'd to perdition. I know
If Lucretia at Tarquin but once had looked so,
She had needed no dagger next morning.

She rose
And swept to the door, like that phantom the snows
Feel at nightfall sweep o'er them, when daylight is
gone,

And Caucasus is with the moon all alone.

There she paused; and, as though from immeas-
urable,

Insurpassable distance, she murmur'd —

“ Farewell!

We, alas! have mistaken each other. Once more
Illusion, to-night, in my lifetime is o'er.

Duc de Luvois, adieu!”

From the heart-breaking gloom
Of that vacant, reproachful, and desolate room,
He felt she was gone — gone forever!

IX.

No word,

The sharpest that ever was edged like a sword,
Could have pierced to his heart with such keen
accusation

As the silence, the sudden profound isolation,
In which he remain'd.

“O return; I repent!”

He exclaimed; but no sound through the stillness
was sent,

Save the roar of the water, in answer to him,
And the beetle that, sleeping, yet humm'd her
night-hymn:

An indistinct anthem, that troubled the air
With a searching, and wistful, and questioning
prayer.

“Return,” sung the wandering insect. The roar
Of the waters replied, “Nevermore! nevermore!”
He walked to the window. The spray on his brow
Was flung cold from the whirlpools of water be-
low;

The frail wooden balcony shook in the sound
Of the torrent. The mountains gloom'd sullenly
round.

A candle one ray from a closed casement flung.
O'er the dim balustrade all bewilder'd he hung,
Vaguely watching the broken and shimmering blink
Of the stars on the veering and vitreous brink
Of that snake-like prone column of water; and
listing

Aloof o'er the languors of air the persisting
Sharp horn of the gray gnat. Before he relinquish'd
His unconscious employment, that light was ex-
tinguish'd.

Wheels at last, from the inn door aroused him. He
ran

Down the stairs ; reached the door — just to see her
depart.

Down the mountain the carriage was speeding.

X.

His heart

Peal'd the knell of its last hope. He rush'd on ;
but whither

He knew not — on, into the dark cloudy weather —
The midnight — the mountains — on, over the shelf
Of the precipice — on, still — away from himself !
Till exhausted, he sank 'mid the dead leaves and
moss

At the mouth of the forest. A glimmering cross
Of gray stone stood for prayer by the woodside.
He sank

Prayerless, powerless, down at its base, 'mid the dank
Weeds and grasses ; his face hid amongst them.
He knew

That the night had divided his whole life in two.
Behind him a past that was over forever ;
Before him a future devoid of endeavor
And purpose. He felt a remorse for the one,
Of the other a fear. What remain'd to be done ?
Whither now should he turn ? Turn again, as
before,

To his old easy, careless existence of yore
He could not. He felt that for better or worse
A change had passed o'er him ; an angry remorse
Of his own frantic failure and error had marr'd
Such a refuge forever. The future seem'd barr'd

By the corpse of a dead hope o'er which he must
tread

To attain it. Life's wilderness round him was
spread,

What clew there to cling by ?

He clung by a name
To a dynasty fallen forever. He came
Of an old princely house, true through change to
the race

And the sword of Saint Louis — a faith 'twere dis-
grace

To relinquish, and folly to live for! Nor less
Was his ancient religion (once potent to bless
Or to ban; and the crozier his ancestors kneel'd
To adore, when they fought for the Cross, in hard
field

With the Crescent) become, ere it reach'd him,
tradition;

A mere faded badge of a social position;

A thing to retain and say nothing about.

Lest, if used, it should draw degradation from
doubt.

Thus, the first time he sought them, the creeds of
his youth

Wholly fail'd the strong needs of his manhood, in
truth!

And beyond them, what region of refuge? what
field

For employment, this civilized age, did it yield,

In that civilized land? or to thought? or to action?

Blind deliriums, bewilder'd and endless distraction!

Not even a desert, not even the cell
 Of a hermit to flee to, wherein he might quell
 The wild devil-instincts which now, unrepres't,
 Ran riot through that ruin'd world in his breast.

XI.

So he lay there, like Lucifer, fresh from the sight
 Of a heaven scaled and lost; in the wide arms of
 night
 O'er the howling abysses of nothingness! There
 As he lay, Nature's deep voice was teaching him
 prayer;
 But what had he to pray to?

The winds in the woods,
 The voices abroad o'er those vast solitudes,
 Were in commune all round with the invisible Power
 That walk'd the dim world by Himself at that hour.
 But their language he had not yet learn'd—in
 despite
 Of the much he *had* learn'd — or forgotten it quite,
 With its once native accents. Alas! what had he
 To add to that deep-toned sublime symphony
 Of thanksgiving? . . . A fiery finger was still
 Scorching into his heart some dread sentence.

His will,
 Like a wind that is put to no purpose, was wild
 At its work of destruction within him. The child
 Of an infidel age, he had been his own god,
 His own devil.

He sat on the damp mountain sod,
 And stared sullenly up at the dark sky.

The clouds

Had heap'd themselves over the bare west in crowds
 Of misshapen, incongruous potents. A green
 Streak of dreary, cold, luminous ether, between
 The base of their black barricades, and the ridge
 Of the grim world, gleam'd ghastly, as under some
 bridge,
 Cyclop-sized, in a city of ruins o'erthrown
 By sieges forgotten, some river, unknown
 And unnamed, widens on into desolate lands.
 While he gazed, that cloud-city invisible hands
 Dismantled and rent: and reveal'd, through a loop
 In the breach'd dark, the blemish'd and half-broken
 hoop
 Of the moon, which soon silently sank; and anon
 The whole supernatural pageant was gone.
 The wide night, discomfited, conscious of loss,
 Darken'd round him. One object alone — that
 gray cross —
 Glimmer'd faint on the dark Gazing up, he de-
 scried,
 Through the void air, its desolate arms outstretch'd,
 wide,
 As though to embrace him.

He turn'd from the sight,
 Set his face to the darkness, and fled.

XII.

When the light

Of the dawn grayly flicker'd and glared on the spent
 Wearied ends of the night, like a hope that is sent

To the need of some grief when its need is the sorest,
 He was sullenly riding across the dark forest
 Toward Luchon.

Thus riding, with eyes of defiance
 Set against the young day, as disclaiming alliance
 With aught that the day brings to man, he perceived

Faintly, suddenly, fleetingly, through the damp-
 leaved

Autumn branches that put forth gaunt arms on his
 way,

The face of a man pale and wistful, and gray
 With the gray glare of morning. Eugène de
 Luvois,

With the sense of a strange second sight, when he
 saw

That phantom-like face, could at once recognize,
 By the sole instinct now left to guide him, the eyes
 Of his rival, though fleeting the vision and dim,
 With a stern sad inquiry fix'd keenly on him,
 And, to meet it, a lie leap'd at once to his own;
 A lie born of that lying darkness now grown
 Over all in his nature! He answer'd that gaze
 With a look which, if ever a man's look conveys
 More intensely than words what a man means,
 convey'd

Beyond doubt in its smile an announcement which
 said,

*"I have triumph'd. The question your eyes would
 imply*

Comes too late, Alfred Vargrave!"

And so he rode by,
 And rode on, and rode gayly, and rode out of sight,
 Leaving that look behind him to rankle and bite.

XIII.

And it bit, and it rankled.

XIV.

Lord Alfred, scarce knowing,
 Or choosing, or heeding the way he was going,
 By one wild hope impell'd, by one wild fear pursued,
 And led by one instinct, which seem'd to exclude
 From his mind every human sensation, save one —
 The torture of doubt — had stray'd moodily on,
 Down the highway deserted, that evening in which
 With the Duke he had parted; stray'd on, through
 rich
 Haze of sunset, or into the gradual night,
 Which darken'd, unnoticed, the land from his sight,
 Toward Saint Saviour; nor did the changed aspect
 of all
 The wild scenery around him avail to recall
 To his senses their normal perceptions, until,
 As he stood on the black shaggy brow of the hill
 At the mouth of the forest, the moon, which had
 hung
 Two dark hours in a cloud, slipp'd on fire from
 among
 The rent vapors, and sunk o'er the ridge of the
 world.

Then he lifted his eyes, and saw round him un-
furl'd,

In one moment of splendor, the leagues of dark
trees,

And the long rocky line of the wild Pyrenees.

And he knew by the milestone scored rough on the
face

Of the bare rock, he was but two hours from the
place

Where Lucile and Luvois must have met. This
same track

The Duke must have traversed, perforce, to get
back

To Luchon; not yet then the Duke had returned!

He listen'd, he look'd up the dark, but discern'd

Not a trace, not a sound of a horse by the way.

He knew that the night was approaching to day.

He resolved to proceed to Saint Saviour. The
morn,

Which, at last, through the forest broke chill and
forlorn,

Reveal'd to him, riding toward Luchon, the Duke.

'Twas then that the two men exchanged look for
look.

XV.

And the Duke's rankled in him.

XVI.

He rush'd on. He tore
His path through the thicket. He reach'd the inn
door,

Roused the yet drowsing porter, reluctant to rise,
 And inquired for the Countess. The man rubb'd
 his eyes,

The Countess was gone. And the Duke?

The man stared

A sleepy inquiry.

With accents that scared

The man's dull sense awake, "He, the stranger,"
 he cried,

"Who had been there that night!"

The man grinn'd and replied,

With a vacant intelligence, "He, oh ay, ay!

He went after the lady."

No further reply

Could he give. Alfred Vargrave demanded no
 more,

Flung a coin to the man, and so turn'd from the
 door.

"What! the Duke, then, the night in that lone inn
 had pass'd?

In that lone inn — with her!" Was that look he
 had cast

When they met in the forest, that look which re-
 main'd

On his mind with its terrible smile, thus explain'd?

XVII.

The day was half turn'd to the evening, before
 He re-entered Luchon, with a heart sick and sore.
 In the midst of a light crowd of babblers, his look,
 By their voices attracted, distinguished the Duke,

Gay, insolent, noisy, with eyes sparkling bright,
With laughter, shrill, airy, continuous.

Right

Through the throng Alfred Vargrave, with swift
sombre stride,

Glided on. The Duke noticed him, turn'd, stepp'd
aside,

And, cordially grasping his hand, whisper'd low,
"O, how right have you been! There can never
be — no,

Never — any more contest between us! Milord,
Let us henceforth be friends!"

Having utter'd that word,

He turn'd lightly round on his heel, and again
His gay laughter was heard, echoed loud by that
train

Of his young imitators.

Lord Alfred stood still,

Rooted, stunn'd, to the spot. He felt weary and
ill,

Out of heart with his own heart, and sick to the
soul

With a dull, stifling anguish he could not control.
Does he hear in a dream, through the buzz of the
crowd,

The Duke's blithe associates, babbling aloud
Some comment upon his gay humor that day?
He never was gayer: what makes him so gay?
'Tis, no doubt, say the flatterers, flattering in
tune,

Some vestal whose virtue no tongue dare impugn

Has at last found a Mars — who, of course, shall be
nameless,

That vestal that yields to Mars *only* is blame-
less!

Hark! hears he a name which, thus syllabled,
stirs

All his heart into tumult? . . . Lucille de Nevers
With the Duke's coupled gayly, in some laughing,
light,

Free allusion? Not so as might give him the right
To turn fiercely round on the speaker, but yet
To a trite and irreverent compliment set!

XVIII.

Slowly, slowly, usurping that place in his soul
Where the thought of Lucile was enshrined, did there
roll

Back again, back again, on its smooth downward
course

O'er his nature, with gather'd momentum and force,
THE WORLD.

XIX.

“No!” he mutter'd, “she cannot have sinn'd!
True! women there are (self-named women of
mind!)

Who love rather liberty — liberty, yes!

To choose and to leave — than the legalized stress
Of the lovingest marriage. But she — is she so?

I will not believe it. Lucile! O no, no!

Not Lucile!

“ But the world? and, ah, what would it say?
 O the look of that man, and his laughter, to-day!
 The gossip's light question! the slanderous jest!
 She is right! no, we could not be happy. 'Tis
 best

As it is. I will write to her — write, O my heart!
 And accept her farewell. *Our* farewell! must we
 part —

Part thus, then — forever, Lucile? Is it so?
 Yes! I feel it. We could not be happy, I know.
 'Twas a dream! we must waken!”

XX.

With head bow'd, as though
 By the weight of the heart's resignation, and slow
 Moody footsteps, he turned to his inn. *

Drawn apart
 From the gate, in the courtyard, and ready to
 start,
 Postboys mounted, portmanteaus packed up and
 made fast,
 A travelling-carriage, unnoticed, he pass'd.
 He order'd his horse to be ready anon:
 Sent, and paid, for the reckoning, and slowly pass'd
 on,
 And ascended the staircase, and enter'd his room.
 It was twilight. The chamber was dark in the
 gloom
 Of the evening. He listlessly kindled a light
 On the mantel-piece; there a large card caught his
 sight —

A large card, a stout card, well-printed and plain,
 Nothing flourishing, flimsy, affected, or vain.
 It gave a respectable look to the slab
 That it lay on. The name was —

SIR RIDLEY MACNAB.

Full familiar to him was the name that he saw,
 For 'twas that of his own future uncle-in-law.
 Mrs. Darcy's rich brother, the banker, well known
 As wearing the longest philacteried gown
 Of all the rich Pharisees England can boast of,
 A shrewd Puritan Scot, whose sharp wits made the
 most of

This world and the next: having largely invested
 Not only where treasure is never molested
 By thieves, moth, or rust: but on this earthly ball
 Where interest was high, and security small.
 Of mankind there was never a theory yet
 Not by some individual instance upset:
 And so to that sorrowful verse of the Psalm
 Which declares that the wicked expand like the
 palm

In a world where the righteous are stunted and pent,
 A cheering exception did Ridley present.
 Like the worthy of Uz, Heaven prosper'd his piety.
 The leader of every religious society,

Christian knowledge he labor'd through life to promote
 With personal profit, and knew how to quote
 Both the Stocks and the Scripture, with equal advantage
 To himself and admiring friends, in this Cant-Age.

XXI.

Whilst over this card Alfred vacantly brooded,
 A waiter his head through the doorway protruded ;
 " Sir Ridley MacNab with Milord wish'd to speak."
 Albert Vargrave could feel there were tears on his
 cheek ;
 He brush'd them away with a gesture of pride.
 He glanced at the glass ; when his own face he eyed,
 He was scared by its pallor. Inclining his head,
 He with tones calm, unshaken, and silvery, said,
 " Sir Ridley may enter."

In three minutes more
 That benign apparition appeared at the door.
 Sir Ridley, released for a while from the cares
 Of business, and minded to breathe the pure airs
 Of the blue Pyrenees, and enjoy his release,
 In company there with his sister and niece,
 Found himself now at Luchon — distributing tracts,
 Sowing seed by the way, and collecting new facts
 For Exeter Hall ; he was starting that night
 For Bigorre : he had heard, to his cordial delight,
 That Lord Alfred was there, and, himself, setting
 out
 For the same destination : impatient, no doubt !

Here some commonplace compliments as to "the marriage"

Through his speech trickled softly, like honey: his carriage

Was ready. A storm seem'd to threaten the weather:

If his young friend agreed, why not travel together?

With a footstep uncertain and restless, a frown

Of perplexity, during this speech, up and down

Alfred Vargrave was striding: but, after a pause

And a slight hesitation, the which seem'd to cause

Some surprise to Sir Ridley, he answer'd — "My dear

Sir Ridley. allow me a few moments here —

Half an hour at the most — to conclude an affair

Of a nature so urgent as hardly to spare

My presence (which brought me, indeed, to this spot),

Before I accept your kind offer."

"Why not?"

Said Sir Ridley, and smiled. Alfred Vargrave, before

Sir Ridley observed it, had pass'd through the door.

A few moments later, with footsteps revealing

Intense agitation of uncontroll'd feeling,

He was rapidly pacing the garden below.

What pass'd through his mind then is more than I know.

But before one half-hour into darkness had fled,

In the courtyard he stood with Sir Ridley. His tread

Was firm and composed. Not a sign on his face
 Betrayed there the least agitation. "The place
 You so kindly have offer'd," he said, "I accept."
 And he stretch'd out his hand. The two travellers
 stepp'd
 Smiling into the carriage.

And thus, out of sight,
 They drove down the dark road, and into the night.

XXII.

Sir Ridley was one of those wise men who, so far
 As their power of saying it goes, say with Zophar,
 "We, no doubt, are the people, and wisdom shall
 die with us!"

Though of wisdom like theirs there is no small
 supply with us.

Side by side in the carriage ensconced, the two
 men

Began to converse somewhat drowsily, when
 Alfred suddenly thought — "Here's a man of ripe
 age,

At my side, by his fellows reputed as sage,
 Who looks happy, and therefore who must have
 been wise;

Suppose I with caution reveal to his eyes
 Some few of the reasons which make me believe
 That I neither am happy nor wise? 'twould relieve
 And enlighten, perchance, my own darkness and
 doubt."

For which purpose a feeler he softly put out.
 It was snapp'd up at once.

“What is truth?” jesting Pilate
Ask'd, and pass'd from the question at once with a
smile at

Its utter futility. Had he address'd it
To Ridley McNab, he at least had confess'd it
Admitted discussion! and certainly no man
Could more promptly have answer'd the sceptical
Roman

Than Ridley. Hear some street astronomer talk!
Grant him two or three hearers, a morsel of chalk,
And forthwith on the pavement he'll sketch you the
scheme

Of the heavens. Then hear him enlarge on his
theme!

Not afraid of La Place, nor of Arago, he!
He'll prove you the whole plan in plain A B C.
Here's your sun — call him A; B's the moon; it is
clear

How the rest of the alphabet brings up the rear
Of the planets. Now ask Arago, ask La Place,
(Your sages, who speak with the heavens face to
face!)

Their science in plain A B C to accord
To your point-blank inquiry, my friends! not a
word

Will you get for your pains from their sad lips.
Alas!

Not a drop from the bottle that's quite full will
pass.

'Tis the half-empty vessel that freest emits
The water that's in it. 'Tis thus with men's wits;

Or at least with their knowledge. A man's capability
 Of imparting to others a truth with facility
 Is proportion'd forever with painful exactness
 To the portable nature, the vulgar compactness,
 The minuteness in size, or the lightness in weight,
 Of the truth he imparts. So small coins circulate
 More freely than large ones. A beggar asks alms,
 And we fling him a sixpence, nor feel any qualms ;
 But if every street charity shook an investment,
 Or each beggar to clothe we must strip off a vest-
 ment,
 The length of the process would limit the act ;
 And therefore the truth that's summ'd up in a
 tract
 Is most lightly dispensed.

As for Alfred, indeed,
 On what spoonfuls of truth he was suffer'd to feed
 By Sir Ridley, I know not. This only I know,
 That the two men thus talking continued to go
 Onward somehow, together — on into the night —
 The midnight — in which they escape from our
 sight.

XXIII.

And meanwhile a world had been changed in its
 place,
 And those glittering chains that o'er blue balmy
 space
 Hang the blessing of darkness, had drawn out of
 sight
 To solace unseen hemispheres, the soft night ;

And the dew of the dayspring benignly descended,
And the fair morn to all things new sanction extended,

In the smile of the East. And the lark soaring on,
Lost in light, shook the dawn with a song from the sun.

And the world laugh'd.

It wanted but two rosy hours
From the noon, when they pass'd through the thick
passion flowers

Of the little wild garden that dimpled before
The small house where their carriage now stopp'd,
at Bigorre.

And more fair than the flowers, more fresh than the
dew,

With her white morning robe flitting joyously
through

The dark shrubs with which the soft hillside was
clothed,

Alfred Vargrave perceived, where he paused, his
betrothed.

Matilda sprang to him, at once, with a face
Of such sunny sweetness, such gladness, such grace,
And radiant confidence, childlike delight,

That his whole heart upbraided itself at that sight.
And he murmur'd, or sigh'd, "O, how could I have
stray'd

From this sweet child, or suffer'd in aught to invade
Her young claim on my life, though it were for an
hour,

The thought of another?"

“Look up, my sweet flower!”

He whisper'd her softly, “my heart unto thee
Is return'd, as returns to the rose the wild bee!”

“And will wander no more?” laughed Matilda.

“No more,”

He repeated. And, low to himself, “Yes, 'tis o'er!
My course, too, is decided, Lucile! Was I blind
To have dream'd that these clever Frenchwomen of
mind

Could satisfy simply a plain English heart,
Or sympathize with it?”

XXIV.

And here the first part
Of the drama is over. The curtain falls furl'd
On the actors within it—the Heart, and the World.
Woo'd and wooer have play'd with the riddle of
life,—

Have they solved it?

Appear! answer, Husband and Wife?

XXV.

Yet, ere bidding farewell to Lucile de Nevers,
Hear her own heart's farewell in this letter of hers.

THE COMTESSE DE NEVERS TO A FRIEND IN INDIA.

“Once more, O my friend, to your arms and your
heart,

And the places of old . . . never, never to part!
Once more to the palm, and the fountain! Once
more

To the land of my birth, and the deep skies of yore
From the cities of Europe, pursued by the fret
Of their turmoil wherever my footsteps are set ;
From the children that cry for the birth, and behold,
There is no strength to bear them — old Time is so
old !

From the world's weary masters, that come upon
earth

Sapp'd and mined by the fever they bear from their
birth :

From the men of small stature, mere parts of a
crowd,

Born too late, when the strength of the world hath
been bow'd :

Back, — back to the Orient, from whose sunbright
womb

Sprang the giants which now are no more, in the
bloom

And the beauty of times that are faded forever !

To the palms ! to the tombs ! to the still Sacred
River !

Where I too, the child of a day that is done,

First leaped into life, and look'd up at the sun,

Back again, back again, to the hill-tops of home

I come. O my friend, my consoler, I come !

Are the three intense stars, that we watch'd night
by night

Burning broad on the band of Orion, as bright ?

Are the large Indian moons as serene as of old,

When, as children, we gather'd the moonbeams
for gold ?

Do you yet recollect me, my friend? Do you still
Remember the free games we play'd on the hill,
'Mid those huge stones up-heav'd, where we reck-
lessly trod

O'er the old ruin'd fane of the old ruin'd god?
How he frown'd while around him we carelessly
play'd!

That frown on my life ever after hath stay'd,
Like the shade of a solemn experience upcast
From some vague supernatural grief in the past.
For the poor god, in pain, more than anger, he
frown'd,

To perceive that our youth, though so fleeting, had
found,

In its transient and ignorant gladness, the bliss
Which his science divine seem'd divinely to miss.

Alas! you may haply remember me yet
The free child, whose glad childhood myself I for-
get.

I come — a sad woman, defrauded of rest:

I bear to you only a laboring breast:

My heart is a storm-beaten ark, wildly hurl'd
O'er the whirlpools of time, with the wrecks of a
world:

The dove from my bosom hath flown far away:
It is flown and returns not, though many a day
Have I watch'd from the windows of life for its
coming.

Friend, I sigh for repose, I am weary of roaming.

I know not what Ararat rises for me

Far away, o'er the waves of the wandering sea:

I know not what rainbow may yet, from far hills,
Lift the promise of hope, the cessation of ills :
But a voice, like the voice of my youth, in 'my
breast

Wakes and whispers me on—to the East! to the
East!

Shall I find the child's heart that I left there? or
find

The lost youth I recall with its pure peace of
mind?

Alas! who shall number the drops of the rain?

Or give to the dead leaves their greenness again?

Who shall seal up the caverns the earthquake hath
rent?

Who shall bring forth the winds that within them
are pent?

To a voice who shall render an image? or who

From the heats of the noontide shall gather the
dew?

I have burn'd out within me the fuel of life.

Wherefore lingers the flame? Rest is sweet after
strife.

I would sleep for a while. I am weary.

“ My friend,

I had meant in these lines to regather, and send

To our old home, my life's scatter'd links. But 'tis
vain!

Each attempt seems to shatter the chaplet again ;

Only fit now for fingers like mine to run o'er,

Who return, a recluse, to those cloisters of yore

Whence too far I have wander'd.

“ How many long years

Does it seem to me now since the quick, scorching
tears,

While I wrote to you, splash'd out a girl's premature
Moans of pain at what women in silence endure !

To your eyes, friend of mine, and to your eyes
alone,

That now long-faded page of my life hath been
shown

Which recorded my heart's birth, and death, as you
know,

Many years since, — how many !

“ A few months ago
I seem'd reading it backward, that page ! Why ex-
plain

Whence or how? The old dream of my life rose
again.

The old superstition ! the idol of old !

It is over. The leaf trodden down in the mould

Is not to the forest more lost than to me

That emotion. I bury it here by the sea

Which will bear me anon far away from the shore

Of a land which my footsteps will visit no more.

And a heart's *requiescat* I write on that grave.

Hark ! the sigh of the wind, and the sound of the
wave,

Seem like voices of spirits that whisper me home !

I come, O you whispering voices, I come !

My friend, ask me nothing.

“ Receive me alone

As a Santon receives to his dwelling of stone

In silence some pilgrim the midnight may bring :
 It may be an angel that, weary of wing,
 Hath paused in his flight from some city of doom,
 Or only a wayfarer stray'd in the gloom.
 This only I know : that in Europe at least
 Lives the craft or the power that must master our
 East.

Wherefore strive where the gods must themselves
 yield at last?

Both they and their altars pass by with the Past.
 The gods of the household Time thrusts from the
 shelf ;

And I seem as unreal and weird to myself
 As those idols of old.

 “ Other times, other men,
 Other men, other passions !

 “ So be it ! yet again
 I turned to my birthplace, the birthplace of morn,
 And the light of those lands where the great sun is
 born !

Spread your arms, O my friend ! on your breast let
 me feel

The repose which hath fled from my own.

 “ Your LUCILE.”

PART II.

CANTO I.

I.

HAIL, Muse! But each Muse by this time has, I
know,
Been used up, and Apollo has bent his own bow
All too long; so I leave unassaulted the portal
Of Olympus, and only invoke here a mortal.

Hail, Murray!—not Lindley,—but Murray and
Son.

Hail, omniscient, beneficent, great Two-in-One!
In Albermarle Street may thy temple long stand!
Long enlighten'd and led by thine erudite hand,
May each novice in science nomadic unravel
Statistical mazes of modernized travel!
May each inn-keeper knave long thy judgment re-
vere,
And the postboys of Europe regard thee with fear;
While they feel, in the silence of baffled extortion,
That knowledge is power! Long, long, like that
portion

Of the national soil which the Greek exile took
 In his baggage wherever he went, may thy book
 Cheer each poor British pilgrim, who trusts to thy
 wit

Not to pay through his nose just for following it !
 May'st thou long, O instructor ! preside o'er his
 way,

And teach him alike what to praise and to pay !
 Thee, pursuing this pathway of song, once again
 I invoke, lest, unskill'd, I should wander in vain.
 To my call be propitious, nor, churlish, refuse
 Thy great accents to lend to the lips of my Muse ;
 For I sing of the Naiads who dwell 'mid the stems
 Of the green linden-trees by the waters of Ems.
 Yes ! thy spirit descends upon mine, O John Murray !
 And I start — with thy book — for the Baths in a
 hurry.

II.

“ At Coblentz a bridge of boats crosses the Rhine ;
 And from thence the road, winding by Ehrenbreit-
 stein,

Passes over the frontier of Nassua.

(“ N. B.

No custom-house here since the Zollverein.” See
 Murray, paragraph 30.)

“ The route, at each turn,
 Here the lover of nature allows to discern,
 In varying prospect, a rich wooded dale :
 The vine and acacia-tree mostly prevail
 In the foliage observable here : and, moreover,
 The soil is carbonic. The road, under cover

Of the grape-clad and mountainous upland that hems
Round this beautiful spot, brings the traveller
to — “ EMS.

A Schnellpost from Frankfort arrives every day.
At the Kurhaus (the old Ducal mansion) you pay
Eight florins for lodgings. A Restaurateur
Is attach'd to the place; but most travellers prefer
(Including, indeed, many persons of note)
To dine at the usual-priced table d'hôte.
Through the town runs the Lahn, the steep green
banks of which

Two rows of white picturesque houses enrich;
And between the high road and the river is laid
Out a sort of a garden, call'd 'THE Promenade.'
Female visitors here, who may make up their mind
To ascend to the top of these mountains, will find
On the banks of the stream, saddled all the day long,
Troops of donkeys — sure-footed — proverbially
strong;”

And the traveller at Ems may remark, as he passes,
Here, as elsewhere, the women run after the asses.

III.

'Mid the world's weary denizens bound for these
springs
In the month when the merle on the maple-bough
sings,
Pursued to the place from dissimilar paths
By a similar sickness, there came to the Baths
Four sufferers — each stricken deep through the
heart,

Or the head, by the self-same invisible dart
 Of the arrow that flieth unheard in the noon,
 From the sickness that walketh unseen in the moon,
 Through this great lazaretto of life, wherein each
 Infects with his own sores the next within reach.
 First of these were a young English husband and
 wife,

Grown weary ere half through the journey of life.
 O Nature, say where, thou gray mother of earth,
 Is the strength of thy youth ? that thy womb brings
 to birth

Only old men to-day ! On the winds, as of old,
 Thy voice in its accent is joyous and bold ;
 Thy forests are green as of yore ; and thine oceans
 Yet move in the might of their ancient emotions :
 But man — thy last birth and thy best — is no more
 Life's free lord, that look'd up to the starlight of yore,
 With the faith on the brow, and the fire in the eyes,
 The firm foot on the earth, the high heart in the
 skies :

But a gray-headed infant, defrauded of youth,
 Born too late or too early.

The lady, in truth,
 Was young, fair, and gentle ; and never was given
 To more heavenly eyes the pure azure of heaven.
 Never yet did the sun touch to ripples of gold
 Tresses brighter than those which her soft hand un-
 roll'd

From her noble and innocent brow, when she rose,
 An Aurora, at dawn, from her balmy repose,
 And into the mirror the bloom and the blush

Of her beauty broke, glowing ; like light in a gush
From the sunrise in summer.

Love, roaming, shall meet
But rarely a nature more sound or more sweet —
Eyes brighter — brows whiter — a figure more fair —
Or lovelier lengths of more radiant hair —
Than thine, Lady Alfred ! And here I aver
(May those that have seen thee declare if I err)
That not all the oysters in Britain contain
A pearl pure as thou art.

Let some one explain, —
Who may know more than I of the intimate life
Of the pearl with the oyster, — why yet in his wife,
In despite of her beauty — and most when he felt
His soul to the sense of her loveliness melt —
Lord Alfred miss'd something he sought for : indeed,
The more that he miss'd it the greater the need ;
Till it seem'd to himself he could willingly spare
All the charms that he found for the one charm not
there.

IV.

For the blessings Life lends us, it strictly demands
The worth of their full usufruct at our hands.
And the value of all things exists, not indeed
In themselves, but man's use of them, feeding man's
need.

Alfred Vargrave, in wedding with beauty and youth,
Had embraced both Ambition and Wealth. Yet in
truth
Unfulfill'd the ambition, and sterile the wealth
(In a life paralyzed by a moral ill-health),

Had remain'd, while the beauty and youth, unre-
 deem'd
 From a vague disappointment at all things, but
 seem'd
 Day by day to reproach him in silence for all
 That lost youth in himself they had fail'd to recall.
 No career had he follow'd, no object obtain'd
 In the world by those worldly advantages gain'd
 From nuptials beyond which once seem'd to appear,
 Lit by love, the broad path of a brilliant career.
 All that glitter'd and gleam'd through the moonlight
 of youth
 With a glory so fair, now that manhood in truth
 Grasp'd and gather'd it, seem'd like that false fairy
 gold
 Which leaves in the hand only moss, leaves, and
 mould!

v.

Fairy gold! moss and leaves! and the young Fairy
 Bride?
 Lived there yet fairy-lands in the face at his side?
 Say, O friend, if at evening thou ever hast watch'd
 Some pale and impalpable vapor, detach'd
 From the dim and disconsolate earth, rise and fall
 O'er the light of a sweet serene star, until all
 The chill'd splendor reluctantly waned in the deep
 Of its own native heaven? Even so seem'd to creep
 O'er that fair and ethereal face, day by day,
 While the radiant vermeil, subsiding away,
 Hid its light in the heart, the faint gradual veil
 Of a sadness unconscious.

The lady grew pale

As silent her lord grew : and both, as they eyed
Each the other askance, turn'd, and secretly sigh'd.
Ah, wise friend, what avails all experience can
give?

True, we know what life is — but, alas ! do we live?
The grammar of life we have gotten by heart,
But life's self we have made a dead language — an
art,

Not a voice. Could we speak it, but once, as 'twas
spoken

When the silence of passion the first time was
broken !

Cuvier knew the world better than Adam, no doubt ;
But the last man, at best, was but learn'd about
What the first, without learning, *enjoyed*. What
art thou

To the man of to-day, O Leviathan, now?

A science. What wert thou to him that from ocean
First beheld thee appear ? A surprise, — an emo-
tion !

When life leaps in the veins, when it beats in the
heart,

When it thrills as it fills every animate part,
Where lurks it? how works it? . . . We scarcely
detect it.

But life goes : the heart dies : haste, O leech, and
dissect it !

This accursèd æsthetic, ethical age
Hath so finger'd life's hornbook, so blurr'd every
page,

That the old glad romance, the gay chivalrous story
 With its fables of faery, its legends of glory,
 Is turn'd to a tedious instruction, not new
 To the children that read it insipidly through.
 We know too much of Love ere we love. We can
 trace

Nothing new, unexpected, or strange in his face
 When we see it at last. 'Tis the same little Cupid,
 With the same dimpled cheek, and the smile almost
 stupid,

We have seen in our pictures, and stuck on our
 shelves,

And copied a hundred times over, ourselves,
 And wherever we turn, and whatever we do,
 Still, that horrible sense of the *déjà connu*!

VI.

Perchance 'twas the fault of the life that they led ;
 Perchance 'twas the fault of the novels they read ;
 Perchance 'twas a fault in themselves : I am bound not
 To say : this I know — that these two creatures found
 not

In each other some sign they expected to find
 Of a something unnamed in the heart or the mind ;
 And, missing it, each felt a right to complain
 Of a sadness which each found no word to explain.
 Whatever it was, the world noticed not it
 In the light-hearted beauty, the light-hearted wit.
 Still, as once with the actors in Greece, 'tis the case,
 Each must speak to the crowd with a mask on his
 face.

Praise follow'd Matilda wherever she went.
 She was flatter'd. Can flattery purchase content?
 Yes. While to its voice for a moment she listen'd,
 The young cheek still bloom'd and the soft eyes
 still glisten'd ;
 And her lord, when, like one of those light vivid
 things
 That glide down the gauzes of summer with wings
 Of rapturous radiance, unconscious she moved
 Through that buzz of inferior creatures, which proved
 Her beauty, their envy, one moment forgot,
 'Mid the many charms there, the one charm that
 was not :
 And when o'er her beauty enraptured he bow'd,
 (As they turn'd to each other, each flush'd from the
 crowd,)
 And murmur'd those praises which yet seem'd more
 dear
 Than the praises of others had grown to her ear,
 She, too, ceased awhile her own fate to regret :
 "Yes! . . . he loves me," she sigh'd ; "this is
 love, then — and *yet!*"

VII.

Ah, that *yet!* fatal word! 'tis the moral of all
 Thought and felt, seen or done, in this world since
 the Fall!
 It stands at the end of each sentence we learn ;
 It flits in the vista of all we discern ;
 It leads us, forever and ever, away
 To find in to-morrow what flies with to-day.

'Twas the same little fatal and mystical word
 That now, like a mirage, led my lady and lord
 To the waters of Ems from the waters of Marah;
 Drooping Pilgrims in Fashion's blank, arid Sahara!

VIII.

At the same time, pursued by a spell much the same,
 To these waters two other worn pilgrims there came:
 One a man, one a woman: just now, at the latter,
 As the Reader I mean by and by to look at her
 And judge for himself, I will not even glance.

IX.

Of the self-crown'd young kings of the Fashion in
 France
 Whose resplendent regalia so dazzled the sight,
 Whose horse was so perfect, whose boots were so
 bright,
 Who so hail'd in the salon, so mark'd in the Bois,
 Who so welcomed by all, as Eugène de Luvois?
 Of all the smooth-brow'd premature debauchees
 In that town of all towns, where Debauchery sees
 On the forehead of youth her mark everywhere
 graven, —
 In Paris I mean, — where the streets are all paven
 By those two fiends whom Milton saw bridging the
 way
 From Hell to this planet, — who, haughty and gay,
 The free rebel of life, bound or led by no law,
 Walk'd that causeway as bold as Eugene de Luvois?

Yes! he march'd through the great masquerade,
 loud of tongue,
 Bold of brow : but the motley he mask'd in, it hung
 So loose, trail'd so wide, and appear'd to impede
 So strangely at times the vex'd effort at speed,
 That a keen eye might guess it was made — not for
 him,
 But some brawler more stalwart of stature and limb.
 That it irk'd him, in truth, you at times could divine,
 For when low was the music, and spilt was the
 wine,
 He would clutch at the garment, as though it op-
 press'd
 And stifled some impulse that choked in his breast.

X.

What! he, . . . the light sport of his frivolous ease!
 Was he, too, a prey to a mortal disease?
 My friend, hear a parable : ponder it well :
 For a moral there is in the tale that I tell.
 One evening I sat in the Palais Royal,
 And there, while I laugh'd at Grassot and Arnal,
 My eye fell on the face of a man at my side ;
 Every time that he laugh'd I observed that he sigh'd,
 As though vex'd to be pleased. I remark'd that he
 sat
 Ill at ease on his seat, and kept twirling his hat
 In his hand, with a look of unquiet abstraction.
 I inquired the cause of his dissatisfaction.
 “ Sir,” he said, “ if what vexes me here you would
 know,

Learn that, passing this way some few half-hours
ago,

I walk'd into the Français, to look at Rachel.

(Sir, that woman in Phèdre is a miracle!) — Well,

I ask'd for a box: they were occupied all:

For a seat in the balcony: all taken! a stall:

Taken too: the whole house was as full as could
be, —

Not a hole for a rat! I had just time to see

The lady I love *tête-à-tête* with a friend

In a box out of reach at the opposite end:

Then the crowd push'd me out. What was left me
to do?

I tried for the tragedy . . . *que voulez-vous?*

Every place for the tragedy book'd! . . . *mon ami.*

The farce was close by: . . . at the farce *me voici!*

The piece is a new one: and Grassot plays well:

There is drollery, too, in that fellow Ravel:

And Hyacinth's nose is superb: . . . yet I meant

My evening elsewhere, and not thus to have spent.

Fate orders these things by her will, not by ours!

Sir, mankind is the sport of invisible powers."

I once met the Duc de Luvois for a moment;

And I mark'd, when his features I fix'd in my com-
ment,

O'er those features the same vague disquietude
stray

I had seen on the face of my friend at the play;

And I thought that he too, very probably, spent

His evenings not wholly as first he had meant.

XI.

O source of the holiest joys we inherit,
O Sorrow, thou solemn, invisible spirit!
Ill fares it with man when, through life's desert
 sand,
Grown impatient too soon for the long-promised
 land,
He turns from the worship of thee, as thou art,
An expressless and imageless truth in the heart,
And takes of the jewels of Egypt, the pelf
And the gold of the Godless, to make to himself
A gaudy, idolatrous image of thee,
And then bows to the sound of the cymbal the knee.
The sorrows we make to ourselves are false gods:
Like the prophets of Baal, our bosoms with rods
We may smite, we may gash at our hearts till they
 bleed,
But these idols are blind, deaf, and dumb to our
 need.
The land is athirst, and cries out! . . . 'tis in vain;
The great blessing of Heaven descends not in rain.

XII.

It was night; and the lamps were beginning to
 gleam
Through the long linden-trees, folded each in his
 dream,
From that building which looks like a temple . . .
 and is
The Temple of — Health? Nay, but enter! I wis

That never the rosy-hued deity knew
 One votary out of that sallow-cheek'd crew
 Of Courlanders, Wallacs, Greeks, affable Russians,
 Explosive Parisians, potato-faced Prussians :
 Jews — Hamburghers chiefly ; — pure patriots, —
 Suabians ; —
 .. Cappadocians and Elamites, Cretes and Arabians,
 And the dwellers in Pontus" . . . My muse will
 not weary
 More lines with the list of them . . . *cur fremuere?*
 What is it they murmur, and mutter, and hum?
 Into what Pandemonium is Pentecost come?
 Oh, what is the name of the god at whose fane
 Every nation is mix'd in so motley a train?
 What weird Kabala lies on those tables outspread?
 To what oracle turns with attention each head?
 What holds these pale worshippers each so devout,
 And what are those hierophants busied about?

XIII.

Here passes, repasses, and flits to and fro.
 And rolls without ceasing the great Yes and No :
 Round this altar alternate the weird Passions dance,
 And the God worshipp'd here is the old God of
 Chance.
 Through the wide-open doors of the distant saloon
 Flute, hautboy, and fiddle are squeaking in tune ;
 And an indistinct music forever is roll'd,
 That mixes and chimes with the chink of the gold,
 From a vision, that flits in a luminous haze,
 Of figures forever eluding the gaze ;

It fleets through the doorway, it gleams on the glass,
 And the weird words pursue it— *Rouge, Impair, et
 Passe!*

Like a sound borne in sleep through such dreams
 as encumber

With haggard emotions the wild wicked slumber
 Of some witch when she seeks, through a night-
 mare, to grab at

The hot hoof of the fiend, on her way to the Sabbat.

XIV.

The Duc de Luvois and Lord Alfred had met
 Some few evenings ago (for the season as yet
 Was but young) in this selfsame Pavilion of Chance.
 The idler from England, the idler from France,
 Shook hands, each, of course, with much cordial
 pleasure :

An acquaintance at Ems is to most men a treasure,
 And they both were too well-bred in aught to betray
 One discourteous remembrance of things pass'd
 away.

'Twas a sight that was pleasant, indeed, to be seen,
 These friends exchange greetings ;— the men who
 had been

Foes so nearly in days that were past.

This, no doubt,

Is why, on the night I am speaking about,
 My Lord Alfred sat down by himself at roulette,
 Without one suspicion his bosom to fret,
 Although he had left, with his pleasant French friend,
 Matilda, half vex'd, at the room's farthest end.

XV.

Lord Alfred his combat with Fortune began
 With a few modest thalers — away they all ran —
 The reserve follow'd fast in the rear. As his purse
 Grew lighter his spirits grew sensibly worse.
 One needs not a Bacon to find a cause for it:
 'Tis an old law in physics — *Natura abhorret*
vacuum — and my lord, as he watch'd his last
 crown
 Tumble into the bank, turn'd away with a frown
 Which the brows of Napoleon himself might have
 deck'd
 On that day of all days when an empire was wreck'd
 On thy plain, Waterloo, and he witness'd the last
 Of his favorite Guard cut to pieces, aghast!
 Just then Alfred felt, he could scarcely tell why,
 Within him the sudden strange sense that some
 eye
 Had long been intently regarding him there, —
 That some gaze was upon him too searching to bear.
 He rose and look'd up. Was it fact? Was it fable?
 Was it dream? Was it waking? Across the green
 table,
 That face, with its features so fatally known —
 Those eyes, whose deep gaze answer'd strangely his
 own —
 What was it? Some ghost from its grave come
 again?
 Some cheat of a feverish, fanciful brain?
 Or was it herself — with those deep eyes of hers,
 And that face unforgotten? — Lucile de Nevers!

XVI.

Ah, well that pale woman a phantom might seem,
Who appear'd to herself but the dream of a dream!
'Neath those features so calm, that fair forehead so
hush'd,

That pale cheek forever by passion unflush'd,
There yawn'd an insatiate void, and there heaved
A tumult of restless regrets unrelieved.

The brief noon of beauty was passing away,
And the chill of the twilight fell, silent and gray,
O'er that deep, self-perceived isolation of soul.
And now, as all around her the dim evening stole,
With its weird desolations, she inwardly grieved
For the want of that tender assurance received
From the warmth of a whisper, the glance of an eye,
Which should say, or should look, "Fear thou
naught, — *I am by!*"

And thus, through that lonely and self-fix'd exist-
ence,
Crept a vague sense of silence, and horror, and
distance:

A strange sort of faint-footed fear, — like a mouse
That comes out, when 'tis dark, in some old ducal
house

Long deserted, where no one the creature can scare,
And the forms on the arras are all that move there.

In Rome, — in the Forum, — there open'd one night
A gulf. All the augurs turn'd pale at the sight.
In this omen the anger of Heaven they read.
Men consulted the gods: then the oracle said: —

“ Ever open this gulf shall endure, till at last
That which Rome hath most precious within it be
cast.”

The Romans threw in it their corn and their stuff,
But the gulf yawn'd as wide. Rome seem'd likely
enough

To be ruin'd ere this rent in her heart she could
choke.

Then Curtius, revering the oracle, spoke :

“ O Quirites ! to this Heaven's question is come :
What to Rome is most precious ? The manhood
of Rome.”

He plunged, and the gulf closed.

The tale is not new ;

But the moral applies many ways, and is true.

How, for hearts rent in twain, shall the curse be
destroy'd ?

'Tis a warm human one that must fill up the void.

Through many a heart runs the rent in the fable ;

But who to discover a Curtius is able ?

XVII.

Back she came from her long hiding-place, at the
source

Of the sunrise : where, fair in their fabulous course,
Run the rivers of Eden : an exile again,

To the cities of Europe — the scenes, and the men,
And the life, and the ways, she had left : still
oppress'd

With the same hungry heart, and unpeaceable
breast.



“The enchanting
Lucile.”

The same, to the same things! The world she had
quitted
With a sigh, with a sigh she re-enter'd. Soon
flitted
Through the salons and clubs, to the great satisfac-
tion
Of Paris, the news of a novel attraction.
The enchanting Lucile, the gay Countess, once
more,
To her old friend, the World, had reopen'd her
door;
The World came, and shook hands, and was
pleased and amused
With what the World then went away and abused.
From the woman's fair fame it in naught could
detract:
'Twas the woman's free genius it vex'd and attack'd
With a sneer at her freedom of action and speech.
But its light careless cavils, in truth, could not
reach
The lone heart they aim'd at. Her tears fell beyond
The world's limit, to feel that the world could
respond
To that heart's deepest, innermost yearning, in
naught,
'Twas no longer this earth's idle inmates she sought:
The wit of the woman sufficed to engage
In the woman's gay court the first men of the age.
Some had genius; and all, wealth of mind to confer
On the world: but that wealth was not lavish'd for
her.

For the genius of man, though so human indeed,
When call'd out to man's help by some great human
 need,

The right to a man's chance acquaintance refuses
To use what it hoards for mankind's nobler uses.
Genius touches the world at but one point alone
Of that spacious circumference, never quite known
To the world; all the infinite number of lines
That radiate thither a mere point combines,
But one only, — some central affection apart
From the reach of the world, in which Genius is
 Heart,

And love, life's fine centre, includes heart and mind,
And therefore it was that Lucile sigh'd to find
Men of genius appear, one and all in her ken,
When they stoop'd themselves to it, as mere clever
 men;

Artists, statesmen, and they in whose works are
 unfurl'd
Worlds new-fashioned for man, as mere men of
 the world.

And so, as alone now she stood, in the sight
Of the sunset of youth, with her face from the light,
And watch'd her own shadow grow long at her feet,
As though stretch'd out, the shade of some *other*
 to meet,

The woman felt homeless and childless: in scorn
She seem'd mock'd by the voices of children
 unborn;

And when from these sombre reflections away
She turn'd, with a sigh, to that gay world, more gay

For her presence within it, she knew herself friend-
 less ;
 That her path led from peace, and that path
 appear'd endless !
 That even her beauty had been but a snare,
 And her wit sharpen'd only the edge of despair.

XVIII.

With a face all transfigured and flush'd by surprise,
 Alfred turn'd to Lucile. With those deep search-
 ing eyes
 She look'd into his own. Not a word that she said,
 Not a look, not a blush, one emotion betray'd.
 She seem'd to smile through him, at something
 beyond :
 When she answer'd his questions, she seem'd to
 respond
 To some voice in herself. With no trouble descried,
 To each troubled inquiry she calmly replied.
 Not so he. At the sight of that face back again
 To his mind came the ghost of a long-stifled pain,
 A remember'd resentment, half check'd by a wild
 And relentful regret like a motherless child
 Softly seeking admittance, with plaintive appeal,
 To the heart which resisted its entrance.

Lucile

And himself thus, however, with freedom allow'd
 To old friends, talking still side by side, left the
 crowd
 By the crowd unobserved. Not unnoticed, how-
 ever,

By the Duke and Matilda. Matilda had never
Seen her husband's new friend.

She had follow'd by chance,
Or by instinct, the sudden half-menacing glance
Which the Duke, when he witness'd their meeting,
had turn'd
On Lucile and Lord Alfred: and, scared, she
discern'd
On his feature the shade of a gloom so profound
That she shudder'd instinctively. Deaf to the
sound
Of her voice, to some startled inquiry of hers
He replied not, but murmur'd, " Lucile de Nevers
Once again then ? so be it ! " In the mind of that
man,
At that moment, there shaped itself vaguely the
plan
Of a purpose malignant and dark, such alone
(To his own secret heart but imperfectly shown)
As could spring from the cloudy, fierce chaos of
thought
By which all his nature to tumult was wrought.

XIX.

" So ! " he thought, " they meet thus : and reweave
the old charm !
And she hangs on his voice, and she leans on his
arm,
And she heeds me not, seeks me not, recks not
of me !
Oh, what if I show'd her that I, too, can be

Loved by one — her own rival — more fair and more
young ?”

The serpent rose in him : a serpent which, stung,
Sought to sting.

Each unconscious, indeed, of the eye
Fix'd upon them, Lucile and my lord saunter'd by,
In converse which seem'd to be earnest. A smile
Now and then seem'd to show where their thoughts
touch'd Meanwhile

The muse of this story, convinced that they need
her,

To the Duke and Matilda returns, gentle Reader.

XX.

The Duke with that sort of aggressive false praise
Which is meant a resentful remonstrance to raise
From a listener (as sometimes a judge, just before
He pulls down the black cap, very gently goes o'er
The case for the prisoner, and deals tenderly
With the man he is minded to hang by and by),
Had referr'd to Lucile, and then stopp'd to detect
In the face of Matilda the growing effect
Of the words he had dropp'd. There's no weapon
that slays

Its victim so surely (if well aim'd) as praise.

Thus, a pause on their converse had fallen : and now
Each was silent, preoccupied, thoughtful.

You know

There are moments when silence, prolong'd and
unbroken,

More expressive may be than all words ever spoken.

It is when the heart has an instinct of what
In the heart of another is passing. And that
In the heart of Matilda, what was it? Whence
came

To her cheek on a sudden that tremulous flame?
What weighed down her head?

All your eye could discover
Was the fact that Matilda was troubled. Moreover
That trouble the Duke's presence seem'd to renew.
She, however, broke silence, the first of the two.
The Duke was too prudent to shatter the spell
Of a silence which suited his purpose so well.
She was plucking the leaves from a pale blush rose
blossom

Which had fall'n from the nosegay she wore in her
bosom.

“This poor flower,” she said, “seems it not out
of place

In this hot, lamplit air, with its fresh, fragile
grace?”

She bent her head low as she spoke. With a smile
The Duke watch'd her caressing the leaves all the
while,

And continued on his side the silence. He knew
This would force his companion their talk to renew
At the point that he wish'd; and Matilda divined
The significant pause with new trouble of mind.
She lifted one moment her head; but her look
Encounter'd the ardent regard of the Duke,
And dropp'd back on her floweret abash'd. Then,
still seeking

The assurance she fancied she show'd him by
speaking,
She conceived herself safe in adopting again
The theme she should most have avoided just then.

XXI.

“Duke,” she said, . . . and she felt, as she spoke,
her cheek burn'd,
“You know, then, this . . . lady?”
“Too well!” he return'd.

MATILDA.

True; you drew with emotion her portrait just now.

LUVOIS.

With emotion?

MATILDA.

Yes, yes! you described her, I know,
As possess'd of a charm all unrivall'd

LUVOIS.

Alas!

You mistook me completely! You, madam, surpass
This lady as moonlight does lamplight; as youth
Surpasses its best imitations; as truth
The fairest of falsehood surpasses; as nature
Surpasses art's masterpiece; ay, as the creature
Fresh and pure in its native adornment surpasses
All the charms got by heart at the world's looking-
glasses!

“ Yet you said,” — she continued with some trepidation,
 “ That you quite comprehended ” . . . a slight
 hesitation
 Shook the sentence, . . . “ a passion so strong
 as ” . . .

LUVOIS.

“ True, true !

But not in a man that had once look'd at you.
 Nor can I conceive, or excuse, or ” . . .

“ Hush, hush ! ”

She broke in, all more fair for one innocent blush.
 “ Between man and woman these things differ so !
 It may be that the world pardons . . . (how should
 I know?)

In you what it visits on us ; or 'tis true,
 It may be that we women are better than you.”

LUVOIS

Who denies it? Yet, madam, once more you mistake.

The world, in its judgment, some difference may
 make

'Twixt the man and the woman, so far as respects
 Its social enchantments ; but not as affects
 The one sentiment which it were easy to prove,
 Is the sole law we look to the moment we love.

MATILDA.

That may be. Yet I think I should be less severe.
 Although so inexperienced in such things, I fear

I have learn'd that the heart cannot always repress
Or account for the feelings which sway it.

“ Yes! yes!

That is too true, indeed!” . . . the Duke sigh'd.

And again

For one moment in silence continued the twain.

XXII.

At length the Duke slowly, as though he had needed
All this time to repress his emotions, proceeded :

“ And yet! . . . what avails, then, to woman the
gift

Of a beauty like yours, if it cannot uplift

Her heart from the reach of one doubt, one despair,

One pang of wrong'd love, to which women less
far

Are exposed, when they love?”

With a quick change of tone,

As though by resentment impell'd, he went on : —

“ The name that you bear, it is whisper'd, you took
From love, not convention. Well, lady, . . . that

look

So excited, so keen, on the face you must know

Throughout all its expressions, — that rapturous
glow,

Those eloquent features — significant eyes —

Which that pale woman sees, yet betrays no sur-
prise,”

(He pointed his hand, as he spoke, to the door,

Fixing with it Lucile and Lord Alfred) . . . “ be-
fore,

Have you ever once seen what just now you may
 view
 In that face so familiar? . . . no, lady, 'tis new.
 Young, lovely, and loving, no doubt, as you are,
 Are you loved?" . . .

XXIII.

He look'd at her — paused — felt if thus far
 The ground held yet. The ardor with which he had
 spoken,

This close, rapid question, thus suddenly broken,
 Inspired in Matilda a vague sense of fear,
 As though some indefinite danger were near.

With composure, however, at once she replied. —
 " 'Tis three years since the day when I first was a
 bride,

And my husband I never had cause to suspect;
 Nor ever have stoop'd, sir, such cause to detect.
 Yet if in his looks or his acts I should see —
 See, or fancy — some moment's oblivion of me,
 I trust that I too should forget it, — for you
 Must have seen that my heart is my husband's."

The hue
 On her cheek, with the effort wherewith to the Duke
 She had uttered this vague and half-frightened re-
 buke,

Was white as the rose in her hand. The last word
 Seem'd to die on her lip, and could scarcely be heard.
 There was silence again.

A great step had been made
 By the Duke in the words he that evening had said.

There, half drown'd by the music, Matilda, that
 night,
 Had listen'd — long listen'd — no doubt, in despite
 Of herself, to a voice she should never have heard,
 And her heart by that voice had been troubled and
 stirr'd.

And so having suffer'd in silence his eye
 To fathom her own, he resumed, with a sigh :

XXIV.

“ Will you suffer me, lady, your thoughts to invade
 By disclosing my own? The position,” he said,
 “ In which we so strangely seem placed may excuse
 The frankness and force of the words which I use.
 You say that your heart is your husband's : You say
 That you love him. You think so, of course, lady
 . . . nay,

Such a love, I admit, were a merit, no doubt.
 But, trust me, no true love there can be without
 Its dread penalty — jealousy.

“ Well, do not start !

Until now, — either thanks to a singular art
 Of supreme self-control, you have held them all down
 Unreveal'd in your heart, — or you never have known
 Even one of those fierce irresistible pangs
 Which deep passion engenders ; that anguish which
 hangs

On the heart like a nightmare, by jealousy bred.
 But if, lady, the love you describe, in the bed
 Of a blissful security thus hath reposed
 Undisturb'd, with mild eyelids on happiness closed,

Were it not to expose to a peril unjust,
And most cruel, that happy repose you so trust,
To meet, to receive, and, indeed, it may be,
For how long I know not, continue to see
A woman whose place rivals yours in the life
And the heart which not only your title of wife,
But also (forgive me!) your beauty alone,
Should have made wholly yours? — You, who gave
all your own!

Reflect! — 'tis the peace of existence you stake
On the turn of a die. And for whose — for his
sake?

While you witness this woman, the false point of
view

From which she must now be regarded by you
Will exaggerate to you, whatever they be,
The charms I admit she possesses. To me
They are trivial indeed; yet to your eyes, I fear
And foresee, they will true and intrinsic appear.
Self-unconscious, and sweetly unable to guess
How more lovely by far is the grace you possess,
You will wrong your own beauty. The graces of
art,

You will take for the natural charm of the heart;
Studied manners, the brilliant and bold repartee,
Will too soon in that fatal comparison be
To your fancy more fair than the sweet timid sense
Which, in shrinking, betrays its own best eloquence.
O then, lady, then, you will feel in your heart
The poisonous pain of a fierce jealous dart!
While you see her, yourself you no longer will see, —

You will hear her, and hear not yourself, — you will
be

Unhappy ; unhappy, because you will deem
Your own power less great than her power will
seem.

And I shall not be by your side, day by day,
In despite of your noble displeasure, to say
‘ You are fairer than she, as the star is more fair
Than the diamond, the brightest that beauty can
wear ! ’ ”

XXV.

This appeal, both by looks and by language, in-
creased

The trouble Matilda felt grow in her breast.

Still she spoke with what calmness she could —

“ Sir, the while

I thank you,” she said, with a faint scornful smile,

“ For your fervor in painting my fancied distress :

Allow me the right some surprise to express

At the zeal you betray in disclosing to me

The possible depth of my own misery.”

“ That zeal would not startle you, madam,” he said,

“ Could you read in my heart, as myself I have
read,

The peculiar interest which causes that zeal — ”

Matilda her terror no more could conceal.

“ Duke,” she answer’d in accents short, cold and
severe,

As she rose from her seat, “ I continue to hear ;

But permit me to say, I no more understand.”

“Forgive!” with a nervous appeal of the hand,
 And a well-feign’d confusion of voice and of look,
 “Forgive, oh, forgive me!” at once cried the Duke.
 “I forgot that you know me so slightly. Your
 leave

I entreat (from your anger those words to retrieve)
 For one moment to speak of myself, — for I think
 That you wrong me — ”

His voice, as in pain, seem’d to sink ;
 And tears in his eyes, as he lifted them, glisten’d.

XXVI.

Matilda, despite of herself, sat and listen’d.

XXVII.

“Beneath an exterior which seems, and may be,
 Worldly, frivolous, careless, my heart hides in me,”
 He continued, “a sorrow which draws me to side
 With all things that suffer. Nay, laugh not,” he
 cried,

“At so strange an avowal.

“I seek at a ball,
 For instance, — the beauty admired by all?
 No! some plain, insignificant creature, who sits
 Scorn’d of course by the beauties, and shunn’d by
 the wits.

All the world is accustom’d to wound, or neglect,
 Or oppress, claims my heart and commands my re-
 spect.

No Quixote, I do not affect to belong,
 I admit, to those charter’d redressers of wrong ;

But I seek to console, where I can. 'Tis a part
 Not brilliant, I own, yet its joys bring no smart."
 These trite words, from the tone which he gave
 them, received

An appearance of truth which might well be believed
 By a heart shrewder yet than Matilda's.

And so
 He continued . . . "O lady! alas, could you know
 What injustice and wrong in this world I have seen!
 How many a woman, believed to have been
 Without a regret, I have known turn aside
 To burst into heartbroken tears undescried!
 On how many a lip have I witness'd the smile
 Which but hid what was breaking the poor heart
 the while!"

Said Matilda, "Your life, it would seem, then,
 must be
 One long act of devotion."

"Perhaps so," said he;
 "But at least that devotion small merit can boast,
 For one day may yet come, — if *one* day at the
 most, —

When, perceiving at last all the difference — how
 great! —

'Twixt the heart that neglects, and the heart that
 can wait,

'Twixt the natures that pity, the natures that pain,
 Some woman, that else might have pass'd in disdain
 Or indifference by me, — in passing *that* day
 Might pause with a word or a smile to repay
 This devotion, — and then" . . .

XXVIII.

To Matilda's relief

At that moment her husband approach'd.

With some grief

I must own that her welcome, perchance, was express'd

The more eagerly just for one twinge in her breast
Of a conscience disturb'd, and her smile not less
warm,

Though she saw the Comtesse de Nevers on his
arm.

The Duke turn'd and adjusted his collar.

Thought he,

“ Good! the gods fight my battle to-night. I foresee

That the family doctor's the part I must play.

Very well! but the patients my visits shall pay.”

Lord Alfred presented Lucile to his wife;

And Matilda, repressing with effort the strife

Of emotions which made her voice shake, murmur'd
low

Some faint, troubled greeting. The Duke, with a
bow

Which betoken'd a distant defiance, replied

To Lucile's startled cry, as surprised she descried

Her former gay wooer. Anon, with the grace

Of that kindness which seeks to win kindness, her
place

She assumed by Matilda, unconscious, perchance,

Or resolved not to notice the half-frighten'd
glance,

That follow'd that movement.

The Duke to his feet
Arose ; and, in silence, relinquish'd his seat.
One must own that the moment was awkward for all ;
But nevertheless, before long, the strange thrall
Of Lucile's gracious tact was by every one felt,
And from each the reserve seem'd, reluctant, to melt ;
Thus, conversing together, the whole of the four
Thro' the crowd saunter'd smiling.

XXIX.

Approaching the door,
Eugène de Luvois, who had fallen behind,
By Lucile, after some hesitation, was join'd.
With a gesture of gentle and kindly appeal,
Which appear'd to imply, without words, " Let us
feel

That the friendship between us in years that are fled,
Has survived one mad moment forgotten," she said :
" You remain, Duke, at Ems ? "

He turn'd on her a look
Of frigid, resentful, and sullen rebuke ;
And then, with a more than significant glance
At Matilda, maliciously answer'd, " Perchance.
I have here an attraction. And you ? " he return'd.
Lucile's eyes had follow'd his own, and discern'd
The boast they implied.

He repeated, " And you ? "
And, still watching Matilda, she answer'd, " I too."
And he thought, as with that word she left him,
she sigh'd.

The next moment her place she resumed by the side
Of Matilda; and they soon shook hands at the gate
Of the selfsame hotel.

XXX.

One depress'd, one elate,
The Duke and Lord Alfred again, thro' the glooms
Of the thick linden alley, return'd to the Rooms.
His cigar each had lighted, a moment before,
At the inn, as they turn'd, arm-in-arm, from the door.
Ems cigars do not cheer a man's spirits, *experto*
(*Me miserum quoties!*) *crede Roberto*.
In silence, awhile, they walk'd onward.

At last

The Duke's thoughts to language half consciously
pass'd.

LUVOIS.

Once more! yet once more!

ALFRED.

What?

LUVOIS.

We meet her, once more,
The woman for whom we two madmen of yore
(Laugh, *mon cher Alfred*, laugh!) were about to
destroy
Each other!

ALFRED.

It is not with laughter that I
Raise the ghost of that once troubled time. Say!
can you
Recall it with coolness and quietude now?

LUIVOIS.

Now? yes! I, *mon cher*, am a true *Parisien*:
 Now, the red revolution, the tocsin, and then
 The dance and the play. I am now at the play.

ALFRED.

At the play, are you now? Then perchance I now
 may
 Presume, Duke, to ask you what, ever until
 Such a moment, I waited . . .

LUIVOIS.

Oh! ask what you will.
Franc jeu! on the table my cards I spread out.
 Ask!

ALFRED.

Duke, you were called to a meeting (no doubt
 You remember it yet) with Lucile. It was night
 When you went; and before you return'd it was light.
 We met: you accosted me then with a brow
 Bright with triumph: your words (you remember
 them now!)
 Were "Let us be friends!"

LUIVOIS.

Well?

ALFRED.

How then, after that
 Can you and she meet as acquaintances?

LUVOIS.

What!

Did she not then, herself, the Comtesse de Nevers,
Solve your riddle to-night with those soft lips of
hers?

ALFRED.

In our converse to-night we avoided the past.
But the question I ask should be answer'd at last:
By you, if you will; if you will not, by her.

LUVOIS.

Indeed? but that question, milord, can it stir
Such an interest in you, if your passion be o'er?

ALFRED.

Yes. Esteem may remain, although love be no
more.

Lucile ask'd me, this night, to my wife (understand,
To *my wife!*) to present her. I did so. Her hand
Has clasp'd that of Matilda. We gentlemen owe
Respect to the name that is ours: and, if so,
To the woman that bears it a twofold respect.

Answer, Duc de Luvois! Did Lucile then reject
The proffer you made of your hand and your name?
Or did you on her love then relinquish a claim
Urged before? I ask bluntly this question, because
My title to do so is clear by the laws

That all gentlemen honor. Make only one sign
That you know of Lucile de Nevers aught, in fine,
For which, if your own virgin sister were by,

From Lucile you would shield her acquaintance,
 and I
 And Matilda leave Ems on the morrow.

XXXI.

The Duke

Hesitated and paused. He could tell, by the look
 Of the man at his side, that he meant what he said,
 And there flash'd in a moment these thoughts through
 his head :

“ Leave Ems ! would that suit me ? no ! that were
 again

To mar all. And besides, if I do not explain,
 She herself will . . . *et puis, il a raison : on est
 Gentilhomme avant tout !*” He replied therefore,

“ Nay !

Madame de Nevers had rejected me. I,

In those days, I was mad ; and in some mad reply
 I threatened the life of the rival to whom

That rejection was due, I was led to presume.

She fear'd for his life ; and the letter which then

She wrote me, I show'd you ; we met : and again

My hand was refused, and my love was denied,

And the glance you mistook was the vizard which

Pride

Lends to Humiliation. *

“ And so,” half in jest,

He went on, “ in this best world, 'tis all for the
 best ;

You are wedded (bless'd Englishman !) wedded to
 one

Whose past can be called into question by none :
 And I (fickle Frenchman !) can still laugh to feel
 I am lord of myself, and the Mode : and Lucile
 Still shines from her pedestal, frigid and fair
 As yon German moon o'er the linden-tops there !
 A Dian in marble that scorns any troth
 With the little love gods, whom I thank for us
 both,
 While she smiles from her lonely Olympus apart,
 That her arrows are marble as well as her heart.
 Stay at Ems, Alfred Vargrave ! ”

XXXII.

 The Duke, with a smile,
 Turn'd and enter'd the Rooms which, thus talking,
 meanwhile,
 They had reach'd.

XXXIII.

 Alfred Vargrave strode on (overthrown
 Heart and mind !) in the darkness bewilder'd, alone :
 “ And so,” to himself did he mutter, “ and so
 'Twas to rescue my life, gentle spirit ! and, oh,
 For this did I doubt her ? . . . a light word — a
 look —
 The mistake of a moment ! . . . for this I forsook —
 For this ? Pardon, pardon, Lucile ! O Lucile ! ”
 Thought and memory rang, like a funeral peal,
 Weary changes on one dirge-like note through his
 brain,
 As he stray'd down the darkness.

XXXIV.

Re-entering again

The Casino, the Duke smiled. He turned to
roulette,

And sat down, and play'd fast, and lost largely, and
yet

He still smiled: night deepen'd: he play'd his last
number:

Went home: and soon slept: and still smil'd in his
slumber.

XXXV.

In his desolate Maxims, La Rochefoucauld wrote,
"In the grief or mischance of a friend you may
note,

There is something which always gives pleasure."

Alas!

That reflection fell short of the truth as it was.

La Rochefoucauld might have as truly set down —

"No misfortune, but what some one turns to his
own

Advantage its mischief: no sorrow, but of it

There ever is somebody ready to profit:

No affliction without its stock-jobbers, who all

Gamble, speculate, play on the rise and the fall

Of another man's heart, and make traffic in it."

Burn thy book, O La Rochefoucauld!

Fool! one man's wit

All men's selfishness how should it fathom?

O sage,

Dost thou satirize Nature?

She laughs at thy page.

CANTO II.

I.

COUSIN JOHN TO COUSIN ALFRED.

“ London, 18—

“ My dear Alfred,

Your last letters put me in pain.
This contempt of existence, this listless disdain
Of your own life, — its joys and its duties, — the
deuce
Take my wits if they find for it half an excuse!
I wish that some Frenchman would shoot off your
leg,
And compel you to stump through the world on a
peg.
I wish that you had, like myself (more's the pity!),
To sit seven hours on this cursed committee.
I wish that you knew, sir, how salt is the bread
Of another — (what is it that Dante has said?)
And the trouble of other men's stairs. In a word,
I wish fate had some real affliction conferr'd
On your whimsical self, that, at least, you had cause
For neglecting life's duties, and damning its laws!
This pressure against all the purpose of life,
This self-ebullition, and ferment, and strife,
Betoken'd, I grant that it may be in truth,
The richness and strength of the new wine of youth.

But if, when the wine should have mellow'd with
time,

Being bottled and binn'd, to a flavor sublime,

It retains the same acrid, incongruous taste,

Why, the sooner to throw it away that we haste

The better, I take it. And this vice of snarling,

Self-love's little lapdog, the overfed darling

Of a hypochondriacal fancy appears,

To my thinking, at least, in a man of your years,

At the midnight of manhood with plenty to do,

And every incentive for doing it too,

With the duties of life just sufficiently pressing

For prayer, and of joys more than most men for
blessing ;

With a pretty young wife, and a pretty full purse,

Like poltroonery, puerile truly, or worse !

I wish I could get you at least to agree

To take life as it is, and consider with me,

If it be not all smiles, that it is not all sneers ;

It admits honest laughter, and needs honest tears.

Do you think none have known but yourself all the
pain

Of hopes that retreat, and regrets that remain ?

And all the wide distance fate fixes, no doubt,

'Twixt the life that's within, and the life that's with-
out ?

What one of us finds the world just as he likes ?

Or gets what he wants when he wants it ? Or strikes

Without missing the thing that he strikes at the
first ?

Or walks without stumbling ? Or quenches his thirst

At one draught? Bah! I tell you! I, bachelor
John,

Have had griefs of my own. But what then? I
push on

All the faster perchance that I yet feel the pain
Of my last fall, albeit I may stumble again.

God means every man to be happy, be sure.

He sends us no sorrows that have not some cure.

Our duty down here is to do, not to know.

Live as though life were earnest, and life will be so.

Let each moment, like Time's last ambassador,
come :

It will wait to deliver its message ; and some

Sort of answer it merits. It is not the deed

A man does, but the way that he does it, should
plead

For the man's compensation in doing it.

“ Here,

My next neighbor's a man with twelve thousand a
year,

Who deems that life has not a pastime more pleasant
Than to follow a fox, or to slaughter a pheasant.

Yet this fellow goes through a contested election,

Lives in London, and sits, like the soul of dejection,

All the day through upon a committee, and late

To the last, every night, through the dreary debate,

As though he were getting each speaker by heart,

Though amongst them he never presumes to take
part.

One asks himself why, without murmur or question,

He foregoes all his tastes, and destroys his digestion,

For a labor of which the result seems so small.
 ‘The man is ambitious,’ you say. Not at all.
 He has just sense enough to be fully aware
 That he never can hope to be Premier, or share
 The renown of a Tully; — or even to hold
 A subordinate office. He is not so bold
 As to fancy the House for ten minutes would bear
 With patience his modest opinions to hear.
 ‘But he wants something!’

“What! with twelve thousand a year?
 What could Government give him would be half so
 dear

To his heart as a walk with a dog and a gun
 Through his own pheasant woods, or a capital run?
 ‘No; but vanity fills out the emptiest brain;
 The man would be more than his neighbor, ’tis
 plain;

And the drudgery drearily gone through in towe.
 Is more than repaid by provincial renown.
 Enough if some Marchioness, lively and loose,
 Shall have eyed him with passing complaisance; the
 goose,

If the Fashion to him open one of its doors,
 As proud as a sultan returns to his boors.’
 Wrong again! if you think so,

“For, *primo*; my friend
 Is the head of a family known from one end
 Of his shire to the other as the oldest; and there-
 fore

He despises fine lords and fine ladies. *He* care for
 A peerage? no truly! *Secondo*; he rarely

Or never goes out: dines at Bellamy's sparsely,
And abhors what you call the gay world.

“ Then, I ask,
What inspires, and consoles, such a self-imposed task
As the life of this man, — but the sense of its duty?
And I swear that the eyes of the haughtiest beauty
Have never inspired in my soul that intense,
Reverential, and loving, and absolute sense
Of heart-felt admiration I feel for this man,
As I see him beside me; — there, wearing the wan
London daylight away, on his humdrum committee;
So unconscious of all that awakens my pity,
And wonder — and worship, I might say?

“ To me
There seems something nobler than genius to be
In that dull patient labor no genius relieves,
That absence of all joy which yet never grieves;
The humility of it! the grandeur withal!
The sublimity of it! And yet, should you call
The man's own very slow apprehension to this,
He would ask, with a stare, what sublimity is!
His work is the duty to which he was born:
He accepts it, without ostentation or scorn:
And this man is no uncommon type (I thank
Heaven!)
Of this land's common men. In all other lands,
even
The type's self is wanting. Perchance, 'tis the
reason
That Government oscillates ever 'twixt treason
And tyranny elsewhere.

“ I wander away

Too far, though, from what I was wishing to say.
You, for instance, read Plato. You know that the
soul

Is immortal; and put this in rhyme, on the whole,
Very well, with sublime illustration. Man's heart
Is a mystery, doubtless. You trace it in art: —
The Greek Psyche, — that's beauty, — the perfect
ideal.

But then comes the imperfect, perfectible real,
With its pain'd aspiration and strife. In those pale
Ill-drawn virgins of Giotto you see it prevail.
You have studied all this. Then, the universe, too,
Is not a mere house to be lived in, for you.
Geology opens the mind. So you know
Something also of strata and fossils; these show
The bases of cosmical structure: some mention
Of the nebulous theory demands your attention;
And so on.

“ In short, it is clear the interior
Of your brain, my dear Alfred, is vastly superior
In fibre, and fulness, and function, and fire,
To that of my poor parliamentary squire;
But your life leaves upon me (forgive me this heat
Due to friendship) the sense of a thing incomplete.
You fly high. But what is it, in truth, you fly at?
My mind is not satisfied quite as to that.
An old illustration's as good as a new,
Provided the old illustration be true.
We are children. Mere kites are the fancies we fly,
Though we marvel to see them ascending so high;

Things slight in themselves, — long-tail'd toys, and
no more :

What is it that makes the kite steadily soar
Through the realms where the cloud and the whirl-
wind have birth

But the tie that attaches the kite to the earth?
I remember the lessons of childhood, you see,
And the hornbook I learn'd on my poor mother's
knee.

In truth, I suspect little else do we learn
From this great book of life, which so shrewdly we
turn,

Saving how to apply, with a good or bad grace,
What we learn'd in the hornbook of childhood.

“ Your case

Is exactly in point.

“ Fly your kite, if you please,
Out of sight: let it go where it will, on the breeze;
But cut not the one thread by which it is bound,
Be it never so high, to this poor human ground.
No man is the absolute lord of his life.

You, my friend, have a home, and a sweet and dear
wife.

If I often have sigh'd by my own silent fire,
With the sense of a sometimes recurring desire
For a voice sweet and low, or a face fond and fair,
Some dull winter evening to solace and share
With the love which the world its good children
allows

To shake hands with, — in short, a legitimate
spouse,

This thought has consoled me: ‘At least I have
given

For my own good behavior no hostage to heaven.’
You have, though. Forget it not! faith, if you do,
I would rather break stones on a road than be you.
If any man wilfully injured, or led
That little girl wrong, I would sit on his head,
Even though you yourself were the sinner!

“And this
Leads me back (do not take it, dear cousin, amiss!)
To the matter I meant to have mention’d at once,
But these thoughts put it out of my head for the
nonce.

Of all the preposterous humbugs and shams,
Of all the old wolves ever taken for lambs,
The wolf best received by the flock he devours
Is that uncle-in-law, my dear Alfred, of yours.
At least, this has long been my unsettled conviction,

And I almost would venture at once the prediction
That before very long — but no matter! I trust,
For his sake and our own, that I may be unjust.
But Heaven forgive me, if cautious I am on
The score of such men as with both God and
Mammon
Seem so shrewdly familiar.

“Neglect not this warning.
There were rumors afloat in the City this morning
Which I scarce like the sound of. Who knows?
would he fleece
At a pinch, the old hypocrite, even his own niece?

For the sake of Matilda I cannot importune
 Your attention too early. If all your wife's fortune
 Is yet in the hands of that specious old sinner,
 Who would dice with the devil, and yet rise up
 winner,

I say, lose no time ! get it out of the grab
 Of her trustee and uncle, Sir Ridley McNab.
 I trust those deposits, at least, are drawn out,
 And safe at this moment from danger or doubt.
 A wink is as good as a nod to the wise.

Verbum sap. I admit nothing yet justifies
 My mistrust : but I have in my own mind a notion
 That old Ridley's white waistcoat, and airs of
 devotion,

Have long been the only ostensible capital
 On which he does business. If so, time must sap
 it all.

Sooner or later. Look sharp. Do not wait,
 Draw at once. In a fortnight it may be too late.
 I admit I know nothing. I can but suspect ;
 I give you my notions. Form yours and reflect.
 My love to Matilda. Her mother looks well.
 I saw her last week. I have nothing to tell
 Worth your hearing. We think that the Govern-
 ment here

Will not last our next session. Fitz Funk is a peer,
 You will see by the Times. There are symptoms
 which show

That the ministers now are preparing to go,
 And finish their feast of the loaves and the fishes.
 It is evident that they are clearing the dishes,

And cramming their pockets with bonbons. Your
 news
 Will be always acceptable. Vere, of the Blues,
 Has bolted with Lady Selina. And so
 You have met with that hot-headed Frenchman? I
 know
 That the man is a sad *mauvais sujet*. Take care
 Of Matilda. I wish I could join you both there;
 But before I am free, you are sure to be gone.
 Good-by, my dear fellow. Yours, anxiously,
 JOHN."

II.

This is just the advice I myself would have given
 To Lord Alfred, had I been his cousin, which,
 Heaven
 Be praised, I am not. But it reach'd him indeed
 In an unlucky hour, and received little heed.
 A half-languid glance was the most that he lent
 at
 That time to these homilies. *Primum dementat
 Quem Deus vult perdere*. Alfred in fact
 Was behaving just then in a way to distract
 Job's self had Job known him. The more you'd
 have thought
 The Duke's court to Matilda his eye would have
 caught,
 The more did his aspect grow listless to hers,
 And the more did it beam to Lucile de Nevers.
 And Matilda, the less she found love in the look
 Of her husband, the less did she shrink from the
 Duke.

With each day that pass'd o'er them, they each,
heart from heart,

Woke to feel themselves further and further apart.
More and more of his time Alfred pass'd at the
table ;

Played high ; and lost more than to lose he was able.
He grew feverish, querulous, absent, perverse. —
And here I must mention, what made matters
worse,

That Lucile and the Duke at the selfsame hotel
With the Vargraves resided. It needs not to tell
That they all saw too much of each other. The
weather

Was so fine that it brought them each day all to-
gether

In the garden, to listen, of course, to the band.
The house was a sort of phalanstery ; and
Lucile and Matilda were pleased to discover
A mutual passion for music. Moreover,
The Duke was an excellent tenor ; could sing
“ *Ange si pure* ” in a way to bring down on the
wing

All the angels St. Cicely play'd to. My lord
Would also, at times, when he was not too bored,
Play Beethoven, and Wagner's new music, not ill ;
With some little things of his own, showing skill.
For which reason, as well as for some others too,
Their rooms were a pleasant enough rendezvous.
Did Lucile, then, encourage (the heartless coquette !)
All the mischief she could not but mark ?

Patience yet !

III.

In that garden, an arbor, withdrawn from the sun,
 By laburnum and lilac with blooms overrun,
 Form'd a vault of cool verdure, which made, when
 the heat

Of the noontide hung heavy, a gracious retreat.
 And here, with some friends of their own little world,
 In the warm afternoons, till the shadows uncurl'd
 From the feet of the lindens, and crept through the
 grass,

Their blue hours would this gay little colony pass.
 The men loved to smoke, and the women to bring,
 Undeterr'd by tobacco, their work there, and sing
 Or converse, till the dew fell, and homeward the
 bee

Floated, heavy with honey. Towards eve there was
 tea

(A luxury due to Matilda), and ice,

Fruit and coffee. Ὡς ἔσπερε, πάντα φέρεις!

Such an evening it was, while Matilda presided
 O'er the rustic arrangements thus daily provided,
 With the Duke, and a small German Prince with a
 thick head,

And an old Russian Countess both witty and wicked,
 And two Austrian Colonels, — that Alfred, who yet
 Was lounging alone with his last cigarette,
 Saw Lucile de Nevers by herself pacing slow
 'Neath the shade of the cool linden-trees to and fro,
 And joining her, cried, “ Thank the good stars, we
 meet!

I have so much to say to you!”

“ Yes? . . . ” with her sweet
Serene voice, she replied to him. . . . “ Yes? and

I too

Was wishing, indeed, to say somewhat to you.”

She was paler just then than her wont was. The
sound

Of her voice had within it a sadness profound.

“ You are ill?” he exclaim’d.

“ No ! ” she hurriedly said.

“ No, no ! ”

“ You alarm me ! ”

She droop’d down her head.

“ If your thoughts have of late sought, or cared, to
divine

The purpose of what has been passing in mine,
My farewell can scarcely alarm you.”

ALFRED.

Lucile !

Your farewell ! you go !

LUCILE.

Yes, Lord Alfred.

ALFRED.

Reveal

The cause of this sudden unkindness.

LUCILE.

Unkind?

ALFRED.

Yes ! what else is this parting?

LUCILE.

No, no ! are you blind?
 Look into your own heart and home. Can you see
 No reason for this, save unkindness in me?
 Look into the eyes of your wife — those true eyes,
 Too pure and too honest in aught to disguise
 The sweet soul shining through them.

ALFRED.

Lucile ! (first and last
 Be the word, if you will !) let me speak of the past.
 I know now, alas ! though I know it too late,
 What pass'd at that meeting which settled my fate.
 Nay, nay, interrupt me not yet ! let it be !
 I but say what is due to yourself — due to me,
 And must say it.

He rushed incoherently on,
 Describing how, lately, the truth he had known,
 To explain how, and whence, he had wrong'd her
 before,
 All the complicate coil wound about him of yore,
 All the hopes that had flown with the faith that was
 fled,
 “ And then, O Lucile, what was left me,” he said,
 “ When my life was defrauded of you, but to take
 That life, as 'twas left, and endeavor to make
 Unobserved by another, the void which remain'd
 Unconceal'd to myself? If I have not attain'd,
 I have striven. One word of unkindness has never
 Pass'd my lips to Matilda. Her least wish has ever

Received my submission. And if, of a truth,
 I have fail'd to renew what I felt in my youth,
 I at least have been loyal to what I *do* feel,
 Respect, duty, honor, affection. Lucile,
 I speak not of love now, nor love's long regret :
 I would not offend you, nor dare I forget
 The ties that are round me. But may there not
 be

A friendship yet hallow'd between you and me?
 May we not be yet friends — friends the dearest? ”
 “ Alas ! ”

She replied, “ for one moment, perchance, did it
 pass

Through my own heart, that dream which forever
 hath brought

To those who indulge it in innocent thought
 So fatal an evil awaking ! But no.

For in lives such as ours are, the Dream-tree would
 grow

On the borders of Hades : beyond it, what lies?

The wheel of Ixion, alas ! and the cries

Of the lost and tormented. Departed, for us,

Are the days when with innocence we could discuss
 Dreams like these. Fled, indeed, are the dreams
 of *my* life !

Oh trust me, the best friend you have is your wife.

And I — in that pure child's pure virtue, I bow

To the beauty of virtue. I felt on my brow

Not one blush when I first took her hand. With
 no blush

Shall I clasp it to-night, when I leave you.

“ Hush ! hush !

I would say what I wish'd to have said when you
came.

Do not think that years leave us and find us the
same !

The woman you knew long ago, long ago,
Is no more. You yourself have within you, I know,
The germ of a joy in the years yet to be,
Whereby the past years will bear fruit. As for me,
I go my own way, — onward, upward !

“ O yet,

Let me thank you for that which ennobled regret
When it came, as it beautified hope ere it fled, —
The love I once felt for you. True, it is dead,
But it is not corrupted. I too have at last
Lived to learn that love is not — such love as is
past,

Such love as youth dreams of at least) — the sole
part

Of life, which is able to fill up the heart ;
Even that of a woman.

“ Between you and me

Heaven fixes a gulf, over which you must see
That our guardian angels can bear us no more.
We each of us stand on an opposite shore.
Trust a woman's opinion for once. Women learn,
By an instinct men never attain, to discern
Each other's true natures. Matilda is fair,
Matilda is young — see her now, sitting there ! —
How tenderly fashion'd — (oh, is she not ? say,)
To love and be loved !”

IV.

He turn'd sharply away—

“ Matilda is young, and Matilda is fair ;
Of all that you tell me pray deem me aware ;
But Matilda's a statue, Matilda's a child ;
Matilda loves not — ”

Lucile quietly smiled

As she answer'd him :— “ Yesterday, all that you
say

Might be true ; it is false, wholly false, though, to-
day.”

“ How?— what mean you? ”

“ I mean that to-day.” she replied,

“ The statue with life has become vivified :

I mean that the child to a woman has grown :

And that woman is jealous.”

“ What, she ! ” with a tone

Of ironical wonder, he answer'd — what, she !

She jealous ! — Matilda ! — of whom, pray? — not
me ! ”

“ My lord, you deceive yourself : no one but you
Is she jealous of. Trust me. And thank Heaven,
too,

That so lately this passion within her hath grown.
For who shall declare, if for months she had known
What for days she has known all too keenly, I fear,
That knowledge perchance might have cost you
more dear? ”

“ Explain ! explain, madam ! ” he cried, in surprise ;
And terror and anger enkindled his eyes.

“How blind are you men!” she replied. “Can
you doubt

That a woman, young, fair, and neglected—”

“Speak out!”

He gasp'd with emotion. “Lucile! you mean—
what!

Do you doubt her fidelity?”

“Certainly not.

Listen to me, my friend. What I wish to explain

Is so hard to shape forth. I could almost refrain

From touching a subject so fragile. However,

Bear with me awhile, if I frankly endeavor

To invade for one moment your innermost life.

Your honor, Lord Alfred, and that of your wife,

Are dear to me,—most dear! And I am con-
vinced

That you rashly are risking that honor.”

He winced,

And turn'd pale, as she spoke.

She had aim'd at his heart,

And she saw, by his sudden and terrified start,

That her aim had not miss'd.

“Stay, Lucile!” he exclaim'd,

“What in truth do you mean by these words,
vaguely framed

To alarm me? Matilda?—my wife?—do you
know?”—

“I know that your wife is as spotless as snow.

But I know not how far your continued neglect

Her nature, as well as her heart, might affect.

Till at last, by degrees, that serene atmosphere
 Of her unconscious purity, faint and yet clear,
 Like the indistinct golden and vaporous fleece
 Which surrounded and hid the celestials in Greece
 From the glances of men, would disperse and depart
 At the sighs of a sick and delirious heart, —
 For jealousy is to a woman, be sure,
 A disease heal'd too oft by a criminal cure ;
 And the heart left too long to its ravage in time
 May find weakness in virtue, reprisal in crime."

v.

"Such thoughts could have never," he falter'd, "I
 know,
 Reach'd the heart of Matilda."

"Matilda? oh no!
 But reflect! when such thoughts do not come of
 themselves
 To the heart of a woman neglected, like elves
 That seek lonely places, — there rarely is wanting
 Some voice at her side, with an evil enchanting
 To conjure them to her."

"O lady, beware!
 At this moment, around me I search everywhere
 For a clew to your words" —

"You mistake them," she said,
 Half fearing, indeed, the effect they had made.
 "I was putting a mere hypothetical case."
 With a long look of trouble he gazed in her face.
 "Woe to him, . . ." he exclaim'd . . . "woe to
 him that shall feel

Such a hope! for I swear, if he did but reveal
 One glimpse, — it should be the last hope of his
 life!”

The clench'd hand and bent eyebrow betoken'd the
 strife

She had roused in his heart.

“ You forget,” she began,
 “ That you menace yourself. You yourself are the
 man

That is guilty. Alas! must it ever be so?

Do we stand in our own light, wherever we go,

And fight our own shadows forever? O think!

The trial from which you, the stronger ones, shrink,

You ask woman, the weaker one, still to endure;

You bid her be true to the laws you abjure;

To abide by the ties you yourselves rend asunder,

With the force that has fail'd you; and that too,
 when under

The assumption of rights which to her you refuse,

The immunity claim'd for yourselves you abuse!

Where the contract exists, it involves obligation

To both husband and wife, in an equal relation.

You unloose, in asserting your own liberty,

A knot, which, unloosed, leaves another as free.

Then, O Alfred! be juster at heart: and thank
 Heaven

That Heaven to your wife such a nature has given

That you have not wherewith to reproach her,
 albeit

You have cause to reproach your own self, could you
 see it!”

VI.

In the silence that follow'd the last word she said,
 In the heave of his chest, and the droop of his head,
 Poor Lucile mark'd her words had sufficed to im-
 part

A new germ of motion and life to that heart
 Of which he himself had so recently spoken
 As dead to emotion — exhausted, or broken !
 New fears would awaken new hopes in his life.
 In the husband indifferent no more to the wife
 She already, as she had foreseen, could discover
 That Matilda had gain'd, at her hands, a new lover.
 So after some moments of silence, whose spell
 They both felt, she extended her hand to him. . . .

VII.

“ Well ? ”

VIII.

“ Lucile,” he replied. as that soft quiet hand
 In his own he clasp'd warmly, “ I both understand
 And obey you.”

“ Thank Heaven ! ” she murmur'd.

“ O yet,

One word. I beseech you ! I cannot forget.”

He exclaim'd, “ we are parting for life. You have
 shown

My pathway to me : but say. what is your own ? ”

The calmness with which until then she had spoken
 In a moment seem'd strangely and suddenly broken.
 She turn'd from him nervously, hurriedly.

“Nay,

I know not,” she murmur’d, “I follow the way
Heaven leads me; I cannot foresee to what end.
I know only that far, far away it must tend
From all places in which we have met, or might meet.
Far away!—onward—upward!”

A smile strange and sweet
As the incense that rises from some sacred cup
And mixes with music, stole forth, and breathed up
Her whole face, with those words.

“Wheresoever it be,
May all gentlest angels attend you!” sighed he,
“And bear my heart’s blessing wherever you are!”
And her hand, with emotion, he kiss’d.

IX.

From afar

That kiss was, alas! by Matilda beheld
With far other emotions: her young bosom swell’d,
And her young cheek with anger was crimson’d.

The Duke

Adroitly attracted towards it her look
By a faint but significant smile.

X.

Much ill-construed,
Renown’d Bishop Berkeley has fully, for one, strew’d
With arguments page upon page to teach folks
That the world they inhabit is only a hoax.
But it surely is hard, since we can’t do without them,
That our senses should make us so oft wish to doubt
them!

CANTO III.

I.

WHEN first the red savage call'd Man strode, a king,
 Through the wilds of creation — the very first thing
 That his naked intelligence taught him to feel
 Was the shame of himself; and the wish to conceal
 Was the first step in art. From the apron which

Eve

In Eden sat down out of fig-leaves to weave,
 To the furbelow'd flounce and the broad crinoline
 Of my lady — you all know of course whom I
 mean —

This art of concealment has greatly increas'd.
 A whole world lies cryptic in each human breast;
 And that drama of passions as old as the hills,
 Which the moral of all men in each man fulfils,
 Is only reveal'd now and then to our eyes
 In the newspaper-files and the courts of assize.

II.

In the group seen so lately in sunlight assembled,
 'Mid those walks over which the laburnum-bough
 trembled,
 And the deep-bosom'd lilac, emparadising
 The haunts where the blackbird and thrush flit and
 sing,

The keenest eye could but have seen, and seen only,
A circle of friends, minded not to leave lonely
The bird on the bough, or the bee on the blossom;
Conversing at ease in the garden's green bosom,
Like those who, when Florence was yet in her
 glories,
Cheated death and kill'd time with Boccaccian
 stories.
But at length the long twilight more deeply grew
 shaded,
And the fair night the rosy horizon invaded.
And the bee in the blossom, the bird on the bough,
Through the shadowy garden were slumbering now.
The trees only, o'er every unvisited walk,
Began on a sudden to whisper and talk.
And, as each little sprightly and garrulous leaf
Woke up with an evident sense of relief,
They all seem'd to be saying . . . "Once more
 we're alone,
And, thank Heaven, those tiresome people are
 gone!"

III.

Through the deep blue concave of the luminous air,
Large, loving, and languid, the stars here and there,
Like the eyes of shy passionate women, look'd down
O'er the dim world whose sole tender light was their
 own,
When Matilda, alone, from her chamber descended,
And enter'd the garden, unseen, unattended.
Her forehead was aching and parch'd, and her breast
By a vague inexpressible sadness oppress'd:

A sadness which led her, she scarcely knew how,
 And she scarcely knew why . . . (save, indeed,
 that just now

The house, out of which with a gasp she had fled
 Half stifled, seem'd ready to sink on her head) . . .
 Out into the night air, the silence, the bright
 Boundless starlight, the cool isolation of night!
 Her husband that day had look'd once in her face,
 And press'd both her hands in a silent embrace,
 And reproachfully noticed her recent dejection
 With a smile of kind wonder and tacit affection.
 He, of late so indifferent and listless! . . . at last
 Was he startled and awed by the change which had
 pass'd

O'er the once radiant face of his young wife?
 Whence came

That long look of solicitous fondness? . . . the
 same

Look and language of quiet affection — the look
 And the language, alas! which so often she took
 For pure love in the simple repose of its purity —
 Her own heart thus lull'd to a fatal security!
 Ha! would he deceive her again by this kindness?
 Had she been, then, O fool! in her innocent blind-
 ness,

The sport of transparent illusion? ah folly!
 And that feeling, so tranquil, so happy, so holy,
 She had taken, till then, in the heart, not alone
 Of her husband, but also, indeed, in her own,
 For true love, nothing else, after all, did it prove
 But a friendship profanely familiar?

“And love? . . .

What was love, then? . . . not calm, not secure —
scarcely kind,
But in one, all intensest emotions combined :
Life and death : pain and rapture.”

Thus wandering astray,
Led by doubt, through the darkness she wander'd
away.

All silently crossing, recrossing the night.
With faint, meteoric, miraculous light,
The swift-shooting stars through the infinite burn'd,
And into the infinite ever return'd.
And silently o'er the obscure and unknown
In the heart of Matilda there darted and shone
Thoughts, enkindling like meteors the deeps, to
expire,
Leaving traces behind them of tremulous fire.

IV.

She enter'd that arbor of lilacs, in which
The dark air with odors hung heavy and rich,
Like a soul that grows faint with desire.

'Twas the place
In which she so lately had sat face to face,
With her husband, — and her, the pale stranger
detested
Whose presence her heart like a plague had infested.
The whole spot with evil remembrance was haunted.
Through the darkness there rose on the heart which
it daunted.

Each dreary detail of that desolate day,

So full, and yet so incomplete. Far away
 The acacias were muttering, like mischievous elves,
 The whole story over again to themselves,
 Each word, — and each word was a wound! By
 degrees
 Her memory mingled its voice with the trees.

v.

Like the whisper Eve heard, when she paused by
 the root
 Of the sad tree of knowledge, and gazed on its
 fruit,
 To the heart of Matilda the trees seem'd to hiss
 Wild instructions, revealing man's last right, which
 is
 The right of reprisals.

An image uncertain,

And vague, dimly shaped itself forth on the curtain
 Of the darkness around her. It came, and it went ;
 Through her senses a faint sense of peril it sent :
 It pass'd and repass'd her ; it went and it came,
 Forever returning ; forever the same :
 And forever more clearly defined : till her eyes
 In that outline obscure could at last recognize
 The man to whose image, the more and the more
 That her heart, now aroused from its calm sleep of
 yore,
 From her husband detach'd itself slowly, with pain.
 Her thoughts had return'd, and return'd to, again,
 As though by some secret indefinite law, —
 The vigilant Frenchman — Eugène de Luvois !

IV.

A light sound behind her. She trembled. By some
 Night-witchcraft her vision a fact had become.
 On a sudden she felt, without turning to view,
 That a man was approaching behind her. She
 knew

By the fluttering pulse which she could not restrain,
 And the quick-beating heart, that this man was
 Eugène.

Her first instinct was flight ; but she felt her slight foot
 As heavy as though to the soil it had root.
 And the Duke's voice retain'd her, like fear in a
 dream.

VII.

“ Ah, lady ! in life there are meetings which seem
 Like a fate. Dare I think like a sympathy too ?
 Yet what else can I bless for this vision of you ?
 Alone with my thoughts, on this starlighted lawn,
 By an instinct resistless, I felt myself drawn
 To revisit the memories left in the place
 Where so lately this evening I look'd in your face.
 And I find, — you, yourself, — my own dream !

“ Can there be
 In this world one thought common to you and
 to me ?

If so, . . . I, who deem'd but a moment ago
 My heart uncompanion'd, save only by woe,
 Should indeed be more bless'd than I dare to
 believe —

— Ah, but *one* word, but one from your lips to re-
 ceive ” . . .

Interrupting him quickly, she murmur'd, "I sought,
Here, a moment of solitude, silence, and thought,
Which I needed." . . .

"Lives solitude only for one?
Must its charm by my presence so soon be undone?
Ah, cannot two share it? What needs it for
this?—

The same thought in both hearts,—be it sorrow
or bliss;
If my heart be the reflex of yours, lady— you,
Are you not yet alone,—even though we be
two?"

"For that," . . . said Matilda, . . . "needs were,
you should read
What I have in my heart" . . .

"Think you, lady, indeed,
You are yet of that age when a woman conceals
In her heart so completely whatever she feels
From the heart of the man whom it interests to
know
And find out what that feeling may be? Ah,
not so,
Lady Alfred! Forgive me that in it I look,
But I read in your heart as I read in a book."

"Well, Duke! and what read you within it? unless
It be, of a truth, a profound weariness,
And some sadness?"

"No doubt. To all facts there are laws.
The effect has its cause, and I mount to the cause."

VIII.

Matilda shrank back ; for she suddenly found
That a finger was press'd on the yet bleeding wound
She, herself, had but that day perceived in her
breast.

“ You are sad,” . . . said the Duke (and that
finger yet press'd
With a cruel persistence the wound it made
bleed) —

“ You are sad, Lady Alfred, because the first need
Of a young and a beautiful woman is to be
Beloved, and to love. You are sad : for you see
That you are not beloved, as you deem'd that you
were :

You are sad : for that knowledge hath left you aware
That you have not yet loved, though you thought
that you had.

“ Yes, yes ! . . . you are sad — because knowledge
is sad ! ”

He could not have read more profoundly her heart.
“ What gave you,” she cried, with a terrified start,
“ Such strange power ? ”

“ To read in your thoughts ? ” he exclaim'd,
“ O lady, — a love, deep, profound — be it blamed
Or rejected, — a love, true, intense — such, at least,
As you, and you only, could wake in my breast ! ”

“ Hush, hush ! . . . I beseech you . . . for pity ! ”
she gasp'd,

Snatching hurriedly from him the hand he had
 clasp'd,
 In her effort instinctive to fly from the spot.

“For pity?” . . . he echoed, “for pity! and what
 Is the pity you owe him? his pity for you!
 He, the lord of a life, fresh as new-fallen dew!
 The guardian and guide of a woman, young, fair,
 And matchless! (whose happiness did he not swear
 To cherish through life?) he neglects her— for
 whom?”

For a fairer than she? No! the rose in the bloom
 Of that beauty which, even when hidd'n, can prevail
 To keep sleepless with song the aroused nightingale,
 Is not fairer; for even in the pure world of flowers
 Her symbol is not, and this pure world of ours
 Has no second Matilda! For whom? Let that
 pass!

'Tis not I, 'tis not you, that can name her, alas!
 And I dare not question or judge her. But why,
 Why cherish the cause of your own misery?
 Why think of one, lady, who thinks not of you?
 Why be bound by a chain which himself he breaks
 through?

And why, since you have but to stretch forth your
 hand,

The love which you need and deserve to command,
 Why shrink? Why repel it?”

“O hush, sir! O hush!”

Cried Matilda, as though her whole heart were one
 blush.

“ Cease, cease, I conjure you, to trouble my life!
Is not Alfred your friend? and am I not his wife? ”

IX.

“ And have I not, lady,” he answer’d, . . . “ re-
spected

His rights as a friend, till himself he neglected
Your rights as a wife? Do you think ’tis alone
For three days I have loved you? My love may
have grown,

I admit, day by day, since I first felt your eyes,
In watching their tears, and in sounding your sighs.

But, O lady! I loved you before I believed
That your eyes ever wept, or your heart ever grieved.
Then I deem’d you were happy—I deem’d you
possess’d

All the love you deserved, — and I hid in my breast
My own love, till this hour — when I could not but
feel

Your grief gave me the right my own grief to
reveal!

I knew, years ago, of the singular power
Which Lucile o’er your husband possess’d. Till
the hour

In which he reveal’d it himself, did I, — say! —
By a word, or a look, such a secret betray?

No! no! do me justice. I never have spoken
Of this poor heart of mine, till all ties he had
broken

Which bound *your* heart to him. And now —
now, that his love

For another hath left your own heart free to rove,
 What is it, — even now, — that I kneel to implore
 you?

Only this, Lady Alfred! . . . to let me adore you
 Unblamed: to have confidence in me: to spend
 On me not one thought, save to think me your
 friend.

Let me speak to you, — ah, let me speak to you
 still!

Hush to silence my words in your heart if you will.
 I ask no response: I ask only your leave
 To live yet in your life, and to grieve when you
 grieve!”

x.

“Leave me, leave me!” . . . she gasp'd, with a
 voice thick and low

From emotion. “For pity's sake, Duke, let me go!
 I feel that to blame we should both of us be,
 Did I linger.”

“To blame? yes, no doubt!” . . . answer'd he,
 “If the love of your husband, in bringing you
 peace,

Had forbidden you hope. But he signs your release
 By the hand of another. One moment! but one!
 Who knows when, alas! I may see you alone
 As to-night I have seen you? or when we may
 meet

As to-night we have met? when, entranced at your
 feet,

As in this blessed hour, I may ever avow
 The thoughts which are pining for utterance now?”

“Duke! Duke!” . . . she exclaim’d, . . . “for
Heaven’s sake let me go!

It is late. In the house they will miss me, I know.
We must not be seen here together. The night
Is advancing. I feel overwhelm’d with affright!
It is time to return to my lord.”

“To your lord?”

He repeated, with lingering reproach on the word.

“To your lord? do you think he awaits you in
truth?”

Is he anxiously missing your presence, forsooth?
Return to your lord! . . . his restraint to renew?
And hinder the glances which are not for you?
No, no! . . . at this moment his looks seek the face
Of another! another is there in your place!
Another consoles him! another receives
The soft speech which from silence your absence
relieves!”

XI.

“You mistake, sir!” . . . responded a voice, calm,
severe,

And sad, . . . “You mistake, sir! that other is
here.”

Eugene and Matilda both started.

“Lucile!”

With a half-stifled scream, as she felt herself reel
From the place where she stood, cried Matilda.

“Ho, oh!

What! eaves-dropping, madam?” . . the Duke cried.
. . . “And so

You were listening?”

“ Say, rather,” she said, “ that I heard,
Without wishing to hear it, that infamous word, —
Heard — and therefore reply.”

“ Belle Comtesse.” said the Duke,
With concentrated wrath in the savage rebuke,
Which betray’d that he felt himself baffled . . .

“ you know
That your place is not *here*.”

“ Duke.” she answer’d him slow,
“ My place is wherever my duty is clear ;
And therefore my place, at this moment, is here.
O lady, this morning my place was beside
Your husband, because (as she said this she sigh’d)
I felt that from folly fast growing to crime —
The crime of self-blindness — Heaven yet spared
me time
To save for the love of an innocent wife
All that such love deserved in the heart and the
life
Of the man to whose heart and whose life you
alone
Can with safety confide the pure trust of your own.”

She turn’d to Matilda, and lightly laid on her
Her soft quiet hand . . .

“ ’Tis, O lady, the honor
Which that man has confided to you, that, in spite
Of his friend, I now trust I may yet save to-night —
Save for both of you, lady ! for yours I revere :
Duc de Luvois, what say you? — my place is not
here?”

XII.

And, so saying, the hand of Matilda she caught,
Wound one arm round her waist unresisted and
sought

Gently, softly, to draw her away from the spot.
The Duke stood confounded, and follow'd them
not,

But not yet the house had they reach'd when Lu-
cile

Her tender and delicate burden could feel
Sink and falter beside her. Oh, then she knelt
down,

Flung her arms round Matilda, and press'd to her
own

The poor bosom beating against her.

The moon,

Bright, breathless, and buoyant, and brimful of
June,

Floated up from the hillside, sloped over the vale,
And poised herself loose in mid-heaven, with one
pale,

Minute, scintillessent, and tremulous star
Swinging under her globe like a wizard-lit car,
Thus to each of those women revealing the face
Of the other. Each bore on her features the trace
Of a vivid emotion. A deep inward shame
The cheek of Matilda had flooded with flame.

With her enthusiastic emotion, Lucile
Trembled visibly yet; for she could not but feel
That a heavenly hand was upon her that night.
And it touch'd her pure brow to a heavenly light.

“In the name of your husband, dear lady,” she said,
 “In the name of your mother, take heart! Lift
 your head,

For those blushes are noble. Alas! do not trust
 To that maxim of virtue made ashes and dust,
 That the fault of the husband can cancel the wife’s.
 Take heart! and take refuge and strength in your
 life’s

Pure silence, — there, kneel, pray, and hope, weep,
 and wait!”

“Saved, Lucile!” sobb’d Matilda, “but saved to
 what fate?

Tears, prayers, yes! not hopes.”

“Hush!” the sweet voice replied.

“Fool’d away by a fancy, again to your side
 Must your husband return. Doubt not this. And
 return

For the love you can give, with the love that you
 yearn

To receive, lady. What was it chill’d you both
 now?

Not the absence of love, but the ignorance how
 Love is nourish’d by love. Well! henceforth you
 will prove

Your heart worthy of love, — since it knows how to
 love.”

XIII

“What gives you such power over me, that I feel
 Thus drawn to obey you? What are you, Lucile?”
 Sigh’d Matilda, and lifted her eyes to the face
 Of Lucile.



“Side by side, hand in hand.”

There pass'd suddenly through it the trace
Of deep sadness ; and o'er that fair forehead came
down

A shadow which yet was too sweet for a frown.

“The pupil of sorrow, perchance,” . . . she re-
plied.

“Of sorrow?” Matilda exclaim'd . . . “O confide
To my heart your affliction. In all you made known
I should find some instruction, no doubt, for my
own!”

“And I some consolation, no doubt ; for the tears
Of another have not flow'd for me many years.”

It was then that Matilda herself seized the hand
Of Lucile in her own, and uplifted her ; and
Thus together they enter'd the house.

XIV.

'Twas the room
Of Matilda.

The languid and delicate gloom
Of a lamp of pure white alabaster, aloft
From the ceiling suspended, around it slept soft.
The casement oped into the garden. The pale
Cool moonlight stream'd through it. One lone
nightingale

Sung aloof in the laurels. And here, side by side,
Hand in hand, the two women sat down unde-
sried,

Save by guardian angels.

As when, sparkling yet
 From the rain, that, with drops that are jewels,
 leaves wet

The bright head it humbles, a young rose inclines
 To some pale lily near it, the fair vision shines
 As one flower with two faces, in hush'd, tearful
 speech,

Like the showery whispers of flowers, each to each
 Link'd, and leaning together, so loving, so fair,
 So united, yet diverse, the two women there
 Look'd, indeed, like two flowers upon one drooping
 stem,

In the soft light that tenderly rested on them.
 All that soul said to soul in that chamber, who
 knows?

All that heart gain'd from heart?

Leave the lily, the rose,
 Undisturb'd with their secret within them. For
 who

To the heart of the floweret can follow the dew?
 A night full of stars! O'er the silence, unseen,
 The footsteps of sentinel angels between
 The dark land and deep sky were moving. You
 heard

Pass'd from earth up to heaven the happy watch-
 word

Which brighten'd the stars as amongst them it fell
 From earth's heart, which it eased . . . "All is
 well! all is well!"

CANTO IV.

I.

THE Poets pour wine ; and, when 'tis new, all decry
it ;

But, once let it be old, every trifler must try it.
And Polonius, who praises no wine that's not
Massic,

Complains of my verse, that my verse is not classic.
And Miss Tilburina, who sings, and not badly,
My earlier verses, sighs " Commonplace sadly ! "

As for you, O Polonius, you vex me but slightly ;
But you, Tilburina, your eyes beam so brightly
In despite of their languishing looks, on my word,
That to see you look cross I can scarcely afford.
Yes ! the silliest woman that smiles on a bard
Better far than Longinus himself can reward
The appeal to her feelings of which she approves ;
And the critics I most care to please are the Loves.

Alas, friend ! what boots it, a stone at his head
And a brass on his breast, — when a man is once
dead ?

Ay ! were fame the sole guerdon, poor guerdon
were then

Theirs who, stripping life bare, stand forth models
for men.

The reformer's? — a creed by posterity learnt
 A century after its author is burnt!
 The poet's? — a laurel that hides the bald brow
 It hath blighted! The painter's? — ask Raphael
 now
 Which Madonna's authentic! The statesman's? —
 a name
 For parties to blacken, or boys to declaim!
 The soldier's? — three lines on the cold Abbey
 pavement!
 Were this all the life of the wise and the brave
 meant,
 All it ends in, thrice better, Neæra, it were
 Unregarded to sport with thine odorous hair,
 Untroubled to lie at thy feet in the shade
 And be loved, while the roses yet bloom overhead,
 Than to sit by the lone hearth, and think the long
 thought,
 A severe, sad, blind schoolmaster, envied for
 naught
 Save the name of John Milton! For all men,
 indeed,
 Who in some choice edition may graciously read,
 With fair illustration, and erudite note,
 The song which the poet in bitterness wrote,
 Beat the poet, and notably beat him, in this —
 The joy of the genius is theirs, whilst they miss
 The grief of the man: Tasso's song — not his
 madness!
 Dante's dreams — not his waking to exile and sad-
 ness!

Milton's music — but not Milton's blindness! . . .

Yet rise,

My Milton, and answer, with those noble eyes
Which the glory of heaven hath blinded to earth!
Say — the life, in the living it, savors of worth:
That the deed, in the doing it, reaches its aim:
That the fact has a value apart from the fame:
That a deeper delight, in the mere labor, pays
Scorn of lesser delights, and laborious days:
And Shakespeare, though all Shakespeare's writings
were lost,

And his genius, though never a trace of it crossed
Posterity's path, not the less would have dwelt
In the isle with Miranda, with Hamlet have felt
All that Hamlet hath uttered, and haply where, pure
On its death-bed, wrong'd Love lay, have moan'd
with the Moor!

II.

When Lord Alfred that night to the salon return'd
He found it deserted. The lamp dimly burn'd
As though half out of humor to find itself there
Forced to light for no purpose a room that was
bare.

He sat down by the window alone. Never yet
Did the heavens a lovelier evening beget
Since Latona's bright childbed that bore the new
moon!

The dark world lay still, in a sort of sweet swoon,
Wide open to heaven; and the stars on the stream
Were trembling like eyes that are loved on the
dream

Of a lover ; and all things were glad and at rest
 Save the unquiet heart in his own troubled breast.
 He endeavor'd to think — an unwonted employ-
 ment,
 Which appear'd to afford him no sort of enjoyment.

III.

“Withdraw into yourself. But, if peace you seek
 there for,
 Your reception, beforehand, be sure to prepare for,”
 Wrote the tutor of Nero ; who wrote, be it said,
 Better far than he acted — but peace to the dead !
 He bled for his pupil : what more could he do ?
 But Lord Alfred, when into himself he withdrew,
 Found all there in disorder. For more than an
 hour
 He sat with his head droop'd like some stubborn
 flower
 Beaten down by the rush of the rain — with such
 force
 Did the thick, gushing thoughts hold upon him the
 course
 Of their sudden descent, rapid, rushing, and dim,
 From the cloud that had darken'd the evening for
 him.
 At one moment he rose — rose and open'd the door,
 And wistfully look'd down the dark corridor
 Toward the room of Matilda. Anon, with a sigh
 Of an incomplete purpose, he crept quietly
 Back again to his place in a sort of submission
 To doubt, and return'd to his former position, —

That loose fall of the arms, that dull droop of the
face,
And the eye vaguely fix'd on impalpable space.
The dream, which till then had been lulling his life,
As once Circe the winds, had seal'd thought; and
his wife
And his home for a time he had quite, like Ulysses,
Forgotten; but now o'er the troubled abysses
Of the spirit within him, æolian, forth leapt
To their freedom new-found, and resistlessly swept
All his heart into tumult, the thoughts which had
been
Long pent up in their mystic recesses unseen.

IV.

How long he thus sat there, himself he knew not,
Till he started, as though he were suddenly shot,
To the sound of a voice too familiar to doubt,
Which was making some noise in the passage
without.
A sound English voice, with a round English
accent,
Which the scared German echoes resentfully back
sent;
The complaint of a much disappointed cab-driver
Mingled with it, demanding some ultimate stiver;
Then, the heavy and hurried approach of a boot
Which reveal'd by its sound no diminutive foot:
And the door was flung suddenly open, and on
The threshold Lord Alfred by bachelor John
Was seized in that sort of affectionate rage or

Frenzy of hugs which some stout Ursa Major
 On some lean Ursa Minor would doubtless bestow
 With a warmth for which only starvation and snow
 Could render one grateful. As soon as he could,
 Lord Alfred contrived to escape, nor be food
 Any more for those somewhat voracious embraces.
 Then the two men sat down and scann'd each
 other's faces :
 And Alfred could see that his cousin was taken
 With unwonted emotion. The hand that had
 shaken
 His own trembled somewhat. In truth he descried,
 At a glance, something wrong —

V.

“What's the matter ?” he cried.
 “What have you to tell me ?”

JOHN.

What ! have you not heard ?

ALFRED.

Heard what ?

JOHN.

This sad business —

ALFRED.

I ? no, not a word.

JOHN.

You received my last letter ?

ALFRED.

I think so. If not,
What then?

JOHN.

You have acted upon it?

ALFRED.

On what?

JOHN.

The advice that I gave you —

ALFRED.

Advice? — let me see?

You *always* are giving advice, Jack, to me.
About Parliament, was it?

JOHN.

Hang Parliament! no,
The Bank, the Bank, Alfred!

ALFRED.

What Bank?

JOHN.

Heavens! I know
You are careless; — but surely you have not for-
gotten, —
Or neglected . . . I warn'd you the whole thing
was rotten.
You have drawn those deposits at least?

LUCILE.

ALFRED.

No, I meant

To have written to-day ; but the note shall be sent
To-morrow, however.

JOHN.

To-morrow? too late!

Too late ! oh, what devil bewitch'd you to wait?

ALFRED.

Mercy save us ! you don't mean to say . . .

JOHN.

Yes, I do.

ALFRED.

What ! Sir Ridley? . . .

JOHN.

Smash'd, broken, blown up, bolted too !

ALFRED.

But his own niece? . . . In Heaven's name Jack . . .

JOHN.

Oh, I told you

The old hypocritical scoundrel would . . .

ALFRED.

Hold ! you

Surely can't mean we are ruin'd?

JOHN.

Sit down!

A fortnight ago a report about town
 Made me most apprehensive. Alas, and alas!
 I at once wrote and warn'd you. Well, now let that
 pass.

A run on the Bank about five days ago
 Confirm'd my forebodings too terribly, though.
 I drove down to the city at once; found the door
 Of the Bank close: the Bank had stopp'd payment
 at four.

Next morning the failure was known to be fraud:
 Warrant out for McNab: but McNab was abroad:
 Gone — we cannot tell where. I endeavor'd to
 get

Information: have learn'd nothing certain as yet —
 Not even the way that old Ridley was gone:
 Or with those securities what he had done:
 Or whether they had been already call'd out:
 If they are not, their fate is, I fear, past a doubt.
 Twenty families ruin'd, they say: what was left, —
 Unable to find any clew to the cleft
 The old fox ran to earth in, — but join you as
 fast

As I could, my dear Alfred? *

* These events, it is needless to say, Mr. Morse,
 Took place when Bad News as yet travell'd by horse;
 Ere the world, like a cockchafer, buzz'd on a wire,
 Or Time was calcined by electrical fire;
 Ere a cable went under the hoary Atlantic,
 Or the word Telegram drove grammarians frantic.

VI.

He stopp'd here, aghast
 At the change in his cousin, the hue of whose face
 Had grown livid; and glassy his eyes fix'd on space.
 "Courage, courage!" . . . said John, . . . "bear
 the blow like a man!"

And he caught the cold hand of Lord Alfred. There
 ran
 Through that hand a quick tremor. "I bear it," he
 said,
 "But Matilda? the blow is to her!" And his head
 Seem'd forced down, as he said it.

JOHN.

Matilda? Pooh, pooh!
 I half think I know the girl better than you.
 She has courage enough — and to spare. She cares
 less
 Than most women for luxury, nonsense, and dress.

ALFRED.

The fault has been mine.

JOHN.

Be it yours to repair it:
 If you did not avert, you may help her to bear it.

ALFRED.

I might have averted.

JOHN.

Perhaps so. But now
There is clearly no use in considering how,
Or whence, came the mischief. The mischief is
here.

Broken shins are not mended by crying — that's
clear!

One has but to rub them, and get up again,
And push on — and not think too much of the pain.
And at least it is much that you see that to her
You owe too much to think of yourself. You must
stir

And arouse yourself, Alfred, for her sake. Who
knows?

Something yet may be saved from this wreck. I
suppose

We shall make him disgorge all he can, at the least.

“ O Jack, I have been a brute idiot ! a beast !
A fool ! I have sinn'd, and to *her* I have sinn'd !
I have been heedless, blind, inexcusably blind !
And now, in a flash, I see all things ! ”

As though

To shut out the vision, he bow'd his head low
On his hands ; and the great tears in silence roll'd on
And fell momentarily, heavily, one after one.

John felt no desire to find instant relief
For the trouble he witness'd.

He guess'd, in the grief
Of his cousin, the broken and heartfelt admission
Of some error demanding a heartfelt contrition :

Some oblivion perchance which could plead less
excuse

To the heart of a man re-aroused to the use
Of the conscience God gave him, than simply and
merely

The neglect for which now he was paying so dearly.
So he rose without speaking, and paced up and down
The long room, much afflicted, indeed, in his own
Cordial heart for Matilda.

Thus, silently lost

In his anxious reflections, he cross'd and re-cross'd
The place where his cousin yet hopelessly hung
O'er the table; his fingers entwisted among
The rich curls they were knotting and dragging:
and there,

That sound of all sounds the most painful to hear,
The sobs of a man! Yet so far in his own
Kindly thoughts was he plunged, he already had
grown

Unconscious of Alfred.

And so for a space

There was silence between them.

VII.

At last, with sad face

He stopp'd short, and bent on his cousin awhile
A pain'd sort of wistful, compassionate smile,
Approach'd him, — stood o'er him, — and suddenly
laid

One hand on his shoulder—

“Where is she?” he said.

Alfred lifted his face all disfigured with tears
 And gazed vacantly at him, like one that appears
 In some foreign language to hear himself greeted,
 Unable to answer.

“Where is she?” repeated
 His cousin.

He motion'd his hand to the door ;
 “There, I think,” he replied. Cousin John said no
 more,
 And appear'd to relapse to his own cogitations,
 Of which not a gesture vouchsafed indications.
 So again there was silence.

A timepiece at last
 Struck the twelve strokes of midnight.

Roused by them, he cast
 A half-look to the dial ; then quietly threw
 His arm round the neck of his cousin, and drew
 The hands down from his face.

“It is time she should know
 What has happen'd,” he said, . . . “let us go to
 her now.”
 Alfred started at once to his feet.

Drawn and wan
 Though his face, he look'd more than his wont was
 — a man.
 Strong for once, in his weakness. Uplifted, fill'd
 through
 With a manly resolve.

If that axiom be true
 Of the “*Sum quia cogito*,” I must opine
 That “*id sum quod cogito* :” — that which, in fine,

A man thinks and feels, with his whole force of
 thought
 And feeling, the man is himself.

He had fought

With himself, and rose up from his self-overthrow
 The survivor of much which that strife had laid low.
 At his feet, as he rose at the name of his wife,
 Lay in ruins the brilliant unrealized life
 Which, though yet unfulfill'd, seem'd till then, in
 that name,
 To be his, had he claim'd it. The man's dream of
 fame

And of power fell shatter'd before him; and only
 There rested the heart of the woman, so lonely
 In all save the love he could give her. The lord
 Of that heart he arose. Blush not, Muse, to record
 That his first thought, and last, at that moment
 was not

Of the power and fame that seem'd lost to his
 lot,

But the love that was left to it; not of the self
 He had cared for, yet squander'd; and not of him-
 self,

But of her; as he murmur'd,

“ One moment, dear Jack!

We have grown up from boyhood together. Our
 track

Has been through the same meadows in childhood:
 in youth

Through the same silent gateways, to manhood.
 In truth,

There is none that can know me as you do; and
none

To whom I more wish to believe myself known.
Speak the truth; you are not wont to mince it, I
know.

Nor I, shall I shirk it, or shrink from it now.
In despite of a wanton behavior, in spite
Of vanity, folly, and pride, Jack, which might
Have turn'd from me many a heart strong and true
As your own, I have never turn'd round and miss'd
YOU

From my side in one hour of affliction or doubt
By my own blind and heedless self-will brought
about.

Tell me truth. Do I owe this alone to the sake
Of those old recollections of boyhood that make
In your heart yet some clinging and crying appeal
From a judgment more harsh, which I cannot but
feel

Might have sentenced our friendship to death long
ago?

Or is it . . . (I would I could deem it were so!)
That, not all overlaid by a listless exterior,
Your heart has divined in me something superior
To that which I seem; from my innermost nature
Not wholly expell'd by the world's usurpature?
Some instinct of earnestness, truth, or desire
For truth? Some one spark of the soul's native fire
Moving under the ashes, and cinders, and dust
Which life hath heap'd o'er it? Some one fact to
trust

And to hope in? Or by you alone am I deem'd
The mere frivolous fool I so often have seem'd
To my own self?"

JOHN.

No, Alfred! you will, I believe,
Be true, at the last, to what now makes you grieve
For having belied your true nature so long.
Necessity is a stern teacher. Be strong!

"Do you think," he resumed, . . . "what I feel
while I speak

Is no more than a transient emotion, as weak
As these weak tears would seem to betoken it?"

JOHN.

No!

ALFRED.

Thank you, cousin! your hand then. And now I
will go
Alone, Jack. Trust to me.

VIII.

JOHN.

I do. But 'tis late.

If she sleeps, you'll not wake her?

ALFRED.

No, no! it will wait
(Poor infant!) too surely, this mission of sorrow;
If she sleeps, I will not mar her dreams of to-
morrow.



“She knew not her
husband stood watching
her.”

He open'd the door, and pass'd out.

Cousin John

Watch'd him wistful, and left him to seek her alone.

IX.

His heart beat so loud when he knock'd at her
door,

He could hear no reply from within. Yet once
more

He knock'd lightly. No answer. The handle he
tried :

The door open'd : he enter'd the room undescried.

X.

No brighter than is that dim circlet of light
Which enhaloes the moon when rains form on the
night,

The pale lamp an indistinct radiance shed
Round the chamber, in which at her pure snowy
bed

Matilda was kneeling ; so wrapt in deep prayer
That she knew not her husband stood watching her
there.

With the lamplight the moonlight had mingled a
faint

And unearthly effulgence which seem'd to acquaint
The whole place with a sense of deep peace made
secure

By the presence of something angelic and pure.

And not purer some angel Grief carves o'er the
tomb

Where Love lies, than the lady that kneel'd in that
gloom.

She had put off her dress; and she look'd to his
eyes

Like a young soul escaped from its earthly disguise;
Her fair neck and innocent shoulders were bare,

And over them rippled her soft golden hair;

Her simple and slender white bodice unlaced

Confined not one curve of her delicate waist.

As the light that, from water reflected, forever,

Trembles up through the tremulous reeds of a river,

So the beam of her beauty went trembling in him,

Through the thoughts it suffused with a sense soft
and dim.

Reproducing itself in the broken and bright

Lapse and pulse of a million emotions.

That sight

Bow'd his heart, bow'd his knee. Knowing scarce
what he did,

To her side through the chamber he silently slid,

And knelt down beside her — and pray'd at her
side.

XI.

Upstarting, she then for the first time descried

That her husband was near her: suffused with the
blush

Which came o'er her soft pallid cheek with a gush

Where the tears sparkled yet.

As a young fawn uncouches,

Shy with fear from the fern where some hunter ap-
proaches,

She shrank back ; he caught her, and circling his
arm

Round her waist, on her brow press'd one kiss long
and warm.

Then her fear changed in impulse ; and hiding her
face

On his breast, she hung lock'd in a clinging em-
brace

With her soft arms wound heavily round him, as
though

She fear'd, if their clasp was relaxed, he would go :
Her smooth, naked shoulders, uncared for, con-
vulsed

By sob after sob, while her bosom yet pulsed
In its pressure on his, as the effort within it
Lived and died with each tender tumultuous min-
ute.

“ O Alfred, O Alfred ! forgive me,” she cried —
“ Forgive me ! ”

“ Forgive you, my poor child ! ” he sigh'd ;
“ But I never have blamed you for aught that I
know,

And I have not one thought that reproaches you
now.”

From her arms he unwound himself gently. And
so

He forced her down softly beside him. Below
The canopy shading their couch, they sat down.
And he said, clasping firmly her hand in his own,
“ When a proud man, Matilda, has found out at
length,

That he is but a child in the midst of his strength,
 But a fool in his wisdom, to whom can he own
 The weakness which thus to himself hath been
 shown?

From whom seek the strength which his need of is
 sore,

Although in his pride he might perish, before
 He could plead for the one, or the other avow
 'Mid his intimate friends? Wife of mine, tell me
 now,

Do you join me in feeling, in that darken'd hour,
 The sole friend that *can* have the right or the power
 To be at his side, is the woman that shares
 His fate, if he falter: the woman that bears
 The name dear for *her* sake, and hallows the life
 She has mingled her own with, — in short, that
 man's wife?"

"Yes," murmur'd Matilda, "O yes!"

"Then," he cried,

"This chamber in which we two sit, side by side,
 (And his arm, as he spoke, seem'd more softly to
 press her),

Is now a confessional — *you*, my confessor!"

"I?" she falter'd, and timidly lifted her head.

"Yes! but first answer one other question," he
 said:

"When a woman once feels that she is not alone:
 That the heart of another is warm'd by her own;
 That another feels with her whatever she feel,

And halves her existence in woe or in weal;

That a man, for her sake, will, so long as he lives,

Live to put forth the strength which the thought of
her gives ;

Live to shield her from want, and to share with her
sorrow ;

Live to solace the day, and provide for the morrow :

Will that woman feel less than another, O say,

The loss of what life, sparing this, takes away?

Will she feel (feeling this), when calamities come,

That they brighten the heart, though they darken
the home? ”

She turn'd, like a soft rainy heav'n, on him

Eyes that smiled through fresh tears, trustful, ten-
der, and dim.

“ That woman,” she murmur'd, “ indeed were thrice
blest ! ”

“ Then courage, true wife of my heart ! ” to his
breast

As he folded and gather'd her closely, he cried.

“ For the refuge, to-night in these arms open'd wide

To your heart, can be never closed to it again,

And this room is for both an asylum ! For when

I pass'd through that door, at the door I left there

A calamity sudden and heavy to bear.

One step from that threshold, and daily, I fear,

We must face it henceforth ; but it enters not here,

For that door shuts it out, and admits here alone

A heart which calamity leaves all your own ! ”

She started . . . “ Calamity, Alfred, to you ? ”

“ To both, my poor child, but 'twill bring with it
too

The courage, I trust, to subdue it.”

“ O speak !

Speak !” she falter’d in tones timid, anxious, and
weak

“ O yet for a moment,” he said, “ hear me on !

Matilda, this morn we went forth in the sun,
Like those children of sunshine, the bright sum-
mer flies,

That sport in the sunbeam, and play through the
skies

While the skies smile, and heed not each other : at
last,

When their sunbeam is gone, and their sky over-
cast,

Who recks in what ruin they fold their wet wings ?
So indeed the morn found us, — poor frivolous
things !

Now our sky is o’ercast, and our sunbeam is set,
And the night brings its darkness around us. Oh
yet

Have we weather’d no storm through those twelve
cloudless hours ?

Yes : you, too, have wept !

“ While the world was yet ours,
While its sun was upon us, its incense stream’d to
us,

And its myriad voices of joy seem’d to woo us,
We stray’d from each other, too far, it may be,
Nor, wantonly wandering, then did I see
How deep was my need of thee, dearest, how
great

Was thy claim on my heart and thy share in my fate !

But, Matilda, an angel was near us, meanwhile,
Watching o'er us to warn, and to rescue !

“ That smile
Which you saw with suspicion, that presence you
eyed

With resentment, an angel's they were at your side
And at mine ; nor perchance is the day all so far,
When we both in our prayers, when most heartfelt
they are,

May murmur the name of that woman now gone
From our sight evermore.

“ Here, this evening, alone,
I seek your forgiveness, in opening my heart
Unto yours, — from this clasp be it never to part !
Matilda, the fortune you brought me is gone,
But a prize richer far than that fortune has won
It is yours to confer, and I kneel for that prize,
’Tis the heart of my wife ! ” With suffused happy
eyes

She sprang from her seat, flung her arms wide
apart,

And tenderly closing them round him, his heart
Clasp'd in one close embrace to her bosom ; and
there

Droop'd her head on his shoulder ; and sobb'd.

Not despair,
Not sorrow, not even the sense of her loss,
Flow'd in those happy tears, so oblivious she was
Of all save the sense of her own love ! Anon,
However, his words rush'd back to her. “ All gone,
The fortune you brought me ! ”

And eyes that were dim
With soft tears she upraised ; but those tears were
for *him*.

“Gone! my husband?” she said, “tell me all!
see! I need,

To sober this rapture, so selfish indeed,
Fuller sense of affliction.”

“Poor innocent child!”

He kiss'd her fair forehead, and mournfully smiled,
As he told her the tale he had heard—something
more,

The gain found in loss of what gain lost of yore.

“Rest, my heart, and my brain, and my right hand,
for you ;

And with these, my Matilda, what may I not do ?
And know not, I knew not myself till this hour,
Which so sternly reveal'd it, my nature's full
power.”

“And I too,” she murmur'd, “I too am no more
The mere infant at heart you have known me
before.

I have suffer'd since then. I have learn'd much in
life.

O take, with the faith I have pledged as a wife,
The heart I have learn'd as a woman to feel!
For I—love you, my husband!”

As though to conceal
Less from him, than herself, what that motion ex-
press'd,

She dropp'd her bright head, and hid all on his
breast.

"O lovely as woman, belovèd as wife!
 Evening star of my heart, light forever my life!
 If from eyes fix'd too long on this base earth thus
 far
 You have miss'd your due homage, dear guardian
 star,
 Believe that, uplifting those eyes unto heaven,
 There I see you, and know you, and bless the light
 given
 To lead me to life's late achievement; my own,
 My blessing, my treasure, my all things in one!"

XII.

How lovely she look'd in the lovely moonlight,
 That stream'd thro' the pane from the blue balmy
 night!
 How lovely she look'd in her own lovely youth,
 As she clung to his side, full of trust and of truth!
 How lovely to *him*, as he tenderly press'd
 Her young head on his bosom, and sadly caress'd
 The glittering tresses which now shaken loose
 Shower'd gold in his hand, as he smooth'd them!

XIII.

O Muse,
 Interpose not one pulse of thine own beating heart
 'Twixt these two silent souls! There's a joy be-
 yond art,
 And beyond sound the music it makes in the
 breast.

XIV.

Here were lovers twice wed, that were happy at
least !

No music, save such as the nightingales sung,
Breath'd their bridals abroad ; and no cresset, up-
hung,

Lit that festival hour, save what soft light was given
From the pure stars that peopled the deep-purple
heaven.

He open'd the casement : he led her with him,
Hush'd in heart, to the terrace, dipp'd cool in the
dim

Lustrous gloom of the shadowy laurels. They
heard

Aloof, the invisible, rapturous bird,
With her wild note bewildering the woodlands :
they saw

Not unheard, afar off, the hill-rivulet draw
His long ripple of moon-kindled wavelets with
cheer

From the throat of the vale ; o'er the dark sap-
phire sphere

The mild, multitudinous lights lay asleep,
Pastured free on the midnight, and bright as the
sheep

Of Apollo in pastoral Thrace ; from unknown
Hollow glooms freshen'd odors around them were
blown

Intermittingly ; then the moon dropp'd from their
sight,

Immersed in the mountains, and put out the light

Which no longer they needed to read on the face
Of each other life's last revelation.

The place

Slept sumptuous round them; and Nature, that
never

Sleeps, but waking reposes, with patient endeavor
Continued about them, unheeded, unseen,
Her old, quiet toil in the heart of the green
Summer silence, preparing new buds for new blossoms,

And stealing a finger of change o'er the bosoms
Of the unconscious woodlands; and Time, that
halts not

His forces, how lovely soever the spot
Where their march lies — the wary, gray strategist,
Time,

With the armies of Life, lay encamp'd — Grief and
Crime,

Love and Faith, in the darkness unheeded; matur-
ing,

For his great war with man, new surprises; secur-
ing

All outlets, pursuing and pushing his foe
To his last narrow refuge — the grave.

XV.

Sweetly though

Smiled the stars like new hopes out of heaven, and
sweetly

Their hearts beat thanksgiving for all things, com-
pletely

Confiding in that yet untrodden existence
 Over which they were pausing. To-morrow, resist-
 ance
 And struggle; to-night, Love his hallow'd device
 Hung forth, and proclaim'd his serene armistice.

CANTO V.

I.

WHEN Lucile left Matilda, she sat for long hours
 In her chamber, fatigued by long overwrought
 powers,
 'Mid the signs of departure, about to turn back
 To her old vacant life, on her old homeless track.
 She felt her heart falter within her. She sat
 Like some poor player, gazing dejectedly at
 The insignia of royalty worn for a night;
 Exhausted, fatigued, with the dazzle and light,
 And the effort of passionate feigning; who thinks
 Of her own meagre, rush-lighted garret, and
 shrinks
 From the chill of the change that awaits her.

II.

From these

Oppressive, and comfortless, blank reveries,
 Unable to sleep, she descended the stair
 That led from her room to the garden.

The air,

With the chill of the dawn, yet unris'n, but at hand,
Strangely smote on her feverish forehead. The
land

Lay in darkness and change, like a world in its
grave :

No sound, save the voice of the long river wave
And the crickets that sing all the night!

She stood still,
Vaguely watching the thin cloud that curl'd on the
hill.

Emotions, long pent in her breast, were at stir,
And the deeps of the spirit were troubled in her.
Ah, pale woman! what, with that heart-broken
look,

Didst thou read then in nature's weird heart-break-
ing book?

Have the wild rains of heaven a father? and who
Hath in pity begotten the drops of the dew?

Orion, Arcturus, who pilots them both?

What leads forth in his season the bright Maza-
roth?

Hath the darkness a dwelling,—save there, in
those eyes?

And what name hath that half-reveal'd hope in the
skies?

Ay, question, and listen! What answer?

The sound
Of the long river wave through its stone-troubled
bound,

And the crickets that sing all the night.

There are hours
 Which belong to unknown, supernatural powers,
 Whose sudden and solemn suggestions are all
 That to this race of worms, — stinging creatures,
 that crawl,
 Lie, and fear, and die daily, beneath their own
 stings, —
 Can excuse the blind boast of inherited wings.
 When the soul, on the impulse of anguish, hath
 pass'd
 Beyond anguish, and risen into rapture at last ;
 When she traverses nature and space, till she stands
 In the Chamber of Fate ; where, through tremulous
 hands,
 Hum the threads from an old-fashion'd distaff un-
 curl'd,
 And those three blind old women sit spinning the
 world.

III.

The dark was blanch'd wan, overhead. One green
 star
 Was slipping from sight in the pale void afar ;
 The spirits of change and of awe, with faint breath,
 Were shifting the midnight, above and beneath.
 The spirits of awe and of change were around
 And about, and upon her.

A dull muffled sound,
 And a hand on her hand, like a ghostly surprise,
 And she felt herself fix'd by the hot hollow eyes
 Of the Frenchman before her : those eyes seemed to
 burn,

And scorch out the darkness between them, and
 turn
 Into fire as they fix'd her. He look'd like the shade
 Of a creature by fancy some solitude made,
 And sent forth by the darkness to scare and oppress
 Some soul of a monk in a waste wilderness.

IV.

“ At last, then, — at last, and alone, — I and thou,
 Lucile de Nevers, have we met?

“ Hush! I know
 Not for me was the tryst. Never mind — it is mine;
 And whatever led hither those proud steps of thine,
 They remove not, until we have spoken. My hour
 Is come; and it holds me and thee in its power,
 As the darkness holds both the horizons. 'Tis well!
 The timidest maiden that e'er to the spell
 Of her first lover's vows listen'd, hush'd with delight,
 When soft stars were brightly uphanging the night,
 Never listen'd, I swear, more unquestioningly,
 Than thy fate hath compell'd thee to listen to me! ”
 To the sound of his voice, as though out of a dream,
 She appear'd with a start to awaken.

The stream,
 When he ceased, took the night with its moaning
 again,

Like the voices of spirits departing in pain.

“ Continue,” she answer'd, “ I listen to hear.”
 For a moment he did not reply.

Through the drear
 And dim light between them, she saw that his face

Was disturb'd. To and fro he continued to pace,
 With his arms folded close, and the low restless
 stride

Of a panther, in circles around her, first wide,
 Then narrower, nearer, and quicker. At last
 He stood still, and one long look upon her he
 cast.

“ Lucile, dost thou dare to look into my face?
 Is the sight so repugnant? ha, well! canst thou
 trace

One word of thy writing in this wicked scroll,
 With thine own name scrawl'd through it, defacing
 a soul?”

In his face there was something so wrathful and
 wild,

That the sight of it scared her.

He saw it, and smiled,
 And then turn'd him from her, renewing again
 That short restless stride; as though searching in
 vain

For the point of some purpose within him.

“ Lucile,
 You shudder to look in my face: do you feel
 No reproach when you look in your own heart?”

“ No, Duke,
 In my conscience I do not deserve your rebuke:
 Not yours!” she replied.

“ No,” he mutter'd again,
 “ Gentle justice! you first bid Life hope not, and
 then

To Despair you say, ‘ Act not!’”

v.

He watch'd her awhile

With a chill sort of restless and suffering smile.

They stood by the wall of the garden. The skies,
Dark, sombre, were troubled with vague prophecies
Of the dawn yet far distant. The moon had long
set,

And all in a glimmering light, pale, and wet
With the night-dews, the white roses sullenly loom'd
Round about her. She spoke not. At length he
resumed,

“Wrecked creatures we are! I and thou — one and
all!

Only able to injure each other and fall,
Soon or late, in that void which ourselves we pre-
pare

For the souls that we boast of! weak insects we are!
O heaven! and what has become of them? all

Those instincts of Eden surviving the Fall:

That glorious faith in inherited things:

That sense in the soul of the length of her wings;
Gone! all gone! and the wail of the night wind
sounds human,

Bewailing those once nightly visitants! Woman,
Woman, what hast thou done with my youth? Give
again,

Give me back the young heart that I gave thee . . .
in vain!”

“Duke!” she falter'd.

“Yes, yes!” he went on, “I was not
Always thus! what I once was, I have not forgot.”

VI.

As the wind that heaps sand in a desert, there
stirr'd

Through his voice an emotion that swept every word
Into one angry wail: as, with feverish change,
He continued his monologue, fitful and strange.

‘Woe to him in whose nature, once kindled, the
torch

Of Passion burns downward to blacken and scorch!
But shame, shame and sorrow, O woman, to thee
Whose hand sow'd the seed of destruction in me!
Whose lip taught the lesson of falsehood to mine!
Whose looks made me doubt lies that look'd so
divine!

My soul by thy beauty was slain in its sleep:
And if tears I mistrust, 'tis that thou too canst weep!
Well! . . . how utter soever it be, one mistake
In the love of a man, what more change need it
make

In the steps of his soul through the course love
began,

Than all other mistakes in the life of a man?
And I said to myself, ‘I am young yet: too young
To have wholly survived my own portion among
The great needs of man's life, or exhausted its joys;
What is broken? one only of youth's pleasant toys!
Shall I be the less welcome, wherever I go,
For one passion survived? No! the roses will blow
As of yore, as of yore will the nightingales sing,
Not less sweetly for one blossom cancell'd from
Spring!

Hast thou loved, O my heart? to thy love yet remains

All the wide loving-kindness of nature. The plains
And the hills with each summer their verdure renew.
Wouldst thou be as they are? do thou then as they do,
Let the dead sleep in peace. Would the living divine
Where they slumber? Let only new flowers be the
sign!

“Vain! all vain! . . . For when, laughing, the
wine I would quaff,

I remember'd too well all it cost me to laugh.

Through the revel it was but the old song I heard,
Through the crowd the old footsteps behind me they
stirr'd,

In the night-wind, the starlight, the murmurs of
even,

In the ardors of earth, and the languors of heaven,
I could trace nothing more, nothing more through
the spheres,

But the sound of old sobs, and the track of old
tears!

It was with me the night long in dreaming or
waking,

It abided in loathing, when daylight was breaking,
The burthen of the bitterness in me! Behold,

All my days were become as a tale that is told.

And I said to my sight, ‘No good thing shalt thou
see,

For the noonday is turned to darkness in me.

In the house of Oblivion my bed I have made.’

And I said to the grave, 'Lo, my father!' and said
 To the worm, 'Lo, my sister!' The dust to the
 dust,
 And one end to the wicked shall be with the just!"

VII.

He ceased, as a wind that wails out on the night
 And moans itself mute. Through the indistinct
 light

A voice clear, and tender, and pure with a tone
 Of ineffable pity, replied to his own.

"And say you, and deem you, that I wreck'd your
 life?"

Alas! Duc de Luvois, had I been your wife
 By a fraud of the heart which could yield you alone
 For the love in your nature a lie in my own,
 Should I not, in deceiving, have injured you worse?
 Yes, I then should have merited justly your curse,
 For I then should have wrong'd you!"

 "Wrong'd! ah, is it so?
 You could never have loved me?"

 "Duke!"

 "Never? oh, no!"

(He broke into a fierce, angry laugh, as he said)

"Yet, lady, you knew that I loved you: you led
 My love on to lay to its heart, hour by hour,
 All the pale, cruel, beautiful, passionless power
 Shut up in that cold face of yours! was this well?
 But enough! not on you would I vent the wild hell
 Which has grown in my heart. Oh, that man!
 first and last

He tramples in triumph my life! he has cast
 His shadow 'twixt me and the sun . . . let it pass!
 My hate yet may find him!"

She murmur'd, "Alas!
 These words, at least, spare me the pain of reply.
 Enough, Duc de Luvois! farewell. I shall try
 To forget every word I have heard, every sight
 That has grieved and appall'd me in this wretched
 night

Which must witness our final farewell. May you,
 Duke,

Never know greater cause your own heart to rebuke
 Than mine thus to wrong and afflict you have had!
 Adieu!"

"Stay, Lucile, stay!" . . . he groaned, "I am
 mad,
 Brutalized, blind with pain! I know not what I
 said.

I mean it not. But" (he moan'd, drooping his
 head)

"Forgive me! I— have I so wrong'd you, Lucile?
 I . . . have I . . . forgive me, forgive me!"

"I feel
 Only sad, very sad to the soul," she said, "far,
 Far too sad for resentment."

"Yet stand as you are
 One moment," he murmur'd. "I think, could I
 gaze

Thus awhile on your face, the old innocent days
 Would come back upon me, and this scorching
 heart

Free itself in hot tears Do not, do not depart
Thus, Lucile! stay one moment. I know why you
shrink,

Why you shudder; I read in your face what you
think.

Do not speak to me of it. And yet, if you will,
Whatever you say, my own lips shall be still.

I lied. And the truth, now, could justify nought.
There are battles, it may be, in which to have
fought

Is more shameful than, simply, to fail. Yet,
Lucile,

Had you help'd me to bear what you forced me to
feel — ”

“ Could I help you,” she murmur'd, “ but what can
I say

That your life will respond to? ” “ My life? ” he
sigh'd. “ Nay,

My life hath brought forth only evil, and there
The wild wind hath planted the wild weed: yet ere
You exclaim, ‘ Fling the weed to the flames,’ think
again

Why the field is so barren. With all other men
First love, though it perish from life, only goes
Like the primrose that falls to make way for the
rose.

For a man, at least most men, may love on through
life:

Love in fame; love in knowledge; in work: earth
is rife

With labor, and therefore, with love, for a man.

If one love fails, another succeeds, and the plan
Of man's life includes love in all objects! But I?
All such loves from my life through its whole
destiny

Fate excluded. The love that I gave you, alas!
Was the sole love that life gave to me. Let that
pass!

It perish'd, and all perish'd with it. Ambition?
Wealth left nothing to add to my social condi-
tion.

Fame? But fame in itself presupposes some
great

Field wherein to pursue and attain it. The State?
I, to cringe to an upstart? The Camp? I, to draw
From its sheath the old sword of the Dukes of
Luvois

To defend usurpation? Books, then? Science,
Art?

But, alas! I was fashion'd for action: my heart,
Wither'd thing though it be, I should hardly
compress

'Twixt the leaves of a treatise on Statics: life's
stress

Needs scope, not contraction! what rests? to wear
out

At some dark northern court an existence, no
doubt,

In wretched and paltry intrigues for a cause
As hopeless as is my own life! By the laws
Of a fate I can neither control nor dispute,
I am what I am!"

VIII.

For a while she was mute.

Then she answer'd, "We are our own fates. Our
own deeds

Are our doomsden. Man's life was made not for
men's creeds

But men's actions. And, Duc de Luvois, I might say
That all life attests, that 'the will makes the way.'
Is the land of our birth less the land of our birth,
Or its claim the less strong, or its cause the less
worth

Our upholding, because the white lily no more
Is as sacred as all that it bloom'd for of yore?
Yet be that as it may be; I cannot perchance
Judge this matter. I am but a woman, and France
Has for me simpler duties. Large hope, though,
Eugène

De Luvois, should be yours. There is purpose in
pain,

Otherwise it were devilish. I trust in my soul
That the great master hand which sweeps over the
whole

Of this deep harp of life, if at moments it stretch
To shrill tension some one wailing nerve, means to
fetch

Its response the truest, most stringent, and smart,
Its pathos the purest, from out the wrung heart,
Whose faculties, flaccid it may be, if less
Sharply strung, sharply smitten, had fail'd to
express

Just the one note the great final harmony needs.

And what best proves there's life in a heart?—
that it bleeds?

Grant a cause to remove, grant an end to attain,
Grant both to be just, and what mercy in pain!
Cease the sin with the sorrow! See morning
begin!

Pain must burn itself out if not fuell'd by sin.
There is hope in yon hill-tops, and love in yon
light.

Let hate and despondency die with the night!"

He was moved by her words. As some poor wretch
confined

In cells loud with meaningless laughter, whose
mind

Wanders trackless amidst its own ruins, may hear
A voice heard long since, silenced many a year,
And now, 'mid mad ravings recaptured again,
Singing through the caged lattice a once well-known
strain,

Which brings back his boyhood upon it, until
The mind's ruin'd crevices graciously fill
With music and memory, and, as it were,
The long-troubled spirit grows slowly aware
Of the mockery round it, and shrinks from each
thing

It once sought, — the poor idiot who pass'd for a
king,

Hard by, with his squalid straw crown, now con-
fess'd

A madman more painfully mad than the rest, —

So the sound of her voice, as it there wander'd o'er
 His echoing heart, seem'd in part to restore
 The forces of thought: he recaptured the whole
 Of his life by the light which, in passing, her soul
 Reflected on his: he appear'd to awake
 From a dream, and perceived he had dream'd a
 mistake:

His spirit was soften'd, yet troubled in him:
 He felt his lips falter, his eyesight grow dim,
 But he murmur'd . . .

“ Lucile, not for me that sun's light
 Which reveals — not restores — the wild havoc of
 night.

There are some creatures born for the night, not
 the day.

Broken-hearted the nightingale hides in the spray,
 And the owl's moody mind in his own hollow tower
 Dwells muffled. Be darkness henceforward my
 dower.

Light, be sure, in that darkness there dwells, by
 which eyes

Grown familiar with ruins may yet recognize
 Enough desolation.”

IX.

“ The pride that claims here
 On earth to itself (howsoever severe
 To itself it may be) God's dread office and right
 Of punishing sin, is a sin in heaven's sight,
 And against heaven's service.

“ Eugène de Luvois,
 Leave the judgment to Him who alone knows the law.

Surely no man can be his own judge, least of all
His own doomsman."

Her words seem'd to fall
With a weight of tears in them.

He look'd up, and saw
That sad serene countenance, mournful as law
And tender as pity, bow'd o'er him: and heard
In some thicket the matinal chirp of a bird.

X.

"Vulgar natures alone suffer vainly.

"Eugène,"

She continued, "in life we have met once again,
And once more life parts us. Yon day-spring for me
Lifts the veil of a future in which it may be
We shall meet nevermore. Grant, oh grant to me
yet

The belief that it is not in vain we have met!
I plead for the future. A new horoscope
I would cast: will you read it? I plead for a hope:
I plead for a memory; yours, yours alone,
To restore or to spare. Let the hope be your own,
Be the memory mine.

"Once of yore, when for man
Faith yet lived, ere this age of the sluggard began,
Men aroused to the knowledge of evil, fled far
From the fading rose-gardens of sense, to the war
With the Pagan, the cave in the desert, and sought
Not repose, but employment in action or thought,
Life's strong earnest, in all things! oh, think not of
me,

But yourself! for I plead for your own destiny:
 I plead for your life, with its duties undone,
 With its claims unappeased, and its trophies un-
 won;
 And in pleading for life's fair fulfilment, I plead
 For all that you miss, and for all that you need."

XI.

Through the calm crystal air, faint and far, as she
 spoke,
 A clear, chilly chime from a church-turret broke;
 And the sound of her voice, with the sound of the
 bell,
 On his ear, where he kneel'd, softly, soothingly
 fell.
 All within him was wild and confused, as within
 A chamber deserted in some roadside inn,
 Where, passing, wild travellers paused, over-night,
 To quaff and carouse; in each socket each light
 Is extinct; crash'd the glasses, and scrawl'd is the
 wall
 With wild ribald ballads; serenely o'er all,
 For the first time perceived, where the dawn-light
 creeps faint
 Through the wrecks of that orgy, the face of a
 saint,
 Seen through some broken frame, appears noting
 meanwhile
 The ruin all round with a sorrowful smile.
 And he gazed round. The curtains of Darkness
 half drawn

Oped behind her; and pure as the pure light of
dawn

She stood, bathed in morning, and seem'd to his eyes
From their sight to be melting away in the skies
That expanded around her.

XII.

There pass'd through his head
A fancy — a vision. That woman was dead
He had loved long ago — loved and lost! dead to
him,

Dead to all the life left him; but there, in the dim
Dewy light of the dawn, stood a spirit; 'twas hers;
And he said to the soul of Lucile de Nevers:

“ O soul to its sources departing away!

Pray for mine, if one soul for another may pray.

I to ask have no right, thou to give hast no power,
One hope to my heart. But in this parting hour
I name not my heart, and I speak not to thine.

Answer, soul of Lucile, to this dark soul of mine,
Does not soul owe to soul, what to heart heart
denies,

Hope, when hope is salvation? Behold, in yon
skies,

This wild night is passing away while I speak:

Lo, above us, the day-spring beginning to break!

Something wakens within me, and warms to the
beam:

Is it hope that awakens? or do I but dream?

I know not. It may be, perchance, the first spark
Of a new light within me to solace the dark

Unto which I return ; or perchance it may be
The last spark of fires half extinguish'd in me.
I know not. Thou goest thy way : I my own ;
For good or for evil, I know not. Alone
This I know : we are parting. I wish'd to say
more,

But no matter ! 'twill pass. All between us is o'er.
Forget the wild words of to-night. 'Twas the pain
For long years hoarded up, that rush'd from me
again.

I was unjust : forgive me. Spare now to reprove
Other words, other deeds. It was madness, not
love,

That you thwarted this night. What is done is
now done.

Death remains to avenge it, or life to atone.

I was madden'd, delirious ! I saw you return
To him — not to me ; and I felt my heart burn
With a fierce thirst for vengeance — and thus . . .
let it pass !

Long thoughts these, and so brief the moments,
alas !

Thou goest thy way, and I mine. I suppose
'Tis to meet nevermore. Is it not so ? Who
knows.

Or who heeds, where the exile from Paradise flies ?
Or what altars of his in the desert may rise ?

Is it not so, Lucile ? Well, well ! Thus then we
part

Once again, soul from soul, as before heart from
heart !”

XIII.

And again clearer far than the chime of the bell,
That voice on his sense softly, soothingly fell.

“ Our two paths must part us, Eugène ; for my own
Seems no more through that world in which hence-
forth alone

You must work out (as now I believe that you will)
The hope which you speak of. That work I shall
still

(If I live) watch and welcome, and bless far away.
Doubt not this. But mistake not the thought, if I
say

That the great moral combat between human life
And each human soul must be single. The strife
None can share, though by all its results may be
known.

When the soul arms for battle, she goes forth alone.
I say not, indeed, we shall meet nevermore,
For I know not. But meet, as we have met of yore,
I know that we cannot. Perchance we may meet
By the death-bed, the tomb, in the crowd, in the
street,

Or in solitude even, but never again
Shall we meet from henceforth as we have met,
Eugène.

For we know not the way we are going, nor yet
Where our two ways may meet, or may cross. Life
hath set

No landmarks before us. But this, this alone,
I will promise : whatever your path, or my own,
If, for once in the conflict before you, it chance

That the Dragon prevail, and with cleft shield, and
 lance
 Lost or shatter'd, borne down by the stress of the
 war,
 You falter and hesitate, if from afar
 I, still watching (unknown to yourself, it may be)
 O'er the conflict to which I conjure you, should see
 That my presence could rescue, support you, or
 guide,
 In the hour of that need I shall be at your side,
 To warn, if you will, or incite, or control;
 And again, once again, we shall meet, soul to soul!"

XIV.

The voice ceased.

He uplifted his eyes.

All alone

He stood on the bare edge of dawn. She was gone,
 Like a star, when up bay after bay of the night,
 Ripples in, wave on wave, the broad ocean of light.
 And at once, in her place was the Sunrise! It rose
 In its sumptuous splendor and solemn repose,
 The supreme revelation of light. Domes of gold,
 Realms of rose, in the Orient! and breathless, and
 bold,
 While the great gates of heaven roll'd back one by
 one,
 The bright herald angel stood stern in the sun!
 Thrice holy Eospheros! Light's reign began
 In the heaven, on the earth, in the heart of the
 man.

And he — as the body may yearn for the soul,
 So he yearn'd to embody that image. His whole
 Heart arose to regain it.

“ And is it too late?”

No! for Time is a fiction, and limits not fate.
 Thought alone is eternal. Time thralls it in vain.
 For the thought that springs upward and yearns to
 regain

The pure source of spirit, there *is* no TOO LATE.
 As the stream to its first mountain levels, elate
 In the fountain arises, the spirit in him
 Arose to that image. The image waned dim
 Into heaven; and heavenward with it, to melt
 As it melted, in day's broad expansion, he felt
 With a thrill, sweet and strange, and intense — awed,
 amazed —

Something soar and ascend in his soul, as he gazed.

CANTO VI.

I.

MAN is born on a battle-field. Round him, to rend
 Or resist, the dread Powers he displaces attend,
 By the cradle which Nature, amidst the stern shocks
 That have shatter'd creation, and shapen it, rocks.
 He leaps with a wail into being; and lo!
 His own mother, fierce Nature herself, is his foe.
 Her whirlwinds are roused into wrath o'er his head:

'Neath his feet roll her earthquakes : her solitudes
 spread
 To daunt him : her forces dispute his command :
 Her snows fall to freeze him : her suns burn to
 brand :
 Her seas yawn to engulf him : her rocks rise to
 crush :
 And the lion and leopard, allied, lurk to rush
 On their startled invader.

In lone Malabar,
 Where the infinite forest spreads breathless and far,
 'Mid the cruel of eye and the stealthy of claw
 (Striped and spotted destroyers!) he sees, pale with
 awe,
 On the menacing edge of a fiery sky,
 Grim Doorga, blue-limb'd and red-handed, go by,
 And the first thing he worships is Terror.

Anon,

Still impell'd by necessity hungrily on,
 He conquers the realms of his own self-reliance,
 And the last cry of fear wakes the first of defiance.
 From the serpent he crushes its poisonous soul ;
 Smitten down in his path see the dead lion roll !
 On toward Heaven the son of Alcmena strides high
 on
 The heads of the Hydra, the spoils of the lion :
 And man, conquering terror, is worshipp'd by man.

A camp has the world been since first it began !
 From his tents sweeps the roving Arabian ; at peace,
 A mere wandering shepherd that follows the fleece ;

But, warring his way through a world's destinies,
 Lo from Delhi, from Bagdadt, from Cordova, rise
 Domes of empire, dower'd with science and art,
 Schools, libraries, forums, the palace, the mart!

New realms to man's soul have been conquer'd.

But those

Forthwith they are peopled for man by new foes!
 The stars keep their secrets, the earth hides her
 own,

And bold must the man be that braves the Un-
 known!

Not a truth has to art or to science been given,
 But brows have ached for it, and souls toil'd and
 striven;

And many have striven, and many have fail'd,
 And many died, slain by the truth they assail'd.
 But when Man hath tamed Nature, asserted his
 place

And dominion, behold! he is brought face to face
 With a new foe — himself!

Nor may man on his shield
 Ever rest, for his foe is ever afield.

Danger ever at hand, till the armed Archangel
 Sound o'er him the trump of earth's final evangel.

II.

Silence straightway, stern Muse, the soft cymbals
 of pleasure,

Be all bronzen these numbers, and martial the
 measure!

Breathe, sonorously breathe, o'er the spirit in me
 One strain, sad and stern, of that deep Epopée
 Which thou, from the fashionless cloud of far time,
 Chantest lonely, when Victory, pale, and sublime
 In the light of the aureole over her head,
 Hears, and heeds not the wound in her heart fresh
 and red.

Blown wide by the blare of the clarion, unfold
 The shrill clanging curtains of war!

And behold

A vision!

The antique Heracleian seats;
 And the long Black Sea billow that once bore those
 fleets,

Which said to the winds, "Be ye, too, Genoese!"
 And the red angry sands of the chafed Cheronese;
 And the two foes of man, War and Winter, allied
 Round the Armies of England and France, side by
 side

Enduring and dying (Gaul and Briton abreast!)
 Where the towers of the North fret the skies of the
 East.

III.

Since that sunrise which rose through the calm
 linden stems

O'er Lucile and Eugène, in the garden of Ems,
 Through twenty-five seasons encircling the sun,
 This planet of ours on its pathway hath gone,
 And the fates that I sing of have flowed with the
 fates

Of a world, in the red wake of war, round the gates

Of that doom'd and heroical city, in which
 (Fire crowning the rampart, blood bathing the
 ditch !),
 At bay, fights the Russian as some hunted bear,
 Whom the huntsmen have hemm'd round at last in
 his lair.

IV.

A fang'd, arid plain, sapp'd with underground fire,
 Soak'd with snow, torn with shot, mash'd to one
 gory mire !
 There Fate's iron scale hangs in horrid suspense,
 While those two famished ogres — the Siege, the
 Defence,
 Face to face, through a vapor frore, dismal, and dun,
 Glare, scenting the breath of each other.

The one

Double-bodied, two-headed — by separate ways
 Winding, serpent-wise, nearer; the other, each
 day's
 Sullen toil adding size to, — concentrated, solid,
 Indefatigable — the brass-fronted, embodied,
 And audible *αυτο;* gone sombrely forth
 To the world from that Autocrat Will of the north !

V.

In the dawn of a moody October, a pale
 Ghostly motionless vapor began to prevail
 Over city and camp; like the garment of death
 Which (is formed by) the face it conceals.

'Twas the breath

War, yet drowsily yawning, began to suspire;

Wherethrough, here and there, flash'd an eye of red
 fire,
 And closed, from some rampart beginning to bel-
 low
 Hoarse challenge; replied to anon, through the
 yellow
 And sulphurous twilight: till day reel'd and rock'd
 And roar'd into dark. Then the midnight was
 mock'd
 With fierce apparitions. Ring'd round by a rain
 Of red fire, and of iron, the murtherous plain
 Flared with fitful combustion; where fitfully fell
 Afar off the fatal, disgorged *scharpenelle*,
 And fired the horizon, and singed the coil'd gloom
 With wings of swift flame round that City of
 Doom.

VI.

So the day — so the night! So by night, so by
 day,
 With stern patient pathos, while time wears away,
 In the trench flooded through, in the wind where
 it wails,
 In the snow where it falls, in the fire where it hails
 Shot and shell — link by link, out of hardship and
 pain,
 Toil, sickness, endurance, is forged the bronze
 chain
 Of those terrible siege-lines!
 No change to that toil
 Save the mine's sudden leap from the treacherous
 soil,

Save the midnight attack, save the groans of the
 maim'd,
 And Death's daily obolus due, whether claim'd
 By man or by nature.

VII.

Time passes. The dumb,
 Bitter, snow-bound, and sullen November is come.
 And its snows have been bathed in the blood of
 the brave ;
 And many a young heart has glutted the grave :
 And on Inkerman yet the wild bramble is gory,
 And those bleak heights henceforth shall be famous
 in story.

VIII.

The moon, swathed in storm, has long set : through
 the camp
 No sound save the sentinel's slow sullen tramp,
 The distant explosion, the wild sleety wind,
 That seems searching for something it never can
 find.
 The midnight is turning : the lamp is nigh spent :
 And, wounded and lone, in a desolate tent
 Lies a young British soldier whose sword . . .
 In this place,
 However, my Muse is compell'd to retrace
 Her precipitous steps and revert to the past.
 The shock which had suddenly shatter'd at last
 Alfred Vargrave's fantastical holiday nature,
 Had sharply drawn forth to his full size and stat-
 ure

The real man, conceal'd till that moment beneath
 All he yet had appear'd. From the gay broider'd
 sheath

Which a man in his wrath flings aside, even so
 Leaps the keen trenchant steel summon'd forth by
 a blow.

And thus loss of fortune gave value to life.

The wife gain'd a husband, the husband a wife,
 In that home which, though humbled and narrow'd
 by fate,

Was enlarged and ennobled by love. Low their
 state,

But large their possessions.

Sir Ridley, forgiven

By those he unwittingly brought nearer heaven
 By one fraudulent act, than through all his sleek
 speech

The hypocrite brought his own soul, safe from
 reach

Of the law, died abroad.

Cousin John, heart and hand,
 Purse and person, henceforth (honest man!) took
 his stand

By Matilda and Alfred; guest, guardian, and
 friend

Of the home he both shared and assured, to the
 end,

With his large lively love. Alfred Vargrave mean-
 while

Faced the world's frown, consoled by his wife's
 faithful smile.

Late in life he began life in earnest ; and still,
 With the tranquil exertion of resolute will,
 Through long, and laborious, and difficult days,
 Out of manifold failure, by wearisome ways,
 Work'd his way through the world ; till at last he
 began

(Reconciled to the work which mankind claims for
 man),

After years of unwitness'd, unwearied endeavor,
 Years impassion'd yet patient, to realize ever
 More clear on the broad stream of current opinion
 The reflex of powers in himself — that dominion
 Which the life of one man, if his life be a truth,
 May assert o'er the life of mankind. Thus, his
 youth

In his manhood renew'd, fame and fortune he won
 Working only for home, love, and duty.

One son

Matilda had borne him ; but scarce had the boy,
 With all Eton yet fresh in his full heart's frank
 joy,

The darling of young soldier comrades, just
 glanced

Down the glad dawn of manhood at life, when it
 chanced

That a blight sharp and sudden was breath'd o'er
 the bloom

Of his joyous and generous years, and the gloom
 Of a grief premature on their fair promise fell :
 No light cloud like those which, for June to dispel,
 Captious April engenders ; but deep as his own

Deep nature. Meanwhile, ere I fully make known
The cause of this sorrow, I track the event.
When first a wild war-note through England was
sent,
He, transferring without either token or word,
To friend, parent, or comrade, a yet virgin sword,
From a holiday troop, to one bound for the war,
Had march'd forth, with eyes that saw death in the
star
Whence others sought glory. Thus fighting, he fell
On the red field of Inkerman; found, who can tell
By what miracle, breathing, though shatter'd, and
borne
To the rear by his comrades, pierced, bleeding, and
torn.
Where for long days and nights, with the wound
in his side,
He lay, dark.

IX.

But a wound deeper far, undescried,
The young heart was rankling; for there, of a truth,
In the first earnest faith of a pure pensive youth,
A love large as life, deep and changeless as death,
Lay ensheath'd: and that love, ever fretting its
sheath,
The frail scabbard of life pierced and wore through
and through.
There are loves in man's life for which time can
renew
All that time may destroy. Lives there are, though,
in love,

Which cling to one faith, and die with it; nor
 move,
 Though earthquakes may shatter the shrine.

 Whence or how
 Love laid claim to this young life, it matters not
 now.

X.

Oh is it a phantom? a dream of the night?
 A vision which fever hath fashion'd to sight?
 The wind wailing ever, with motion uncertain,
 Sways sighingly there the drench'd tent's tattered
 curtain,
 To and fro, up and down.

 But it is not the wind
 That is lifting it now: and it is not the mind
 That hath moulded that vision.

 A pale woman enters,
 As wan as the lamp's waning light, which concen-
 ters
 Its dull glare upon her. With eyes dim and dim-
 mer

There, all in a slumberous and shadowy glimmer,
 The sufferer sees that still form floating on,
 And feels faintly aware that he is not alone.
 She is flitting before him. She pauses. She
 stands
 By his bedside all silent. She lays her white
 hands
 On the brow of the boy. A light finger is pressing
 Softly, softly the sore wounds: the hot blood-
 stain'd dressing

A poor Sister of Charity. Shun to inquire
Aught further, young soldier. The son of thy
sire,

For the sake of that sire, I reclaim from the grave.
Thou didst not shun death: shun not life: 'Tis
more brave

To live than to die. Sleep!"

He sleeps: he is sleeping.

XII.

He waken'd again, when the dawn was just steep-
ing

The skies with chill splendor. And there, never
fitting,

Never fitting, that vision of mercy was sitting.

As the dawn to the darkness, so life seemed re-
turning

Slowly, feebly within him. The night-lamp yet
burning,

Made ghastly the glimmering daybreak.

He said,

"If thou be of the living, and not of the dead,
Sweet minister, pour out yet further the healing
Of that balmy voice: if it may be, revealing
Thy mission of mercy: whence art thou?"

"O son

Of Matilda and Alfred, it matters not! One
Who is not of the living nor yet of the dead:
To thee, and to others, alive yet" . . . she
said . . .

"So long as there liveth the poor gift in me

Of this ministration; to them, and to thee,
Dead in all things beside. A French Nun, whose
vocation

Is now by this bedside. A nun hath no nation.
Wherever man suffers, or woman may soothe,
There her land! there her kindred!"

She bent down to smooth
The hot pillow; and added . . . "Yet more than
another

Is thy life dear to me. For thy father, thy mother,
I know them — I know them."

"Oh, can it be? you!
My dearest dear father! my mother! you knew,
You know them?"

She bowed, half averting her head
In silence.

He brokenly, timidly said,
"Do they know I am thus?"

"Hush!" . . . she smiled, as she drew
From her bosom two letters: and — can it be
true?

That beloved and familiar writing!

He burst
Into tears . . . "My poor mother — my father!
the worst

Will have reach'd them!"

"No, no!" she exclaimed, with a smile,
"They know you are living; they know that mean-
while

I am watching beside you. Young soldier, weep
not!"

Of a beauty which time could not ruin. For the
 whole
 Quiet cheek, youth's lost bloom left transparent, the
 soul
 Seemed to fill with its own light, like some sunny
 fountain
 Everlastingly fed from far off in the mountain
 That pours, in a garden deserted, its streams,
 And all the more lovely for loneliness seems.
 So that, watching that face, you could scarce pause
 to guess
 The years which its calm careworn lines might ex-
 press,
 Feeling only what suffering with these must have
 past
 To have perfected there so much sweetness at last.

XV.

Thus, one bronzen evening, when day had put out
 His brief thrifty fires, and the wind was about,
 The nun, watchful still by the boy, on his own
 Laid a firm quiet hand, and the deep tender tone
 Of her voice moved the silence.

She said . . . "I have heal'd
 These wounds of the body. Why hast thou con-
 ceal'd,
 Young soldier, that yet open wound in the heart?
 Wilt thou trust *no* hand near it?"

He winced, with a start,
 As of one that is suddenly touched on the spot
 From which every nerve derives suffering.

“What?

Lies my heart, then, so bare?” he moaned bitterly.

“Nay,”

With compassionate accents she hastened to say,
 “Do you think that these eyes are with sorrow,
 young man,

So all unfamiliar. indeed, as to scan

Her features, yet know them not?

“Oh, was it spoken,

‘*Go ye forth, heal the sick, lift the low, bind the
 broken!*’

Of the body alone? Is our mission, then, done,
 When we leave the bruised hearts, if we bind the
 bruised bone?

Nay, is not the mission of mercy twofold?

Whence twofold, perchance, are the powers that
 we hold

To fulfil it, of Heaven! For Heaven doth still
 To us, Sisters, it may be, who seek it, send skill
 Won from long intercourse with affliction, and art
 Help’d of Heaven, to bind up the broken of heart.
 Trust to me!” (His two feeble hands in her own
 She drew gently.) “Trust to me!” (she said, with
 soft tone):

“I am not so dead in remembrance to all
 I have died to in this world, but what I recall
 Enough of its sorrow, enough of its trial,
 To grieve for both — save from both haply! The
 dial

Receives many shades, and each points to the sun.
 The shadows are many, the sunlight is one.

One uncle their place in her life had supplied,
 And their place in her heart: she had grown at his
 side,

And under his roof-tree, and in his regard,
 From childhood to girlhood.

This fair orphan ward

Seem'd the sole human creature that lived in the
 heart

Of that stern rigid man, or whose smile could impart
 One ray of response to the eyes which, above
 Her fair infant forehead, look'd down with a love
 That seem'd almost stern, so intense was its chill
 Lofty stillness, like sunlight on some lonely hill
 Which is colder and stiller than sunlight elsewhere.

Grass grew in the court-yard; the chambers were
 bare

In that ancient mansion; when first the stern tread
 Of its owner awaken'd their echoes long dead:
 Bringing with him this infant (the child of a
 brother),

Whom, dying, the hands of a desolate mother
 Had placed on his bosom. 'Twas said — right or
 wrong —

That, in the lone mansion, left tenantless long,
 To which, as a stranger, its lord now return'd,
 In years yet recall'd, through loud midnights had
 burn'd

The light of wild orgies. Be that false or true,
 Slow and sad was the footstep which now wander'd
 through

Those desolate chambers ; and calm and severe
Was the life of their inmate.

Men now saw appear

Every morn at the mass that firm sorrowful face,
Which seem'd to lock up in a cold iron case
Tears harden'd to crystal. Yet harsh if he were,
His severity seem'd to be trebly severe
In the rule of his own rigid life, which, at least,
Was benignant to others. The poor parish priest,
Who lived on his largess, his piety praised.
The peasant was fed, and the chapel was raised,
And the cottage was built, by his liberal hand.
Yet he seem'd in the midst of his good deeds to stand
A lone, and unloved, and unlovable man.
There appear'd some inscrutable flaw in the plan
Of his life, that love fail'd to pass over.

That child

Alone did not fear him, nor shrink from him ; smiled
To his frown, and dispell'd it.

The sweet sportive elf

Seem'd the type of some joy lost, and miss'd, in
himself.

Ever welcome he suffer'd her glad face to glide
In on hours when to others his door was denied :
And many a time with a mute moody look
He would watch her at prattle and play, like a brook
Whose babble disturbs not the quietest spot,
But soothes us because we need answer it not.

But few years had pass'd o'er that childhood before
A change came among them. A letter, which bore

Sudden consequence with it, one morning was
 placed
 In the hands of the lord of the château. He paced
 To and fro in his chamber a whole night alone
 After reading that letter. At dawn he was gone.
 Weeks pass'd. When he came back again he
 return'd
 With a tall ancient dame, from whose lips the child
 learn'd
 That they were of the same race and name. With
 a face
 Sad and anxious, to this wither'd stock of the race
 He confided the orphan, and left them alone
 In the old lonely house.

In a few days 'twas known,
 To the angry surprise of half Paris, that one
 Of the chiefs of that party which, still clinging on
 To the banner that bears the white lilies of France,
 Will fight 'neath no other, nor yet for the chance
 Of restoring their own, had renounced the watch-
 word
 And the creed of his youth in unsheathing his sword,
 For a Fatherland father'd no more (such is fate !)
 By legitimate parents.

And meanwhile, elate
 And in no wise disturbed by what Paris might say,
 The new soldier thus wrote to a friend far away : —
 “ To the life of inaction farewell ! After all,
 Creeds the oldest may crumble, and dynasties fall,
 But the sole grand Legitimacy will endure,
 In whatever makes death noble, life strong and pure.

Freedom! action! . . . the desert to breathe in—
 the lance
 Of the Arab to follow! I go! *Vive la France!*”

Few and rare were the meetings henceforth, as
 years fled,
 ’Twi’x the child and the soldier. The two women
 led

Lone lives in the lone house. Meanwhile the child
 grew

Into girlhood; and, like a sunbeam, sliding through
 Her green quiet years, changed by gentle degrees
 To the loveliest vision of youth a youth sees
 In his loveliest fancies: as pure as a pearl,
 And as perfect: a noble and innocent girl,
 With eighteen sweet summers dissolved in the light
 Of her lovely and lovable eyes, soft and bright!
 Then her guardian wrote to the dame, . . . “Let
 Constance

Go with you to Paris. I trust that in France
 I may be ere the close of the year. I confide
 My life’s treasure to you. Let her see, at your side,
 The world which we live in.”

To Paris then came
 Constance to abide with that old stately dame
 In that old stately Faubourg.

The young Englishman
 Thus met her. ’Twas there their acquaintance
 began,
 There it closed. That old miracle, Love-at-first-
 sight,

Needs no explanations. The heart reads aright
 Its destiny sometimes. His love neither chidden
 Nor check'd, the young soldier was graciously bid-
 den

An habitual guest to that house by the dame.
 His own candid graces, the world-honor'd name
 Of his father (in him not dishonor'd) were both
 Fair titles to favor. His love, nothing loath,
 The old lady observed, was return'd by *Constànce*.
 And as the child's uncle his absence from France
 Yet prolong'd, she (thus easing long self-gratula-
 tion)

Wrote to him a lengthen'd and moving narration
 Of the graces and gifts of the young English wooer:
 His father's fair fame; the boy's deference to her;
 His love for *Constànce*, — unaffected, sincere;
 And the girl's love for him, read by her in those
 clear

Limpid eyes; then the pleasure with which she
 awaited

Her cousin's approval of all she had stated.

At length from that cousin an answer there came,
 Brief, stern: such as stunn'd and astonish'd the
 dame.

“ Let *Constànce* leave Paris with you on the day
 You receive this. Until my return she may stay
 At her convent awhile. If my niece wishes ever
 To behold me again, understand, she will never
 Wed that man.

“ You have broken faith with me. Farewell!”

No appeal from that sentence.

It needs not to tell
The tears of *Constànce*, nor the grief of her lover:
The dream they had laid out their lives in was over.
Bravely strove the young soldier to look in the face
Of a life where invisible hands seemed to trace
O'er the threshold these words . . . "Hope no
more!"

Unreturn'd
Had his love been, the strong manful heart would
have spurn'd

That weakness which suffers a woman to lie
At the roots of man's life, like a canker, and dry
And wither the sap of life's purpose. But there
Lay the bitterer part of the pain! Could he dare
To forget he was loved? that he grieved not alone?
Recording a love that drew sorrow upon
The woman he loved, for himself dare he seek
Surcease to that sorrow, which thus held him weak,
Beat him down, and destroy'd him?

News reach'd him indeed,
Through a comrade, who brought him a letter to
read

From the dame who had care of *Constànce* (it was one
To whom, when at Paris, the boy had been known,
A Frenchman, and friend of the *Faubourg*), which
said

That *Constànce*, although never a murmur betray'd
What she suffer'd, in silence grew paler each day,
And seem'd visibly drooping and dying away.
It was then he sought death.

XVII.

Thus the tale ends. 'Twas told
 With such broken, passionate words, as unfold
 In glimpses alone, a coil'd grief. Through each
 pause
 Of its fitful recital, in raw gusty flaws,
 The rain shook the canvas, unheeded; aloof,
 And unheeded, the night-wind around the tent-
 roof
 At intervals wirbled. And when all was said,
 The sick man, exhausted, droop'd backward his
 head,
 And fell into a feverish slumber.

Long while
 Sat the Sœur Seraphine, in deep thought. The
 still smile
 That was wont, angel-wise, to inhabit her face
 And made it like heaven, was fled from its place
 In her eyes, on her lips; and a deep sadness
 there
 Seem'd to darken the lines of long sorrow and
 care,
 As low to herself she sigh'd . . .

“Hath it, Eugène,
 Been so long, then, the struggle?” . . . and yet,
 all in vain!
 Nay, not all in vain! Shall the world gain a man,
 And yet Heaven lose a soul? Have I done all I
 can?
 Soul to soul, did he say? Soul to soul, be it so!
 And then — soul of mine, whither? whither?”

XVIII.

Large, slow,
 Silent tears in those deep eyes ascended, and
 fell.

“*Here*, at least, I have fail’d not” . . . she mused
 . . . “this is well!”

She drew from her bosom two letters.

In one,
 A mother’s heart, wild with alarm for her son,
 Breathed bitterly forth its despairing appeal.
 “The pledge of a love owed to thee, O Lucile!
 The hope of a home saved by thee — of a heart
 Which hath never since then (thrice endear’d as
 thou art!)

Ceased to bless thee, to pray for thee, save! . . .
 save my son!

And if not” . . . the letter went brokenly on,
 “Heaven help us!”

Then follow’d, from Alfred, a few
 Blotted heart-broken pages. He mournfully drew,
 With pathos, the picture of that earnest youth,
 So unlike his own; how in beauty and truth
 He had nurtured that nature, so simple and brave!
 And how he had striven his son’s youth to save
 From the errors so sadly redeem’d in his own,
 And so deeply repented: how thus, in that son,
 In whose youth he had garner’d his age, he had
 seem’d

To be bless’d by a pledge that the past was re-
 deem’d,

And forgiven. He bitterly went on to speak

Of the boy's baffled love; in which fate seem'd to
break

Unawares on his dreams with retributive pain,
And the ghosts of the past rose to scourge back
again

The hopes of the future. To sue for consent
Pride forbade: and the hope his old foe might
relent

Experience rejected . . . "My life for the boy's!"
(He exclaim'd); "for I die with my son, if he dies!
Lucile! Heaven bless you for all you have done!
Save him, save him, Lucile! save my son! save my
son!"

XIX.

"Ay!" murmur'd the Sœur Seraphine . . . "heart
to heart!

There, at least, I have fail'd not! Fulfill'd is my
part?

Accomplish'd my mission? One act crowns the
whole.

Do I linger? Nay, be it so, then! . . . Soul to
soul!"

She knelt down, and pray'd. Still the boy
slumber'd on,

Dawn broke. The pale nun from the bedside was
gone.

XX.

Meanwhile, 'mid his aides-de-camp, busily bent
O'er the daily reports, in his well-order'd tent
There sits a French General — bronzed by the sun
And sear'd by the sands of Algeria. One

Who forth from the wars of the wild Kabylee
Had strangely and rapidly risen to be
The idol, the darling, the dream and the star
Of the younger French chivalry: daring in war,
And wary in council. He enter'd, indeed,
Late in life (and discarding his Bourbonite creed)
The Army of France: and had risen, in part
From a singular aptitude proved for the art
Of that wild desert warfare of ambush, surprise,
And stratagem, which to the French camp supplies
Its subtlest intelligence; partly from chance;
Partly, too, from a name and position which France
Was proud to put forward; but mainly, in fact,
From the prudence to plan, and the daring to act,
In frequent emergencies startlingly shown,
To the rank which he now held, — intrepidly won
With many a wound, trench'd in many a scar,
From fierce Milianah and Sidi-Sakhdar.

XXI.

All within, and without, that warm tent seems to
bear

Smiling token of provident order and care.

All about, a well-fed, well-clad soldiery stands
In groups round the music of mirth-breathing
bands.

In and out of the tent, all day long, to and fro,
The messengers come and the messengers go,
Upon missions of mercy, or errands of toil:
To report how the sapper contends with the soil
In the terrible trench, how the sick man is faring

In the hospital tent: and, combining, comparing,
Constructing, within moves the brain of one man,
Moving all.

He is bending his brow o'er some plan
For the hospital service, wise, skilful, humane.

The officer standing behind him is fain

To refer to the angel solicitous cares

Of the Sisters of Charity: one he declares

To be known through the camp as a seraph of
grace;

He has seen, all have seen her indeed, in each
place

Where suffering is seen, silent, active — the
Sœur . . .

Sœur . . . how do they call her?

“Ay, truly, of her
I have heard much,” the General, musing, replies;

“And we owe her already (unless rumor lies)

The lives of not few of our bravest. You
mean . . .

Ay, how do they call her? . . . the Sœur—
Seraphine

(Is it not so?). I rarely forget names once heard.”

“Yes; the Sœur Seraphine. Her I meant.”

“On my word,
I have much wish'd to see her. I fancy I trace.

In some facts traced to her, something more than
the grace

Of an angel; I mean an acute human mind,

Ingenious, constructive, intelligent. Find,

And if possible, let her come to me. We shall,
I think, aid each other."

"*Oui, mon Général:*

I believe she has lately obtained the permission
To tend some sick man in the Second Division
Of our Ally: they say a relation."

"Ay, so?

A relation?"

"'Tis said so."

"The name do you know?"

"*Non, mon Général.*"

While they spoke yet, there went

A murmur and stir round the door of the tent.

"A Sister of Charity craves, in a case
Of urgent and serious importance, the grace
Of brief private speech with the General there.
Will the General speak with her?"

"Bid her declare

Her mission."

"She will not. She craves to be seen
And be heard."

"Well, her name, then?"

"The Sœur Seraphine."

"Clear the tent. She may enter."

XXII.

The tent has been clear'd,
The chieftain stroked moodily somewhat his beard,
A sable long silver'd: and press'd down his brow
On his hand, heavy vein'd. All his countenance,
now

Unwitness'd, at once fell dejected, and dreary,
 As a curtain let fall by a hand that's grown weary,
 Into puckers and folds. From his lips, unrepress'd,
 Steals th' impatient sigh which reveals in man's
 breast

A conflict conceal'd, and experience at strife
 With itself, — the vex'd heart's passing protest on
 life.

He turn'd to his papers. He heard the light tread
 Of a faint foot behind him: and, lifting his head,
 Said, " Sit, Holy Sister! your worth is well known
 To the hearts of our soldiers: nor less to my own.
 I have much wish'd to see you. I owe you some
 thanks;

In the name of all those you have saved to our
 ranks

I record them. Sit! Now then, your mission?"

The nun

Paused silent. The General eyed her anon
 More keenly. His aspect grew troubled. A change
 Darken'd over his features. He mutter'd . . .

" Strange! strange!

Any face should so strongly remind me of *her*!
 Fool! again the delirium, the dream! does it stir?
 Does it move as of old? Psha!

" Sit, Sister! I wait
 Your answer, my time halts but hurriedly. State
 The cause why you seek me."

" The cause? ay, the cause!"

She vaguely repeated. Then, after a pause, —
 As one who, awaked unawares, would put back

The sleep that forever returns in the track
Of dreams which, though scared and dispersed,
 not the less
Settle back to faint eyelids that yield 'neath their
 stress,
Like doves to a penthouse,—a movement she
 made,
Less toward him than away from herself; droop'd
 her head
And folded her hands on her bosom: long, spare,
Fatigued, mournful hands! Not a stream of stray
 hair
Escaped the pale bands; scarce more pale than the
 face
Which they bound and lock'd up in a rigid white
 case.
She fix'd her eyes on him. There crept a vague awe
O'er his sense, such as ghosts cast.

“Eugène de Luvois,
The cause which recalls me again to your side,
Is a promise that rests unfulfill'd,” she replied.
“I come to fulfil it.”

He sprang from the place
Where he sat, press'd his hand, as in doubt, o'er
 his face;
And, cautiously feeling each step o'er the ground
That he trod on (as one who walks fearing the
 sound
Of his footstep may startle and scare out of sight
Some strange sleeping creature on which he would
 'light

Unawares), crept towards her; one heavy hand laid
 On her shoulder in silence; bent o'er her his head,
 Search'd her face with a long look of troubled
 appeal

Against doubt: stagger'd backward, and murmur'd
 . . . "Lucile?"

Thus we meet then? . . . here! . . . thus?"

"Soul to soul, ay, Eugène,
 As I pledged you my word that we should meet
 again.

Dead, . . ." she murmur'd, "long dead! all that
 lived in our lives —

Thine and mine — saving that which ev'n life's self
 survives,

The soul! 'Tis my soul seeks thine own. What
 may reach

From my life to thy life (so wide each from each!)
 Save the soul to the soul? To thy soul I would
 speak.

May I do so?"

He said (work'd and white was his cheek

As he raised it), "Speak to me!"

Deep, tender, serene,
 And sad was the gaze which the Sœur Seraphine
 Held on him. She spoke.

XXIII.

As some minstrel may fling,
 Preluding the music yet mute in each string,
 A swift hand athwart the hush'd heart of the
 whole,

Seeking which note most fitly must first move the
soul;

And, leaving untroubled the deep chords below,
Move pathetic in numbers remote; — even so
The voice which was moving the heart of that man
Far away from its yet voiceless purpose began,
Far away in the pathos remote of the past;
Until, through her words, rose before him, at last,
Bright and dark in their beauty, the hopes that
were gone
Unaccomplish'd from life.

He was mute.

XXIV.

She went on
And still further down the dim past did she lead
Each yielding remembrance, far, far off, to feed
'Mid the pastures of youth, in the twilight of hope,
And the valleys of boyhood, the fresh-flower'd
slope
Of life's dawning land!

'Tis the heart of a boy,
With its indistinct, passionate prescience of joy!
The unproved desire — the unaim'd aspiration —
The deep conscious life that forestalls consummation
With ever a flitting delight — one arm's length
In advance of the august inward impulse.

The strength
Of the spirit which troubles the seed in the sand
With the birth of the palm-tree! Let ages expand
The glorious creature! The ages lie shut

(Safe, see!) in the seed, at time's signal to put
Forth their beauty and power, leaf by leaf, layer
on layer,

Till the palm strikes the sun, and stands broad in
blue air.

So the palm in the palm-seed! so, slowly—so,
wrought

Year by year unperceived, hope on hope, thought
by thought,

Trace the growth of the man from its germ in the
boy.

Ah, but Nature, that nurtures, may also destroy!
Charm the wind and the sun, lest some chance
intervene!

While the leaf's in the bud, while the stem's in the
green.

A light bird bends the branch, a light breeze breaks
the bough,

Which, if spared by the light breeze, the light
bird, may grow

To baffle the tempest, and rock the high nest,
And take both the bird and the breeze to its breast.

Shall we save a whole forest in sparing one seed?
Save the man in the boy? in the thought save the
deed?

Let the whirlwind uproot the grown tree, if it can!
Save the seed from the north wind. So let the
grown man

Face our fate. Spare the man-seed in youth.

He was dumb.

She went one step further.

XV.

Lo! manhood is come.

And love, the wild song-bird, hath flown to the
tree.

And the whirlwind comes after. Now prove we,
and see :

What shade from the leaf? what support from the
branch?

Spreads the leaf broad and fair? holds the bough
strong and staunch?

There, he saw himself — dark, as he stood on that
night,

The last when they met and they parted : a sight
For heaven to mourn o'er, for hell to rejoice!

An ineffable tenderness troubled her voice ;

It grew weak, and a sigh broke it through.

Then he said

(Never looking at her, never lifting his head,

As though, at his feet, there lay visibly hur'd

Those fragments), "It was not a love, 'twas a
world,

'Twas a life that lay ruin'd, Lucile!"

XXVI.

She went on.

"So be it! Perish Babel, arise Babylon!

From ruins like these rise the fanes that shall last,

And to build up the future heaven shatters the
past."

"Ay," he moodily murmur'd, "and who cares to
scan

The heart's perish'd world, if the world gains a
man?

From the past to the present, though late, I appeal;
To the nun Seraphine, from the woman Lucile!"

XXVII.

Lucile! . . . the old name — the old self! silenced
long:

Heard once more! felt once more!

As some soul to the throng
Of invisible spirits admitted, baptized
By death to a new name and nature — surprised
'Mid the songs of the seraphs, hears faintly, and
far,

Some voice from the earth, left below a dim star,
Calling to her forlornly; and (sadd'ning the psalms
Of the angels, and piercing the Paradise palms!)
The name borne 'mid earthly belovèds on earth
Sigh'd above some lone grave in the land of her
birth; —

So that one word . . . Lucile! . . . stirr'd the
Sœur Seraphine,

For a moment. Anon she resumed her serene
And concentrated calm.

“ Let the Nun, then, retrace
The life of the soldier!” . . . she said, with a face
That glow'd, gladdening her words.

“ To the present I come:
Leave the Past!”

There her voice rose, and seem'd as when some
Pale Priestess proclaims from her temple the praise

Of her hero whose brows she is crowning with bays.
Step by step did she follow his path from the place
Where their two paths diverged. Year by year did
she trace

(Familiar with all) his, the soldier's existence.
Her words were of trial, endurance, resistance ;
Of the leaguer around this besieged world of ours :
And the same sentinels that ascend the same towers
And report the same foes, the same fears, the same
strife,

Waged alike to the limits of each human life.
She went on to speak of the lone moody lord,
Shut up in his lone moody halls : every word
Held the weight of a tear : she recorded the good
He had patiently wrought through a whole neigh-
borhood ;

And the blessing that lived on the lips of the poor,
By the peasant's hearthstone, or the cottager's door.
There she paused : and her accents seem'd dipp'd
in the hue

Of his own sombre heart, as the picture she drew
Of the poor, proud, sad spirit, rejecting love's
wages,

Yet working love's work ; reading backwards life's
pages

For penance ; and stubbornly, many a time,
Both missing the moral, and marring the rhyme.
Then she spoke of the soldier ! . . . the man's
work and fame,

The pride of a nation, a world's just acclaim !
Life's inward approval !

XXVIII.

Her voice reach'd his heart,
 And sank lower. She spoke of herself: how, apart
 And unseen, — far away, — she had watch'd, year
 by year,

With how many a blessing, how many a tear,
 And how many a prayer, every stage in the strife:
 Guess'd the thought in the deed: traced the love
 in the life:

Bless'd the man in the man's work!

 “*Thy* work . . . oh, not mine!
 Thine, Lucile!” . . . he exclaim'd . . . “all the
 worth of it thine,
 If worth there be in it!”

 Her answer convey'd
 His reward, and her own: joy that cannot be said
 Alone by the voice . . . eyes — face — spoke
 silently:

All the woman, one grateful emotion!

 And she
 A poor Sister of Charity! hers a life spent
 In one silent effort for others! . . .

 She bent
 Her divine face above him, and fill'd up his heart
 With the look that glow'd from it.

 Then slow, with soft art,
 Fix'd her aim, and moved to it.

XXIX.

 He, the soldier humane,
 He, the hero; whose heart hid in glory the pain

Of a youth disappointed; whose life had made
known

The value of man's life! . . . that youth over-
thrown

And retrieved, had it left him no pity for youth

In another? his own life of strenuous truth

Accomplish'd in act, had it taught him no care

For the life of another? . . . oh no! every-
where

In the camp which she moved through, she came
face to face

With some noble token, some generous trace

Of his active humanity . . .

“Well,” he replied,

“If it be so?”

“I come from the solemn bedside

Of a man that is dying,” she said. “While we
speak,

A life is in jeopardy.”

“Quick then! you seek

Aid or medicine, or what?”

“’Tis not needed,” she said.

“Medicine? yes, for the mind! ’Tis a heart that
needs aid!

You, Eugène de Luvois, you (and you only) can

Save the life of this man. Will you save it?”

“What man?

How? . . . where? . . . can you ask?”

She went rapidly on

To her object in brief vivid words . . . The young
son

Of Matilda and Alfred — the boy lying there
Half a mile from that tent door — the father's de-
spair,

The mother's deep anguish — the pride of the boy
In the father — the father's one hope and one joy
In the son : — the son now — wounded, dying ! She
told

Of the father's stern struggle with life : the boy's
bold,

Pure, and beautiful nature : the fair life before him
If that life were but spared . . . yet a word might
restore him !

The boy's broken love for the niece of Eugène !
Its pathos : the girl's love for him : how, half slain
In his tent, she had found him : won from him the
tale ;

Sought to nurse back his life : found her efforts
still fail ;

Beaten back by a love that was stronger than life :
Of how bravely till then he had stood in that strife
Wherein England and France in their best blood,
at last,

Had bathed from remembrance the wounds of the
past.

And shall nations be nobler than men? Are not
great

Men the models of nations? For what is a state
But the many's confused imitation of one?

Shall he, the fair hero of France, on the son
Of his ally seek vengeance, destroying perchance
An innocent life, — here, when England and France

Have forgiven the sins of their fathers of yore,
And baptized a new hope in their sons' recent
gore?

She went on to tell how the boy had clung still
To life, for the sake of life's uses, until
From his weak hands the strong effort dropp'd,
stricken down

By the news that the heart of Constànce, like his
own,
Was breaking beneath . . .

But there "Hold!" he exclaim'd,
Interrupting, "forbear!" . . . his whole face was
inflamed

With the heart's swarthy thunder which yet, while
she spoke,
Had been gathering silent — at last the storm broke
In grief or in wrath . . .

"'Tis to him, then," he cried, . . .
Checking suddenly short the tumultuous stride,
"That I owe these late greetings — for him you are
here —

For his sake you seek me — for him, it is clear,
You have deign'd at the last to bethink you again
Of this long-forgotten existence!"

"Eugène!"

"Ha! fool that I was!" . . . he went on, . . .
"and just now,

While you spoke yet, my heart was beginning to
grow

Almost boyish again, almost sure of *one* friend!
Yet this was the meaning of all — this the end!

Be it so! There's a sort of slow justice (admit!)
 In this — that the word that man's finger hath
 writ

In fire on my heart, I return him at last.

Let him learn that word — Never!"

“ Ah, still to the past
 Must the present be vassal?” she said. “ In the
 hour

We last parted I urged you to put forth the power
 Which I felt to be yours, in the conquest of life.
 Yours, the promise to strive: mine — to watch o'er
 the strife.

I foresaw you would conquer; you *have* conquer'd
 much,

Much, indeed, that is noble! I hail it as such,
 And am here to record and applaud it. I saw
 Not the less in your nature, Eugène de Luvois,
 One peril — one point where I feared you would
 fail

To subdue that worst foe which a man can assail, —
 Himself: and I promised that, if I should see
 My champion once falter, or bend the brave knee,
 That moment would bring me again to his side.
 That moment is come! for that peril was pride,
 And you falter. I plead for yourself, and an-
 other,

For that gentle child without father or mother,
 To whom you are both. I plead, soldier of France,
 For your own nobler nature — and plead for Con-
 stànce!"

At the sound of that name he averted his head.

“ Constance ! . . . Ay, she enter’d my lone life ”

(he said)

“ When its sun was long set ; and hung over its night
Her own starry childhood. I have but that light,
In the midst of much darkness ! Who names me
but she

With titles of love ? And what rests there for me
In the silence of age save the voice of that child ?
The child of my own better life, undefiled !
My creature, carved out of my heart of hearts ! ”

“ Say, ”

Said the Sœur Seraphine — “ are you able to lay
Your hand as a knight on your heart as a man
And swear that, whatever may happen, you can
Feel assured for the life you thus cherish ? ”

“ How so ? ”

He look’d up. “ If the boy should die thus ? ”

“ Yes, I know

What your look would imply . . . this sleek stranger
forsooth !

Because on his cheek was the red rose of youth
The heart of my niece must break for it ! ”

She cried,

“ Nay, but hear me yet further ! ”

With slow heavy stride,

Unheeding her words, he was pacing the tent,
He was muttering low to himself as he went.

“ Ay, these young things lie safe in our heart just
so long

As their wings are in growing ; and when these are
strong

They break it, and farewell! the bird flies!" . . .

The nun

Laid her hand on the soldier, and murmur'd, " The
 sun
 Is descending, life fleets while we talk thus! oh, yet
 Let this day upon one final victory set,
 And complete a life's conquest!"

He said, " Understand!

If Constànce wed the son of this man, by whose
 hand
 My heart hath been robb'd, she is lost to my life!
 Can her home be my home? Can I claim in the
 wife
 Of that man's son the child of my age? At her side
 Shall he stand on my hearth? Shall I sue to the
 bride
 Of . . . enough!

" Ah, and you immemorial halls
 Of my Norman forefathers, whose shadow yet falls
 On my fancy, and fuses hope, memory, past,
 Present, — all, in one silence! old trees to the blast
 Of the North Sea repeating the tale of old days,
 Nevermore, nevermore in the wild bosky ways
 Shall I hear through your umbrage ancestral the
 wind
 Prophecy as of yore, when it shook the deep mind
 Of my boyhood, with whispers from out the far years
 Of love, fame, the raptures life cools down with
 tears!

Henceforth shall the tread of a Vargrave alone
 Rouse your echoes?"

“O think not,” she said, “of the son
Of the man whom unjustly you hate; only think
Of this young human creature, that cries from the
brink

Of a grave to your mercy!

“Recall your own words
(Words my memory mournfully ever records!)

How with love may be wreck'd a whole life! then,
Eugène,

Look with me (still those words in our ears!) once
again

At this young soldier sinking from life here—
dragg'd down

By the weight of the love in his heart: no renown,
No fame comforts *him!* nations shout not above
The lone grave down to which he is bearing the
love

Which life has rejected! Will *you* stand apart?
You, with such a love's memory deep in your heart!
You the hero, whose life hath perchance been led on
Through the deeds it hath wrought to the fame it
hath won,

By recalling the visions and dreams of a youth,
Such as lies at your door now: who have but, in
truth,

To stretch forth a hand, to speak only one word,
And by that word you rescue a life!”

He was stirr'd.

Still he sought to put from him the cup, bow'd his
face

On his hand; and anon, as though wishing to chase

With one angry gesture his own thoughts aside,
 He sprang up, brush'd past her, and bitterly cried,
 "No!—Constànce wed a Vargrave!—I cannot
 consent!"

Then up rose the Sœur Seraphine.

The low tent

In her sudden uprising, seem'd dwarf'd by the height
 From which those imperial eyes pour'd the light
 Of their deep silent sadness upon him.

No wonder

He felt, as it were, his own stature shrink under
 The compulsion of that grave regard! For between
 The Duc de Luvois and the Sœur Seraphine
 At that moment there rose all the height of one soul
 O'er another; she look'd down on him from the whole
 Lonely length of a life. There were sad nights and
 days,

There were long months and years in that heart-
 searching gaze;
 And her voice, when she spoke, with sharp pathos
 thrill'd through
 And transfix'd him.

"Eugène de Luvois, but for you,
 I might have been now — not this wandering nun,
 But a mother, a wife — pleading, not for the son
 Of another, but blessing some child of my own,
 His, — the man's that I once loved! . . . Hush!
 that which is done

I regret not. I breathe no reproaches. That's best
 Which God sends. 'Twas his will: it is mine.
 And the rest

Of that riddle I will not look back to. He reads
In your heart — He that judges of all thoughts and
deeds.

With eyes, mine forestall not! This only I say:
You have not the right (read it, you, as you may!)
To say . . . ‘I am the wrong’d.’” . . .

“Have I wrong’d thee? — wrong’d *thee!*”
He falter’d, “Lucile, ah, Lucile!”

“Nay, not me,”
She murmur’d, “but man! The lone nun standing
here
Has no claim upon earth, and is pass’d from the
sphere

Of earth’s wrongs and earth’s reparations. But she,
The dead woman, Lucile, she whose grave is in me,
Demands from her grave reparation to man,
Reparation to God. Heed, O heed, while you can,
This voice from the grave!”

“Hush!” he moan’d, “I obey
The Sœur Seraphine. There, Lucile! let this pay
Every debt that is due to that grave. Now lead on:
I follow you, Sœur Seraphine! . . . To the son
Of Lord Alfred Vargrave . . . and then,” . . .

As he spoke
He lifted the tent-door, and down the dun smoke
Pointed out the dark bastions, with batteries
crown’d,
Of the city beneath them . . .

“Then, *there*, underground,
And *valete et plaudite*, soon as may be!
Let the old tree go down to the earth — the old tree,

With the worm at its heart! Lay the axe to the
root!

Who will miss the old stump, so we save the young
shoot?

A Vargrave! . . . this pays all . . . Lead on! . . .
In the seed

Save the forest! . . .

I follow . . . forth, forth! where you lead."

XXX.

The day was declining: a day sick and damp.

In a blank ghostly glare shone the bleak ghostly
camp

Of the English. Alone in his dim, spectral tent
(Himself the wan spectre of youth), with eyes bent
On the daylight departing, the sick man was sitting
Upon his low pallet. These thoughts, vaguely flit-
ting,

Cross'd the silence between him and death, which
seem'd near,

— "Pain o'erreaches itself, so is balk'd! else, how
bear

This intense and intolerable solitude.

With its eye on my heart and its hand on my blood?
Pulse by pulse! Day goes down: yet she comes
not again.

Other suffering, doubtless, where hope is more plain,
Claims her elsewhere. I die, strange! and scarcely
feel sad.

Oh, to think of *Constance thus*, and not to go
mad!

But Death, it would seem, dulls the sense to his
 own
 Dull doings . . .”

XXXI.

Between those sick eyes and the sun
 A shadow fell thwart.

XXXII.

’Tis the pale nun once more!
 But who stands at her side, mute and dark in the
 door?
 How oft had he watch’d through the glory and
 gloom
 Of the battle, with long, longing looks, that dim
 plume
 Which now (one stray sunbeam upon it) shook,
 stoop’d
 To where the tent-curtain, dividing, was loop’d!
 How that stern face had haunted and hover’d
 about
 The dreams it still scared! through what fond fear
 and doubt
 Had the boy yearn’d in heart to the hero. (What’s
 like
 A boy’s love for some famous man?) . . . Oh, to
 strike
 A wild path through the battle, down striking per-
 chance
 Some rash foeman too near the great soldier of
 France,

And so fall in his glorious regard! . . . Oft, how
 oft,
 Had his heart flash'd this hope out, whilst watch-
 ing aloft
 The dim battle that plume dance and dart — never
 seen
 So near till this moment! how eager to glean
 Every stray word, dropp'd through the camp-babble
 in praise
 Of his hero — each tale of old venturous days
 In the desert! And now . . . could he speak out
 his heart
 Face to face with that man ere he died!

XXXIII.

With a start

The sick soldier sprang up: the blood sprang up in
 him,
 To his throat, and o'erthrew him: he reel'd back:
 a dim
 Sanguine haze fill'd his eyes; in his ears rose the
 din
 And rush, as of cataracts loosen'd within,
 Through which he saw faintly, and heard, the pale
 nun
 (Looking larger than life, where she stood in the
 sun)
 Point to him and murmur, "Behold!" Then that
 plume
 Seem'd to wave like a fire, and fade off in the gloom
 Which momentarily put out the world.

XXXIV.

To his side

Moved the man the boy dreaded yet loved . . .

“ Ah! ” . . . he sigh'd,

“ The smooth brow, the fair Vargrave face! and
those eyes,

All the mother's! The old things again!

“ Do not rise.

You suffer, young man? ”

THE BOY.

Sir, I die.

THE DUKE.

Not so young!

THE BOY.

So young? yes! and yet I have tangled among
The fray'd warp and woof of this brief life of mine
Other lives than my own. Could my death but un-
twineThe vext skein . . . but it will not. Yes, Duke,
young — so young!And I knew you not? yet I have done you a wrong
Irreparable! . . . late, too late to repair.

If I knew any means . . . but I know none! . . .

I swear,

If this broken fraction of time could extend
Into infinite lives of atonement, no end
Would seem too remote for my grief (could that
be!)

To include it! Not too late, however, for me

To entreat: is it too late for you to forgive?

THE DUKE.

You wrong — my forgiveness — explain.

THE BOY.

Could I live!

Such a very few hours left to life, yet I shrink,
I falter . . . Yes, Duke, your forgiveness I think
Should free my soul hence.

Ah! you could not surmise
That a boy's beating heart, burning thoughts, long-
ing eyes

Were following you evermore (heeded not!)
While the battle was flowing between us: nor what
Eager, dubious footsteps at nightfall oft went
With the wind and the rain, round and round your
blind tent,

Persistent and wild as the wind and the rain,
Unnoticed as these, weak as these, and as vain!
Oh, how obdurate then look'd your tent! The
waste air

Grew stern at the gleam which said . . . "Off! he
is there!"

I know not what merciful mystery now
Brings you here, whence the man whom you see
lying low

Other footsteps (not those!) must soon bear to the
grave.

But death is at hand, and the few words I have
Yet to speak, I must speak them at once.

Duke, I swear,
As I lie here, (Death's angel too close not to hear!)

That I meant not this wrong to you. Duc de
 Luvois,
 I loved your niece — loved? why, I *love* her! I
 saw,
 And, seeing, how could I but love her? I seem'd
 Born to love her. Alas, were that all! Had I
 dream'd
 Of this love's cruel consequence as it rests now
 Ever fearfully present before me, I vow
 That the secret, unknown, had gone down to the
 tomb
 Into which I descend . . . Oh why, whilst there
 was room
 In life left for warning, had no one the heart
 To warn me? Had any one whisper'd . . . “De-
 part!”
 To the hope the whole world seem'd in league then
 to nurse!
 Had any one hinted . . . “Beware of the curse
 Which is coming!” There was not a voice raised
 to tell,
 Not a hand moved to warn from the blow ere it fell,
 And then . . . then the blow fell on *both*! This is
 why
 I implore you to pardon that great injury
 Wrought on her, and, through her, wrought on you,
 Heaven knows
 How unwittingly!

THE DUKE.

Ah! . . . and, young soldier, suppose
 That I came here to seek, not grant, pardon? —

THE BOY.

Of whom?

THE DUKE.

Of yourself.

THE BOY.

Duke, I bear in my heart to the tomb
No boyish resentment; not one lonely thought
That honors you not. In all this there is naught
'Tis for me to forgive.

Every glorious act
Of your great life starts forward, an eloquent fact,
To confirm in my boy's heart its faith in your own.
And have I not hoarded, to ponder upon,
A hundred great acts from your life? Nay, all these,
Were they so many lying and false witnesses,
Does there rest not *one* voice which was never
untrue?

I believe in Constànce, Duke, as she does in you!
In this great world around us, wherever we turn,
Some grief irremediable we discern;
And yet — there sits God, calm in Heaven above!
Do we trust one whit less in his justice or love?
I judge not.

THE DUKE.

Enough! Hear at last, then, the truth.
Your father and I — foes we were in our youth.
It matters not why. Yet thus much understand:
The hope of my youth was sign'd out by his hand.
I was not of those whom the buffets of fate
Tame and teach; and my heart buried slain love in
hate.

If your own frank young heart, yet unconscious of
all
Which turns the heart's blood in its springtide to
gall,
And unable to guess even aught that the furrow
Across these gray brows hides of sin or of sorrow,
Comprehends not the evil and grief of my life,
'Twill at least comprehend how intense was the
strife
Which is closed in this act of atonement, whereby
I seek in the son of my youth's enemy
The friend of my age. Let the present release
Here acquitted the past! In the name of my
niece,
Whom for my life in yours as a hostage I give,
Are you great enough, boy, to forgive me, — and
live?

Whilst he spoke thus, a doubtful tumultuous joy
Chased its fleeting effects o'er the face of the boy:
As when some stormy moon, in a long cloud con-
fined,
Struggles outward through shadows, the varying
wind
Alternates, and bursts, self-surprised, from her
prison,
So that slow joy grew clear in his face. He had
risen
To answer the Duke; but strength fail'd every
limb;
A strange, happy feebleness trembled through him..

With a faint cry of rapturous wonder, he sank
On the breast of the nun, who stood near.

“ Yes, boy! thank
This guardian angel,” the Duke said. “ I — you,
We owe all to her. Crown her work. Live! be
true
To your young life’s fair promise, and live for her
sake!”

“ Yes, Duke: I will live. I *must* live — live to make
My whole life the answer you claim,” the boy said,
“ For joy does not kill!”

Back again the faint head
Declined on the nun’s gentle bosom. She saw
His lips quiver, and motion’d the Duke to withdraw
And leave them a moment together.

He eyed
Them both with a wistful regard; turn’d and sigh’d,
And lifted the tent-door, and pass’d from the tent.

XXXV.

Like a furnace, the fervid, intense occident
From its hot seething levels a great glare struck
up
On the sick metal sky. And, as out of a cup
Some witch watches boiling wild portents arise,
Monstrous clouds, mass’d, misshapen, and ting’d
with strange dyes,
Hover’d over the red fume, and changed to weird
shapes
As of snakes, salamanders, efts, lizards, storks,
apes,

Chimeras, and hydras : whilst — ever the same
In the midst of all these (creatures fused by his
 flame,
And changed by his influence!) changeless, as
 when,
Ere he lit down to death generations of men,
O'er that crude and ungainly creation, which
 there
With wild shapes this cloud-world seem'd to mimic
 in air,
The eye of Heaven's all-judging witness, he shone,
And shall shine on the ages we reach not — the sun!

XXXVI.

Nature posted her parable thus in the skies,
And the man's heart bore witness. Life's vapors
 arise
And fall, pass and change, group themselves and
 revolve
Round the great central life, which is love : these
 dissolve
And resume themselves, here assume beauty, there
 terror ;
And the phantasmagoria of infinite error,
And endless complexity, lasts but a while ;
Life's self, the immortal, immutable smile
Of God, on the soul in the deep heart of Heaven
Lives changeless, unchanged : and our morning
 and even
Are earth's alternations, not Heaven's.

XXXVII.

While he yet
 Watched the skies, with this thought in his heart ;
 while he set
 Thus unconsciously all his life forth in his mind,
 Summ'd it up, search'd it out, proved it vapor and
 wind,
 And embraced the new life which that hour had
 reveal'd, —
 Love's life, which earth's life had defaced and con-
 ceal'd ;
 Lucile left the tent and stood by him.

Her tread
 Aroused him ; and, turning towards her, he said :
 “ O Sœur Seraphine, are you happy ? ”
 “ Eugène,
 What is happier than to have hoped not in vain ? ”
 She answer'd, — “ And you ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ You do not repent ? ”

“ No.”

“ Thank Heaven ! ” she murmur'd. He musingly
 bent
 His looks on the sunset, and somewhat apart
 Where he stood, sigh'd, as though to his innermost
 heart,
 “ O bless'd are they, amongst whom I was not,
 Whose morning unclouded, without stain or spot,
 Predicts a pure evening ; who, sunlike, in light
 Have traversed, unsullied, the world, and set
 bright ! ”

But she in response, “ Mark yon ship far away,
Asleep on the wave, in the last light of day,
With all its hush’d thunders shut up! Would you
 know
A thought which came to me a few days ago,
Whilst watching those ships? . . . When the great
 Ship of Life
Surviving, though shatter’d, the tumult and strife
Of earth’s angry element, — masts broken short,
Decks drench’d, bulwarks beaten — drives safe into
 port ;
When the Pilot of Galilee, seen on the strand,
Stretches over the waters a welcoming hand ;
When, heeding no longer the sea’s baffled roar,
The mariner turns to his rest evermore ;
What will then be the answer the helmsman must
 give ?
Will it be . . . ‘ Lo our log-book ! Thus once did
 we live
In the zones of the South ; thus we traversed the
 seas
Of the Orient ; there dwelt with the Hesperides ;
Thence follow’d the west wind ; here, eastward we
 turn’d ;
The stars fail’d us there ; just here land we discern’d
On our lee ; there the storm overtook us at last ;
That day went the bowsprit, the next day the
 mast ;
There the mermen came round us, and there we
 saw bask
A siren?’ The Captain of Port will he ask

Any one of such questions? I cannot think so!
 But . . . ‘What is the last Bill of Health you can
 show?’

Not — How fared the soul through the trials she
 pass’d?

But — What is the state of that soul at the last?”

“May it be so!” he sigh’d. “There the sun drops,
 behold!”

And indeed, whilst he spoke all the purple and gold
 In the west had turn’d ashen, save one fading strip
 Of light that yet gleam’d from the dark nether lip
 Of a long reef of cloud; and o’er sullen ravines
 And ridges the raw damps were hanging white
 screens

Of melancholy mist.

“*Nunc dimittis?*” she said.

“O God of the living! whilst yet ’mid the dead
 And the dying we stand here alive, and thy days
 Returning, admit space for prayer and for praise,
 In both these confirm us!

“The helmsman, Eugène,
 Needs the compass to steer by. Pray always. Again
 We two part: each to work out Heaven’s will: you,
 I trust,

In the world’s ample witness; and I, as I must,
 In secret and silence: you, love, fame, await;
 Me, sorrow and sickness. We meet at one gate
 When all’s over. The ways they are many and
 wide,

And seldom are two ways the same. Side by side

May we stand at the same little door when all's
done!

The ways they are many, the end it is one.

He that knocketh shall enter: who asks shall ob-
tain:

And who seeketh, he findeth. Remember, Eugène!"
She turn'd to depart.

"Whither? whither?" . . . he said.

She stretch'd forth her hand where, already out-
spread

On the darken'd horizon, remotely they saw
The French camp-fires kindling.

"See yonder vast host, with its manifold heart
Made as one man's by one hope! The hope 'tis
your part

To aid towards achievement, to save from reverse:
Mine, through suffering to soothe, and through sick-
ness to nurse.

I go to my work: you to yours."

XXXVIII.

Whilst she spoke,
On the wide wasting evening there distantly
broke

The low roll of musketry. Straightway, anon,
From the dim Flag-staff Battery bellow'd a gun.

"Our chasseurs are at it!" he mutter'd.

She turn'd,
Smiled, and pass'd up the twilight.

He faintly discern'd
Her form, now and then, on the flat lurid sky

Rise, and sink, and recede through the mists: by
 and by
 The vapors closed round, and he saw her no more.

XXXIX.

Nor shall we. For her mission, accomplish'd, is
 o'er.

The mission of genius on earth! To uplift,
 Purify, and confirm by its own gracious gift,
 The world, in despite of the world's dull endeavor
 To degrade, and drag down, and oppose it forever.
 The mission of genius: to watch, and to wait,
 To renew, to redeem, and to regenerate.

The mission of woman on earth! to give birth
 To the mercy of Heaven descending on earth.

The mission of woman: permitted to bruise
 The head of the serpent, and sweetly infuse,
 Through the sorrow and sin of earth's register'd
 curse,

The blessing which mitigates all: born to nurse,
 And to soothe, and to solace, to help and to heal
 The sick world that leans on her. This was Lucile.

XL.

A power hid in pathos: a fire veil'd in cloud:
 Yet still burning outward: a branch which, though
 bow'd
 By the bird in its passage, springs upward again:
 Through all symbols I search for her sweetness — in
 vain!

Judge her love by her life. For our life is but
love

In act. Pure was hers : and the dear God above,
Who knows what His creatures have need of for life,
And whose love includes all loves, through much
patient strife

Led her soul into peace. Love, though love may be
given

In vain, is yet lovely. Her own native heaven
More clearly she mirror'd, as life's troubled dream
Wore away ; and love sigh'd into rest, like a stream
That breaks its heart over wild rocks toward the
shore

Of the great sea which hushes it up evermore
With its little wild wailing. No stream from its
source

Flows seaward, how lonely soever its course,
But what some land is gladden'd. No star ever
rose

And set, without influence somewhere. Who knows
What earth needs from earth's lowest creature? No
life

Can be pure in its purpose and strong in its strife
And all life not be purer and stronger thereby.
The spirits of just men made perfect on high,
The army of martyrs who stand by the Throne
And gaze into the face that makes glorious their own,
Know this, surely, at last. Honest love, honest
sorrow,

Honest work for the day, honest hope for the
morrow,





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