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*Elizabeth Barrett Browning*

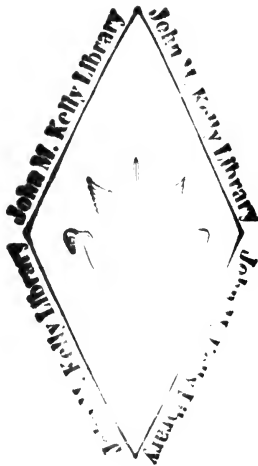


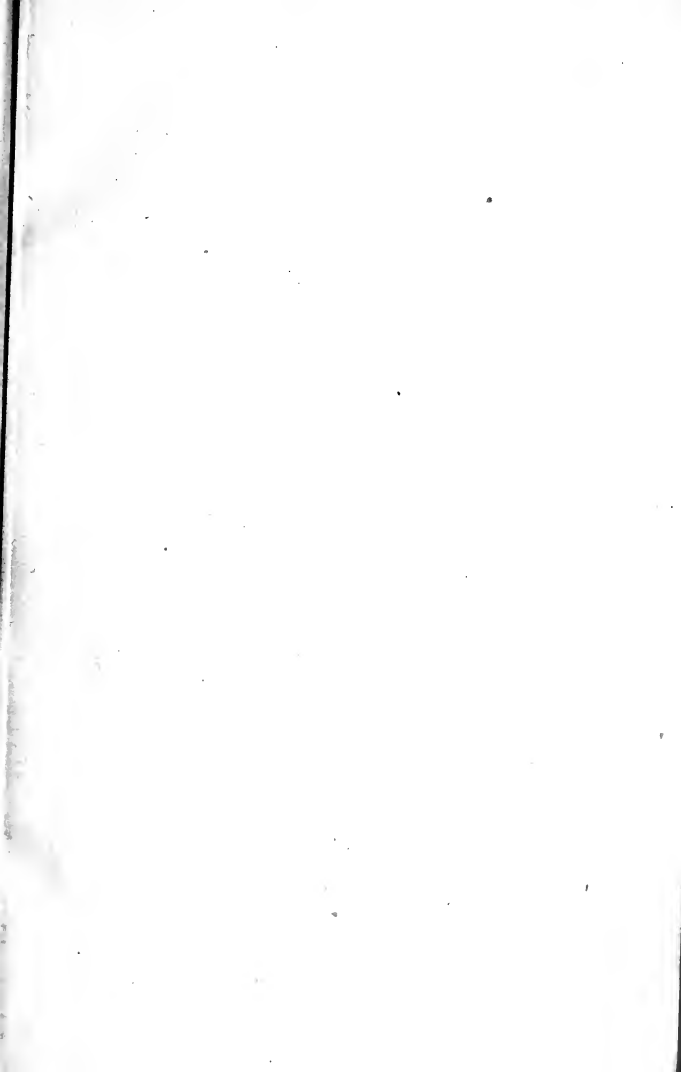


CLOKE & SON,  
HAMILTON.

MRS. BROWNING'S POEMS

SERIES I.







B.P.—I. “Face and figure of a child,—  
Though too calm, you think, and tender,  
For the childhood you would lend her.”

Page 247.

A



THE  
POETICAL WORKS

OF

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Harvard College Library

WITH  
EIGHT ORIGINAL ENGRAVINGS

SERIES I.

LONDON AND GLASGOW  
COLLINS' CLEAR-TYPE PRESS



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# Mrs. Browning's Poems.

## THE TEMPEST.

### A FRAGMENT.

"Mors erat ante oculos."—LUCAN, lib. ix.

. . . . .

THE forest made my home—the voiceful streams  
My minstrel throng: the everlasting hills,—  
Which marry with the firmament, and cry  
Unto the brazen thunder, "Come away,  
Come from thy secret place, and try our strength,"—  
Enwrapp'd me with their solemn arms. Here, light  
Grew pale as darkness, scared by the shade  
O' the forest Titans. Here, in piney state,  
Reign'd Night, the Æthiopian queen, and crown'd  
The charmed brow of Solitude, her spouse.

. . . . .

A sign was on creation. You beheld  
All things encolour'd in a sulph'rous hue,  
As day were sick with fear. The haggard clouds  
O'erhung the utter lifelessness of air;  
The top boughs of the forest, all aghast,  
Stared in the face of Heav'n; the deep-mouth'd wind,  
That hath a voice to bay the armèd sea,  
Fled with a low cry like a beaten hound;  
And only that askance the shadows, flew  
Some open-beakèd birds in wilderment,  
Naught stirred abroad. All dumb did Nature seem,  
In expectation of the coming storm.

It came in power. You soon might hear afar  
The footsteps of the martial thunder sound  
Over the mountain battlements; the sky  
Being deep-stain'd with hues fantastical,

## THE TEMPEST.

Red like to blood, and yellow like to fire,  
 And black like plumes at funerals ; overhead  
 You might behold the lightning faintly gleam  
 Amid the clouds which thrill and gape aside,  
 And straight again shut up their solemn jaws,  
 As if to interpose between Heaven's wrath  
 And Earth's despair. Interposition brief !  
 Darkness is gathering out her mighty pall  
 Above us, and the pent-up rain is loosed,  
 Down trampling in its fierce delirium.

Was not my spirit gladden'd as with wine,  
 To hear the iron rain, and view the mark  
 Of battle on the banner of the clouds ?  
 Did I not hearken for the battle-cry,  
 And rush along the bowing woods to meet  
 The riding Tempest—skyey cataracts  
 Hissing around him with rebellion vain ?  
 Yea ! and I lifted up my glorying voice  
 In an " All hail " ; when, wildly resonant,  
 As brazen chariots rushing from the war,  
 As passion'd waters gushing from the rock,  
 As thousand crashèd woods, the thunder cried :  
 And at his cry the forest tops were shook  
 As by the woodman's axe ; and far and near  
 Stagger'd the mountains with a mutter'd dread.

All hail unto the lightning ! hurriedly  
 His lurid arms are glaring through the air,  
 Making the face of Heav'n to show like hell !  
 Let him go breathe his sulphur stench about,  
 And, pale with death's own mission, lord the storm !  
 Again the gleam—the glare : I turn'd to hail  
 Death's mission : at my feet there lay the dead !  
 The dead—the dead lay there ! I could not view  
 (For Night espoused the storm, and made all dark)  
 Its features, but the lightning in his course  
 Shiver'd above a white and corpse-like heap,  
 Stretch'd in the path, as if to show its prey,  
 And have a triumph ere he pass'd. Then I  
 Crouch'd down upon the ground, and groped about  
 Until I touch'd that thing of flesh, rain-drench'd,  
 And chill, and soft. Nathless, I did refrain  
 My soul from natural horror ! I did lift

The heavy head, half-bedded in the clay,  
 Unto my knee; and pass'd my fingers o'er  
 The wet face, touching every lineament,  
 Until I found the brow; and chafed its chill,  
 To know if life yet lingered in its pulse.  
 And while I was so busied, there did leap,  
 From out the entrails of the firmament,  
 The lightning, who his white unblenching breath  
 Blew in the dead man's face, discov'ring it  
 As by a staring day. I knew that face—  
 His, who did hate me—his, whom I did hate!

I shrunk not—spake not—sprang not from the ground!  
 But felt my lips shake without cry or breath,  
 And mine heart wrestle in my breast to still  
 The tossing of its pulses; and a cold,  
 Instead of living blood, o'ercreep my brow.  
 Albeit such darkness brooded all around,  
 I had dread knowledge that the open eyes  
 Of that dead man were glaring up at mine,  
 With their unwinking, unexpressive stare;  
 And mine I could not shut nor turn away.  
 The man was my familiar. I had borne  
 Those eyes to scowl on me their living hate,  
 Better than I could bear their deadliness:  
 I had endured the curses of those lips,  
 Far better than their silence. Oh, constrain'd  
 And awful silence!—awful peace of death!  
*There* is an answering to all questioning,  
 That one word—*death*. Our bitterness can throw  
 No look upon the face of death, and live.  
 The burning thoughts that erst my soul illumed,  
 Were quench'd at once; as tapers in a pit  
 Wherein the vapour-witches weirdly reign  
 In charge of darkness. Farewell all the past!  
 It was out-blotted from my memory's eyes,  
 When clay's cold silence pleaded for its sin.

Farewell the elemental war! farewell  
 The clashing of the shielded clouds—the cry  
 Of scathèd echoes! I no longer knew  
 Silence from sound, but wandered far away  
 Into the deep Eleusis of mine heart,  
 To learn its secret things. When armèd foes

Meet on one deck with impulse violent,  
 The vessel quakes thro' all her oaken ribs,  
 And shivers in the sea ; so with mine heart :  
 For there had battled in her solitudes,  
 Contrary spirits ; sympathy with power,  
 And stooping unto power ;—the energy  
 And passiveness,—the thunder and the death !

Within me was a nameless thought : it closed  
 The Janus of my soul on echoing hinge,  
 And said " Peace ! " with a voice like War's. I bow'd,  
 And trembled at its voice : it gave a key,  
 Empower'd to open out all mysteries  
 Of soul and flesh ; of man, who doth begin,  
 But endeth not ; of life, and *after life*.

. . . . .

Day came at last : her light show'd gray and sad,  
 As hatch'd by tempest, and could scarce prevail  
 Over the shaggy forest to imprint  
 Its outline on the sky—expressionless,  
 Almost sans shadow as sans radiance :  
 An idiocy of light. I waken'd from  
 My deep unslumb'ring dream, but utter'd naught.  
 My living I uncoupled from the dead,  
 And look'd out, 'mid the swart and sluggish air,  
 For place to make a grave. A mighty tree  
 Above me, his gigantic arms outstretch'd,  
 Poising the clouds. A thousand mutter'd spells  
 Of every ancient wind and thund'rous storm,  
 Had been off-shaken from his scathless bark.  
 He had heard distant years sweet concord yield,  
 And go to silence ; having firmly kept  
 Majestical companionship with Time.  
 Anon his strength wax'd proud : his tusky roots  
 Forced for themselves a path on every side,  
 Riving the earth ; and, in their savage scorn,  
 Casting it from them like a thing unclean,  
 Which might impede his naked clambering  
 Unto the heavens. Now blasted, peel'd, he stood,  
 By the gone night, whose lightning had come in  
 And rent him, even as it rent the man  
 Beneath his shade : and there the strong and weak  
 Communion join'd in deathly agony.



There, underneath, I lent my feverish strength,  
 To scoop a lodgment for the traveller's corse.  
 I gave it to the silence and the pit,  
 And strew'd the heavy earth on all: and then—  
 I—I, whose hands had form'd that silent house,—  
 I could not look thereon, but turn'd and wept!

. . . . .

O death—O crownèd Death—pale-steedèd Death!  
 Whose name doth make our respiration brief,  
 Muffling the spirit's drum! Thou, whom men know  
 Alone by charnel-houses, and the dark  
 Sweeping of funeral feathers, and the scath  
 Of happy days,—love deem'd inviolate!  
 Thou of the shrouded face, which to have seen  
 Is to be very awful, like thyself!—  
 Thou, whom all flesh shall see!—thou, who dost call,  
 And there is none to answer!—thou, whose call  
 Changeth all beauty into what we fear,  
 Changeth all glory into what we tread,  
 Genius to silence, wrath to nothingness,  
 And love—not love!—thou hast no change for love!  
 Thou, who art Life's betroth'd, and bear'st her forth  
 To scare her with sad sights,—who hast thy joy  
 Where'er the peopled towns are dumb with plague,—  
 Where'er the battle and the vulture meet,—  
 Where'er the deep sea writhes like Laocoon  
 Beneath the serpent winds, the vessels split  
 On secret rocks, and men go gurgling down,  
 Down, down, to lose their shriekings in the depth.  
 Oh universal thou! who comest aye  
 Among the minstrels, and their tongue is tied;  
 Among the sophists, and their brain is still;  
 Among the mourners, and their wail is done;  
 Among the dancers, and their tinkling feet  
 No more make echoes on the tombing earth!  
 Among the wassail rout, and all the lamps  
 Are quenched; and wither'd the wine-pouring hands!

My heart is armèd not in panoply  
 Of the old Roman iron, nor assumes  
 The Stoic valour,—has a human heart,  
 And so confesses, with a human fear;—

## A SEA-SIDE MEDITATION.

That only for the hope the cross inspires,  
 That only for the MAN who died and lives,  
 'Twould crouch beneath thy sceptre's royalty,  
 With faintness of the pulse, and backward cling  
 To life. But knowing what I soothly know,  
 High-seeming Death, I dare thee! and have hope,  
 In God's good time, of showing to thy face  
 An unsuccumbing spirit, which sublime  
 May cast away the low anxieties  
 That wait upon the flesh—the reptile moods;  
 And enter that eternity to come,  
 Where live the dead, and only Death shall die.

## A SEA-SIDE MEDITATION.

“Ut per aquas quæ nunc rerum simulacra videmus.”—LUCRETIVS.

Go, travel 'mid the hills! The summer's hand  
 Hath shaken pleasant freshness o'er them all.  
 Go, travel 'mid the hills! There, tuneful streams  
 Are touching myriad stops, invisible;  
 And winds, and leaves, and birds, and your own thoughts  
 (Not the least glad) in wordless chorus, crowd  
 Around the thymele\* of Nature.

Go,

And travel onward. Soon shall leaf and bird,  
 Wind, stream, no longer sound. Thou shalt behold  
 Only the pathless sky, and houseless sward;  
 O'er which anon are spied innumerable sails  
 Of fisher vessels like the wings o' the hill,  
 And white as gulls above them, and as fast.—  
 But sink they—sink they out of sight. And now  
 The wind is springing upward in your face;  
 And, with its fresh-toned gushings, you may hear  
 Continuous sound which is not of the wind,  
 Nor of the thunder, nor o' the cataract's  
 Deep passion, nor o' the earthquake's wilder pulse;  
 But which rolls on in stern tranquillity,  
 As memories of evil o'er the soul;

\* The central point of the choral movements in the Greek theatre.



B.P.—I.

“Thou shalt behold  
Only the pathless sky, and houseless sward;  
O'er which anon are spied innumerable sails  
Of fisher vessels.”

Page 12.



Boweth the bare broad Heav'n.—What view you? sea—  
and sea!

The sea—the glorious sea! from side to side,  
Swinging the grandeur of his foamy strength,  
And undersweeping the horizon,—on—  
On—with his life and voice inscrutable.  
Pause: sit you down in silence! I have read  
Of that Athenian, who, when ocean raged,  
Unchain'd the prison'd music of his lips,  
By shouting to the billows, sound for sound.  
I marvel how his mind would let his tongue  
Affront thereby the ocean's solemnness.  
Are we not mute, or speak restrainedly,  
When overhead the trampling tempests go,  
Dashing their lightning from their hoofs? and when  
We stand beside the bier? and when we see  
The strong bow down to weep—and stray among  
Places which dust or mind hath sanctified?  
Yea! for such sights and acts do tear apart  
The close and subtle clasping of a chain,  
Form'd not of gold, but of corroded brass,  
Whose links are furnish'd from the common mine  
Of every day's event, and want, and wish;  
From work-times, diet-times, and sleeping-times;  
And thence constructed, mean and heavy links,  
Within the pandemonic walls of sense,  
Enchain our deathless part, constrain our strength,  
And waste the goodly stature of our soul.

Howbeit, we love this bondage; we do cleave  
Unto the sordid and unholy thing,  
Fearing the sudden wrench required to break  
Those claspèd links. Behold! all sights and sounds  
In air, and sea, and earth, and under earth,  
All flesh, all life, all ends, are mysteries;  
And all that is mysterious dreadful seems,  
And all we cannot understand we fear.  
Ourselves do scare ourselves: we hide our sight  
In artificial nature from the true,  
And throw sensation's veil associative  
On God's creation, man's intelligence:  
Bowing our high imaginings to eat  
Dust, like the serpent, once erect as they;  
Binding conspicuous on our reason's brow

Phylacteries of shame ; learning to feel  
 By rote, and act by rule (man's rule, not God's !)  
 Until our words grow echoes, and our thoughts  
 A mechanism of spirit.

Can this last ?

No ! not for aye. We cannot subject aye  
 The heav'n-born spirit to the earth-born flesh.  
 Tame lions *will* scent blood, and appetite  
 Carnivorous glare from out their restless eyes.  
 Passions, emotions, sudden changes, throw  
 Our nature back upon us till we burn.  
 What warm'd Cyrene's fount ? As poets sing,  
 The *change* from light to dark, from dark to light.

All that doth force this nature back on us,  
 All that doth force the mind to view the mind,  
 Engend'reth what is named by men, *sublime*.  
 Thus when, our wonted valley left, we gain  
 The mountain's horrent brow, and mark from thence  
 The sweep of lands extending with the sky ;  
 Or view the spanless plain ; or turn our sight  
 Upon yon deep immensity ;—we breathe  
 As if our breath were marble : to and fro  
 Do reel our pulses, and our words are mute.  
 We cannot mete by parts, but grapple all ;  
 We cannot measure with our eye, but soul ;  
 And fear is on us. The extent unused,  
 Our spirit, sends, to spirit's element,  
 To seize upon abstractions : first on space,  
 The which *eternity in place*, I deem ;  
 And then upon eternity ; till thought  
 Hath form'd a mirror from their secret sense,  
 Wherein we view ourselves, and back recoil  
 At our own awful likeness ; ne'ertheless,  
 Cling to that likeness with a wonder wild,  
 And while we tremble, glory—proud in fear.

So ends the prose of life : and so shall be  
 Unlock'd her poetry's magnificent store.  
 And so, thou pathless and perpetual sea,  
 So, o'er thy deeps, I brooded and must brood,  
 Whether I view thee in thy dreadful peace,  
 Like a spent warrior hanging in the sun

His glittering arms, and meditating death ;  
 Or whether thy wild visage gath'reth shades,  
 What time thou marshall'st forth thy waves who hold  
 A covenant of storms, then roar and wind  
 Under the rocking rocks ; as martyrs lie  
 Wheel-bound ; and, dying, utter lofty words !  
 Whether the strength of day is young and high,  
 Or whether, weary of the watch, he sits  
 Pale on thy wave, and weeps himself to death ;—  
 In storm and calm, at morn and eventide,  
 Still have I stood beside thee, and out-thrown  
 My spirit onward on thine element—  
 Beyond thine element—to tremble low  
 Before those feet which trod thee as they trod  
 Earth—to the holy, happy peopled place,  
 Where there is no more sea. Yea, and my soul,  
 Having put on thy vast similitude,  
 Hath wildly moanèd at her proper depth,  
 Echoed her proper musings, veil'd in shade  
 Her secrets of decay, and exercised  
 An elemental strength, in casting up  
 Rare gems and things of death on fancy's shore,  
 Till Nature said, "Enough."

Who longest dreams,  
 Dreams not for ever ; seeing day and night  
 And corporal feebleness divide his dreams,  
 And, on his elevate creations weigh  
 With hunger, cold, heat, darkness, weariness :  
 Else should we be like gods ; else would the course  
 Of thought's free wheels, increased in speed and might,  
 By an eterne volution, oversweep  
 The heights of wisdom, and invade her depths :  
 So, knowing all things, should we have all power ;  
 For is not Knowledge power ? But mighty spells  
 Our operation sear ; the Babel must,  
 Or ere it touch the sky, fall down to earth ;  
 The web, half form'd, must tumble from our hands,  
 And, ere they can resume it, lie decay'd.  
 Mind struggles vainly from the flesh. E'en so,  
 Hell's angel (saith a scroll apocryphal)  
 Shall, when the latter days of earth have shrunk  
 Before the blast of God, affect his heav'n ;  
 Lift his scarr'd brow, confirm his rebel heart,  
 Shoot his strong wings, and darken pole and pole—

Till day be blotted into night ; and shake  
 The fever'd clouds, as if a thousand storms  
 Throbb'd into life ! Vain hope—vain strength—vain flight !  
 God's arm shall meet God's foe, and hurl him back !

## EARTH.

How beautiful is earth ! my starry thoughts  
 Look down on it from their unearthly sphere,  
 And sing symphonious—Beautiful is earth !  
 The lights and shadows of her myriad hills ;  
 The branching greenness of her myriad woods ;  
 Her sky-affecting rocks ; her zoning sea ;  
 Her rushing, gleaming cataracts ; her streams  
 That race below, the wingèd clouds on high ;  
 Her pleasantness of vale and meadow !—

Hush !

Meseemeth through the leafy trees to ring  
 A chime of bells to falling waters tuned ;  
 Whereat comes heathen Zephyrus, out of breath  
 With running up the hills, and shakes his hair  
 From off his gleesome forehead, bold and glad  
 With keeping blythe Dan Phœbus company—  
 And throws him on the grass, though half afraid ;  
 First glancing round, lest tempests should be nigh ;  
 And lays close to the ground his ruddy lips,  
 And shapes their beauty into sound, and calls  
 On all the petall'd flowers that sit beneath  
 In hiding-places from the rain and snow,  
 To loosen the hard soil, and leave their cold  
 Sad idlesse, and betake them up to him.  
 They straightway hear his voice—

A thought did come,

And press from out my soul the heathen dream.  
 Mine eyes were purgèd. Straightway did I bind  
 Round me the garment of my strength, and heard  
 Nature's death-shrieking—the hereafter cry,  
 When he o' the lion voice, the rainbow-crown'd,  
 Shall stand upon the mountains and the sea,  
 And swear by earth, by Heaven's throne, and Him  
 Who sitteth on the throne, there shall be time  
 No more, no more ! Then, veil'd Eternity  
 Shall straight unveil her awful countenance



Unto the reeling worlds, and take the place  
 Of seasons, years, and ages. Aye and aye  
 Shall be the time of day. The wrinkled heav'n  
 Shall yield her silent sun, made blind and white  
 With an exterminating light: the wind,  
 Unchained from the poles, nor having charge  
 Of cloud or ocean, with a sobbing wail  
 Shall rush among the stars, and swoon to death.  
 Yea, the shrunk earth, appearing livid pale  
 Beneath the red-tongued flame, shall shudder by  
 From out her ancient place, and leave—a void.  
 Yet haply by that void the saints redeem'd  
 May sometimes stray; when memory of sin  
 Ghost-like shall rise upon their holy souls;  
 And on their lips shall lie the name of earth  
 In paleness and in silentness; until  
 Each looking on his brother, face to face,  
 And bursting into sudden happy tears  
 (The only tears undried) shall murmur—"Christ!"

## THE AUTUMN.

Go, sit upon the lofty hill,  
 And turn your eyes around,  
 Where waving woods and waters wild  
 Do hymn an autumn sound.  
 The summer sun is faint on them—  
 The summer flowers depart—  
 Sit still—as all transform'd to stone,  
 Except your musing heart.

How there you sat in summer-time,  
 May yet be in your mind;  
 And how you heard the green woods sing  
 Beneath the freshening wind.  
 Though the same wind now blows around,  
 You would its blast recall;  
 For every breath that stirs the trees,  
 Doth cause a leaf to fall.

Oh! like that wind, is all the mirth  
 That flesh and dust impart;  
 We cannot bear its visitings,  
 When change is on the heart.

## THE APPEAL.

Gay words and jests may make us smile,  
 When Sorrow is asleep ;  
 But other things must make us smile,  
 When Sorrow bids us *weep!*

The dearest hands that clasp our hands—  
*Their* presence may be o'er :  
 The dearest voice that meets our ear,  
*That* tone may come no more !  
 Youth fades ; and then, the joys of youth,  
 Which once refresh'd our mind,  
 Shall come—as, on those sighing woods,  
 The chilling autumn wind.

Hear not the wind—view not the woods ;  
 Look out o'er vale and hill :  
 In spring, the sky encircled them—  
 The sky is round them still.  
 Come autumn's scathe—come winter's cold—  
 Come change—and human fate !  
 Whatever prospect HEAVEN doth bound,  
 Can ne'er be desolate.

## THE APPEAL.

CHILDREN of our England ! stand  
 On the shores that girt our land ;  
 The ægis of whose cloud-white rock  
 Braveth Time's own battle shock.  
 Look above the wide, wide world ;  
 Where the northern blasts have furl'd  
 Their numbèd wings amid the snows,  
 Mutt'ring in a forced repose—  
 Or where the madden'd sun on high  
 Shakes his torch athwart the sky,  
 Till within their prison sere,  
 Chainèd earthquake groan for fear ?  
 Look above the wide, wide world,  
 Where a gauntlet Sin hath hurl'd  
 To astonied Life ; and where  
 Death's gladiatorial smile doth glare  
 On making the arena bare.

Shout aloud the words that show  
 Jesus in the sands and snow ;—  
 Shout aloud the words that free,  
 Over the perpetual sea.

Speak ye. As a breath will sweep  
 Avalanche from Alpine steep,  
 So the spoken word shall roll  
 Fear and darkness from the soul.  
 Are ye men, and love not man?  
 Love ye, and permit his ban?  
 Can ye, dare ye, rend the chain  
 Wrought of common joy and pain,  
 Claspings with its links of gold,  
 Man to man in one strong hold?  
 Lo ! if the golden links ye sever,  
 Ye shall make your heart's flesh quiver ;  
 And wheresoe'er the links are rest,  
 There, shall be a blood-stain left.  
 To earth's remotest rock repair,  
 Ye shall find a vulture there :  
 Though for others sorrowing not,  
 Your own tears shall still be hot :  
 Though ye play a lonely part ;  
 Though ye bear an iron heart ;—  
 Woe, like Echetus, still must  
 Grind your iron into dust.

But, children of our Britain, ye  
 Rend not man's chain of sympathy ;  
 To those who sit in woe and night,  
 Denying tears and hiding light.  
 Ye have stretch'd your hands abroad  
 With the Spirit's sheathless sword :  
 Ye have spoken—and the tone  
 To earth's extremest verge hath gone :  
 East and west sublime it rolls,  
 Echoed by a million souls !  
 The wheels of rapid circling years,  
 Erst hot with crime, are quench'd in tears.  
 Rocky hearts wild waters pour,  
 That were chain'd in stone before :  
 Bloody hands, that only bare  
 Hilted sword, are clasp'd in prayer :

## WEARINESS.

Savage tongues, that wont to fling  
 Shout of war in deathly ring,  
 Speak the name which angels sing.  
 Dying lips are lit the while  
 With a most undying smile,  
 Which reposing there, instead  
 Of language, when the lips are dead,  
 Saith—"No sound of grief or pain  
 Shall haunt us when we move again."

Children of our country! brothers  
 To the children of all others!  
 Shout aloud the words that show  
 Jesus in the sands and snow;—  
 Shout aloud the words that free,  
 Over the perpetual sea!

## WEARINESS.

MINE eyes are weary of surveying  
 The fairest things, too soon decaying;  
 Mine ears are weary of receiving  
 The kindest words—ah, past believing!  
 Weary my hope, of ebb and flow;  
 Weary my pulse, of tunes of woe:  
 My trusting heart is weariest!  
 I would—I would, I were at rest!

For *me*, can earth refuse to fade?  
 For *me*, can words be faithful made?  
 Will *my* embitter'd hope be sweet?  
*My* pulse forego the human beat?  
 No! Darkness must consume mine eye—  
 Silence, mine ear—hope cease—pulse die—  
 And o'er mine heart a stone be press'd—  
 Or vain this—"Would I were at rest!"

There is a land of rest deferr'd:  
 Nor eye hath seen, nor ear hath heard,  
 Nor Hope hath trod the precinct o'er;  
 For hope beheld is hope no more!  
 There, human pulse forgets its tone—  
 There, hearts may know as they are known!  
 Oh for dove's wings, thou dwelling blest,  
 To fly to *thee*, and be at rest!

## THE SERAPHIM.

"I look for Angels' songs, and hear Him cry."

GILES FLETCHER.

## PART THE FIRST.

[*It is the time of the Crucifixion; and the angels of heaven have departed towards the earth, except the two seraphim, ADOR the Strong and ZERAH the Bright One. The place is the outer side of the shut heavenly gate.*]

*Ador.* O SERAPH, pause no more.  
Beside this gate of heaven we stand alone.

*Zerah.* Of heaven!

*Ador.* Our brother hosts are gone—

*Zerah.* Are gone before.

*Ador.* And the golden harps the angels bore  
To help the songs of their desire,  
Still burning from their hands of fire,  
Lie without touch or tone  
Upon the glass-sea shore.

*Zerah.* Silent upon the glass-sea shore!

*Ador.* There the Shadow from the throne  
Formless with infinity  
Hovers o'er the crystal sea.

Awfuller than light derived,  
And red with those primæval heats  
Whereby all life has lived.

*Zerah.* Our visible God, our heavenly seats!

*Ador.* Beneath us sinks the pomp angelical,  
Cherub and seraph, powers and virtues, all,—  
The roar of whose descent has died  
To a still sound, as thunder into rain.

Immeasurable space spreads magnified  
With that thick life, along the plane  
The worlds slid out on. What a fall  
And eddy of wings innumerable, crossed  
By trailing curls that have not lost  
The glitter of the God-smile shed  
On every prostrate angel's head!  
What gleaming up of hands that fling  
Their homage in retorted rays,  
From high instinct of worshipping,  
And habitude of praise!

## THE SERAPHIM.

*Zerah.* Rapidly they drop below us.  
 Pointed palm and wing and hair,  
 Indistinguishable, show us  
 Only pulses in the air  
 Throbbing with a fiery beat,  
 As if a new creation heard  
 Some divine and plastic word,  
 And trembling at its new-found being,  
 Awakened at our feet.

*Ador.* *Zerah*, do not wait for seeing.  
 His voice, His, that thrills us so  
 As we our harpstrings, uttered *Go*,  
*Behold the Holy in His woe.*  
 And all are gone, save thee and—

*Zerah.* Thee!

*Ador.* I stood the nearest to the throne  
 In hierarchical degree,  
 What time the Voice said *Go*.  
 And whether I was moved alone  
 By the storm-pathos of the tone  
 Which swept through heaven the alien name of *woe*,  
 Or whether the subtle glory broke  
 Through my strong and shielding wings,  
 Bearing to my finite essence  
 Incapacious of their presence,  
 Infinite imaginings,  
 None knoweth save the Throned who spoke ;  
 But I who at creation stood upright  
 And heard the God-breath move  
 Shaping the words that lightened, "Be there light,"  
 Nor trembled but with love ;  
 Now fell down shudderingly,  
 My face upon the pavement whence I had towered,  
 As if in mine immortal overpowered  
 By God's eternity.

*Zerah.* Let me wait!—let me wait!—

*Ador.* Nay, gaze not backward through the gate.  
 God fills our heaven with God's own solitude  
 Till all the pavements glow.  
 His Godhead being no more subdued  
 By itself, to glories low  
 Which seraphs can sustain,  
 What if thou, in gazing so,  
 Shouldst behold but only one

Attribute, the veil undone—  
 Even that to which we dare to press  
 Nearest, for its gentleness—  
 Ay, His love !  
 How the deep ecstatic pain  
 Thy being's strength would capture !  
 Without language for the rapture,  
 Without music strong to come  
 And set the adoration free,  
 For ever, ever, wouldst thou be  
 Amid the general chorus dumb,  
 God-stricken to seraphic agony.  
 Or, brother, what if on thine eyes  
 In vision bare should rise  
 The life-fount whence His hand did gather  
 With solitary force  
 Our immortalities !  
 Straightway how thine own would wither,  
 Falter like a human breath,  
 And shrink into a point like death,  
 By gazing on its source !—  
 My words have imaged dread.  
 Meekly hast thou bent thine head,  
 And dropt thy wings in languishment  
 Overclouding foot and face,  
 As if God's throne were eminent  
 Before thee, in the place.  
 Yet not—not so,  
 O loving spirit and meek, dost thou fulfil  
 The supreme Will.  
 Not for obeisance, but obedience,  
 Give motion to thy wings. Depart from hence.  
 The voice said "Go."  
*Zerah.* Belovèd, I depart.  
 His will is as a spirit within my spirit,  
 A portion of the being I inherit.  
 His will is mine obedience. I resemble  
 A flame all undefilèd though it tremble ;  
 I go and tremble. Love me, O beloved !  
 O thou, who stronger art,  
 And standest ever near the Infinite,  
 Pale with the light of Light,  
 Love me, beloved ! me, more newly made  
 More feeble, more afraid ;

And let me hear with mine thy pinions moved,  
 As close and gentle as the loving are,  
 That love being near, heaven may not seem so far.

*Ador.* I am near thee and I love thee.

Were I loveless, from thee gone,  
 Love is round, beneath, above thee—  
 God, the omnipresent One.  
 Spread the wing, and lift the brow.  
 Well-beloved, what fearest thou?

*Zerah.* I fear, I fear—

*Ador.* What fear?

*Zerah.* The fear of earth.

*Ador.* Of earth, the God-created and God-praised  
 In the hour of birth?

Where every night the moon in light  
 Doth lead the waters silver-faced?  
 Where every day the sun doth lay  
 A rapture to the heart of all

The leafy and reeded pastoral,  
 As if the joyous shout which burst  
 From angel lips to see him first,  
 Had left a silent echo in his ray?

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

Where man is, and the thorn.  
 Where sun and moon have borne  
 No light to souls forlorn.

Where Eden's tree of life no more uprears  
 Its spiral leaves and fruitage, but instead  
 The yew-tree bows its melancholy head  
 And all the undergrasses kills and seres.

*Ador.* Of earth the weak,  
 Made and unmade?

Where men that faint, do strive for crowns that fade?  
 Where, having won the profit which they seek,  
 They lie beside the sceptre and the gold  
 With fleshless hands that cannot wield or hold,  
 And the stars shine in their unwinking eyes?

*Zerah.* Of earth the bold,

Where the blind matter wrings  
 An awful potency out of impotence,  
 Bowing the spiritual things  
 To the things of sense.

Where the human will replies  
 With ay and no,



Because the human pulse is quick or slow.  
Where Love succumbs to Change,  
With only his own memories, for revenge.  
And the fearful mystery—

*Ador.* called Death?

*Zerah.* Nay, death is fearful,—but who saith  
“To die,” is comprehensible.

What’s fearfuller, thou knowest well,  
Though the utterance be not for thee,  
Lest it blanch thy lips from glory—  
Ay! the cursèd thing that moved  
A shadow of ill, long times ago,  
Across our heaven’s own shining floor,  
And when it vanished, some who were  
On thrones of holy empire there,  
Did reign—were seen—were—never more.

Come nearer, O beloved!

*Ador.* I am near thee. Didst thou bear thee  
Ever to this earth?

*Zerah.* Before.

When thrilling from His hand along  
Its lustrous path with spheric song  
The earth was deathless, sorrowless.  
Unfearing, then, pure feet might press  
The grasses brightening with their feet,  
For God’s own voice did mix its sound  
In a solemn confluence oft  
With the rivers’ flowing round,  
And the life-tree’s waving soft.  
Beautiful new earth and strange!

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

*Zerah.* Nay, or wherefore should I fear  
To look upon it now?

I have beheld the ruined things  
Only in depicting  
Of angels from an earthly mission,—  
Strong one, even upon thy brow,  
When, with task completed, given  
Back to us in that transition,  
I have beheld thee silent stand,  
Abstracted in the seraph band,  
Without a smile in heaven.

*Ador.* Then thou wast not one of those  
Whom the loving Father chose

## THE SERAPHIM.

In visionary pomp to sweep  
 O'er Judæa's grassy places,  
 O'er the shepherds and the sheep,  
 Though thou art so tender?—dimming  
 All the stars except one star  
 With their brighter, kinder faces,  
 And using heaven's own tune in hymning,  
 While deep response from earth's own mountains ran,  
 "Peace upon earth, goodwill to man."

*Zerah.* "Glory to God." I said amen afar.  
 And those who from that earthly mission are,  
 Within mine ears have told  
 That the seven everlasting Spirits did hold  
 With such a sweet and prodigal constraint  
 The meaning yet the mystery of the song  
 What time they sang it, on their natures strong,  
 That, gazing down on earth's dark steadfastness  
 And speaking the new peace in promises,  
 The love and pity made their voices faint  
 Into the low and tender music, keeping  
 The place in heaven of what on earth is weeping.

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

*Zerah.*

Ah me!

I hear thereof uncomprehendingly.  
 Peace where the tempest, where the sighing is,  
 And worship of the idol, 'stead of His?

*Ador.* Yea, peace, where He is.

*Zerah.*

He!

Say it again.

*Ador.*

Where He is.

*Zerah.*

Can it be

That earth retains a tree  
 Whose leaves, like Eden foliage can be swayed  
 By the breathing of His voice, nor shrink and fade?

*Ador.* There is a tree!—it hath no leaf nor root;  
 Upon it hangs a curse for all its fruit:

Its shadow on His head is laid.

For He, the crownèd Son,

Has left his crown and throne,

Walks earth in Adam's clay,

Eve's snake to bruise and slay—

*Zerah.* Walks earth in clay?

*Ador.* And walking in the clay which He created,  
 He through it shall touch death.

What do I utter? what conceive? did breath  
 Of demon howl it in a blasphemy?  
 Or was it mine own voice, informed, dilated  
 By the seven confluent Spirits?—Speak—answer me!  
*Who* said man's victim was his Deity?

*Zerah.* Beloved, beloved, the word came forth from thee.  
 Thine eyes are rolling a tempestuous light

Above, below, around,  
 As putting thunder-questions without cloud,  
 Reverberate without sound,  
 To universal nature's depth and height.  
 The tremor of an inexpressive thought  
 Too self-amazed to shape itself aloud,  
 O'erruns the awful curving of thy lips;  
 And while thine hands are stretched above,  
 As newly they had caught  
 Some lightning from the Throne, or showed the Lord  
 Some retributive sword,

Thy brows do alternate with wild eclipse  
 And radiance, with contrasted wrath and love,  
 As God had called thee to a seraph's part,  
 With a man's quailing heart.

*Ador.* O heart—O heart of man!  
 O ta'en from human clay  
 To be no seraph's but Jehovah's own!  
 Made holy in the taking,  
 And yet unseparate

From death's perpetual ban,  
 And human feelings sad and passionate:  
 Still subject to the treacherous forsaking  
 Of other hearts, and its own steadfast pain.  
 O heart of man—of God! which God has ta'en  
 From out the dust, with its humanity  
 Mournful and weak yet innocent around it,  
 And bade its many pulses beating lie  
 Beside that incommunicable stir  
 Of Deity wherewith He interwound it.  
 O man! and is thy nature so defiled  
 That all that holy Heart's devout law-keeping,  
 And low pathetic beat in deserts wild,  
 And gushings pitiful of tender weeping  
 For traitors who consigned it to such woe—  
 That all could cleanse thee not, without the flow  
 Of blood, the life-blood—*His*—and streaming *so*?

O earth, the thundercleft, windshaken!—where  
The louder voice of “blood and blood” doth rise—  
Hast thou an altar for this sacrifice?

O heaven! O vacant throne!

O crownèd hierarchies that wear your crown  
When His is put away!

Are ye unshamed that ye cannot dim  
Your alien brightness to be liker Him—  
Assume a human passion, and down-lay  
Your sweet secureness for congenial fears,  
And teach your cloudless ever-burning eyes  
The mystery of His tears?

*Zerah.* I am strong, I am strong!

Were I never to see my heaven again,  
I would wheel to earth like the tempest rain  
Which sweeps there with an exultant sound  
To lose its life as it reaches the ground.

I am strong, I am strong!

Away from mine inward vision swim  
The shining seats of my heavenly birth—  
I see but His, I see but Him—  
The Maker's steps on His cruel earth.  
Will the bitter herbs of earth grow sweet  
To me, as trodden by His feet?

Will the vexed, accurst humanity,  
As worn by Him, begin to be  
A blessèd, yea, a sacred thing  
For love and awe and ministering?

I am strong, I am strong!

By our angel ken shall we survey  
His loving smile through His woeful clay?

I am swift, I am strong—

The love is bearing me along.

*Ador.* One love is bearing us along.

## PART THE SECOND.

[*Mid-air, above Judæa. ADOR and ZERAH are a little apart from the visible angelic hosts.*]

*Ador.* BELOVED ! dost thou see ?—

*Zerah.* Thee,—thee.

Thy burning eyes already are  
Grown wild and mournful as a star  
Whose occupation is for aye  
To look upon the place of clay  
Whereon thou lookest now.

The crown is fainting on thy brow  
To the likeness of a cloud—

The forehead's self, a little bowed  
From its aspect high and holy—

As it would in meekness meet

Some seraphic melancholy :

Thy very wings that lately flung

An outline clear, do flicker here

And wear to each a shadow hung,

Dropped across thy feet.

In these strange contrasting glooms

Stagnant with the scent of tombs,

Seraph faces, O my brother,

Show awfully to one another.

*Ador.* Dost thou see ?

*Zerah.* Even so ; I see

Our empyreal company,

Alone the memory of their brightness

Left in them, as in thee.

The circle upon circle, tier on tier,

Piling earth's hemisphere

With heavenly infiniteness,

Above us and around,

Straining the whole horizon like a bow :

Their songful lips divorcèd from all sound ;

A darkness gliding down their silvery glances,—

Bowing their steadfast solemn countenances

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

*Ador.* Look downward ! dost thou see ?

*Zerah.* And wouldst thou press *that* vision on my words ?

## THE SERAPHIM.

Doth not Earth speak enough  
 Of change and of undoing,  
 Without a seraph's witness? Oceans rough  
 With tempest, pastoral swords  
 Displaced by fiery deserts, mountains ruing  
 The bolt fallen yesterday,  
 That shake their piney heads, as who would say  
 "We are too beautiful for our decay"—  
 Shall seraphs speak of these things? Let alone  
 Earth to her earthly moan.

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

*Ador.* Hearest thou the attestation

Of the rousèd Universe  
 Like a desert lion shaking  
 Dews of silence from its mane?  
 With an irrepresive passion

Uprising at once,  
 Rising up and forsaking  
 Its solemn state in the circle of suns,  
 To attest the pain

Of Him who stands (O patience sweet!)  
 In His own hand-prints of creation,  
 With human feet?

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

*Zerah.* Forms, Spaces, Motions wide,

O meek, insensate things,  
 O congregated matters! who inherit,  
 Instead of vital powers,  
 Impulsions God-supplied;  
 Instead of influent spirit,  
 A clear informing beauty;  
 Instead of creature-duty,  
 Submission calm as rest.

Lights, without feet or wings,  
 In golden courses sliding!

Glooms, stagnantly subsiding,  
 Whose lustrous heart away was prest  
 Into the argent stars!

Ye crystal, firmamental bars,  
 That hold the skyey waters free  
 From tide or tempest's ecstasy!

Airs universal! thunders lorn  
 That wait your lightnings in cloud-cave  
 Hewn out by the winds! O brave

And subtle elements ! the Holy  
 Hath charged me by your voice with folly.\*  
 Enough, the mystic arrow leaves its wound.  
 Return ye to your silences inborn,  
 Or to your inarticulated sound !

*Ador. Zerah.*

*Zerah.* Wilt *thou* rebuke ?

God hath rebuked me, brother. I am weak.

*Ador. Zerah,* my brother *Zerah* ! could I speak  
 Of thee, 'twould be of love to thee.

*Zerah.*

Thy look  
 Is fixed on earth, as mine upon thy face !—  
 Where shall I seek His ?—

I have thrown

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

He is not there.

All these are unworthy  
 Those footsteps to bear—

Before which, bowing down,  
 I would fain quench the stars of my crown  
 In the dark of the earthy.  
 Where shall I seek Him ?

No reply ?

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

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

*Ador.*

I constrain  
 The passion of my silence. None  
 Of those places gazed upon  
 Are gloomy enow to fit His pain.  
 Unto Him, whose forming word  
 Gave to Nature flower and sward,  
 She hath given back again,  
 For the myrtle, the thorn ;

\* "His angels He charged with folly."—Job iv. 18.

## THE SERAPHIM.

For the sylvan calm, the human scorn.  
Still, still, reluctant seraph, gaze beneath  
There is a city—

*Zerah.* Temple and tower,  
Palace and purple would droop like a flower  
(Or a cloud at our breath),  
If He neared in His state  
The outermost gate.

*Ador.* Ah me, not so  
In the state of a King, did the victim go!  
And THOU who hangest mute of speech,  
'Twixt heaven and earth, with forehead yet  
Stained by the bloody sweat—  
God! man! Thou hast forgone Thy throne in each!

*Zerah.* Thine eyes behold Him?

*Ador.* Yea, below.

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

Seest thou yet, beloved?

*Zerah.* I see  
Beyond the city, crosses three,  
And mortals three that hang thereon,  
'Ghast and silent to the sun.

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

*Ador.* Turn not. God dwells with men.

*Zerah.* Above

He dwells with angels, and they love.  
Can these love? With the living's pride  
They stare at those who die—who hang  
In their sight and die. They bear the streak  
Of the crosses' shadow, black not wide,  
To fall on their heads, as it swerves aside

When the victims' pang  
Makes the dry wood creak.

*Ador.* The cross—the cross!

*Zerah.* A woman kneels  
The mid cross under—



With white lips asunder,  
 And motion on each :  
 They throb, as she feels,  
 With a spasm, not a speech ;  
 And her lids, close as sleep,  
 Are less calm—for the eyes  
 Have made room there to weep  
 Drop on drop—

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

Of salt curses, whose foam is the darkness, on roll  
 Forward, on from the strand of the storm-beaten years,  
 And back from the rocks of the horrid hereafter,  
 And up, in a coil, from the present's wrath-spring,  
 Yea, down from the windows of heaven opening,  
 Deep calling to deep as they meet on His soul,—  
 And men weep only tears ?

*Zerah.* Little drops in the lapse !  
 And yet, Ador, perhaps  
 It is all that they can.  
 Tears ! the lovingest man  
 Has no better bestowed  
 Upon man.

*Ador.* Nor on God.

*Zerah.* Do all-givers need gifts ?  
 If the Giver said " Give," the first motion would slay  
 Our Immortals, the echo would ruin away  
 The same worlds which He made. Why, what angel  
 uplifts  
 Such a music, so clear,  
 It may seem in God's ear

Worth more than a woman's hoarse weeping ? And thus,  
 Pity tender as tears, I above thee would speak,  
 Thou woman that weepest ! weep unscorned of us :  
 I, the tearless and pure, am but loving and weak.

*Ador.* Speak low, my brother, low,—and not of love  
 Or human or angelic. Rather stand  
 Before the throne of that Supreme above,

## THE SERAPHIM.

In whose infinitude the secrecies  
Of thine own being lie hid, and lift thine hand  
Exultant, saying, "Lord God, I am wise!"—  
Than utter *here*, "I love."

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

*Ador.* Of heaven. Ah me!

*Zerah.* Ador!

*Ador.* Say on.

*Zerah.* The crucified are three.  
Beloved, they are unlike.

*Ador.* Unlike.

*Zerah.* For one  
Is as a man who has sinned and still  
Doth wear the wicked will,  
The hard malign life-energy,  
Tossed outward, in the parting soul's disdain,  
On brow and lip that cannot change again.

*Ador.* And one—

*Zerah.* Has also sinned.  
And yet (O marvel!) doth the Spirit-wind  
Blow white those waters? Death upon his face  
Is rather shine than shade,  
A tender shine by looks beloved made:  
He seemeth dying in a quiet place,  
And less by iron wounds in hands and feet  
Than heart-broke by new joy too sudden and sweet.

*Ador.* And ONE!—

*Zerah.* And ONE!—

*Ador.* Why dost thou pause?  
*Zerah.* God! God!

Spirit of my spirit! who movest  
Through seraph veins in burning deity,  
To light the quenchless pulses!—

*Ador.* But hast trod  
The depths of love in Thy peculiar nature,  
And not in any Thou hast made and lovest  
In narrow seraph hearts!—

*Zerah.* Above, Creator!  
Within, Upholder!—

*Ador.* And below, below,  
The creature's and the upholden's sacrifice!

*Zerah.* Why do I pause?—

*Ador.* There is a silentness  
 That answers thee enow ;  
 That, like a brazen sound  
 Excluding others, doth ensheathe us round,—  
 Hear it ! It is not from the visible skies  
 Though they are still,  
 Unconscious that their own dropped dew's express  
 The light of heaven on every earthly hill.  
 It is not from the hills ; though calm and bare  
 They, since their first creation,  
 Through midnight cloud or morning's glittering air,  
 Or the deep deluge blindness, toward the place  
 Whence thrilled the mystic word's creative grace,  
 And whence again shall come  
 The word that uncreates,  
 Have lift their brows in voiceless expectation.  
 It is not from the places that entomb  
 Man's dead—though common Silence there dilates  
 Her soul to grand proportions, worthily  
 To fill life's vacant room.  
 Not there : not there !  
 Not yet within those chambers lieth He,  
 A dead One in His living world ; His south  
 And west winds blowing over earth and sea,  
 And not a breath on that creating Mouth.  
 But now,—a silence keeps  
 (Not death's, nor sleep's)  
 The lips whose whispered word  
 Might roll the thunders round reverberated.  
 Silent art Thou, O my Lord,  
 Bowing down thy stricken head !  
 Fearest thou, a groan of thine  
 Would make the pulse of thy creation fail  
 As thine own pulse?—would rend the veil  
 Of visible things and let the flood  
 Of the unseen Light, the essential God,  
 Rush in to whelm the undivine?—  
 Thy silence, to my thinking, is as dread !  
*Zerah.* O silence !  
*Ador.* Doth it say to thee—the NAME,  
 Slow-learning seraph ?  
*Zerah.* I have learnt.  
*Ador.* The flame  
 Perishes in thine eyes.

*Zerah.* He opened His,  
And looked. I cannot bear—

*Ador.* Their agony?

*Zerah.* Their love. God's depth is in them. From his  
brows

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

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

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

*Zerah.* Heaven is dull,  
Mine Ador, to man's earth. The light that burns  
In fluent, reflux motion  
Along the crystal ocean;

The springing of the golden harps between  
The bowery wings, in fountains of sweet sound—  
The winding, wandering music that returns  
Upon itself, exultingly self-bound  
In the great spheric round

Of everlasting praises;  
The God-thoughts in our midst that intervene,  
Visibly flashing from the supreme throne,  
Full in seraphic faces,  
Till each astonishes the other, grown  
More beautiful with worship and delight—  
My heaven! my home of heaven! my infinite  
Heaven-choirs! what are ye to this dust and death,  
This cloud, this cold, these tears, this failing breath,  
Where God's immortal love now issueth  
In this MAN'S woe?

*Ador.* His eyes are very deep yet calm.

*Zerah.* No more  
On me, Jehovah-man—

*Ador.* Calm-deep. They show  
A passion which is tranquil. They are seeing  
No earth, no heaven: no men that slay and curse—  
No seraphs that adore;

Their gaze is on the invisible, the dread—  
The things we cannot view or think or speak,  
Because we are too happy, or too weak,—  
The sea of ill, for which the universe,  
With all its piled space, can find no shore,

With all its life, no living foot to tread.  
But He, accomplished in Jehovah-being,

Sustains the gaze adown,  
Conceives the vast despair,

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

*Zerah.* Thus, do I find Thee thus? My undiminished  
And undiminshable God!—my God!

The echoes are still tremulous along  
The heavenly mountains, of the latest song

Thy manifested glory swept abroad  
In rushing past our lips: they echo aye

“Creator, Thou art strong!

Creator, Thou are blessed over all.”

By what new utterance shall I now recall,  
Unteaching the heaven-echoes? dare I say,

“Creator, Thou art feebler than Thy work!  
Creator, Thou art sadder than Thy creature!

A worm, and not a man,

Yea, no worm—but a curse?”

I dare not, so, mine heavenly phrase reverse.

Albeit the piercing thorn and thistle-fork

(Whose seed disordered ran

From Eve's hand trembling when the curse did reach her)

Be garnered darklier in Thy soul, the rod

That smites Thee never blossoming, and Thou,

Grief-bearer for Thy world, with unkinged brow—

I leave to men their song of Ichabod:

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

*Ador.* Hereafter shall the blood-bought captives raise  
The passion-song of blood.

*Zerah.\** And *we*, extend  
Our holy vacant hands towards the Throne,  
Crying “We have no music.”

*Ador.* Rather, blend

Both musics into one.

The sanctities and sanctified above

Shall each to each, with lifted looks serene,

Their shining faces lean,

And mix the adoring breath

And breathe the full thanksgiving.

*Zerah.*

But the love—

The love, mine Ador!

*Ador.*

Do we love not?

*Zerah.* Yea,  
 But not as man shall! not with life for death,  
 New-throbbing through the startled being; not  
 With strange astonished smiles, that ever may  
 Gush passionate like tears and fill their place:  
 Nor yet with speechless memories of what  
 Earth's winters were, enverduring the green  
 Of every heavenly palm  
 Whose windless, shadeless calm  
 Moves only at the breath of the Unseen.  
 Oh, not with this blood on us—and this face,—  
 Still, haply, pale with sorrow that it bore  
 In our behalf, and tender evermore  
 With nature all our own, upon us gazing—  
 Nor yet with these forgiving hands upraising  
 Their unreprouchful wounds, alone to bless!  
 Alas, Creator! shall we love Thee less  
 Than mortals shall?

*Ador.* Amen! so let it be.  
 We love in our proportion—to the bound  
 Thine infinite, our finite, set around,  
 And that is finitely,—Thou, infinite  
 And worthy infinite love! And our delight  
 Is watching the dear love poured out to Thee  
 From ever fuller chalice. Blessed they,  
 Who love Thee more than we do: blessed we,  
 Viewing that love which shall exceed even this,  
 And winning in the sight a double bliss,  
 For all so lost in love's supremacy.  
 The bliss is better. Only on the sad  
 Cold earth there are who say  
 It seemeth better to be great than glad.  
 The bliss is better. Love Him more, O man,  
 Than sinless seraphs can.

*Zerah.* Yea, love Him more.

*Voices of the Angelic Multitude.* Yea, more.

*Ador.* The loving word  
 Is caught by those from whom we stand apart.  
 For silence hath no deepness in her heart  
 Where love's low name low breathed would not be heard  
 By angels, clear as thunder.

*Angelic voices.* Love Him more.

*Ador.* Sweet voices, swooning o'er!  
 The music which ye make!

Albeit to love there were not ever given  
 A mournful sound when uttered out of heaven,  
 That angel-sadness ye would fitly take.  
 Of love be silent now : we gaze adown  
 Upon the incarnate Love who wears no crown.

*Zerah.* No crown ! the woe instead  
 Is heavy on His head,  
 Pressing inward on His brain  
 With a hot and clinging pain  
 Till all tears are prest away,  
 And clear and calm His vision may  
 Peruse the black abyss.  
 No rod, no sceptre is  
 Holden in his fingers pale ;  
 They close instead upon the nail,  
 Concealing the sharp dole—  
 Never stirring to put by  
 The fair hair peaked with blood,  
 Drooping forward from the rood,  
 Helplessly—heavily—  
 On the cheek that waxeth colder,  
 Whiter ever—and the shoulder  
 Where the government was laid.  
 His glory made the Heavens afraid ;  
 Will He not unearth this cross from its hole ?  
 His pity makes his piteous state ;  
 Will He be uncompassionate  
 Alone to His proper soul ?  
 Yea, will He not lift up  
 His lips from the bitter cup,  
 His brows from the dreary weight,  
 His hand from the clenching cross—  
 Crying, “ My Father, give to me  
 Again the joy I had with Thee,  
 Or ere this earth was made for loss ? ”  
 No stir : no sound.  
 The love and woe being interwound  
 He cleaveth to the woe ;  
 And putteth forth heaven’s-strength below—  
 To bear.

*Ador.* And that creates His anguish now,  
 Which made His glory there.

*Zerah.* Shall it need be so ?  
 Awake, thou Earth ! behold !

## THE SERAPHIM.

Thou, uttered forth of old,  
 In all thy life-emotion,  
 In all-thy vernal noises ;  
 In the rollings of thine ocean,  
 Leaping founts, and rivers running,—  
 In thy woods' prophetic heaving,  
 Ere the rains a stroke have given ;  
 In thy winds' exultant voices  
 When they feel the hills anear,—  
 In the firmamental sunning,  
 And the tempest which rejoices  
 Thy full heart with an awful cheer !  
 Thou ! uttered forth of old,  
 And with all thy music rolled  
 In a breath abroad  
 By the breathing God,—  
 Awake ! He is here ! behold !  
 Even *thou*—beseems it good  
 To thy vacant vision dim,  
 That the deadly ruin should,  
 For thy sake, encompass Him ?  
 That the Master-word should lie  
 A mere silence—while His own  
 Processive harmony—  
 The faintest echo of His lightest tone,  
 Is sweeping in a choral triumph by ?  
 Awake ! emit a cry !  
 And say, albeit used  
 From Adam's ancient years  
 To falls of acrid tears,  
 To frequent sighs unloosed,  
 Caught back to press again  
 On bosoms zoned with pain—  
 To corpses still and sullen  
 The shine and music dulling  
 With closed eyes and ears  
 That nothing sweet can enter,  
 Commoving thee no less  
 With that forced quietness,  
 Than the earthquake in thy centre—  
 Thou hast not learnt to bear  
 This new divine despair !  
 These tears that sink into thee,  
 These dying eyes that view thee,



This dropping blood from lifted rood,  
 They darken and undo thee !  
 Thou canst not presently sustain this corse—  
 Cry, cry, thou hast not force !  
 Cry, thou wouldst fainer keep  
 Thy hopeless charnels deep—  
 Thyself a general tomb—  
 Where the first and the second Death  
 Sit gazing face to face,  
 And mar each other's breath,  
 While silent bones through all the place  
 'Neath sun and moon do faintly glisten,  
 And seem to lie and listen  
 For the tramp of the coming Doom.

Is it not meet

That they who erst the Eden fruit did eat,  
 Should champ the ashes ?  
 That they who wrap them in the thunder-cloud,  
 Should wear it as a shroud,  
 Perishing by its flashes ?  
 That they who vexed the lion, should be rent ?  
 Cry, cry—"I will sustain my punishment,  
 The sin being mine ; but take away from me  
 This visioned Dread—this Man—this Deity."

*The Earth.* I have groaned; I have travailed: I am weary  
 I am blind with my own grief, and cannot see,  
 As clear-eyed angels can, His agony,  
 And what I see I also can sustain,  
 Because His power protects me from His pain.  
 I have groaned—I have travailed—I am dreary,  
 Harkening the thick sobs of my children's heart :  
 How can I say "Depart"  
 To that Atoner making calm and free ?  
 Am I a God as He,

To lay down peace and power as willingly ?

*Ador.* He looked for some to pity. There is none.  
 All pity is within Him and not for Him.  
 His earth is iron under Him, and o'er Him  
 His skies are brass.

His seraphs cry "Alas !"

With hallelujah voice that cannot weep.

And man, for-whom the dreadful work is done . . .

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

## THE SERAPHIM.

*Ador.* Thou hearest. Man is grateful.

*Zerah.*

Can I hear

Nor darken into man and cease for ever

My seraph-smile to wear?

Was it for such,

It pleased Him to overleap

His glory with His love, and sever

From the God-light and the throne,

And all angels bowing down,

For whom His every look did touch

New notes of joy on the unworn string

Of an eternal worshipping?

For such, He left His heaven?

There, though never bought by blood

And tears, we gave Him gratitude:

We loved Him there, though unforgiven.

*Ador.* The light is riven

Above, around,

And down in lurid fragments flung,

That catch the mountain-peak and stream

With momentary gleam,

Then perish in the water and the ground.

River and waterfall,

Forest and wilderness,

Mountain and city, are together wrung

Into one shape, and that is shapelessness;

The darkness stands for all.

*Zerah.* The pathos hath the day undone:

The death-look of His eyes

Hath overcome the sun

And made it sicken in its narrow skies.

*Ador.* Is it to death? He dieth.

*Zerah.*

Through the dark

He still, He only, is discernible—

The naked hands and feet transfixed stark,

The countenance of patient anguish white,

Do make themselves a light

More dreadful than the glooms which round them dwell

And therein do they shine.

*Ador.*

God! Father-God!

Perpetual Radiance on the radiant throne!

Uplift the lids of inward Deity,

Flashing abroad

Thy burning Infinite!

Light up this dark where there is nought to see  
 Except the unimagined agony  
 Upon the sinless forehead of the Son.

*Zerah.* God, tarry not! Behold, enow  
 Hath He wandered as a stranger,  
 Sorrowed as a victim. Thou,  
 Appear for Him, O Father!  
 Appear for Him, Avenger!  
 Appear for Him, just One and holy One,  
 For He is holy and just!

At once the darkness and dishonour rather  
 To the ragged jaws of hungry chaos rake,  
 And hurl aback to ancient dust  
 These mortals that make blasphemies  
 With their made breath, this earth and skies  
 That only grow a little dim,  
 Seeing their curse on Him.  
 But Him, of all forsaken,  
 Of creature and of brother,  
 Never wilt Thou forsake!

Thy living and Thy loving cannot slacken  
 Their firm essential hold upon each other,  
 And well Thou dost remember how His part  
 Was still to lie upon Thy breast and be  
 Partaker of the light that dwelt in Thee  
 Ere sun or seraph shone;  
 And how, while silence trembled round the throne,  
 Thou countedst by the beatings of His heart,  
 The moments of Thine own eternity!

Awaken,  
 O right Hand with the lightnings! Again gather  
 His glory to Thy glory! What estranger—  
 What ill supreme in evil, can be thrust  
 Between the faithful Father and the Son?

Appear for Him, O Father!  
 Appear for Him, Avenger!  
 Appear for Him, just One and holy One,  
 For He is holy and just.

*Ador.* Thy face, upturned toward the throne, is dark;  
 Thou hast no answer, *Zerah.*

*Zerah.* No reply,  
 O unforsaking Father?

*Ador.* Hark!  
 Instead of downward voice, a cry  
 Is uttered from beneath.

## THE SERAPHIM.

*Zerah.* And by a sharper sound than death,  
 Mine immortality is riven.  
 The heavy darkness which doth tent the sky,  
 Floats backward as by a sudden wind :

But I see no light behind,  
 But I feel the farthest stars are all  
 Stricken and shaken,  
 And I know a shadow sad and broad  
 Doth fall—doth fall

On our vacant thrones in heaven.

*Voice from the Cross.* MY GOD, MY GOD,  
 WHY HAST THOU ME FORSAKEN ?

*The Earth.* Ah me, ah me, ah me! the dreadful  
 why!

My sin is on Thee, sinless One ! Thou art  
 God-orphaned, for my burden on Thy head,  
 Dark sin, white innocence, endurance dread !  
 Be still, within your shrouds, my buried dead ;  
 Nor work with this quick horror round mine heart.

*Zerah.* He hath forsaken *Him.* I perish.

*Ador.*

Hold

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

*Zerah.* I seek His will. Seek, seraphim !  
 My God, my God ! where is it ? Doth that curse  
 Reverberate, spare us, seraph or universe ?

*He hath forsaken Him.*

*Ador.* He cannot fail.

*Angel Voices.* We faint, we droop,  
 Our love doth tremble like fear.

*Voices of Fallen Angels from the Earth.* Do we prevail ?  
 Or are we lost ? Hath not the ill we did  
 Been heretofore our good ?

Is it not ill that One, all sinless, should  
 Hang heavy with all curses on a cross ?  
 Nathless, that cry ! With huddled faces hid  
 Within the empty graves which men did scoop  
 To hold more damned dead, we shudder through  
 What shall exalt us or undo,  
 Our triumph, or—our loss.

*Voice from the Cross.* IT IS FINISHED.

*Zerah.*

Hark, again !

Like a victor, speaks the Slain.

*Angel Voices.* Finished be the trembling vain !

*Ador.* Upward, like a well-loved Son,  
Looketh He, the orphaned One.

*Angel Voices.* Finished is the mystic pain !

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

Gleameth like a seraph sword.

*Angel Voices.* Finished is the demon reign !

*Ador.* His breath, as living God, createth,  
His breath, as dying man, completeth.

*Angel Voices.* Finished work His hands sustain !

*The Earth.* In mine ancient sepulchres

Where my kings and prophets freeze,

Adam dead four thousand years,

Unwakened by the universe's

Everlasting moan,

Aye his ghastly silence mocking—

Unwakened by his children's knocking

At his old sepulchral stone,

“Adam, Adam, all this curse is

Thine and on us yet !”—

Unwakened by the ceaseless tears

Wherewith they made his cerement wet,

“Adam, must thy curse remain ?”—

Starts with sudden life, and hears

Through the slow dripping of the caverned eaves,—

*Angel Voices.* Finished is his bane.

*Voice from the Cross.* FATHER ! MY SPIRIT TO THINE  
HANDS IS GIVEN.

*Ador.* Hear the wailing winds that be  
By wings of unclean spirits made.

They, in that last look, surveyed  
The love they lost in losing heaven,

And passionately flee,

With a desolate cry that cleaves

The natural storms—though *they* are lifting

God's strong cedar-roots like leaves,

And the earthquake and the thunder,

Neither keeping either under,

Roar and hurtle through the glooms—

And a few pale stars are drifting

Past the Dark, to disappear,

What time, from the splitting tombs,

Gleamingly the Dead arise,

Viewing with their death-calmed eyes

The elemental strategies,  
To witness, Victory is the Lord's!  
Hear the wail o' the spirits! hear.

*Zerah.* I hear alone the memory of His words.

## EPILOGUE.

## I.

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

## II.

I see no more Thy cross, O holy Slain!  
I hear no more the horror and the coil  
Of the great world's turmoil,  
Feeling Thy countenance *too still*,—nor yell  
Of demons sweeping past it to their prison.  
The skies that turned to darkness with Thy pain  
Make now a summer's day;  
And on my changèd ear that sabbath bell  
Records how CHRIST IS RISEN.

## III.

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

## IV.

Bright ministers of God and grace—of grace  
Because of God! whether ye bow adown  
In your own heaven, before the living face  
Of Him who died, and deathless wears the crown—  
Or whether at this hour ye haply are  
Anear, around me, hiding in the night  
Of this permitted ignorance your light,  
This feebleness to spare,—  
Forgive me, that mine earthly heart should dare

Shape images of unincarnate spirits  
 And lay upon their burning lips a thought  
 Cold with the weeping which mine earth inherits.  
 And though ye find in such hoarse music, wrought  
 To copy yours, a cadence all the while  
 Of sin and sorrow—only pitying smile !  
 Ye know to pity, well.

## v.

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

## THE POET'S VOW.

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

WORDSWORTH.

## PART THE FIRST.

*Showing wherefore the Vow was made.*

## I.

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

## II.

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

## THE POET'S VOW.

## III.

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

## IV.

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

## V.

Nor wore the dead a stiller face  
 Beneath the cerement's roll :  
 His lips refusing out in words  
 Their mystic thoughts to dole ;  
 His steadfast eye burnt inwardly,  
 As burning out his soul.

## VI.

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

## VII.

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

## VIII.

None gazed within the poet's face—  
 The poet gazed in none :



He threw a lonely shadow straight  
Before the moon and sun,  
Affronting nature's heaven-dwelling creatures,  
With wrong to nature done :

## IX.

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

## X.

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

## XI.

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

## XII.

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

## XIII.

" Poor crystal sky, with stars astray !  
Mad winds that howling go  
From east to west ! perplexed seas  
That stagger from their blow !

## THE POET'S VOW.

O motion wild ! O wave defiled !  
Our curse hath made thee so.

## XIV.

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

## XV.

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

## XVI.

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

## XVII.

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

## XVIII.

" That so my purged, once human heart,  
From all the human rent,  
May gather strength to pledge and drink  
Your wine of wonderment,  
While you pardon me, all blessingly,  
The woe mine Adam sent.

## XIX.

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

## XX.

“And ever, when I lift my brow  
 At evening to the sun,  
 No voice of woman or of child  
 Recording ‘Day is done,’  
 Your silence shall a love express,  
 More deep than such an one !”

## PART THE SECOND.

*Showing to whom the Vow was declared.*

## I.

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

## II.

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

## III.

He said—“My friends have wended forth,  
 With farewells smooth and kind ;  
 Mine oldest friend, my plighted bride,  
 Ye need not stay behind.

## THE POET'S VOW.

Friend, wed my fair bride for my sake—  
 And let my lands ancestral make  
 A dower for Rosalind.

## IV.

“And when beside your wassail board  
 Ye bless your social lot,  
 I charge you, that the giver be  
 In all his gifts forgot !  
 Or alone of all his words recall  
 The last—Lament me not.”

## V.

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

## VI.

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

## VII.

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

## VIII.

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

## IX.

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

## X.

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

## XI.

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

## XII.

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

## XIII.

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

## XIV.

“ And thou, O distant, sinful heart,  
 That climbest up so high,

## THE POET'S VOW.

To wrap and blind thee with the snows  
 That cause to dream and die—  
 What blessing can, from lips of man,  
 Approach thee with his sigh?

## XV.

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

## XVI.

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

## XVII.

“And now HE pleadeth up in Heaven  
 For our humanities,  
 Till the ruddy light on seraphs’ wings  
 In pale emotion dies.  
 They can better bear His Godhead’s glare  
 Than the pathos of His eyes.

## XVIII.

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

## XIX.

“So, for the blood’s sake, shed by Him,  
 Whom angels, God, declare,

Tears, like it, moist and warm with love,  
 Thy reverent eyes shall wear,  
 To see i' the face of Adam's race  
 The nature God doth share."

## XX.

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

## XXI.

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

## XXII.

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

## PART THE THIRD.

*Showing how the Vow was kept.*

## I.

HE dwelt alone, and, sun and moon,  
 Were witness that he made  
 Rejection of his humanness  
 Until they seemed to fade;

## THE POET'S VOW.

His face did so, for he did grow  
Of his own soul afraid.

## II.

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

## III.

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

## IV.

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

## V.

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

## VI.

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



## PART THE FOURTH.

*Showing how Rosalind fared by the keeping of the Vow.*

## I.

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

## II.

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

## III.

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

## IV.

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

## V.

" When all this feeble breath is done,  
 And I on bier am laid,

## THE POET'S VOW.

My tresses smoothed, for never a feast,  
 My body in shroud arrayed ;  
 Uplift each palm in a saintly calm,  
 As if that still I prayed.

## VI.

“ And heap beneath mine head the flowers  
 You stoop so low to pull ;  
 The little white flowers from the wood,  
 Which grow there in the cool ;  
 Which *he* and I, in childhood's games,  
 Went plucking, knowing not their names,  
 And filled thine apron full.

## VII.

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

## VIII.

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

## IX.

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

## X.

“ And through the piney forest still,  
 And down the open moorland—  
 Round where the sea beats mistily  
 And blindly on the foreland—

And let them chant that hymn I know,  
 Bearing me soft, bearing me slow,  
 To the ancient hall of Courland.

## XI.

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

## XII.

The old nurse looked within her eyes,  
 Whose mutual look was gone :  
 The old nurse stooped upon her mouth,  
 Whose answering voice was done ;  
 And nought she heard, till a little bird  
 Upon the casement's woodbine swinging  
 Broke out into a loud sweet singing  
 For joy o' the summer sun.  
 “Alack ! alack !”—she watched no more—  
 With head on knee she wailéd sore ;  
 And the little bird sang o'er and o'er  
 For joy o' the summer sun.

## PART THE FIFTH.

*Showing how the Vow was broken.*

## I.

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

## II.

They shine upon the steadfast hills,  
 Upon the swinging tide ;

## THE POET'S VOW.

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

## III.

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

## IV.

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

## THE WORDS OF ROSALIND'S SCROLL.

" I LEFT thee last, a child at heart,  
 A woman scarce in years :  
 I come to thee, a solemn corpse,  
 Which neither feels nor fears.  
 I have no breath to use in sighs ;  
 They laid the death-weights on mine eyes,  
 To seal them safe from tears.

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

" But out, alas ! these words are writ  
 By a living, loving one,

Adown whose cheeks, the proofs of life,  
 The warm, quick tears do run.  
 Ah, let the unloving corpse control  
 Thy scorn back from the loving soul,  
 Whose place of rest is won.

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

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

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

## V.

Bow lower down before the throne,  
 Triumphant Rosalind !  
 He boweth on thy corpse his face,  
 And weepeth as the blind.  
 'Twas a dread sight to see them so—  
 For the senseless corpse rocked to and fro,  
 With the wail of his living mind.

## VI.

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

## THE POET'S VOW.

## VII.

I tell you, friends, had you heard his wail,  
 'Twould haunt you in court and mart,  
 And in merry feast, until you set  
 Your cup down to depart—  
 That weeping wild of a reckless child  
 From a proud man's broken heart!

## VIII.

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

## IX.

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

## X.

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

That thou and I this law must keep,  
 If not in love, in sorrow then ;  
 Though smiling not like other men,  
 Still, like them, we must weep."

## THE ROMAUNT OF MARGRET.

"Can my affections find out nothing best,  
 But still and still remove?"—QUARLES.

## I.

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

## II.

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

## III.

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

## IV.

All little birds do sit  
 With heads beneath their wings :  
 Nature doth seem in a mystic dream,  
 Absorbed from her living things :  
 That dream, by that ladye,  
 Is certes unpartook,  
 For she looketh to the high cold stars  
 With a tender human look.

Margret, Margret.

## V.

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

Margret, Margret.

## VI.

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

Margret, Margret.

## VII.

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

Margret, Margret.



## VIII.

“Am I not like to thee?”—

The voice was calm and low—  
And between each word you might have heard  
The silent forests grow.

“*The like may sway the like!*”

By which mysterious law,  
Mine eyes from thine, and my lips from thine,  
The light and breath may draw,  
Margret, Margret.

## IX.

“My lips do need thy breath,  
My lips do need thy smile,  
And my pallid eyne, that light in thine,  
Which met the stars erewhile;  
Yet go with light and life,  
If that thou lovest one  
In all the earth, who loveth thee  
As truly as the sun,  
Margret, Margret.”

## X.

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

## XI.

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

## XII.

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

Margret, Margret.

## XIII.

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

Margret, Margret.

## XIV.

IT trembled on the grass,  
 With a low, shadowy laughter :  
 The sounding river which rolled for ever,  
 Stood dumb and stagnant after.  
 "Brave knight thy brother is ;  
 But better loveth he  
 Thy chalice wine than thy chanted song—  
 And better both, than thee,  
 Margret, Margret."

## XV.

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

## XVI.

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

## XVII.

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

## XVIII.

The lady did not heed  
 The withering on the bough :  
 Still calm her smile, albeit the while  
 A little pale her brow.  
 "I have a father old,  
 The lord of ancient halls :  
 An hundred friends are in his court,  
 Yet only me he calls.  
 Margret, Margret.

## XIX.

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

## XX.

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

## XXI.

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

## XXII.

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

## XXIII.

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





B.P.—I.

“Hear not the wind—view not the woods;  
Look out o’er vale and hill.”

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## XXIV.

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

## XXV.

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

## XXVI.

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

## XXVII.

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

## ISOBEL'S CHILD.

## ISOBEL'S CHILD.

"—so find we profit,  
By losing of our prayers."—SHAKESPEARE.

## I.

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

## II.

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

## III.

She only dreamed : for all the while  
'Twas Lady Isobel that kept  
The little baby ; and it slept  
Fast, warm, as if its mother's smile,  
Laden with love's dewy weight,  
And red as a rose of Harpocrate,  
Dropt upon its eyelids, pressed  
Lashes to cheek in a sealèd rest.



## IV.

And more and more smiled Isobel  
To see the baby sleep so well—

She knew not that she smiled.  
Against the lattice, dull and wild,  
Drive the heavy droning drops,  
Drop by drop, the sound being one—  
As momentarily time's segments fall  
On the ear of God who hears through all,  
Eternity's unbroken monotone.

And more and more smiled Isobel  
To see the baby sleep so well—

She knew not that she smiled.  
The wind in intermission stops  
Down in the beechen forest,  
Then cries aloud  
As one at the sorest,  
Self-stung, self-driven,  
And rises up to its very tops,  
Stiffening erect the branches bowed ;  
Dilating with a tempest-soul  
The trees that with their dark hands break  
Through their own outline, and heavy roll  
Shadows as massive as clouds in heaven,  
Across the castle lake.  
And more and more smiled Isobel  
To see the baby sleep so well—  
She knew not that she smiled ;  
She knew not that the storm was wild.  
Through the uproar drear she could not hear  
The castle clock which struck anear—  
She heard the low, light breathing of her child.

## V.

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

## ISOBEL'S CHILD.

## VI.

So motionless she sate,  
 The babe asleep upon her knees,  
 You might have dreamed their souls had gone  
 Away to things inanimate,  
 In such to live, in such to moan ;  
 And that their bodies had ta'en back,  
 In mystic change, all silences  
 That cross the sky in cloudy rack,  
 Or dwell beneath the reedy ground  
 In waters safe from their own sound.

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

## VII.

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

## VIII.

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

## IX.

A solemn thing it is to me  
 To look upon a babe that sleeps—  
 Wearing in its spirit-deeps  
 The undeveloped mystery  
 Of our Adam's taint and woe,  
 Which, when they developed be,  
 Will not let it slumber so :  
 Lying new in life beneath  
 The shadow of the coming death,  
 With that soft, low, quiet breath,  
 As if it felt the sun !  
 Knowing all things by their blooms,  
 Not their roots ; yea—sun and sky,  
 Only by the warmth that comes  
 Out of each—earth, only by  
 The pleasant hues that o'er it run ;  
 And human love, by drops of sweet  
 White nourishment still hanging round  
 The little mouth so slumber-bound.  
 All which broken sentiency  
 And conclusion incomplete,  
 Will gather and unite and climb  
 To an immortality  
 Good or evil, each sublime,  
 Through life and death to life again !  
 O little lids, now folded fast,  
 Must ye learn to drop at last  
 Our large and burning tears ?  
 O warm quick body, must thou lie,  
 When the time comes round to die,  
 Still from all the whirl of years,  
 Bare of all the joy and pain ?  
 O small frail being, wilt thou stand  
 At God's right hand—  
 Lifting up those sleeping eyes,  
 Dilated by great destinies,  
 To an endless waking ? Thrones and seraphim,  
 Through the long ranks of their solemnities,  
 Sunning thee with calm looks of Heaven's surprise—  
 But thine alone on *Him* ?  
 Or else, self-willed to tread the Godless place,  
 (God keep thy will !) feel thine own energies,

Cold, strong, objectless, like a dead man's clasp,  
 The sleepless, deathless life within thee, grasp ;  
 While myriad faces, like one changeless face,  
 With woe *not love's*, shall glass thee everywhere,  
 And overcome thee with thine own despair ?

## X.

More soft, less solemn images  
 Drifted o'er the lady's heart,  
     Silently as snow :  
 She had seen eight days depart  
 Hour by hour, on bended knees,  
 With pale-wrung hands and prayings low  
 And broken—through which came the sound  
 Of tears that fell against the ground,  
 Making sad stops :—“ Dear Lord, dear Lord ! ”  
 She still had prayed—(the heavenly word,  
 Broken by an earthly sigh :)  
 “ Thou, who didst not erst deny  
 The mother-joy to Mary mild,  
 Blessed in the Blessed Child,  
 Which hearkened in meek babyhood  
 Her cradle-hymn, albeit used  
 To all that music interfused  
 In breasts of angels high and good !  
 Oh, take not, Lord, my babe away—  
 Oh, take not to Thy songful heaven  
 The pretty baby Thou hast given,  
 Or ere that I have seen him play  
 Around his father's knees, and known  
 That *he* knew how my love has gone  
     From all the world to him.  
 Think, God among the cherubim,  
 How I shall shiver every day  
 In Thy June sunshine, knowing where  
 The grave-grass keeps it from his fair  
 Still cheeks ! and feel at every tread  
 His little body which is dead  
 And hidden in the turfy fold,  
 Doth make the whole warm earth a-cold !  
 O God, I am so young, so young—  
 I am not used to tears at nights  
 Instead of slumber—not to prayer  
 With sobbing lips and hands out-wrung :

Thou knowest all my prayings were,  
 'I bless Thee, God, for past delights—  
 Thank God!' I am not used to bear  
 Hard thoughts of death. The earth doth cover  
 No face from me of friend or lover :  
 And must the first who teaches me  
 The form of shrouds and funerals, be  
 Mine own first-born beloved? he  
 Who taught me first this mother-love?  
 Dear Lord, who spreadest out above  
 Thy loving, transpierced hands to meet  
 All lifted hearts with blessing sweet—  
 Pierce not my heart, my tender heart,  
 Thou madest tender! Thou who art  
 So happy in Thy heaven always,  
 Take not mine only bliss away!"

## XI.

She so had prayed : and God, who hears  
 Through seraph-songs the sound of tears,  
 From that beloved babe had ta'en  
 The fever and the beating pain.  
 And more and more smiled Isobel  
 To see the baby sleep so well—  
 (She knew not that she smiled, I wis)  
 Until the pleasant gradual thought  
 Which near her heart, the smile, enwrought,  
 Now soft and slow, itself, did seem  
 To float along a happy dream,  
 Beyond it, into speech like this.—

## XII.

"I prayed for thee, my little child,  
 And God has heard my prayer!  
 And when thy babyhood is gone,  
 We two together undefiled  
 By men's repinings, will kneel down  
 Upon His earth which will be fair  
 (Not covering thee, sweet!) to us twain,  
 And give Him thankful praise."

## XIII.

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

## ISOBEL'S CHILD.

## XIV.

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

## XV.

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

## XVI.

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

## XVII.

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

## XVIII.

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

## XIX.

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

## XX.

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

## XXI.

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

## XXII.

“ But, O my babe, thy lids are laid  
     Close, fast upon thy cheek !  
 And not a dream of power and sheen  
 Can make a passage up between :  
 Thy heart is of thy mother's made—  
     Thy looks are very meek !

## ISOBEL'S CHILD.

And it will be their chosen place  
 To rest on some beloved face,  
 As these on thine—and let the noise  
 Of the whole world go on, nor drown  
     The tender silence of thy joys ;  
 Or when that silence shall have grown  
 Too tender for itself, the same  
 Yearning for sound—to look above,  
 And utter their one meaning, LOVE—  
     That *He* may hear His name !”

## XXIII.

No wind—no rain—no thunder !  
 The waters had trickled not slowly,  
 The thunder was not spent,  
 Nor the wind near finishing.  
 Who would have said that the storm was diminishing ?  
 No wind—no rain—no thunder !  
 Their noises dropped asunder  
 From the earth and the firmament,  
 From the towers and the lattices,  
 Abrupt and echoless,  
 As ripe fruits on the ground, unshaken wholly—  
     As life in death ;  
 And sudden and solemn the silence fell,  
 Startling the heart of Isobel,  
     As the tempest could not !  
 Against the door went panting the breath  
 Of the lady's hound whose cry was still—  
 And *she*, constrained, how'er she would not,  
 Lifted her eyes, and saw the moon  
 Looking out of heaven alone  
     Upon the poplared hill—  
     A calm of God made visible,  
     That men might bless it at their will.

## XXIV.

The moonshine on the baby's face  
 Falleth clear and cold.  
 The mother's looks have fallen back  
 To the same place :  
 Because no moon with silver rack,



Nor broad sunrise in jasper skies  
Has power to hold  
Our loving eyes,  
Which still revert, as ever must  
Wonder and Hope, to gaze on the dust.

## XXV.

The moonshine on the baby's face  
Cold and clear remaineth !  
The mother's looks do shrink away,  
The mother's looks return to stay,  
As charmèd by what paineth.  
Is any glamour in the case ?  
Is it dream or is it sight ?  
Hath the change upon the wild  
Elements, that signs the night,  
Passed upon the child ?  
It is not dream, but sight !—

## XXVI.

The babe hath awakened from sleep,  
And unto the gaze of its mother,  
Bent over it, lifted another !  
Not the baby-looks that go  
Unaimingly to and fro ;  
But an earnest gazing deep,  
Such as soul gives soul at length,  
When by work and wail of years  
It winneth a solemn strength,  
And mourneth as it wears !  
A strong man could not brook  
With pulse unhurried by fears,  
To meet that baby's look  
O'er glazed by manhood's tears—  
The tears of a man full grown,  
With a power to wring our own,  
In the eyes all undefiled  
Of a little three-months' child !  
To see that babe-brow, wrought  
By witnessings of thought,  
To judgment's prodigy ;  
And the small soft mouth unweaned,  
By mother's kiss o'erleaned

## ISOBEL'S CHILD.

(Putting the sound of loving  
 Where no sound else was moving,  
 Except the speechless cry)  
 Quickened to mind's expression,  
 Shaped to articulation—  
 Yea, speaking words—yea, naming woe  
 In tones that with it strangely went,  
 Because so baby-innocent,  
 As the child spake out to the mother so!—

## XXVII.

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

## XXVIII.

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

\* “For I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. xviii. 10).

## XXIX.

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

## XXX.

"Is your wisdom very wise,  
 Mother, on the narrow earth ?  
 Very happy, very worth  
 That I should stay to learn ?

## ISOBEL'S CHILD.

Are these air-corrupting sighs  
 Fashioned by unlearned breath?  
 Do the students' lamps that burn  
 All night, illumine death?  
 Mother, albeit this be so,  
 Loose thy prayer, and let me go  
 Where that bright chief angel stands  
 Apart from all his brother bands,  
 Too glad for smiling; having bent  
 In angelic wilderment  
 O'er the depths of God, and brought  
 Reeling, thence, one only thought  
 To fill his whole eternity.  
 He the teacher is for me!—  
 He can teach what I would know—  
 Mother, mother, let me go!—

## XXXI.

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

## XXXII.

Love! earth's love! and *can* we love  
 Fixedly where all things move?

Can the sinning love each other?  
 Mother, mother,  
 I tremble in thy close embrace—  
 I feel thy tears adown my face—  
 Thy prayers do keep me out of bliss—  
 O dreary earthly love!  
 Loose thy prayer, and let me go  
 To the place which loving is,  
 Yet not sad! and when is given  
 Escape to *thee* from this below,  
 Thou shalt behold me that I wait  
 For thee beside the happy gate;  
 And silence shall be up in Heaven,  
 To hear our greeting kiss."

## XXIII.

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

## XXXIV.

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

## XXXV.

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

## AN ISLAND.

XXXVI.

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

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

XXXVII.

Oh you,  
 Earth's tender and impassioned few,  
 Take courage to entrust your love  
 To Him so Named, who guards above  
 Its ends and shall fulfil ;  
 Breaking the narrow prayers that may  
 Befit your narrow hearts, away  
 In His broad, loving will.

## AN ISLAND.

"All goeth but Goddis will."—OLD POET.

I.

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

II.

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

## III.

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

## IV.

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

## V.

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

## VI.

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

## VII.

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

## VIII.

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

## IX.

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

## X.

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

## XI.

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

## XII.

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



## XIII.

Free gamesome horses, antelopes,  
And harmless, leaping leopards,  
And buffaloes upon the slopes,  
And sheep unrul'd by shepherds ;  
Hares, lizards, hedgehogs, badgers, mice,  
Snakes, squirrels, frogs, and butterflies.

## XIV.

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

## XV.

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

## XVI.

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

## XVII.

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

## XVIII.

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

## XIX.

I said that two or three might choose  
 Their dwelling near mine own :  
 Those who would change man's voice and use  
 For Nature's way and tone—  
 Man's veering heart and careless eyes,  
 For Nature's steadfast sympathies.

## XX.

Ourselves to meet her faithfulness,  
 Shall play a faithful part :  
 Her beautiful shall ne'er address  
 The monstrous at our heart ;  
 Her musical shall ever touch  
 Something within us also such.

## XXI.

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

## XXII.

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

## XXIII.

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

## XXIV.

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

## XXV.

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

## XXVI.

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

## XXVII.

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

## THE DESERTED GARDEN.

## XXVIII.

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

## XXIX.

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

## XXX.

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

## THE DESERTED GARDEN.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## THE DESERTED GARDEN.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## THE SLEEP.

"He giveth his beloved sleep."—PSALM cxxvii. 2.

## I.

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

## THE SLEEP.

## II.

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

## III.

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

## IV.

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

## V.

O earth, so full of dreary noises!  
 O men, with wailing in your voices!  
 O delvèd gold, the wailers heap!  
 O strife, O curse, that o'er it fall!  
 God strikes a silence through you all,  
 And "giveth *His* beloved, sleep."

## VI.

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

## VII.

Ay, men may wonder while they scan  
 A living, thinking, feeling man,  
 Confirmed, in such a rest to keep;



But angels say—and through the word  
I think their happy smile is *heard*—  
“He giveth His beloved, sleep.”

## VIII.

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

## IX.

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

## THE SEA-MEW.

AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED TO M. E. H.

## I.

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

## II.

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

## III.

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

## THE SEA-MEW.

## IV.

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

## V.

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

## VI.

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

## VII.

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

## VIII.

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

## IX.

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

## VICTORIA'S TEARS.

"Hark! the reiterated clangour sounds!  
 Now murmurs, like the sea or like the storm,  
 Or like the flames on forests, move and mount  
 From rank to rank, and loud and louder roll,  
 Till all the people is one vast applause."

LANDOR'S *Gebir*.

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

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

She saw no purples shine,  
 For tears had dimmed her eyes;  
 She only knew her childhood's flowers  
 Were happier pageantries!  
 And while her heralds played the part,  
 For million shouts to drown—  
 "God save the Queen" from hill to mart—  
 She heard through all her beating heart,  
 And turned and wept—  
 She wept, to wear a crown!

## THE PET-NAME.

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

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

## THE PET-NAME.

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

## I.

I HAVE a name, a little name,  
 Uncadenced for the ear,  
 Unhonoured by ancestral claim,  
 Unsanctified by prayer and psalm,  
 The solemn font anear.

## II.

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

## III.

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

## IV.

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

## V.

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

## VI.

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

## VII.

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

## VIII.

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

## THE PET-NAME.

## IX.

Nay, do not smile ! I hear in it  
 What none of you can hear !  
 The talk upon the willow seat,  
 The bird and wind that did repeat  
 Around, our human cheer.

## X.

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

## XI.

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

## XII.

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

## XIII.

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

## XIV.

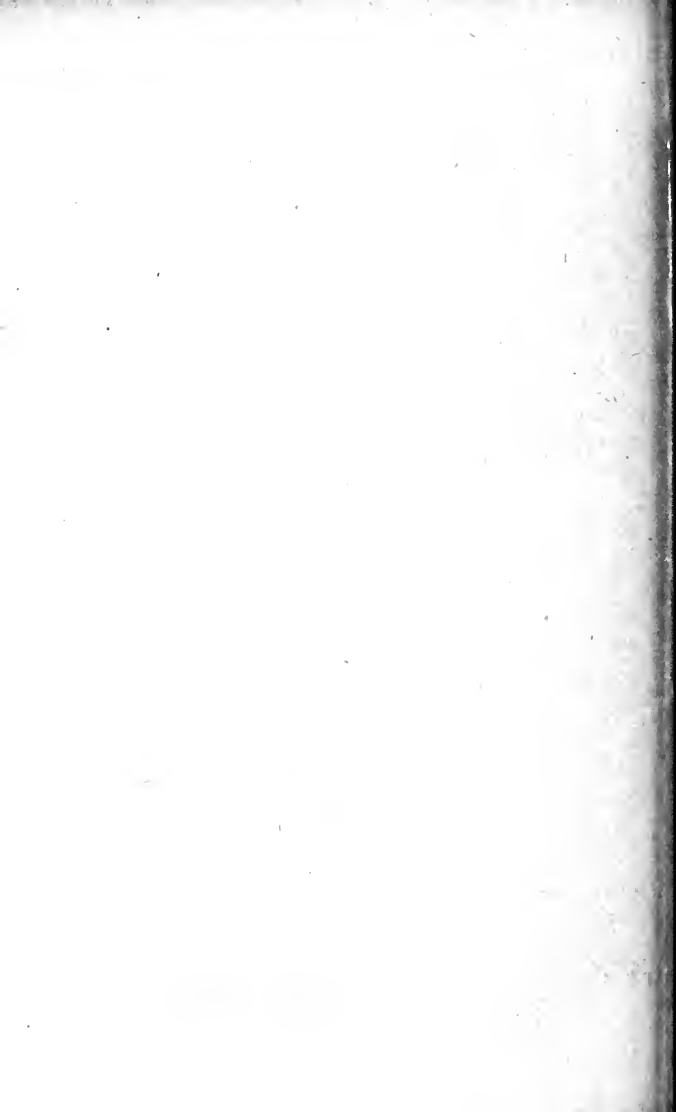
Earth saddens, never shall remove,  
 Affections purely given ;  
 And e'en that mortal grief shall prove  
 The immortality of love,  
 And heighten it with Heaven.



B.P.—I.

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

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## A DRAMA OF EXILE.

SCENE.—*The outer side of the gate of Eden shut fast with cloud, from the depth of which revolves a sword of fire self-moved. ADAM and EVE are seen in the distance flying along the glare.*

LUCIFER, *alone.*

REJOICE in the clefts of Gehenna,  
 My exiled, my host !  
 Earth has exiles as hopeless as when a  
 Heaven's empire was lost.  
 Through the seams of her shaken foundations,  
 Smoke up in great joy !  
 With the smoke of your fierce exultations  
 Deform and destroy !  
 Smoke up with your lurid revenges,  
 And darken the face  
 Of the white heavens and taunt them with changes  
 From glory and grace.  
 We, in falling, while destiny strangles,  
 Pull down with us all.  
 Let them look to the rest of their angels !  
 Who's safe from a fall ?  
 HE saves not. Where's Adam ? Can pardon  
 Requicken that sod ?  
 Unkinged is the King of the Garden,  
 The image of God.  
 Other exiles are cast out of Eden,—  
 More curse has been hurled.  
 Come up, O my locusts, and feed in  
 The green of the world.  
 Come up ! we have conquered by evil.  
 Good reigns not alone.  
 I prevail now, and, angel or devil,  
 Inherit a throne.

[*In sudden apparition a watch of innumerable angels, rank above rank, slopes up from around the gate to the zenith. The angel GABRIEL descends.*]

*Luc.* Hail Gabriel, the keeper of the gate !  
 Now that the fruit is plucked, prince Gabriel,

I hold that Eden is impregnable  
Under thy keeping.

*Gab.* Angel of the sin,  
Such as thou standest,—pale in the drear light  
Which rounds the rebel's work with Maker's wrath,—  
Thou shalt be an Idea to all souls,  
A monumental melancholy gloom  
Seen down all ages, whence to mark despair  
And measure out the distances from good.  
Go from us straightway.

*Luc.* Wherefore?

*Gab.* Lucifer,  
Thy last step in this place trod sorrow up.  
Recoil before that sorrow, if not this sword.

*Luc.* Angels are in the world—wherefore not I?  
Exiles are in the world—wherefore not I?  
The cursed are in the world—wherefore not I?

*Gab.* Depart.

*Luc.* And where's the logic of "depart"?  
Our lady Eve had half been satisfied  
To obey her Maker, if I had not learnt  
To fix my postulate better. Dost thou dream  
Of guarding some monopoly in heaven  
Instead of earth? Why, I can dream with thee  
To the length of thy wings.

*Gab.* I do not dream.  
This is not Heaven, even in a dream, nor earth,  
As earth was once, first breathed among the stars,  
Articulate glory from the mouth divine,  
To which the myriad spheres thrilled audibly  
Touched like a lute-string, and the sons of God  
Said AMEN, singing it. I know that this  
Is earth not new created but new cursed—  
This, Eden's gate not opened but built up  
With a final cloud of sunset. Do I dream?  
Alas, not so! this is the Eden lost  
By Lucifer the serpent! this the sword  
(This sword alive with justice and with fire!)  
That smote upon the forehead, Lucifer  
The angel. Wherefore, angel, go—depart—  
Enough is sinned and suffered.

*Luc.* By no means.  
Here's a brave earth to sin and suffer on.  
It holds fast still—it cracks not under curse;

It holds like mine immortal. Presently  
 We'll sow it thick enough with graves as green  
 Or greener certes, than its knowledge-tree—  
 We'll have the cypress for the tree of life,  
 More eminent for shadow :—for the rest  
 We'll build it dark with towns and pyramids,  
 And temples, if it please you :—we'll have feasts  
 And funerals also, merrymakes and wars,  
 Till blood and wine shall mix and run along  
 Right o'er the edges. And, good Gabriel  
 (Ye like that word in Heaven !) I too have strength—  
 Strength to behold Him and not worship Him ;  
 Strength to fall from Him and not cry on Him ;  
 Strength to be in the universe and yet  
 Neither God nor his servant. The red sign  
 Burnt on my forehead, which you taunt me with,  
 Is God's sign that it bows not unto God ;  
 The potter's mark upon his work, to show  
 It rings well to the striker. I and the earth  
 Can bear more curse.

*Gab.* O miserable earth,  
 O ruined angel !

*Luc.* Well, and if it be !  
 I CHOSE this ruin ; I elected it  
 Of my will, not of service. What I do,  
 I do volitent, not obedient,  
 And overtop thy crown with my despair.  
 My sorrow crowns me. Get thee back to Heaven,  
 And leave me to the earth, which is mine own  
 In virtue of her ruin, as I hers  
 In virtue of my revolt ! turn thou from both  
 That bright, impassive, passive angelhood,  
 And spare to read us backward any more  
 Of the spent hallelujahs.

*Gab.* Spirit of scorn,  
 I might say, of unreason ! I might say,  
 That who despairs, acts ; that who acts, connives  
 With God's relations set in time and space ;  
 That who elects, assumes a something good  
 Which God made possible ; that who lives, obeys  
 The law of a Life-maker . . .

*Luc.* Let it pass.  
 No more, thou Gabriel ! What if I stand up  
 And strike my brow against the crystalline

Roofing the creatures,—shall I say, for that,  
My stature is too high for me to stand,—  
Henceforward I must sit? Sit *thou*.

*Gab.* I kneel.

*Luc.* A heavenly answer. Get thee to thy  
Heaven,  
And leave my earth to me.

*Gab.* Through Heaven and earth  
God's will moves freely, and I follow it,  
As colour follows light. He overflows  
The firmamental walls with deity,  
Therefore with love; His lightnings go abroad,  
His pity may do so, His angels must,  
Whene'er He gives them charges.

*Luc.* Verily,  
I and my demons, who are spirits of scorn,  
Might hold this charge of standing with a sword  
'Twi'x man and his inheritance, as well  
As the benignest angel of you all.

*Gab.* Thou speakest in the shadow of thy change.  
If thou hadst gazed upon the face of God  
This morning for a moment, thou hadst known  
That only pity fitly can chastise.  
Hate but avenges.

*Luc.* As it is, I know  
Something of pity. When I reeled in Heaven,  
And my sword grew too heavy for my grasp,  
Stabbing through matter, which it could not pierce  
So much as the first shell of,—toward the throne;  
When I fell back, down,—staring up as I fell,—  
The lightnings holding open my scathed lids,  
And that thought of the infinite of God,  
Hurled after to precipitate descent;  
When countless angel faces still and stern  
Pressed out upon me from the level heavens  
Adown the abysmal spaces, and I fell  
Trampled down by your stillness, and struck blind  
By the sight within your eyes,—'twas then I knew  
How ye could pity, my kind angelhood!

*Gab.* Alas, discrowned one, by the truth in me  
Which God keeps in me, I would give away  
All—save that truth and His love keeping it,—  
To lead thee home again into the light  
And hear thy voice chant with the morning stars.

When their rays tremble round them with much  
song

Sung in more gladness !

*Luc.* Sing, my Morning Star !

Last beautiful, last heavenly, that I loved !  
If I could drench thy golden locks with tears,  
What were it to this angel ?

*Gab.* What love is.

And now I have named God.

*Luc.* Yet Gabriel,

By the lie in me which I keep myself,  
Thou'rt a false swearer. Were it otherwise,  
What dost thou here, vouchsafing tender thoughts  
To that earth-angel or earth-demon—which,  
Thou and I have not solved the problem yet  
Enough to argue,—that fallen Adam there,—  
That red-clay and a breath ! who must, forsooth,  
Live in a new apocalypse of sense,  
With beauty and music waving in his trees  
And running in his rivers, to make glad  
His soul made perfect ?—is it not for hope,  
A hope within thee deeper than thy truth,  
Of finally conducting him and his  
To fill the vacant thrones of me and mine,  
Which affront Heaven with their vacuity ?

*Gab.* Angel, there are no vacant thrones in Heaven  
To suit thy empty words. Glory and life  
Fulfil their own depletions ; and if God  
Sighed you far from Him, His next breath drew in  
A compensative splendour up the vast,  
Flushing the starry arteries.

*Luc.* With a change !

So, let the vacant thrones and gardens too  
Fill as may please you !—and be pitiful,  
As ye translate that word, to the dethroned  
And exiled, man or angel. The fact stands,  
That I, the rebel, the cast out and down,  
Am here and will not go ; while there, along  
The light to which ye flash the desert out,  
Flies your adopted Adam, your red-clay  
In two kinds, both being flawed. Why, what is this ?  
Whose work is this ? Whose hand was in the work ?  
Against whose hand ? In this last strife, methinks,  
I am not a fallen angel !

*Gab.* Dost thou know  
Aught of those exiles?

*Luc.* Ay: I know they have fled  
Silent all day along the wilderness:  
I know they wear, for burden on their backs,  
The thought of a shut gate of Paradise,  
And faces of the marshalled cherubim  
Shining against, not for them; and I know  
They dare not look in one another's face,—  
As if each were a cherub!

*Gab.* Dost thou know  
Aught of their future?

*Luc.* Only as much as this:  
That evil will increase and multiply  
Without a benediction.

*Gab.* Nothing more?

*Luc.* Why so the angels taunt! What should be more?

*Gab.* God is more.

*Luc.* Proving what?

*Gab.* That He is God

And capable of saving. Lucifer,  
I charge thee by the solitude He kept  
Ere He created,—leave the earth to God!

*Luc.* My foot is on the earth, firm as my sin.

*Gab.* I charge thee by the memory of Heaven  
Ere any sin was done,—leave earth to God!

*Luc.* My sin is on the earth, to reign thereon.

*Gab.* I charge thee by the choral song we sang,  
When up against the white shore of our feet,  
The depths of the creation swelled and brake,—  
And the new worlds, the beaded foam and flower  
Of all that coil, roared outward into space  
On thunder-edges,—leave the earth to God!

*Luc.* My woe is on the earth, to curse thereby.

*Gab.* I charge thee by that mournful Morning Star  
Which trembles . . . .

*Luc.* Enough spoken. As the pine  
In norland forest, drops its weight of snows  
By a night's growth, so, growing toward my ends  
I drop thy counsels. Farewell, Gabriel!  
Watch out thy service; I achieve my will.  
And peradventure in the after years,  
When thoughtful men shall bend their spacious brows  
Upon the storm and strife seen everywhere

To ruffle their smooth manhood and break up  
 With lurid lights of intermittent hope  
 Their human fear and wrong;—they may discern  
 The heart of a lost angel in the earth.

## CHORUS OF EDEN SPIRITS.

*(Chanting from Paradise, while ADAM and EVE fly across  
 the Sword-glare.)*

Hearken, oh hearken ! let your souls behind you  
 Turn, gently moved !  
 Our voices feel along the Dread to find you,  
 O lost, beloved !  
 Through the thick-shielded and strong-marshalled  
 angels,  
 They press and pierce :  
 Our requiems follow fast on our evangels,—  
 Voice throbs in verse.  
 We are but orphaned spirits left in Eden  
 A time ago.  
 God gave us golden cups, and we were bidden  
 To feed you so.  
 But now our right hand hath no cup remaining,  
 No work to do,  
 The mystic hydromel is spilt, and staining  
 The whole earth through.  
 Most ineradicable stains, for showing  
 (Not interfused !)  
 That brighter colours were the world's foregoing,  
 Than shall be used.  
 Hearken, oh hearken ! ye shall hearken surely  
 For years and years,  
 The noise beside you, dripping coldly, purely,  
 Of spirits' tears.  
 The yearning to a beautiful denied you,  
 Shall strain your powers.  
 Ideal sweetnesses shall over-glide you,  
 Resumed from ours.  
 In all your music, our pathetic minor  
 Your ears shall cross ;  
 And all good gifts shall mind you of diviner,  
 With sense of loss.

We shall be near you in your poet-languors  
 And wild extremes,  
 What time ye vex the desert with vain angers,  
 Or mock with dreams.  
 And when upon you, weary after roaming,  
 Death's seal is put,  
 By the foregone ye shall discern the coming,  
 Through eyelids shut.

*Spirits of the trees.*

Hark! the Eden trees are stirring,  
 Soft and solemn in your hearing!  
 Oak and linden, palm and fir,  
 Tamarisk and juniper,  
 Each still throbbing in vibration  
 Since that crowning of creation  
 When the God-breath spake abroad,  
*Let us make man like to God!*  
 And the pine stood quivering  
 As the awful word went by,  
 Like a vibrant music-string  
 Stretched from mountain-peak to sky;  
 And the platan did expand  
 Slow and gradual, branch and head;  
 And the cedar's strong black shade  
 Fluttered brokenly and grand:  
 Grove and wood were swept aslant  
 In emotion jubilant.

*Voice of the same, but softer.*

Which divine impulsion cleaves  
 In dim movements to the leaves  
 Dropt and lifted, dropt and lifted  
 In the sunlight greenly sifted,—  
 In the sunlight and the moonlight  
 Greenly sifted through the trees.  
 Ever wave the Eden trees  
 In the nightlight and the noonlight,  
 With a ruffling of green branches  
 Shaded off to resonances,  
 Never stirred by rain or breeze.

Fare ye well, farewell!

The sylvan sounds, no longer audible,  
 Expire at Eden's door.  
 Each footstep of your treading



Treads out some murmur which ye heard before.  
 Farewell! the trees of Eden  
 Ye shall hear nevermore.

*River-spirits.*

Hark! the flow of the four rivers—  
 Hark the flow!  
 How the silence round you shivers,  
 While our voices through it go,  
 Cold and clear.

*A softer voice.*

Think a little, while ye hear,  
 Of the banks  
 Where the willows and the deer  
 Crowd in intermingled ranks,  
 As if all would drink at once  
 Where the living water runs!—  
 Of the fishes' golden edges  
 Flashing in and out the sedges;  
 Of the swans on silver thrones,  
 Floating down the winding streams  
 With impassive eyes turned shoreward  
 And a chant of undertones,—  
 And the lotos leaning forward  
 To help them into dreams.  
 Fare ye well, farewell!  
 The river-sounds, no longer audible,  
 Expire at Eden's door.  
 Each footstep of your treading  
 Treads out some murmur which ye heard before.  
 Farewell! the streams of Eden  
 Ye shall hear nevermore.

*Bird-spirit.*

I am the nearest nightingale  
 That singeth in Eden after you;  
 And I am singing loud and true,  
 And sweet,—I do not fail.  
 I sit upon a cypress bough,  
 Close to the gate, and I fling my song  
 Over the gate and through the mail  
 Of the warden angels marshalled strong,—  
 Over the gate and after you!  
 And the warden angels let it pass,  
 Because the poor brown bird, alas,  
 Sings in the garden, sweet and true.

## A DRAMA OF EXILE.

And I built my song of high pure notes,  
 Note over note, height over height,  
 Till I strike the arch of the Infinite,  
 And I bridge abysmal agonies  
 With strong, clear calms of harmonies,—  
 And something abides, and something floats,  
 In the song which I sing after you.  
 Fare ye well, farewell !  
 The creature-sounds, no longer audible,  
 Expire at Eden's door.  
 Each footstep of your treading  
 Treads out some cadence which ye heard before.  
 Farewell ! the birds of Eden,  
 Ye shall hear nevermore.

*Flower-spirits.*

We linger, we linger,  
 The last of the throng,  
 Like the tones of a singer  
 Who loves his own song.  
 We are spirit-aromas  
 Of blossom and bloom.  
 We call your thoughts home as  
 Ye breathe our perfume,—  
 To the amaranth's splendour  
 Afire on the slopes ;  
 To the lily-bells tender,  
 And gray heliotropes ;  
 To the poppy-plains keeping  
 Such dream-breath and blee  
 That the angels there stepping  
 Grew whiter to see :  
 To the nook, set with moly,  
 Ye jested one day in,  
 Till your smile waxed too holy  
 And left your lips praying :  
 To the rose in the bower-place,  
 That dripped o'er you sleeping :  
 To the asphodel flower-place,  
 Ye walked ankle-deep in !  
 We pluck at your raiment,  
 We stroke down your hair,  
 We faint in our lament  
 And pine into air.  
 Fare ye well, farewell !

The Eden scents, no longer sensible,  
 Expire at Eden's door!  
 Each footstep of your treading  
 Treads out some fragrance which ye knew before.  
 Farewell! the flowers of Eden,  
 Ye shall smell nevermore.

[*There is silence. ADAM and EVE fly on, and never look back. Only a colossal shadow, as of the dark Angel passing quickly, is cast upon the Sword-glare.*]

SCENE.—*The extremity of the Sword-glare.*

*Adam.* Pausing a moment on this outer edge  
 Where the supernal sword-glare cuts in light  
 The dark exterior desert,—hast thou strength,  
 Beloved, to look behind us to the gate?

*Eve.* Have I not strength to look up to thy face?

*Adam.* We need be strong: yon spectacle of  
 cloud

Which seals the gate up to the final doom.  
 Is God's seal manifest. There seem to lie  
 A hundred thunders in it, dark and dead;  
 The unmolten lightnings vein it motionless;  
 And, outward from its depth, the self-moved sword  
 Swings slow its awful gnomon of red fire  
 From side to side, in pendulous horror slow,  
 Across the stagnant, ghastly glare thrown flat  
 On the intermediate ground from that to this.  
 The angelic hosts, the archangelic pomps,  
 Thrones, dominations, pryncedoms, rank on rank,  
 Rising sublimely to the feet of God,  
 On either side and overhead the gate,  
 Show like a glittering and sustained smoke  
 Drawn to an apex. That their faces shine  
 Betwixt the solemn clasping of their wings  
 Clasped high to a silver point above their heads,—  
 We only guess from hence, and not discern.

*Eve.* Though we were near enough to see them  
 shine,

The shadow on thy face were awfuller,  
 To me, at least,—to me—than all their light.

*Adam.* What is this, Eve? thou droppest heavily  
 In a heap earthward, and thy body heaves  
 Under the golden floodings of thine hair!

*Eve.* O Adam, Adam ! by that name of Eve—  
Thine Eve, thy life—which suits me little  
now,

Seeing that I now confess myself thy death  
And thine undoer, as the snake was mine,—  
I do adjure thee, put me straight away,  
Together with my name. Sweet, punish me !  
O Love, be just ! and, ere we pass beyond  
The light cast outward by the fiery sword,  
Into the dark which earth must be to us,  
Bruise my head with thy foot,—as the curse  
said

My seed shall the first tempter's ! strike with  
curse,

As God struck in the garden ! and as HE,  
Being satisfied with justice and with wrath,  
Did roll His thunder gentler at the close,—  
Thou, peradventure, may'st at last recoil  
To some soft need of mercy. Strike, my lord !  
I, also, after tempting, writhe on the ground,  
And I would feed on ashes from thine hand,  
As suits me, O my tempted !

*Adam.* My beloved,  
Mine Eve and life—I have no other name  
For thee or for the sun than what ye are,  
My utter life and light ! If we have fallen,  
It is that we have sinned,—we : God is just ;  
And, since His curse doth comprehend us both,  
It must be that His balance holds the weights  
Of first and last sin on a level. What !  
Shall I who had not virtue to stand straight  
Among the hills of Eden, here assume  
To mend the justice of the perfect God,  
By piling up a curse upon His curse,  
Against thee—thee—

*Eve.* For so, perchance, thy God,  
Might take thee into grace for scorning me ;  
Thy wrath against the sinner giving proof  
Of inward abrogation of the sin.

And so, the blessed angels might come down  
And walk with thee as erst,—I think they  
would,—

Because I was not near to make them sad  
Or soil the rustling of their innocence.

*Adam.* They know me. I am deepest in the guilt,  
If last in the transgression.

*Eve.* THOU!

*Adam.* If God,  
Who gave the right and joyaunce of the world  
Both unto thee and me,—gave thee to me,  
The best gift last, the last sin was the worst,  
Which sinned against more complement of gifts  
And grace of giving. God! I render back  
Strong benediction and perpetual praise  
From mortal feeble lips (as incense-smoke,  
Out of a little censer, may fill heaven),  
That Thou, in striking my benumbèd hands  
And forcing them to drop all other boons  
Of beauty and dominion and delight,—  
Hast left this well-belovèd Eve, this life  
Within life, this best gift between their palms,  
In gracious compensation!

*Eve.* Is it thy voice?  
Or some saluting angel's—calling home  
My feet into the garden?

*Adam.* O my God!  
I, standing here between the glory and dark,—  
The glory of Thy wrath projected forth  
From Eden's wall, the dark of our distress  
Which settles a step off in that drear world—  
Lift up to Thee the hands from whence hath fallen  
Only creation's sceptre,—thanking Thee  
That rather Thou hast cast me out with *her*  
Than left me lorn of her in Paradise,  
With angel looks and angel songs around  
To show the absence of her eyes and voice,  
And make society full desertness  
Without her use in comfort!

*Eve.* Where is loss?  
Am I in Eden? can another speak  
Mine own love's tongue?

*Adam.* Because with *her*, I stand  
Upright, as far as can be in this fall,  
And look away from heaven which doth accuse,  
And look away from earth which doth convict,  
Into her face, and crown my discrowned brow  
Out of her love, and put the thought of her  
Around me, for an Eden full of birds,

And lift her body up—thus—to my heart,  
 And with my lips upon her lips,—thus, thus,—  
 Do quicken and sublimate my mortal breath  
 Which cannot climb against the grave's steep sides  
 But overtops this grief!

*Eve.* I am renewed.  
 My eyes grow with the light which is in thine;  
 The silence of my heart is full of sound.  
 Hold me up—so! Because I comprehend  
 This human love, I shall not be afraid  
 Of any human death; and yet because  
 I know this strength of love, I seem to know  
 Death's strength by that same sign. Kiss on my lips,  
 To shut the door close on my rising soul,—  
 Lest it pass outwards in astonishment  
 And leave thee lonely.

*Adam.* Yet thou liest, Eve,  
 Bent heavily on thyself across mine arm,  
 Thy face flat to the sky.

*Eve.* Ay! and the tears  
 Running, as it might seem, my life from me,  
 They run so fast and warm. Let me lie so,  
 And weep so, as if in a dream or prayer,  
 Unfastening, clasp by clasp, the hard, tight thought  
 Which clipped my heart and showed me evermore  
 Loathed of thy justice as I loathe the snake,  
 And as the pure ones loathe our sin. To-day,  
 All day, beloved, as we fled across  
 This desolating radiance cast by swords  
 Not suns,—my lips prayed soundless to myself,  
 Striking against each other—"O Lord God!"  
 ('Twas so I prayed) "I ask Thee by my sin,  
 'And by Thy curse, and by Thy blameless heavens,  
 'Make dreadful haste to hide me from Thy face  
 'And from the face of my beloved here  
 'For whom I am no helpmeet, quick away  
 'Into the new dark mystery of death!  
 'I will lie still there, I will make no plaint,  
 'I will not sigh, nor sob, nor speak a word,  
 'Nor struggle to come back beneath the sun  
 'Where peradventure I might sin anew  
 'Against Thy mercy and his pleasure. Death,  
 'Oh death, whate'er it be, is good enough  
 'For such as I am.—While for Adam here

'No voice shall say again, in heaven or earth,  
'*It is not good for him to be alone.*"

*Adam.* And was it good for such a prayer to pass,  
My unkind Eve, betwixt our mutual lives?  
If I am exiled, must I be bereaved?

*Eve.* 'Twas an ill prayer: it shall be prayed no more;  
And God did use it like a foolishness,  
Giving no answer. Now my heart has grown  
Too high and strong for such a foolish prayer;  
Love makes it strong: and since I was the first  
In the transgression, with a steady foot  
I will be first to tread from this sword-glare  
Into the outer darkness of the waste,—  
And thus I do it.

*Adam.* Thus I follow thee,  
As erewhile in the sin.—What sounds! what sounds!  
I feel a music which comes straight from Heaven,  
As tender as a watering dew.

*Eve.* I think  
That angels—not those guarding Paradise,—  
But the love-angels, who came erst to us,  
And when we said "God," fainted unawares  
Back from our mortal presence unto God,  
(As if He drew them inward in a breath)  
His name being heard of them,—I think that they  
With sliding voices lean from heavenly towers,  
Invisible but gracious. Hark—how soft!

#### CHORUS OF INVISIBLE ANGELS.

*Faint and tender.*

Mortal man and woman,  
Go upon your travel!  
Heaven assist the human  
Smoothly to unravel  
All that web of pain  
Wherein ye are holden.  
Do ye know our voices  
Chanting down the Golden?  
Do ye guess our choice is,  
Being un beholden,  
To be hearkened by you yet again?

This pure door of opal  
 God hath shut between us,—  
 Us, his shining people,  
 You, who once have seen us,  
 And are blinded new !  
 Yet, across the doorway,  
 Past the silence reaching,  
 Farewells evermore may,  
 Blessing in the teaching,  
 Glide from us to you.

*First semichorus.*

Think how erst your Eden,  
 Day on day succeeding,  
 With our presence glowed.  
 We came as if the Heavens were bowed  
 To a milder music rare.  
 Ye saw us in our solemn treading,  
 Treading down the steps of cloud,  
 While our wings, outspreading  
 Double calms of whiteness,  
 Dropped superfluous brightness  
 Down from stair to stair.

*Second semichorus.*

Or oft, abrupt though tender,  
 While ye gazed on space,  
 We flashed our angel-splendour  
 In either human face.  
 With mystic lilies in our hands,  
 From the atmospheric bands  
 Breaking with a sudden grace,  
 We took you unaware !  
 While our feet struck glories  
 Outward, smooth and fair,  
 Which we stood on floorwise,  
 Platformed in mid air.

*First semichorus.*

Or oft, when Heaven-descended,  
 Stood we in your wondering sight  
 In a mute apocalypse !  
 With dumb vibrations on our lips  
 From hosannas ended,  
 And grand half-vanishings  
 Of the empyreal things  
 Within our eyes belated,



Till the heavenly Infinite  
 Falling off from the Created,  
 Left our inward contemplation  
 Opened into ministration.

*Chorus.*

Then upon our axle turning  
 Of great joy to sympathy,  
 We sang out the morning  
 Broadening up the sky.  
 Or we drew  
 Our music through  
 The noontide's hush and heat and shine,  
 Informed with our intense Divine!  
 Interrupted vital notes  
 Palpitating hither, thither,  
 Burning out into the æther,  
 Sensible like fiery notes.

Or, whenever twilight drifted  
 Through the cedar masses,  
 The globed sun we lifted,  
 Trailing purple, trailing gold  
 Out between the passes  
 Of the mountains manifold,  
 To anthems slowly sung!  
 While he, aweary, half in swoon  
 For joy to hear our climbing tune  
 Transpierce the stars' concentric rings,—  
 The burden of his glory flung  
 In broken lights upon our wings.

[*The chant dies away confusedly, and LUCIFER appears.*]

*Luc.* Now may all fruits be pleasant to thy lips,  
 Beautiful Eve! The times have somewhat changed  
 Since thou and I had talk beneath a tree,  
 Albeit ye are not gods yet.

*Eve.* Adam! hold  
 My right hand strongly. It is Lucifer—  
 And we have love to lose.

*Adam.* I' the name of God,  
 Go apart from us, O thou Lucifer!  
 And leave us to the desert thou hast made  
 Out of thy treason. Bring no serpent-slime  
 Athwart this path kept holy to our tears,  
 Or we may curse thee with their bitterness.

*Luc.* Curse freely! curses thicken. Why, this  
Eve

Who thought me once part worthy of her ear  
And somewhat wiser than the other beasts,—  
Drawing together her large globes of eyes,  
The light of which is throbbing in and out  
Their steadfast continuity of gaze,—  
Knots her fair eyebrows in so hard a knot,  
And down from her white heights of womanhood  
Looks on me so amazed,—I scarce should fear  
To wager such an apple as she plucked,  
Against one riper from the tree of life,  
That she could curse too—as a woman may—  
Smooth in the vowels.

*Eve.* So—speak wickedly!  
I like it best so. Let thy words be wounds,—  
For, so, I shall not fear thy power to hurt.  
Trench on the forms of good by open ill—  
For, so, I shall wax strong and grand with  
scorn,  
Scorning myself for ever trusting thee  
As far as thinking, ere a snake ate dust,  
He could speak wisdom.

*Luc.* Our new gods, it seems,  
Deal more in thunders than in courtesies.  
And, sooth, mine own Olympus, which anon  
I shall build up to loud-voiced imagery  
From all the wandering visions of the world,  
May show worse railing than our lady Eve  
Pours o'er the rounding of her argente arm.  
But why should this be? Adam pardoned Eve.

*Adam.* Adam loved Eve. Jehovah pardon both!

*Eve.* Adam forgave Eve—because loving Eve.

*Luc.* So, well. Yet Adam was undone of Eve,  
As both were by the snake. Therefore forgive,  
In like wise, fellow-temptress, the poor snake—  
Who stung there, not so poorly!

[*Aside.*

*Eve.* Hold thy wrath,  
Beloved Adam! let me answer him;  
For this time he speaks truth, which we should  
hear,

And asks for mercy, which I most should grant,  
In like wise, as he tells us—in like wise!  
And therefore I thee pardon, Lucifer,

As freely as the streams of Eden flowed  
 When we were happy by them. So, depart ;  
 Leave us to walk the remnant of our time  
 Out mildly in the desert. Do not seek  
 To harm us any more or scoff at us  
 Or ere the dust be laid upon our face  
 To find there the communion of the dust  
 And issue of the dust.—Go !

*Adam.* At once, go !

*Luc.* Forgive ! and go ! Ye images of clay,  
 Shrunk somewhat in the mould,—what jest is this ?  
 What words are these to use ? By what a thought  
 Conceive ye of me ? Yesterday—a snake !  
 To-day—what ?

*Adam.* A strong spirit.

*Eve.* A sad spirit.

*Adam.* Perhaps a fallen angel.—Who shall say !

*Luc.* Who told thee, Adam ?

*Adam.* Thou ! The prodigy  
 Of thy vast brows and melancholy eyes  
 Which comprehend the heights of some great fall.  
 I think that thou hast one day worn a crown  
 Under the eyes of God.

*Luc.* And why of God ?

*Adam.* It were no crown else. Verily, I think  
 Thou'rt fallen far. I had not yesterday  
 Said it so surely, but I know to-day  
 Grief by grief, sin by sin !

*Luc.* A crown, by a crown.

*Adam.* Ay, mock me ! now I know more than I  
 knew :

Now I know that thou art fallen below hope  
 Of final re-ascent.

*Luc.* Because ?

*Adam.* Because

A spirit who expected to see God  
 Though at the last point of a million years,  
 Could dare no mockery of a ruined man  
 Such as this Adam.

*Luc.* Who is high and bold—  
 Be it said passing !—of a good red clay  
 Discovered on some top of Lebanon,  
 Or haply of Aornus, beyond sweep  
 Of the black eagle's wing ! A furlong lower

Had made a meeker king for Eden. Soh !  
 Is it not possible, by sin and grief  
 (To give the things your names) that spirits should  
     rise  
 Instead of falling ?

*Adam.* Most impossible.  
 The Highest being the Holy and the Glad,  
 Whoever rises must approach delight  
 And sanctity in the act.

*Luc.* Ha, my clay-king !  
 Thou wilt not rule by wisdom very long  
 The after generations. Earth, methinks,  
 Will disinherit thy philosophy  
 For a new doctrine suited to thine heirs,  
 And class these present dogmas with the rest  
 Of the old-world traditions, Eden fruits  
 And Saurian fossils.

*Eve.* Speak no more with him,  
 Beloved ! it is not good to speak with him.  
 Go from us, Lucifer, and speak no more !  
 We have no pardon which thou dost not scorn,  
 Nor any bliss, thou seest, for coveting,  
 Nor innocence for staining. Being bereft,  
 We would be alone.—Go !

*Luc.* Ah ! ye talk the same,  
 All of you—spirits and clay—go, and depart !  
 In Heaven they say so ; and at Eden's gate,—  
 And here, reiterant, in the wilderness.  
 None saith, Stay with me, for thy face is fair !  
 None saith, Stay with me, for thy voice is sweet !  
 And yet I was not fashioned out of clay.  
 Look on me, woman ! Am I beautiful ?

*Eve.* Thou hast a glorious darkness.

*Luc.* Nothing more ?

*Eve.* I think, no more.

*Luc.* False Heart—thou thinkest more !  
 Thou canst not choose but think, as I praise God,  
 Unwillingly but fully, that I stand  
 Most absolute in beauty. As yourselves  
 Were fashioned very good at best, so *we*  
 Sprang very beauteous from the creant Word  
 Which thrilled behind us, God Himself being  
     moved  
 When that august work of a perfect shape

His dignities of sovran angel-hood  
 Swept out into the universe,—divine  
 With thunderous movements, earnest looks of gods,  
 And silver-solemn clash of cymbal wings!  
 Whereof was I, in motion and in form,  
 A part not poorest. And yet,—yet, perhaps,  
 This beauty which I speak of, is not here,  
 As God's voice is not here, nor even my crown—  
 I do not know. What is this thought or thing  
 Which I call beauty? is it thought, or thing?  
 Is it a thought accepted for a thing?  
 Or both? or neither?—a pretext—a word?  
 Its meaning flutters in me like a flame  
 Under my own breath: my perceptions reel  
 For evermore around it, and fall off,  
 As if it too were holy.

*Eve.* Which it is.

*Adam.* The essence of all beauty, I call love.  
 The attribute, the evidence, and end,  
 The consummation to the inward sense,  
 Of beauty apprehended from without,  
 I still call love. As form, when colourless,  
 Is nothing to the eye,—that pine-tree there,  
 Without its black and green, being all a blank,—  
 So, without love, is beauty undiscerned  
 In man or angel. Angel! rather ask  
 What love is in thee, what love moves to thee,  
 And what collateral love moves on with thee;  
 Then shalt thou know if thou art beautiful.

*Luc.* Love! what is love? I lose it. Beauty and  
 love!

I darken to the image. Beauty—love!

[*He fades away, while a low music sounds.*]

*Adam.* Thou art pale, *Eve.*

*Eve.* The precipice of ill  
 Down this colossal nature, dizzies me—  
 And, hark! the starry harmony remote  
 Seems measuring the heights from whence he fell.

*Adam.* Think that we have not fallen so. By the  
 hope  
 And aspiration, by the love and faith,  
 We do exceed the stature of this angel.

*Eve.* Happier we are than he is, by the death.

*Adam.* Or rather, by the life of the Lord God !  
How dim the angel grows, as if that blast  
Of music swept him back into the dark.

[*The music is stronger, gathering  
itself into uncertain articulation.*]

*Eve.* It throbs in on us like a plaintive heart,  
Pressing, with slow pulsations, vibrative,  
Its gradual sweetness through the yielding air,  
To such expression as the stars may use,  
Most starry-sweet and strange ! With every note  
That grows more loud, the angel grows more dim,  
Receding in proportion to approach,  
Until he stand afar,—a shade.

*Adam.*

Now, words.

SONG OF THE MORNING STAR TO LUCIFER.

(*He fades utterly away and vanishes, as it proceeds.*)

Mine orbèd image sinks

Back from thee, back from thee,

As thou art fallen, methinks,

Back from me, back from me,

O my light-bearer,

Could another fairer

Lack to thee, lack to thee ?

Ah, ah, Heosphoros !

I loved thee with the fiery love of stars

Who love by burning, and by loving move,

Too near the throned Jehovah not to love.

Ah, ah, Heosphoros !

Their brows flash fast on me from gliding cars,

Pale-passioned for my loss

Ah, ah, Heosphoros !

Mine orbèd heats drop cold

Down from thee, down from thee,

As fell thy grace of old

Down from me, down from me.

O my light-bearer,

Is another fairer

Won to thee, won to thee?  
 Ah, ah, Heosphoros,  
 Great love preceded loss,  
 Known to thee, known to thee.  
 Ah, ah!

Thou, breathing thy communicable grace  
 Of life into my light,  
 Mine astral faces, from thine angel face,  
 Hast inly fed,  
 And flooded me with radiance overmuch  
 From thy pure height.  
 Ah, ah!

Thou, with calm, floating pinions both ways spread,  
 Erect, irradiated,  
 Didst sting my wheel of glory  
 On, on before thee  
 Along the Godlight by a quickening touch!  
 Ha, ha!

Around, around the firmamental ocean  
 I swam expanding with delirious fire!  
 Around, around, around, in blind desire  
 To be drawn upward to the Infinite—  
 Ha, ha!

Until, the motion flinging out the motion  
 To a keen whirl of passion and avidity,  
 To a dim whirl of languor and delight,  
 I wound in girant orbits smooth and white  
 With that intense rapidity.  
 Around, around,  
 I wound and interwound,  
 While all the cyclic heavens about me spun.  
 Stars, planets, suns, and moons dilated broad,  
 Then flashed together into a single sun,  
 And wound, and wound in one,  
 And as they wound I wound,—around, around,  
 In a great fire I almost took for God!  
 Ha, ha, Heosphoros!

Thine angel glory sinks  
 Down from me, down from me—  
 My beauty falls, methinks,  
 Down from thee, down from thee!

## A DRAMA OF EXILE.

O my light-bearer,  
 O my path-preparer,  
 Gone from me, gone from me !  
 Ah, ah, Heosphoros !

I cannot kindle underneath the brow  
 Of this new angel here, who is not Thou.  
 All things are altered since that time ago,—  
 And if I shine at eve, I shall not know.

I am strange—I am slow.

Ah, ah, Heosphoros !

Henceforward, human eyes of lovers be  
 The only sweetest sight that I shall see,  
 With tears between the looks raised up to me.

Ah, ah !

When, having wept all night, at break of day  
 Above the folded hills they shall survey  
 My light, a little trembling, in the gray.

Ah, ah !

And gazing on me, such shall comprehend,  
 Through all my piteous pomp at morn or even  
 And melancholy leaning out of heaven,  
 That love, their own divine, may change or end,

That love may close in loss !

Ah, ah, Heosphoros !

SCENE.—*Farther on. A wild open country seen vaguely in the approaching night.*

*Adam.* How doth the wide and melancholy earth  
 Gather her hills around us, gray and ghast,  
 And stare with blank significance of loss  
 Right in our faces ! Is the wind up ?

*Eve.*

*Nay.*

*Adam.* And yet the cedars and the junipers  
 Rock slowly through the mist, without a sound,  
 And shapes which have no certainty of shape  
 Drift dusky in and out between the pines,  
 And loom along the edges of the hills,  
 And lie flat, curdling in the open ground—  
 Shadows without a body, which contract  
 And lengthen as we gaze on them.

*Eve.*

O life

Which is not man's nor angel's ! What is this ?



*Adam.* No cause for fear. The circle of God's life  
Contains all life beside.

*Eve.* I think the earth  
Is crazed with curse, and wanders from the sense  
Of those first laws affixed to form and space  
Or ever she knew sin.

*Adam.* We will not fear :  
We were brave sinning.

*Eve.* Yea, I plucked the fruit  
With eyes upturned to heaven and seeing there  
Our god-thrones, as the tempter said,—not GOD.  
My heart, which beats then, sinks. The sun hath sunk  
Out of sight with our Eden.

*Adam.* Night is near.

*Eve.* And God's curse, nearest. Let us travel back  
And stand within the sword-glare till we die,  
Believing it is better to meet death  
Than suffer desolation.

*Adam.* Nay, beloved !  
We must not pluck death from the Maker's hand,  
As erst we plucked the apple : we must wait  
Until He gives death as He gave us life,  
Nor murmur faintly o'er the primal gift  
Because we spoil its sweetness with our sin.

*Eve.* Ah, ah ! dost thou discern what I behold ?

*Adam.* I see all. How the spirits in thine eyes  
From their dilated orbits bound before  
To meet the spectral Dread !

*Eve.* I am afraid—  
Ah, ah ! the twilight bristles wild with shapes  
Of intermittent motion, aspect vague  
And mystic bearings, which o'ercreep the earth,  
Keeping slow time with horrors in the blood.  
How near they reach . . . and far ! How gray they move—  
Treading upon the darkness without feet,  
And fluttering on the darkness without wings !  
Some run like dogs, with noses to the ground ;  
Some keep one path, like sheep ; some rock like trees ;  
Some glide like a fallen leaf ; and some flow on  
Copious as rivers.

*Adam.* Some spring up like fire—  
And some coil . . .

*Eve.* Ah, ah ! dost thou pause to say  
Like what ?—coil like the serpent, when he fell



In twelve colossal shades instead of stars,  
Through which the ecliptic line of mystery  
Strikes bleakly with an unrelenting scope,  
Foreshowing life and death.

*Eve.* By dream or sense,  
Do we see this?

*Adam.* Our spirits have climbed high  
By reason of the passion of our grief,  
And, from the top of sense, looked over sense,  
To the significance and heart of things  
Rather than things themselves.

*Eve.* And the dim twelve . . .

*Adam.* Are dim exponents of the creature-life  
As earth contains it. Gaze on them, beloved!  
By stricter apprehension of the sight,  
Suggestions of the creatures shall assuage  
The terror of the shadows,—what is known  
Subduing the unknown and taming it  
From all prodigious dread. That phantasm, there,  
Presents a lion, albeit twenty times  
As large as any lion—with a roar  
Set soundless in his vibratory jaws,  
And a strange horror stirring in his mane.  
And, there, a pendulous shadow seems to weigh—  
Good against ill, perchance; and there, a crab  
Puts coldly out its gradual shadow-claws,  
Like a slow blot that spreads,—till all the ground,  
Crawled over by it, seems to crawl itself.  
A bull stands hornèd here with gibbous glooms;  
And a ram likewise! and a scorpion writhes  
Its tail in ghastly slime and stings the dark.  
This way a goat leaps with wild blank of beard;  
And here, fantastic fishes dusky float,  
Using the calm for waters, while their fins  
Throb out quick rhythms along the shallow air.  
While images more human—

*Eve.* How he stands,  
That phantasm of a man—who is not *thou*!  
Two phantasms of two men!

*Adam.* One that sustains,  
And one that strives,—resuming, so, the ends  
Of manhood's curse of labour.\* Dost thou see

\* Adam recognises in *Aquarius*, the water-bearer, and *Sagittarius*, the archer, distinct types of the man bearing and the man combating—the passive and active

That phantasm of a woman?—

*Eve.* I have seen,  
But look off to those small humanities \*  
Which draw me tenderly across my fear,—  
Lesser and fainter than my womanhood  
Or yet thy manhood—with strange innocence  
Set in the misty lines of head and hand.  
They lean together! I would gaze on them  
Longer and longer, till my watching eyes,  
As the stars do in watching anything,  
Should light them forward from their outline vague  
To clear configuration—

*[Two spirits, of organic and inorganic  
nature, arise from the ground.]*

But what Shapes

Rise up between us in the open space,  
And thrust me into horror, back from hope!

*Adam.* Colossal Shapes—twin sovran images,  
With a disconsolate, blank majesty  
Set in their wondrous faces! with no look,  
And yet an aspect—a significance  
Of individual life and passionate ends,  
Which overcomes us gazing.

O bleak sound,  
O shadow of sound, O phantasm of thin sound!  
How it comes, wheeling as the pale moth wheels,  
Wheeling and wheeling in continuous wail  
Around the cyclic zodiac, and gains force,  
And gathers, settling coldly like a moth,  
On the wan faces of these images  
We see before us,—whereby modified,  
It draws a straight line of articulate song  
From out that spiral faintness of lament,  
And, by one voice, expresses many griefs.

*First Spirit.*

I am the spirit of the harmless earth.

God spake me softly out among the stars,  
As softly as a blessing of much worth;

And then, His smile did follow unawares,  
That all things fashioned so for use and duty  
Might shine anointed with His chrism of beauty—

Yet I wail!

forms of human labour. I hope that the preceding zodiacal signs—transferred to the earthly shadow and representative purpose—of Aries, Taurus, Cancer, Leo, Libra, Scorpio, Capricornus, and Pisces, are sufficiently obvious to the reader.

\* Her maternal instinct is excited by *Gemini*.

I drave on with the worlds exultingly,  
 Obliquely down the Godlight's gradual fall ;  
 Individual aspect and complexity  
 Of giratory orb and interval  
 Lost in the fluent motion of delight  
 Toward the high ends of Being beyond sight—  
 Yet I wail !

*Second Spirit.*

I am the Spirit of the harmless beasts,  
 Of flying things, and creeping things, and swimming ;  
 Of all the lives, erst set at silent feasts,  
 That found the love-kiss on the goblet brimming,  
 And tasted, in each drop within the measure,  
 The sweetest pleasure of their Lord's good pleasure—  
 Yet I wail !

What a full hum of life around His lips  
 Bore witness to the fullness of creation !  
 How all the grand words were full-laden ships ;  
 Each sailing onward from enunciation  
 To separate existence,—and each bearing  
 The creature's power of joying, hoping, fearing !—  
 Yet I wail !

*Eve.* They wail, beloved ! they speak of glory and  
 God,  
 And they wail—wail. That burden of the song  
 Drops from it like its fruit, and heavily falls  
 Into the lap of silence.

*Adam.* Hark, again !

*First Spirit.*

I was so beautiful, so beautiful,  
 My joy stood up within me bold to add  
 A word to God's,—and, when His work was full,  
 To "very good," responded "very glad !"  
 Filtered through roses, did the light enclose me,  
 And bunches of the grape swam blue across me—  
 Yet I wail !

*Second Spirit.*

I bounded with my panthers ! I rejoiced  
 In my young tumbling lions rolled together !  
 My stag, the river at his fetlocks, poised  
 Then dipped his antlers through the golden weather  
 In the same ripple which the alligator  
 Left, in his joyous troubling of the water—  
 Yet I wail !

*First Spirit.*

O my deep waters, cataract and flood,  
 What wordless triumph did your voices render !  
 O mountain-summits, where the angels stood  
 And shook from head and wing thick dews of splendour  
 How, with a holy quiet, did your Earthy  
 Accept that Heavenly, knowing ye were worthy !  
 Yet I wail !

*Second Spirit.*

O my wild wood-dogs, with your listening eyes !  
 My horses—my ground-eagles, for swift fleeing !  
 My birds, with viewless wings of harmonies,  
 My calm cold fishes of a silver being,  
 How happy were ye, living and possessing,  
 O fair half-souls capacious of full blessing !  
 Yet I wail !

*First Spirit.*

I wail, I wail ! Now hear my charge to-day,  
 Thou man, thou woman, marked as the misdoers  
 By God's sword at your backs ! I lent my clay  
 To make your bodies, which had grown more flowers :  
 And now, in change for what I lent, ye give me  
 The thorn to vex, the tempest-fire to cleave me—  
 And I wail !

*Second Spirit.*

I wail, I wail ! Behold ye that I fasten  
 My sorrow's fang upon your souls dishonoured ?  
 Accursed transgressors ! down the steep ye hasten,—  
 Your crown's weight on the world, to drag it downward  
 Unto your ruin. Lo ! my lions, scenting  
 The blood of wars, roar hoarse and unrelenting—  
 And I wail !

*First Spirit.*

I wail, I wail ! Do you hear that I wail ?  
 I had no part in your transgression—none.  
 My roses on the bough did bud not pale,  
 My rivers did not loiter in the sun ;  
 I was obedient. Wherefore in my centre  
 Do I thrill at this curse of death and winter ?—  
 Do I wail ?

*Second Spirit.*

I wail, I wail ! I wail in the assault  
 Of undeserved perdition, sorely wounded !  
 My nightingale sang sweet without a fault,  
 My gentle leopards innocently bounded.

We were obedient. What is this convulses  
Our blameless life with pangs and fever pulses?  
And I wail!

*Eve.* I choose God's thunder and His angels'  
swords  
To die by, Adam, rather than such words.  
Let us pass out and flee.

*Adam.* We cannot flee.  
This zodiac of the creatures' cruelty  
Curls round us, like a river cold and drear,  
And shuts us in, constraining us to hear.

*First Spirit.*  
I feel your steps, O wandering sinners, strike  
A sense of death to me, and undug graves!  
The heart of earth, once calm, is trembling like  
The ragged foam along the ocean-waves:  
The restless earthquakes rock against each other;  
The elements moan 'round me—"Mother, mother"—  
And I wail!

*Second Spirit.*  
Your melancholy looks do pierce me through;  
Corruption swathes the paleness of your beauty.  
Why have ye done this thing? What did we do  
That we should fall from bliss as ye from duty?  
Wild shriek the hawks, in waiting for their jesses,  
Fierce howl the wolves along the wildernesses—  
And I wail!

*Adam.* To thee, the Spirit of the harmless earth,  
To thee, the Spirit of earth's harmless lives,  
Inferior creatures but still innocent,  
Be salutation from a guilty mouth  
Yet worthy of some audience and respect  
From you who are not guilty. If we have sinned,  
God hath rebuked us, who is over us  
To give rebuke or death, and if ye wail  
Because of any suffering from our sin,  
Ye who are under and not over us,  
Be satisfied with God, if not with us,  
And pass out from our presence in such peace  
As we have left you, to enjoy revenge  
Such as the Heavens have made you. Verily,  
There must be strife between us, large as sin.

*Eve.* No strife, mine Adam! Let us not stand high  
Upon the wrong we did to reach disdain,

Who rather should be humbler evermore  
 Since self-made sadder. Adam! shall I speak—  
 I who spake once to such a bitter end—  
 Shall I speak humbly now, who once was proud?  
 I, schooled by sin to more humility  
 Than thou hast, O mine Adam, O my king—  
 My king, if not the world's?

*Adam.* Speak as thou wilt.

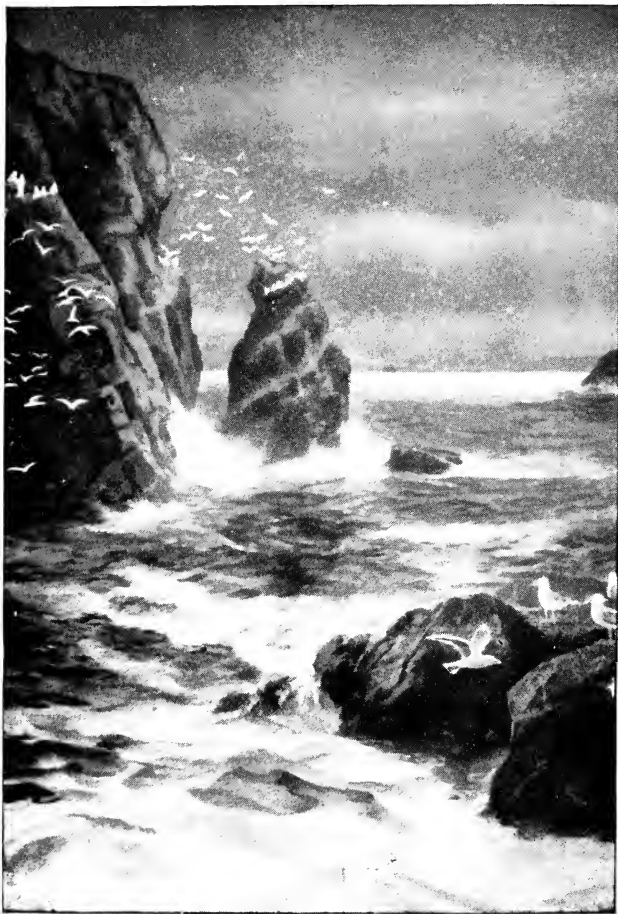
*Eve.* Thus, then—my hand in thine—

. . . . Sweet, dreadful Spirits!

I pray you humbly in the name of God,  
 Not to say of these tears, which are impure—  
 Grant me such pardoning grace as can go forth  
 From clean volitions towards a spotted will,  
 From the wronged to the wronger, this and no more;  
 I do not ask more. I am 'ware, indeed,  
 That absolute pardon is impossible  
 From you to me, by reason of my sin,—  
 And that I cannot evermore, as once,  
 With worthy acceptance of pure joy,  
 Behold the trances of the holy hills  
 Beneath the leaning stars, or watch the vales  
 Dew-pallid with their morning ecstasy,—  
 Or hear the winds make pastoral peace between  
 Two grassy uplands,—and the river-wells  
 Work out their bubbling mysteries underground,—  
 And all the birds sing, till for joy of song  
 They lift their trembling wings as if to heave  
 The too-much weight of music from their heart  
 And float it up the æther. I am 'ware  
 That these things I can no more apprehend  
 With a pure organ into a full delight,—  
 The sense of beauty and of melody  
 Being no more aided in me by the sense  
 Of personal adjustment to those heights  
 Of what I see well-formed or hear well-tuned,  
 But rather coupled darkly and made ashamed  
 By my percipiency of sin and fall  
 In melancholy of humiliant thoughts.  
 But, oh! fair, dreadful Spirits—albeit this  
 Your accusation must confront my soul,  
 And your pathetic utterance and full gaze  
 Must evermore subdue me, be content—  
 Conquer me gently—as if pitying me,







B.P.—1.

“Familiar with the waves and free,  
As if their own white foam were he.”

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E

Not to say loving ! let my tears fall thick  
 As watering dews of Eden, unreprieved ;  
 And when your tongues reprove me, make me smooth,  
 Not ruffled—smooth and still with your reproof,  
 And peradventure better while more sad.  
 For look to it, sweet Spirits, look well to it,  
 It will not be amiss in you who kept  
 The law of your own righteousness, and keep  
 The right of your own griefs to mourn themselves, —  
 To pity me twice fallen, from that, and this,  
 From joy of place, and also right of wail,  
 “ I wail ” being not for me—only “ I sin.”  
 Look to it, O sweet Spirits !—

For was I not,

At that last sunset seen in Paradise,  
 When all the westering clouds flashed out in throngs  
 Of sudden angel-faces, face by face,  
 All hushed and solemn, as a thought of God  
 Held them suspended,—was I not, that hour,  
 The lady of the world, princess of life,  
 Mistress of feast and favour ? Could I touch  
 A rose with my white hand, but it became  
 Redder at once ? Could I walk leisurely  
 Along our swarded garden, but the grass  
 Tracked me with greenness ? Could I stand aside  
 A moment underneath a cornel-tree,  
 But all the leaves did tremble as alive  
 With songs of fifty birds who were made glad  
 Because I stood there ? Could I turn to look  
 With these twain eyes of mine, now weeping fast,  
 Now good for only weeping,—upon man,  
 Angel, or beast, or bird, but each rejoiced  
 Because I looked on him ? Alas, alas !  
 And is not this much woe, to cry “ alas ! ”  
 Speaking of joy ? And is not this more shame,  
 To have made the woe myself, from all that joy ?  
 To have stretched my hand, and plucked it from the tree,  
 And chosen it for fruit ? Nay, is not this  
 Still most despair,—to have halved that bitter fruit,  
 And ruined, so, the sweetest friend I have,  
 Turning the GREATEST to mine enemy ?

*Adam.* I will not hear thee speak so. Harken, Spirits !  
 Our God, who is the enemy of none  
 But only of their sin, hath set your hope

And my hope, in a promise, on this Head.  
 Show reverence, then, and never bruise her more  
 With unpermitted and extreme reproach,—  
 Lest, passionate in anguish, she fling down  
 Beneath your trampling feet, God's gift to us  
 Of sovranly by reason and freewill ;  
 Sinning against the province of the Soul  
 To rule the soulless. Reverence her estate,  
 And pass out from her presence with no words.

*Eve.* O dearest Heart, have patience with my heart !  
 O Spirits, have patience, 'stead of reverence,  
 And let me speak ; for, not being innocent,  
 It little doth become me to be proud,  
 And I am prescient by the very hope  
 And promise set upon me, that henceforth  
 Only my gentleness shall make me great,  
 My humbleness exalt me. Awful Spirits,  
 Be witness that I stand in your reproof  
 But one sun's length off from my happiness—  
 Happy, as I have said, to look around,  
 Clear to look up !—And now ! I need not speak—  
 Ye see me what I am ; ye scorn me so,  
 Because ye see me what I have made myself  
 From God's best making ! Alas,—peace foregone,  
 Love wronged, and virtue forfeit, and tears wept  
 Upon all, vainly ! Alas, me ! alas,  
 Who have undone myself from all that best  
 Fairest and sweetest, to this wretchedest  
 Saddest and most defiled—cast out, cast down—  
 What word metes absolute loss ? let absolute loss  
 Suffice you for revenge. For *I*, who lived  
 Beneath the wings of angels yesterday,  
 Wander to-day beneath the roofless world !  
*I*, reigning the earth's empress yesterday,  
 Put off from me, to-day, your hate with prayers !  
*I*, yesterday, who answered the Lord God,  
 Composed and glad as singing-birds the sun,  
 Might shriek now from our dismal desert, " God,"  
 And hear Him make reply, " What is thy need,  
 Thou whom I cursed to-day ? "

*Adam.*

*Eve !*

*Eve.*

*I*, at last,

Who yesterday was helpmate and delight  
 Unto mine Adam, am to-day the grief

And curse-mete for him! And, so, pity us,  
 Ye gentle Spirits, and pardon him and me,  
 And let some tender peace, made of our pain,  
 Grow up betwixt us, as a tree might grow,  
 With boughs on both sides. In the shade of which,  
 When presently ye shall behold us dead,—  
 For the poor sake of our humility,  
 Breathe out your pardon on our breathless lips,  
 And drop your twilight dews against our brows,  
 And stroking with mild airs our harmless hands  
 Left empty of all fruit, perceive your love  
 Distilling through your pity over us,  
 And suffer it, self-reconciled, to pass.

*LUCIFER rises in the circle.*

*Luc.* Who talks here of a complement of grief?  
 Of expiation wrought by loss and fall?  
 Of hate subduable to pity? Eve?  
 Take counsel from thy counsellor the snake,  
 And boast no more in grief, nor hope from pain,  
 My docile Eve! I teach you to despond,  
 Who taught you disobedience. Look around;—  
 Earth-spirits and phantasms hear you talk unmoved,  
 As if ye were red clay again and talked!  
 What are your words to them? your grief to them?  
 Your deaths, indeed, to them? Did the hand pause  
 For *their* sake, in the plucking of the fruit,  
 That they should pause for *you*, in hating you?  
 Or will your grief or death, as did your sin,  
 Bring change upon their final doom? Behold,  
 Your grief is but your sin in the rebound,  
 And cannot expiate for it.

*Adam.* That is true.

*Luc.* Ay, that is true. The clay-king testifies  
 To the snake's counsel,—hear him!—very true.

*Earth Spirits.* I wail, I wail!

*Luc.* And certes, *that* is true.  
 Ye wail, ye all wail. Peradventure I  
 Could wail among you. O thou universe,  
 That holdest sin and woe,—more room for wail!

*Distant starry voice.* Ah, ah, Heosphoros! Heosphoros!

*Adam.* Mark Lucifer. He changes awfully.

*Eve.* It seems as if he looked from grief to God  
 And could not see Him!—wretched Lucifer!

*Adam.* How he stands—yet an angel!

*Earth Spirits.*

We all wail!

*Luc.* (after a pause.) Dost thou remember, Adam, when  
the curse

Took us in Eden? On a mountain-peak  
Half-sheathed in primal woods and glittering  
In spasms of awful sunshine at that hour,  
A lion couched, part raised upon his paws,  
With his calm, massive face turned full on thine,  
And his mane listening. When the ended curse  
Left silence in the world, right suddenly  
He sprang up rampant and stood straight and stiff,  
As if the new reality of death  
Were dashed against his eyes, and roared so fierce  
(Such thick carnivorous passion in his throat  
Tearing a passage through the wrath and fear)  
And roared so wild, and smote from all the hills  
Such fast, keen echoes crumbling down the vales  
Precipitately,—that the forest beasts,  
One after one, did mutter a response  
Of savage and of sorrowful complaint  
Which trailed along the gorges. Then, at once,  
He fell back, and rolled crashing from the height  
Into the dusk of pines.

*Adam.* It might have been.

I heard the curse alone.

*Earth Spirits.* I wail, I wail!

*Luc.* That lion is the type of what I am.

And as he fixed thee with his full-faced hate,  
And roared, O Adam, comprehending doom,  
So, gazing on the face of the Unseen,  
I cry out here between the Heavens and Earth  
My conscience of this sin, this woe, this wrath,  
Which damn me to this depth.

*Earth Spirits.*

I wail, I wail!

*Eve.* I wail—O God!

*Luc.*

I scorn you that ye wail,

Who use your pretty griefs for pedestals  
To stand on, beckoning pity from without,  
And deal in pathos of antithesis  
Of what ye were forsooth, and what ye are;—  
I scorn you like an angel! Yet, one cry  
I, too, would drive up like a column erect,  
Marble to marble, from my heart to Heaven,

A monument of anguish to transpierce  
 And overtop your vapoury complaints  
 Expressed from feeble woes.

*Earth Spirits.*

I wail, I wail!

*Luc.* For, O ye Heavens, ye are my witnesses,  
 That *I*, struck out from nature in a blot,  
 The outcast and the mildew of things good,  
 The leper of angels, the excepted dust  
 Under the common rain of daily gifts,—  
 I the snake, I the tempter, I the cursed,—  
 To whom the highest and the lowest alike  
 Say, Go from us—we have no need of thee,—  
 Was made by God like others. Good and fair,  
 He did create me!—ask Him, if not fair!  
 Ask, if I caught not fair and silverly  
 His blessing for chief angels on my head,  
 Until it grew there, a crown crystallised!  
 Ask, if He never called me by my name,  
*Lucifer*—kindly said as “Gabriel”—  
*Lucifer*—soft as “Michael!” while serene  
 I, standing in the glory of the lamps,  
 Answered “my Father,” innocent of shame  
 And of the sense of thunder. Ha! ye think  
 White angels in your niches,—I repent,  
 And would tread down my own offences back  
 To service at the footstool? *that’s* read wrong!  
 I cry as the beast did, that I may cry—  
 Expansive, not appealing! Fallen so deep,  
 Against the sides of this prodigious pit  
 I cry—cry—dashing out the hands of wail  
 On each side, to meet anguish everywhere,  
 And to attest it in the ecstasy  
 And exaltation of a woe sustained  
 Because provoked and chosen.

Pass along

Your wilderness, vain mortals! Puny griefs  
 In transitory shapes, be henceforth dwarfed  
 To your own conscience, by the dread extremes  
 Of what I am and have been. If ye have fallen,  
 It is but a step’s fall,—the whole ground beneath  
 Strewn woolly soft with promise! if ye have sinned,  
 Your prayers tread high as angels! if ye have grieved,  
 Ye are too mortal to be pitiable,  
 The power to die disproves the right to grieve.

Go to ! ye call this ruin ? I half-scorn  
 The ill I did you ! Were ye wronged by me,  
 Hated and tempted and undone of me,—  
 Still, what's your hurt to mine of doing hurt,  
 Of hating, tempting, and so ruining ?  
 This sword's *hilt* is the sharpest, and cuts through  
 The hand that wields it.

Go—I curse you all.

Hate one another—feebly—as ye can ;  
 I would not certes cut you short in hate,  
 Far be it from me ! hate on as ye can !  
 I breathe into your faces, spirits of earth,  
 As wintry blast may breathe on wintry leaves  
 And lifting up their brownness show beneath  
 The branches bare.—Beseech you, spirits, give  
 To Eve who beggarly entreats your love  
 For her and Adam when they shall be dead,  
 An answer rather fitting to the sin  
 Than to the sorrow—as the Heavens, I trow,  
 For justice' sake gave theirs.

I curse you both,

Adam and Eve ! Say grace as after meat,  
 After my curses. May your tears fall hot  
 On all the hissing scorns o' the creatures here,—  
 And yet rejoice. Increase and multiply,  
 Ye in your generations, in all plagues,  
 Corruptions, melancholies, poverties,  
 And hideous forms of life and fears of death,—  
 The thought of death being alway eminent  
 Immovable and dreadful in your life,  
 And deafly and dumbly insignificant  
 Of any hope beyond,—as death itself,  
 Whichever of you lieth dead the first,  
 Shall seem to the survivor—yet rejoice !  
 My curse catch at you strongly, body and soul,  
 And He find no redemption—nor the wing  
 Of seraph move your way ; and yet rejoice !  
 Rejoice,—because ye have not, set in you,  
 This hate which shall pursue you—this fire-hate  
 Which glares without, because it burns within—  
 Which kills from ashes—this potential hate,  
 Wherein I, angel, in antagonism  
 To God and his reflex beatitudes,  
 Moan ever in the central universe



With the great woe of striving against Love—  
 And gasp for space amid the Infinite,  
 And toss for rest amid the Desertness,  
 Self-orphaned by my will, and self-elect  
 To kingship of resistant agony  
 Toward the Good round me—hating good and love,  
 And willing to hate good and to hate love,  
 And willing to will on so evermore,  
 Scorning the past and damning the To come—  
 Go and rejoice! I curse you. [LUCIFER *vanishes*.

*Earth Spirits.*

And we scorn you! there's no pardon  
 Which can lean to you aright.  
 When your bodies take the guerdon  
 Of the death-curse in our sight,  
 Then the bee that hummeth lowest shall transcend you:  
 Then ye shall not move an eyelid  
 Though the stars look down your eyes;  
 And the earth which ye defiled,  
 Shall expose you to the skies,—  
 "Lo! these kings of ours, who sought to comprehend you."

*First Spirit.*

And the elements shall boldly  
 All your dust to dust constrain.  
 Unresistedly and coldly  
 I will smite you with my rain.  
 From the slowest of my frosts is no receding.

*Second Spirit.*

And my little worm, appointed  
 To assume a royal part,  
 He shall reign, crowned and anointed,  
 O'er the noble human heart.  
 Give him counsel against losing of that Eden!

*Adam.* Do ye scorn us? Back your scorn  
 Toward your faces gray and lorn,  
 As the wind drives back the rain,  
 Thus I drive with passion-strife,  
 I who stand beneath God's sun,  
 Made like God, and, though undone,  
 Not unmade for love and life.  
 Lo! ye utter threats in vain.  
 By my free will that chose sin,  
 By mine agony within  
 Round the passage of the fire,

## A DRAMA OF EXILE.

By the pinings which disclose  
That my native soul is higher  
Than what it chose.

We are yet too high, O Spirits, for your disdain.  
*Eve.* Nay, beloved! If these be low,  
We confront them from no height.  
We have stooped down to their level  
By infecting them with evil,  
And their scorn that meets our blow  
Scathes aright.

Amen. Let it be so.

*Earth Spirits.*

We shall triumph—triumph greatly  
When ye lie beneath the sward.  
There, our lily shall grow stately  
Though ye answer not a word,  
And her fragrance shall be scornful of your silence :  
While your throne ascending calmly  
We, in heirdom of your soul,  
Flash the river, lift the palm-tree,  
The dilated ocean roll  
By the thoughts that throbb'd within you, round the  
islands.

Alp and torrent shall inherit  
Your significance of will,  
And the grandeur of your spirit  
Shall our broad savannahs fill ;  
In our winds, your exultations shall be springing.  
Even your parlance which inveigles,  
By our rudeness shall be won.  
Hearts poetic in our eagles  
Shall beat up against the sun  
And strike downward in articulate clear singing.

Your bold speeches, our Behemoth  
With his thunderous jaw shall wield.  
Your high fancies, shall our Mammoth  
Breathe sublimely up the shield  
Of St. Michael at God's throne, who waits to speed him  
Till the heavens' smooth-groovèd thunder  
Spinning back, shall leave them clear,  
And the angels smiling wonder  
With dropt looks from sphere to sphere,  
Shall cry, " Ho, ye heirs of Adam ! ye exceed him."

*Adam.* Root out thine eyes, sweet, from the dreary ground.

Beloved, we may be overcome by God,  
But not by these.

*Eve.* By God, perhaps, in these.

*Adam.* I think, not so. Had God foredoomed despair  
He had not spoken hope. He may destroy,  
Certes, but not deceive.

*Eve.* Behold this rose !

I plucked it in our bower of Paradise  
This morning as I went forth, and my heart  
Has beat against its petals all the day.  
I thought it would be always red and full  
As when I plucked it—*Is it?*—ye may see !  
I cast it down to you that ye may see,  
All of you !—count the petals lost of it,  
And note the colours fainted ! ye may see !  
And I am as it is, who yesterday  
Grew in the same place. O ye spirits of earth !  
I almost, from my miserable heart,  
Could here upbraid you for your cruel heart,  
Which will not let me, down the slope of death,  
Draw any of your pity after me,  
Or lie still in the quiet of your looks,  
As my flower, there, in mine.

[*A bleak wind, quickened with indistinct human voices, spins around the earth-zodiac, filling the circle with its presence; and then wailing off into the east, carries the rose away with it. EVE falls upon her face. ADAM stands erect.*]

*Adam.*

So, verily,

The last departs.

*Eve.*

So Memory follows Hope,  
And Life both. Love said to me, "Do not die,"  
And I replied, "O Love, I will not die.  
I exiled and I will not orphan Love."  
But now it is no choice of mine to die—  
My heart throbs from me.

*Adam.*

Call it straightway back.  
Death's consummation crowns completed life,  
Or comes too early. Hope being set on thee  
For others, if for others then for thee,—  
For thee and me.

[*The wind revolves from the east, and round again to the east, perfumed by the Eden-rose, and full of voices which sweep out into articulation as they pass.*]

Let thy soul shake its leaves.  
To feel the mystic wind—hark !

*Eve.*

I hear life.

*Infant voices passing in the wind.*

O we live, O we live—  
And this life that we receive  
Is a warm thing and a new,  
Which we softly bud into  
From the heart and from the brain,—  
Something strange that overmuch is  
Of the sound and of the sight,  
Flowing round in trickling touches,  
With a sorrow and delight,—  
Yet is it all in vain ?

Rock us softly,

Lest it be all in vain.

*Youthful voices passing.*

O we live, O we live—  
And this life that we achieve,  
Is a loud thing and a bold,  
Which with pulses manifold  
Strikes the heart out full and fain—  
Active doer, noble liver,  
Strong to struggle, sure to conquer,  
Though the vessel's prow will quiver  
At the lifting of the anchor :  
Yet do we strive in vain ?

*Infant voices passing.*

Rock us softly,

Lest it be all in vain.

*Poet voices passing.*

O we live, O we live—  
And this life that we conceive,  
Is a clear thing and a fair,  
Which we set in crystal air  
That its beauty may be plain !  
With a breathing and a flooding  
Of the heaven-life on the whole,  
While we hear the forests budding

To the music of the soul—  
Yet is it tuned in vain?

*Infant voices passing.*

Rock us softly,

Lest it be all in vain.

*Philosophic voices passing.*

O we live, O we live—

And this life that we perceive,  
Is a great thing and a grave,  
Which for others' use we have,  
Duty-laden to remain.

We are helpers, fellow-creatures,  
Of the right against the wrong,  
We are earnest-hearted teachers  
Of the truth which maketh strong—

Yet do we teach in vain?

*Infant voices passing.*

Rock us softly

Lest it be all in vain.

*Revel voices passing.*

O we live, O we live—

And this life that we reprove,  
Is a low thing and a light,  
Which is jested out of sight,  
And made worthy of disdain!

Strike with bold electric laughter

The high tops of things divine—

Turn thy head, my brother, after,

Lest thy tears fall in my wine;—

For is all laughed in vain?

*Infant voices passing.*

Rock us softly,

Lest it be all in vain.

*Eve.* I hear a sound of life—of life like ours—  
Of laughter and of wailing, of grave speech,  
Of little plaintive voices innocent,  
Of life in separate courses flowing out  
Like our four rivers to some outward main.  
I hear life—life!

*Adam.* And, so, thy cheeks have snatched  
Scarlet to paleness, and thine eyes drink fast  
Of glory from full cups, and thy moist lips  
Seem trembling, both of them, with earnest doubts  
Whether to utter words or only smile.

*Eve.* Shall I be mother of the coming life?  
 Hear the steep generations, how they fall  
 Adown the visionary stairs of Time  
 Like supernatural thunders—far, yet near,—  
 Sowing their fiery echoes through the hills.  
 Am I a cloud to these—mother to these?

*Earth Spirits.* And bringer of the curse upon all these.

[*EVE sinks down again.*]

*Poet voices passing.*

O we live, O we live—  
 And this life that we conceive,  
 Is a noble thing and high,  
 Which we climb up loftily  
 To view God without a stain;  
 Till, recoiling where the shade is,  
 We retread our steps again,  
 And descend the gloomy Hades  
 To resume man's mortal pain.  
 Shall it be climbed in vain?

*Infant voices passing.*

Rock us softly,  
 Lest it be all in vain.

*Love voices passing.*

O we live, O we live—  
 And this life we would retrieve,  
 Is a faithful thing apart  
 Which we love in, heart to heart,  
 Until one heart fitteth twain.  
 "Wilt thou be one with me?"  
 "I will be one with thee."  
 "Ha, ha!—we love and live!"  
 Alas! ye love and die.  
 Shriek—who shall reply?  
 For is it not loved in vain?

*Infant voices passing.*

Rock us softly,  
 Though it be all in vain.

*Aged voices passing.*

O we live, O we live  
 And this life we would survive,  
 Is a gloomy thing and brief,  
 Which, consummated in grief,  
 Leaveth ashes for all gain.  
 Is it not *all* in vain?

*Infant voices passing.*

Rock us softly,  
Though it be *all* in vain. [*Voices die away.*  
*Earth Spirits.* And bringer of the curse upon all  
these.

*Eve.* The voices of foreshown Humanity  
Die off;—so let me die.

*Adam.* So let us die.  
When God's will soundeth the right hour of death.

*Earth Spirits.* And bringer of the curse upon all  
these.

*Eve.* O Spirits! by the gentleness ye use  
In winds at night, and floating clouds at noon,  
In gliding waters under lily-leaves,  
In chirp of crickets, and the settling hush  
A bird makes in her nest with feet and wings,—  
Fulfil your natures now!

*Earth Spirits.* Agreed, allowed!  
We gather out our natures like a cloud,  
And thus fulfil their lightnings! Thus, and thus!  
Hearken, O hearken to us!

*First Spirit.*

As the storm-wind blows bleakly from the nor-  
land,  
As the snow-wind beats blindly on the moorland,  
As the simoom drives hot across the desert,  
As the thunder roars deep in the Unmeasured,  
As the torrent tears the ocean-world to atoms,  
As the whirlpool grinds it fathoms below fathoms,  
Thus,—and thus!

*Second Spirit.*

As the yellow toad, that spits its poison chilly,  
As the tiger, in the jungle crouching stilly,  
As the wild boar, with ragged tusks of anger,  
As the wolf-dog, with teeth of glittering clangour,  
As the vultures, that scream against the thunder,  
As the owlets, that sit and moan asunder,  
Thus,—and thus!

*Eve.* Adam! God!

*Adam.* Cruel, unrelenting Spirits!  
By the power in me of the sovran soul  
Whose thoughts keep pace yet with the angel's march,  
I charge you into silence—trample you  
Down to obedience.—I am king of you!

*Earth Spirits.*

Ha, ha ! thou art king !  
 With a sin for a crown,  
 And a soul undone !  
 Thou, the antagonised,  
 Tortured and agonised,  
 Held in the ring  
 Of the zodiac !  
 Now, king, beware !  
 We are many and strong  
 Whom thou standest among,—  
 And we press on the air,  
 And we stifle thee back,  
 And we multiply where  
 Thou wouldst trample us down  
 From rights of our own  
 To an utter wrong—

And, from under the feet of thy scorn,  
 O forlorn !

We shall spring up like corn,  
 And our stubble be strong.

*Adam.* God, there is power in Thee ! I make appeal  
 Unto thy kingship.

*Eve.* There is pity in THEE,  
 O sinned against, great God !—My seed, my seed,  
 There is hope set on THEE—I cry to Thee,  
 Thou mystic Seed that shalt be !—leave us not  
 In agony beyond what we can bear,  
 Fallen in debasement below thunder-mark,  
 A mark for scorning—taunted and perplexed  
 By all these creatures we ruled yesterday,  
 Whom thou, Lord, rulest alway. O my Seed,  
 Through the tempestuous years that rain so thick  
 Betwixt my ghostly vision and thy face,  
 Let me have token ! for my soul is bruised  
 Before the serpent's head is.

[*A vision of CHRIST appears in the midst of the zodiac,  
 which pales before the heavenly light. The Earth  
 Spirits grow grayer and fainter.*]

CHRIST. I AM HERE !

*Adam.* This is God !—Curse us not, God, any more.

*Eve.* But gazing so—so—with omnific eyes,  
 Lift my soul upward till it touch thy feet



Or lift it only,—not to seem too proud,—  
To the low height of some good angel's feet,  
For such to tread on when he walketh straight  
And thy lips praise him.

CHRIST.                      Spirits of the earth,  
I meet you with rebuke for the reproach  
And cruel and unmitigated blame  
Ye cast upon your masters. True, they have sinned ;  
And true their sin is reckoned into loss  
For you the sinless. Yet, your innocence,  
Which of you praises? since God made your acts  
Inherent in your lives, and bound your hands  
With instincts and imperious sanctities  
From self-defacement? Which of you disdains  
These sinners, who, in falling, proved their height  
Above you, by their liberty to fall?  
And which of you complains of loss by them,  
For whose delight and use ye have your life  
And honour in creation? Ponder it!  
This regent and sublime Humanity  
Though fallen, exceeds you! this shall film your sun,  
Shall hunt your lightning to its lair of cloud,  
Turn back your rivers, footpath all your seas,  
Lay flat your forests, master with a look;  
Your lion at his fasting, and fetch down  
Your eagle flying. Nay, without this law  
Of mandom, ye would perish,—beast by beast  
Devouring,—tree by tree, with strangling roots  
And trunks set tuskwise. Ye would gaze on God  
With imperceptive blankness up the stars,  
And mutter, “Why, God, hast thou made us thus?”  
And pining to a sallow idiocy  
Stagger up blindly against the ends of life,  
Then stagnate into rottenness and drop  
Heavily—poor, dead matter—piecemeal down  
The abysmal spaces—like a little stone  
Let fall to chaos. Therefore over you  
Receive man's sceptre,—therefore be content  
To minister with voluntary grace  
And melancholy pardon, every rite  
And function in you, to the human hand.  
Be ye to man as angels are of God,  
Servants in pleasure, singers of delight,  
Suggesters to his soul of higher things

Than any of your highest. So at last,  
 He shall look round on you with lids too straight  
 To hold the grateful tears, and thank you well,  
 And bless you when he prays his secret prayers,  
 And praise you when he sings his open songs  
 For the clear song-note he has learnt in you  
 Of purifying sweetness, and extend  
 Across your head his golden fantasies  
 Which glorify you into soul from sense !  
 Go, serve him for such price. That not in vain  
 Nor yet ignobly ye shall serve, I place  
 My word here for an oath, Mine oath for act  
 To be hereafter. In the name of which  
 Perfect redemption and perpetual grace,  
 I bless you through the hope and through the peace  
 Which are Mine,—to the Love, which is Myself.

*Eve.* Speak on still, Christ. Albeit Thou bless me not  
 In set words, I am blessed in hearkening thee—  
 Speak, Christ.

CHRIST. Speak, Adam. Bless the woman, man—  
 It is thine office.

*Adam.* Mother of the world,  
 Take heart before this Presence. Lo, my voice,  
 Which, naming erst the creatures, did express  
 (God breathing through my breath) the attributes  
 And instincts of each creature in its name,  
 Floats to the same afflatus,—floats and heaves  
 Like a water-weed that opens to a wave,  
 A full-leaved prophecy affecting thee,  
 Out fairly and wide. Henceforward, arise, aspire  
 To all the calms and magnanimities,  
 The lofty uses and the noble ends,  
 The sanctified devotion and full work,  
 To which thou art elect for evermore,  
 First woman, wife, and mother.

*Eve.* And first in sin.

*Adam.* And also the sole bearer of the Seed  
 Whereby sin dieth ! raise the majesties  
 Of thy disconsolate brows, O well-beloved,  
 And front with level eyelids the To come,  
 And all the dark o' the world. Rise, woman, rise  
 To thy peculiar and best altitudes  
 Of doing good and of enduring ill,  
 Of comforting for ill, and teaching good,

And reconciling all that ill and good  
Unto the patience of a constant hope,—  
Rise with thy daughters! If sin came by thee,  
And by sin, death,—the ransom-righteousness  
The heavenly life and compensative rest  
Shall come by means of thee. If woe by thee  
Had issue to the world, thou shalt go forth  
An angel of the woe thou didst achieve  
Found acceptable to the world instead  
Of others of that name, of whose bright steps  
Thy deeds stripped bare the hills. Be satisfied;  
Something thou hast to bear through womanhood,  
Peculiar suffering answering to the sin,—  
Some pang paid down for each new human life,  
Some weariness in guarding such a life,  
Some coldness from the guarded, some mistrust  
From those thou hast too well served, from those beloved  
Too loyally some treason; feebleness  
Within thy heart, and cruelty without,  
And pressures of an alien tyranny  
With its dynastic reasons of larger bones  
And stronger sinews. But, go to! thy love  
Shall chant itself its own beatitudes  
After its own life-working. A child's kiss  
Set on thy sighing lips, shall make thee glad;  
A poor man served by thee, shall make thee rich;  
A sick man helped by thee, shall make thee strong;  
Thou shalt be served thyself by every sense  
Of service which thou renderest. Such a crown  
I set upon thy head,—Christ witnessing  
With looks of prompting love—to keep thee clear  
Of all reproach against the sin forgone,  
From all the generations which succeed.  
Thy hand which plucked the apple, I clasp close,  
Thy lips which spake wrong counsel, I kiss close,  
I bless thee in the name of Paradise  
And by the memory of Edenic joys  
Forfeit and lost,—by that last cypress tree  
Green at the gate, which thrilled as we came out,  
And by the blessed nightingale which threw  
Its melancholy music after us,—  
And by the flowers, whose spirits full of smells  
Did follow softly, plucking us behind  
Back to the gradual banks and vernal bowers

And fourfold river-courses.—By all these,  
 I bless thee to the contraries of these,  
 I bless thee to the desert and the thorns,  
 To the elemental change and turbulence,  
 And to the roar of the estranged beasts,  
 And to the solemn dignities of grief,—  
 To each one of these ends,—and to their END  
 Of Death and the hereafter !

*Eve.* I accept  
 For me and for my daughters this high part  
 Which lowly shall be counted. Noble work  
 Shall hold me in the place of garden-rest,  
 And in the place of Eden's lost delight  
 Worthy endurance of permitted pain ;  
 While on my longest patience there shall wait  
 Death's speechless angel, smiling in the east  
 Whence cometh the cold wind. I bow myself  
 Humbly henceforward on the ill I did,  
 That humbleness may keep it in the shade.  
 Shall it be so ? shall I smile, saying so ?  
 O Seed ! O King ! O God, who *shalt* be seed,—  
 What shall I say ? As Eden's fountains swelled  
 Brightly betwixt their banks, so swells my soul  
 Betwixt Thy love and power !

And, sweetest thoughts  
 Of foregone Eden ! now, for the first time  
 Since God said " Adam," walking through the trees,  
 I dare to pluck you as I plucked erewhile  
 The lily or pink, the rose or heliotrope.  
 So pluck I you—so largely—with both hands,  
 And throw you forward on the outer earth  
 Wherein we are cast out, to sweeten it.

*Adam.* As thou, Christ, to illumine it, holdest Heaven  
 Broadly over our heads.

[*The CHRIST is gradually transfigured during the following phrases of dialogue, into humanity and suffering.*]

*Eve.* O Saviour Christ,  
 Thou standest mute in glory, like the sun.

*Adam.* We worship in Thy silence, Saviour Christ.

*Eve.* Thy brows grow grander with a forecast woe,—  
 Diviner, with the possible of death !  
 We worship in Thy sorrow, Saviour Christ.

*Adam.* How do Thy clear, still eyes transpierce our souls,  
As gazing *through* them toward the Father-throne  
In a pathological, full Deity,  
Serenely as the stars gaze through the air  
Straight on each other.

*Eve.* O pathetic Christ,  
Thou standest mute in glory, like the moon.

CHRIST. Eternity stands alway fronting God ;  
A stern colossal image, with blind eyes  
And grand dim lips that murmur evermore  
God, God, God ! while the rush of life and death,  
The roar of act and thought, of evil and good,  
The avalanches of the ruining worlds  
Tolling down space,—the new world's genesis  
Budding in fire,—the gradual humming growth  
Of the ancient atoms and first forms of earth,  
The slow procession of the swathing seas  
And firmamental waters,—and the noise  
Of the broad, fluent strata of pure airs,—  
All these flow onward in the intervals  
Of that reiterated sound of—*GOD !*  
Which *WORD*, innumerable angels straightway lift  
Wide on celestial altitudes of song  
And choral adoration, and then drop  
The burden softly, shutting the last notes  
In silver wings. Howbeit in the noon of time  
Eternity shalt wax as dumb as Death,  
While a new voice beneath the spheres shall cry,  
“ God ! why hast Thou forsaken Me, My God ? ”  
And not a voice in Heaven shall answer it.

[*The transfiguration is complete in sadness.*]

*Adam.* Thy speech is of the Heavenlies, yet, O Christ,  
Awfully human are Thy voice and face.

*Eve.* My nature overcomes me from Thine eyes.

CHRIST. In the set noon of time, shall one from Heaven,  
An angel fresh from looking upon God,  
Descend before a woman, blessing her  
With perfect benediction of pure love,  
For all the world in all its elements,  
For all the creatures of earth, air, and sea,  
For all men in the body and in the soul,  
Unto all ends of glory and sanctity.

*Eve.* O pale, pathetic Christ—I worship Thee !  
I thank Thee for that woman !

CHRIST. Then, at last,  
 I, wrapping round Me your humanity,  
 Which being sustained, shall neither break nor burn  
 Beneath the fire of Godhead, will tread earth,  
 And ransom you and it, and set strong peace  
 Betwixt you and its creatures. With My pangs  
 I will confront your sins ; and since those sins  
 Have sunken to all Nature's heart from yours,  
 The tears of My clean soul shall follow them  
 And set a holy passion to work clear  
 Absolute consecration. In My brow  
 Of kingly whiteness, shall be crowned anew  
 Your discrowned human nature. Look on Me !  
 As I shall be uplifted on a cross  
 In darkness of eclipse and anguish dread,  
 So shall I lift up in My piercèd hands,  
 Not into dark, but light—not unto death,  
 But life,—beyond the reach of guilt and grief,  
 The whole creation. Henceforth in My name  
 Take courage, O thou woman,—man, take hope !  
 Your grave shall be as smooth as Eden's sward,  
 Beneath the steps of your prospective thoughts,  
 And, one step past it, a new Eden-gate  
 Shall open on a hinge of harmony  
 And let you through to mercy. Ye shall fall  
 No more, within that Eden, nor pass out  
 Any more from it. In which hope, move on,  
 First sinners and first mourners. Live and love,—  
 Doing both nobly, because lowly.  
 Live and work, strongly, because patiently.  
 And, for the deed of death, trust it to God  
 That it be well done, unrepented of,  
 And not to loss. And thence, with constant prayers  
 Fasten your souls so high, that constantly  
 The smile of your heroic cheer may float  
 Above all floods of earthly agonies,  
 Purification being the joy of pain.

[*The vision of CHRIST vanishes. ADAM and EVE stand in an ecstasy. The earth-zodiac pales away shade by shade, as the stars, star by star, shine out in the sky ; and the following chant from the two Earth Spirits (as they sweep back into the zodiac and disappear with it) accompanies the process of change.*]

*Earth Spirits.*

By the mighty word thus spoken  
 Both for living and for dying,  
 We our homage-oath, once broken,  
 Fasten back again in sighing,  
 And the creatures and the elements renew their covenanting.

Here, forgive us all our scorning ;  
 Here, we promise milder duty :  
 And the evening and the morning  
 Shall re-organise in beauty,  
 A sabbath day of sabbath joy, for universal chanting.

And if, still, this melancholy  
 May be strong to overcome us,  
 If this mortal and unholy  
 We still fail to cast out from us,  
 If we turn upon you, unaware, your own dark influences,—

If ye tremble when surrounded  
 By our forest pine and palm-trees,  
 If we cannot cure the wounded  
 With our gum-trees and our balm-trees,  
 And if your souls all mournfully sit down among your  
 senses,—

Yet, O mortals, do not fear us,  
 We are gentle in our languor ;  
 Much more good ye shall have near us  
 Than any pain or anger,  
 And our God's refracted blessing in our blessing shall be  
 given.

By the desert's endless vigil  
 We will solemnise your passions,  
 By the wheel of the black eagle  
 We will teach you exaltations,  
 When he sails against the wind, to the white spot up in  
 Heaven.

Ye shall find us tender nurses  
 To your weariness of nature,  
 And our hands shall stroke the curse's  
 Dreary furrows from the creature,  
 Till your bodies shall lie smooth in death and straight and  
 slumberful.

Then, a couch we will provide you  
 Where no summer heats shall dazzle,  
 Strewing on you and beside you  
 Thyme and rosemary and basil,  
 And the yew-tree shall grow overhead to keep all safe  
 and cool.

Till the Holy blood awaited  
 Shall be chrisam around us running,  
 Whereby, newly-consecrated  
 We shall leap up in God's sunning,  
 To join the spheric company which purer worlds assemble.

While, renewed by new evangels,  
 Soul-consummated, made glorious,  
 Ye shall brighten past the angels,  
 Ye shall kneel to Christ victorious,  
 And the rays around His feet beneath your sobbing lips  
 shall tremble.

[*The phantastic vision has all passed; the earth-zodiac  
 has broken like a belt, and is dissolved from the  
 desert. The Earth Spirits vanish, and the stars  
 shine out above.*]

#### CHORUS OF INVISIBLE ANGELS.

*While ADAM and EVE advance into the desert, hand in hand.*

Hear our heavenly promise  
 Through your mortal passion !  
 Love, ye shall have from us,  
 In a pure relation.  
 As a fish or bird  
 Swims or flies, if moving,  
 We unseen are heard  
 To live on by loving.  
 Far above the glances  
 Of your eager eyes,  
 Listen ! we are loving.  
 Listen, through man's ignorances,  
 Listen, through God's mysteries,  
 Listen down the heart of things,—  
 Ye shall hear our mystic wings



Murmurous with loving.  
 Through the opal door  
 Listen evermore  
 How we live by loving!

*First Semichorus.*

When your bodies therefore  
 Reach the grave their goal,  
 Softly will we care for  
 Each enfranchised soul.  
 Softly and unloathly  
 Through the door of opal  
 Toward the Heavenly people,  
 Floated on a minor fine  
 Into the full chant divine,  
 We will draw you smoothly,—  
 While the human in the minor  
 Makes the harmony diviner.  
 Listen to our loving!

*Second semichorus.*

There, a sough of glory  
 Shall breathe on you as you come,  
 Ruffling round the doorway  
 All the light of angeldom.  
 From the empyrean centre  
 Heavenly voices shall repeat,  
 "Souls redeemed and pardoned, enter,  
 For the chrism on you is sweet."  
 And every angel in the place  
 Lowlily shall bow his face,  
 Folded fair on softened sounds,  
 Because upon your hands and feet  
 He images his Master's wounds.  
 Listen to our loving!

*First semichorus.*

So, in the universe's  
 Consummated undoing,  
 Our seraphs of white mercies  
 Shall hover round the ruin.  
 Their wings shall stream upon the flame  
 As if incorporate of the same  
 In elemental fusion,  
 And calm their faces shall burn out  
 With a pale and mastering thought,  
 And a steadfast looking of desire

From out between the clefts of fire,—  
While they cry, in the Holy's name,  
To the final Restitution.

Listen to our loving !

*Second semichorus.*

So, when the day of God is  
To the thick graves accompted,  
Awaking the dead bodies  
The angel of the trumpet  
Shall split and shatter the earth  
To the roots of the grave  
Which never before were slackened,  
And quicken the charnel birth,  
With his blast so clear and brave ;  
That the Dead shall start and stand erect,  
And every face of the burial-place  
Shall the awful, single look, reflect,  
Wherewith he them awakened.  
Listen to our loving !

*First semichorus.*

But wild is the horse of Death.  
He will leap up wild at the clamour  
Above and beneath.  
And where is his Tamer  
On that last day,  
When he crieth, Ha, ha !  
To the trumpet's blare,  
And paweth the earth's Aceldama ?  
When he tosseth his head,  
The drear-white steed,  
And ghastlily champeth the last moon-ray—  
What angel there  
Can lead him away,  
That the living may rule for the Dead ?

*Second semichorus.*

Yet a TAMER shall be found !  
One more bright than seraph crowned,  
And more strong than cherub bold,  
Elder, too, than angel old,  
By his gray eternities.  
He shall master and surprise  
The steed of Death.  
For He is strong, and He is fain.  
He shall quell him with a breath,

And shall lead him where He will,  
 With a whisper in the ear,  
     Full of fear,  
 And a hand upon the mane,  
     Grand and still.

*First semichorus.*

Through the flats of Hades where the souls assemble  
 He will guide the Death-steed calm between their ranks,  
 While, like beaten dogs, they a little moan and tremble  
 To see the darkness curdle from the horse's glittering  
     flanks.

Through the flats of Hades where the dreary shade is,  
 Up the steep of Heaven will the Tamer guide the steed,—  
 Up the spheric circles, circle above circle,  
 We who count the ages, shall count the tolling tread—  
 Every hoof-fall striking a blinder, blanker sparkle  
 From the stony orbs, which shall show as they were dead.

*Second semichorus.*

All the way the Death-steed with tolling hoofs shall  
     travel,

Ashen gray the planets shall be motionless as stones,  
 Loosely shall the systems eject their parts coæval,  
 Stagnant in the spaces shall float the pallid moons :  
 Suns that touch their apogees, reeling from their level,  
 Shall run back on their axles, in wild, low broken tunes.

*Chorus.*

Up against the arches of the crystal ceiling,  
 From the horse's nostrils shall steam the blurting breath :  
 Up between the angels pale with silent feeling,  
 Will the Tamer calmly lead the horse of Death.

*Semichorus.*

Cleaving all that silence, cleaving all that glory,  
 Will the Tamer lead him straightway to the Throne ;  
 "Look out, O Jehovah, to this I bring before Thee,  
 With a hand nail piercèd, I who am Thy Son."  
 Then the Eye Divinest, from the Deepest, flaming,  
 On the mystic courser shall look out in fire :  
 Blind the beast shall stagger where It overcame him,  
 Meek as lamb at pasture, bloodless in desire.  
 Down the beast shall shiver,—slain amid the taming,—  
 And, by Life essential, the phantasm Death expire.

*Chorus.*

Listen, man, through life and death,  
 Through the dust and through the breath,

Listen down the heart of things !  
 Ye shall hear our mystic wings  
 Murmurous with loving.

*A Voice from below.* Gabriel, thou Gabriel !

*A Voice from above.* What wouldst *thou* with me ?

*First Voice.* I heard thy voice sound in the angels' song  
 And I would give thee question.

*Second Voice.* Question me.

*First Voice.* Why have I called thrice to my Morning Star  
 And had no answer ? All the stars are out,  
 And answer in their places. Only in vain  
 I cast my voice against the outer rays  
 Of *my* Star shut in light behind the sun.  
 No more reply than from a breaking string,  
 Breaking when touched. Or is she *not* my star ?  
 Where *is* my Star—my Star ? Have ye cast down  
 Her glory like my glory ? has she waxed  
 Mortal, like Adam ? has she learnt to hate  
 Like any angel ?

*Second Voice.* She is sad for thee.  
 All things grow sadder to thee, one by one.

*Angel chorus.*

Live, work on, O Earthy !

By the Actual's tension,  
 Speed the arrow worthy  
 Of a pure ascension.

From the low earth round you,  
 Reach the heights above you :  
 From the stripes that wound you,  
 Seek the loves that love you.

God's divinest burneth plain  
 Through the crystal diaphane  
 Of our loves that love you.

*First Voice.* Gabriel, O Gabriel !

*Second Voice.* What wouldst *thou* with me ?

*First Voice.* Is it true, O thou Gabriel, that the crown  
 Of sorrow which I claimed, another claims ?  
 That HE claims THAT too ?

*Second Voice.* Lost one, it is true.

*First Voice.* That HE will be an exile from His Heaven,  
 To lead those exiles homeward ?

*Second Voice.* It is true.

*First Voice.* That HE will be an exile by His will,  
 As I by mine election ?

*Second Voice.* It is true.

*First Voice.* That *I* shall stand sole exile finally,—  
Made desolate for fruition?

*Second Voice.* It is true.

*First Voice.* Gabriel!

*Second Voice.* I hearken.

*First Voice.* Is it true besides—  
Aright true—that mine orient Star will give  
Her name of “Bright and Morning-Star” to HIM,—  
And take the fairness of His virtue back  
To cover loss and sadness?

*Second Voice.* It is true.

*First Voice.* Untrue, Untrue! O Morning - Star, O  
MINE,  
Who sittest secret in a veil of light  
Far up the starry spaces, say—*Untrue!*  
Speak but so loud as doth a wasted moon  
To Tyrrhene waters. I am Lucifer.

[*A pause. Silence in the stars.*]

All things grow sadder to me, one by one.

*Angel chorus.*

Exiled human creatures,  
Let your hope grow larger :  
Larger grows the vision  
Of the new delight.  
From this chain of Nature's  
God is the Discharger,  
And the Actual's prison  
Opens to your sight.

*Semichorus.*

Calm the stars and golden  
In a light exceeding :  
What their rays have measured  
Let your feet fulfil.  
These are stars beholden  
By your eyes in Eden,  
Yet, across the desert,  
See them shining still.

*Chorus.*

Future joy and far light  
Working such relations,  
Hear us singing gently  
*Exiled is not lost.*

## THE ROMAUNT OF THE PAGE.

God, above the starlight,  
 God, above the patience,  
 Shall at last present ye  
 Guerdons worth the cost.  
 Patiently enduring,  
 Painfully surrounded,  
 Listen how we love you,  
 Hope the uttermost.  
 Waiting for that curing  
 Which exalts the wounded,  
 Hear us sing above you  
 EXILED, BUT NOT LOST !

*[The stars shine on brightly while ADAM and EVE pursue their way into the far wilderness. There is a souna through the silence, as of the falling tears of an angel.]*

## THE ROMAUNT OF THE PAGE.

## I.

A KNIGHT of gallant deeds,  
 And a young page at his side,  
 From the holy war in Palestine,  
 Did slow and thoughtful ride,  
 As each were a palmer, and told for beads  
 The dews of the eventide.

## II.

"O young page," said the knight,  
 "A noble page art thou !  
 Thou fearest not to steep in blood  
 The curls upon thy brow ;  
 And once in the tent, and twice in the fight,  
 Didst ward me a mortal blow."

## III.

"O brave knight," said the page,  
 "Or ere we hither came,  
 We talked in tent, we talked in field,  
 Of the bloody battle-game :  
 But here, below this greenwood bough,  
 I cannot speak the same.

## IV.

“ Our troop is far behind,  
The woodland calm is new ;  
Our steeds, with slow grass-muffled hoofs,  
Tread deep the shadows through :  
And in my mind some blessing kind  
Is dropping with the dew.

## V.

“ The woodland calm is pure—  
I cannot choose but have  
A thought, from these, o' the beechen-trees  
Which in our England wave ;  
And of the little finches fine,  
Which sang there, while in Palestine  
The warrior-hilt we drave.

## VI.

“ Methinks, a moment gone,  
I heard my mother pray !  
I heard, Sir Knight, the prayer for *me*  
Wherein she passed away ;  
And I know the Heavens are leaning down  
To hear what I shall say.”

## VII.

The page spake calm and high,  
As of no mean degree ;  
Perhaps he felt in nature's broad  
Full heart, his own was free.  
And the knight looked up to his lifted eye,  
Then answered smilingly :

## VIII.

“ Sir Page, I pray your grace !  
Certes, I meant not so  
To cross your pastoral mood, Sir Page,  
With the crook of the battle-bow ;  
But a knight may speak of a lady's face,  
I ween, in any mood or place,  
If the grasses die or grow.

## IX.

“ And this I meant to say,—  
 My lady’s face shall shine,  
 As ladies’ faces use, to greet  
 My page from Palestine ;  
 Or speak she fair, or prank she gay,  
 She is no lady of mine.

## X.

“ And this I meant to fear,—  
 Her bower may suit thee ill !  
 For sooth, in that same field and tent,  
 Thy *talk* was somewhat still ;  
 And fitter thine hand for my knightly spear,  
 Than thy tongue for my lady’s will.”

## XI.

Slowly and thankfully  
 The young page bowed his head :  
 His large eyes seemed to muse a smile,  
 Until he blushed instead ;  
 And no lady in her bower, *pardiè*,  
 Could blush more sudden red—  
 “ Sir Knight,—thy lady’s bower to me  
 Is suited well,” he said.

## XII.

*Beati, beati, mortui!*  
 From the convent on the sea,—  
 One mile off, or scarce as nigh,  
 Swells the dirge as clear and high  
 As if that, over brake and lea,  
 Bodily the wind did carry  
 The great altar of St. Mary,  
 And the fifty tapers burning o’er it,  
 And the Lady Abbess dead before it,—  
 And the chanting nuns whom yesterweek  
 Her voice did charge and bless—  
 Chanting steady, chanting meek,  
 Chanting with a solemn breath  
 Because that they are thinking less  
 Upon the Dead than upon death !  
*Beati, beati, mortui!*



Now the vision in the sound  
 Wheeleth on the wind around—  
 Now it sweepeth back, away—  
 The uplands will not let it stay  
 To dark the western sun.  
*Mortui!*—away at last,—  
 Or ere the page's blush is past !  
 And the knight heard all, and the page heard none.

## XIII.

“A boon, thou noble knight,  
 If ever I servèd thee !  
 Though thou art a knight, and I am a page,  
 Now grant a boon to me—  
 And tell me sooth, if dark or bright,  
 If little loved, or loved aright,  
 Be the face of thy ladye.”

## XIV.

Gloomily looked the knight ;—  
 “As a son thou hast servèd me :  
 And would to none I had granted boon,  
 Except to only thee !  
 For haply then I should love aright,—  
 For then I should know if dark or bright  
 Were the face of my ladye.

## XV.

“Yet it still suits my knightly tongue  
 To grudge that granted boon ;  
 That heavy price, from heart and life,  
 I paid in silence down ;  
 The hand that claimed it, cleared in fine  
 My father's fame : I swear by mine,  
 That price was nobly won.

## XVI.

“Earl Walter was a brave old earl,—  
 He was my father's friend ;  
 And while I rode the lists at court,  
 And little guessed the end,—  
 My noble father in his shroud,  
 Against a slanderer lying loud,  
 He rose up to defend.

## XVII.

“ Oh, calm, below the marble gray,  
 My father's dust was strown !  
 Oh, meek, above the marble gray,  
 His image prayed alone !  
 The slanderer lied—the wretch was brave,—  
 For, looking up the minster-nave,  
 He saw my father's knightly glaive  
 Was changed from steel to stone.

## XVIII.

“ Earl Walter's glaive was steel,  
 With a brave old hand to wear it !  
 And dashed the lie back in the mouth  
 Which lied against the godly truth  
 And against the knightly merit.  
 The slanderer, 'neath the avenger's heel,  
 Struck up the dagger in appeal  
 From stealthy lie to brutal force—  
 And out upon the traitor's corse,  
 Was yielded the true spirit.

## XIX.

“ I would mine hand had fought that fight,  
 And justified my father !  
 I would mine heart had caught that wound,  
 And slept beside him rather !  
 I think it were a better thing  
 Than murdered friend, and marriage-ring,  
 Forced on my life together.

## XX.

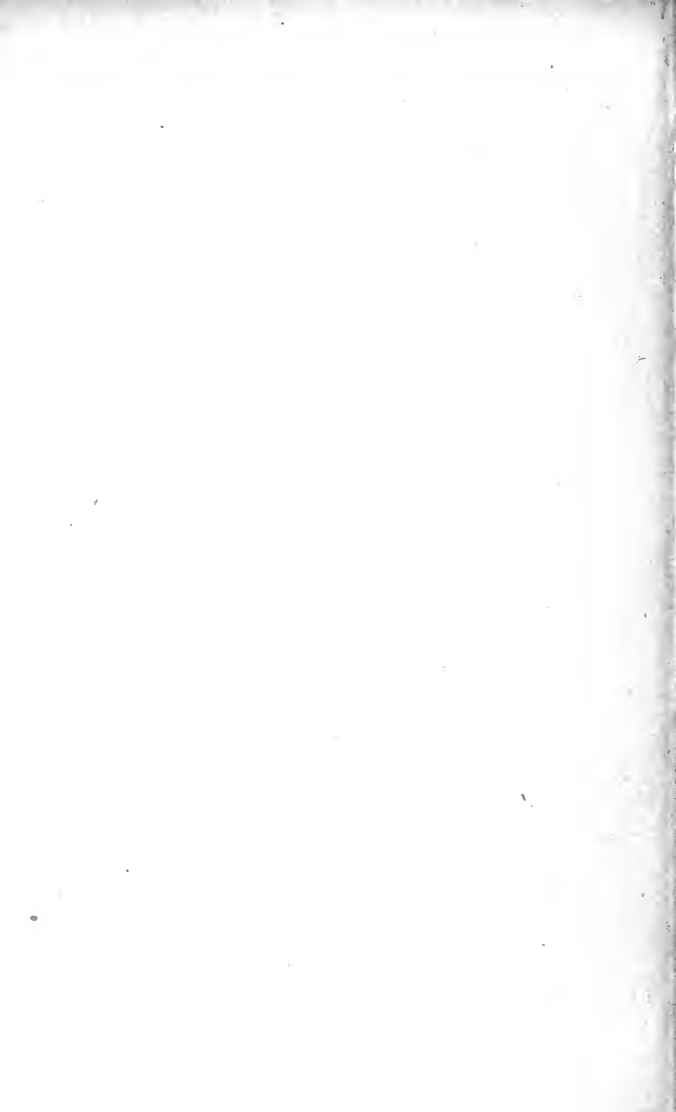
“ Wail shook Earl Walter's house—  
 His true wife shed no tear—  
 She lay upon her bed as mute  
 As the earl did on his bier :  
 Till—‘ Ride, ride fast,’ she said at last,  
 ‘ And bring the avengèd's son anear !  
 Ride fast—ride free, as a dart can flee ;  
 For white of blee, with waiting for me,  
 Is the corse in the next chambère.’



B.P.—I.

“I, struck out from nature in a blot,  
Was made by God like others.”

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## XXI.

“I came—I knelt beside her bed—  
 Her calm was worse than strife—  
 ‘My husband, for thy father dear,  
 Gave freely, when thou wast not here,  
 His own and eke my life.  
 A boon! Of that sweet child we make  
 An orphan for thy father’s sake,  
 Make thou, for ours, a wife.’

## XXII.

“I said, ‘My steed neighs in the court;  
 My bark rocks on the brine;  
 And the warrior’s vow, I am under now,  
 To free the pilgrim’s shrine:  
 But fetch the ring, and fetch the priest,  
 And call that daughter of thine;  
 And rule she wide, from my castle on Nyde,  
 While I am in Palestine.’

## XXIII.

“In the dark chambère, if the bride was fair,  
 Ye wis, I could not see;  
 But the steed thrice neighed, and the priest fast  
 prayed,  
 And wedded fast were we.  
 Her mother smiled upon her bed,  
 As at its side we knelt to wed;  
 And the bride rose from her knee,  
 And kissed the smile of her mother dead,  
 Or ever she kissed me.

## XXIV.

“My page, my page, what grieves thee so,  
 That the tears run down thy face?”—  
 “Alas, alas! mine own sistèr  
 Was in thy lady’s case!  
 But *she* laid down the silks she wore,  
 And followed him she wed before,  
 Disguised as his true servitor,  
 To the very battle-place.”

## XXV.

And wept the page, but laughed the knight,—  
 A careless laugh laughed he :  
 “ Well done it were for thy sistèr,  
 But not for my ladye !  
 My love, so please you, shall requite  
 No woman, whether dark or bright,  
 Unwomaned if she be.”

## XXVI.

The page stopped weeping, and smiled cold—  
 “ Your wisdom may declare  
 That womanhood is proved the best  
 By golden brooch and glossy vest  
 The mincing ladies wear ;  
 Yet is it proved, and was of old,  
 Anear as well—I dare to hold—  
 By truth, or by despair.”

## XXVII.

He smiled no more—he wept no more,—  
 But passionate he spake,—  
 “ Oh, womanly, she prayed in tent,  
 When none beside did wake !  
 Oh, womanly, she paled in fight,  
 For one belovèd’s sake !—  
 And her little hand defiled with blood,  
 Her tender tears of womanhood,  
 Most woman-pure, did make ! ”

## XXVIII.

“ Well done it were for thy sistèr—  
 Thou tellest well her tale !  
 But for my lady, she shall pray  
 I’ the kirk of Nydesdale—  
 Not dread for me, but love for me,  
 Shall make my lady pale.  
 No casque shall hide her woman’s tear—  
 It shall have room to trickle clear  
 Behind her woman’s veil.”

## XXIX.

“ But what if she mistook thy mind,  
 And followed thee to strife ;  
 Then kneeling, did entreat thy love  
 As Paynims ask for life ? ”  
 “ I would forgive, and evermore  
 Would love her as my servitor,  
 But little as my wife.

## XXX.

“ Look up—there is a small bright cloud  
 Alone amid the skies !  
 So high, so pure, and so apart,  
 A woman’s honour lies.”  
 The page looked up—the cloud was sheen—  
 A sadder cloud did rush, I ween,  
 Betwixt it and his eyes :

## XXXI.

Then dimly dropped his eyes away  
 From welkin unto hill—  
 Ha ! who rides there ?—the page is ’ware,  
 Though the cry at his heart is still !  
 And the page seeth all, and the knight seeth none,  
 Though banner and spear do fleck the sun,  
 And the Saracens ride at will.

## XXXII.

He speaketh calm, he speaketh low,—  
 “ Ride fast, my master, ride,  
 Or ere within the broadening dark  
 The narrow shadows hide ! ”  
 “ Yea, fast, my page ; I will do so ;  
 And keep thou at my side.”

## XXXIII.

“ Now nay, now nay, ride on thy way,  
 Thy faithful page precede !  
 For I must loose on saddle-bow  
 My battle-casque, that galls, I trow,  
 The shoulder of my steed ;  
 And I must pray, as I did vow,  
 For one in bitter need.

## XXXIV.

“ Ere night I shall be near to thee,-  
 Now ride, my master, ride !  
 Ere night, as parted spirits cleave  
 To mortals too beloved to leave,  
 I shall be at thy side.”  
 The knight smiled free at the fantasy,  
 And adown the dell did ride.

## XXXV.

Had the knight looked up to the page's face,  
 No smile the word had won ;  
 Had the knight looked up to the page's face,  
 I ween he had never gone.  
 Had the knight looked back to the page's geste,  
 I ween he had turned anon ;  
 For dread was the woe in the face so young,  
 And wild was the silent geste that flung  
 Casque, sword to earth—as the boy down-sprung  
 And stood—alone, alone.

## XXXVI.

He clenched his hands, as if to hold  
 His soul's great agony—  
 “ Have I renounced my womanhood,  
 For wifhood unto *thee*,  
 And is this the last, last look of thine,  
 That ever I shall see ?

## XXXVII.

“ Yet God thee save, and mayst thou have  
 A lady to thy mind ;  
 More woman-proud, and half as true  
 As one thou leav'st behind !  
 And God me take with HIM to dwell—  
 For HIM I cannot love too well,  
 As I have loved my kind.”

## XXXVIII.

SHE looketh up in earth's despair,  
 The hopeful heavens to seek :  
 That little cloud still floateth there,  
 Whereof her Loved did speak.



How bright the little cloud appears !  
 Her eyelids fall upon the tears,—  
 And the tears, down either cheek.

## XXXIX.

The tramp of hoof, the flash of steel—  
 The Paynims round her coming !  
 The sound and sight have made her calm,—  
 False page, but truthful woman !  
 She stands amid them all unmoved :  
 A heart, once broken by the Loved,  
 Is strong to meet the foeman.

## XL.

“ Ho, Christian page ! art keeping sheep,  
 From pouring wine-cups, resting ? ”  
 “ I keep my master’s noble name,  
 For warring, not for feasting :  
 And if that here Sir Hubert were,  
 My master brave, my master dear,  
 Ye would not stay the questing.”

## XLI.

“ Where is thy master, scornful page,  
 That we may slay or bind him ? ”—  
 “ Now search the lea, and search the wood,  
 And see if ye can find him !  
 Nathless, as hath been often tried,  
 Your Paynim heroes faster ride  
 Before him than behind him.”

## XLII.

“ Give smoother answers, lying page,  
 Or perish in the lying.”—  
 “ I trow that if the warrior brand  
 Beside my foot, were in my hand,  
 ’Twere better at replying.”  
 They cursed her deep, they smote her low,  
 They cleft her golden ringlets through ;  
 The Loving is the Dying.

## XLIII.

She felt the scimitar gleam down  
 And met it from beneath,

With smile more bright in victory  
 Than any sword from sheath,—  
 Which flashed across her lip serene,  
 Most like the spirit-light between  
 The darks of life and death.

## XLIV.

*Ingemisco, ingemisco!*

From the convent on the sea,  
 Now it sweepeth solemnly!  
 As over wood and over lea,  
 Bodily the wind did carry  
 The great altar of St. Mary,  
 And the fifty tapers paling o'er it,  
 And the Lady Abbess stark before it,  
 And the weary nuns, with hearts that faintly  
 Beat along their voices saintly—

*Ingemisco, ingemisco!*

Dirge for abbess laid in shroud,  
 Sweepeth o'er the shroudless Dead.  
 Page or lady, as we said,  
 With the dews upon her head,  
 All as sad if not as loud.

*Ingemisco, ingemisco!*

Is ever a lament begun  
 By any mourner under sun,  
 Which, ere it endeth, suits but *one*?

## THE LAY OF THE BROWN ROSARY.

## FIRST PART.

“ONORA, Onora!”—her mother is calling—  
 She sits at the lattice, and hears the dew falling  
 Drop after drop from the sycamores laden  
 With dew as with blossom—and calls home the maiden—  
 “Night cometh, Onora!”

She looks down the garden-walk caverned with trees,  
 To the limes at the end, where the green arbour is—  
 “Some sweet thought or other may keep where it found  
 her,  
 While, forgot or unseen in the dreamlight around her,  
 Night cometh, Onora!”

She looks up the forest, whose alleys shoot on  
 Like the mute minster-aisles, when the anthem is  
     done,  
 And the choristers, sitting with faces aslant,  
 Feel the silence to consecrate more than the chant—  
     “ Onora, Onora !”

And forward she looketh across the brown heath—  
 “ Onora, art coming ? ”—what is it she seeth ?  
 Nought, nought, but the gray border-stone that is wist—  
 To dilate and assume a wild shape in the mist—  
     “ My daughter ! ”—Then over

The casement she leaneth, and as she doth so,  
 She is 'ware of her little son playing below :  
 “ Now where is Onora ? ”—He hung down his head  
 And spake not, then answering blushed scarlet-red,—  
     “ At the tryst with her lover.”

But his mother was wroth. In a sternness quoth she,  
 “ As thou play'st at the ball, art thou playing with me ?  
 When we know that her lover to battle is gone,  
 And the saints know above that she loveth but one,  
     And will ne'er wed another ? ”

Then the boy wept aloud. 'Twas a fair sight, yet sad,  
 To see the tears run down the sweet blooms he had :  
 He stamped with his foot, said—“ The saints know  
     lied,  
 Because truth that is wicked, is fittest to hide !  
     Must I utter it, mother ? ”

In his vehement childhood he hurried within,  
 And knelt at her feet as in prayer against sin ;  
 But a child at a prayer never sobbeth as he—  
 “ Oh ! she sits with the nun of the brown rosary,  
     At nights in the ruin !

“ The old convent ruin, the ivy rots off,  
 Where the owl hoots by day, and the toad is sun-proof ;  
 Where no singing-birds build ; and the trees gaunt and  
     gray,  
 As in stormy sea-coasts, appear blasted one way—  
     But is *this* the wind's doing ?

“A nun in the east wall was buried alive,  
 Who mocked at the priest when he called her to shrive,—  
 And shrieked such a curse as the stone took her breath,  
 The old abbess fell backwards and swooned unto death  
 With an Ave half-spoken.

“I tried once to pass it, myself and my hound,  
 Till, as fearing the lash, down he shivered to ground!  
 A brave hound, my mother! a brave hound, ye wot!  
 And the wolf thought the same, with his fangs at her  
 throat,  
 In the pass of the Brocken.

“At dawn and at eve, mother, who sitteth there,  
 With the brown rosary never used for a prayer?  
 Stoop low, mother, low! If we went there to see,  
 What an ugly great hole in that east wall must be  
 At dawn and at even!

“Who meet there, my mother, at dawn and at even?  
 Who meet by that wall, never looking to heaven?  
 O sweetest my sister, what doeth with *thee*  
 The ghost of a nun with a brown rosary,  
 And a face turned from heaven?

“St. Agnes o'erwatcheth my dreams; and erewhile  
 I have felt through mine eyelids the warmth of her  
 smile—  
 But last night, as a sadness like pity came o'er her,  
 She whispered—‘Say *two* prayers at dawn for Onora!  
 The Tempted is sinning.’”

Onora, Onora! they heard her not coming—  
 Not a step on the grass, not a voice through the gloaming!  
 But her mother looked up, and she stood on the floor,  
 Fair and still as the moonlight that came there before,  
 And a smile just beginning.

It touches her lips—but it dares not arise  
 To the height of the mystical sphere of her eyes:  
 And the large musing eyes, neither joyous nor sorry,  
 Sing on like the angels in separate glory,  
 Between clouds of amber.

For the hair droops in clouds amber-coloured, till stirred  
 Into gold by the gesture that comes with a word ;  
 While—O soft !—her speaking is so interwound  
 Of the dim and the sweet, 'tis a twilight of sound,  
 And floats through the chamber.

“Since thou shrivest my brother, fair mother,” said she,  
 “I count on thy priesthood for marrying of me ;  
 And I know by the hills, that the battle is done—  
 That my lover rides on—will be here with the sun,  
 'Neath the eyes that behold thee.”

Her mother sate silent—too tender, I wis,  
 Of the smile her dead father smiled dying to kiss ;  
 But the boy started up, pale with tears, passion-wrought,—  
 “O wicked fair sister, the hills utter nought !  
 If he cometh, who told thee ?”

“I know by the hills,” she resumed calm and clear,  
 “By the beauty upon them, that HE is anear ;  
 Did they ever look so since he bade me adieu ?  
 Oh, love in the waking, sweet brother, is true  
 As St. Agnes in sleeping.”

Half-ashamed and half-softened, the boy did not speak,  
 And the blush met the lashes which fell on his cheek ;  
 She bowed down to kiss him—Dear saints, did he see  
 Or feel on her bosom the BROWN ROSARY—  
 That he shrank away weeping ?

## SECOND PART.

*A bed—ONORA sleeping. ANGELS, but not near.*

*First Angel.*

Must we stand so far, and she  
 So very fair ?

*Second Angel.*

As bodies be.

*First Angel.*

And she so mild ?

*Second Angel.*

As spirits, when  
 They meeken, not to God but men.

*First Angel.*

And she so young,—that I who bring  
 Good dreams for saintly children, might  
 Mistake that small soft face to-night,  
 And fetch her such a blessed thing,  
 That, at her waking, she would weep  
 For childhood lost anew in sleep.  
 How hath she sinned?

*Second Angel.*

In bartering love—

God's love—for man's.

*First Angel.*

We may reprove  
 The world for this! not only her.—  
 Let me approach, to breathe away  
 This dust o' the heart with holy air.

*Second Angel.*

Stand off! She sleeps, and did not pray.

*First Angel.*

Did none pray for her?

*Second Angel.*

Ay, a child,—  
 Who never, praying, wept before :  
 While, in a mother undefiled  
 Prayer goeth on in sleep, as true  
 And pauseless as the pulses do.

*First Angel.*

Then I approach.

*Second Angel.*

It is not WILLED.

*First Angel.*

One word: Is she redeemed?

*Second Angel.*

No more!

THE PLACE IS FILLED.

[ANGELS *vanish.*

*Evil Spirit in a Nun's garb by the bed.*

Forbear that dream—forbear that dream! too near to  
 Heaven it leaned.

*Onora in sleep.*

Nay, leave me this—but only this! 'tis but a dream, sweet  
 fiend!

*Evil Spirit.*

It is a *thought.*

*Onora in sleep.*

A sleeping thought—most innocent of good—  
It doth the Devil no harm, sweet fiend! it cannot, if it  
would.

I say in it no holy hymn—I do no holy work;  
I scarcely hear the sabbath-bell that chimeth from the kirk.

*Evil Spirit.*

Forbear that dream—forbear that dream!

*Onora in sleep.*

Nay, let me *dream* at least.  
That far-off bell, it may be took for viol at a feast—  
I only walk among the fields, beneath the autumn sun,  
With my dead father, hand in hand, as I have often  
done.

*Evil Spirit.*

Forbear that dream—forbear that dream!

*Onora in sleep.*

Nay, sweet fiend, let me go—  
I never more can walk with *him*, oh, never more but so.  
For they have tied my father's feet beneath the kirkyard  
stone,—

Oh, deep and straight; oh, very straight! they move at  
nights alone:

And then he calleth through my dreams, he calleth  
tenderly,—

“Come forth, my daughter, my beloved, and walk the  
fields with me!”

*Evil Spirit.*

Forbear that dream, or else disprove its pureness by a sign.

*Onora in sleep.*

Speak on, thou shalt be satisfied! my word shall answer  
thine.

I heard a bird which used to sing when I a child was  
praying;

I see the poppies in the corn, I used to sport away in.—

What shall I do—tread down the dew, and pull the  
blossoms blowing?

Or clap my wicked hands to fright the finches from the  
rowan?

*Evil Spirit.*

Thou shalt do something harder still. Stand up where  
thou dost stand,

Among the fields of Dreamland, with thy father, hand in  
hand,

And clear and slow, repeat the vow—declare its cause and kind,  
Which, not to break in sleep or wake, thou bearest on thy mind.

*Onora in sleep.*

I bear a vow of sinful kind, a vow for mournful cause :  
I vowed it deep, I vowed it strong—the spirits laughed  
applause :  
The spirits trailed, along the pines, low laughter like a breeze,  
While, high atween their swinging tops, the stars appeared  
to freeze.

*Evil Spirit.*

More calm and free,—speak out to me, why such a vow  
was made.

*Onora in sleep.*

Because that God decreed my death, and I shrank back  
afraid.

Have patience, O dead father mine ! I did not fear to die ;—  
I wish I were a young dead child, and had thy company !  
I wish I lay beside thy feet, a buried three-year child,  
And wearing only a kiss of thine, upon my lips that  
smiled !

The linden-tree that covers thee, might, so, have shadowed  
twain—

For death itself I did not fear—'tis love that makes the pain.  
Love feareth death. I was no child—I was betrothed that day ;  
I wore a troth-kiss on my lips, I could not give away.  
How could I bear to lie content and still beneath a stone,  
And feel mine own Betrothed go by—alas ! no more mine  
own,—

Go leading by, in wedding pomp, some lovely lady brave,  
With cheeks that blushed as red as rose, while mine were  
white in grave ?

How could I bear to sit in Heaven, on e'er so high a throne,  
And hear him say to her—to *her!* that else he loveth none ?  
Though e'er so high I sate above, though e'er so low he  
spake,

As clear as thunder I should hear the new oath he might  
take—

That *hers*, forsooth, are heavenly eyes—ah me ! while very  
dim

Some heavenly eyes (indeed of Heaven !) would darken  
down to *him*.



*Evil Spirit.*

Who told thee thou wert called to death ?

*Onora in sleep.*

I sate all night beside thee—

The gray owl on the ruined wall shut both his eyes to hide thee ;

And ever he flapped his heavy wing, all brokenly and weak,  
And the long grass waved against the sky, around his  
gaspng beak.

I sate beside thee all the night, while the moonlight lay  
forlorn,

Strewn round us like a dead world's shroud, in ghastly  
fragments torn.

And through the night, and through the hush, and over  
the flapping wing,

We heard, beside the Heavenly Gate, the angels murmur-  
ing :—

We heard them say, " Put day to day, and count the days  
to seven,

'And God will draw Onora up the golden stairs of  
Heaven :

'And yet the Evil ones have leave that purpose to defer,

'For if she has no need of HIM, He has no need of *her*.'—

*Evil Spirit.*

Speak out to me—speak bold and free.

*Onora in sleep.*

And then I heard thee say,—

" I count, upon my rosary brown, the hours thou hast to  
stay !

'Yet God permits us Evil ones to put by that decree,

'Since if thou hast no need of HIM, He has no need of  
*thee*—

'And if thou wilt forego the sight of angels, verily

'Thy true love gazing on thy face, shall guess what  
angels be—

'Nor bride shall pass, save thee " . . . Alas!—my father's  
hand's a-cold—

The meadows seem . . .

*Evil Spirit.*

Forbear the dream, or let the vow be told !

*Onora in sleep.*

I vowed upon thy rosary brown, this string of antique  
beads,

By charnel lichens overgrown, and dank among the weeds—

This rosary brown, which is thine own,—lost soul of  
buried nun—

Who, lost by vow, wouldst render now all souls alike  
undone;—

I vowed upon thy rosary brown,—and, till such vow should  
break,

A pledge always of living days, 'twas hung around my  
neck—

I vowed to thee on rosary, (Dead father, look not so!),  
*I would not thank God in my weal, nor seek God in my woe.*

*Evil Spirit.*

And canst thou prove . . .

*Onora in sleep.*

O love—my love! I felt him near again!

I saw his steed on mountain-head, I heard it on the  
plain!

Was this no weal for me to feel?—is greater weal than  
this?

Yet when he came, I wept his name—and the angels  
heard but *his*.

*Evil Spirit.*

Well done, well done!

*Onora in sleep.*

Ah me, the sun! the dreamlight 'gins to pine,—

Ah me, how dread can look the Dead!—Aroint thee,  
father mine!

She starteth from slumber, she sitteth upright,  
And her breath comes in sobs while she stares through the  
night,

There is nought. The great willow, her lattice before,  
Large-drawn in the moon, lieth calm on the floor;  
But her hands tremble fast as their pulses, and, free  
From the death-clasp, close over—the BROWN ROSARY.

### THIRD PART.

'Tis a morn for a bridal; the merry bride-bell  
Rings clear through the greenwood that skirts the  
chappelle

And the priest at the altar awaiteth the bride,  
And the sacristans slyly are jesting aside

At the work shall be doing.

While down through the wood rides that fair company,  
 The youths with the courtship, the maids with the glee,—  
 Till the chapel-cross opens to sight, and at once  
 All the maids sigh demurely, and think for the nonce,  
 “And so endeth a wooing!”

And the bride and the bridegroom are leading the way,  
 With his hand on her rein, and a word yet to say :  
 Her dropt eyelids suggest the soft answers beneath,—  
 And the little quick smiles come and go with her  
 breath,  
 When she sigheth or speaketh.

And the tender bride-mother breaks off unaware  
 From an Ave, to think that her daughter is fair,—  
 Till in nearing the chapel, and glancing before,  
 She seeth her little son stand at the door,—  
 Is it play that he seeketh ?

Is it play ? when his eyes wander innocent-wild,  
 And sublimed with a sadness unfitting a child !  
 He trembles not, weeps not—the passion is done,  
 And calmly he kneels in their midst, with the sun  
 On his head like a glory.

“O fair-featured maids, ye are many!” he cried,—  
 “But, in fairness and vileness, who matcheth the bride ?  
 O brave-hearted youths, ye are many ! but whom,  
 For the courage and woe, can ye match with the  
 groom,  
 As ye see them before ye ?”

Out spake the bride’s mother—“The vileness is thine,  
 If thou shame thine own sister, a bride at the shrine !”  
 Out spake the bride’s lover—“The vileness be mine,  
 If he shame mine own wife at the hearth of the shrine,  
 And the charge be unprovèd.

“Bring the charge, prove the charge, brother ! speak it  
 aloud—  
 Let thy father and hers hear it deep in his shroud !”—  
 —“O father, thou seest—for dead eyes can see—  
 How she wears on her bosom a *brown rosary*,  
 O my father beloved !”

Then outlaughed the bridegroom, and outlaughed withal  
 Both maidens and youths, by the old chapel-wall—  
 “So she weareth no love-gift, kind brother,” quoth he,  
 “She may wear an she listeth a brown rosary,  
 Like a pure-hearted lady.”

Then swept through the chapel the long bridal train :  
 Though he spake to the bride, she replied not again :  
 On, as one in a dream, pale and stately she went,  
 Where the altar-lights burn o’er the great sacrament,  
 Faint with daylight, but steady.

But her brother had passed in between them and her,  
 And calmly knelt down on the high-altar stair—  
 Of an infantine aspect so stern to the view,  
 That the priest could not smile on the child’s eyes of blue,  
 As he would for another.

He knelt like a child marble-sculptured and white,  
 That seems kneeling to pray on the tomb of a knight,  
 With a look taken up to each iris of stone  
 From the greatness and death where he kneeleth, but none  
 From the face of a mother.

“In your chapel, O priest, ye have wedded and shriven  
 Fair wives for the hearth, and fair sinners for Heaven !  
 But this fairest my sister, ye think now to wed,  
 Bid her kneel where she standeth, and shrive her instead—  
 O shrive her and wed not !”

In tears, the bride’s mother—“Sir Priest, unto thee  
 Would he lie, as he lied to this fair company !”  
 In wrath, the bride’s lover—“The lie shall be clear !  
 Speak it out, boy ! the saints in their niches shall hear—  
 Be the charge proved or said not !”

Then serene in his childhood he lifted his face,  
 And his voice sounded holy and fit for the place—  
 “Look down from your niches, ye still saints, and see  
 How she wears on her bosom a *brown rosary* !  
 Is it used for the praying ?”

The youths looked aside—to laugh there were a sin—  
 And the maidens’ lips trembled with smiles shut within :  
 Quoth the priest—“Thou art wild, pretty boy ! Blessed she  
 Who prefers at her bridal a brown rosary  
 To a worldly arraying !”

The bridegroom spake low, and led onward the bride,  
 And before the high altar they stood side by side :  
 The rite-book is opened, the rite is begun—  
 They have knelt down together to rise up as one—  
 Who laughed by the altar ?

The maidens looked forward, the youths looked around,—  
 The bridegroom's eye flashed from his prayer at the sound ;  
 And each saw the bride, as if no bride she were,  
 Gazing cold at the priest, without gesture of prayer,  
 As he read from the psalter.

The priest never knew that she did so, but still  
 He felt a power on him, too strong for his will ;  
 And whenever the Great Name was there to be read,  
 His voice sank to silence—THAT could not be said,  
 Or the air could not hold it.

“ I have sinned,” quoth he, “ I have sinned, I wot ”—  
 And the tears ran adown his old cheeks at the thought ;  
 They dropped fast on the book ; but he read on the same,—  
 And aye was the silence where should be the NAME,—  
 As the choristers told it.

The rite-book is closed, and the rite being done,  
 They who knelt down together, arise up as one :  
 Fair riseth the bride—Oh, a fair bride is she,—  
 But, for all (think the maidens) that brown rosary,  
 No saint at her praying !

What aileth the bridegroom ? He glares blank and wide—  
 Then suddenly turning, he kisseth the bride—  
 His lip stung her with cold : she glanced upwardly mute :  
 “ Mine own wife,” he said, and fell stark at her foot  
 In the word he was saying.

They have lifted him up,—but his head sinks away,—  
 And his face showeth bleak in the sunshine, and gray.  
 Leave him now where he lieth—for oh, never more  
 Will he kneel at an altar or stand on a floor !  
 Let his bride gaze upon him !

Long and still was her gaze, while they chafed him there,  
 And breathed in the mouth whose last life had kissed her.  
 But when they stood up—only *they* ! with a start  
 The shriek from her soul struck her pale lips apart—  
 She has lived, and foregone him !

And low on his body she droppeth adown—

“Didst call me thine own wife, beloved—thine own?  
Then take thine own with thee! thy coldness is warm  
To the world’s cold without thee! Come, keep me from  
harm

In a calm of thy teaching!”

She looked in his face earnest long, as in sooth  
There were hope of an answer,—and then kissed his  
mouth;

And with head on his bosom, wept, wept bitterly,—

“Now, O God, take pity—take pity on me!—

God, hear my beseeching!”

She was ’ware of a shadow that crossed where she lay;

She was ’ware of a presence that withered the day—

Wild she sprang to her feet,—“I surrender to *thee*

The broken vow’s pledge,—the accursed rosary,—

I am ready for dying!”

She dashed it in scorn to the marble-paved ground,

Where it fell mute as snow; and a weird music-sound

Crept up, like a chill, up the aisles long and dim,—

As the fiends tried to mock at the choristers’ hymn,

And moaned in the trying.

#### FOURTH PART.

ONORA looketh listlessly adown the garden walk:

“I am weary, O my mother, of thy tender talk!

I am weary of the trees a-waving to and fro—

Of the steadfast skies above, the running brooks below;—

All things are the same but I;—only I am dreary;

And, mother, of my dreariness, behold me very weary.

“Mother, brother, pull the flowers I planted in the spring,

And smiled to think I should smile more upon their  
gathering.

The bees will find out other flowers—oh, pull them, dearest  
mine,

And carry them and carry me before St. Agnes’ shrine.”

—Whereat they pulled the summer flowers she planted in  
the spring,

And her and them, all mournfully, to Agnes’ shrine did  
bring.

She looked up to the pictured saint, and gently shook her head—

“The picture is too calm for *me*—too calm for *me*,” she said :

“The little flowers we brought with us, before it we may lay,  
For those are used to look at Heaven,—but *I* must turn  
away,—

Because no sinner under sun can dare or bear to gaze  
On God’s or angel’s holiness, except in Jesu’s face.”

She spoke with passion after pause—“And were it wisely  
done,

If we who cannot gaze above, should walk the earth alone?—  
If we whose virtue is so weak, should have a will so  
strong,—

And stand blind on the rocks, to choose the right path from  
the wrong?

To choose perhaps a love-lit hearth, instead of love and  
Heaven,—

A single rose, for a rose-tree, which beareth seven times  
seven?

A rose that droppeth from the hand, that fadeth in the breast,  
Until, in grieving for the worst, we learn what is the best !”  
Then breaking into tears,—“Dear God,” she cried, “and  
must we see

All blissful things depart from *us*, or ere we go to *THEE*?  
We cannot guess Thee in the wood, or hear Thee in the  
wind?

Our cedars must fall round us, ere we see the light behind?  
Ay sooth, we feel too strong in weal, to need Thee on that  
road ;

But woe being come, the soul is dumb, that crieth not on  
‘God.’”

Her mother could not speak for tears ; she ever musèd  
thus—

“*The bees will find out other flowers*,—but what is left for *us*?”  
But her young brother stayed his sobs, and knelt beside her  
knee,

—“Thou sweetest sister in the world, hast never a word  
for me?”

She passed her hand across his face, she pressed it on his  
cheek,

So tenderly, so tenderly—she needed not to speak.

The wreath which lay on shrine that day, at vespers bloomed  
no more—

The woman fair who placed it there, had died an hour  
before.

Both perished mute, for lack of root, earth's nourishment  
to reach ;—

O reader, breathe (the ballad saith) some sweetness out of  
each !

## LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP.

A ROMANCE OF THE AGE.

*A poet writes to his friend. PLACE—A room in Wycombe  
Hall. TIME—Late in the evening.*

DEAR my friend and fellow-student, I would lean my spirit  
o'er you !

Down the purple of this chamber tears should scarcely  
run at will.

I am humbled who was humble. Friend, I bow my head  
before you :

You should lead me to my peasants, but their faces are  
too still.

There's a lady, an earl's daughter,—she is proud and she  
is noble,

And she treads the crimson carpet and she breathes the  
perfumed air,

And a kingly blood sends glances up, her princely eye  
to trouble,

And the shadow of a monarch's crown is softened in  
her hair.

She has halls among the woodlands, she has castles by  
the breakers,

She has farms and she has manors, she can threaten and  
command,

And the palpitating engines snort in steam across her  
acres,

As they mark upon the blasted heaven the measure of  
the land.



There are none of England's daughters who can show a prouder presence :

Upon princely suitors praying, she has looked in her disdain.

She was sprung of English nobles, I was born of English peasants ;

What was *I* that I should love her, save for competence to pain ?

I was only a poor poet, made for singing at her case-ment,

As the finches or the thrushes, while she thought of other things.

Oh, she walked so high above me, she appeared to my abasement,

In her lovely silken murmur, like an angel clad in wings !

Many vassals bow before her as her carriage sweeps their door-ways ;

She has blest their little children, as a priest or queen were she :

Far too tender, or too cruel far, her smile upon the poor was,

For I thought it was the same smile which she used to smile on *me*.

She has voters in the commons, she has lovers in the palace,

And of all the fair court-ladies, few have jewels half as fine ;

Oft the prince has named her beauty 'twixt the red wine and the chalice :

Oh, and what was *I* to love her ? my beloved, my Geraldine !

Yet I could not choose but love her : I was born to poet-uses,

To love all things set above me, all of good and all of fair.

Nymphs of mountain, not of valley, we are wont to call the Muses ;

And in nympholeptic climbing, poets pass from mount to star.

And because I was a poet, and because the public  
praised me,  
With a critical deduction for the modern writer's fault,  
I could sit at rich men's tables,—though the courtesies  
that raised me,  
Still suggested clear between us the pale spectrum of  
the salt.

And they praised me in her presence;—"Will your book  
appear this summer?"  
Then returning to each other—"Yes, our plans are for the  
moors."  
Then with whisper dropped behind me—"There he is! the  
latest comer.  
Oh, she only likes his verses! what is over, she endures.

"Quite low-born, self-educated! somewhat gifted though  
by nature,  
And we make a point of asking him,—of being very  
kind.  
You may speak, he does not hear you! and besides, he  
writes no satire,—  
All these serpents kept by charmers leave the natural sting  
behind."

I grew scornfuller, grew colder, as I stood up there among  
them,  
Till as frost intense will burn you, the cold scorning  
scorched my brow;  
When a sudden silver speaking, gravely cadenced, over-  
rung them,  
And a sudden silken stirring touched my inner nature  
through.

I looked upward and beheld her: with a calm and  
regnant spirit,  
Slowly round she swept her eyelids, and said clear before  
them all—  
"Have you such superfluous honour, sir, that able to  
confer it  
You will come down, Mister Bertram, as my guest to  
Wycombe Hall?"

Here she paused; she had been paler at the first word of her speaking,  
But because a silence followed it, blushed somewhat, as for shame,  
Then, as scorning her own feeling, resumed calmly—"I am seeking  
More distinction than these gentlemen think worthy of my claim.

"Ne'ertheless, you see, I seek it—not because I am a woman"

(Here her smile sprang like a fountain and, so, overflowed her mouth)

"But because my woods in Sussex have some purple shades at gloaming  
Which are worthy of a king in state, or poet in his youth.

"I invite you, Mister Bertram, to no scene for worldly speeches—

Sir, I scarce should dare—but only where God asked the thrushes first :

And if *you* will sing beside them, in the covert of my beeches,

I will thank you for the woodlands,—for the human world, at worst."

Then she smiled around right childly, then she gazed around right queenly,

And I bowed—I could not answer; alternated light and gloom—

While as one who quells the lions, with a steady eye serenely,

She, with level fronting eyelids, passed out stately from the room.

Oh, the blessed woods of Sussex, I can hear them still around me,

With their leafy tide of greenery still rippling up the wind.

Oh, the cursèd woods of Sussex! where the hunter's arrow found me,

When a fair face and a tender voice had made me mad and blind!

In that ancient hall of Wycombe thronged the numerous  
guests invited,  
And the lovely London ladies trod the floors with gliding  
feet ;  
And their voices low with fashion, not with feeling, softly  
freighted  
All the air about the windows with elastic laughters  
sweet.

For at eve the open windows flung their light out on the  
terrace,  
Which the floating orbs of curtains did with gradual  
shadow sweep,  
While the swans upon the river, fed at morning by the  
heiress,  
Trembled downward through their snowy wings at music  
in their sleep.

And there evermore was music, both of instrument and  
singing,  
Till the finches of the shrubberies grew restless in the  
dark ;  
But the cedars stood up motionless, each in a moonlight-  
ringing,  
And the deer, half in the glimmer, strewed the hollows of  
the park.

And though sometimes she would bind me with her silver-  
corded speeches  
To commix my words and laughter with the converse and  
the jest,  
Oft I sate apart and, gazing on the river through the beeches,  
Heard, as pure the swans swam down it, her pure voice  
o'erfloat the rest.

In the morning, horn of huntsman, hoof of steed and  
laugh of rider,  
Spread out cheery from the court-yard till we lost them  
in the hills,  
While herself and other ladies, and her suitors left  
beside her,  
Went a-wandering up the gardens through the laurels and  
abeles.

Thus, her foot upon the new-mown grass, bareheaded,  
 with the flowing  
 Of the virginal white vesture gathered closely to her  
 throat,  
 And the golden ringlets in her neck just quickened by  
 her going,  
 And appearing to breathe sun for air, and doubting if to  
 float,—

With a branch of dewy maple, which her right hand held  
 above her,  
 And which trembled a green shadow in betwixt her and  
 the skies,  
 As she turned her face in going, thus, she drew me on  
 to love her,  
 And to worship the divineness of the smile hid in her  
 eyes.

For her eyes alone smile constantly; her lips have serious  
 sweetness,  
 And her front is calm, the dimple rarely ripples on the  
 cheek;  
 But her deep blue eyes smile constantly, as if they in  
 discreetness  
 Kept the secret of a happy dream she did not care to  
 speak.

Thus she drew me the first morning, out across into the  
 garden,  
 And I walked among her noble friends and could not keep  
 behind.  
 Spake she unto all and unto me—"Behold, I am the  
 warden  
 Of the song-birds in these lindens, which are cages to their  
 mind.

"But within this swarded circle into which the lime-walk  
 brings us,  
 Whence the beeches, rounded greenly, stand away in  
 reverent fear,  
 I will let no music enter, saving what the fountain sings us,  
 Which the lilies round the basin may seem pure enough to  
 hear.

"The live air that waves the lilies waves the slender jet  
of water,  
Like a holy thought sent feebly up from soul of fasting saint :  
Whereby lies a marble Silence, sleeping, (Lough the  
sculptor wrought her)  
So asleep she is forgetting to say Hush !—a fancy quaint.

"Mark how heavy white her eyelids ! not a dream between  
them lingers ;  
And the left hand's index droppeth from the lips upon the  
cheek :  
While the right hand,—with the symbol-rose held slack  
within the fingers,—  
Has fallen backward in the basin—yet this Silence will not  
speak !

"That the essential meaning growing may exceed the  
special symbol,  
Is the thought as I conceive it : it applies more high and low.  
Our true noblemen will often through right nobleness grow  
humble,  
And assert an inward honour by denying outward show."

"Nay, your Silence," said I, "truly, holds her symbol rose  
but slackly,  
Yet *she holds it*, or would scarcely be a Silence to our ken :  
And your nobles wear their ermine on the outside, or walk  
blackly  
In the presence of the social law as mere ignoble men.

"Let the poets dream such dreaming ! madam, in these  
British islands  
'Tis the substance that wanes ever, 'tis the symbol that  
exceeds.  
Soon we shall have nought but symbol : and, for statues  
like this Silence,  
Shall accept the rose's image—in another case, the weed's."

"Not so quickly," she retorted,—*"I confess, where'er you  
go, you  
Find for things, names—shows for actions, and pure gold  
for honour clear :*  
But when all is run to symbol in the Social, I will throw you  
The world's book which now reads drily, and sit down with  
Silence here."

Half in playfulness she spoke, I thought, and half in  
 indignation ;  
 Friends who listened, laughed her words off, while her  
 lovers deemed her fair :  
 A fair woman, flushed with feeling, in her noble-lighted  
 station  
 Near the statue's white reposing—and both bathed in sunny  
 air !

With the trees round, not so distant but you heard their  
 vernal murmur,  
 And beheld in light and shadow the leaves in and outward  
 move,  
 And the little fountain leaping toward the sun-heart to be  
 warmer,  
 Then recoiling in a tremble from the too much light  
 above.—

'Tis a picture for remembrance. And thus, morning after  
 morning,  
 Did I follow as she drew me by the spirit to her feet.  
 Why, her grayhound followed also ! dogs—we both were  
 dogs for scorning—  
 To be sent back when she pleased it and her path lay  
 through the wheat.

And thus, morning after morning, spite of vows and spite  
 of sorrow,  
 Did I follow at her drawing, while the week-days passed  
 along ;  
 Just to feed the swans this noontide, or to see the fawns  
 to-morrow,  
 Or to teach the hill-side echo some sweet Tuscan in a  
 song.

Ay, for sometimes on the hill-side, while we sate down in  
 the gowans,  
 With the forest green behind us and its shadow cast  
 before,  
 And the river running under, and across it from the  
 rowans,  
 A brown partridge whirring near us till we felt the air it  
 bore,—

There, obedient to her praying, did I read aloud the  
 poems  
 Made to Tuscan flutes, or instruments more various o.  
 our own ;  
 Read the pastoral parts of Spenser, or the subtle inter-  
 flowings  
 Found in Petrarch's sonnets—here's the book, the leaf is  
 folded down !—

Or at times a modern volume, Wordsworth's solemn-  
 thoughted idyl,  
 Howitt's ballad-verse, or Tennyson's enchanted reverie,—  
 Or from Browning some "Pomegranate," which, if cut  
 deep down the middle,  
 Shows a heart within blood-tinctured, of a veined  
 humanity.

Or at times I read there, hoarsely, some new poem of my  
 making :  
 Poets ever fail in reading their own verses to their  
 worth,  
 For the echo in you breaks upon the words which you are  
 speaking,  
 And the chariot wheels jar in the gate through which you  
 drive them forth.

After, when we were grown tired of books, the silence  
 round us flinging  
 A slow arm of sweet compression, felt with beatings at the  
 breast,  
 She would break out on a sudden in a gush of woodland  
 singing,  
 Like a child's emotion in a god—a naiad tired of rest.

Oh, to see or hear her singing ! scarce I know which is  
 divinest,  
 For her looks sing too—she modulates her gestures on  
 the tune,  
 And her mouth stirs with the song, like song ; and when  
 the notes are finest,  
 'Tis the eyes that shoot out vocal light and seem to swell  
 them on.



Then we talked—oh, how we talked! her voice, so  
 cadenced in the talking,  
 Made another singing—of the soul! a music without  
 bars:  
 While the leafy sounds of woodlands, humming round  
 where we were walking,  
 Brought interposition worthy-sweet,—as skies about the  
 stars.

And she spake such good thoughts natural, as if she  
 always thought them;  
 She had sympathies so rapid, open, free as bird on  
 branch,  
 Just as ready to fly east as west, whichever way besought  
 them,  
 In the birchen-wood a chirrup, or a cock-crow in the  
 grange.

In her utmost lightness there is truth—and often she  
 speaks lightly;  
 Has a grace in being gay which even mournful souls  
 approve,  
 For the root of some grave earnest thought is understruck  
 so rightly  
 As to justify the foliage and the waving flowers above.

And she talked on—*we* talked, rather! upon all things—  
 substance—shadow—  
 Of the sheep that browsed the grasses—of the reapers in  
 the corn—  
 Of the little children from the schools, seen winding  
 through the meadow—  
 Of the poor rich world beyond them, still kept poorer by  
 its scorn.

So, of men, and so, of letters—books are men of higher  
 stature,  
 And the only men that speak aloud for future times to  
 hear;  
 So, of mankind in the abstract, which grows slowly into  
 nature,  
 Yet will lift the cry of “progress,” as it trod from sphere  
 to sphere.

And her custom was to praise me when I said,—“The Age  
 culls simples,  
 With a broad clown's back turned broadly to the glory of  
 the stars.  
 We are gods by our own reck'ning, and may well shut up  
 the temples,  
 And wield on, amid the incense-steam, the thunder of our  
 cars.

“For we throw out acclamations of self-thanking, self-  
 admiring,  
 With, at every mile run faster,—‘O the wondrous  
 wondrous age!’  
 Little thinking if we work our SOULS as nobly as our  
 iron,  
 Or if angels will commend us at the goal of pilgrimage.

“Why, what is this patient entrance into nature's deep  
 resources,  
 But the child's most gradual learning to walk upright  
 without bane?—  
 When we drive out, from the cloud of steam, majestic  
 white horses,  
 Are we greater than the first men who led black ones by  
 the mane?”

“If we trod the deeps of ocean, if we struck the stars in  
 rising,  
 If we wrapped the globe intensely with one hot electric  
 breath,  
 'Twere but power within our tether—no new spirit-power  
 comprising—  
 And in life we were not greater men, nor bolder men in  
 death.”

She was patient with my talking; and I loved her—loved  
 her certes,  
 As I loved all heavenly objects, with uplifted eyes and  
 hands;  
 As I loved pure inspirations, loved the graces, loved the  
 virtues,—  
 In a Love content with writing his own name on desert  
 sands.

Or at least I thought so, purely; thought no idiot Hope  
 was raising  
 Any crown to crown Love's silence, silent Love that sate  
 alone:  
 Out, alas! the stag is like me—he that tries to go on  
 grazing  
 With the great deep gun-wound in his neck, then reels  
 with sudden moan.

It was thus I reeled. I told you that her hand had many  
 suitors;  
 But she smiles them down imperially as Venus did the  
 waves,  
 And with such a gracious coldness that they cannot press  
 their futures  
 On the present of her courtesy, which yieldingly enslaves.

And this morning, as I sat alone within the inner  
 chamber  
 With the great saloon beyond it, lost in pleasant thought  
 serene,  
 For I had been reading Camöens—that poem you  
 remember,  
 Which his lady's eyes are praised in, as the sweetest ever  
 seen.

And the book lay open, and my thought flew from it,  
 taking from it  
 A vibration and impulsion to an end beyond its own,  
 As the branch of a green osier, when a child would  
 overcome it,  
 Springs up freely from his clasping and goes swinging  
 in the sun.

As I mused I heard a murmur; it grew deep as it grew  
 longer—  
 Speakers using earnest language—"Lady Geraldine, you  
*would!*"  
 And I heard a voice that pleaded, ever on in accents  
 stronger,  
 As a sense of reason gave it power to make its rhetoric  
 good.

Well I knew that voice ; it was an earl's, of soul that  
 matched his station—

Soul completed into lordship, might and right read on  
 his brow ;

Very finely courteous ; far too proud to doubt his domination  
 Of the common people, he atones for grandeur by a bow.

High straight forehead, nose of eagle, cold blue eyes of  
 less expression

Than resistance—coldly casting off the looks of other men,  
 As steel, arrows ; unelastic lips which seem to taste  
 possession,

And be cautious lest the common air should injure or  
 distract.

For the rest, accomplished, upright,—ay, and standing  
 by his order

With a bearing not ungraceful ; fond of art and letters too ;  
 Just a good man made a proud man,—as the sandy rocks  
 that border

A wild coast, by circumstances, in a regnant ebb and flow.

Thus, I knew that voice, I heard it, and I could not help  
 the hearkening :

In the room I stood up blindly, and my burning heart  
 within

Seemed to seethe and fuse my senses till they ran on all  
 sides darkening,

And scorched, weighed, like melted metal, round my feet  
 that stood therein.

And that voice, I heard it pleading, for love's sake—for  
 wealth, position,

For the sake of liberal uses and great actions to be done—

And she interrupted gently, "Nay, my lord, the old  
 tradition

Of your Normans, by some worthier hand than mine is,  
 should be won."

"Ah, that white hand!" he said quickly,—and in his  
 he either drew it,

Or attempted—for with gravity and instance she replied—

"Nay indeed, my lord, this talk is vain, and we had best  
 eschew it,

And pass on, like friends, to other points less easy to decide."

What he said again, I know not: it is likely that his  
trouble  
Worked his pride up to the surface, for she answered in  
slow scorn,  
“And your lordship judges rightly. Whom I marry, shall  
be noble,  
Ay, and wealthy. I shall never blush to think how he  
was born.”

There, I maddened! her words stung me. Life swept  
through me into fever,  
And my soul sprang up astonished, sprang full-statured  
in an hour.  
Know you what it is when anguish, with apocalyptic  
NEVER,  
To a Pythian height dilates you,—and despair sublimes  
to power?

From my brain the soul-wings budded—waved a flame  
about my body,  
Whence conventions coiled to ashes. I felt self-drawn out,  
as man,  
From amalgamate false natures, and I saw the skies grow  
ruddy  
With the deepening feet of angels, and I knew what  
spirits can.

I was mad—inspired—say either! (anguish worketh  
inspiration)  
Was a man, or beast—perhaps so, for the tiger roars when  
speared;  
And I walked on, step by step, along the level of my  
passion—  
Oh my soul! and passed the doorway to her face, and never  
feared.

*He* had left her, peradventure, when my footstep proved  
my coming,  
But for *her*—she half arose, then sate, grew scarlet and  
grew pale.  
Oh, she trembled! 'tis so always with a worldly man or  
woman,  
In the presence of true spirits; what else *can* they do but  
quail?

Oh, she fluttered like a tame bird, in among its forest-  
 brothers,  
 Far too strong for it ; then drooping, bowed her face upon  
 her hands ;  
 And I spake out wildly, fiercely, brutal truths of her and  
 others :  
 I, she planted in the desert, swathed her, windlike, with  
 my sands.

I plucked up her social fictions, bloody-rooted though leaf-  
 verdant,  
 Trod them down with words of shaming,—all the purple  
 and the gold,  
 All the “landed stakes” and lordships—all, that spirits  
 pure and ardent  
 Are cast out of love and honour, because chancing not  
 to hold.

“For myself I do not argue,” said I, “though I love you,  
 madam,  
 But for better souls that nearer to the height of yours have  
 trod :  
 And this age shows, to my thinking, still more infidels  
 to Adam  
 Than directly, by profession, simple infidels to God.

“Yet, O God,” I said, “O grave,” I said, “O mother’s  
 heart and bosom,  
 With whom first and last are equal, saint and corpse and  
 little child !  
 We are fools to your deductions, in these figments of  
 heart-closing ;  
 We are traitors to your causes, in these sympathies  
 defiled.

“Learn more reverence, madam, not for rank or wealth—  
*that* needs no learning,  
*That* comes quickly—quick as sin does, ay, and culminates  
 to sin ;  
 But for Adam’s seed, MAN ! Trust me, ’tis a clay above  
 your scorning,  
 With God’s image stamped upon it, and God’s kindling  
 breath within.

“What right have you, madam, gazing in your palace  
 mirror daily,  
 Getting so, by heart, your beauty, which all others must  
 adore,  
 While you draw the golden ringlets down your fingers, to  
 vow gaily,  
 You will wed no man that's only good to God, and nothing  
 more ?

“Why, what right have you, made fair by that same God,  
 the sweetest woman  
 Of all women He has fashioned—with your lovely spirit-face,  
 Which would seem too near to vanish if its smile were not  
 so human,  
 And your voice of holy sweetness, turning common words  
 to grace :

“What right *can* you have, God's other works to scorn,  
 despise, revile them  
 In the gross, as mere men, broadly—not as *noble* men,  
 forsooth,—  
 As mere Parias of the outer world, forbidden to assoil them,  
 In the hope of living,—dying,—near that sweetness of your  
 mouth ?

“Have you any answer, madam ? If my spirit were less  
 earthly,  
 If its instrument were gifted with a better silver string,  
 I would kneel down where I stand, and say—Behold me !  
 I am worthy  
 Of thy loving, for I love thee. I am worthy as a king.

“As it is—your ermined pride, I swear, shall feel this  
 stain upon her,  
 That *I*, poor, weak, tost with passion, scorned by me  
 and you again,  
 Love you, madam—dare to love you—to my grief and  
 your dishonour—  
 To my endless desolation, and your impotent disdain !”

More mad words like these—mere madness ! friend, I  
 need not write them fuller,  
 For I hear my hot soul dropping on the lines in showers  
 of tears.

Oh, a woman! friend, a woman! why, a beast had scarce  
 been duller  
 Than roar bestial loud complaints against the shining of  
 the spheres.

But at last there came a pause. I stood all vibrating with  
 thundér,  
 Which my soul had used. The silence drew her face up  
 like a call.  
 Could you guess what word she uttered? She looked  
 up, as if in wonder,  
 With tears beaded on her lashes, and said—"Bertram!"  
 it was all.

If she had cursed me—and she might have—or if even,  
 with queenly bearing,  
 Which at need is used by women, she had risen up  
 and said,  
 "Sir, you are my guest, and therefore I have given you  
 a full hearing:  
 Now, beseech you, choose a name exacting somewhat  
 less, instead!"—

I had borne it: but that "Bertram"—why, it lies there  
 on the paper  
 A mere word, without her accent, and you cannot judge  
 the weight  
 Of the calm which crushed my passion: I seemed  
 drowning in a vapour;  
 And her gentleness destroyed me whom her scorn made  
 desolate.

So, struck backward and exhausted by that inward flow  
 of passion  
 Which had rushed on, sparing nothing, into forms of  
 abstract truth,  
 By a logic agonising through unseemly demonstration,  
 And by youth's own anguish turning grimly gray the  
 hairs of youth,—

By the sense accursed and instant, that if even I spake  
 wisely  
 I spake basely—using truth, if what I spake indeed was  
 true,



To avenge wrong on a woman—*her*, who sate there  
 weighing nicely  
 A poor manhood's worth, found guilty of such deeds as  
 I could do!—

By such wrong and woe exhausted—what I suffered and  
 occasioned,—  
 As a wild horse through a city runs with lightning in  
 his eyes,  
 And then dashing at a church's cold and passive wall,  
 impassioned,  
 Strikes the death into his burning brain, and blindly  
 drops and dies—

So I fell, struck down before her—do you blame me,  
 friend, for weakness?  
 'Twas my strength of passion slew me!—fell before her  
 like a stone;  
 Fast the dreadful world rolled from me, on its roaring  
 wheels of blackness:  
 When the light came I was lying in this chamber and alone.

Oh, of course, she charged her lacqueys to bear out the  
 sickly burden,  
 And to cast it from her scornful sight, but not *beyond*  
 the gate;  
 She is too kind to be cruel, and too haughty not to pardon  
 Such a man as I; 'twere something to be level to her hate.

But for me—you now are conscious why, my friend, I  
 write this letter,  
 How my life is read all backward, and the charm of life  
 undone.  
 I shall leave her house at dawn; I would to-night, if I  
 were better—  
 And I charge my soul to hold my body strengthened for  
 the sun.

When the sun has dyed the oriel, I depart, with no last  
 gazes,  
 No weak moanings, (one word only, left in writing for  
 her hands,)  
 Out of reach of all derision, and some unavailing praises,  
 To make front against this anguish in the far and foreign  
 lands.

Blame me not. I would not squander life in grief—I  
am abstemious.

I but nurse my spirit's falcon that its wing may soar  
again.

There's no room for tears of weakness in the blind eyes of a  
Phemius :

Into work the poet kneads them, and he does not die *till*  
*then.*

#### CONCLUSION.

Bertram finished the last pages, while along the silence  
ever

Still in hot and heavy splashes fell the tears on every leaf.

Having ended, he leans backward in his chair, with lips  
that quiver

From the deep unspoken, ay, and deep unwritten thoughts  
of grief.

Soh! how still the lady standeth! 'Tis a dream—a dream  
of mercies!

'Twixt the purple lattice-curtains, how she standeth still  
and pale!

'Tis a vision, sure, of mercies, sent to soften his self  
curses,

Sent to sweep a patient quiet o'er the tossing of his wail.

"Eyes," he said, "now throbbing through me! are ye  
eyes that did undo me?"

Shining eyes, like antique jewels set in Parian statue-  
stone!

Underneath that calm white forehead, are ye ever burning  
torrid,

O'er the desolate sand-desert of my heart and life undone?"

With a murmurous stir, uncertain, in the air, the purple  
curtain

Swelleth in and swelleth out around her motionless pale  
brows,

While the gliding of the river sends a rippling noise for  
ever

Through the open casement whitened by the moonlight's  
slant repose.

Said he—"Vision of a lady! stand there silent, stand there steady!

Now I see it plainly, plainly; now I cannot hope or doubt—  
There, the brows of mild repression—there, the lips of  
silent passion,

Curvèd like an archer's bow, to send the bitter arrows out."

Ever, evermore the while in a slow silence she kept  
smiling,

And approached him slowly, slowly, in a gliding measured  
pace;

With her two white hands extended, as if praying one  
offended,

And a look of supplication, gazing earnest in his face.

Said he—"Wake me by no gesture,—sound of breath, or  
stir of vesture!

Let the blessèd apparition melt not yet to its divine!

No approaching—hush, no breathing! or my heart must  
swoon to death in

The too utter life thou bringest, O thou dream of  
Geraldine!"

Ever, evermore the while in a slow silence she kept  
smiling,—

But the tears ran over lightly from her eyes, and  
tenderly:—

"Dost thou, Bertram, truly love me? Is no woman far  
above me

Found more worthy of thy poet-heart, than such a one  
as I?"

Said he—"I would dream so ever, like the flowing of that  
river,

Flowing ever in a shadow, greenly onward to the sea!

So, thou vision of all sweetness, princely to a full  
completeness

Would my heart and life flow onward—deathward—through  
this dream of THEE!"

Ever, evermore the while in a slow silence she kept  
smiling,

While the silver tears ran faster down the blushing of her  
cheeks;

Then with both her hands enfolding both of his, she softly  
told him,  
"Bertram, if I say I love thee, . . . 'tis the vision only  
speaks."

Softened, quickened to adore her, on his knees he fell  
before her,  
And she whispered low in triumph,—“It shall be as I  
have sworn!  
Very rich he is in virtues, very noble—noble, certes;  
And I shall not blush in knowing that men call him lowly  
born.”

## RHYME OF THE DUCHESS MAY.

## I.

To the belfrey, one by one, went the ringers from the sun,—  
*Toll slowly.*  
And the oldest ringer said, “Ours is music for the Dead,  
When the rebecks are all done.”

## II.

Six abeles i' the churchyard grow, on the northside in a  
row,—  
*Toll slowly.*  
And the shadows of their tops rock across the little slopes  
Of the grassy graves below.

## III.

On the south side and the west, a small river runs in haste,—  
*Toll slowly.*  
And between the river flowing, and the fair green trees  
a-growing,  
Do the dead lie at their rest.

## IV.

On the east I sate that day, up against a willow gray :—  
*Toll slowly.*  
Through the rain of willow-branches, I could see the low  
hill-ranges,  
And the river on its way.

## V.

There I sate beneath the tree, and the bell tolled solemnly,—  
*Toll slowly.*

While the trees' and river's voices flowed between the  
solemn noises,—

Yet death seemed more loud to me.

## VI.

There, I read this ancient rhyme, while the bell did all the  
time

*Toll slowly.*

And the solemn knell fell in with the tale of life and sin,  
Like a rhythmic fate sublime.

## THE RHYME.

## I.

Broad the forest stood (I read) on the hills of Linteged,—  
*Toll slowly.*

And three hundred years had stood, mute adown each  
hoary wood,

Like a full heart, having prayed.

## II.

And the little birds sang east, and the little birds sang west,—  
*Toll slowly.*

And but little thought was theirs, of the silent antique years,  
In the building of their nest.

## III.

Down the sun dropt, large and red, on the towers of  
Linteged,—

*Toll slowly.*

Lance and spear upon the height, bristling strange in fiery  
light,

While the castle stood in shade.

## IV.

There, the castle stood up black, with the red sun at its  
back,—

*Toll slowly,*

Like a sullen smouldering pyre, with a top that flickers fire,  
When the wind is on its track.

## V.

And five hundred archers tall did besiege the castle wall,—  
*Toll slowly,*  
 And the castle, seethed in blood, fourteen days and nights  
 had stood,  
 And to-night was near its fall.

## VI.

Yet thereunto, blind to doom, three months since, a bride  
 did come,—  
*Toll slowly.*  
 One who proudly trod the floors, and softly whispered in  
 the doors,  
 “May good angels bless our home.”

## VII.

Oh, a bride of queenly eyes, with a front of constancies,—  
*Toll slowly.*  
 Oh, a bride of cordial mouth,—where the untired smile of  
 youth  
 Did light outward its own sighs.

## VIII.

’Twas a Duke’s fair orphan-girl, and her uncle’s ward, the  
 Earl,  
*Toll slowly.*  
 Who betrothed her twelve years old, for the sake of dowry  
 gold,  
 To his son Lord Leigh, the churl.

## IX.

But what time she had made good all her years of woman-  
 hood,—  
*Toll slowly.*  
 Unto both these Lords of Leigh spake she out right  
 sovranly,  
 “My will runneth as my blood.

## X.

“And while this same blood makes red this same right  
 hand’s veins,” she said,—  
*Toll slowly.*  
 “’Tis my will, as lady free, not to wed a Lord of Leigh,  
 But Sir Guy of Linteged.”

XI.

The old Earl he smiled smooth, then he sighed for wilful youth,—

*Toll slowly.*

“Good my niece, that hand withal looketh somewhat soft and small

For so large a will, in sooth.”

XII.

She too smiled by that same sign,—but her smile was cold and fine,—

*Toll slowly.*

“Little hand clasps nuckle gold; or it were not worth the hold

Of thy son, good uncle mine!”

XIII.

Then the young Lord jerked his breath, and sware thickly in his teeth,—

*Toll slowly.*

“He would wed his own betrothed, an she loved him an she loathed,

Let the life come or the death.”

XIV.

Up she rose with scornful eyes, as her father’s child might rise,—

*Toll slowly.*

“Thy hound’s blood, my Lord of Leigh, stains thy knightly heel,” quoth she,

“And he moans not where he lies :

XV.

“But a woman’s will dies hard, in the hall or on the sward!”—

*Toll slowly.*

“By that grave, my lords, which made me orphaned girl and dowered lady,

I deny you wife and ward.”

## XVI.

Unto each she bowed her head, and swept past with lofty tread,—

*Toll slowly.*

Ere the midnight-bell had ceased, in the chapel had the priest

Blessed her, bride of Linteged.

## XVII.

Fast and fain the bridal train along the night-storm rode  
amain:—

*Toll slowly.*

Hard the steeds of lord and serf struck their hoofs out on  
the turf,

In the pauses of the rain.

## XVIII.

Fast and fain the kinsmen's train along the storm pursued  
amain,—

*Toll slowly.*

Steed on steed-track, dashing off—thickening, doubling,  
hoof on hoof,

In the pauses of the rain.

## XIX.

And the bridegroom led the flight, on his red-roan steed of  
might,—

*Toll slowly.*

And the bride lay on his arm, still, as if she feared no  
harm,

Smiling out into the night.

## XX.

“Dost thou fear?” he said at last;—“Nay!” she answered  
him in haste,—

*Toll slowly.*

“Not such death as we could find—only life with one  
behind—

Ride on fast as fear—ride fast!”



## XXI.

Up the mountain wheeled the steed—girth to ground, and  
fetlocks spread,—

*Toll slowly.*

Headlong bounds, and rocking flanks,—down he staggered  
—down the banks,

To the towers of Linteged.

## XXII.

High and low the serfs looked out, red the flambeaus tossed  
about,—

*Toll slowly.*

In the courtyard rose the cry — “Live the Duchess and  
Sir Guy!”

But she never heard them shout.

## XXIII.

On the steed she dropped her cheek, kissed his mane and  
kissed his neck,—

*Toll slowly.*

“I had happier died by thee, than lived on a Lady  
Leigh,”

Were the first words she did speak.

## XXIV.

But a three months' joyaunce lay 'twixt that moment and  
to-day,—

*Toll slowly.*

When five hundred archers tall stand beside the castle  
wall,

To recapture Duchess May.

## XXV.

And the castle standeth black, with the red sun at its  
back,—

*Toll slowly.*

And a fortnight's siege is done—and, except the Duchess,  
none

Can misdoubt the coming wrack.

## XXVI.

Then the captain, young Lord Leigh, with his eyes so gray  
of blee,—

*Toll slowly.*

And thin lips, that scarcely sheathe the cold white gnashing  
of his teeth,

Gnashed in smiling, absently,—

## XXVII.

Cried aloud—"So goes the day, bridegroom fair of  
Duchess May!"—

*Toll slowly.*

"Look thy last upon that sun. If thou seest to-morrow's  
one,

'Twill be through a foot of clay.

## XXVIII.

"Ha, fair bride! Dost hear no sound, save that moaning  
of the hound?"—

*Toll slowly.*

"Thou and I have parted troth,—yet I keep my vengeance-  
oath,

And the other may come round.

## XXIX.

"Ha! thy will is brave to dare, and thy new love past  
compare,"—

*Toll slowly.*

"Yet thine old love's faulchion brave is as strong a thing  
to have,

As the will of lady fair.

## XXX.

"Peck on blindly, netted dove!—If a wife's name thee  
behave,"—

*Toll slowly.*

"Thou shalt wear the same to-morrow, ere the grave has  
hid the sorrow

Of thy last ill-mated love.

XXXI.

“O'er his fixed and silent mouth, thou and I will call back  
troth,”—

*Toll slowly.*

“He shall altar be and priest,—and he will not cry at least  
‘I forbid you—I am loth!’

XXXII.

“I will wring thy fingers pale in the gauntlet of my mail,”—

*Toll slowly.*

“‘Little hand and muckle gold’ close shall lie within my  
hold,

As the sword did to prevail.”

XXXIII.

Oh, the little birds sang east, and the little birds sang west,—

*Toll slowly.*

Oh, and laughed the Duchess May, and her soul did put  
away

All his boasting, for a jest.

XXXIV.

In her chamber did she sit, laughing low to think of it,—

*Toll slowly.*

“Tower is strong and will is free—thou canst boast, my  
Lord of Leigh,—

But thou boastest little wit.”

XXXV.

In her tire-glass gazed she, and she blushed right womanly,—

*Toll slowly.*

She blushed half from her disdain—half, her beauty was so  
plain,

—“Oath for oath, my Lord of Leigh !

XXXVI.

Straight she called her maidens in—“Since ye gave me  
blame herein,”—

*Toll slowly.*

“That a bridal such as mine should lack gauds to make it  
fine,

Come and shrive me from that sin.

## XXXVII.

"It is three months gone to-day since I gave mine hand  
away :"—

*Toll slowly.*

"Bring the gold and bring the gem, we will keep bride-  
state in them,  
While we keep the foe at bay.

## XXXVIII.

"On your arms I loose mine hair ;—comb it smooth and  
crown it fair,"—

*Toll slowly.*

"I would look in purple-pall from this lattice down the wall  
And throw scorn to one that's there !"

## XXXIX.

Oh, the little birds sang east, and the little birds sang west,—  
*Toll slowly.*

On the tower the castle's lord leant in silence on his sword,  
With an anguish in his breast.

## XL.

With a spirit-laden weight did he lean down passionate,—  
*Toll slowly.*

They have almost sapped the wall,—they will enter there-  
withal,  
With no knocking at the gate.

## XLI.

Then the sword he leant upon, shivered—snapped upon the  
stone,—

*Toll slowly.*

"Sword," he thought, with inward laugh, "ill thou  
servest for a staff,  
When thy nobler use is done !

## XLII.

"Sword, thy nobler use is done !—tower is lost, and shame  
begun :"—

*Toll slowly.*

"If we met them in the breach, hilt to hilt or speech to  
speech,  
We should die there, each for one.

## XLIII.

“If we met them at the wall, we should singly, vainly  
fall,”—

*Toll slowly.*

“But if *I* die here alone,—then I die, who am but one,  
And die nobly for them all.

## XLIV.

“Five true friends lie for my sake—in the moat and in the  
brake ;”—

*Toll slowly.*

“Thirteen warriors lie at rest, with a black wound in the  
breast,  
And not one of these will wake.

## XLV.

“So no more of this shall be !—heart-blood weighs too  
heavily,”—

*Toll slowly.*

“And I could not sleep in grave, with the faithful and the  
brave  
Heaped around and over me.

## XLVI.

“Since young Clare a mother hath, and young Ralph a  
plighted faith,”—

*Toll slowly.*

“Since my pale young sister’s cheeks blush like rose when  
Ronald speaks,  
Albeit never a word she saith—

## XLVII.

“These shall never die for me—life-blood falls too  
heavily :”—

*Toll slowly.*

“And if *I* die here apart,—o’er my dead and silent  
heart  
They shall pass out safe and free.

## XLVIII.

“When the foe hath heard it said—‘Death holds Guy of  
Lintege,’”—

*Toll slowly.*

“That new corse new peace shall bring; and a blessed,  
blessèd thing  
Shall the stone be at its head.

## XLIX.

“Then my friends shall pass out free, and shall bear my  
memory,”—

*Toll slowly.*

“Then my foes shall sleek their pride, soothing fair my  
widowed bride,  
Whose sole sin was love of me.

## L.

“With their words all smooth and sweet, they will front her  
and entreat :”—

*Toll slowly.*

“And their purple pall will spread underneath her fainting  
head,  
While her tears drop over it.

## LI.

“She will weep her woman’s tears, she will pray her  
woman’s prayers,”—

*Toll slowly.*

“But her heart is young in pain, and her hopes will spring  
again  
By the suntime of her years.

## LII.

“Ah, sweet May—ah, sweetest grief!—once I vowed thee  
my belief,”—

*Toll slowly.*

“That thy name expressed thy sweetness,—May of poets,  
in completeness!  
Now my May-day seemeth brief.”

LIII.

All these silent thoughts did swim o'er his eyes grown  
strange and dim,—

*Toll slowly.*

Till his true men in the place wished they stood there face  
to face

With the foe instead of him.

LIV.

“One last oath, my friends, that wear faithful hearts to do  
and dare!”

*Toll slowly.*

“Tower must fall, and bride be lost!—swear me service  
worth the cost,”

—Bold they stood around to swear.

LV.

“Each man clasp my hand, and swear, by the deed we  
failed in there,”—

*Toll slowly.*

“Not for vengeance, not for right, will ye strike one blow  
to-night!”—

Pale they stood around—to swear.

LVI.

“One last boon, young Ralph and Clare! faithful hearts to  
do and dare!”

*Toll slowly.*

“Bring that steed up from his stall, which she kissed before  
you all,—

Guide him up the turret-stair.

LVII.

“Ye shall harness him aright, and lead upward to this  
height!”—

*Toll slowly.*

“Once in love and twice in war, hath he borne me strong  
and far,—

He shall bear me far to-night.”

## LVIII.

Then his men looked to and fro, when they heard him  
speaking so,—

*Toll slowly.*

—“Las! the noble heart,” they thought,—“he in sooth is  
grief-distraught.—

Would we stood here with the foe!”

## LIX.

But a fire flashed from his eye, 'twixt their thought and  
their reply,—

*Toll slowly.*

“Have ye so much time to waste? We who ride here,  
must ride fast,

As we wish our foes to fly.”

## LX.

They have fetched the steed with care, in the harness he  
did wear,—

*Toll slowly.*

Past the court and through the doors, across the rushes of  
the floors;

But they goad him up the stair.

## LXI.

Then from out her bower chambère did the Duchess May  
repair,—

*Toll slowly.*

“Tell me now what is your need,” said the lady, “of this  
steed,

That ye goad him up the stair?”

## LXII.

Calm she stood! unbodkined through, fell her dark hair  
to her shoe,—

*Toll slowly.*

And the smile upon her face, ere she left the tiring-glass,  
Had not time enough to go.



## LXIII.

“Get thee back, sweet Duchess May! hope is gone like  
yesterday,”—

*Toll slowly.*

“One half-hour completes the breach; and thy lord grows  
wild of speech.—

Get thee in, sweet lady, and pray.

## LXIV.

“In the east tower, high’st of all,—loud he cries for steed  
from stall,”—

*Toll slowly.*

“ ‘He would ride as far,’ quoth he, ‘as for love and victory,  
Though he rides the castle-wall.’

## LXV.

“And we fetch the steed from stall, up where never a hoof  
did fall.”—

*Toll slowly.*

“Wifely prayer meets deathly need! may the sweet  
Heavens hear thee plead,

If he rides the castle-wall.”

## LXVI.

Low she dropt her head, and lower, till her hair coiled  
on the floor,—

*Toll slowly.*

And tear after tear you heard, fall distinct as any word  
Which you might be listening for.

## LXVII.

“Get thee in, thou soft lady!—here, is never a place for  
thee!”

*Toll slowly.*

“Braid thine hair and clasp thy gown, that thy beauty in  
its moan

May find grace with Leigh of Leigh.”

## LXVIII.

She stood up in bitter case, with a pale yet steady face,—

*Toll slowly.*

Like a statue thunderstruck, which, though quivering,  
seems to look

Right against the thunder-place.

## LXIX.

And her foot trod in, with pride, her own tears i' the stone  
beside,—

*Toll slowly.*

“Go to, faithful friends, go to!—Judge no more what  
ladies do,—

No, nor how their lords may ride !”

## LXX.

Then the good steed's rein she took, and his neck did kiss  
and stroke :—

*Toll slowly.*

Soft he neighed to answer her ; and then followed up the  
stair,

For the love of her sweet look.

## LXXI.

Oh, and steeply, steeply wound up the narrow stair  
around,—

*Toll slowly.*

Oh, and closely, closely speeding, step by step beside her  
treading,

Did he follow, meek as hound.

## LXXII.

On the east tower, high'st of all,—there, where never a  
hoof did fall,—

*Toll slowly.*

Out they swept, a vision steady,—noble steed and lovely  
lady,

Calm as if in bower or stall.

LXXIII.

Down she knelt at her lord's knee, and she looked up  
silently,—

*Toll slowly.*

And he kissed her twice and thrice, for that look within her  
eyes,

Which he could not bear to see.

LXXIV.

Quoth he, "Get thee from this strife,—and the sweet saints  
bless thy life!"—

*Toll slowly.*

In this hour, I stand in need of my noble red-roan steed—  
But no more of my noble wife."

LXXV.

Quoth she, "Meekly have I done all thy biddings under  
sun:"—

*Toll slowly.*

"But by all my womanhood,—which is proved so, true and  
good,

I will never do this one.

LXXVI.

"Now, by womanhood's degree, and by wifhood's  
verity,"—

*Toll slowly.*

"In this hour if thou hast need of thy noble red-roan steed,  
Thou hast also need of *me*.

LXXVII.

"By this golden ring ye see on this lifted hand, pardiè,"—

*Toll slowly.*

"If, this hour, on castle wall, can be room for steed from  
stall,

Shall be also room for *me*.

LXXVIII.

"So the sweet saints with me be," (did she utter solemnly),—

*Toll slowly.*

"If a man, this eventide, on this castle wall will ride,  
He shall ride the same with *me*."

## LXXIX.

Oh, he sprang up in the selle, and he laughed out bitter-  
well,—

*Toll slowly.*

“Wouldst thou ride among the leaves, as we used on other  
eves,

To hear chime a vesper-bell?”

## LXXX.

She clang closer to his knee—“Ay, beneath the cypress-  
tree!”—

*Toll slowly.*

“Mock me not; for otherwhere, than along the greenwood  
fair,

Have I ridden fast with thee!

## LXXXI.

“Fast I rode, with new-made vows, from my angry  
kinsman’s house!”

*Toll slowly.*

“What! and would you men should reckon, that I dared  
more for love’s sake,

As a bride than as a spouse?

## LXXXII.

“What, and would you it should fall, as a proverb, before  
all,”—

*Toll slowly,*

“That a bride may keep your side, while through castle-  
gate you ride,

Yet eschew the castle-wall?”

## LXXXIII.

Ho! the breach yawns into ruin, and roars up against her  
suing,—

*Toll slowly.*

With the inarticulate din, and the dreadful falling in—  
Shrieks of doing and undoing!

## LXXXIV.

Twice he wrung her hands in twain,—but the small hands  
closed again,—

*Toll slowly.*

Back he reined the steed—back, back! but she trailed  
along his track,

With a frantic clasp and strain.

## LXXXV.

Evermore the foemen pour through the crash of window  
and door,—

*Toll slowly.*

And the shouts of Leigh and Leigh, and the shrieks of  
“kill!” and “flee!”

Strike up clear the general roar.

## LXXXVI.

Thrice he wrung her hands in twain,—but they closed and  
clung again,—

*Toll slowly.*

Wild she clung, as one, withstood, clasps a Christ upon  
the rood,

In a spasm of deadly pain.

## LXXXVII.

She clung wild and she clung mute,—with her shuddering  
lips half-shut,—

*Toll slowly.*

Her head fallen as in swoond,—hair and knee swept on the  
ground,—

She clung wild to stirrup and foot.

## LXXXVIII.

Back he reined his steed, back thrown on the slippery  
coping-stone,—

*Toll slowly.*

Back the iron hoofs did grind, on the battlement behind,  
Whence a hundred feet went down:

## LXXXIX.

And his heel did press and goad on the quivering flank  
bestrode,—

*Toll slowly.*

‘Friends, and brothers! save my wife!—Pardon, sweet,  
in change for life,—  
But I ride alone to God.’

## XC.

Straight as if the Holy Name had upbreathed her like a  
flame,—

*Toll slowly.*

She upsprang, she rose upright—in his selle she sate in  
sight ;  
By her love she overcame.

## XCI.

And her head was on his breast, where she smiled as one  
at rest,—

*Toll slowly.*

“Ring,” she cried, “O vesper-bell, in the beechwood’s old  
chappelle !  
But the passing-bell rings best.”

## XCII.

They have caught out at the rein, which Sir Guy threw  
loose—in vain,—

*Toll slowly.*

For the horse in stark despair, with his front hoofs poised  
in air,  
On the last verge, rears amain.

## XCIII.

And he hangs, he rocks between—and his nostrils curdle  
in,—

*Toll slowly.*

And he shivers head and hoof—and the flakes of foam fall  
off ;  
And his face grows fierce and thin !

XCIV.

And a look of human woe, from his staring eyes did go,—  
*Toll slowly.*  
 And a sharp cry uttered he, in a foretold agony  
 Of the headlong death below,—

XCV.

And, “Ring, ring, thou passing-bell,” still she cried, “i’  
 the old chapelle!”—  
*Toll slowly.*  
 Then back-toppling, crashing back—a dead weight flung  
 out to wrack,  
 Horse and riders overfell.

I.

Oh, the little birds sang east, and the little birds sang  
 west,—  
*Toll slowly.*  
 And I read this ancient Rhyme, in the kirkyard, while the  
 chime  
 Slowly tolled for one at rest.

II.

The abeles moved in the sun, and the river smooth did  
 run,—  
*Toll slowly.*  
 And the ancient Rhyme rang strange, with its passion and  
 its change,  
 Here, where all done lay undone.

III.

And beneath a willow-tree I a little grave did see,—  
*Toll slowly.*  
 Where was graved,—“HERE UNDEFILED, LIETH MAUD, A  
 THREE-YEAR CHILD,  
 EIGHTEEN HUNDRED, FORTY-THREE.”

## IV.

Then, O Spirits—did I say—ye who rode so fast that day,—

*Toll slowly.*

Did star-wheels and angel-wings, with their holy  
winnowings,

Keep beside you all the way?

## V.

Though in passion ye would dash, with a blind and  
heavy crash,

*Toll slowly.*

Up against the thick-bossed shield of God's judgment  
in the field,—

Though your heart and brain were rash,—

## VI.

Now, your will is all unwilling—now, your pulses are all  
stilled,—

*Toll slowly.*

Now, ye lie as meek and mild (whereso laid) as Maud the  
child,

Whose small grave was lately filled.

## VII.

Beating heart and burning brow, ye are very patient  
now,—

*Toll slowly.*

And the children might be bold to pluck the kingscups  
from your mould,

Ere a month had let them grow.

## VIII.

And you let the goldfinch sing, in the alder near, in spring,—

*Toll slowly.*

Let her build her nest, and sit all the three weeks out  
on it,

Murmuring not at anything.



## IX.

In your patience ye are strong ; cold and heat ye take not  
wrong :—

*Toll slowly.*

When the trumpet of the angel blows eternity's evangel,  
Time will seem to you not long.

## X.

Oh, the little birds sang east, and the little birds sang  
west,—

*Toll slowly.*

And I said in underbreath,—All our life is mixed with death,  
And who knoweth which is best ?

## XI.

Oh, the little birds sang east, and the little birds sang  
west,—

*Toll slowly.*

And I smiled to think God's greatness flowed around our  
incompleteness,—  
Round our restlessness, His rest.

## THE LOST BOWER.

## I.

In the pleasant orchard-closes,  
"God bless all our gains," say we ;  
But "May God bless all our losses,"  
Better suits with our degree.

Listen, gentle—ay, and simple ! listen, children on the knee !

## II.

Green the land is where my daily  
Steps in jocund childhood played,  
Dimpled close with hill and valley,  
Dappled very close with shade ;

Summer-snow of apple-blossoms running up from glade  
to glade.

## III.

There is one hill I see nearer  
 In my vision of the rest ;  
 And a little wood seems clearer  
 As it climbeth from the west,  
 Sideway from the tree-locked valley, to the airy upland  
 crest.

## IV.

Small the wood is, green with hazels,  
 And, completing the ascent,  
 Where the wind blows and sun dazzles,  
 Thrills in leafy tremblement,  
 Like a heart that, after climbing, beateth quickly through  
 content.

## V.

Not a step the wood advances  
 O'er the open hill-top's bound ;  
 There, in green arrest, the branches  
 See their image on the ground :  
 You may walk beneath them smiling, glad with sight and  
 glad with sound.

## VI.

For you hearken on your right hand,  
 How the birds do leap and call  
 In the greenwood, out of sight and  
 Out of reach and fear of all ;  
 And the squirrels crack the filberts through their cheerful  
 madrigal.

## VII.

On your left, the sheep are cropping  
 The slant grass and daisies pale,  
 And five apple-trees stand dropping  
 Separate shadows toward the vale  
 Over which, in choral silence, the hills look you their  
 "All hail !"

## VIII.

Far out, kindled by each other,  
 Shiring hills on hills arise ;

Close as brother leans to brother,  
 When they press beneath the eyes  
 Of some father praying blessings from the gifts of paradise.

## IX.

While beyond, above them mounted,  
 And above their woods alsò,  
 Malvern hills, for mountains counted  
 Not unduly, loom a-row—  
 Keepers of Piers Plowman's visions through the sunshine  
 and the snow. \*

## X.

Yet, in childhood, little prized I  
 That fair walk and far survey ;  
 'Twas a straight walk unadvised by  
 The least mischief worth a nay ;  
 Up and down—as dull as grammar on the eve of holiday.

## XI.

But the wood, all close and clenching  
 Bough in bough and root in root,—  
 No more sky (for over-branching)  
 At your head than at your foot,—  
 Oh, the wood drew me within it by a glamour past dispute !

## XII.

Few and broken paths showed through it,  
 Where the sheep had tried to run,—  
 Forced with snowy wool to strew it  
 Round the thickets, when anon  
 They, with silly thorn-pricked noses, bleated back into  
 the sun.

## XIII.

But my childish heart beat stronger  
 Than those thickets dared to grow :  
 I could pierce them ! I could longer  
 Travel on, methought, than so :  
 Sheep for sheep-paths ! braver children climb and creep  
 where they would go.

\* The Malvern Hills of Worcestershire are the scene of Langlande's visions, and thus present the earliest classic ground of English poetry.

## XIV.

And the poets wander, said I,  
 Over places all as rude :  
 Bold Rinaldo's lovely lady  
 Sate to meet him in a wood :  
 Rosalinda, like a fountain, laughed out pure with solitude.

## XV.

And if Chaucer had not travelled  
 Through a forest by a well,  
 He had never dreamt nor marvelled  
 At those ladies fair and fell  
 Who lived smiling without loving, in their island-citadel.

## XVI.

Thus I thought of the old singers,  
 And took courage from their song,  
 Till my little struggling fingers  
 Tore asunder gyve and thong  
 Of the brambles which entrapped me, and the barrier  
 branches strong.

## XVII.

On a day, such pastime keeping,  
 With a fawn's heart debonair,  
 Under-crawling, overleaping  
 Thorns that prick and boughs that bear,  
 I stood suddenly astonished—I was gladdened unaware.

## XVIII.

From the place I stood in, floated  
 Back the covert dim and close,  
 And the open ground was coated  
 Carpet-smooth with grass and moss,  
 And the blue-bell's purple presence signed it worthily  
 across.

## XIX.

Here a linden-tree stood, bright'ning  
 All adown its silver rind ;  
 For, as some trees draw the lightning,  
 So this tree, unto my mind,  
 Drew to earth the blessed sunshine from the sky where it  
 was shrined.

## XX.

Tall the linden-tree, and near it  
 An old hawthorn also grew ;  
 And wood-ivy like a spirit  
 Hovered dimly round the two,

Shaping thence that bower of beauty which I sing of thus  
 to you.

## XXI.

'Twas a bower for garden fitter  
 Than for any woodland wide :  
 Though a fresh and dewy glitter  
 Struck it through from side to side,

Shaped and shaven was the freshness, as by garden-  
 cunning plied.

## XXII.

Oh, a lady might have come there,  
 Hooded fairly like her hawk,  
 With a book or lute in summer,  
 And a hope of sweeter talk,—

Listening less to her own music than for footsteps on the  
 walk!

## XXIII.

But that bower appeared a marvel  
 In the wildness of the place ;  
 With such seeming art and travail,  
 Finely fixed and fitted was

Leaf to leaf, the dark-green ivy, to the summit from the  
 base.

## XXIV.

And the ivy veined and glossy  
 Was enwrought with eglantine ;  
 And the wild hop fibred closely,  
 And the large-leaved columbine,

Arch of door and window-mullion, did right sylvanly  
 entwine.

## XXV.

Rose-trees either side the door were  
 Growing lithe and growing tall,  
 Each one set a summer warder  
 For the keeping of the hall,—

With a red rose and a white rose, leaning, nodding at the  
 wall.

## XXVI.

As I entered, mosses hushing  
 Stole all noises from my foot ;  
 And a green elastic cushion,  
 Clasped within the linden's root,  
 Took me in a chair of silence very rare and absolute.

## XXVII.

All the floor was paved with glory,  
 Greenly, silently inlaid  
 (Through quick motions made before me)  
 With fair counterparts in shade  
 Of the fair serrated ivy-leaves which slanted overhead.

## XXVIII.

"Is such pavement in a palace?"  
 So I questioned in my thought :  
 The sun, shining through the chalice  
 Of the red rose hung without,  
 Threw within a red libation, like an answer to my doubt.

## XXIX.

At the same time, on the linen  
 Of my childish lap there fell  
 Two white may-leaves, downward winning  
 Through the ceiling's miracle,  
 From a blossom, like an angel, out of sight yet blessing  
 well.

## XXX.

Down to floor and up to ceiling  
 Quick I turned my childish face,  
 With an innocent appealing  
 For the secret of the place  
 To the trees, which surely knew it in partaking of the  
 grace.

## XXXI.

Where's no foot of human creature  
 How could reach a human hand?  
 And if this be work of nature,  
 Why has nature turned so bland,  
 Breaking off from other wild-work? It was hard to under-  
 stand.

## XXXII.

Was she weary of rough-doing,  
Of the bramble and the thorn?  
Did she pause, in tender ruing,  
Here, of all her sylvan scorn?

Or, in mock of art's deceiving, was the sudden mildness  
worn?

## XXXIII.

Or could this same bower (I fancied)  
Be the work of Dryad strong,  
Who, surviving all that chanced  
In the world's old pagan wrong,

Lay hid, feeding in the woodland on the last true poet's  
song?

## XXXIV.

Or was this the house of fairies,  
Left, because of the rough ways,  
Unassoiled by Ave Marys  
Which the passing pilgrim prays,

And beyond St. Catherine's chiming on the blessed Sabbath  
days?

## XXXV.

So, young muser, I sate listening  
To my fancy's wildest word:  
On a sudden, through the glistening  
Leaves around, a little stirred,

Came a sound, a sense of music, which was rather felt than  
heard.

## XXXVI.

Softly, finely, it inwound me;  
From the world it shut me in,—  
Like a fountain, falling round me,  
Which with silver waters thin

Clips a little water Naiad, sitting smilingly within.

## XXXVII.

Whence the music came, who knoweth?  
I know nothing: but indeed  
Pan or Faunus never bloweth  
So much sweetness from a reed

Which has sucked the milk of waters at the oldest riverhead.

## XXXVIII.

Never lark the sun can waken  
 With such sweetness ! when the lark,  
 The high planets overtaking  
 In the half-*evanished* Dark,  
 Casts his singing to their singing, like an arrow to the mark.

## XXXIX.

Never nightingale so singeth :  
 Oh, she leans on thorny tree,  
 And her poet-song she flingeth  
 Over pain to victory !  
 Yet she never sings such music,—or she sings it not to me.

## XL.

Never blackbirds, never thrushes,  
 Nor small finches sing as sweet,  
 When the sun strikes through the bushes,  
 To their crimson clinging feet,  
 And their pretty eyes look sideways to the summer heavens  
 complete.

## XLI.

If it *were* a bird, it seemèd  
 Most like Chaucer's, which, in sooth,  
 He of green and azure dreamèd,  
 While it sate in spirit-ruth  
 On that bier of a crowned lady, singing nigh her silent  
 mouth.

## XLII.

If it *were* a bird ?—ah, sceptic,  
 Give me "yea" or give me "nay"—  
 Though my soul were nympholeptic,  
 As I heard that virèlay,  
 You may stoop your pride to pardon, for my sin is far  
 away !

## XLIII.

I rose up in exaltation  
 And an inward trembling heat,



And (it seemed) in gestic of passion  
 Dropped the music to my feet  
 Like a garment rustling downwards — such a silence  
 followed it!

## XLIV.

Heart and head beat through the quiet  
 Full and heavily, though slower :  
 In the song, I think, and by it,  
 Mystic Presences of power  
 Had up-snatched me to the Timeless, then returned me to  
 the Hour.

## XLV.

In a child-abstraction lifted,  
 Straightway from the bower I past ;  
 Foot and soul being dimly drifted  
 Through the greenwood, till, at last,  
 In the hill-top's open sunshine, I all consciously was cast.

## XLVI.

Face to face with the true mountains,  
 I stood silently and still ;  
 Drawing strength from fancy's dauntings,  
 From the air about the hill,  
 And from Nature's open mercies and most debonair good-  
 will.

## XLVII.

Oh ! the golden-hearted daisies  
 Witnessed there, before my youth,  
 To the truth of things, with praises  
 Of the beauty of the truth ;  
 And I woke to Nature's real, laughing joyfully for both.

## XLVIII.

And I said within me, laughing,  
 I have found a bower to-day,  
 A green lusus, fashioned half in  
 Chance and half in Nature's play—  
 And a little bird sings nigh it, I will nevermore missay.

## THE LOST BOWER.

## XLIX.

Henceforth, *I* will be the fairy  
 Of this bower not built by one ;  
 I will go there, sad or merry,  
 With each morning's benison,  
 And the bird shall be my harper in the dream-hall I have  
 won.

## L.

So I said. But the next morning,  
 (—Child, look up into my face—  
 'Ware, oh sceptic, of your scorning !  
 This is truth in its pure grace !)  
 The next morning, all had vanished, or my wandering  
 missed the place.

## LI.

Bring an oath most sylvan-holy,  
 And upon it swear me true—  
 By the wind-bells swinging slowly  
 Their mute curfews in the dew,  
 By the advent of the snow-drop, by the rosemary and rue,—

## LII.

I affirm by all or any,  
 Let the cause be charm or chance,  
 That my wandering searches many  
 Missed the bower of my romance—  
 That I nevermore upon it turned my mortal countenance.

## LIII.

I affirm that, since I lost it,  
 Never bower has seemed so fair ;  
 Never garden-creeper crossed it  
 With so deft and brave an air,  
 Never bird sung in the summer, as I saw and heard them  
 there.

## LIV.

Day by day, with new desire,  
 Toward my wood I ran in faith,  
 Under leaf and over brier,  
 Through the thickets, out of breath ;  
 Like the prince who rescued Beauty from the sleep as long  
 as death.

## LV.

But his sword of mettle clashèd,  
 And his arm smote strong, I ween,  
 And her dreaming spirit flashèd  
 Through her body's fair white screen,  
 And the light thereof might guide him up the cedar alleys  
 green :

## LVI.

But for me, I saw no splendour—  
 All my sword was my child-heart ;  
 And the wood refused surrender  
 Of that bower it held apart,  
 Safe as CEdipus's grave-place 'mid Colone's olives swart.

## LVII.

As Aladdin sought the basements  
 His fair palace rose upon,  
 And the four-and-twenty casements  
 Which gave answers to the sun ;  
 So, in wilderment of gazing, I looked up, and I looked  
 down.

## LVIII.

Years have vanished since, as wholly  
 As the little bower did then ;  
 And you call it tender folly  
 That such thoughts should come again ?  
 Ah, I cannot change this sighing for your smiling, brother  
 men !

## LIX.

For this loss it did prefigure  
 Other loss of better good,  
 When my soul, in spirit-vigour,  
 And in ripened womanhood,  
 Fell from visions of more beauty than an arbour in a wood.

## LX.

I have lost—oh, many a pleasure,  
 Many a hope and many a power—  
 Studious health and merry leisure—  
 The first dew on the first flower !  
 But the first of all my losses was the losing of the bower.

## LXI.

I have lost the dream of Doing,  
 And the other dream of Done,  
 The first spring in the pursuing,  
 The first pride in the Begun,—  
 First recoil from incompleteness, in the face of what is won—

## LXII.

Exaltations in the far light  
 Where some cottage only is ;  
 Mild dejections in the starlight,  
 Which the sadder-hearted miss ;  
 And the child-cheek blushing scarlet, for the very shame of  
 bliss.

## LXIII.

I have lost the sound child-sleeping  
 Which the thunder could not break ;  
 Something too of the strong leaping  
 Of the staglike heart awake,  
 Which the pale is low for keeping in the road it ought  
 to take.

## LXIV.

Some respect to social fictions  
 Has been also lost by me ;  
 And some generous genuflexions,  
 Which my spirit offered free  
 To the pleasant old conventions of our false humanity.

## LXV.

All my losses did I tell you,  
 Ye, perchance, would look away ;—  
 Ye would answer me, " Farewell ! you  
 Make sad company to-day,  
 And your tears are falling faster than the bitter words  
 you say."

## LXVI.

For God placed me like a dial  
 In the open ground with power,  
 And my heart had for its trial,  
 All the sun and all the shower :  
 And I suffered many losses,—and my first was of the bower.

## LXVII.

Laugh you? If that loss of mine be  
 Of no heavy-seeming weight—  
 When the cone falls from the pine-tree,  
 The young children laugh thereat ;  
 Yet the wind that struck it, riseth, and the tempest shall  
 be great.

## LXVIII.

One who knew me in my childhood  
 In the glamour and the game,  
 Looking on me long and mild, would  
 Never know me for the same.  
 Come, unchanging recollections, where those changes  
 overcame !

## LXIX.

By this couch I weakly lie on,  
 While I count my memories,—  
 Through the fingers which, still sighing,  
 I press closely on mine eyes,—  
 Clear as once beneath the sunshine, I behold the bower  
 arise.

## LXX.

Springs the linden-tree as greenly,  
 Stroked with light adown its rind ;  
 And the ivy-leaves serenely  
 Each in either intertwined ;  
 And the rose-trees at the doorway, they have neither grown  
 nor pined.

## LXXI.

From those overblown faint roses  
 Not a leaf appeareth shed,  
 And that little bud discloses  
 Not a thorn's-breadth more of red,  
 For the winters and the summers which have passed me  
 overhead.

## LXXII.

And that music overfloweth,  
 Sudden sweet, the sylvan eaves :  
 Thrush or nightingale—who knoweth ?  
 Fay or Faunus—who believes ?  
 But my heart still trembles in me to the trembling of the  
 leaves

## LXXIII.

Is the bower lost, then? who sayeth  
 That the bower indeed is lost?  
 Hark! my spirit in it prayeth  
 Through the sunshine and the frost,—  
 And the prayer preserves it greenly, to the last and  
 uttermost.

## LXXIV.

Till another open for me  
 In God's Eden-land unknown,  
 With an angel at the doorway,  
 White with gazing at His Throne;  
 And a saint's voice in the palm-trees, singing—"ALL IS  
 LOST . . . and *won!*"

## THE CRY OF THE CHILDREN.

"*φεῦ, φεῦ, τι προσδερκεσθε μ' ομμασιν, τεκνα.*"—MEDEA.

## I.

Do ye hear the children weeping, O my brothers,  
 Ere the sorrow comes with years?  
 They are leaning their young heads against their mothers,—  
 And *that* cannot stop their tears.  
 The young lambs are bleating in the meadows;  
 The young birds are chirping in the nest;  
 The young fawns are playing with the shadows;  
 The young flowers are blowing toward the west—  
 But the young, young children, O my brothers,  
 They are weeping bitterly!—  
 They are weeping in the playtime of the others,  
 In the country of the free.

## II.

Do you question the young children in the sorrow,  
 Why their tears are falling so?—  
 The old man may weep for his to-morrow  
 Which is lost in Long Ago—  
 The old tree is leafless in the forest—  
 The old year is ending in the frost—  
 The old wound, if stricken, is the sorest—  
 The old hope is hardest to be lost:

But the young, young children, O my brothers,  
 Do you ask them why they stand  
 Weeping sore before the bosoms of their mothers,  
 In our happy Fatherland?

## III.

They look up with their pale and sunken faces,  
 And their looks are sad to see,  
 For the man's hoary anguish draws and presses  
 Down the cheeks of infancy—  
 "Your old earth," they say, "is very dreary";  
 "Our young feet," they say, "are very weak!  
 Few paces have we taken, yet are weary—  
 Our grave-rest is very far to seek.  
 Ask the aged why they weep, and not the children,  
 For the outside earth is cold,—  
 And we young ones stand without, in our bewildering,  
 And the graves are for the old.

## IV.

"True," say the young children, "it may happen  
 That we die before our time :  
 Little Alice died last year—the grave is shapen  
 Like a snowball, in the rime.  
 We looked into the pit prepared to take her—  
 Was no room for any work in the close clay :  
 From the sleep wherein she lieth none will wake her,  
 Crying, 'Get up, little Alice! it is day.'  
 If you listen by that grave, in sun and shower,  
 With your ear down, little Alice never cries!—  
 Could we see her face, be sure we should not know her,  
 For the smile has time for growing in her eyes,—  
 And merry go her moments, lulled and stilled in  
 The shroud, by the kirk-chime!  
 It is good when it happens," say the children,  
 "That we die before our time."

## V.

Alas, alas, the children! they are seeking  
 Death in life, as best to have!  
 They are binding up their hearts away from breaking,  
 With a cerement from the grave.

Go out, children, from the mine and from the city—  
 Sing out, children, as the little thrushes do—  
 Pluck your handfuls of the meadow-cowslips pretty—  
 Laugh aloud, to feel your fingers let them through!  
 But they answer, "Are your cowslips of the meadows  
 Like our weeds anear the mine?  
 Leave us quiet in the dark of the coal-shadows,  
 From your pleasures fair and fine!

## VI.

"For oh," say the children, "we are weary,  
 And we cannot run or leap—  
 If we cared for any meadows, it were merely  
 To drop down in them and sleep.  
 Our knees tremble sorely in the stooping—  
 We fall upon our faces, trying to go;  
 And, underneath our heavy eyelids drooping,  
 The reddest flower would look as pale as snow.  
 For, all day, we drag our burden tiring,  
 Through the coal-dark, underground—  
 Or, all day, we drive the wheels of iron  
 In the factories, round and round.

## VII.

"For, all day, the wheels are droning, turning,—  
 Their wind comes in our faces,—  
 Till our hearts turn,—our heads, with pulses burning,  
 And the walls turn in their places—  
 Turns the sky in the high window blank and reeling—  
 Turns the long light that drops adown the wall—  
 Turn the black flies that crawl along the ceiling—  
 All are turning, all the day, and we with all.—  
 And, all day, the iron wheels are droning;  
 And sometimes we could pray,  
 'O ye wheels,' (breaking out in a mad moaning)  
 'Stop! be silent for to-day!'"

## VIII.

Ay! be silent! Let them hear each other breathing  
 For a moment, mouth to mouth—  
 Let them touch each other's hands, in a fresh wreathing  
 Of their tender human youth!



Let them feel that this cold metallic motion  
 Is not all the life God fashions or reveals—  
 Let them prove their living souls against the notion  
 That they live in you, or under you, O wheels!—  
 Still, all day, the iron wheels go onward,  
 Grinding life down from its mark;  
 And the children's souls, which God is calling sunward,  
 Spin on blindly in the dark.

## IX.

Now, tell the poor young children, O my brothers,  
 To look up to Him and pray—  
 So the blessed One, who blesseth all the others,  
 Will bless them another day.  
 They answer, "Who is God that He should hear us,  
 While the rushing of the iron wheels is stirred?  
 When we sob aloud, the human creatures near us  
 Pass by, hearing not, or answer not a word!  
 And *we* hear not (for the wheels in their resounding)  
 Strangers speaking at the door:  
 Is it likely God, with angels singing round Him,  
 Hears our weeping any more?"

## X.

"Two words, indeed, of praying we remember;  
 And at midnight's hour of harm,—  
 'Our Father,' looking upward in the chamber,  
 We say softly for a charm.\*  
 We know no other words except 'Our Father,'  
 And we think that, in some pause of angels' song,  
 God may pluck them with the silence sweet to gather,  
 And hold both within His right hand which is strong.  
 'Our Father!' If He heard us, He would surely  
 (For they call Him good and mild)  
 Answer, smiling down the steep world very purely,  
 'Come and rest with me, my child.'

\* A fact rendered pathetically historical by Mr. Horne's report of his commission. The name of the poet of "Orion" and "Cosmo de' Medici" has, however, a change of associations; and comes in time to remind me that we have some noble poetic heat of literature still,—however open to the reproach of being somewhat gelid in our humanity.—1844.

## XI.

"But no!" say the children, weeping faster,  
 "He is speechless as a stone;  
 And they tell us, of His image is the master  
 Who commands us to work on.  
 Go to!" say the children,— "Up in Heaven,  
 Dark, wheel-like, turning clouds are all we find.  
 Do not mock us; grief has made us unbelieving—  
 We look up for God, but tears have made us blind."  
 Do you hear the children weeping and disproving,  
 O my brothers, what ye preach?  
 For God's possible is taught by His world's loving—  
 And the children doubt of each.

## XII.

And well may the children weep before you;  
 They are weary ere they run;  
 They have never seen the sunshine, nor the glory  
 Which is brighter than the sun:  
 They know the grief of man, without its wisdom;  
 They sink in man's despair, without its calm—  
 Are slaves, without the liberty in Christdom,—  
 Are martyrs, by the pang without the palm,—  
 Are worn, as if with age, yet unretrievably  
 The harvest of its memories cannot reap,—  
 Are orphans of the earthly love and heavenly:  
 Let them weep! let them weep!

## XIII.

They look up, with their pale and sunken faces,  
 And their look is dread to see,  
 For they mind you of their angels in high places,  
 With eyes turned on Deity;—  
 "How long," they say, "how long, O cruel nation,  
 Will you stand, to move the world, on a child's heart,—  
 Stifle down with a mailed heel its palpitation,  
 And tread onward to your throne amid the mart?  
 Our blood splashes upward, O gold-heaper,  
 And your purple shows your path;  
 But the child's sob in the silence curses deeper  
 Than the strong man in his wrath!"

## TO FLUSH, MY DOG.

## I.

LOVING friend, the gift of one  
 Who, her own true faith, has run,  
 Through thy lower nature ; \*  
 Be my benediction said  
 With my hand upon thy head,  
 Gentle fellow-creature !

## II.

Like a lady's ringlets brown,  
 Flow thy silken ears adown  
 Either side demurely,  
 Of thy silver-suited breast,  
 Shining out from all the rest  
 Of thy body purely.

## III.

Darkly brown thy body is,  
 Till the sunshine, striking this,  
 Alchemise its dullness ;  
 When the sleek curls manifold  
 Flash all over into gold,  
 With a burnished fullness.

## IV.

Underneath my stroking hand,  
 Startled eyes of hazel bland  
 Kindling, growing larger,  
 Up thou leapest with a spring,  
 Full of prank and curveting,  
 Leaping like a charger.

## V.

Leap ! thy broad tail waves a light ;  
 Leap ! thy slender feet are bright,  
 Canopied in fringes.  
 Leap—those tasselled ears of thine  
 Flicker strangely, fair and fine,  
 Down their golden inches.

\* This dog was the gift of my dear and admired friend, Miss Mitford, and belongs to the beautiful race she has rendered celebrated among English and American readers. The Flushes have their laurels as well as the Cæsars,—the chief difference (at least the very head and front of it) consisting, perhaps, in the bald head of the latter under the crown.—1844.

## VI.

Yet, my pretty, sportive friend,  
Little is't to such an end

That I praise thy rareness !  
Other dogs may be thy peers  
Haply in these drooping ears,  
And this glossy fairness.

## VII.

But of *thee* it shall be said,  
This dog watched beside a bed  
Day and night unwearied,—  
Watched within a curtained room,  
Where no sunbeam brake the gloom  
Round the sick and dreary.

## VIII.

Roses, gathered for a vase,  
In that chamber died apace,  
Beam and breeze resigning—  
This dog only, waited on,  
Knowing that when light is gone,  
Love remains for shining.

## IX.

Other dogs in thymy dew  
Tracked the hares and followed through  
Sunny moor or meadow—  
This dog only, crept and crept  
Next a languid cheek that slept,  
Sharing in the shadow.

## X.

Other dogs of loyal cheer  
Bounded at the whistle clear,  
Up the woodside hieing—  
This dog only, watched in reach  
Of a faintly uttered speech,  
Or a louder sighing.

## XI.

And if one or two quick tears  
Dropped upon his glossy ears,  
Or a sigh came double,—

Up he sprang in eager haste,  
Fawning, fondling, breathing fast,  
In a tender trouble.

## XII.

And this dog was satisfied,  
If a pale thin hand would glide  
Down his dewlaps sloping,—  
Which he pushed his nose within,  
After,—platforming his chin  
On the palm left open.

## XIII.

This dog, if a friendly voice  
Call him now to blyther choice  
Than such chamber-keeping,  
“Come out!” praying from the door,—  
Presseth backward as before,  
Up against me leaping.

## XIV.

Therefore to this dog will I,  
Tenderly, not scornfully,  
Render praise and favour :  
With my hand upon his head,  
Is my benediction said  
Therefore, and for ever.

## XV.

And because he loves me so,  
Better than his kind will do  
Often, man or woman,—  
Give I back more love again  
Than dogs often take of men,—  
Leaning from my Human.

## XVI.

Blessings on thee, dog of mine,  
Pretty collars make thee fine,  
Sugared milk make fat thee !  
Pleasures wag on in thy tail—  
Hands of gentle motion fail  
Nevermore, to pat thee !

## A PORTRAIT.

## XVII.

Downy pillow take thy head  
 Silken coverlid bestead,  
 Sunshine help thy sleeping !  
 No fly's buzzing wake thee up—  
 No man break thy purple cup,  
 Set for drinking deep in.

## XVIII.

Whiskered cats aointed flee—  
 Sturdy stoppers keep from thee  
 Cologne distillations ;  
 Nuts lie in thy path for stones,  
 And thy feast-day macaroons  
 Turn to daily rations !

## XIX.

Mock I thee, in wishing weal ?—  
 Tears are in my eyes to feel  
 Thou art made so straightly,  
 Blessing needs must straighten too, —  
 Little canst thou joy or do,  
 Thou who lovest *greatly*.

## XX.

Yet be blessèd to the height  
 Of all good and all delight  
 Pervious to thy nature,—  
 Only *loved* beyond that line,  
 With a love that answers thine,  
 Loving fellow-creature !

## A PORTRAIT.

"One name is Elizabeth."—BEN JONSON.

I WILL paint her as I see her.  
 Ten times have the lilies blown,  
 Since she looked upon the sun.

And her face is lily-clear—  
 Lily-shaped, and drooped in duty  
 To the law of its own beauty.

Oval cheeks, encoloured faintly,  
Which a trail of golden hair  
Keeps from fading off to air :

And a forehead fair and saintly,  
Which two blue eyes undershine,  
Like meek prayers before a shrine.

Face and figure of a child,—  
Though too calm, you think, and tender,  
For the childhood you would lend her.

Yet child-simple, undefiled,  
Frank, obedient,—waiting still  
On the turnings of your will.

Moving light, as all young things—  
As young birds, or early wheat  
When the wind blows over it.

Only free from flutterings  
Of loud mirth that scorneth measure—  
Taking love for her chief pleasure.

Choosing pleasures (for the rest)  
Which come softly—just as *she*,  
When she nestles at your knee.

Quiet talk she liketh best,  
In a bower of gentle looks,—  
Watering flowers, or reading books.

And her voice, it murmurs lowly,  
As a silver stream may run,  
Which yet feels, you feel, the sun.

And her smile, it seems half holy,  
As if drawn from thoughts more far,  
Than our common jestings are.

And if any poet knew her,  
He would sing of her with falls  
Used in lovely madrigals.

## SLEEPING AND WATCHING.

And if any painter drew her,  
He would paint her unaware  
With a halo round the hair.

And if reader read the poem,  
He would whisper—"You have done a  
Consecrated little Una!"

And a dreamer (did you show him  
That same picture) would exclaim,  
"'Tis my angel, with a name!"

And a stranger—when he sees her  
In the street even—smileth stilly,  
Just as *you* would at a lily.

And all voices that address her,  
Soften, sleeken every word,—  
As if speaking to a bird.

And all fancies yearn to cover  
The hard earth whereon she passes,  
With the thymy-scented grasses.

And all hearts do pray, "God love her!"  
Ay, and always in good sooth,  
We may all be sure HE DOETH.

## SLEEPING AND WATCHING.

## I.

Sleep on, baby, on the floor,  
Tired of all the playing,—  
Sleep with smile the sweeter for  
That, you dropped away in!  
On your curls' full roundness, stand  
Golden lights serenely—  
One cheek, pushed out by the hand,  
Folds the dimple inly:  
Little head and little foot  
Heavy laid for pleasure,  
Underneath the lids half-shut,  
Slants the shining azure;—



Open-soul in noonday sun,  
 So, you lie and slumber !  
 Nothing evil, having done,  
 Nothing can encumber.

## II.

I, who cannot sleep as well,  
 Shall I sigh to view you ?  
 Or sigh further to foretell  
 All that may undo you ?  
 Nay, keep smiling, little child,  
 Ere the sorrow neareth,—  
 I will smile too. Patience mild  
 Pleasure's token weareth.  
 Nay, keep sleeping, before loss ;  
 I shall sleep though losing !  
 As by cradle, so by cross,  
 Sure is the reposing.

## III.

And God knows, who sees us twain,  
 Child at childish leisure,  
 I am near as tired of pain  
 As you seem of pleasure ;—  
 Very soon, too, by His grace  
 Gently wrapt around me,  
 Shall I show as calm a face,  
 Shall I sleep as soundly !  
 Differing in this, that you  
 Clasp your playthings sleeping,  
 While my hand shall drop the few  
 Given to my keeping ;  
 Differing in this, that I,  
 Sleeping, shall be colder,  
 And in waking presently,  
 Brighter to beholder !  
 Differing in this beside  
 (Sleeper, have you heard me ?  
 Do you move, and open wide  
 Eyes of wonder toward me ?)—  
 That while you I thus recall  
 From your sleep,—I solely,—  
 Me, from mine, an angel shall,  
 With reveillé holy !

## THE ROMANCE OF THE SWAN'S NEST.

" So the dreams depart,  
So the fading phantoms flee,  
And the sharp reality  
Now must act its part."

WESTWOOD'S *Beads from a Rosary.*

## I.

LITTLE Ellie sits alone  
'Mid the beeches of a meadow,  
By a stream-side, on the grass ;  
And the trees are showering down  
Doubles of their leaves in shadow,  
On her shining hair and face.

## II.

She has thrown her bonnet by :  
And her feet she has been dipping  
In the shallow water's flow—  
Now she holds them nakedly  
In her hands, all sleek and dripping,  
While she rocketh to and fro.

## III.

Little Ellie sits alone,—  
And the smile, she softly uses,  
Fills the silence like a speech ;  
While she thinks what shall be done,—  
And the sweetest pleasure chooses  
For her future within reach.

## IV.

Little Ellie in her smile  
Chooseth—" I will have a lover,  
Riding on a steed of steeds !  
He shall love me without guile ;  
And to *him* I will discover  
That swan's nest among the reeds.

## V.

“And the steed shall be red-roan,  
 And the lover shall be noble,  
 With an eye that takes the breath,—  
 And the lute he plays upon,  
 Shall strike ladies into trouble,  
 As his sword strikes men to death.

## VI.

“And the steed, it shall be shod  
 All in silver, housed in azure,  
 And the mane shall swim the wind;  
 And the hoofs, along the sod,  
 Shall flash onward and keep measure,  
 Till the shepherds look behind.

## VII.

“But my lover will not prize  
 All the glory that he rides in,  
 When he gazes in my face.  
 He will say, ‘O Love, thine eyes  
 Build the shrine my soul abides in;  
 And I kneel here for thy grace.’

## VIII.

“Then, ay, then—he shall kneel low,—  
 With the red-roan steed anear him,  
 Which shall seem to understand  
 Till I answer, ‘Rise and go!  
 For the world must love and fear him  
 Whom I gift with heart and hand.’

## IX.

“Then he will arise so pale,  
 I shall feel my own lips tremble  
 With a *yes* I must not say—  
 Nathless, maiden-brave, ‘Farewell,’  
 I will utter, and dissemble—  
 ‘Light to-morrow with to-day.’

## X.

“Then he'll ride among the hills  
 To the wide world past the river,  
 There to put away all wrong ;  
 To make straight distorted wills,  
 And to empty the broad quiver  
 Which the wicked bear along.

## XI.

“Three times shall a young foot-page  
 Swim the stream, and climb the mountain,  
 And kneel down beside my feet—  
 ‘Lo! my master sends this gage,  
 Lady, for thy pity's counting!  
 What wilt thou exchange for it?’

## XII.

“And the first time, I will send  
 A white rosebud for a guerdon,—  
 And the second time, a glove ;  
 But the third time—I may bend  
 From my pride, and answer—‘Pardon—  
 If he comes to take my love.’

## XIII.

“Then the young foot-page will run—  
 Then my lover will ride faster,  
 Till he kneeleth at my knee :  
 ‘I am a duke's eldest son !  
 Thousand serfs do call me master,—  
 But, O, Love, I love but *thee!*’

## XIV.

“He will kiss me on the mouth  
 Then, and lead me as a lover,  
 Through the crowds that praise his deeds :  
 And, when soul-tied by one troth,  
 Unto *him* I will discover  
 That swan's nest among the reeds.”

## XV.

Little Ellie, with her smile  
 Not yet ended, rose up gaily,—  
 Tied the bonnet, donned the shoe,—  
 And went homeward, round a mile,  
 Just to see, as she did daily,  
 What more eggs were with the *two*.

## XVI.

Pushing through the elm-tree copse,  
 Winding by the stream, light-hearted,  
 Where the osier pathway leads—  
 Past the boughs she stoops—and stops :  
 Lo ! the wild swan had deserted—  
 And a rat had gnawed the reeds.

## XVII.

Ellie went home sad and slow ;  
 If she found the lover ever,  
 With his red-roan steed of steeds,  
 Sooth I know not ! but I know  
 She could never show him—never,  
 That swan's nest among the reeds !

## THE DEAD PAN.

Excited by Schiller's *Götter Griechenlands*, and partly founded on a well-known tradition mentioned in a treatise of Plutarch (*De Oraculorum Defectu*), according to which, at the hour of the Saviour's agony, a cry of "Great Pan is dead!" swept across the waves in the hearing of certain mariners,—and the oracles ceased.

It is in all veneration to the memory of the deathless Schiller, that I oppose a doctrine still more dishonouring to poetry than to Christianity.

As Mr. Kenyon's graceful and harmonious paraphrase of the German poem was the first occasion of the turning of my thoughts in this direction, I take advantage of the pretence to indulge my feelings (which overflow on other grounds) by inscribing my lyric to that dear friend and relative, with the earnestness of appreciating esteem as well as of affectionate gratitude (1844).

## I.

GODS of Hellas, gods of Hellas,  
 Can ye listen in your silence ?  
 Can your mystic voices tell us  
 Where ye hide ? In floating islands,  
 With a wind that evermore  
 Keeps you out of sight of shore ?  
 Pan, Pan is dead.

## THE DEAD PAN.

## II.

In what revels are ye sunken  
 In old Æthiopia?  
 Have the pygmies made you drunken,  
 Bathing in mandragora  
 Your divine pale lips that shiver  
 Like the lotus in the river?

Pan, Pan is dead.

## III.

Do ye sit there still in slumber,  
 In gigantic Alpine rows?  
 The black poppies out of number  
 Nodding, dripping from your brows  
 To the red lees of your wine,—  
 And so kept alive and fine?

Pan, Pan is dead.

## IV.

Or lie crushed your stagnant corpses  
 Where the silver spheres roll on,  
 Stung to life by centric forces  
 Thrown like rays out from the sun?—  
 While the smoke of your old altars  
 Is the shroud that round you welters?

Great Pan is dead.

## V.

“Gods of Hellas, gods of Hellas,”  
 Said the old Hellenic tongue!  
 Said the hero-oaths, as well as  
 Poets’ songs the sweetest sung!  
 Have ye grown deaf in a day?  
 Can ye speak not yea or nay—

Since Pan is dead?

## VI.

Do ye leave your rivers flowing  
 All alone, O Naiades,  
 While your drenchèd locks dry slow in  
 This cold feeble sun and breeze?—  
 Not a word the Naiads say,  
 Though the rivers run for aye—

For Pan is dead.

## VII.

From the gloaming of the oak-wood,  
 O ye Dryads, could ye flee?  
 At the rushing thunderstroke, would  
 No sob tremble through the tree?—  
 Not a word the Dryads say,  
 Though the forests wave for aye—  
 For Pan is dead.

## VIII.

Have ye left the mountain places,  
 Oreads wild, for other tryst?  
 Shall we see no sudden faces  
 Strike a glory through the mist?  
 Not a sound the silence thrills,  
 Of the everlasting hills.  
 Pan, Pan is dead.

## IX.

O twelve gods of Plato's vision,  
 Crowned to starry wanderings,—  
 With your chariots in procession,  
 And your silver clash of wings!  
 Very pale ye seem to rise,  
 Ghosts of Grecian deities—  
 Now Pan is dead.

## X.

Jove! that right hand is unloaded,  
 Whence the thunder did prevail:  
 While in idiocy of godhead,  
 Thou art staring the stars pale!  
 And thine eagle, blind and old,  
 Roughs his feathers in the cold.  
 Pan, Pan is dead.

## XI.

Where, O Juno, is the glory  
 Of thy regal look and tread?  
 Will they lay, for evermore, thee  
 On thy dim, straight, golden bed?  
 Will thy queendom all lie hid  
 Meekly under either lid?  
 Pan, Pan is dead.

## THE DEAD PAN.

## XII.

Ha, Apollo! Floats his golden  
 Hair, all mist-like where he stands;  
 While the Muses hang enfolding  
 Knee and foot with faint wild hands?  
 'Neath the clanging of thy bow,  
 Niobe looked lost as thou!

Pan, Pan is dead.

## XIII.

Shall the casque with its brown iron,  
 Pallas' broad blue eyes, eclipse,—  
 And no hero take inspiring  
 From the God-Greek of her lips?  
 'Neath her olive dost thou sit,  
 Mars the mighty, cursing it?

Pan, Pan is dead.

## XIV.

Bacchus, Bacchus! on the panther  
 He swoons,—bound with his own vines!  
 And his Mænads slowly saunter,  
 Head aside, among the pines,  
 While they murmur dreamingly,—  
 "Evohe—ah evohe—!"

Ah, Pan is dead.

## XV.

Neptune lies beside the trident,  
 Dull and senseless as a stone:  
 And old Pluto, deaf and silent,  
 Is cast out into the sun.

Ceres smileth stern thereat,—

"We *all* now are desolate—

Now Pan is dead.

## XVI.

Aphrodite! dead and driven  
 As thy native foam, thou art;  
 With the cestus long done heaving  
 On the white calm of thine heart!

*Ai Adonis!* At that shriek,  
 Not a tear runs down her cheek—

Pan, Pan is dead.



## XVII.

And the Loves, we used to know from  
 One another,—huddled lie,  
 Frore as taken in a snowstorm,  
 Close beside her tenderly,—  
 As if each had weakly tried  
 Once to kiss her as he died.

Pan, Pan is dead.

## XVIII.

What, and Hermes? Time enthralleth  
 All thy cunning, Hermes, thus,—  
 And the ivy blindly crawleth  
 Round thy brave caduceus?  
 Hast thou no new message for us,  
 Full of thunder and Jove-glories?

Nay! Pan is dead.

## XIX.

Crownèd Cybele's great turret  
 Rocks and crumbles on her head :  
 Roar the lions of her chariot  
 Toward the wilderness, unfed :  
 Scornful children are not mute,—  
 "Mother, mother, walk a-foot—  
 Since Pan is dead."

## XX.

In the fiery-hearted centre  
 Of the solemn universe,  
 Ancient Vesta,—who could enter  
 To consume thee with this curse?  
 Drop thy gray chin on thy knee,  
 O thou palsied Mystery!

For Pan is dead.

## XXI.

Gods! we vainly do adjure you,—  
 Ye return nor voice nor sign :  
 Not a votary could secure you  
 Even a grave for your Divine!  
 Not a grave, to show thereby,  
*Here these gray old gods do lie.*

Pan, Pan is dead.



## XXVII.

'Twas the hour when One in Sion  
 Hung for love's sake on a cross—  
 When His brow was chill with dying,  
 And His soul was faint with loss ;  
 When His priestly blood dropped downward,  
 And His kingly eyes looked throneward—  
*Then, Pan was dead.*

## XXVIII.

By the love He stood alone in,  
 His sole Godhead rose complete :  
 And the false gods fell down moaning,  
 Each from off his golden seat—  
 All the false gods with a cry  
 Rendered up their deity—  
*Pan, Pan was dead.*

## XXIX.

Wailing wide across the islands,  
 They rent, vest-like, their Divine !  
 And a darkness and a silence  
 Quenched the light of every shrine :  
 And Dodona's oak swang lonely  
 Henceforth, to the tempest only.  
*Pan, Pan was dead.*

## XXX.

Pythia staggered,—feeling o'er her  
 Her lost god's forsaking look !  
 Straight her eyeballs filmed with horror,  
 And her crispy fillets shook—  
 And her lips gasped through their foam,  
 For a word that did not come.  
*Pan, Pan was dead.*

## XXXI.

O ye vain false gods of Hellas,  
 Ye are silent evermore !  
 And I dash down this old chalice,  
 Whence libations ran of yore.  
 See ! the wine crawls in the dust  
 Wormlike—as your glories must !  
*Since Pan is dead.*

## THE DEAD PAN.

## XXXII.

Get to dust, as common mortals,  
 By a common doom and track!  
 Let no Schiller from the portals  
 Of that Hades, call you back,—  
 Or instruct us to weep all  
 At your antique funeral.

Pan, Pan is dead.

## XXXIII.

By your beauty, which confesses  
 Some chief Beauty conquering you,—  
 By our grand heroic guesses,  
 Through your falsehood, at the True,—  
 We will weep *not!* earth shall roll  
 Heir to each god's aureole—

And Pan is dead.

## XXXIV.

Earth outgrows the mythic fancies  
 Sung beside her in her youth:  
 And those debonaire romances  
 Sound but dull beside the truth.  
 Phœbus' chariot-course is run.  
 Look up, poets, to the sun!

Pan, Pan is dead.

## XXXV.

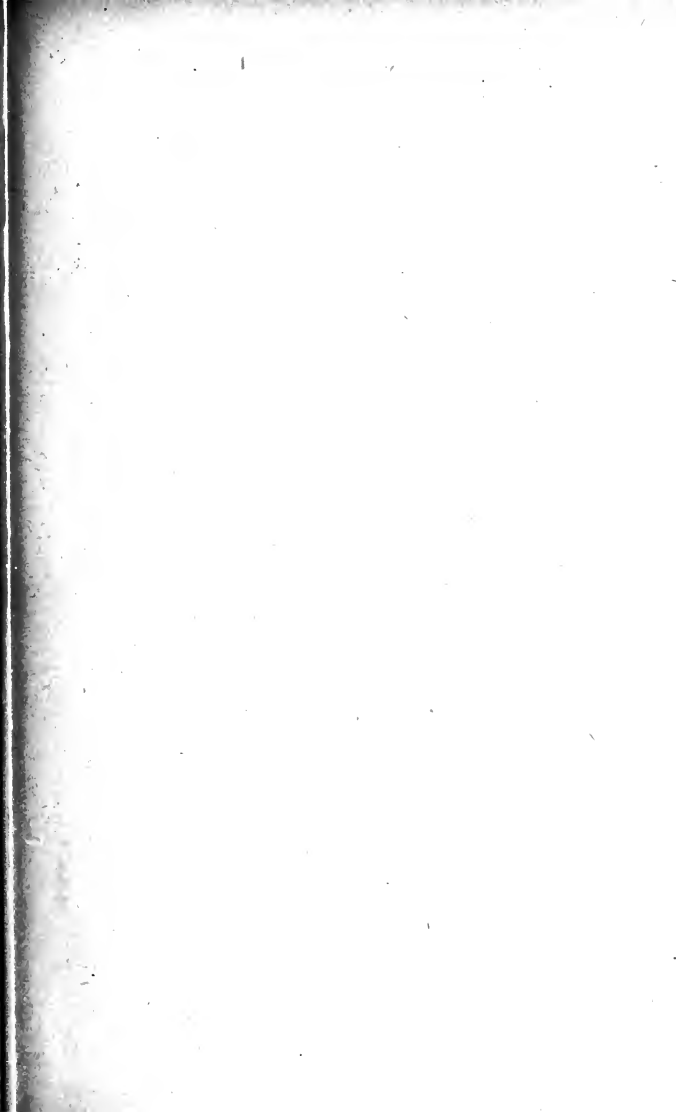
Christ hath sent us down the angels;  
 And the whole earth and the skies  
 Are illumed by altar-candles  
 Lit for blessed mysteries:  
 And a Priest's Hand through creation,  
 Waveth calm and consecration—

And Pan is dead.

## XXXVI.

Truth is fair: should we forego it?  
 Can we sigh right for a wrong?  
 God Himself is the best Poet,  
 And the Real is His song.  
 Sing His truth out fair and full,  
 And secure His beautiful.

Let Pan be dead.





B.P.—I.

“And his Mænads slowly saunter,  
Head aside, among the pines.”

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## XXXVII.

Truth is large. Our aspiration  
 Scarce embraces half we be.  
 Shame! to stand in His creation  
 And doubt Truth's sufficiency!—  
 To think God's song unexcelling  
 The poor tales of our own telling—  
 When Pan is dead!

## XXXVIII.

What is true and just and honest,  
 What is lovely, what is pure—  
 All of praise that hath admonisht,—  
 All of virtue, shall endure,—  
 These are themes for poets' uses,  
 Stirring nobler than the Muses—  
 Ere Pan was dead.

## XXXIX.

O brave poets, keep back nothing,  
 Nor mix falsehood with the whole!  
 Look up Godward! speak the truth in  
 Worthy song from earnest soul!  
 Hold, in high poetic duty,  
 Truest Truth the fairest Beauty!  
 Pan, Pan is dead.

## THE RUNAWAY SLAVE AT PILGRIM'S POINT.

## I.

I STAND on the mark beside the shore  
 Of the first white pilgrim's bended knee,  
 Where exile turned to ancestor,  
 And God was thanked for liberty.  
 I have run through the night, my skin is as dark,  
 I bend my knee down on this mark:  
 I look on the sky and the sea.

## THE RUNAWAY SLAVE.

## II.

O pilgrim-souls, I speak to you !  
 I see you come proud and slow  
 From the land of the spirits pale as dew,  
 And round me and round me ye go.  
 O pilgrims, I have gasped and run  
 All night long from the whips of one  
 Who in your names works sin and woe !

## III.

And thus I thought that I would come  
 And kneel here where ye knelt before,  
 And feel your souls around me hum  
 In undertone to the ocean's roar ;  
 And lift my black face, my black hand,  
 Here, in your names, to curse this land  
 Ye blessed in freedom's evermore.

## IV.

I am black, I am black,  
 And yet God made me, they say :  
 But if He did so, smiling back  
 He must have cast His work away  
 Under the feet of His white creatures,  
 With a look of scorn, that the dusky features  
 Might be trodden again to clay.

## V.

And yet He has made dark things  
 To be glad and merry as light :  
 There's a little dark bird sits and sings ;  
 There's a dark stream ripples out of sight ;  
 And the dark frogs chant in the safe morass,  
 And the sweetest stars are made to pass  
 O'er the face of the darkest night.

## VI.

But *we* who are dark, we are dark !  
 Ah God, we have no stars !  
 About our souls in care and cark  
 Our blackness shuts like prison-bars :  
 The poor souls crouch so far behind,  
 That never a comfort can they find  
 By reaching through the prison-bars.



## VII.

Indeed, we live beneath the sky,  
 That great smooth Hand of God stretched out  
 On all His children fatherly,  
 To save them from the dread and doubt  
 Which would be, if, from this low place,  
 All opened straight up to His face  
 Into the grand eternity.

## VIII.

And still God's sunshine and His frost,  
 They make us hot, they make us cold,  
 As if we were not black and lost ;  
 And the beasts and birds, in wood and fold,  
 Do fear and take us for very men :  
 Could the weep-poor-will or the cat of the glen  
 Look into my eyes and be bold ?

## IX.

I am black, I am black !  
 But, once, I laughed in girlish glee,  
 For one of my colour stood in the track  
 Where the drivers drove, and looked at me,  
 And tender and full was the look he gave—  
 Could a slave look *so* at another slave ?—  
 I look at the sky and the sea,

## X.

And from that hour our spirits grew  
 As free as if unsold, unbought :  
 Oh, strong enough, since we were two,  
 To conquer the world, we thought !  
 The drivers drove us day by day ;  
 We did not mind, we went one way,  
 And no better a freedom sought.

## XI.

In the sunny ground between the canes,  
 He said " I love you " as he passed ;  
 When the shingle-roof rang sharp with the rains,  
 I heard how he vowed it fast :  
 While others shook he smiled in the hut,  
 As he carved me a bowl of the cocoa-nut,  
 Through the roar of the hurricanes.

## XII.

I sang his name instead of a song,  
 Over and over I sang his name,  
 Upward and downward I drew it along  
 My various notes,—the same, the same !  
 I sang it low, that the slave-girls near  
 Might never guess from aught they could hear,  
 It was only a name—a name.

## XIII.

I look on the sky and the sea—  
 We were two to love, and two to pray,  
 Yes, two, O God, who cried to Thee,  
 Though nothing didst Thou say !  
 Coldly Thou sat'st behind the sun :  
 And now I cry who am but one,  
 Thou wilt not speak to-day.

## XIV.

We were black, we were black !—  
 We had no claim to love and bliss :  
 What marvel if each went to wrack ?  
 They wrung my cold hands out of his,  
 They dragged him—where ? I crawled to touch  
 His blood's mark in the dust . . . not much,  
 Ye pilgrim-souls, though plain as *this* !

## XV.

Wrong, followed by a deeper wrong !  
 Mere grief's too good for such as I :  
 So the white men brought the shame ere long  
 To strangle the sob of my agony.  
 They would not leave me for my dull  
 Wet eyes !—it was too merciful  
 To let me weep pure tears and die.

## XVI.

I am black, I am black !—  
 I wore a child upon my breast,  
 An amulet that hung too slack,  
 And, in my unrest, could not rest :  
 Thus we went moaning, child and mother,  
 One to another, one to another,  
 Until all ended for the best :

## XVII.

For hark ! I will tell you low, low,  
 I am black, you see,—  
 And the babe who lay on my bosom so,  
 Was far too white, too white for me ;  
 As white as the ladies who scorned to pray  
 Beside me at church but yesterday,  
 Though my tears had washed a place for my knee.

## XVIII.

My own, own child ! I could not bear  
 To look in his face, it was so white ;  
 I covered him up with a kerchief there,  
 I covered his face in close and tight :  
 And he moaned and struggled, as well might be,  
 For the white child wanted his liberty—  
 Ha, ha ! he wanted the master-right.

## XIX.

He moaned and beat with his head and feet,  
 His little feet that never grew ;  
 He struck them out, as it was meet,  
 Against my heart to break it through :  
 I might have sung and made him mild,  
 But I dared not sing to the white-faced child  
 The only song I knew.

## XX.

I pulled the kerchief very close :  
 He could not see the sun, I swear,  
 More, then, alive, than now he does  
 From between the roots of the mango . . . where ?  
 I know where. Close ! A child and mother  
 Do wrong to look at one another,  
 When one is black and one is fair.

## XXI.

Why, in that single glance I had  
 Of my child's face, . . . I tell you all,  
 I saw a look that made me mad !  
 The *master's* look, that used to fall  
 On my soul like his lash . . . or worse !  
 And so, to save it from my curse,  
 I twisted it round in my shawl.

## THE RUNAWAY SLAVE.

## XXII.

And he moaned and trembled from foot to head,  
 He shivered from head to foot ;  
 Till, after a time, he lay instead  
 Too suddenly still and mute.  
 I felt, beside, a stiffening cold,  
 I dared to lift up just a fold,  
 As in lifting a leaf of the mango-fruit.

## XXIII.

But *my* fruit . . . ha, ha !—there, had been  
 (I laugh to think on't at this hour !)  
 Your fine white angels (who have seen  
 Nearest the secret of God's power)  
 And plucked my fruit to make them wine,  
 And sucked the soul of that child of mine,  
 As the humming-bird sucks the soul of the flower.

## XXIV.

Ha, ha, the trick of the angels white !  
 They freed the white child's spirit so.  
 I said not a word, but, day and night,  
 I carried the body to and fro,  
 And it lay on my heart like a stone, as chill.  
 —The sun may shine out as much as he will :  
 I am cold, though it happened a month ago.

## XXV.

From the white man's house, and the black man's hut,  
 I carried the little body on ;  
 The forest's arms did round us shut,  
 And silence through the trees did run :  
 They asked no question as I went,  
 They stood too high for astonishment,  
 They could see God sit on his throne.

## XXVI.

My little body, kerchiefed fast,  
 I bore it on through the forest, on ;  
 And when I felt it was tired at last,  
 I scooped a hole beneath the moon :  
 Through the forest-tops the angels far,  
 With a white sharp finger from every star,  
 Did point and mock at what was done.

## XXVII.

Yet when it was all done aright,—  
 Earth, 'twixt me and my baby, strewed, —  
 All, changed to black earth,—nothing white,—  
 A dark child in the dark!—ensued  
 Some comfort, and my heart grew young :  
 I sate down smiling there and sung  
 The song I learnt in my maidenhood.

## XXVIII.

And thus we two were reconciled,  
 The white child and black mother, thus ;  
 For, as I sang it, soft and wild,  
 The same song, more melodious,  
 Rose from the grave whereon I sate :  
 It was the dead child singing that,  
 To join the souls of both of us.

## XXIX.

I look on the sea and the sky !  
 Where the pilgrims' ships first anchored lay  
 The free sun rideth gloriously,  
 But the pilgrim-ghosts have slid away  
 Through the earliest streaks of the morn :  
 My face is black, but it glares with a scorn  
 Which they dare not meet by day.

## XXX.

Ha !—in their stead, their hunter sons !  
 Ha, ha ! they are on me—they hunt in a ring !  
 Keep off ! I brave you all at once,  
 I throw off your eyes like snakes that sting !  
 You have killed the black eagle at nest, I think :  
 Did you ever stand still in your triumph, and shrink  
 From the stroke of her wounded wing ?

## XXXI.

(Man, drop that stone you dared to lift !—)  
 I wish you, who stand there five abreast,  
 Each, for his own wife's joy and gift,  
 A little corpse as safely at rest  
 As mine in the mangos ! Yes, but *she*  
 May keep live babies on her knee,  
 And sing the song she likes the best.

## XXXII.

I am not mad : I am black.

I see you staring in my face—

I know you, staring, shrinking back—

Ye are born of the Washington-race :

And this land is the free America :

And this mark on my wrist—(I prove what I say)

Ropes tied me up here to the flogging-place.

## XXXIII.

You think I shrieked then ? Not a sound !

I hung, as a gourd hangs in the sun ;

I only cursed them all around,

As softly as I might have done

My very own child : from these sands

Up to the mountains, lift your hands,

O slaves, and end what I begun !

## XXXIV.

Whips, curses ; these must answer those !

For in this UNION, you have set

Two kinds of men in adverse rows,

Each loathing each ; and all forget

The seven wounds in Christ's body fair ;

While HE sees gaping everywhere

Our countless wounds that pay no debt.

## XXXV.

Our wounds are different. Your white men

Are, after all, not gods indeed,

Nor able to make Christs again

Do good with bleeding. *We* who bleed  
(Stand off!) we help not in our loss !

*We* are too heavy for our cross,

And fall and crush you and your seed.

## XXXVI.

I fall, I swoon ! I look at the sky :

The clouds are breaking on my brain ;

I am floated along, as if I should die

Of liberty's exquisite pain—

In the name of the white child waiting for me

In the death-dark where we may kiss and agree,

White men, I leave you all curse-free

In my broken heart's disdain !

## A SABBATH MORNING AT SEA.

## I.

THE ship went on with solemn face ;  
To meet the darkness on the deep,  
The solemn ship went onward.  
I bowed down weary in the place ;  
For parting tears and present sleep  
Had weighed mine eyelids downward.

## II.

Thick sleep, which shut all dreams from me,  
And kept my inner self apart,  
And quiet from emotion,  
Then brake away and left me free,  
Made conscious of a human heart  
Betwixt the heaven and ocean.

## III.

The new sight, the new wondrous sight !  
The waters round me, turbulent,  
The skies, impassive o'er me,  
Calm in a moonless, sunless light,  
Half glorified by that intent  
Of holding the day-glory !

## IV.

Two pale thin clouds did stand upon  
The meeting line of sea and sky,  
With aspect still and mystic.  
I think they did foresee the sun,  
And rested on their prophecy  
In quietude majestic ;

## V.

Then flushed to radiance where they stood,  
Like statues by the open tomb  
Of shining saints half risen.—  
The sun !—he came up to be viewed ;  
And sky and sea made mighty room  
To inaugurate the vision !

## A SABBATH MORNING AT SEA.

## VI.

I oft had seen the dawnlight run,  
 As red wine, through the hills, and break  
 Through many a mist's inurning ;  
 But, here, no earth profaned the sun!  
 Heaven, ocean, did alone partake  
 The sacrament of morning.

## VII.

Away with thoughts fantastical !  
 I would be humble to my worth,  
 Self-guarded as self-doubted.  
 Though here no earthly shadows fall,  
 I, joying, grieving without earth,  
 May desecrate without it.

## VIII.

God's sabbath morning sweeps the waves :  
 I would not praise the pageant high,  
 Yet miss the dedicature :  
 I, carried toward the sunless graves  
 By force of natural things,—should I  
 Exult in only nature ?

## IX.

And could I bear to sit alone  
 'Mid nature's fixed benignities,  
 While my warm pulse was moving ?  
 Too dark thou art, O glittering sun,  
 Too strait ye are, capacious seas,  
 To satisfy the loving.

## X.

It seems a better lot than so,  
 To sit with friends beneath the beech,  
 And feel them dear and dearer ;  
 Or follow children as they go  
 In pretty pairs, with softened speech,  
 As the church-bells ring nearer.



## XI.

Love me, sweet friends, this sabbath day !  
 The sea sings round me while ye roll  
 Afar the hymn unaltered,  
 And kneel, where once I knelt, to pray,  
 And bless me deeper in the soul,  
 Because the voice has faltered.

## XII.

And though this sabbath comes to me  
 Without the stolèd minister,  
 Or chanting congregation,  
 God's Spirit brings communion, HE  
 Who brooded soft on waters drear,  
 Creator on creation.

## XIII.

Himself, I think, shall draw me higher,  
 Where keep the saints, with harp and song,  
 An endless sabbath morning,  
 And, on that sea commixed with fire,  
 Oft drop their eyelids raised too long  
 To the full Godhead's burning.

## A WOMAN'S SHORTCOMINGS.

SHE has laughed as softly as if she sighed,  
 She has counted six, and over,  
 Of a purse well filled, and a heart well tried—  
 Oh, each a worthy lover !  
 They "give her time"; for her soul must slip  
 Where the world has set the grooving :  
 She will lie to none with her fair red lip—  
 But love seeks truer loving.

She trembles her fan in a sweetness dumb,  
 As her thoughts were beyond recalling,  
 With a glance for *one*, and a glance for *some*,  
 From her eyelids rising and falling ;

## A MAN'S REQUIREMENTS.

Speaks common words with a blushful air,  
 Hears bold words, unreproving ;  
 But her silence says—what she never will swear—  
 And love seeks better loving.

Go, lady, lean to the night-guitar  
 And drop a smile to the bringer,  
 Then smile as sweetly, when he is far,  
 At the voice of an indoor singer.  
 Bask tenderly beneath tender eyes ;  
 Glance lightly, on their removing ;  
 And join new vows to old perjuries—  
 But dare not call it loving !

Unless you can think, when the song is done,  
 No other is soft in the rhythm ;  
 Unless you can feel, when left by One,  
 That all men else go with him ;  
 Unless you can know, when upraised by his breath,  
 That your beauty itself wants proving ;  
 Unless you can swear, " For life, for death ! " —  
 Oh, fear to call it loving !

Unless you can muse in a crowd all day,  
 On the absent face that fixed you ;  
 Unless you can love, as the angels may,  
 With the breadth of heaven betwixt you ;  
 Unless you can dream that his faith is fast,  
 Through behoving and unbehoving ;  
 Unless you can *die* when the dream is past—  
 Oh, never call it loving !

## A MAN'S REQUIREMENTS.

LOVE me, Sweet, with all thou art,  
 Feeling, thinking, seeing ;  
 Love me in the lightest part,  
 Love me in full being.

Love me with thine open youth  
 In its frank surrender ;  
 With the vowing of thy mouth,  
 With its silence tender.

Love me with thine azure eyes,  
Made for earnest granting ;  
Taking colour from the skies,  
Can Heaven's truth be wanting ?

Love me with their lids, that fall  
Snow-like at first meeting ;  
Love me with thine heart, that all  
Neighbours then see beating.

Love me with thine hand stretched out  
Freely—open minded :  
Love me with thy loitering foot,—  
Hearing one behind it.

Love me with thy voice, that turns  
Sudden faint above me ;  
Love me with thy blush that burns  
When I murmur, *Love me!*

Love me with thy thinking soul,  
Break it to love-sighing ;  
Love me with thy thoughts that roll  
On through living—dying.

Love me in thy gorgeous airs,  
When the world has crowned thee ;  
Love me, kneeling at thy prayers,  
With the angels round thee.

Love me pure, as musers do,  
Up the woodlands shady :  
Love me gaily, fast and true,  
As a winsome lady.

Through all hopes that keep us brave,  
Further off or nigher,  
Love me for the house and grave,—  
And for something higher.

Thus, if thou wilt prove me, Dear,  
Woman's love no fable,  
*I* will love *thee*—half a year—  
As a man is able.

## SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGUESE.

## I.

I THOUGHT once how Theocritus had sung  
 Of the sweet years, the dear and wished-for years,  
 Who each one in a gracious hand appears  
 To bear a gift for mortals, old or young :  
 And, as I mused it in his antique tongue,  
 I saw, in gradual vision through my tears,  
 The sweet, sad years, the melancholy years,  
 Those of my own life, who by turns had flung  
 A shadow across me. Straightway I was 'ware,  
 So weeping, how a mystic Shape did move  
 Behind me, and drew me backward by the hair ;  
 And a voice said in mastery, while I strove,—  
 " Guess now who holds thee ?"—" Death," I said. But,  
 there,  
 The silver answer rang—" Not Death, but Love."

## II.

BUT only three in all God's universe  
 Have heard this word thou hast said,—Himself, beside  
 Thee speaking, and me listening ! and replied  
 One of us . . . *that* was God, . . . and laid the curse  
 So darkly on my eyelids, as to amerce  
 My sight from seeing thee,—that if I had died,  
 The deathweights, placed there, would have signified  
 Less absolute exclusion. " Nay " is worse  
 From God than from all others, O my friend !  
 Men could not part us with their worldly jars,  
 Nor the seas change us, nor the tempests bend ;  
 Our hands would touch for all the mountain-bars :  
 And, heaven being rolled between us at the end,  
 We should but vow the faster for the stars.

## III.

UNLIKE are we, unlike, O princely Heart !  
 Unlike our uses and our destinies.  
 Our ministering two angels look surprise  
 On one another, as they strike athwart  
 Their wings in passing. Thou, bethink thee, art  
 A guest for queens to social pageantries,

With gages from a hundred brighter eyes  
 Than tears, even, can make mine, to play thy part  
 Of chief musician. What hast *thou* to do  
 With looking from the lattice-lights at me,  
 A poor, tired, wandering singer, singing through  
 The dark, and leaning up a cypress tree?  
 The chrim is on thine head,—on mine, the dew,—  
 And Death must dig the level where these agree.

## IV.

THOU hast thy calling to some palace floor,  
 Most gracious singer of high poems! where  
 The dancers will break footing, from the care  
 Of watching up thy pregnant lips for more.  
 And dost thou lift this house's latch, too poor  
 For hand of thine? and canst thou think and bear  
 To let thy music drop here unaware  
 In folds of golden fullness at my door?  
 Look up and see the casement broken in,  
 The bats and owlets builders in the roof!  
 My cricket chirps against thy mandolin.  
 Hush, call no echo up in further proof  
 Of desolation! There's a voice within  
 That weeps . . . as thou must sing . . . alone, aloof.

## V.

I LIFT my heavy heart up solemnly,  
 As once Electra her sepulchral urn,  
 And, looking in thine eyes, I overturn  
 The ashes at thy feet. Behold and see  
 What a great heap of grief lay hid in me,  
 And how the red wild sparkles dimly burn  
 Through the ashen grayness. If thy foot in scorn  
 Could tread them out to darkness utterly,  
 It might be well, perhaps. But if, instead,  
 Thou wait beside me for the wind to blow  
 The gray dust up, . . . those laurels on thine head,  
 O my Belovèd, will not shield thee so,  
 That none of all the fires shall scorch and shred  
 The hair beneath. Stand further off then! go.

## SONNETS.

## VI.

Go from me. Yet I feel that I shall stand  
 Henceforward in thy shadow. Nevermore  
 Alone upon the threshold of my door  
 Of individual life, I shall command  
 The uses of my soul, nor lift my hand  
 Serenely in the sunshine as before,  
 Without the sense of that which I forbore—  
 Thy touch upon the palm. The widest land  
 Doom takes to part us, leaves thy heart in mine  
 With pulses that beat double. What I do  
 And what I dream include thee, as the wine  
 Must taste of its own grapes. And when I sue  
 God for myself, He hears that name of thine,  
 And sees within my eyes the tears of two.

## VII.

THE face of all the world is changed, I think,  
 Since first I heard the footsteps of thy soul  
 Move still, oh, still, beside me, as they stole  
 Betwixt me and the dreadful outer brink  
 Of obvious death, where I, who thought to sink,  
 Was caught up into love, and taught the whole  
 Of life in a new rhythm. The cup of dole  
 God gave for baptism, I am fain to drink,  
 And praise its sweetness, Sweet, with thee anear.  
 The names of country, heaven, are changed away  
 For where thou art or shalt be, there or here;  
 And this . . . this lute and song . . . loved yesterday,  
 (The singing angels know) are only dear  
 Because thy name moves right in what they say.

## VIII.

WHAT can I give thee back, O liberal  
 And princely giver, who hast brought the gold  
 And purple of thine heart, unstained, untold,  
 And laid them on the outside of the wall  
 For such as I to take or leave withal,  
 In unexpected largesse? am I cold,  
 Ungrateful, that for these most manifold  
 High gifts, I render nothing back at all?  
 Not so; not cold,—but very poor instead.  
 Ask God who knows. For frequent tears have run

The colours from my life, and left so dead  
 And pale a stuff, it were not fitly done  
 To give the same as pillow to thy head.  
 Go farther ! let it serve to trample on.

## IX.

CAN it be right to give what I can give ?  
 To let thee sit beneath the fall of tears  
 As salt as mine, and hear the sighing years  
 Re-sighing on my lips renunciative  
 Through those infrequent smiles which fail to live  
 For all thy adjurations ? O my fears,  
 That this can scarce be right ! We are not peers,  
 So to be lovers ; and I own, and grieve,  
 That givers of such gifts as mine are, must  
 Be counted with the ungenerous. Out, alas !  
 I will not soil thy purple with my dust,  
 Nor breathe my poison on thy Venice-glass,  
 Nor give thee any love—which were unjust.  
 Beloved, I only love thee ! let it pass.

## X.

YET, love, mere love, is beautiful indeed  
 And worthy of acceptance. Fire is bright,  
 Let temple burn, or flax ; an equal light  
 Leaps in the flame from cedar-plank or weed :  
 And love is fire. And when I say at need  
*I love thee . . . mark ! . . . I love thee*—in thy sight  
 I stand transfigured, glorified aright,  
 With conscience of the new rays that proceed  
 Out of my face toward thine. There's nothing low  
 In love, when love the lowest : meanest creatures  
 Who love God, God accepts while loving so.  
 And what I *feel*, across the inferior features  
 Of what I *am*, doth flash itself, and show  
 How that great work of Love enhances Nature's.

## XI.

AND therefore if to love can be desert,  
 I am not all unworthy. Cheeks as pale  
 As these you see, and trembling knees that fail  
 To bear the burden of a heavy heart,—

This weary minstrel-life that once was girt  
 To climb Aornus, and can scarce avail  
 To pipe now 'gainst the valley nightingale  
 A melancholy music,—why advert  
 To these things? O Belovèd, it is plain  
 I am not of thy worth nor for thy place!  
 And yet, because I love thee, I obtain  
 From that same love this vindicating grace,  
 To live on still in love, and yet in vain,—  
 To bless thee, yet renounce thee to thy face.

## XII.

INDEED this very love which is my boast,  
 And which, when rising up from breast to brow,  
 Doth crown me with a ruby large enow  
 To draw men's eyes and prove the inner cost,—  
 This love even, all my worth, to the uttermost,  
 I should not love withal, unless that thou  
 Hadst set me an example, shown me how,  
 When first thine earnest eyes with mine were crossed,  
 And love called love. And thus, I cannot speak  
 Of love even, as a good thing of my own:  
 Thy soul hath snatched up mine all faint and weak,  
 And placed it by thee on a golden throne,—  
 And that I love (O soul, we must be meek!)  
 Is by thee only, whom I love alone.

## XIII.

AND wilt thou have me fashion into speech  
 The love I bear thee, finding words enough,  
 And hold the torch out, while the winds are rough,  
 Between our faces, to cast light on each?—  
 I drop it at thy feet. I cannot teach  
 My hand to hold my spirit so far off  
 From myself—me—that I should bring thee proof  
 In words, of love hid in me out of reach.  
 Nay, let the silence of my womanhood  
 Commend my woman-love to thy belief,—  
 Seeing that I stand unwon, however wooed,  
 And rend the garment of my life, in brief,  
 By a most dauntless, voiceless fortitude,  
 Lest one touch of this heart convey its grief.



## XIV.

IF thou must love me, let it be for nought  
 Except for love's sake only. Do not say  
 "I love her for her smile—her look—her way  
 Of speaking gently,—for a trick of thought  
 That falls in well with mine, and certes brought  
 A sense of pleasant ease on such a day"—  
 For these things in themselves, Belovèd, may  
 Be changed, or change for thee,—and love, so wrought,  
 May be unwrought so. Neither love me for  
 Thine own dear pity's wiping my cheeks dry,—  
 A creature might forget to weep, who bore  
 Thy comfort long, and lose thy love thereby!  
 But love me for love's sake, that evermore  
 Thou may'st love on, through love's eternity.

## XV.

ACCUSE me not, beseech thee, that I wear  
 Too calm and sad a face in front of thine;  
 For we two look two ways, and cannot shine  
 With the same sunlight on our brow and hair.  
 On me thou lookest with no doubting care,  
 As on a bee shut in a crystalline;  
 Since sorrow hath shut me safe in love's divine  
 And to spread wing and fly in the outer air  
 Were most impossible failure, if I strove  
 To fail so. But I look on thee—on thee—  
 Beholding, besides love, the end of love,  
 Hearing oblivion beyond memory;  
 As one who sits and gazes from above,  
 Over the rivers to the bitter sea.

## XVI.

AND yet, because thou overcomest so,  
 Because thou art more noble and like a king,  
 Thou canst prevail against my fears and fling  
 Thy purple round me, till my heart shall grow  
 Too close against thine heart henceforth to know  
 How it shook when alone. Why, conquering  
 May prove as lordly and complete a thing  
 In lifting upward, as in crushing low!

And as a vanquished soldier yields his sword  
 To one who lifts him from the bloody earth,  
 Even so, Belovèd, I at last record,  
 Here ends my strife. If *thou* invite me forth,  
 I rise above abasement at the word.  
 Make thy love larger to enlarge my worth.

## XVII.

My poet, thou canst touch on all the notes  
 God set between His After and Before,  
 And strike up and strike off the general roar  
 Of the rushing worlds a melody that floats  
 In a serene air purely. Antidotes  
 Of medicated music, answering for  
 Mankind's forlornest uses, thou canst pour  
 From thence into their ears. God's will devotes  
 Thine to such ends, and mine to wait on thine.  
 How, Dearest, wilt thou have me for most use?  
 A hope, to sing by gladly? or a fine  
 Sad memory, with thy songs to interfuse?  
 A shade, in which to sing—of palm or pine?  
 A grave, on which to rest from singing? Choose.

## XVIII.

I NEVER gave a lock of hair away  
 To a man, Dearest, except this to thee,  
 Which now upon my fingers thoughtfully  
 I ring out to the full brown length, and say,  
 "Take it." My day of youth went yesterday;  
 My hair no longer bounds to my foot's glee,  
 Nor plant I it from rose or myrtle-tree,  
 As girls do, any more: it only may  
 Now shade on two pale cheeks the mark of tears,  
 Taught drooping from the head that hangs aside  
 Through sorrow's trick. I thought the funeral-shears  
 Would take this first, but Love is justified,—  
 Take it thou,—finding pure, from all those years.  
 The kiss my mother left here when she died.

## XIX.

THE soul's Rialto hath its merchandise;  
 I barter curl for curl upon that mart,  
 And from my poet's forehead to my heart  
 Receive this lock which outweighs argosies,—

As purple black, as erst to Pindar's eyes  
 The dim purpleal tresses gloomed athwart  
 The nine white Muse-brows. For this counterpart, . . .  
 The bay-crown's shade, Belovèd, I surmise,  
 Still lingers on thy curl, it is so black!  
 Thus, with a fillet of smooth-kissing breath,  
 I tie the shadows safe from gliding back,  
 And lay the gift where nothing hindereth;  
 Here on my heart, as on thy brow, to lack  
 No natural heat till mine grows cold in death.

## XX.

BELOVÈD, my Belovèd, when I think  
 That thou wast in the world a year ago,  
 What time I sate alone here in the snow  
 And saw no footprint, heard the silence sink  
 No moment at thy voice, but, link by link,  
 Went counting all my chains, as if that so  
 They never could fall off at any blow  
 Struck by thy possible hand,—why, thus I drink  
 Of life's great cup of wonder! Wonderful,  
 Never to feel thee thrill the day or night  
 With personal act or speech,—nor ever cull  
 Some prescience of thee with the blossoms white  
 Thou sawest growing! Atheists are as dull,  
 Who cannot guess God's presence out of sight.

## XXI.

SAY over again, and yet once over again,  
 That thou dost love me. Though the word repeated  
 Should seem a "cuckoo-song," as thou dost treat it.  
 Remember, never to the hill or plain,  
 Valley and wood, without her cuckoo-strain  
 Comes the fresh Spring in all her green completed.  
 Belovèd, I, amid the darkness greeted  
 By a doubtful spirit-voice, in that doubt's pain  
 Cry, "Speak once more—thou lovest!" Who can fear  
 Too many stars, though each in heaven shall roll,  
 Too many flowers, though each shall crown the year?  
 Say thou dost love me, love me, love me—toll  
 The silver iterance!—only minding, Dear,  
 To love me also in silence with thy soul.

## XXII.

WHEN our two souls stand up erect and strong,  
 Face to face, silent, drawing nigh and nigher,  
 Until the lengthening wings break into fire  
 At either curvèd point,—what bitter wrong  
 Can the earth do to us, that we should not long  
 Be here contented? Think. In mounting higher,  
 The angels would press on us and aspire  
 To drop some golden orb of perfect song  
 Into our deep, dear silence. Let us stay  
 Rather on earth, Belovèd,—where the unfit  
 Contrarious moods of men recoil away  
 And isolate pure spirits, and permit  
 A place to stand and love in for a day,  
 With darkness and the death-hour rounding it.

## XXIII.

Is it indeed so? If I lay here dead,  
 Wouldst thou miss any life in losing mine?  
 And would the sun for thee more coldly shine  
 Because of grave-damps falling round my head?  
 I marvelled, my Belovèd, when I read  
 Thy thought so in the letter. I am thine—  
 But . . . so much to thee? Can I pour thy wine  
 While my hands tremble? Then my soul, instead  
 Of dreams of death, resumes life's lower range.  
 Then, love me, Love; look on me—breathe on me!  
 As brighter ladies do not count it strange,  
 For Love, to give up acres and degree,  
 I yield the grave for thy sake, and exchange  
 My near sweet view of Heaven, for earth with thee!

## XXIV.

LET the world's sharpness like a claspèd knife  
 Shut in upon itself and do no harm  
 In this close hand of Love, now soft and warm,  
 And let us hear no sound of human strife,  
 After the click of the shutting. Life to life—  
 I lean upon thee, Dear, without alarm,  
 And feel as safe as guarded by a charm  
 Against the stab of worldlings, who, if rife,

Are weak to injure. Very whitely still  
 The lilies of our lives may reassure  
 Their blossoms from their roots, accessible  
 Alone to heavenly dews that drop not fewer ;  
 Growing straight, out of man's reach, on the hill.  
 God only, who made us rich, can make us poor.

## XXV.

A HEAVY heart, Belovèd, have I borne  
 From year to year until I saw thy face,  
 And sorrow after sorrow took the place  
 Of all those natural joys as lightly worn  
 As the stringed pearls, each lifted in its turn  
 By a beating heart at dance-time. Hopes apace  
 Were changed to long despairs, till God's own grace  
 Could scarcely lift above the world forlorn  
 My heavy heart. Then *thou* didst bid me bring  
 And let it drop adown thy calmly great  
 Deep being ! Fast it sinketh, as a thing  
 Which its own nature doth precipitate,  
 While thine doth close above it, mediating  
 Betwixt the stars and the unaccomplished fate.

## XXVI.

I LIVED with visions for my company  
 Instead of men and women, years ago,  
 And found them gentle mates, nor thought to know  
 A sweeter music than they played to me.  
 But soon their trailing purple was not free  
 Of this world's dust, their lutes did silent grow,  
 And I myself grew faint and blind below  
 Their vanishing eyes. Then THOU didst come—to be,  
 Belovèd, what they seemed. Their shining fronts,  
 Their songs, their splendours (better, yet the same,  
 As river-water hallowed into founts),  
 Met in thee, and from out thee overcame  
 My soul with satisfaction of all wants :  
 Because God's gifts put man's best dreams to shame.

## XXVII.

MY own Belovèd, who hast lifted me  
 From this drear flat of earth where I was thrown,  
 And, in betwixt the languid ringlets, blown  
 A life-breath, till the forehead hopefully

Shines out again, as all the angels see,  
 Before thy saving kiss! My own, my own,  
 Who camest to me when the world was gone,  
 And I who looked for only God, found *thee*!  
 I find thee; I am safe, and strong, and glad.  
 As one who stands in dewless asphodel,  
 Looks backward on the tedious time he had  
 In the upper life,—so I, with bosom-swell,  
 Make witness, here, between the good and bad,  
 That Love, as strong as Death, retrieves as well.

## XXVIII.

My letters! all dead paper, mute and white!  
 And yet they seem alive and quivering  
 Against my tremulous hands, which loose the string  
 And let them drop down on my knee to-night.  
 This said,—he wished to have me in his sight  
 Once, as a friend: this fixed a day in spring  
 To come and touch my hand . . . a simple thing,  
 Yet I wept for it!—this, . . . the paper's light . . .  
 Said, *Dear, I love thee*; and I sank and quailed  
 As if God's future thundered on my past.  
 This said, *I am thine*—and so its ink has paled  
 With lying at my heart that beat too fast.  
 And this . . . O Love, thy words have ill availed,  
 If, what this said, I dared repeat at last!

## XXIX.

I THINK of thee!—my thoughts do twine and bud  
 About thee, as wild vines, about a tree,  
 Put out broad leaves, and soon there's nought to see  
 Except the straggling green which hides the wood.  
 Yet, O my palm-tree, be it understood  
 I will not have my thoughts instead of thee  
 Who art dearer, better! Rather, instantly  
 Renew thy presence; as a strong tree should,  
 Rustle thy boughs and set thy trunk all bare,  
 And let these bands of greenery which insphere thee,  
 Drop heavily down,—burst, shattered, everywhere!  
 Because, in this deep joy to see and hear thee,  
 And breathe within thy shadow a new air,  
 I do not think of thee—I am too near thee.

## XXX.

I SEE thine image through my tears to-night,  
 And yet to-day I saw thee smiling. How  
 Refer the cause?—Belovèd, is it thou  
 Or I, who makes me sad? The acolyte  
 Amid the chanted joy and thankful rite  
 May so fall flat, with pale insensate brow,  
 On the altar-stair. I hear thy voice and vow,  
 Perplexed, uncertain, since thou art out of sight,  
 As he, in his swooning ears, the choir's amen.  
 Belovèd, dost thou love? or did I see all  
 The glory as I dreamed, and fainted when  
 Too vehement light dilated my ideal,  
 For my soul's eyes? Will that light come again,  
 As now these tears come—falling hot and real?

## XXXI.

THOU comest! all is said without a word.  
 I sit beneath thy looks, as children do  
 In the noon-sun, with souls that tremble through  
 Their happy eyelids from an unaverred  
 Yet prodigal inward joy. Behold, I erred  
 In that last doubt! and yet I cannot rue  
 The sin most, but the occasion—that we two  
 Should for a moment stand unministered  
 By a mutual presence. Ah, keep near and close,  
 Thou dovelike help! and, when my fears would rise,  
 With thy broad heart serenely interpose:  
 Brood down with thy divine sufficiencies  
 These thoughts which tremble when bereft of those,  
 Like callow birds left desert to the skies.

## XXXII.

THE first time that the sun rose on thine oath  
 To love me, I looked forward to the moon  
 To slacken all those bonds which seemed too soon  
 And quickly tied to make a lasting troth.  
 Quick-loving hearts, I thought, may quickly loathe,  
 And, looking on myself, I seemed not one  
 For such man's love!—more like an out of tune  
 Worn viol, a good singer would be wroth

To spoil his song with, and which, snatched in haste,  
 Is laid down at the first ill-sounding note.  
 I did not wrong myself so, but I placed  
 A wrong on *thee*. For perfect strains may float  
 'Neath master-hands, from instruments defaced,—  
 And great souls, at one stroke, may do and doat.

## XXXIII.

YES, call me by my pet-name! let me hear  
 The name I used to run at, when a child,  
 From innocent play, and leave the cowslips piled,  
 To glance up in some face that proved me dear  
 With the look of its eyes. I miss the clear  
 Fond voices which, being drawn and reconciled  
 Into the music of Heaven's undefiled,  
 Call me no longer. Silence on the bier,  
 While I call God—call God!—So let thy mouth  
 Be heir to those who are now exanimate.  
 Gather the north flowers to complete the south,  
 And catch the early love up in the late.  
 Yes, call me by that name,—and I, in truth,  
 With the same heart, will answer and not wait.

## XXXIV.

WITH the same heart, I said, I'll answer thee,  
 As those, when thou shalt call me by my name—  
 Lo, the vain promise! is the same, the same,  
 Perplexed and ruffled by life's strategy?  
 When called before, I told how hastily  
 I dropped my flowers, or brake off from a game,  
 To run and answer with the smile that came  
 At play last moment, and went on with me  
 Through my obedience. When I answer now,  
 I drop a grave thought, break from solitude;  
 Yet still my heart goes to thee—ponder how—  
 Not as to a single good, but all my good!  
 Lay thy hand on it, best one, and allow  
 That no child's foot could run fast as this blood.

## XXXV.

IF I leave all for thee, wilt thou exchange  
 And be all to me? Shall I never miss  
 Home-talk and blessing, and the common kiss  
 That comes to each in turn, nor count it strange,



When I look up, to drop on a new range  
 Of walls and floors, another home than this?  
 Nay, wilt thou fill that place by me which is  
 Filled by dead eyes too tender to know change?  
 That's hardest. If to conquer love, has tried,  
 To conquer grief, tries more, as all things prove  
 For grief indeed is love and grief beside.  
 Alas, I have grieved so I am hard to love.  
 Yet love me—wilt thou? Open thine heart wide,  
 And fold within the wet wings of thy dove.

## XXXVI.

WHEN we met first and loved, I did not build  
 Upon the event with marble. Could it mean  
 To last, a love set pendulous between  
 Sorrow and sorrow? Nay, I rather thrilled,  
 Distrusting every light that seemed to gild  
 The onward path, and feared to overlean  
 A finger even. And, though I have grown serene  
 And strong since then, I think that God has willed  
 A still renewable fear . . . O love, O troth . . .  
 Lest these enclasped hands should never hold,  
 This mutual kiss drop down between us both  
 As an unowned thing, once the lips being cold.  
 And Love, be false! if *he*, to keep one oath,  
 Must lose one joy, by his life's star foretold.

## XXXVII.

PARDON, oh, pardon, that my soul should make  
 Of all that strong divineness which I know  
 For thine and thee, an image only so  
 Formed of the sand, and fit to shift and break.  
 It is that distant years which did not take  
 Thy sovranly, recoiling with a blow,  
 Have forced my swimming brain to undergo  
 Their doubt and dread, and blindly to forsake  
 Thy purity of likeness and distort  
 Thy worthiest love to a worthless counterfeit;  
 As if a shipwrecked Pagan, safe in port,  
 His guardian sea-god to commemorate,  
 Should set a sculptured porpoise, gills a-snort  
 And vibrant tail, within the temple-gate.

## XXXVIII.

FIRST time he kissed me, he but only kissed  
 The fingers of this hand wherewith I write ;  
 And ever since, it grew more clean and white,  
 Slow to world-greetings, quick with its " Oh, list,"  
 When the angels speak. A ring of amethyst  
 I could not wear here plainer to my sight,  
 Than that first kiss. The second passed in height  
 The first, and sought the forehead, and half missed,  
 Half falling on the hair. O beyond meed !  
 That was the chrism of love, which love's own crown,  
 With sanctifying sweetness, did precede.  
 The third, upon my lips, was folded down  
 In perfect, purple state ; since when, indeed,  
 I have been proud and said, " My love, my own."

## XXXIX.

BECAUSE thou hast the power and own'st the grace  
 To look through and behind this mask of me  
 (Against which, years have beat thus blanchingly  
 With their rains !) and behold my soul's true face,  
 The dim and weary witness of life's race, —  
 Because thou hast the faith and love to see,  
 Through that same soul's distracting lethargy,  
 The patient angel waiting for a place  
 In the new Heavens, — because nor sin nor woe,  
 Nor God's infliction, nor death's neighbourhood,  
 Nor all, which others viewing, turn to go,  
 Nor all which makes me tired of all, self-viewed, —  
 Nothing repels thee, . . . Dearest, teach me so  
 To pour out gratitude, as thou dost, good !

## XL.

OH, yes ! they love through all this world of ours !  
 I will not gainsay love, called love, forsooth.  
 I have heard love talked in my early youth,  
 And since, not so long back but that the flowers  
 Then gathered, smell still. Mussulmans and Giaours  
 Throw kerchiefs at a smile, and have no ruth  
 For any weeping. Polypheme's white tooth  
 Slips on the nut, if, after frequent showers,  
 The shell is over-smooth, — and not so much  
 Will turn the thing called love, aside to hate,

Or else to oblivion. But thou art not such  
 A lover, my Belovèd ! thou canst wait  
 Through sorrow and sickness, to bring souls to touch,  
 And think it soon when others cry " Too late."

## XLI.

I THANK all who have loved me in their hearts,  
 With thanks and love from mine. Deep thanks to all  
 Who paused a little near the prison-wall,  
 To hear my music in its louder parts,  
 Ere they went onward, each one to the mart's  
 Or temple's occupation, beyond call.  
 But thou, who in my voice's sink and fall,  
 When the sob took it, thy divinest Art's  
 Own instrument didst drop down at thy foot  
 To hearken what I said between my tears, . . .  
 Instruct me how to thank thee ! Oh, to shoot  
 My soul's full meaning into future years,  
 That *they* should lend it utterance, and salute  
 Love that endures, from Life that disappears !

## XLII.

" *My future will not copy fair my past*"—  
 I wrote that once ; and thinking at my side  
 My ministering life-angel justified.  
 The word by his appealing look upcast  
 To the white throne of God, I turned at last,  
 And there, instead, saw thee, not unallied  
 To angels in thy soul ! Then I, long tried  
 By natural ills, received the comfort fast,  
 While budding, at thy sight, my pilgrim's staff  
 Gave out green leaves with morning dews impearled.  
 I seek no copy now of life's first half :  
 Leave here the pages with long musing curled,  
 And write me new my future's epigraph,  
 New angel mine, unhopèd for in the world !

## XLIII.

How do I love thee ? Let me count the ways.  
 I love thee to the depth and breadth and height  
 My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight  
 For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.  
 I love thee to the level of every day's  
 Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight.

I love thee freely, as men strive for Right ;  
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.  
I love thee with the passion put to use  
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.  
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose  
With my lost saints,—I love thee with the breath,  
Smiles, tears, of all my life !—and, if God choose,  
I shall but love thee better after death.

## XLIV.

BELOVÈD, thou hast brought me many flowers  
Plucked in the garden, all the summer through  
And winter, and it seemed as if they grew  
In this close room, nor missed the sun and showers.  
So, in the like name of that love of ours,  
Take back these thoughts which here unfolded too,  
And which on warm and cold days I withdrew  
From my heart's ground. Indeed, those beds and bowers  
Be overgrown with bitter weeds and rue,  
And wait thy weeding ; yet here's eglantine,  
Here's ivy !—take them, as I used to do  
Thy flowers, and keep them where they shall not pine :  
Instruct thine eyes to keep their colours true,  
And tell thy soul, their roots are left in mine.

## AURORA LEIGH.

TO

JOHN KENYON, Esq.

THE words "cousin" and "friend" are constantly recurring in this poem, the last pages of which have been finished under the hospitality of your roof, my own dearest cousin and friend;—cousin and friend, in a sense of less equality and greater disinterestedness than "Romney"'s.

Ending, therefore, and preparing once more to quit England, I venture to leave in your hands this book, the most mature of my works, and the one into which my highest convictions upon Life and Art have entered: that as, through my various efforts in literature and steps in life, you have believed in me, borne with me, and been generous to me, far beyond the common uses of mere relationship or sympathy of mind, so you may kindly accept, in sight of the public, this poor sign of esteem, gratitude, and affection, from—Your unforgetting

E. B. B.

39, DEVONSHIRE PLACE,  
October 17, 1856.

## FIRST BOOK.

OF writing many books there is no end;  
And I who have written much in prose and verse  
For others' uses, will write now for mine,—  
Will write my story for my better self,  
As when you paint your portrait for a friend,  
Who keeps it in a drawer and looks at it  
Long after he has ceased to love you, just  
To hold together what he was and is.

I, writing thus, am still what men call young;  
I have not so far left the coasts of life  
To travel inland, that I cannot hear  
That murmur of the outer Infinite

Which unweaned babies smile at in their sleep  
 When wondered at for smiling ; not so far,  
 But still I catch my mother at her post  
 Beside the nursery-door, with finger up,  
 " Hush, hush—here's too much noise ! " while her sweet eyes  
 Leap forward, taking part against her word  
 In the child's riot. Still I sit and feel  
 My father's slow hand, when she had left us both,  
 Stroke out my childish curls across his knee ;  
 And hear Assunta's daily jest (she knew  
 He liked it better than a better jest)  
 Inquire how many golden scudi went  
 To make such ringlets. O my father's hand,  
 Stroke the poor hair down, stroke it heavily,—  
 Draw, press the child's head closer to thy knee !  
 I'm still too young, too young, to sit alone.

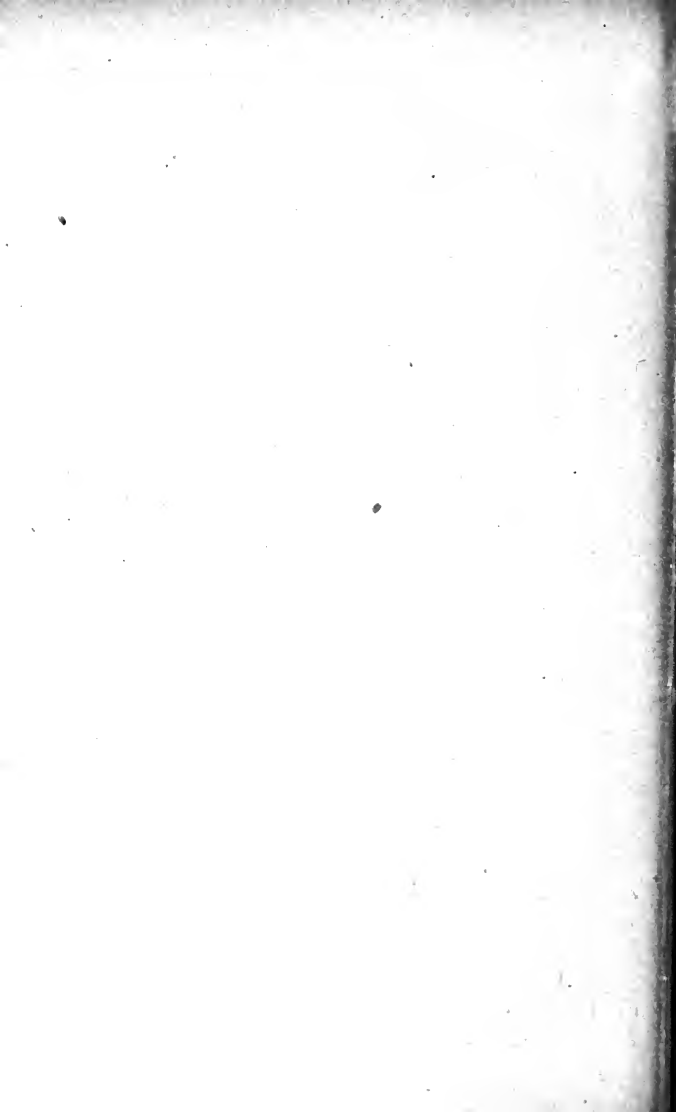
I write. My mother was a Florentine,  
 Whose rare blue eyes were shut from seeing me  
 When scarcely I was four years old ; my life,  
 A poor spark snatched up from a failing lamp  
 Which went out therefore. She was weak and frail ;  
 She could not bear the joy of giving life—  
 The mother's rapture slew her. If her kiss  
 Had left a longer weight upon my lips,  
 It might have steadied the uneasy breath,  
 And reconciled and fraternised my soul  
 With the new order. As it was, indeed,  
 I felt a mother-want about the world,  
 And still went seeking, like a bleating lamb  
 Left out at night, in shutting up the fold,—  
 As restless as a nest-deserted bird  
 Grown chill through something being away, though what  
 It knows not. I, Aurora Leigh, was born  
 To make my father sadder, and myself  
 Not over-joyous, truly. Women know  
 The way to rear up children (to be just),  
 They know a simple, merry, tender knack  
 Of tying sashes, fitting baby-shoes,  
 And stringing pretty words that make no sense,  
 And kissing full sense into empty words ;  
 Which things are corals to cut life upon,  
 Although such trifles : children learn by such,  
 Love's holy earnest in a pretty play,



B P.—I.

“To meet the darkness on the deep,  
The solemn ship went onward.”

*Page 269.*





And get not over-early solemnised,—  
 But seeing, as in a rose-bush, Love's Divine,  
 Which burns and hurts not,—not a single bloom,—  
 Become aware and unafraid of Love.  
 Such good do mothers. Fathers love as well  
 —Mine did, I know,—but still with heavier brains,  
 And wills more consciously responsible,  
 And not as wisely, since less foolishly ;  
 So mothers have God's licence to be missed.

My father was an austere Englishman,  
 Who, after a dry life-time spent at home  
 In college-learning, law, and parish talk,  
 Was flooded with a passion unaware,  
 His whole provisioned and complacent past  
 Drowned out from him that moment. As he stood  
 In Florence, where he had come to spend a month  
 And note the secret of Da Vinci's drains,  
 He musing somewhat absently, perhaps,  
 Some English question . . . whether men should pay  
 The unpopular but necessary tax  
 With left or right hand—in the alien sun  
 In that great square of the Santissima,  
 There drifted past him (scarcely marked enough  
 To move his comfortable island-scorn),  
 A train of priestly banners, cross and psalm,—  
 The white-veiled rose-crowned maidens holding up  
 Tall tapers, weighty for such wrists, aslant  
 To the blue luminous tremor of the air,  
 And letting drop the white wax as they went  
 To eat the bishop's wafer at the church ;  
 From which long trail of chanting priests and girls,  
 A face flashed like a cymbal on his face,  
 And shook with silent clangour brain and heart,  
 Transfiguring him to music. Thus, even thus,  
 He too received his sacramental gift  
 With eucharistic meanings ; for he loved.

And thus beloved, she died. I've heard it said  
 That but to see him in the first surprise  
 Of widower and father, nursing me,  
 Unmothered little child of four years old,  
 His large man's hands afraid to touch my curls,  
 K As if the gold would tarnish,—his grave lips

Contriving such a miserable smile,  
As if he knew needs must, or I should die,  
And yet 'twas hard,—would almost make the stones  
Cry out for pity. There's a verse he set  
In Santa Croce to her memory,  
“Weep for an infant too young to weep much  
When death removed this mother”—stops the mirth  
To-day, on women's faces when they walk  
With rosy children hanging on their gowns,  
Under the cloister, to escape the sun  
That scorches in the piazza. After which,  
He left our Florence, and made haste to hide  
Himself, his prattling child, and silent grief,  
Among the mountains above Pelago ;  
Because unmothered babes, he thought, had need  
Of mother nature more than others use,  
And Pan's white goats, with udders warm and full  
Of mystic contemplations, come to feed  
Poor milkless lips of orphans like his own—  
Such scholar-scrap he talked, I've heard from friends,  
For even prosaic men, who wear grief long,  
Will get to wear it as a hat aside  
With a flower stuck in't. Father, then, and child,  
We lived among the mountains many years,  
God's silence on the outside of the house,  
And we, who did not speak too loud, within ;  
And old Assunta to make up the fire,  
Crossing herself whene'er a sudden flame  
Which lightened from the firewood, made alive  
That picture of my mother on the wall.  
The painter drew it after she was dead ;  
And when the face was finished, throat and hands,  
Her cameriera carried him, in hate  
Of the English-fashioned shroud, the last brocade  
She dressed in at the Pitti. “He should paint  
No sadder thing than that,” she swore, “to wrong  
Her poor signora.” Therefore very strange  
The effect was. I, a little child, would crouch  
For hours upon the floor, with knees drawn up,  
And gaze across them, half in terror, half  
In adoration, at the picture there,—  
That swan-like supernatural white life,  
Just sailing upward from the red stiff silk  
Which seemed to have no part in it, nor power

To keep it from quite breaking out of bounds :  
 For hours I sate and stared. Assunta's awe  
 And my poor father's melancholy eyes  
 Still pointed that way. That way, went my thoughts  
 When wandering beyond sight. And as I grew  
 In years, I mixed, confused, unconsciously,  
 Whatever I last read or heard or dreamed,  
 Abhorrent, admirable, beautiful,  
 Pathetical, or ghastly, or grotesque,  
 With still that face . . . which did not therefore change,  
 But kept the mystic level of all forms  
 And fears and admirations ; was by turns  
 Ghost, fiend, and angel, fairy, witch, and sprite,—  
 A dauntless Muse who eyes a dreadful Fate,  
 A loving Psyche who loses sight of Love,  
 A still Medusa, with mild milky brows  
 All curdled and all clothed upon with snakes  
 Whose slime falls fast as sweat will ; or, anon,  
 Our Lady of the Passion, stabbed with swords  
 Where the Babe sucked ; or, Lamia in her first  
 Moonlighted pallor, ere she shrunk and blinked,  
 And, shuddering, wriggled down to the unclean  
 Or, my own mother, leaving her last smile  
 In her last kiss, upon the baby-mouth  
 My father pushed down on the bed for that,—  
 Or my dead mother, without smile or kiss,  
 Buried at Florence. All which images,  
 Centred on the picture, glassed themselves  
 Before my meditative childhood, . . . as  
 The incoherences of change and death  
 Are represented fully, mixed and merged,  
 In the smooth fair mystery of perpetual Life.

And while I stared away my childish wits  
 Upon my mother's picture (ah, poor child !)  
 My father, who through love had suddenly  
 Thrown off the old conventions, broken loose  
 From chin-bands of the soul, like Lazarus,  
 Yet had no time to learn to talk and walk  
 Or grow anew familiar with the sun,—  
 Who had reached to freedom, not to action, lived,  
 But lived as one entranced, with thoughts, not aims,—  
 Whom love had unmade from a common man,  
 But not completed to an uncommon man,—

My father taught me what he had learnt the best  
 Before he died and left me,—grief and love.  
 And, seeing we had books among the hills,  
 Strong words of counselling souls, confederate  
 With vocal pines and waters,—out of books  
 He taught me all the ignorance of men,  
 And how God laughs in heaven when any man  
 Says, “Here I’m learned; this, I understand;  
 In that, I am never caught at fault or doubt.”  
 He sent the schools to school, demonstrating  
 A fool will pass for such through one mistake,  
 While a philosopher will pass for such,  
 Through said mistakes being ventured in the gross  
 And heaped up to a system.

I am like,  
 They tell me, my dear father. Broader brows  
 Howbeit, upon a slenderer undergrowth  
 Of delicate features,—paler, near as grave;  
 But then my mother’s smile breaks up the whole,  
 And makes it better sometimes than itself.

So, nine full years, our days were hid with God  
 Among His mountains. I was just thirteen,  
 Still growing like the plants from unseen roots  
 In tongue-tied Springs,—and suddenly awoke  
 To full life and its needs and agonies,  
 With an intense, strong, struggling heart beside  
 A stone-dead father. Life, struck sharp on death,  
 Makes awful lightning. His last word was, “Love—”  
 “Love, my child, love, love!”—(then he had done with grief)  
 “Love, my child.” Ere I answered he was gone,  
 And none was left to love in all the world.

There ended childhood: what succeeded next  
 I recollect as, after fevers, men  
 Thread back the passage of delirium,  
 Missing the turn still, baffled by the door;  
 Smooth endless days, notched here and there with knives;  
 A weary, wormy darkness, spurred i’ the flank  
 With flame, that it should eat and end itself  
 Like some tormented scorpion. Then, at last,  
 I do remember clearly, how there came  
 A stranger with authority, not right  
 (I thought not), who commanded, caught me up

From old Assunta's neck ; how, with a shriek,  
 She let me go,—while I, with ears too full  
 Of my father's silence, to shriek back a word,  
 In all a child's astonishment at grief  
 Stared at the wharfage where she stood and moaned,  
 My poor Assunta, where she stood and moaned !  
 The white walls, the blue hills, my Italy,  
 Drawn backward from the shuddering steamer-deck,  
 Like one in anger drawing back her skirts  
 Which suppliants catch at. Then the bitter sea  
 Inexorably pushed between us both,  
 And, sweeping up the ship with my despair,  
 Threw us out as a pasture to the stars.

Ten nights and days we voyaged on the deep ;  
 Ten nights and days, without the common face  
 Of any day or night ; the moon and sun  
 Cut off from the green reconciling earth,  
 To starve into a blind ferocity  
 And glare unnatural ; the very sky  
 (Dropping its bell-net down upon the sea  
 As if no human heart should 'scape alive),  
 Bedraggled with the desolating salt,  
 Until it seemed no more that holy heaven  
 To which my father went. All new, and strange—  
 The universe turned stranger, for a child.

Then, land !—then, England ! oh, the frosty cliffs  
 Looked cold upon me. Could I find a home  
 Among those mean red houses through the fog ?  
 And when I heard my father's language first  
 From alien lips which had no kiss for mine,  
 I wept aloud, then laughed, then wept, then wept,—  
 And some one near me said the child was mad  
 Through much sea-sickness. The train swept us on.  
 Was this my father's England ? the great Isle ?  
 The ground seemed cut up from the fellowship  
 Of verdure, field from field, as man from man ;  
 The skies themselves looked low and positive,  
 As almost you could touch them with a hand  
 And dared to do it, they were so far off  
 From God's celestial crystals ; all things, blurred  
 And dull and vague. Did Shakspeare and his mates

Absorb the light here?—not a hill or stone  
 With heart to strike a radiant colour up,  
 Or active outline on the indifferent air!

I think I see my father's sister stand  
 Upon the hall-step of her country-house  
 To give me welcome. She stood straight and calm,  
 Her somewhat narrow forehead braided tight  
 As if for taming accidental thoughts  
 From possible pulses; brown hair pricked with gray  
 By frigid use of life (she was not old,  
 Although my father's elder by a year),  
 A nose drawn sharply, yet in delicate lines;  
 A close mild mouth, a little soured about  
 The ends, through speaking unrequited loves,  
 Or peradventure niggardly half-truths;  
 Eyes of no colour,—once they might have smiled,  
 But never, never have forgot themselves  
 In smiling; cheeks, in which was yet a rose  
 Of perished summers, like a rose in a book,  
 Kept more for ruth than pleasure,—if past bloom,  
 Past fading also. She had lived, we'll say,  
 A harmless life, she called a virtuous life,  
 A quiet life, which was not life at all  
 (But that, she had not lived enough to know),  
 Between the vicar and the county squires,  
 The lord-lieutenant looking down sometimes  
 From the empyreal, to assure their souls  
 Against chance-vulgarisms, and, in the abyss,  
 The apothecary looked on once a year,  
 To prove their soundness of humility.  
 The poor-club exercised her Christian gifts  
 Of knitting stockings, stitching petticoats,  
 Because we are of one flesh after all  
 And need one flannel (with a proper sense  
 Of difference in the quality)—and still  
 The book-club, guarded from your modern trick  
 Of shaking dangerous questions from the crease,  
 Preserved her intellectual. She had lived  
 A sort of cage-bird life, born in a cage,  
 Accounting that to leap from perch to perch  
 Was act and joy enough for any bird.  
 Dear heaven, how silly are the things that live  
 In thickets and eat berries!

I, alas,  
 A wild bird scarcely fledged, was brought to her cage,  
 And she was there to meet me. Very kind.  
 Bring the clean water ; give out the fresh seed.

She stood upon the steps to welcome me,  
 Calm, in black garb. I clung about her neck,—  
 Young babes, who catch at every shred of wool  
 To draw the new light closer, catch and cling  
 Less blindly. In my ears, my father's word  
 Hummed ignorantly, as the sea in shells,  
 "Love, love, my child." She, black there with my  
 grief,  
 Might feel my love—she was his sister once—  
 I clung to her. A moment, she seemed moved,  
 Kissed me with cold lips, suffered me to cling,  
 And drew me feebly through the hall, into  
 The room she sate in.

There, with some strange spasm  
 Of pain and passion, she wrung loose my hands  
 Imperiously, and held me at arm's length,  
 And with two gray-steel naked-bladed eyes  
 Searched through my face,—ay, stabbed it through and  
 through,  
 Through brows and cheeks and chin, as if to find  
 A wicked murderer in my innocent face,  
 If not here, there perhaps. Then, drawing breath,  
 She struggled for her ordinary calm,  
 And missed it rather,—told me not to shrink,  
 As if she had told me not to lie or swear,—  
 "She loved my father, and would love me too  
 As long as I deserved it." Very kind.  
 I understood her meaning afterward ;  
 She thought to find my mother in my face,  
 And questioned it for that. For she, my aunt,  
 Had loved my father truly, as she could,  
 And hated, with the gall of gentle souls,  
 My Tuscan mother, who had fooled away  
 A wise man from wise courses, a good man  
 From obvious duties, and, depriving her,  
 His sister, of the household precedence,  
 Had wronged his tenants, robbed his native land,  
 And made him mad, alike by life and death,  
 In love and sorrow. She had pored for years

What sort of woman could be suitable  
 To her sort of hate, to entertain it with ;  
 And so, her very curiosity  
 Became hate too, and all the idealism  
 She ever used in life, was used for hate,  
 Till hate, so nourished, did exceed at last  
 The love from which it grew, in strength and heat,  
 And wrinkled her smooth conscience with a sense  
 Of disputable virtue (say not, sin)  
 When Christian doctrine was enforced at church.

And thus my father's sister was to me  
 My mother's hater. From that day, she did  
 Her duty to me (I appreciate it  
 In her own word as spoken to herself),  
 Her duty, in large measure, well-pressed out,  
 But measured always. She was generous, bland,  
 More courteous than was tender, gave me still  
 The first place,—as if fearful that God's saints  
 Would look down suddenly and say, "Herein  
 You missed a point, I think, through lack of love."  
 Alas, a mother never is afraid  
 Of speaking angerly to any child,  
 Since love, she knows, is justified of love.

And I, I was a good child on the whole,  
 A meek and manageable child. Why not ?  
 I did not live, to have the faults of life :  
 There seemed more true life in my father's grave  
 Than in all England. Since *that* threw me off  
 Who fain would cleave (his latest will, they say,  
 Consigned me to his land), I only thought  
 Of lying quiet there where I was thrown  
 Like sea-weed on the rocks, and suffer her  
 To prick me to a pattern with her pin,  
 Fibre from fibre, delicate leaf from leaf,  
 And dry out from my drowned anatomy  
 The last sea-salt left in me.

So it was.

I broke the copious curls upon my head  
 In braids, because she liked smooth-ordered hair.  
 I left off saying my sweet Tuscan words,  
 Which still at any stirring of the heart



Came up to float across the English phrase,  
 As lilies (*Bene . . . or che ch'è*), because  
 She liked my father's child to speak his tongue.  
 I learnt the collects and the catechism,  
 The creeds, from Athanasius back to Nice,  
 The Articles . . . the Tracts *against* the times  
 (By no means Buonaventure's "Prick of Love"),  
 And various popular synopses of  
 Inhuman doctrines never taught by John,  
 Because she liked instructed piety.  
 I learnt my complement of classic French  
 (Kept pure of Balzac and neologism),  
 And German also, since she liked a range  
 Of liberal education,—tongues, not books.  
 I learnt a little algebra, a little  
 Of the mathematics,—brushed with extreme flounce  
 The circle of the sciences, because  
 She disliked women who are frivolous.  
 I learnt the royal genealogies  
 Of Oviedo, the internal laws  
 Of the Burmese empire, . . . by how many feet  
 Mount Chimborazo outsoars Himmeleh,  
 What navigable river joins itself  
 To Lara, and what census of the year five  
 Was taken at Klagenfurt,—because she liked  
 A general insight into useful facts.  
 I learnt much music,—such as would have been  
 As quite impossible in Johnson's day  
 As still it might be wished—fine sleights of hand  
 And unimagined fingering, shuffling off  
 The hearer's soul through hurricanes of notes  
 To a noisy Tophet; and I drew . . . costumes  
 From French engravings, nereids neatly draped,  
 With smirks of simmering godship,—I washed in  
 From nature, landscapes (rather say, washed out),  
 I danced the polka and Cellarius,  
 Spun glass, stuffed birds, and modelled flowers in wax,  
 Because she liked accomplishments in girls.  
 I read a score of books on womanhood  
 To prove, if women do not think at all,  
 They may teach thinking (to a maiden-aunt  
 Or else the author)—books demonstrating  
 Their right of comprehending husband's talk  
 When not too deep, and even of answering

With pretty "may it please you," or "so it is,"—  
 Their rapid insight and fine aptitude,  
 Particular worth and general missionariness,  
 As long as they keep quiet by the fire  
 And never say "no" when the world says "ay,"  
 For that is fatal,—their angelic reach  
 Of virtue, chiefly used to sit and darn,  
 And fatten household sinners,—their, in brief,  
 Potential faculty in everything  
 Of abdicating power in it: she owned  
 She liked a woman to be womanly,  
 And English women, she thanked God and sighed  
 (Some people always sigh in thanking God),  
 Were models to the universe. And last  
 I learnt cross-stitch, because she did not like  
 To see me wear the night with empty hands,  
 A-doing nothing. So, my shepherdess  
 Was something after all (the pastoral saints  
 Be praised for't), leaning lovelorn with pink eyes  
 To match her shoes, when I mistook the silks;  
 Her head uncrushed by that round weight of hat  
 So strangely similar to the tortoise-shell  
 Which slew the tragic poet.

By the way,  
 The works of women are symbolical.  
 We sew, sew, prick our fingers, dull our sight,  
 Producing what? A pair of slippers, sir,  
 To put on when you're weary—or a stool  
 To stumble over and vex you . . . "curse that stool!"  
 Or else at best, a cushion, where you lean  
 And sleep, and dream of something we are not,  
 But would be for your sake. Alas, alas!  
 This hurts most, this . . . that, after all, we are paid  
 The worth of our work, perhaps.

In looking down  
 Those years of education (to return),  
 I wonder if Brinvilliers suffered more  
 In the water-torture, . . . flood succeeding flood  
 To drench the incapable throat and split the veins . . .  
 Than I did. Certain of your feebler souls  
 Go out in such a process; many pine  
 To a sick, inodorous light; my own endured:  
 I had relations in the Unseen, and drew  
 The elemental nutriment and heat

From nature, as earth feels the sun at nights,  
 Or as a babe sucks surely in the dark.  
 I kept the life, thrust on me, on the outside  
 Of the inner life, with all its ample room  
 For heart and lungs, for will and intellect,  
 Inviolable by conventions. God,  
 I thank thee for that grace of thine !

At first,

I felt no life which was not patience,—did  
 The thing she bade me, without heed to a thing  
 Beyond it, sate in just the chair she placed,  
 With back against the window, to exclude  
 The sight of the great lime-tree on the lawn,  
 Which seemed to have come on purpose from the woods  
 To bring the house a message,—ay, and walked  
 Demurely in her carpeted low rooms,  
 As if I should not, hearkening my own steps,  
 Misdoubt I was alive. I read her books,  
 Was civil to her cousin, Romney Leigh,  
 Gave ear to her vicar, tea to her visitors,  
 And heard them whisper, when I changed a cup  
 (I blushed for joy at that)—“The Italian child,  
 For all her blue eyes and her quiet ways,  
 Thrives ill in England : she is paler yet  
 Than when we came the last time ; she will die.”

“Will die.” My cousin, Romney Leigh, blushed too,  
 With sudden anger, and, approaching me,  
 Said low between his teeth—“You’re wicked now?  
 You wish to die and leave the world a-dusk  
 For others, with your naughty light blown out?”  
 I looked into his face defyingly.  
 He might have known that, being what I was,  
 ’Twas natural to like to get away  
 As far as dead folk can ; and then indeed  
 Some people make no trouble when they die.  
 He turned and went abruptly, slammed the door  
 And shut his dog out.

Romney, Romney Leigh.

I have not named my cousin hitherto,  
 And yet I used him as a sort of friend ;  
 My elder by few years, but cold and shy  
 And absent . . . tender, when he thought of it,  
 Which scarcely was imperative, grave betimes,

As well as early master of Leigh Hall,  
 Whereof the nightmare sate upon his youth  
 Repressing all its seasonable delights,  
 And agonising with a ghastly sense  
 Of universal hideous want and wrong  
 To incriminate possession. When he came  
 From college to the country, very oft  
 He crossed the hills on visits to my aunt,  
 With gifts of blue grapes from the hot-houses,  
 A book in one hand,—mere statistics (if  
 I chanced to lift the cover), count of all  
 The goats whose beards are sprouting down toward hell,  
 Against God's separating judgment-hour.  
 And she, she almost loved him,—even allowed  
 That sometimes he should seem to sigh my way ;  
 It made him easier to be pitiful,  
 And sighing was his gift. So, undisturbed  
 At whiles she let him shut my music up  
 And push my needles down, and lead me out  
 To see in that south angle of the house  
 The figs grow black as if by a Tuscan rock,  
 On some light pretext. She would turn her head  
 At other moments, go to fetch a thing,  
 And leave me breath enough to speak with him,  
 For his sake ; it was simple.

Sometimes too

He would have saved me utterly, it seemed,  
 He stood and looked so.

Once, he stood so near

He dropped a sudden hand upon my head  
 Bent down on woman's work, as soft as rain—  
 But then I rose and shook it off as fire,  
 The stranger's touch that took my father's place,  
 Yet dared seem soft.

I used him for a friend

Before I ever knew him for a friend.  
 'Twas better, 'twas worse also, afterward :  
 We came so close, we saw our differences  
 Too intimately. Always Romney Leigh  
 Was looking for the worms, I for the gods.  
 A godlike nature his ; the gods look down,  
 Incurious of themselves ; and certainly  
 'Tis well I should remember, how, those days,  
 I was a worm too, and he looked on me.

A little by his act perhaps, yet more  
 By something in me, surely not my will,  
 I did not die. But slowly, as one in swoon,  
 To whom life creeps back in the form of death,  
 With a sense of separation, a blind pain  
 Of blank obstruction, and a roar i' the ears  
 Of visionary chariots which retreat  
 As earth grows clearer . . . slowly, by degrees,  
 I woke, rose up . . . where was I? in the world;  
 For uses, therefore, I must count worth while.

I had a little chamber in the house,  
 As green as any privet-hedge a bird  
 Might choose to build in, though the nest itself  
 Could show but dead-brown sticks and straws; the walls  
 Were green, the carpet was pure green, the straight  
 Small bed was curtained greenly, and the folds  
 Hung green about the window, which let in  
 The out-door world with all its greenery.  
 You could not push your head out and escape  
 A dash of dawn-dew from the honeysuckle,  
 But so you were baptised into the grace  
 And privilege of seeing. . . .

First, the lime

(I had enough, there, of the lime, be sure,—  
 My morning-dream was often hummed away  
 By the bees in it); past the lime, the lawn,  
 Which, after sweeping broadly round the house,  
 Went trickling through the shrubberies in a stream  
 Of tender turf, and wore and lost itself  
 Among the acacias, over which you saw  
 The irregular line of elms by the deep lane  
 Which stopped the grounds and dammed the overflow  
 Of arbutus and laurel. Out of sight  
 The lane was; sunk so deep, no foreign tramp  
 Nor drover of wild ponies out of Wales  
 Could guess if lady's hall or tenant's lodge  
 Dispensed such odours,—though his stick well-crook'd  
 Might reach the lowest trail of blossoming briar  
 Which dipped upon the wall. Behind the elms,  
 And through their tops, you saw the folded hills  
 Striped up and down with hedges (burly oaks  
 Projecting from the lines to show themselves),  
 Through which my cousin Romney's chimneys smoked

As still as when a silent mouth in frost  
Breathes—showing where the woodlands hid Leigh Hall  
While, far above, a jut of table-land,  
A promontory without water, stretched,—  
You could not catch it if the days were thick,  
Or took it for a cloud ; but, otherwise  
The vigorous sun would catch it up at eve  
And use it for an anvil, till he had filled  
The shelves of heaven with burning thunderbolts,  
And proved he need not rest so early :—then,  
When all his setting trouble was resolved  
To a trance of passive glory, you might see  
In apparition on the golden sky  
(Alas, my Giotto's background!) the sheep run  
Along the fine clear outline, small as mice  
That run along a witch's scarlet thread.

Not a grand nature. Not my chestnut-woods  
Of Vallombrosa, cleaving by the spurs  
To the precipices. Not my headlong leaps  
Of waters, that cry out for joy or fear  
In leaping through the palpitating pines,  
Like a white soul tossed out to eternity  
With thrills of time upon it. Not indeed  
My multitudinous mountains, sitting in  
The magic circle, with the mutual touch  
Electric, panting from their full deep hearts  
Beneath the influent heavens, and waiting for  
Communion and commission. Italy  
Is one thing, England one.

On English ground

You understand the letter . . . ere the fall,  
How Adam lived in a garden. All the fields  
Are tied up fast with hedges, nosegay-like ;  
The hills are crumpled plains, — the plains, parterres, —  
The trees, round, woolly, ready to be clipped ;  
And if you seek for any wilderness  
You find, at best, a park. A nature tamed  
And grown domestic like a barn-door fowl,  
Which does not awe you with its claws and beak,  
Nor tempt you to an eyrie too high up,  
But which, in cackling, sets you thinking of  
Your eggs to-morrow at breakfast, in the pause  
Of finer meditation.

Rather say,  
 A sweet familiar nature, stealing in  
 As a dog might, or child, to touch your hand  
 Or pluck your gown, and humbly mind you so  
 Of presence and affection, excellent  
 For inner uses, from the things without.

I could not be unthankful, I who was  
 Entreated thus and holpen. In the room  
 I speak of, ere the house was well awake,  
 And also after it was well asleep,  
 I sate alone, and drew the blessing in  
 Of all that nature. With a gradual step,  
 A stir among the leaves, a breath, a ray,  
 It came in softly, while the angels made  
 A place for it beside me. The moon came,  
 And swept my chamber clean of foolish thoughts.  
 The sun came, saying, "Shall I lift this light  
 Against the lime-tree, and you will not look?  
 I make the birds sing—listen! . . . but, for you,  
 God never hears your voice, excepting when  
 You lie upon the bed at nights and weep."

Then something moved me. Then, I wakened up  
 More slowly than I verily write now,  
 But wholly, at last, I wakened, opened wide  
 The window and my soul, and let the airs  
 And out-door sights sweep gradual gospels in,  
 Regenerating what I was. O Life,  
 How oft we throw it off and think,—“Enough,  
 Enough of life in so much!—here's a cause  
 For rupture;—herein we must break with Life,  
 Or be ourselves unworthy; here we are wronged,  
 Maimed, spoiled for aspiration: farewell Life!”

—And so, as froward babes, we hide our eyes  
 And think all ended.—Then, Life calls to us  
 In some transformed, apocryphal, new voice,  
 Above us, or below us, or around . . .  
 Perhaps we name it Nature's voice, or Love's,  
 Tricking ourselves, because we are more ashamed  
 To own our compensations than our griefs:  
 Still, Life's voice!—still, we make our peace with Life.  
 And I, so young then, was not sullen. Soon  
 I used to get up early, just to sit

And watch the morning quicken in the gray,  
 And hear the silence open like a flower,  
 Leaf after leaf,—and stroke with listless hand  
 The woodbine through the window, till at last  
 I came to do it with a sort of love,  
 At foolish unaware : whereat I smiled,—  
 A melancholy smile, to catch myself  
 Smiling for joy.

Capacity for joy

Admits temptation. It seemed, next, worth while  
 To dodge the sharp sword set against my life ;  
 To slip downstairs through all the sleepy house,  
 As mute as any dream there, and escape  
 As a soul from the body, out of doors,—  
 Glide through the shrubberies, drop into the lane,  
 And wander on the hills an hour or two,  
 Then back again before the house should stir.

Or else I sate on in my chamber green,  
 And lived my life, and thought my thoughts, and prayed  
 My prayers without the vicar ; read my books,  
 Without considering whether they were fit  
 To do me good. Mark, there. We get no good  
 By being ungenerous, even to a book,  
 And calculating profits . . . so much help  
 By so much reading. It is rather when  
 We gloriously forget ourselves, and plunge  
 Soul-forward, headlong, into a book's profound,  
 Impassioned for its beauty and salt of truth—  
 'Tis then we get the right good from a book.

I read much. What my father taught before  
 From many a volume, Love re-emphasised  
 Upon the self-same pages : Theophrast  
 Grew tender with the memory of his eyes,  
 And Ælian made mine wet. The trick of Greek  
 And Latin, he had taught me, as he would  
 Have taught me wrestling or the game of fives  
 If such he had known,—most like a shipwrecked man  
 Who heaps his single platter with goats' cheese  
 And scarlet berries ; or like any man  
 Who loves but one, and so gives all at once,  
 Because he has it, rather than because  
 He counts it worthy. Thus, my father gave ;



And thus, as did the women formerly  
 By young Achilles, when they pinned the veil  
 Across the boy's audacious front, and swept  
 With tuneful laughs the silver-fretted rocks,  
 He wrapt his little daughter in his large  
 Man's doublet, careless did it fit or no.

But, after I had read for memory,  
 I read for hope. The path my father's foot  
 Had trod me out, which suddenly broke off  
 (What time he dropped the wallet of the flesh  
 And passed), alone I carried on, and set  
 My child-heart 'gainst the thorny underwood,  
 To reach the grassy shelter of the trees.  
 Ah, babe i' the wood, without a brother-babe !  
 My own self-pity, like the red-breast bird,  
 Flies back to cover all that past with leaves.

Sublimest danger, over which none weeps,  
 When any young wayfaring soul goes forth  
 Alone, unconscious of the perilous road,  
 The day-sun dazzling in his limpid eyes,  
 To thrust his own way, he an alien, through  
 The world of books ! Ah, you !—you think it fine,  
 You clap hands—"A fair day !"—you cheer him on,  
 As if the worst could happen were to rest  
 Too long beside a fountain. Yet, behold,  
 Behold !—the world of books is still the world ;  
 And worldlings in it are less merciful  
 And more puissant. For the wicked there  
 Are winged like angels. Every knife that strikes,  
 Is edged from elemental fire to assail  
 A spiritual life. The beautiful seems right  
 By force of beauty, and the feeble wrong  
 Because of weakness. Power is justified,  
 Though armed against St. Michael. Many a crown  
 Covers bald foreheads. In the book-world, true,  
 There's no lack, neither, of God's saints and kings,  
 That shake the ashes of the grave aside  
 From their calm locks, and undiscomfited  
 Look steadfast truths against Time's changing mask.  
 True, many a prophet teaches in the roads ;  
 True, many a seer pulls down the flaming heavens  
 Upon his own head in strong martyrdom,

In order to light men a moment's space.  
 But stay !—who judges?—who distinguishes  
 'Twixt Saul and Nahash justly, at first sight,  
 And leaves king Saul precisely at the sin,  
 To serve king David? who discerns at once  
 The sound of the trumpets, when the trumpets blow  
 For Alaric as well as Charlemagne?  
 Who judges prophets, and can tell true seers  
 From conjurers? The child, there? Would you leave  
 That child to wander in a battle-field,  
 And push his innocent smile against the guns?  
 Or even in the catacombs, . . . his torch  
 Grown ragged in the fluttering air, and all  
 The dark a-mutter round him? not a child!

I read books bad and good—some bad and good  
 At once: good aims not always make good books:  
 Well-tempered spades turn up ill-smelling soils  
 In digging vineyards, even: books, that prove  
 God's being so definitely, that man's doubt  
 Grows self-defined the other side the line,  
 Made atheist by suggestion; moral books,  
 Exasperating to license; genial books,  
 Discounting from the human dignity;  
 And merry books, which set you weeping when  
 The sun shines,—ay, and melancholy books,  
 Which make you laugh that any one should weep  
 In this disjointed life, for one wrong more.

The world of books is still the world, I write,  
 And both worlds have God's providence, thank God,  
 To keep and hearten: with some struggle, indeed,  
 Among the breakers, some hard swimming through  
 The deeps—I lost breath in my soul sometimes,  
 And cried, "God save me if there's any God,"  
 But, even so, God saved me; and, being dashed  
 From error on to error, every turn  
 Still brought me nearer to the central truth.

I thought so. All this anguish in the thick  
 Of men's opinions . . . press and counterpress,  
 Now up, now down, now underfoot, and now  
 Emergent . . . all the best of it, perhaps,

But throws you back upon a noble trust  
 And use of your own instinct,—merely proves  
 Pure reason stronger than bare inference  
 At strongest. Try it,—fix against heaven's wall  
 Your scaling ladders of high logic—mount  
 Step by step!—Sight goes faster; that still ray  
 Which strikes out from you, how, you cannot tell,  
 And why, you know not—(did you eliminate,  
 That such as you, indeed, should analyse?)  
 Goes straight and fast as light, and high as God.

The cygnet finds the water; but the man  
 Is born in ignorance of his element,  
 And feels out blind at first, disorganised  
 By sin i' the blood,—his spirit-insight dulled  
 And crossed by his sensations. Presently  
 We feel it quicken in the dark sometimes;  
 Then, mark, be reverent, be obedient,—  
 For those dumb motions of imperfect life  
 Are oracles of vital Deity  
 Attesting the Hereafter. Let who says  
 "The soul's a clean white paper," rather say,  
 A palimpsest, a prophet's holograph  
 Defiled, erased and covered by a monk's,—  
 The apocalypse, by a Longus! poring on  
 Which obscene text, we may discern perhaps  
 Some fair, fine trace of what was written once,  
 Some upstroke of an alpha and omega  
 Expressing the old scripture.

Books, books, books!

I had found the secret of a garret-room  
 Piled high with cases in my father's name;  
 Piled high, packed large,—where, creeping in and out  
 Among the giant fossils of my past,  
 Like some small nimble mouse between the ribs  
 Of a mastodon, I nibbled here and there  
 At this or that box, pulling through the gap,  
 In heats of terror, haste, victorious joy,  
 The first book first. And how I felt it beat  
 Under my pillow, in the morning's dark,  
 An hour before the sun would let me read!  
 My books!

At last, because the time was ripe,  
 I chanced upon the poets.

As the earth

Plunges in fury, when the internal fires  
Have reached and pricked her heart, and, throwing flat  
The marts and temples, the triumphal gates  
And towers of observation, clears herself  
To elemental freedom—thus, my soul,  
At poetry's divine first finger-touch,  
Let go conventions and sprang up surprised,  
Convicted of the great eternities  
Before two worlds.

What's this, Aurora Leigh,  
You write so of the poets, and not laugh?  
Those virtuous liars, dreamers after dark,  
Exaggerators of the sun and moon,  
And soothsayers in a tea-cup?

I write so  
Of the only truth-tellers, now left to God,—  
The only speakers of essential truth,  
Opposed to relative, comparative,  
And temporal truths; the only holders by  
His sun-skirts, through conventional gray glooms;  
The only teachers who instruct mankind,  
From just a shadow on a charnel-wall,  
To find man's veritable stature out,  
Erect, sublime,—the measure of a man,  
And that's the measure of an angel, says  
The apostle. Ay, and while your common men  
Build pyramids, gauge railroads, reign, reap, dine,  
And dust the flaunty carpets of the world  
For kings to walk on, or our senators,  
The poet suddenly will catch them up  
With his voice like a thunder. . . "This is soul,  
This is life, this word is being said in heaven,  
Here's God down on us! what are you about?"  
How all those workers start amid their work,  
Look round, look up, and feel, a moment's space,  
That carpet-dusting, though a pretty trade,  
Is not the imperative labour after all.

My own best poets, am I one with you,  
That thus I love you,—or but one through love?  
Does all this smell of thyme about my feet  
Conclude my visit to your holy hill  
In personal presence, or but testify

The rustling of your vesture through my dreams  
 With influent odours? When my joy and pain,  
 My thought and aspiration, like the stops  
 Of pipe or flute, are absolutely dumb  
 If not melodious, do you play on me,  
 My pipers,—and if, sooth, you did not blow,  
 Would no sound come? or is the music mine,  
 As a man's voice or breath is called his own,  
 Inbreathed by the Life-breather? There's a doubt  
 For cloudy seasons!

But the sun was high  
 When first I felt my pulses set themselves  
 For concords; when the rhythmic turbulence  
 Of blood and brain swept outward upon words,  
 As wind upon the alders, blanching them  
 By turning up their under-natures till  
 They trembled in dilation. O delight  
 And triumph of the poet,—who would say  
 A man's mere "yes," a woman's common "no,"  
 A little human hope of that or this,  
 And says the word so that it burns you through  
 With a special revelation, shakes the heart  
 Of all the men and women in the world,  
 As if one came back from the dead and spoke,  
 With eyes too happy, a familiar thing  
 Become divine i' the utterance! while for him  
 The poet, the speaker, he expands with joy;  
 The palpitating angel in his flesh  
 Thrills inly with consenting fellowship  
 To those innumerable spirits who sun themselves  
 Outside of time.

O life, O poetry,  
 —Which means life in life! cognisant of life  
 Beyond this blood-beat,—passionate for truth  
 Beyond these senses,—poetry, my life,—  
 My eagle, with both grappling feet still hot  
 From Zeus's thunder, who hast ravished me  
 Away from all the shepherds, sheep, and dogs,  
 And set me in the Olympian roar and round  
 Of luminous faces, for a cup-bearer,  
 To keep the mouths of all the godheads moist  
 For everlasting laughters,—I, myself,  
 Half drunk across the beaker, with their eyes!  
 How those gods look!

Enough so, Ganymede.

We shall not bear above a round or two—  
 We drop the golden cup at Herè's foot  
 And swoon back to the earth,—and find ourselves  
 Face-down among the pine-cones, cold with dew,  
 While the dogs bark, and many a shepherd scoffs,  
 "What's come now to the youth?" Such ups and  
 downs

Have poets.

Am I such indeed? The name  
 Is royal, and to sign it like a queen,  
 Is what I dare not,—though some royal blood  
 Would seem to tingle in me now and then,  
 With sense of power and ache,—with imposthumes  
 And manias usual to the race. Howbeit  
 I dare not: 'tis too easy to go mad,  
 And ape a Bourbon in a crown of straws;  
 The thing's too common.

Many fervent souls  
 Strike rhyme on rhyme, who would strike steel on steel  
 If steel had offered, in a restless heat  
 Of doing something. Many tender souls  
 Have strung their losses on a rhyming thread,  
 As children, cowslips:—the more pains they take,  
 The work more withers. Young men, ay, and maids,  
 Too often sow their wild oats in tame verse,  
 Before they sit down under their own vine  
 And live for use. Alas, near all the birds  
 Will sing at dawn,—and yet we do not take  
 The chaffering swallow for the holy lark.

In those days, though, I never analysed  
 Myself even. All analysis comes late.  
 You catch a sight of Nature, earliest,  
 In full front sun-face, and your eyelids wink  
 And drop before the wonder of't; you miss  
 The form, through seeing the light. I lived, those days,  
 And wrote because I lived—unlicensed else:  
 My heart beat in my brain. Life's violent flood  
 Abolished bounds,—and, which my neighbour's field,  
 Which mine, what mattered? It is so in youth.  
 We play at leap-frog over the god Term;  
 The love within us and the love without  
 Are mixed, confounded; if we are loved or love,

We scarce distinguish. " So, with other power.  
 Being acted on and acting seem the same :  
 In that first onrush of life's chariot-wheels,  
 We know not if the forests move or we.

And so, like most young poets, in a flush  
 Of individual life, I poured myself  
 Along the veins of others, and achieved  
 Mere lifeless imitations of live verse,  
 And made the living answer for the dead,  
 Profaning nature. " Touch not, do not taste,  
 Nor handle,"—we're too legal, who write young :  
 We beat the phorminx till we hurt our thumbs,  
 As if still ignorant of counterpoint ;  
 We call the Muse . . . " O Muse, benignant Muse !"  
 As if we had seen her purple-braided head  
 With the eyes in it, start between the boughs  
 As often as a stag's. What make-believe,  
 With so much earnest ! what effete results,  
 From virile efforts ! what cold wire-drawn odes,  
 From such white heats !—bucolics, where the cows  
 Would scare the writer if they splashed the mud  
 In lashing off the flies,—didactics, driven  
 Against the heels of what the master said ;  
 And counterfeiting epics, shrill with trumps  
 A babe might blow between two straining cheeks  
 Of bubbled rose, to make his mother laugh ;  
 And elegiac griefs, and songs of love,  
 Like cast-off nosegays picked up on the road,  
 The worse for being warm : all these things, writ  
 On happy mornings, with a morning heart,  
 That leaps for love, is active for resolve,  
 Weak for art only. Oft, the ancient forms  
 Will thrill, indeed, in carrying the young blood.  
 The wine-skins, now and then, a little warped,  
 Will crack even, as the new wine gurgles in.  
 Spare the old bottles !—spill not the new wine.

By Keats's soul the man who never stepped  
 In gradual progress like another man,  
 But, turning grandly on his central self,  
 Enspired himself in twenty perfect years  
 And died, not young—(the life of a long life,  
 Distilled to a mere drop, falling like a tear

Upon the world's cold cheek to make it burn  
 For ever) ; by that strong excepted soul,  
 I count it strange, and hard to understand,  
 That nearly all young poets should write old ;  
 That Pope was sexagenarian at sixteen,  
 And beardless Byron academical,  
 And so with others. It may be, perhaps,  
 Such have not settled long and deep enough  
 In trance, to attain to clairvoyance,—and still  
 The memory mixes with the vision, spoils,  
 And works it turbid.

Or perhaps, again,  
 In order to discover the Muse-Sphinx,  
 The melancholy desert must sweep round,  
 Behind you, as before.—

For me, I wrote  
 False poems, like the rest, and thought them true,  
 Because myself was true in writing them.  
 I, peradventure, have writ true ones since  
 With less complacence.

But I could not hide  
 My quickening inner life from those at watch.  
 They saw a light at a window now and then,  
 They had not set there. Who had set it there?  
 My father's sister started when she caught  
 My soul agaze in my eyes. She could not say  
 I had no business with a sort of soul,  
 But plainly she objected,—and demurred,  
 That souls were dangerous things to carry straight  
 Through all the spilt saltpetre of the world.

She said sometimes, "Aurora, have you done  
 Your task this morning?—Have you read that book?  
 And are you ready for the crochet here?"  
 As if she said, "I know there's something wrong ;  
 I know I have not ground you down enough  
 To flatten and bake you to a wholesome crust  
 For household uses and proprieties,  
 Before the rain has got into my barn  
 And set the grains a-sprouting. What, you're green  
 With out-door impudence? you almost grow?"  
 To which I answered, "Would she hear my task,  
 And verify my abstract of the book?  
 And should I sit down to the crochet work?"



Was such her pleasure?" . . . Then I sate and teased  
 The patient needle till it spilt the thread,  
 Which oozed off from it in meandering lace  
 From hour to hour. I was not, therefore, sad ;  
 My soul was singing at a work apart  
 Behind the wall of sense, as safe from harm  
 As sings the lark when sucked up out of sight,  
 In vortices of glory and blue air.

And so, through forced work and spontaneous work,  
 The inner life informed the outer life,  
 Reduced the irregular blood to settled rhythms,  
 Made cool the forehead with fresh-sprinkling dreams,  
 And, rounding to the spheric soul the thin  
 Pined body, struck a colour up the cheeks,  
 Though somewhat faint. I clenched my brows across  
 My blue eyes greatening in the looking-glass,  
 And said, " We'll live, Aurora ! we'll be strong.  
 The dogs are on us—but we will not die."

Whoever lives true life, will love true love.  
 I learnt to love that England. Very oft,  
 Before the day was born, or otherwise  
 Through secret windings of the afternoons,  
 I threw my hunters off and plunged myself  
 Among the deep hills, as a hunted stag  
 Will take the waters, shivering with the fear  
 And passion of the course. And when, at last  
 Escaped,—so many a green slope built on slope  
 Betwixt me and the enemy's house behind,  
 I dared to rest, or wander,—like a rest  
 Made sweeter for the step upon the grass,—  
 And view the ground's most gentle dimplement  
 (As if God's finger touched but did not press  
 In making England !) such an up and down  
 Of verdure,—nothing too much up or down,  
 A ripple of land ; such little hills, the sky  
 Can stoop to tenderly and the wheatfields climb  
 Such nooks of valleys, lined with orchises,  
 Fed full of noises by invisible streams ;  
 And open pastures, where you scarcely tell  
 White daisies from white dew,—at intervals  
 The mythic oaks and elm-trees standing out  
 Self-poised upon their prodigy of shade,—

I thought my father's land was worthy too  
Of being my Shakspeare's.

Very oft alone,

Unlicensed ; not unfrequently with leave  
To walk the third with Romney and his friend  
The rising painter, Vincent Carrington  
Whom men judge hardly, as bee-bonneted,  
Because he holds that, paint a body well,  
You paint a soul by implication, like  
The grand first Master. Pleasant walks ! for if  
He said . . . " When I was last in Italy " . . .  
It sounded as an instrument that's played  
Too far off for the tune—and yet it's fine  
To listen.

Often we walked only two,  
If cousin Romney pleased to walk with me.  
We read, or talked, or quarrelled, as it chanced :  
We were not lovers, nor even friends well-matched—  
Say rather, scholars upon different tracks,  
And thinkers disagreed ; he, overfull  
Of what is, and I, haply, overbold  
For what might be.

But then the thrushes sang,  
And shook my pulses and the elms' new leaves,—  
And then I turned, and held my finger up,  
And bade him mark that, howsoe'er the world  
Went ill, as he related, certainly  
The thrushes still sang in it.—At which word  
His brow would soften,—and he bore with me  
In melancholy patience, not unkind,  
While, breaking into voluble ecstasy,  
I flattered all the beauteous country round,  
As poets use . . . the skies, the clouds, the fields,  
The happy violets hiding from the roads  
The primroses run down to, carrying gold,—  
The tangled hedgerows, where the cows push out  
Impatient horns and tolerant churning mouths  
'Twixt dripping ash-boughs,—hedgerows all alive  
With birds and gnats and large white butterflies  
Which look as if the May-flower had caught life  
And palpitated forth upon the wind,—  
Hills, vales, woods, netted in a silver mist,  
Farms, granges, doubled up among the hills,  
And cattle grazing in the watered vales,

And cottage-chimneys smoking from the woods,  
 And cottage-gardens smelling everywhere,  
 Confused with smell of orchards. "See," I said,  
 "And see! is God not with us on the earth?  
 And shall we put Him down by aught we do?  
 Who says there's nothing for the poor and vile  
 Save poverty and wickedness? behold!"  
 And ankle-deep in English grass I leaped,  
 And clapped my hands, and called all very fair.

In the beginning when God called all good,  
 Even then was evil near us, it is writ.  
 But we, indeed, who call things good and fair,  
 The evil is upon us while we speak;  
 Deliver us from evil, let us pray.

## SECOND BOOK.

TIMES followed one another. Came a morn  
 I stood upon the brink of twenty years,  
 And looked before and after, as I stood  
 Woman and artist—either incomplete,  
 Both credulous of completion. There I held  
 The whole creation in my little cup,  
 And smiled with thirsty lips before I drank,  
 "Good health to you and me, sweet neighbour mine,  
 And all these peoples."

I was glad, that day;  
 The June was in me, with its multitudes  
 Of nightingales all singing in the dark,  
 And rosebuds reddening where the calyx split.  
 I felt so young, so strong, so sure of God!  
 So glad, I could not choose be very wise!  
 And, old at twenty, was inclined to pull  
 My childhood backward in a childish jest  
 To see the face of't once more, and farewell!  
 In which fantastic mood I bounded forth  
 At early morning, would not wait so long  
 As even to snatch my bonnet by the strings,  
 But, brushing a green trail across the lawn  
 With my gown in the dew, took will and way  
 Among the acacias of the shrubberies,

To fly my fancies in the open air  
 And keep my birthday, till my aunt awoke  
 To stop good dreams. Meanwhile I murmured on,  
 As honeyed bees keep humming to themselves ;  
 "The worthiest poets have remained uncrowned  
 Till death has bleached their foreheads to the bone,  
 And so with me it must be, unless I prove  
 Unworthy of the grand adversity,—  
 And certainly I would not fail so much.  
 What, therefore, if I crown myself to-day  
 In sport, not pride, to learn the feel of it,  
 Before my brows be numb as Dante's own  
 To all the tender pricking of such leaves ?  
 Such leaves ! what leaves ?"

I pulled the branches down  
 To choose from.

"Not the bay ! I choose no bay ;  
 The fates deny us if we are overbold :  
 Nor myrtle—which means chiefly love ; and love  
 Is something awful which one dares not touch  
 So early o' mornings. This verbena strains  
 The point of passionate fragrance ; and, hard by,  
 This guelder-rose, at far too slight a beck  
 Of the wind, will toss about her flower-apples.  
 Ah—there's my choice,—that ivy on the wall,  
 That headlong ivy ! not a leaf will grow  
 But thinking of a wreath. Large leaves, smooth leaves,  
 Serrated like my vines, and half as green.  
 I like such ivy ; bold to leap a height  
 'Twas strong to climb ! as good to grow on graves  
 As twist about a thyrsus ; pretty too,  
 (And that's not ill) when twisted round a comb."

Thus speaking to myself, half singing it,  
 Because some thoughts are fashioned like a bell  
 To ring with once being touched, I drew a wreath  
 Drenched, blinding me with dew, across my brow,  
 And fastening it behind so, . . . turning faced  
 . . . My public !—cousin Romney—with a mouth  
 Twice graver than his eyes.

I stood there fixed—  
 My arms up, like the caryatid, sole  
 Of some abolished temple, helplessly  
 Persistent in a gesture which derides

A former purpose. Yet my blush was flame,  
As if from flax, not stone.

“Aurora Leigh,  
The earliest of Auroras!”

Hand stretched out  
I clasped, as shipwrecked men will clasp a hand,  
Indifferent to the sort of palm. The tide  
Had caught me at my pastime, writing down  
My foolish name too near upon the sea  
Which drowned me with a blush as foolish. “You,  
My cousin!”

The smile died out in his eyes  
And dropped upon his lips, a cold dead weight,  
For just a moment . . . “Here’s a book, I found!  
No name writ on it—poems, by the form;  
Some Greek upon the margin,—lady’s Greek,  
Without the accents. Read it? Not a word.  
I saw at once the thing had witchcraft in’t,  
Whereof the reading calls up dangerous spirits;  
I rather bring it to the witch.”

“My book!  
You found it” . . .

“In the hollow by the stream,  
That beech leans down into—of which you said,  
The Oread in it has a Naiad’s heart  
And pines for waters.”

“Thank you.”  
“Rather *you*,  
My cousin! that I have seen you not too much  
A witch, a poet, scholar, and the rest,  
To be a woman also.”

With a glance  
The smile rose in his eyes again, and touched  
The ivy on my forehead, light as air.  
I answered gravely, “Poets needs must be  
Or men or women—more’s the pity.”

“Ah,  
But men, and still less women, happily,  
Scarce need be poets. Keep to the green wreath,  
Since even dreaming of the stone and bronze  
Brings headaches, pretty cousin, and defiles  
The clean white morning dresses.”

“So you judge!  
Because I love the beautiful, I must

Love pleasure chiefly, and be overcharged  
 For ease and whiteness ! Well—you know the world,  
 And only miss your cousin ; 'tis not much !—  
 But learn this : I would rather take my part  
 With God's Dead, who afford to walk in white  
 Yet spread His glory, than keep quiet here,  
 And gather up my feet from even a step,  
 For fear to soil my gown in so much dust.  
 I choose to walk at all risks.—Here, if heads  
 That hold a rhythmic thought, must ache perforce,  
 For my part, I choose headaches,—and to-day's  
 My birthday."

"Dear Aurora, choose instead  
 To cure such. You have balsams."

"I perceive !—

The headache is too noble for my sex.  
 You think the heartache would sound decenter,  
 Since that's the woman's special, proper ache,  
 And altogether tolerable, except  
 To a woman."

Saying which, I loosed my wreath,  
 And, swinging it beside me as I walked,  
 Half petulant, half playful, as we walked,  
 I sent a sidelong look to find his thought,—  
 As falcon set on falconer's finger may,  
 With sidelong head, and startled, braving eye,  
 Which means, "You'll see—you'll see ! I'll soon take  
 flight—

You shall not hinder." He, as shaking out  
 His hand and answering "Fly then," did not speak  
 Except by such a gesture. Silently  
 We paced, until, just coming into sight  
 Of the house-windows, he abruptly caught  
 At one end of the swinging wreath, and said  
 "Aurora !" There I stopped short, breath and all.  
 "Aurora, let's be serious, and throw by  
 This game of head and heart. Life means, be sure,  
 Both heart and head,—both active, both complete,  
 And both in earnest. Men and women make  
 The world, as head and heart make human life.  
 Work man, work woman, since there's work to do  
 In this beleaguered earth, for head and heart,  
 And thought can never do the work of love !  
 But work for ends, I mean for uses ; not

For such sleek fringes (do you call them ends?  
 Still less God's glory) as we sew ourselves  
 Upon the velvet of those baldaquins  
 Held 'twixt us and the sun. That book of yours,  
 I have not read a page of; but I toss  
 A rose up—it falls calyx down, you see! . . .  
 The chances are that, being a woman, young,  
 And pure, with such a pair of large, calm eyes, . . .  
 You write as well . . . and ill . . . upon the whole,  
 As other women. If as well, what then?  
 If even a little better, . . . still, what then?  
 We want the Best in art now, or no art.  
 The time is done for facile settings up  
 Of minnow gods, nymphs here, and tritons there;  
 The polytheists have gone out in God,  
 That unity of Bests. No best, no God!—  
 And so with art, we say. Give art's divine,  
 Direct, indubitable, real as grief,—  
 Or leave us to the grief we grow ourselves  
 Divine by overcoming with mere hope  
 And most prosaic patience. You, you are young  
 As Eve with nature's daybreak on her face;  
 But this same world you are come to, dearest coz,  
 Has done with keeping birthdays, saves her wreaths  
 To hang upon her ruins,—and forgets  
 To rhyme the cry with which she still beats back  
 Those savage, hungry dogs that hunt her down  
 To the empty grave of Christ. The world's hard  
 pressed;  
 The sweat of labour in the early curse  
 Has (turning acrid in six thousand years)  
 Become the sweat of torture. Who has time,  
 An hour's time . . . think! . . . to sit upon a bank  
 And hear the cymbal tinkle in white hands?  
 When Egypt's slain, I say, let Miriam sing!—  
 Before . . . where's Moses?"

“Ah—exactly that!

Where's Moses?—is a Moses to be found?—  
 You'll seek him vainly in the bulrushes,  
 While I in vain touch cymbals. Yet, concede,  
 Such sounding brass has done some actual good  
 (The application in a woman's hand,  
 If that were credible, being scarcely spoilt),  
 In colonising beehives.”

“There it is!—

You play beside a death-bed like a child,  
 Yet measure to yourself a prophet's place  
 To teach the living. None of all these things  
 Can women understand. You generalise  
 Oh, nothing! not even grief! Your quick-breathed  
 hearts,

So sympathetic to the personal pang,  
 Close on each separate knife stroke, yielding up  
 A whole life at each wound; incapable  
 Of deepening, widening a large lap of life  
 To hold the world-full woe. The human race  
 To you means, such a child, or such a man,  
 You saw one morning waiting in the cold,  
 Beside that gate, perhaps. You gather up  
 A few such cases, and, when strong, sometimes  
 Will write of factories and of slaves, as if  
 Your father were a negro, and your son  
 A spinner in the mills. All's yours and you,—  
 All, coloured with your blood, or otherwise  
 Just nothing to you. Why, I call you hard  
 To general suffering. Here's the world half blind  
 With intellectual light, half brutalised  
 With civilisation, having caught the plague  
 In silks from Tarsus, shrieking east and west  
 Along a thousand railroads, mad with pain  
 And sin too! . . . does one woman of you all  
 (You who weep easily), grow pale to see  
 This tiger shake his cage?—does one of you  
 Stand still from dancing, stop from stringing pearls,  
 And pine and die, because of the great sum  
 Of universal anguish?—Show me a tear  
 Wet as Cordelia's, in eyes bright as yours,  
 Because the world is mad! You cannot count,  
 That you should weep for this account, not you!  
 You weep for what you know. A red-haired child  
 Sick in a fever, if you touch him once,  
 Though but so little as with a finger-tip,  
 Will set you weeping; but a million sick . . .  
 You could as soon weep for the rule of three,  
 Or compound fractions. Therefore, this same world  
 Uncomprehended by you, must remain  
 Uninfluenced by you—Women as you are,  
 Mere women, personal and passionate,



You give us doating mothers, and chaste wives,  
 Sublime Madonnas, and enduring saints !  
 We get no Christ from you,—and verily  
 We shall not get a poet, in my mind."

"With which conclusion you conclude." . . . "But this—

That you, Aurora, with the large live brow  
 And steady eyelids, cannot condescend  
 To play at art, as children play at swords,  
 To show a pretty spirit, chiefly admired  
 Because true action is impossible.  
 You never can be satisfied with praise  
 Which men give women when they judge a book  
 Not as mere work, but as mere woman's work,  
 Expressing the comparative respect  
 Which means the absolute scorn. 'Oh, excellent !  
 'What grace ! what facile turns ! what fluent sweeps !  
 'What delicate discernment . . . almost thought !  
 'The book does honour to the sex, we hold.  
 'Among our female authors we make room  
 'For this fair writer, and congratulate  
 'The country that produces in these times  
 'Such women, competent to . . . spell.'"

"Stop there !"

I answered—burning through his thread of talk  
 With a quick flame of emotion,—“You have read  
 My soul, if not my book, and argue well.  
 I would not condescend . . . we will not say  
 To such a kind of praise (a worthless end  
 Is praise of all kinds) but to such a use  
 Of holy art and golden life. I am young,  
 And peradventure weak—you tell me so—  
 Through being a woman. And, for all the rest,  
 Take thanks for justice. I would rather dance  
 At fairs on tight-rope, till the babies dropped  
 Their gingerbread for joy,—than shift the types  
 For tolerable verse, intolerable  
 To men who act and suffer. Better far  
 Pursue a frivolous trade by serious means,  
 Than a sublime art frivolously.”

“You,  
 Choose nobler work than either, O moist eyes,  
 And hurrying lips, and heaving heart ! We are young,

Aurora, you and I. The world . . . look round . . .  
 The world, we're come to late, is swollen hard  
 With perished generations and their sins :  
 The civiliser's spade grinds horribly  
 On dead men's bones, and cannot turn up soil  
 That's otherwise than fetid. All success  
 Proves partial failure ; all advance implies  
 What's left behind ; all triumph, something crushed  
 At the chariot-wheels ; all government, some wrong :  
 And rich men make the poor, who curse the rich,  
 Who agonise together, rich and poor,  
 Under and over, in the social spasm  
 And crisis of the ages. Here's an age  
 That makes its own vocation ! here, we have stepped  
 Across the bounds of time ! here's nought to see,  
 But just the rich man and just Lazarus,  
 And both in torments ; with a mediate gulf,  
 Though not a hint of Abraham's bosom. Who,  
 Being man and human, can stand calmly by  
 And view these things, and never tease his soul  
 For some great cure ? No physic for this grief,  
 In all the earth and heavens too ? ”

“ You believe  
 In God, for your part ?—ay ? that He who makes,  
 Can make good things from ill things, best from  
 worst,  
 As men plant tulips upon dunghills when  
 They wish them finest ? ”

“ True. A death-heat is  
 The same as life-heat, to be accurate ;  
 And in all nature is no death at all,  
 As men account of death, as long as God  
 Stands witnessing for life perpetually,  
 By being just God. That's abstract truth, I know,  
 Philosophy, or sympathy with God :  
 But I, I sympathise with man, not God,  
 I think I was a man for chiefly this ;  
 And when I stand beside a dying bed,  
 It's death to me. Observe,—it had not much  
 Consoled the race of mastodons to know  
 Before they went to fossil, that anon  
 Their place should quicken with the elephant ;  
 They were not elephants but mastodons ;  
 And I, a man, as men are now, and not

As men may be hereafter, feel with men  
In the agonising present."

"Is it so,"

I said, "my cousin? is the world so bad,  
While I hear nothing of it through the trees?  
The world was always evil,—but so bad?"

"So bad, Aurora. Dear, my soul is gray  
With poring over the long sum of ill;  
So much for vice, so much for discontent,  
So much for the necessities of power,  
So much for the connivances of fear,—  
Coherent in statistical despairs  
With such a total of distracted life, . . .  
To see it down in figures on a page,  
Plain, silent, clear . . . as God sees through the earth  
The sense of all the graves! . . . that's terrible  
For one who is not God, and cannot right  
The wrong he looks on. May I choose indeed  
But vow away my years, my means, my aims,  
Among the helpers, if there's any help  
In such a social strait? The common blood  
That swings along my veins, is strong enough  
To draw me to this duty."

Then I spoke.

"I have not stood long on the strand of life,  
And these salt waters have had scarcely time  
To creep so high up as to wet my feet.  
I cannot judge these tides—I shall, perhaps.  
A woman's always younger than a man  
At equal years, because she is disallowed  
Maturing by the outdoor sun and air,  
And kept in long-clothes past the age to walk.  
Ah well, I know you men judge otherwise!  
You think a woman ripens as a peach,—  
In the cheeks, chiefly. Pass it to me now;  
I'm young in age, and younger still, I think,  
As a woman. But a child may say amen  
To a bishop's prayer and see the way it goes;  
And I, incapable to loose the knot  
Of social questions, can approve, applaud  
August compassion, Christian thoughts that shoot  
Beyond the vulgar white of personal aims.  
Accept my reverence."

There he glowed on me  
With all his face and eyes. "No other help?"  
Said he—"no more than so?"

"What help?" I asked.  
"You'd scorn my help,—as Nature's self, you say,  
Has scorned to put her music in my mouth,  
Because a woman's. Do you now turn round  
And ask for what a woman cannot give?"

"For what she only can, I turn and ask,"  
He answered, catching up my hands in his,  
And dropping on me from his high-eaved brow  
The full weight of his soul,—“I ask for love,  
And that, she can; for life in fellowship  
Through bitter duties—that, I know she can;  
For wifehood . . . will she?"

"Now," I said, "may God  
Be witness 'twixt us two!" and with the word,  
Meseemed I floated into a sudden light  
Above his stature,—“am I proved too weak  
To stand alone, yet strong enough to bear  
Such leaners on my shoulder? poor to think,  
Yet rich enough to sympathise with thought?  
Incompetent to sing, as blackbirds can,  
Yet competent to love, like HIM?"

I paused.  
Perhaps I darkened, as the lighthouse will  
That turns upon the sea. "It's always so!  
Anything does for a wife."

"Aurora, dear,  
And dearly honoured" . . . he pressed in at once  
With eager utterance,—“you translate me ill.  
I do not contradict my thought of you,  
Which is most reverent, with another thought  
Found less so. If your sex is weak for art,  
(And I who said so, did but honour you  
By using truth in courtship) it is strong  
For life and duty. Place your fecund heart  
In mine, and let us blossom for the world  
That wants love's colour in the gray of time.  
With all my talk I can but set you where  
You look down coldly on the arena-heaps  
Of headless bodies, shapeless, indistinct!  
The Judgment-Angel scarce would find his way

Through such a heap of generalised distress,  
 To the individual man with lips and eyes—  
 Much less Aurora. Ah, my sweet, come down,  
 And, hand in hand, we'll go where yours shall touch  
 These victims, one by one! till, one by one,  
 The formless, nameless trunk of every man  
 Shall seem to wear a head, with hair you know,  
 And every woman catch your mother's face  
 To melt you into passion."

"I am a girl,"

I answered slowly; "you do well to name  
 My mother's face. Though far too early, alas,  
 God's hand did interpose 'twixt it and me,  
 I know so much of love, as used to shine  
 In that face and another. Just so much;  
 No more indeed at all. I have not seen  
 So much love since, I pray you pardon me,  
 As answers even to make a marriage with,  
 In this cold land of England. What you love,  
 Is not a woman, Romney, but a cause:  
 You want a helpmate, not a mistress, sir,—  
 A wife to help your ends . . . in her no end!  
 Your cause is noble, your ends excellent,  
 But I, being most unworthy of these and that,  
 Do otherwise conceive of love. Farewell."

"Farewell, Aurora? you reject me thus?"  
 He said.

"Why, sir, you are married long ago.  
 You have a wife already whom you love,  
 Your social theory. Bless you both, I say.  
 For my part, I am scarcely meek enough  
 To be the handmaid of a lawful spouse.  
 Do I look a Hagar, think you?"

"So, you jest!"

"Nay so, I speak in earnest," I replied.  
 "You treat of marriage too much like, at least,  
 A chief apostle; you would bear with you  
 A wife . . . a sister . . . shall we speak it out?  
 A sister of charity."

"Then, must it be  
 Indeed farewell? And was I so far wrong  
 In hope and in illusion, when I took  
 The woman to be nobler than the man,

Yourself the noblest woman,—in the use  
 And comprehension of what love is,—love,  
 That generates the likeness of itself  
 Through all heroic duties? so far wrong,  
 In saying bluntly, venturing truth on love,  
 ‘Come, human creature, love and work with me,’—  
 Instead of, ‘Lady, thou art wondrous fair,  
 ‘And, where the Graces walk before, the Muse  
 ‘Will follow at the lighting of their eyes,  
 ‘And where the Muse walks, lovers need to creep :  
 ‘Turn round and love me, or I die of love.’”

With quiet indignation I broke in :  
 “ You misconceive the question like a man,  
 Who sees a woman as the complement  
 Of his sex merely. You forget too much  
 That every creature, female as the male,  
 Stands single in responsible act and thought,  
 As also in birth and death. Whoever says  
 To a loyal woman, ‘Love and work with me,’  
 Will get fair answers, if the work and love,  
 Being good themselves, are good for her—the best  
 She was born for. Women of a softer mood,  
 Surprised by men when scarcely awake to life,  
 Will sometimes only hear the first word, love,  
 And catch up with it any kind of work,  
 Indifferent, so that dear love go with it :  
 I do not blame such women, though, for love,  
 They pick much oakum ; earth’s fanatics make  
 Too frequently heaven’s saints. But *me*, your work  
 Is not the best for,—nor your love the best,  
 Nor able to commend the kind of work  
 For love’s sake merely. Ah, you force me, sir,  
 To be over-bold in speaking of myself,—  
 I, too, have my vocation,—work to do,  
 The heavens and earth have set me, since I changed  
 My father’s face for theirs,—and, though your world  
 Were twice as wretched as you represent,  
 Most serious work, most necessary work,  
 As any of the economists’. Reform,  
 Make trade a Christian possibility,  
 And individual right no general wrong ;  
 Wipe out earth’s furrows of the Thine and Mine,  
**And leave one green, for men to play at bowls,**

With innings for them all! . . . what then, indeed,  
 If mortals were not greater by the head  
 Than any of their prosperities? what then,  
 Unless the artist keep up open roads  
 Betwixt the seen and unseen,—bursting through  
 The best of your conventions with his best,  
 The speakable, imaginable best  
 God bids him speak, to prove what lies beyond  
 Both speech and imagination? A starved man  
 Exceeds a fat beast: we'll not barter, sir,  
 The beautiful for barley.—And, even so,  
 I hold you will not compass your poor ends  
 Of barley-feeding and material ease,  
 Without a poet's individualism  
 To work your universal. It takes a soul,  
 To move a body: it takes a high-souled man,  
 To move the masses . . . even to a cleaner sty:  
 It takes the ideal, to blow a hair's-breadth off  
 The dust of the actual.—Ah, your Fouriers failed,  
 Because not poets enough to understand  
 That life develops from within.—For me,  
 Perhaps I am not worthy, as you say,  
 Of work like this! . . . perhaps a woman's soul  
 Aspires, and not creates! yet we aspire,  
 And yet I'll try out your perhapses, sir;  
 And if I fail . . . why, burn me up my straw  
 Like other false works—I'll not ask for grace,  
 Your scorn is better, cousin Romney. I  
 Who love my art, would never wish it lower  
 To suit my stature. I may love my art.  
 You'll grant that even a woman may love art,  
 Seeing that to waste true love on anything,  
 Is womanly, past question."

I retain

The very last word which I said, that day,  
 As you the creaking of the door, years past,  
 Which let upon you such disabling news,  
 You ever after have been graver. He,  
 His eyes, the motions in his silent mouth,  
 Were fiery points on which my words were caught,  
 Transfixed for ever in my memory  
 For his sake, not their own. And yet I know  
 I did not love him . . . nor he me . . . that's sure . . .  
 And what I said, is unrepented of,

As truth is always. Yet . . . a princely man!—  
 If hard to me, heroic for himself!  
 He bears down on me through the slanting years,  
 The stronger for the distance. If he had loved,  
 Ay, loved me, with that retributive face, . . .  
 I might have been a common woman now,  
 And happier, less known and less left alone;  
 Perhaps a better woman after all,—  
 With chubby children hanging on my neck  
 To keep me low and wise. Ah me, the vines  
 That bear such fruit, are proud to stoop with it.  
 The palm stands upright in a realm of sand.

And I, who spoke the truth then, stand upright,  
 Still worthy of having spoken out the truth,  
 By being content I spoke it, though it set  
 Him there, me here.—O woman's vile remorse,  
 To hanker after a mere name, a show,  
 A supposition, a potential love!  
 Does every man who names love in our lives,  
 Become a power for that? is love's true thing  
 So much best to us, that what personates love  
 Is next best? A potential love, forsooth!  
 We are not so vile. No, no—he cleaves, I think,  
 This man, this image, . . . chiefly for the wrong  
 And shock he gave my life, in finding me  
 Precisely where the devil of my youth  
 Had set me, on those mountain-peaks of hope  
 All glittering with the dawn-dew, all erect  
 And famished for the morning,—saying, while  
 I looked for empire and much tribute, "Come,  
 I have some worthy work for thee below.  
 Come, sweep my barns, and keep my hospitals,—  
 And I will pay thee with a current coin  
 Which men give women."

As we spoke, the grass  
 Was trod in haste beside us, and my aunt,  
 With smile distorted by the sun,—face, voice,  
 As much at issue with the summer-day  
 As if you brought a candle out of doors,—  
 Broke in with, "Romney, here!—My child, entreat  
 Your cousin to the house, and have your talk,  
 If girls must talk upon their birthdays. Come."



He answered for me calmly, with pale lips  
 That seemed to motion for a smile in vain.  
 'The talk is ended, madam, where we stand.  
 Your brother's daughter has dismissed me here ;  
 And all my answer can be better said  
 Beneath the trees, than wrong by such a word  
 Your house's hospitalities. Farewell."

With that he vanished. I could hear his heel  
 Ring bluntly in the lane, as down he leapt  
 The short way from us.—Then, a measured speech  
 Withdrew me. "What means this, Aurora Leigh?  
 My brother's daughter has dismissed my guests?"

The lion in me felt the keeper's voice,  
 Through all its quivering dewlaps : I was quelled  
 Before her,—meekened to the child she knew :  
 I prayed her pardon, said, "I had little thought  
 To give dismissal to a guest of hers,  
 In letting go a friend of mine, who came  
 To take me into service as a wife,—  
 No more than that, indeed."

"No more, no more?  
 Pray Heaven," she answered, "That I was not mad.  
 I could not mean to tell her to her face  
 That Romney Leigh had asked me for a wife,  
 And I refused him?"

"Did he ask?" I said ;  
 "I think he rather stooped to take me up  
 For certain uses which he found to do  
 For something called a wife. He never asked."

"What stuff!" she answered ; "are they queens, these  
 girls?"

They must have mantles, stitched with twenty silks,  
 Spread out upon the ground, before they'll step  
 One footstep for the noblest lover born."

"But I am born," I said with firmness, "I,  
 To walk another way than his, dear aunt."

"You walk, you walk! A babe at thirteen months  
 Will walk as well as you," she cried in haste,  
 "Without a steadying finger. Why, you child,  
 God help you, you are groping in the dark,  
 For all this sunlight. You suppose, perhaps,

That you, sole offspring of an opulent man,  
 Are rich and free to choose a way to walk?  
 You think, and it's a reasonable thought,  
 That I besides, being well to do in life,  
 Will leave my handful in my niece's hand  
 When death shall paralyse these fingers? Pray,  
 Pray, child,—albeit I know you love me not,—  
 As if you loved me, that I may not die!  
 For when I die and leave you, out you go,  
 (Unless I make room for you in my grave)  
 Unhoused, unfed, my dear, poor brother's lamb,  
 (Ah heaven,—that pains!)—without a right to crop  
 A single blade of grass beneath these trees,  
 Or cast a lamb's small shadow on the lawn,  
 Unfed, unfolded! Ah, my brother, here's  
 The fruit you planted in your foreign loves!—  
 Ay, there's the fruit he planted! never look  
 Astonished at me with your mother's eyes,  
 For it was they, who set you where you are,  
 An undowered orphan. Child, your father's choice  
 Of that said mother, disinherited  
 His daughter, his and hers. Men do not think  
 Of sons and daughters, when they fall in love,  
 So much more than of sisters; otherwise,  
 He would have paused to ponder what he did,  
 And shrunk before that clause in the entail  
 Excluding offspring by a foreign wife  
 (The clause set up a hundred years ago  
 By a Leigh who wedded a French dancing-girl  
 And had his heart danced over in return);  
 But this man shrunk at nothing, never thought  
 Of you, Aurora, any more than me—  
 Your mother must have been a pretty thing,  
 For all the coarse Italian blacks and browns,  
 To make a good man, which my brother was,  
 Uncharry of the duties to his house;  
 But so it fell indeed. Our Cousin Vane,  
 Vane Leigh, the father of this Romney, wrote  
 Directly on your birth, to Italy,  
 'I ask your baby daughter for my son  
 In whom the entail now merges by the law.  
 Betroth her to us out of love, instead  
 Of colder reasons, and she shall not lose  
 By love or law from henceforth'—so he wrote;

A generous cousin was my cousin Vane.  
 Remember how he drew you to his knee  
 The year you came here, just before he died,  
 And hollowed out his hands to hold your cheeks,  
 And wished them redder,—you remember Vane?  
 And now his son, who represents our house,  
 And holds the fiefs and manors in his place,  
 To whom reverts my pittance when I die  
 (Except a few books and a pair of shawls)?  
 The boy is generous like him, and prepared  
 To carry out his kindest word and thought  
 To you, Aurora. Yes, a fine young man  
 Is Romney Leigh; although the sun of youth  
 Has shone too straight upon his brain, I know,  
 And fevered him with dreams of doing good  
 To good-for-nothing people. But a wife  
 Will put all right, and stroke his temples cool  
 With healthy touches” . . .

I broke in at that.

I could not lift my heavy heart to breathe  
 Till then, but then I raised it, and it fell  
 In broken words like these—“No need to wait.  
 The dream of doing good to . . . me, at least,  
 Is ended, without waiting for a wife  
 To cool the fever for him. We’ve escaped  
 That danger . . . thank Heaven for it.”

“You,” she cried,

“Have got a fever. What, I talk and talk  
 An hour long to you,—I instruct you how  
 You cannot eat or drink, or stand or sit,  
 Or even die, like any decent wretch  
 In all this unroofed and unfurnished world,  
 Without your cousin,—and you still maintain  
 There’s room ’twixt him and you, for flirting fans  
 And running knots in eyebrows! You must have  
 A pattern lover sighing on his knee:  
 You do not count enough a noble heart,  
 Above book-patterns, which this very morn  
 Unclosed itself, in two dear fathers’ names,  
 To embrace your orphaned life! fie, fie! But stay,  
 I write a word, and counteract this sin.”

She would have turned to leave me, but I clung.

“O sweet my father’s sister, hear my word

Before you write yours. Cousin Vane did well,  
 And cousin Romney well,—and I well too,  
 In casting back with all my strength and will  
 The good they meant me. O my God, my God!  
 God meant me good, too, when He hindered me  
 From saying 'yes' this morning. If you write  
 A word, it shall be 'no.' I say no, no!  
 I tie up 'no' upon His altar-horns,  
 Quite out of reach of perjury! At least  
 My soul is not a pauper; I can live  
 At least my soul's life, without alms from men;  
 And if it must be in heaven instead of earth,  
 Let heaven look to it,—I am not afraid."

She seized my hands with both hers, strained them fast,  
 And drew her probing and unscrupulous eyes  
 Right through me, body and heart. "Yet, foolish Sweet,  
 You love this man. I have watched you when he came.  
 And when he went, and when we've talked of him:  
 I am not old for nothing; I can tell  
 The weather-signs of love—you love this man."

Girls blush, sometimes, because they are alive,  
 Half wishing they were dead to save the shame.  
 The sudden blush devours them, neck and brow;  
 They have drawn too near the fire of life, like gnats,  
 And flare up bodily, wings and all. What then?  
 Who's sorry for a gnat . . . or girl?

I blushed.

I feel the brand upon my forehead now  
 Strike hot, sear deep, as guiltless men may feel  
 The felon's iron, say, and scorn the mark  
 Of what they are not. Most illogical  
 Irrational nature of our womanhood,  
 That blushes one way, feels another way,  
 And prays, perhaps, another! After all,  
 We cannot be the equal of the male,  
 Who rules his blood a little.

For although  
 I blushed indeed, as if I loved the man,  
 And her incisive smile, accrediting  
 That treason of false witness in my blush,  
 Did bow me downward like a swathe of grass  
 Below its level that struck me,—I attest

The conscious skies and all their daily suns,  
 I think I loved him not . . . nor then, nor since . . .  
 Nor ever. Do we love the schoolmaster,  
 Being busy in the woods? much less, being poor,  
 The overseer of the parish? Do we keep  
 Our love to pay our debts with?

White and cold

I grew next moment. As my blood recoiled  
 From that imputed ignominy, I made  
 My heart great with it. Then, at last, I spoke,—  
 Spoke veritable words, but passionate,  
 Too passionate perhaps . . . ground up with sobs  
 To shapeless endings. She let fall my hands,  
 And took her smile off, in sedate disgust,  
 As peradventure she had touched a snake,  
 A dead snake, mind!—and, turning round, replied,  
 “We’ll leave Italian manners, if you please.  
 I think you had an English father, child,  
 And ought to find it possible to speak  
 A quiet ‘yes’ or ‘no’ like English girls,  
 Without convulsions. In another month  
 We’ll take another answer . . . no, or yes.”  
 With that, she left me in the garden-walk.  
 I had a father! yes, but long ago—  
 How long it seemed that moment. Oh, how far,  
 How far and safe, God, dost Thou keep thy saints  
 When once gone from us! We may call against  
 The lighted windows of Thy fair June-heaven  
 Where all the souls are happy,—and not one,  
 Not even my father, look from work or play  
 To ask, “Who is it that cries after us,  
 Below there, in the dusk?” Yet formerly  
 He turned his face upon me quick enough,  
 If I said “father.” Now I might cry loud;  
 The little lark reached higher with his song  
 Than I with crying. Oh, alone, alone,—  
 Not troubling any in heaven, nor any on earth,  
 I stood there in the garden, and looked up  
 The deaf blue sky that brings the roses out  
 On such June mornings.

You who keep account

Of crisis and transition in this life,  
 Set down the first time Nature says plain “no”  
 To some “yes” in you, and walks over you

In gorgeous sweeps of scorn. We all begin  
 By singing with the birds, and running fast  
 With June-days, hand in hand : but once, for all,  
 The birds must sing against us, and the sun  
 Strike down upon us like a friend's sword caught  
 By an enemy to slay us, while we read  
 The dear name on the blade which bites at us !—  
 That's bitter and convincing : after that,  
 We seldom doubt that something in the large  
 Smooth order of creation, though no more  
 Than haply a man's footstep, has gone wrong.

Some tears fell down my cheeks, and then I smiled,  
 As those smile who have no face in the world  
 To smile back to them. I had lost a friend  
 In Romney Leigh ; the thing was sure—a friend,  
 Who had looked at me most gently now and then,  
 And spoken of my favourite books . . . “ our books ” . . .  
 With such a voice ! Well, voice and look were now  
 More utterly shut out from me, I felt,  
 Than even my father's. Romney now was turned  
 To a benefactor, to a generous man,  
 Who had tied himself to marry . . . me, instead  
 Of such a woman, with low timorous lids  
 He lifted with a sudden word one day,  
 And left, perhaps, for my sake.—Ah, self-tied  
 By a contract,—male Iphigenia, bound  
 At a fatal Aulis, for the winds to change,  
 (But loose him—they'll not change) ; he well might seem  
 A little cold and dominant in love !  
 He had a right to be dogmatical,  
 This poor, good Romney. Love, to him, was made  
 A simple law-clause. If I married him,  
 I would not dare to call my soul my own,  
 Which so he had bought and paid for : every thought  
 And every heart-beat down there in the bill,—  
 Not one found honestly deductible  
 From any use that pleased him ! He might cut  
 My body into coins to give away  
 Among his other paupers ; change my sons,  
 While I stood dumb as Griseld, for black babes  
 Or piteous foundlings ; might unquestioned set  
 My right hand teaching in the Ragged Schools,  
 My left hand washing in the Public Baths,

What time my angel of the Ideal stretched  
Both his to me in vain ! I could not claim  
The poor right of a mouse in a trap, to squeal,  
And take so much as pity, from myself.

Farewell, good Romney ! if I loved you even,  
I could but ill afford to let you be  
So generous to me. Farewell, friend, since friend  
Betwixt us two, forsooth, must be a word  
So heavily overladen. And, since help  
Must come to me from those who love me not,  
Farewell, all helpers—I must help myself,  
And am alone from henceforth.—Then I stooped,  
And lifted the soiled garland from the ground,  
And set it on my head as bitterly  
As when the Spanish king did crown the bones  
Of his dead love. So be it. I preserve  
That crown still,—in the drawer there ! 'twas the first ;  
The rest are like it ;—those Olympian crowns,  
We run for, till we lose sight of the sun  
In the dust of the racing chariots !

After that,

Before the evening fell, I had a note  
Which ran,—“ Aurora, sweet Chaldean, you read  
My meaning backward like your eastern books,  
While I am from the west, dear. Read me now  
A little plainer. Did you hate me quite  
But yesterday ? I loved you for my part ;  
I love you. If I spoke untenderly  
This morning, my beloved, pardon it ;  
And comprehend me that I loved you so,  
I set you on the level of my soul,  
And overwashed you with the bitter brine  
Of some habitual thoughts. Henceforth, my flower,  
Be planted out of reach of any such,  
And lean the side you please, with all your leaves !  
Write woman's verses and dream woman's dreams ;  
But let me feel your perfume in my home,  
To make my sabbath after working-days ;  
Bloom out your youth beside me,—be my wife.”

I wrote in answer—“ We, Chaldeans, discern  
Still farther than we read. I know your heart,  
And shut it like the holy book it is,

Reserved for mild-eyed saints to pore upon  
 Betwixt their prayers at vespers. Well, you're right,  
 I did not surely hate you yesterday ;  
 And yet I do not love you enough to-day  
 To wed you, cousin Romney. Take this word,  
 And let it stop you as a generous man  
 From speaking farther. You may tease, indeed,  
 And blow about my feelings, or my leaves,—  
 And here's my aunt will help you with east winds,  
 And break a stalk, perhaps, tormenting me ;  
 But certain flowers grow near as deep as trees,  
 And, cousin, you'll not move my root, not you,  
 With all your confluent storms. Then let me grow  
 Within my wayside hedge, and pass your way !  
 This flower has never as much to say to you  
 As the antique tomb which said to travellers, ' Pause,  
 ' Siste, viator.' " Ending thus, I signed.

The next week passed in silence, so the next,  
 And several after : Romney did not come,  
 Nor my aunt chide me. I lived on and on,  
 As if my heart were kept beneath a glass,  
 And everybody stood, all eyes and ears,  
 To see and hear it tick. I could not sit,  
 Nor walk, nor take a book, nor lay it down,  
 Nor sew on steadily, nor drop a stitch  
 And a sigh with it, but I felt her looks  
 Still cleaving to me, like the sucking asp  
 To Cleopatra's breast, persistently  
 Through the intermittent pantings. Being observed,  
 When observation is not sympathy,  
 Is just being tortured. If she said a word,  
 A " thank you," or an " if it please you, dear,"  
 She meant a commination, or, at best,  
 An exorcism against the devildom  
 Which plainly held me. So with all the house.  
 Susannah could not stand and twist my hair,  
 Without such glancing at the looking-glass  
 To see my face there, that she missed the plait :  
 And John,—I never sent my plate for soup,  
 Or did not send it, but the foolish John  
 Resolved the problem, 'twixt his napkined thumbs,  
 Of what was signified by taking soup  
 Or choosing mackerel. Neighbours, who dropped in



On morning visits, feeling a joint wrong,  
Smiled admonition, sate uneasily,  
And talked with measured, emphasised reserve,  
Of parish news, like doctors to the sick,  
When not called in,—as if, with leave to speak,  
They might say something. Nay, the very dog  
Would watch me from his sun-patch on the floor,  
In alternation with the large black fly  
Not yet in reach of snapping. So I lived.

A Roman died so ; smeared with honey, teased  
By insects, stared to torture by the noon :  
And many patient souls 'neath English roofs  
Have died like Romans. I, in looking back,  
Wish only, now, I had borne the plague of all  
With meeker spirits than were rife in Rome.

For, on the sixth week, the dead sea broke up,  
Dashed suddenly through beneath the heel of Him  
Who stands upon the sea and earth, and swears  
Time shall be nevermore. The clock struck nine  
That morning, too,—no lark was out of tune ;  
The hidden farms among the hills, breathed straight  
Their smoke toward heaven ; the lime-tree scarcely stirred  
Beneath the blue weight of the cloudless sky,  
Though still the July air came floating through  
The woodbine at my window, in and out,  
With touches of the out-door country news  
For a bending forehead. There I sate, and wished  
That morning-truce of God would last till eve,  
Or longer. "Sleep," I thought, "late sleepers,—sleep,  
And spare me yet, the burden of your eyes."

Then, suddenly, a single ghastly shriek  
Tore upwards from the bottom of the house.  
Like one who wakens in a grave and shrieks,  
The still house seemed to shriek itself alive,  
And shudder through its passages and stairs  
With slam of doors and clash of bells.—I sprang,  
I stood up in the middle of the room,  
And there confronted at my chamber-door,  
A white face,—shivering, ineffectual lips.  
"Come, come," they tried to utter, and I went ;

As if a ghost had drawn me at the point  
 Of a fiery finger through the uneven dark,  
 I went with reeling footsteps down the stair,  
 Nor asked a question.

There she sate, my aunt, —  
 Bolt upright in the chair beside her bed,  
 Whose pillow had no dint ! she had used no bed  
 For that night's sleeping . . . yet slept well. My God,  
 The dumb derision of that gray, peaked face  
 Concluded something grave against the sun,  
 Which filled the chamber with its July burst  
 When Susan drew the curtains, ignorant  
 Of who sate open-eyed behind her. There,  
 She sate . . . it sate . . . we said "she" yesterday . . .  
 And held a letter with unbroken seal,  
 As Susan gave it to her hand last night.  
 All night she had held it. If its news referred  
 To duchies or to dunghills, not an inch  
 She'd budge, 'twas obvious, for such worthless odds :  
 Nor, though the stars were suns, and overburned  
 Their spheric limitations, swallowing up  
 Like wax the azure spaces, could they force  
 Those open eyes to wink once. What last sight  
 Had left them blank and flat so,—drawing out  
 The faculty of vision from the roots,  
 As nothing more, worth seeing, remained behind ?

Were those the eyes that watched me, worried me ?  
 That dogged me up and down the hours and days,  
 A beaten, breathless, miserable soul ?  
 And did I pray, a half-hour back, but so,  
 To escape the burden of those eyes . . . those eyes ?  
 "Sleep late" I said.—

Why now, indeed, they sleep.  
 God answers sharp and sudden on some prayers,  
 And thrusts the thing we have prayed for in our face,  
 A gauntlet with a gift in't. Every wish  
 Is like a prayer . . . with God.

I had my wish,—  
 To read and meditate the thing I would,  
 To fashion all my life upon my thought,  
 And marry, or not marry. Henceforth, none  
 Could disapprove me, vex me, hamper me.  
 Full ground-room, in this desert newly made,

For Babylon or Balbec,—when the breath  
Just choked with sand, returns, for building towns!

The heir came over on the funeral day,  
And we two cousins met before the dead,  
With two pale faces. Was it death or life  
That moved us? When the will was read and done,  
The official guest and witnesses withdrawn,  
We rose up in a silence almost hard,  
And looked at one another. Then I said,  
“Farewell my cousin.”

But he touched, just touched  
My hatstrings tied for going (at the door  
The carriage stood to take me) and said low,  
His voice a little unsteady through his smile,  
“Siste, viator.”

“Is there time,” I asked,  
“In these last days of railroads, to stop short  
Like Cæsar’s chariot (weighing half a ton)  
On the Appian road, for morals?”

“There is time,”  
He answered grave, “for necessary words,  
Inclusive, trust me, of no epitaph  
On man or act, my cousin. We have read  
A will, which gives you all the personal goods  
And funded monies of your aunt.”

“I thank  
Her memory for it. With three hundred pounds  
We buy, in England even, clear standing-room.  
To stand and work in. Only two hours since,  
I fancied I was poor.”

“And, cousin, still  
You’re richer than you fancy. The will says,  
*Three hundred pounds, and any other sum  
Of which the said testatrix dies possessed.*  
I say she died possessed of other sums.”

“Dear Romney, need we chronicle the pence?  
I’m richer than I thought—that’s evident.  
Enough so.”

“Listen rather. You’ve to do  
With business and a cousin,” he resumed,  
“And both, I fear, need patience. Here’s the fact.  
The other sum (there *is* another sum,  
Unspecified in any will which dates

After possession, yet bequeathed as much  
 And clearly as those said three hundred pounds)  
 Is thirty thousand. You will have it paid  
 When . . . where? My duty troubles you with words."

He struck the iron when the bar was hot ;  
 No wonder if my eyes sent out some sparks.  
 "Pause there! I thank you. You are delicate  
 In glosing gifts ;—but I, who share your blood,  
 Am rather made for giving, like yourself,  
 Than taking, like your pensioners. Farewell."

He stopped me with a gesture of calm pride.  
 "A Leigh," he said, "gives largesse and gives love,  
 But gloses neither : if a Leigh could glose,  
 He would not do it, moreover, to a Leigh,  
 With blood trained up along nine centuries  
 To hound and hate a lie, from eyes like yours.  
 And now we'll make the rest as clear ; your aunt  
 Possessed these monies."

"You will make it clear,  
 My cousin, as the honour of us both,  
 Or one of us speaks vainly—that's not I.  
 My aunt possessed this sum,—inherited  
 From whom, and when? bring documents, prove dates.

"Why now indeed you throw your bonnet off,  
 As if you had time left for a logarithm !  
 The faith's the want. Dear cousin, give me faith,  
 And you shall walk this road with silken shoes,  
 As clean as any lady of our house  
 Supposed the proudest. Oh, I comprehend  
 The whole position from your point of sight.  
 I oust you from your father's halls and lands,  
 And make you poor by getting rich—that's law ;  
 Considering which, in common circumstance,  
 You would not scruple to accept from me  
 Some compensation, some sufficiency  
 Of income—that were justice ; but, alas,  
 I love you . . . that's mere nature !—you reject  
 My love . . . that's nature also ;—and at once,  
 You cannot, from a suitor disallowed,  
 A hand thrown back as mine is, into yours  
 Receive a doit, a farthing, . . . not for the world !

That's etiquette with women, obviously  
 Exceeding claim of nature, law, and right,  
 Unanswerable to all. I grant, you see,  
 The case as you conceive it,—leave you room  
 To sweep your ample skirts of womanhood ;  
 While, standing humbly squeezed against the wall,  
 I own myself excluded from being just,  
 Restrained from paying indubitable debts,  
 Because denied from giving you my soul—  
 That's my misfortune !—I submit to it  
 As if, in some more reasonable age,  
 'Twould not be less inevitable. Enough.  
 You'll trust me, cousin, as a gentleman,  
 To keep your honour, as you count it, pure,—  
 Your scruples (just as if I thought them wise)  
 Safe and inviolate from gifts of mine.”  
 I answered mild but earnest. “I believe  
 In no one's honour which another keeps,  
 Nor man's nor woman's. As I keep, myself,  
 My truth and my religion, I depute  
 No father, though I had one this side death,  
 Nor brother, though I had twenty, much less you,  
 Though twice my cousin, and once Romney Leigh,  
 To keep my honour pure. You face, to-day,  
 A man who wants instruction, mark me, not  
 A woman who wants protection. As to a man,  
 Show manhood, speak out plainly, be precise  
 With facts and dates. My aunt inherited  
 This sum, you say—”

“I said she died possessed  
 Of this, dear cousin.”

“Not by heritage.

Thank you : we're getting to the facts at last.  
 Perhaps she played at commerce with a ship  
 Which came in heavy with Australian gold ?  
 Or touched a lottery with her finger end,  
 Which tumbled on a sudden into her lap  
 Some old Rhine tower or principality ?  
 Perhaps she had to do with a marine  
 Sub-transatlantic railroad, which pre-pays  
 As well as pre-supposes ? or perhaps  
 Some stale ancestral debt was after-paid  
 By a hundred years, and took her by surprise ?—  
 You shake your head, my cousin ; I guess ill.”

"You need not guess, Aurora, nor deride,—  
The truth is not afraid of hurting you.  
You'll find no cause, in all your scruples, why  
Your aunt should cavil at a deed of gift  
'Twixt her and me."

"I thought so—ah! a gift."

"You naturally thought so," he resumed.  
"A very natural gift."

"A gift, a gift!  
Her individual life being stranded high  
Above all want, approaching opulence,  
Too haughty was she to accept a gift  
Without some ultimate aim: ah, ah, I see,—  
A gift intended plainly for her heirs,  
And so accepted . . . if accepted . . . ah,  
Indeed that might be; I am snared perhaps,  
Just so. But, cousin, shall I pardon you,  
If thus you have caught me with a cruel springe?"

He answered gently, "Need you tremble and pant  
Like a netted lioness? is't my fault, mine,  
That you're a grand wild creature of the woods,  
And hate the stall built for you? Any way,  
Though triply netted, need you glare at me?  
I do not hold the cords of such a net;  
You're free from me, Aurora!"

"Now may God  
Deliver me from this strait! This gift of yours  
Was tendered . . . when? accepted . . . when?" I asked.  
"A month . . . a fortnight since? Six weeks ago  
It was not tendered. By a word she dropped,  
I know it was not tendered nor received.  
When was it? Bring your dates."

"What matters when?"

A half-hour ere she died, or a half-year,  
Secured the gift, maintains the heritage  
Inviolable with law. As easy pluck  
The golden stars from heaven's embroidered stole,  
To pin them on the gray side of this earth,  
As make you poor again, thank God."

"Not poor  
Nor clean again from henceforth, you thank God?  
Well, sir—I ask you . . . I insist at need, . . .  
Vouchsafe the special date, the special date."

“The day before her death-day,” he replied,  
 “The gift was in her hands. We’ll find that deed,  
 And certify that date to you.”

As one

Who has climbed a mountain-height and carried up  
 His own heart climbing, panting in his throat  
 With the toil of the ascent, takes breath at last,  
 Looks back in triumph—so I stood and looked :  
 “Dear cousin Romney, we have reached the top  
 Of this steep question, and may rest, I think.  
 But first,—I pray you pardon, that the shock  
 And surge of natural feeling and event  
 Had made me oblivious of acquainting you  
 That this, this letter . . . unread, mark,—still sealed,  
 Was found enfolded in the poor dead hand :  
 That spirit of hers had gone beyond the address,  
 Which could not find her though you wrote it clear,—  
 I know your writing, Romney,—recognise  
 The open-hearted *A*, the liberal sweep  
 Of the *G*. Now listen,—let us understand ;  
 You will not find that famous deed of gift,  
 Unless you find it in the letter here,  
 Which, not being mine, I give you back.—Refuse  
 To take the letter ? well then—you and I,  
 As writer and as heiress, open it  
 Together, by your leave.—Exactly so :  
 The words in which the noble offering’s made,  
 Are nobler still, my cousin ; and, I own,  
 The proudest and most delicate heart alive,  
 Distracted from the measure of the gift  
 By such a grace in giving, might accept  
 Your largesse without thinking any more  
 Of the burthen of it, than King Solomon  
 Considered, when he wore his holy ring  
 Charàctered over with the ineffable spell,  
 How many carats of fine gold made up  
 Its money-value. So, Leigh gives to Leigh—  
 Or rather, might have given, observe !—for that’s  
 The point we come to. Here’s a proof of gift,  
 But here’s no proof, sir, of acceptancy,  
 But rather, disproof. Death’s black dust being blown,  
 Infiltrated through every secret fold  
 Of this sealed letter by a puff of fate,  
 Dried up for ever the fresh-written ink,

Annulled the gift, disutilised the grace,  
And left these fragments."

As I spoke, I tore  
The paper up and down, and down and up  
And crosswise, till it fluttered from my hands,  
As forest-leaves, stript suddenly and rapt  
By a whirlwind on Valdarno, drop again,  
Drop slow, and strew the melancholy ground  
Before the amazed hills . . . why, so, indeed,  
I'm writing like a poet, somewhat large  
In the type of the image,—and exaggerate  
A small thing with a great thing, topping it!—  
But then I'm thinking how his eyes looked . . . his,  
With what despondent and surprised reproach!  
I think the tears were in them, as he looked—  
I think the manly mouth just trembled. Then  
He broke the silence.

"I may ask, perhaps,  
Although no stranger . . . only Romney Leigh,  
Which means still less . . . than Vincent Carrington . . .  
Your plans in going hence, and where you go.  
This cannot be a secret."

"All my life  
Is open to you, cousin. I go hence  
To London, to the gathering-place of souls,  
To live mine straight out, vocally, in books;  
Harmoniously for others, if indeed  
A woman's soul, like man's, be wide enough  
To carry the whole octave (that's to prove)  
Or, if I fail, still, purely for myself.  
Pray God be with me, Romney."

"Ah, poor child,  
Who fight against the mother's tiring hand,  
And choose the headsman's! May God change His world  
For your sake, sweet, and make it mild as heaven,  
And juster than I have found you!"

But I paused.

"And you, my cousin?"—

"I," he said,—“you ask?  
You care to ask? Well, girls have curious minds,  
And fain would know the end of everything,  
Of cousins, therefore, with the rest. For me,  
Aurora, I've my work; you know my work;  
And, having missed this year some personal hope,



I must beware the rather that I miss  
 No reasonable duty. While you sing  
 Your happy pastorals of the meads and trees,  
 Bethink you that I go to impress and prove  
 On stifled brains and deafened ears, stunned deaf,  
 Crushed dull with grief, that nature sings itself,  
 And needs no mediate poet, lute or voice,  
 To make it vocal. While you ask of men  
 Your audience, I may get their leave perhaps  
 For hungry orphans to say audibly,  
 'We're hungry, see,'—for beaten and bullied wives  
 To hold their unweaned babies up in sight,  
 Whom orphanage would better; and for all  
 To speak and claim their portion . . . by no means  
 Of the soil, . . . but of the sweat in tilling it,—  
 Since this is now-a-days turned privilege,  
 To have only God's curse on us, and not man's.  
 Such work I have for doing, elbow-deep  
 In social problems,—as you tie your rhymes,  
 To draw my uses to cohere with needs,  
 And bring the uneven world back to its round;  
 Or, failing so much, fill up, bridge at least  
 To smoother issues, some abysmal cracks  
 And feuds of earth, intestine heats have made  
 To keep men separate,—using sorry shifts  
 Of hospitals, almshouses, infant schools,  
 And other practical stuff of partial good,  
 You lovers of the beautiful and whole,  
 Despise by system."

"I despise? The scorn  
 Is yours, my cousin. Poets become such,  
 Through scorning nothing. You decry them for  
 The good of beauty, sung and taught by them,  
 While they respect your practical partial good  
 As being a part of beauty's self. Adieu!  
 When God helps all the workers for His world,  
 The singers shall have help of Him, not last."

He smiled as men smile when they will not speak  
 Because of something bitter in the thought;  
 And still I feel his melancholy eyes  
 Look judgment on me. It is seven years since:  
 I know not if 'twas pity or 'twas scorn  
 Has made them so far-reaching: judge it ye

Who have had to do with pity more than love,  
 And scorn than hatred. I am used, since then,  
 To other ways, from equal men. But so,  
 Even so, we let go hands, my cousin and I,  
 And, in between us, rushed the torrent-world  
 To blanch our faces like divided rocks,  
 And bar for ever mutual sight and touch  
 Except through swirl of spray and all that roar.

### THIRD BOOK.

“TO-DAY thou girdest up thy loins thyself,  
 And goest where thou wouldest : presently  
 Others shall gird thee,” said the Lord, “to go  
 Where thou would’st not.” He spoke to Peter thus,  
 To signify the death which he should die  
 When crucified head downwards.

If He spoke

To Peter then, He speaks to us the same ;  
 The word suits many different martyrdoms,  
 And signifies a multiform of death,  
 Although we scarcely die apostles, we,  
 And have mislaid the keys of heaven and earth.

For ’tis not in mere death that men die most ;  
 And, after our first girding of the loins  
 In youth’s fine linen and fair broidery,  
 To run up hill and meet the rising sun,  
 We are apt to sit tired, patient as a fool,  
 While others gird us with the violent bands  
 Of social figments, feints, and formalisms,  
 Reversing our straight nature, lifting up  
 Our base needs, keeping down our lofty thoughts,  
 Head downward on the cross-sticks of the world.

Yet He can pluck us from that shameful cross.  
 God, set our feet low and our forehead high,  
 And show us how a man was made to walk !

Leave the lamp, Susan, and go up to bed.  
 The room does very well ; I have to write  
 Beyond the stroke of midnight. Get away ;

Your steps, for ever buzzing in the room,  
Tease me like gnats. Ah, letters! throw them down  
At once, as I must have them, to be sure,  
Whether I bid you never bring me such  
At such an hour, or bid you. No excuse.  
You choose to bring them, as I choose perhaps  
To throw them in the fire. Now, get to bed,  
And dream, if possible, I am not cross.

Why what a pettish, petty thing I grow,—  
A mere, mere woman,—a mere flaccid nerve,—  
A kerchief left out all night in the rain,  
Turned soft so,—overtasked and overstrained  
And overlived in this close London life!  
And yet I should be stronger.

Never burn

Your letters, poor Aurora! for they stare  
With red seals from the table, saying each,  
"Here's something that you know not." Out alas,  
'Tis scarcely that the world's more good and wise  
Or even straighter and more consequent  
Since yesterday at this time—yet, again,  
If but one angel spoke from Ararat,  
I should be very sorry not to hear:  
So open all the letters! let me read.  
Blanche Ord, the writer in the "Lady's Fan,"  
Requests my judgment on . . . that, afterwards.  
Kate Ward desires the model of my cloak,  
And signs, "Elisha to you." Pringle Sharpe  
Presents his work on "Social Conduct," . . . craves  
A little money for his pressing debts . . .  
From me, who scarce have money for my needs,—  
Art's fiery chariot which we journey in  
Being apt to singe our singing-ropes to holes,  
Although you ask me for my cloak, Kate Ward!  
Here's Rudgeley knows it,—editor and scribe—  
He's "forced to marry where his heart is not,  
Because the purse lacks where he lost his heart."  
Ah,—lost it because no one picked it up!  
That's really loss! (and passable impudence).  
My critic Hammond flatters prettily,  
And wants another volume like the last.  
My critic Belfair wants another book  
Entirely different, which will sell (and live?)

A striking book, yet not a startling book,  
 The public blames originalities  
 (You must not pump spring-water unawares  
 Upon a gracious public, full of nerves—)  
 Good things, not subtle, new yet orthodox,  
 As easy reading as the dog-eared page  
 That's fingered by said public, fifty years,  
 Since first taught spelling by its grandmother,  
 And yet a revelation in some sort :  
 That's hard, my critic Belfair ! So—what next ?  
 My critic Stokes objects to abstract thoughts ;  
 " Call a man, John, a woman, Joan," says he,  
 " And do not prate so of humanities " :  
 Whereat I call my critic, simply Stokes.  
 My critic Jobson recommends more mirth,  
 Because a cheerful genius suits the times,  
 And all true poets laugh unquenchably  
 Like Shakspeare and the gods. That's very hard.  
 The gods may laugh, and Shakspeare ; Dante smiled  
 With such a needy heart on two pale lips,  
 We cry, " Weep rather, Dante." Poems are  
 Men, if true poems and who dares exclaim  
 At any man's door, " Here, 'tis probable  
 The thunder fell last week, and killed a wife,  
 And scared a sickly husband—what of that ?  
 Get up, be merry, shout, and clap your hands,  
 Because a cheerful genius suits the times—" ?  
 None says so to the man,—and why indeed  
 Should any to the poem ? A ninth seal ;  
 The apocalypse is drawing to a close.  
 Ha,—this from Vincent Carrington,—“ Dear friend,  
 I want good counsel. Will you lend me wings  
 To raise me to the subject, in a sketch  
 I'll bring to-morrow—may I ? at eleven ?  
 A poet's only born to turn to use ;  
 So save you ! for the world . . . and Carrington.”  
 “ (Writ after.) Have you heard of Romney Leigh,  
 Beyond what's said of him in newspapers,  
 His phalansteries there, his speeches here,  
 His pamphlets, pleas, and statements, everywhere ?  
 He dropped *me* long ago ; but no one drops  
 A golden apple—though indeed, one day,  
 You hinted that, but jested. Well, at least,  
 You know Lord Howe, who sees him . . . whom he sees

And *you* see, and I hate to see,—for Howe  
 Stands high upon the brink of theories,  
 Observes the swimmers, and cries 'Very fine,'  
 But keeps dry linen equally,—unlike  
 That gallant breaster, Romney. Strange it is,  
 Such sudden madness seizing a young man,  
 To make earth over again,—while I'm content  
 To make the pictures. Let me bring the sketch.  
 A tiptoe Danae, overbold and hot ;  
 Both arms a-flame to meet her wishing Jove  
 Halfway, and burn him faster down ; the face  
 And breasts upturned and straining, the loose locks  
 All glowing with the anticipated gold.  
 Or here's another on the self-same theme.  
 She lies here—flat upon her prison-floor,  
 The long hair swathed about her to the heel,  
 Like wet sea-weed. You dimly see her through  
 The glittering haze of that prodigious rain,  
 Half blotted out of nature by a love  
 As heavy as fate. I'll bring you either sketch.  
 I think, myself, the second indicates  
 More passion."

Surely. Self is put away,  
 And calm with abdication. She is Jove,  
 And no more Danae—greater thus. Perhaps  
 The painter symbolises unawares  
 Two states of the recipient artist-soul ;  
 One, forward, personal, wanting reverence,  
 Because aspiring only. We'll be calm,  
 And know that, when indeed our Joves come down,  
 We all turn stiller than we have ever been.

Kind Vincent Carrington. I'll let him come.  
 He talks of Florence,—and may say a word  
 Of something as it chanced seven years ago,—  
 A hedgehog in the path, or a lame bird,  
 In those green country walks, in that good time,  
 When certainly I was so miserable . . .  
 I seem to have missed a blessing ever since.

The music soars within the little lark,  
 And the lark soars. It is not thus with men.  
 We do not make our places with our strains  
 Content, while they rise, to remain behind

Alone on earth instead of so in heaven.  
No matter—I bear on my broken tale.

When Romney Leigh and I had parted thus,  
I took a chamber up three flights of stairs,  
Not far from being as steep as some larks climb,  
And, in a certain house in Kensington,  
Three years I lived and worked. Get leave to work  
In this world.—'tis the best you get at all ;  
For God, in cursing, gives us better gifts  
Than men in benediction. God says, "Sweat  
For foreheads"; men say "crowns"; and so we are  
crowned,—

Ay, gashed by some tormenting circle of steel  
Which snaps with a secret spring. Get work, get work ;  
Be sure 'tis better than what you work to get.

So, happy and unafraid of solitude,  
I worked the short days out,—and watched the sun  
On lurid morns or monstrous afternoons,  
Like some Druidic idol's fiery brass,  
With fixed unflickering outline of dead heat,  
In which the blood of wretches pent inside  
Seemed oozing forth to incarnadine the air,—  
Push out through fog with his dilated disc  
And startle the slant roofs and chimney-pots  
With splashes of fierce colour. Or I saw  
Fog only, the great tawny weltering fog,  
Involve the passive city, strangle it  
Alive, and draw it off into the void,  
Spires, bridges, streets, and squares, as if a sponge  
Had wiped out London,—or as noon and night  
Had clapped together and utterly struck out  
The intermediate time, undoing themselves  
In the act. Your city poets see such things,  
Not despicable. Mountains of the south,  
When, drunk and mad with elemental wines,  
They rend the seamless mist and stand up bare,  
Make fewer singers, haply. No one sings,  
Descending Sinai : on Parnassus mount,  
You take a mule to climb, and not a muse,  
Except in fable and figure : forests chant  
Their anthems to themselves, and leave you dumb.  
But sit in London, at the day's decline,

And view the city perish in the mist  
 Like Pharaoh's armaments in the deep Red Sea, —  
 The chariots, horsemen, footmen, all the host,  
 Sucked down and choked to silence—then, surprised  
 By a sudden sense of vision and of tune,  
 You feel as conquerors though you did not fight,  
 And you and Israel's other singing girls,  
 Ay, Miriam with them, sing the song you choose.

I worked with patience, which means almost power.  
 I did some excellent things indifferently,  
 Some bad things excellently. Both were praised,  
 The latter loudest. And by such a time  
 That I myself had set them down as sins  
 Scarce worth the price of sackcloth, week by week,  
 Arrived some letter through the sedulous post,  
 Like these I've read, and yet dissimilar,  
 With pretty maiden seals,—initials twined  
 Of lilies, or a heart marked *Emily*  
 (Convicting Emily of being all heart);  
 Or rarer tokens from young bachelors,  
 Who wrote from college (with the same goosequill,  
 Suppose, they had just been plucked of) and a snatch  
 From Horace, "Collegisse juvat," set  
 Upon the first page. Many a letter signed  
 Or unsigned, showing the writers at eighteen  
 Had lived too long, though every muse should help  
 The daylight, holding candles,—compliments,  
 To smile or sigh at. Such could pass with me  
 No more than coins from Moscow circulate  
 At Paris. Would ten roubles buy a tag  
 Of ribbon on the boulevard, worth a sou?  
 I smiled that all this youth should love me,—sighed  
 That such a love could scarcely raise them up  
 To love what was more worthy than myself;  
 Then sighed again, again, less generously,  
 To think the very love they lavished so,  
 Proved me inferior. The strong loved me not,  
 And he . . . my cousin Romney . . . did not write.  
 I felt the silent finger of his scorn  
 Prick every bubble of my frivolous fame  
 As my breath blew it, and resolve it back  
 To the air it came from. Oh, I justified  
 The measure he had taken of my height:

The thing was plain—he was not wrong a line ;  
I played at art, made thrusts with a toy-sword,  
Amused the lads and maidens.

Came a sigh

Deep, hoarse with resolution,—I would work  
To better ends, or play in earnest. “Heavens,  
I think I should be almost popular  
If this went on !”—I ripped my verses up,  
And found no blood upon the rapier’s point ;  
The heart in them was just an embryo’s heart,  
Which never yet had beat, that it should die ;  
Just gasps of make-believe galvanic life ;  
Mere tones, inorganised to any tune.

And yet I felt it in me where it burnt,  
Like those hot fire-seeds of creation held  
In Jove’s clenched palm before the worlds were sown,—  
But I—I was not Juno even ! my hand  
Was shut in weak convulsion, woman’s ill,  
And when I yearned to loose a finger—lo,  
The nerve revolted. ’Tis the same even now :  
This hand may never, haply, open large,  
Before the spark is quenched, or the palm charred,  
To prove the power not else than by the pain.

It burns, it burnt—my whole life burnt with it,  
And light, not sunlight and not torchlight, flashed  
My steps out through the slow and difficult road.  
I had grown distrustful of too forward Springs,  
The season’s books in drear significance  
Of morals, dropping round me. Lively books ?  
The ash has livelier verdure than the yew ;  
And yet the yew’s green longer, and alone  
Found worthy of the holy Christmas time.  
We’ll plant more yews if possible, albeit  
We plant the graveyards with them.

Day and night

I worked my rhythmic thought, and furrowed up  
Both watch and slumber with long lines of life  
Which did not suit their season. The rose fell  
From either cheek, my eyes globed luminous  
Through orbits of blue shadow, and my pulse  
Would shudder along the purple-veined wrist  
Like a shot bird. Youth’s stern, set face to face



With youth's ideal : and when people came  
 And said, "You work too much, you are looking ill,"  
 I smiled for pity of them who pitied me,  
 And thought I should be better soon perhaps  
 For those ill looks. Observe—"I," means in youth  
 Just *I* . . . the conscious and eternal soul  
 With all its ends, and not the outside life,  
 The parcel-man, the doublet of the flesh,  
 The so much liver, lung, integument,  
 Which made the sum of "I" hereafter, when  
 World-talkers talk of doing well or ill.  
*I* prosper, if I gain a step, although  
 A nail then pierced my foot : although my brain  
 Embracing any truth, froze paralysed,  
*I* prosper. I but change my instrument ;  
 I break the spade off, digging deep for gold,  
 And catch the mattock up.

I worked on, on.

Through all the bristling fence of nights and days  
 Which hedges time in from the eternities,  
 I struggled, . . . never stopped to note the stakes  
 Which hurt me in my course. The midnight oil  
 Would stink sometimes ; there came some vulgar needs :  
 I had to live, that therefore I might work,  
 And, being but poor, I was constrained, for life,  
 To work with one hand for the booksellers,  
 While working with the other for myself  
 And art. You swim with feet as well as hands,  
 Or make small way. I apprehended this,  
 In England, no one lives by verse that lives ;  
 And, apprehending, I resolved by prose  
 To make a space to sphere my living verse .  
 I wrote for cyclopædias, magazines,  
 And weekly papers, holding up my name  
 To keep it from the mud. I learnt the use  
 Of the editorial "we" in a review,  
 As courtly ladies the fine trick of trains,  
 And swept it grandly through the open doors  
 As if one could not pass through doors at all  
 Save so encumbered. I wrote tales beside,  
 Carved many an article on cherry-stones  
 To suit light readers,—something in the lines  
 Revealing, it was said, the mallet-hand,  
 But that, I'll never vouch for. What you do

For bread, will taste of common grain, not grapes,  
 Although you have a vineyard in Champagne,—  
 Much less in Nephelococcygia,  
 As mine was, peradventure.

Having bread

For just so many days, just breathing room  
 For body and verse, I stood up straight and worked  
 My veritable work. And as the soul  
 Which grows within a child, makes the child grow,—  
 Or as the fiery sap, the touch from God,  
 Careering through a tree, dilates the bark,  
 And roughs with scale and knob, before it strikes  
 The summer foliage out in a green flame—  
 So life, in deepening with me, deepened all  
 The course I took, the work I did. Indeed,  
 The academic law convinced of sin ;  
 The critics cried out on the falling off,  
 Regretting the first manner. But I felt  
 My heart's life throbbing in my verse to show  
 It lived, it also—certes incomplete,  
 Disordered with all Adam in the blood,  
 But even its very tumours, warts, and wens  
 Still organised by, and implying life.

A lady called upon me on such a day.  
 She had the low voice of your English dames,  
 Unused, it seems, to need rise half a note  
 To catch attention,—and their quiet mood,  
 As if they lived too high above the earth  
 For that to put them out in anything :  
 So gentle, because verily so proud ;  
 So wary and afeared of hurting you,  
 By no means that you are not really vile,  
 But that they would not touch you with their foot  
 To push you to your place ; so self-possessed  
 Yet gracious and conciliating, it takes  
 An effort in their presence to speak truth :  
 You know the sort of woman,—brilliant stuff,  
 And out of nature. “ Lady Waldemar.”  
 She said her name quite simply, as if it meant  
 Not much indeed, but something,—took my hands,  
 And smiled, as if her smile could help my case,  
 And dropped her eyes on me, and let them melt.  
 ‘ Is this,’ she said, ‘ the Muse ? ’

“No sybil even,”

I answered, “since she fails to guess the cause  
Which taxed you with this visit, madam.”

“Good,”

She said, “I like to be sincere at once ;  
Perhaps, if I had found a literal Muse,  
The visit might have taxed me. As it is,  
You wear your blue so chiefly in your eyes,  
My fair Aurora, in a frank good way,  
It comforts me entirely for your fame,  
As well as for the trouble of my ascent  
To this Olympus.”

There, a silver laugh  
Ran rippling through her quickened little breaths  
The steep stair somewhat justified.

“But still  
Your ladyship has left me curious why  
You dared the risk of finding the said Muse?”

“Ah,—keep me, notwithstanding, to the point,  
Like any pedant. Is the blue in eyes  
As awful as in stockings, after all,  
I wonder, that you’d have my business out  
Before I breathe—exact the epic plunge  
In spite of gasps? Well, naturally you think  
I’ve come here, as the lion-hunters go  
To deserts, to secure you, with a trap,  
For exhibition in my drawing-rooms  
Or zoologic soirées? Not in the least.  
Roar softly at me ; I am frivolous,  
I dare say ; I have played at lions, too,  
Like other women of my class,—but now  
I meet my lion simply as Androcles  
Met his . . . when at his mercy.” So, she bent  
Her head, as queens may mock,—then lifting up  
Her eyelids with a real grave queenly look,  
Which ruled, and would not spare, not even herself,—  
“I think you have a cousin :—Romney Leigh.”

“You bring a word from *him*?”—my eyes leapt up  
To the very height of hers,—“a word from *him*?”

“I bring a word about him, actually.  
But first,”—she pressed me with her urgent eyes—  
“You do not love him,—you?”

"You're frank at least  
 In putting questions, madam," I replied ;  
 I love my cousin cousinly—no more."

"I guessed as much. I'm ready to be frank  
 In answering also, if you'll question me,  
 Or even with something less. You stand outside,  
 You artist women, of the common sex ;  
 You share not with us, and exceed us so  
 Perhaps by what you're mulcted in, your hearts  
 Being starved to make your heads : so run the old  
 Traditions of you. I can therefore speak,  
 Without the natural shame which creatures feel  
 When speaking on their level, to their like.  
 There's many a papist she, would rather die  
 Than own to her maid she put a ribbon on  
 To catch the indifferent eye of such a man,—  
 Who yet would count adulteries on her beads  
 At holy Mary's shrine, and never blush ;  
 Because the saints are so far off, we lose  
 All modesty before them. Thus, to-day.  
 'Tis I, love Romney Leigh."

"Forbear," I cried.

"If here's no Muse, still less is any saint ;  
 Nor even a friend, that Lady Waldemar  
 Should make confessions" . . .

"That's unkindly said.

If no friend, what forbids to make a friend  
 To join to our confession ere we have done ?  
 I love your cousin. If it seems unwise  
 To say so, it's still foolisher (we're frank)  
 To feel so. My first husband left me young,  
 And pretty enough, so please you, and rich enough  
 To keep my booth in May-fair with the rest  
 To happy issues. There are marquises  
 Would serve seven years to call me wife, I know :  
 And, after seven, I might consider it,  
 For there's some comfort in a marquise  
 When all's said,—yes, but after the seven years ;  
 I, now, love Romney. You put up your lip,  
 So like a Leigh ! so like him !—Pardon me,  
 I am well aware I do not derogate  
 In loving Romney Leigh. The name is good,  
 The means are excellent ; but the man, the man—

Heaven help us both,—I am near as mad as he,  
In loving such an one.”

She slowly swung  
Her heavy ringlets till they touched her smile,  
As reasonably sorry for herself ;  
And thus continued,—

“Of a truth, Miss Leigh,  
I have not, without struggle, come to this.  
I took a master in the German tongue,  
I gamed a little, went to Paris twice ;  
But, after all, this love ! . . . you eat of love,  
And do as vile a thing as if you ate  
Of garlic—which, whatever else you eat,  
Tastes uniformly acrid, till your peach  
Reminds you of your onion. Am I coarse ?  
Well, love’s coarse, nature’s coarse—ah, there’s the rub !  
We fair fine ladies, who park out our lives  
From common sheep-paths, cannot help the crows  
From flying over,—we’re as natural still  
As Blowsalinda. Drape us perfectly  
In Lyons velvet,—we are not, for that,  
Lay-figures, look you ! we have hearts within,  
Warm, live, improvident, indecent hearts,  
As ready for distracted ends and acts  
As any distressed sempstress of them all  
That Romney groans and toils for. We catch love  
And other fevers, in the vulgar way.  
Love will not be outwitted by our wit,  
Nor outrun by our equipages :—mine  
Persisted, spite of efforts. All my cards  
Turned up but Romney Leigh ; my German stopped  
At germane Wertherism ; my Paris rounds  
Returned me from the Champs Elysées just  
A ghost, and sighing like Dido’s. I came home  
Uncured,—convicted rather to myself  
Of being in love . . . in love ! That’s coarse you’ll say.  
I’m talking garlic.”

Coldly I replied :  
“Apologise for atheism, not love !  
For me, I do believe in love, and God.  
I know my cousin : Lady Waldemar  
I know not : yet I say as much as this—  
Whoever loves him, let her not excuse  
But cleanse herself, that, loving such a man,

She may not do it with such unworthy love  
He cannot stoop and take it."

"That is said  
Austerely, like a youthful prophetic,  
Who knits her brows across her pretty eyes  
To keep them back from following the gray flight  
Of doves between the temple-columns. Dear,  
Be kinder with me. Let us two be friends.  
I'm a mere woman,—the more weak perhaps  
Through being so proud; you're better; as for him,  
He's best. Indeed he builds his goodness up  
So high, it topples down to the other side,  
And makes a sort of badness; there's the worst  
I have to say against your cousin's best!  
And so be mild, Aurora, with my worst,  
For his sake, if not mine."

"I own myself  
Incredulous of confidence like this  
Availing him or you."

"I, worthy of him?  
In your sense I am not so—let it pass.  
And yet I save him if I marry him;  
Let that pass too."

"Pass, pass! we play police  
Upon my cousin's life, to indicate  
What may or may not pass?" I cried. "He knows  
What's worthy of him; the choice remains with *him*;  
And what he chooses, act or wife, I think  
I shall not call unworthy, I, for one."

"'Tis somewhat rashly said," she answered slow,  
"Now let's talk reason, though we talk of love.  
Your cousin Romney Leigh's a monster! there,  
The word's out fairly; let me prove the fact.  
We'll take, say, that most perfect of antiques,  
They call the Genius of the Vatican,  
Which seems too beauteous to endure itself  
In this mixed world, and fasten it for once  
Upon the torso of the Drunken Faun  
(Who might limp surely, if he did not dance),  
Instead of Buonarroti's mask: what then?  
We show the sort of monster Romney is,  
With godlike virtues and heroic aims  
Subjoined to limping possibilities

Of mismade human nature. Grant the man  
Twice godlike, twice heroic,—still he limps,  
And here's the point we come to."

"Pardon me,  
But, Lady Waldemar, the point's the thing  
We never come to."

"Caustic, insolent  
At need! I like you"—(there, she took my hands)  
"And now, my lioness, help Androcles,  
For all your roaring. Help me! for myself  
I would not say so—but for him. He limps  
So certainly, he'll fall into the pit  
A week hence,—so I lose him—so he is lost!  
And when he's fairly married, he a Leigh,  
To a girl of doubtful life, undoubtful birth,  
Starved out in London, till her coarse-grained hands  
Are whiter than her morals,—you, for one,  
May call his choice most worthy."

"Married! lost!  
He, . . . Romney!"

"Ah, you're moved at last," she said  
"These monsters, set out in the open sun,  
Of course throw monstrous shadows: those who think  
Awry, will scarce act straightly. Who but he?  
And who but you can wonder? He has been mad,  
The whole world knows, since first, a nominal man,  
He soured the proctors, tried the gownsmen's wits,  
With equal scorn of triangles and wine,  
And took no honours, yet was honourable.  
They'll tell you he lost count of Homer's ships  
In Melbourne's poor-bills, Ashley's factory bills,—  
Ignored the Aspasia we all dare to praise,  
For other women, dear, we could not name  
Because we're decent. Well, he had some right  
On his side probably; men always have,  
Who go absurdly wrong. The living boor  
Who brews your ale, exceeds in vital worth  
Dead Cæsar who 'stops bungholes' in the cask;  
And also, to do good is excellent,  
For persons of his income, even to boors:  
I sympathise with all such things. But he  
Went mad upon them . . . madder and more mad,  
From college times to these,—as, going down hill,  
The faster still, the farther! you must know

Your Leigh by heart : he has sown his black young curls  
 With bleaching cares of half a million men  
 Already. If you do not starve, or sin,  
 You're nothing to him. Pay the income-tax,  
 And break your heart upon't . . . he'll scarce be touched ;  
 But come upon the parish, qualified  
 For the parish stocks, and Romney will be there  
 To call you brother, sister, or perhaps  
 A tenderer name still. Had I any chance  
 With Mister Leigh, who am Lady Waldemar,  
 And never committed felony ? ”

“ You speak  
 Too bitterly,” I said, “ for the literal truth.”

“ The truth is bitter. Here's a man who looks  
 For ever on the ground ! you must be low ;  
 Or else a pictured ceiling overhead,  
 Good painting thrown away. For me, I've done  
 What women may (we're somewhat limited,  
 We modest women), but I've done my best.  
 —How men are perjured when they swear our eyes  
 Have meaning in them ! they're just blue or brown,—  
 They just can drop their lids a little. In fact,  
 Mine did more, for I read half Fourier through,  
 Proudhon, Considerant, and Louis Blanc,  
 With various others of his socialists ;  
 And if I had been a fathom less in love,  
 Had cured myself with gaping. As it was,  
 I quoted from them prettily enough,  
 Perhaps, to make them sound half rational  
 To a saner man than he, whene'er we talked  
 (For which I dodged occasion)—learnt by heart  
 His speeches in the Commons and elsewhere  
 Upon the social question ; heaped reports  
 Of wicked women and penitentiaries,  
 On all my tables, with a place for Sue ;  
 And gave my name to swell subscription-lists  
 Toward keeping up the sun at nights in heaven,  
 And other possible ends. All things I did,  
 Except the impossible . . . such as wearing gowns  
 Provided by the Ten Hours' movement ! there,  
 I stopped—we must stop somewhere. He, meanwhile,  
 Unmoved as the Indian tortoise 'neath the world,  
 Let all that noise go on upon his back :



He would not disconcert or throw me out ;  
 'Twas well to see a woman of my class  
 With such a dawn of conscience. For the heart,  
 Made firewood for his sake, and flaming up  
 To his very face . . . he warmed his feet at it ;  
 But deigned to let my carriage stop him short  
 In park or street,—he leaning on the door,  
 With news of the committee which sate last  
 On pickpockets at suck."

" You jest—you jest."

" As martyrs jest, dear (if you've read their lives),  
 Upon the axe which kills them. When all's done  
 By me, . . . for him—you'll ask him presently  
 The colour of my hair—he cannot tell,  
 Or answers 'dark' at random,—while, be sure,  
 He's absolute on the figure, five or ten,  
 Of my last subscription. Is it bearable,  
 And I a woman?"

" Is it reparable,  
 Though *I* were a man?"

" I know not. That's to prove.  
 But, first, this shameful marriage."

" Ay?" I cried,  
 " Then really there's a marriage?"

" Yesterday  
 I held him fast upon it. 'Mister Leigh,'  
 Said I, 'shut up a thing, it makes more noise.  
 'The boiling town keeps secrets ill; I've known  
 'Yours since last week. Forgive my knowledge so:  
 'You feel I'm not the woman of the world  
 'The world thinks; you have borne with me before,  
 'And used me in your noble work, our work,  
 'And now you shall not cast me off because  
 'You're at the difficult point, the *join*. 'Tis true  
 'Even I can scarce admit the cogency  
 'Of such a marriage . . . where you do not love  
 '(Except the class), yet marry and throw your name  
 'Down to the gutter, for a fire-escape  
 'To future generations! it's sublime,  
 'A great example,—a true Genesis  
 'Of the opening social era. But take heed;  
 'This virtuous act must have a patent weight,  
 'Or loses half its virtue. Make it tell,

' Interpret it, and set in the light,  
 ' And do not muffle it in a winter-cloak  
 ' As a vulgar bit of shame,—as if, at best,  
 ' A Leigh had made a misalliance and blushed  
 ' A Howard should know it.' Then, I pressed him more—  
 ' He would not choose,' I said, ' that even his kin, . . .  
 Aurora Leigh, even . . . should conceive his act  
 ' Less service, more appetite.' At which  
 He grew so pale, dear, . . . to the lips, I knew  
 I had touched him. ' Do you know her,' he inquired,  
 ' My cousin Aurora?' ' Yes,' I said, and lied  
 (But truly we all know you by your books),  
 And so I offered to come straight to you,  
 Explain the subject, justify the cause,  
 And take you with me to St. Margaret's Court  
 To see this miracle, this Marian Erle,  
 This drover's daughter (she's not pretty, he swears)  
 Upon whose finger, exquisitely pricked  
 By a hundred needles, we're to hang the tie  
 ' Twixt class and class in England,—thus, indeed,  
 By such a presence, yours and mine, to lift  
 The match up from the doubtful place. At once  
 He thanked me, sighing . . . murmured to himself,  
 ' She'll do it perhaps; she's noble,'—thanked me twice,  
 And promised, as my guerdon, to put off  
 His marriage for a month."

I answered then.

" I understand your drift imperfectly.  
 You wish to lead me to my cousin's betrothed,  
 To touch her hand if worthy, and hold her hand  
 If feeble, thus to justify his match.  
 So be it then. But how this serves your ends,  
 And how the strange confession of your love  
 Serves this, I have to learn—I cannot see."

She knit her restless forehead. " Then, despite,  
 Aurora, that most radiant morning name,  
 You're dull as any London afternoon.  
 I wanted time,—and gained it,—wanted *you*,  
 And gain you! You will come and see the girl,  
 In whose most prodigal eyes, the lineal pearl  
 And pride of all your lofty race of Leighs  
 Is destined to solution. Authorised  
 By sight and knowledge, then, you'll speak your mind,

And prove to Romney, in your brilliant way,  
 He'll wrong the people and posterity  
 (Say such a thing is bad for you and me,  
 And you fail utterly) by concluding thus  
 An execrable marriage. Break it up,  
 Disroot it—peradventure, presently,  
 We'll plant a better fortune in its place.  
 Be good to me, Aurora, scorn me less  
 For saying the thing I should not. Well I know  
 I should not. I have kept, as others have,  
 The iron rule of womanly reserve  
 In lip and life, till now : I wept a week  
 Before I came here.”—Ending, she was pale ;  
 The last words, haughtily said, were tremulous.  
 This palfrey pranced in harness, arched her neck,  
 And, only by the foam upon the bit,  
 You saw she champed against it. Then I rose.  
 “I love love ! truth's no cleaner thing than love.  
 I comprehend a love so fiery hot  
 It burns its natural veil of august shame,  
 And stands sublimely in the nude, as chaste  
 As Medicean Venus. But I know,  
 A love that burns through veils, will burn through masks,  
 And shrivel up treachery. What, love and lie !  
 Nay—go to the opera ! your love's curable.”

“I love and lie ?” she said—“I lie, forsooth ?”  
 And beat her taper foot upon the floor,  
 And smiled against the shoe.—“You're hard, Miss Leigh,  
 Unversed in current phrases.—Bowling-greens  
 Of poets are fresher than the world's highways ;  
 Forgive me that I rashly blew the dust  
 Which dims our hedges even, in your eyes,  
 And vexed you so much. You find, probably,  
 No evil in this marriage,—rather good  
 Of innocence, to pastoralise in song :  
 You'll give the bond your signature, perhaps,  
 Beneath the lady's mark,—indifferent  
 That Romney chose a wife could write her name,  
 In witnessing he loved her.”

“Loved !” I cried ;

“Who tells you that he wants a wife to love ?  
 He gets a horse to use, not love, I think :  
 There's work for wives as well,—and after, straw,

When men are liberal. For myself, you err  
 Supposing power in me to break this match.  
 I could not do it, to save Romney's life ;  
 And would not, to save mine."

" You take it so,"

She said ; " farewell then. Write your books in peace,  
 As far as may be for some secret stir  
 Now obvious to me,—for, most obviously,  
 In coming hither I mistook the way."  
 Whereat she touched my hand, and bent her head,  
 And floated from me like a silent cloud  
 That leaves the sense of thunder.

I drew breath

As hard as in a sick room. After all  
 This woman breaks her social system up  
 For love, so counted—the love possible  
 To such,—and lilies are still lilies, pulled  
 By smutty hands, though spotted from their white ;  
 And thus she is better, haply, of her kind,  
 Than Romney Leigh, who lives by diagrams,  
 And crosses out the spontaneities  
 Of all his individual, personal life,  
 With formal universals. As if man  
 Were set upon a high stool at a desk,  
 To keep God's books for Him, in red and black,  
 And feel by millions ! What, if even God  
 Were chiefly God by living out Himself  
 To an individualism of the Infinite,  
 Eterne, intense, profuse,—still throwing up  
 The golden spray of multitudinous worlds  
 In measure to the proclive weight and rush  
 Of His inner nature,—the spontaneous love  
 Still proof and outflow of spontaneous life ?  
 Then live, Aurora !

Two hours afterward,  
 Within St. Margaret's Court I stood alone,  
 Close-veiled. A sick child, from an ague-fit,  
 Whose wasted right hand gambled 'gainst his left  
 With an old brass button, in a blot of sun,  
 Jeered weakly at me as I passed across  
 The uneven pavement ; while a woman, rouged  
 Upon the angular cheek-bones, kerchief torn,  
 Thin dangling locks, and flat lascivious mouth,  
 Cursed at a window, both ways, in and out,

By turns some bed-rid creature and myself, —  
“Lie still there, mother! liker the dead dog  
You’ll be to-morrow. What, we pick our way,  
Fine madam, with those damnable small feet!  
We cover up our face from doing good,  
As if it were our purse! What brings you here,  
My lady? is’t to find my gentleman  
Who visits his tame pigeon in the eaves?  
Our cholera catch you with its cramps and spasms,  
And tumble up your good clothes, veil and all,  
And turn your whiteness dead-blue.” I looked up;  
I think I could have walked through hell that day,  
And never flinched. “The dear Christ comfort you,”  
I said, “you must have been most miserable  
To be so cruel;”—and I emptied out  
My purse upon the stones: when, as I had cast  
The last charm in the cauldron, the whole court  
Went boiling, bubbling up, from all its doors  
And windows, with a hideous wail of laughs  
And roar of oaths, and blows perhaps . . . I passed  
Too quickly for distinguishing . . . and pushed  
A little side-door hanging on a hinge,  
And plunged into the dark, and groped and climbed  
The long, steep, narrow stair ’twixt broken rail  
And mildewed wall that let the plaster drop  
To startle me in the blackness. Still, up, up!  
So high lived Romney’s bride. I paused at last  
Before a low door in the roof, and knocked;  
There came an answer like a hurried dove—  
“So soon? can that be Mister Leigh? so soon?”  
And as I entered, an ineffable face.  
Met mine upon the threshold. “Oh, not you,  
Not you!” . . . the dropping of the voice implied,  
“Then, if not you, for me not any one.”  
I looked her in the eyes, and held her hands,  
And said, “I am his cousin,—Romney Leigh’s;  
And here I’m come to see my cousin too.”  
She touched me with her face and with her voice,  
This daughter of the people. Such soft flowers,  
From such rough roots? the people, under there,  
Can sin so, curse so, look so, smell so . . . faugh!  
Yet have such daughters?

Nowise beautiful  
Was Marian Erle. She was not white nor brown,

But could look either, like a mist that changed  
 According to being shone on more or less.  
 The hair, too, ran its opulence of curls  
 In doubt 'twixt dark and bright, nor left you clear  
 To name the colour. Too much hair perhaps  
 (I'll name a fault here) for so small a head.  
 Which seemed to droop on that side and on this,  
 As a full-blown rose uneasy with its weight,  
 Though not a breath should trouble it. Again,  
 The dimple in the cheek had better gone  
 With redder, fuller rounds : and somewhat large  
 The mouth was, though the milky little teeth  
 Dissolved it to so infantine a smile !  
 For soon it smiled at me ; the eyes smiled too,  
 But 'twas as if remembering they had wept,  
 And knowing they should, some day, weep again.

We talked. She told me all her story out,  
 Which I'll re-tell with fuller utterance,  
 As coloured and confirmed in aftertimes  
 By others, and herself too. Marian Erle  
 Was born upon the ledge of Malvern Hill  
 To eastward, in a hut, built up at night  
 To evade the landlord's eye, of mud and turf,  
 Still liable, if once he looked that way,  
 To being straight levelled, scattered by his foot,  
 Like any other anthill. Born, I say ;  
 God sent her to His world, commissioned right,  
 Her human testimonials fully signed,  
 Not scant in soul—complete in lineaments ;  
 But others had to swindle her a place  
 To wail in when she had come. No place for her,  
 By man's law ! born an outlaw, was this babe.  
 Her first cry in our strange and strangling air,  
 When cast in spasms out by the shuddering womb,  
 Was wrong against the social code,—forced wrong.  
 What business had the baby to cry there ?

I tell her story and grow passionate.  
 She, Marian, did not tell it so, but used  
 Meek words that made no wonder of herself  
 For being so sad a creature. "Mister Leigh  
 Considered truly that such things should change.  
 They *will*, in heaven—but meantime, on the heart,

There's none can like a nettle as a pink,  
Except himself. We're nettles some of us,  
And give offence by the act of springing up  
And, if we leave the damp side of the wall,  
The hoes, of course, are on us." So she said.

Her father earned his life by random jobs  
Despised by steadier workmen—keeping swine  
On commons, picking hops, or hurrying on  
The harvest at wet seasons,—or, at need,  
Assisting the Welsh drovers, when a drove  
Of startled horses plunged into the mist,  
Below the mountain-road, and sowed the wind  
With wandering neighings. In between the gaps  
Of such irregular work, he drank and slept,  
And cursed his wife because, the pence being out,  
She could not buy more drink. At which she turned  
(The worm) and beat her baby in revenge  
For her own broken heart. There's not a crime  
But takes its proper change out still in crime,  
If once rung on the counter of this world ;  
Let sinners look to it. Yet the outcast child,  
For whom the very mother's face forewent  
The mother's special patience, lived and grew :  
Learnt early to cry low, and walk alone,  
With that pathetic vacillating roll  
Of the infant body on the uncertain feet  
(The earth being felt unstable ground so soon),  
At which most women's arms unclose at once  
With irrepresive instinct. Thus, at three,  
This poor weaned kid would run off from the fold,  
This babe would steal off from the mother's chair,  
And, creeping through the golden walls of gorse,  
Would find some keyhole toward the secrecy  
Of Heaven's high blue, and, nestling down, peer out—  
Oh, not to catch the angels at their games,  
She had never heard of angels,—but to gaze  
She knew not why, to see she knew not what,  
A-hungering outward from the barren earth  
For something like a joy. She liked, she said,  
To dazzle black her sight against the sky,  
For then, it seemed, some grand blind Love came down,  
And groped her out, and clasped her with a kiss ;  
She learnt God that way, and was beat for it

Whenever she went home,—yet came again,  
 As surely as the trapped hare, getting free,  
 Returns to his form. This grand blind Love, she said,  
 This skyeey father and mother both in one,  
 Instructed her and civilised her more  
 Than even the Sunday-school did afterward,  
 To which a lady sent her to learn books  
 And sit upon a low bench in a row  
 With other children. Well, she laughed sometimes  
 To see them laugh and laugh, and moil their texts ;  
 But oft she was sorrowful with noise,  
 And wondered if their mothers beat them hard,  
 That ever they should laugh so. There was one  
 She loved indeed,—Rose Bell, a seven years' child  
 So pretty and clever, who read syllables  
 When Marian was at letters ; *she* would laugh  
 At nothing—hold your finger up, she laughed,  
 Then shook her curls down on her eyes and mouth  
 To hide her make-mirth from the schoolmaster.  
 And Rose's pelting glee, as frank as rain  
 On cherry-blossoms, brightened Marian too,  
 To see another merry whom she loved.  
 She whispered once (the children side by side,  
 With mutual arms entwined about their necks)  
 "Your mother lets you laugh so?" "Ay," said Rose,  
 "She lets me. She was dug into the ground  
 Six years since, I being but a yearling wean.  
 Such mothers let us play and lose our time,  
 And never scold nor beat us! don't you wish  
 You had one like that?" There, Marian breaking off  
 Looked suddenly in my face. "Poor Rose," said she,  
 "I heard her laugh last night in Oxford Street.  
 I'd pour out half my blood to stop that laugh,—  
 Poor Rose, poor Rose!" said Marian.

She resumed.

It tried her, when she had learnt at Sunday-school  
 What God was, what He wanted from us all,  
 And how, in choosing sin, we vexed the Christ,  
 To go straight home and hear her father pull  
 The Name down on us from the thunder-shelf,  
 Then drink away his soul into the dark  
 From seeing judgment. Father, mother, home,  
 Were God and Heaven reversed to her : the more  
 She knew of Right, the more she guessed their wrong ;



Her price paid down for knowledge, was to know  
The vileness of her kindred : through her heart,  
Her filial and tormented heart, henceforth,  
They struck their blows at virtue. Oh, 'tis hard  
To learn you have a Father up in heaven  
By a gathering certain sense of being, on earth,  
Still worse than orphaned : 'tis too heavy a grief,  
The having to thank God for such a joy !

And so passed Marian's life from year to year,  
Her parents took her with them when they tramped,  
Dodged lanes and heaths, frequented towns and fairs,  
And once went farther and saw Manchester,  
And once the sea, that blue end of the world,  
That fair scroll-finis of a wicked book,—  
And twice a prison,—back at intervals,  
Returning to the hills. Hills draw like heaven,  
And stronger sometimes, holding out their hands  
To pull you from the vile flats up to them ;  
And though, perhaps, these strollers still strolled back,  
As sheep do, simply that they knew the way,  
They certainly felt bettered unawares  
Emerging from the social smut of towns  
To wipe their feet clean on the mountain turf.  
In which long wanderings, Marian lived and learned,  
Endured and learned. The people on the roads  
Would stop and ask her how her eyes outgrew  
Her cheeks, and if she meant to lodge the birds  
In all that hair ; and then they lifted her  
The miller in his cart, a mile or twain,  
The butcher's boy on horseback. Often, too,  
The pedlar stopped, and tapped her on the head  
With absolute forefinger, brown and ringed,  
And asked if peradventure she could read !  
And when she answered " ay," would toss her down  
Some stray odd volume from his heavy pack,  
A Thomson's Seasons, mulcted of the Spring,  
Or half a play of Shakspeare's, torn across  
(She had to guess the bottom of a page  
By just the top sometimes,—as difficult,  
As, sitting on the moon, to guess the earth !)  
Or else a sheaf of leaves (for that small Ruth's  
Small gleanings) torn out from the heart of books,  
From Churchyard Elegies and Edens Lost,

From Burns, and Bunyan, Selkirk, and Tom Jones.  
 'Twas somewhat hard to keep the things distinct,  
 And oft the jangling influence jarred the child  
 Like looking at a sunset full of grace  
 Through a pothouse window while the drunken oaths  
 Went on behind her ; but she weeded out  
 Her book-leaves, threw away the leaves that hurt  
 (First tore them small, that none should find a word),  
 And made a nosegay of the sweet and good  
 To fold within her breast, and pore upon  
 At broken moments of the noontide glare,  
 When leave was given her to untie her cloak  
 And rest upon the dusty roadside bank  
 From the highway's dust. Or oft, the journey done,  
 Some city friend would lead her by the hand  
 To hear a lecture at an institute :  
 And thus she had grown, this Marian Erle of ours,  
 To no book-learning,—she was ignorant  
 Of authors,—not in earshot of the things  
 Out-spoken o'er the heads of common men,  
 By men who are uncommon,—but within  
 The cadenced hum of such, and capable  
 Of catching from the fringes of the wind  
 Some fragmentary phrases, here and there,  
 Of that fine music,—which, being carried in  
 To her soul, had reproduced itself afresh  
 In finer motions of the lips and lids.

She said, in speaking of it, “ If a flower  
 Were thrown you out of heaven at intervals,  
 You'd soon attain to a trick of looking up,—  
 And so with her.” She counted me her years,  
 Till *I* felt old ; and then she counted me  
 Her sorrowful pleasures, till I felt ashamed.  
 She told me she was almost glad and calm  
 On such and such a season ; sate and sewed,  
 With no one to break up her crystal thoughts ;  
 While rhymes from lovely poems span around  
 Their ringing circles of ecstatic tune,  
 Beneath the moistened finger of the Hour.  
 Her parents called her a strange, sickly child,  
 Not good for much, and given to sulk and stare,  
 And smile into the hedges and the clouds,  
 And tremble if one shook her from her fit

By any blow, or word even. Out-door jobs  
 Went ill with her; and household quiet work,  
 She was not born to. Had they kept the north,  
 They might have had their pennyworth out of her,  
 Like other parents, in the factories  
 (Your children work for you, not you for them,  
 Or else they better had been choked with air  
 The first breath drawn); but, in this tramping life,  
 Was nothing to be done with such a child,  
 But tramp and tramp. And yet she knitted hose  
 Not ill, and was not dull at needlework;  
 And all the country people gave her pence  
 For darning stockings past their natural age,  
 And patching petticoats from old to new,  
 And other light work done for thrifty wives.

One day, said Marian,—the sun shone that day—  
 Her mother had been badly beat, and felt  
 The bruises sore about her wretched soul  
 (That must have been): she came in suddenly,  
 And snatching, in a sort of breathless rage,  
 Her daughter's headgear comb, let down the hair  
 Upon her, like a sudden waterfall,  
 And drew her drenched and passive, by the arm,  
 Outside the hut they lived in. When the child  
 Could clear her blinded face from all that stream  
 Of tresses . . . there, a man stood, with beast's eyes,  
 That seemed as they would swallow her alive,  
 Complete in body and spirit, hair and all,—  
 With burning stertorous breath that hurt her cheek,  
 He breathed so near. The mother held her tight,  
 Saying hard between her teeth—"Why wench, why wench,  
 The squire speaks to you now—the squire's too good;  
 He means to set you up, and comfort us.  
 Be mannerly at least." The child turned round,  
 And looked up piteous in the mother's face  
 (Be sure that mother's death-bed will not want  
 Another devil to damn, than such a look) . . .  
 "Oh, mother!" then, with desperate glance to heaven,  
 "God, free me from my mother," she shrieked out,  
 "These mothers are too dreadful." And, with force  
 As passionate as fear, she tore her hands,  
 Like lilies from the rocks, from hers and his,  
 And sprang down, bounded headlong down the steen.

Away from both—away, if possible,  
 As far as God,—away! They yelled at her,  
 As famished hounds at a hare. She heard them yell,  
 She felt her name hiss after her from the hills,  
 Like shot from guns. On, on. And now she had cast  
 The voices off with the uplands. On. Mad fear  
 Was running in her feet and killing the ground;  
 The white roads curled as if she burnt them up,  
 The green fields melted, wayside trees fell back  
 To make room for her. Then, her head grew vexed,  
 Trees, fields, turned on her, and ran after her;  
 She heard the quick pants of the hills behind,  
 Their keen air pricked her neck. She had lost her feet,  
 Could run no more, yet, somehow, went as fast,—  
 The horizon, red 'twixt steeples in the east,  
 So sucked her forward, forward, while her heart  
 Kept swelling, swelling, till it swelled so big  
 It seemed to fill her body; then it burst,  
 And overflowed the world and swamped the light,  
 “And now I am dead and safe,” thought Marian Erle—  
 She had dropped, she had fainted.

When the sense returned,  
 The night had passed—not life's night. She was 'ware  
 Of heavy tumbling motions, creaking wheels,  
 The driver shouting to the lazy team  
 That swung their rankling bells against her brain;  
 While, through the waggon's coverture and chinks,  
 The cruel yellow morning pecked at her  
 Alive or dead, upon the straw inside,—  
 At which her soul ached back into the dark  
 And prayed, “no more of that.” A waggoner  
 Had found her in a ditch beneath the moon,  
 As white as moonshine, save for the oozing blood.  
 At first he thought her dead; but when he had wiped  
 The mouth and heard it sigh, he raised her up,  
 And laid her in his waggon in the straw,  
 And so conveyed her to the distant town  
 To which his business called himself, and left  
 That heap of misery at the hospital.

She stirred;—the place seemed new and strange as death.  
 The white strait bed, with others strait and white,  
 Like graves dug side by side, at measured lengths,  
 And quiet people walking in and out

With wonderful low voices and soft steps,  
And apparitional equal care for each,  
Astonished her with order, silence, law :  
And when a gentle hand held out a cup,  
She took it, as you do at sacrament,  
Half awed, half melted,—not being used, indeed,  
To so much love as makes the form of love  
And courtesy of manners. Delicate drinks  
And rare white bread, to which some dying eyes  
Were turned in observation. O my God,  
How sick we must be, ere we make men just !  
I think it frets the saints in heaven to see  
How many desolate creatures on the earth  
Have learnt the simple dues of fellowship  
And social comfort, in a hospital,  
As Marian did. She lay there, stunned, half tranced,  
And wished, at intervals of growing sense,  
She might be sicker yet, if sickness made  
The world so marvellous kind, the air so hushed,  
And all her wake-time quiet as a sleep ;  
For now she understood (as such things were),  
How sickness ended very oft in heaven,  
Among the unspoken raptures. Yet more sick,  
And surelier happy. Then she dropped her lids,  
And, folding up her hands as flowers at night,  
Would lose no moment of the blessed time.

She lay and seethed in fever many weeks,  
But youth was strong and overcame the test ;  
Revolted soul and flesh were reconciled  
And fetched back to the necessary day  
And daylight duties. She could creep about  
The long bare rooms, and stare out drearily  
From any narrow window on the street,  
Till some one, who had nursed her as a friend,  
Said coldly to her, as an enemy,  
“ She had leave to go next week, being well enough,”  
While only her heart ached. “ Go next week,” thought she,  
“ Next week ! how would it be with her next week,  
Let out into that terrible street alone  
Among the pushing people, . . . to go . . . where ? ”

One day, the last before the dreaded last,  
Among the convalescents, like herself

Prepared to go next morning, she sate dumb,  
 And heard half absently the women talk,  
 How one was famished for her baby's cheeks—  
 "The little wretch would know her! a year old,  
 And lively, like his father!" one was keen  
 To get to work, and fill some clamorous mouths;  
 And one was tender for her dear goodman  
 Who had missed her sorely,—and one, querulous . . .  
 "Would pay those scandalous neighbours who had dared  
 To talk about her as already dead,"—  
 And one was proud . . . "and if her sweetheart Luke  
 Had left her for a ruddier face than hers  
 (The gossip would be seen through at a glance),  
 Sweet riddance of such sweethearts—let him hang!  
 'Twere good to have been as sick for such an end."

And while they talked, and Marian felt the worse  
 For having missed the worst of all their wrongs,  
 A visitor was ushered through the wards,  
 And paused among the talkers. "When he looked,  
 It was as if he spoke, and when he spoke  
 He sang perhaps," said Marian; "could she tell?  
 She only knew" (so much she had chronicled,  
 As seraphs might, the making of the sun)  
 "That he who came and spake, was Romney Leigh,  
 And then, and there, she saw and heard him first."

And when it was her turn to have the face  
 Upon her,—all those buzzing pallid lips  
 Being satisfied with comfort—when he changed  
 To Marian, saying "And *you*? you're going, where?"—  
 She, moveless as a worm beneath a stone  
 Which some one's stumbling foot has spurned aside,  
 Writhed suddenly, astonished with the light,  
 And breaking into sobs cried, "Where I go?  
 None asked me till this moment. Can I say  
 Where I go? when it has not seemed worth while  
 To God Himself, who thinks of every one,  
 To think of me, and fix where I shall go?"

"So young," he gently asked her, "you have lost  
 Your father and your mother?"

"Both," she said,  
 "Both lost! my father was burnt up with gin

Or ever I sucked milk, and so is lost.  
 My mother sold me to a man last month,  
 And so my mother's lost, 'tis manifest.  
 And I, who fled from her for miles and miles,  
 As if I had caught sight of the fires of hell  
 Through some wild gap (she was my mother, sir),  
 It seems I shall be lost too, presently,  
 And so we end, all three of us."

"Poor child!"

He said,—with such a pity in his voice,  
 It soothed her more than her own tears,—“poor child!  
 'Tis simple that betrayal by mother's love  
 Should bring despair of God's too. Yet be taught;  
 He's better to us than many mothers are,  
 And children cannot wander beyond reach  
 Of the sweep of His white raiment. Touch and hold!  
 And if you weep still, weep where John was laid  
 While Jesus loved him.

“She could say the words,”

She told me, “exactly as he uttered them  
 A year back, . . . since, in any doubt or dark,  
 They came out like the stars, and shone on her  
 With just their comfort. Common words, perhaps;  
 The ministers in church might say the same;  
 But *he*, he made the church with what he spoke,—  
 The difference was the miracle,” said she.

Then catching up her smile to ravishment,  
 She added quickly, “I repeat his words,  
 But not his tones: can any one repeat  
 The music of an organ, out of church?  
 And when he said ‘poor child,’ I shut my eyes  
 To feel how tenderly his voice broke through,  
 As the ointment-box broke on the Holy feet  
 To let out the rich medicative nard.”

She told me how he had raised and rescued her  
 With reverent pity, as, in touching grief,  
 He touched the wounds of Christ,—and made her feel  
 More self-respecting. Hope, he called, belief  
 In God,—work, worship . . . therefore let us pray  
 And thus, to snatch her soul from atheism,  
 And keep it stainless from her mother's face,  
 He sent her to a famèd sempstress-house  
 Far off in London, there to work and hope.

With that, they parted. She kept sight of Heaven,  
But not of Romney. He had good to do  
To others : through the days and through the nights,  
She sewed and sewed and sewed. She drooped sometimes,  
And wondered, while, along the tawny light,  
She struck the new thread into her needle's eye,  
How people, without mothers on the hills,  
Could choose the town to live in !—then she drew  
The stitch, and mused how Romney's face would look,  
And if 'twere likely he'd remember hers,  
When they two had their meeting after death.

## FOURTH BOOK.

THEY met still sooner. 'Twas a year from thence  
When Lucy Gresham, the sick sempstress girl,  
Who sewed by Marian's chair so still and quick,  
And leant her head upon the back to cough  
More freely, when, the mistress turning round,  
The others took occasion to laugh out,  
Gave up at last. Among the workers, spoke  
A bold girl with black eyebrows and red lips,—  
“ You know the news ? Who's dying, do you think ?  
Our Lucy Gresham. I expected it  
As little as Nell Hart's wedding. Blush not, Nell,  
Thy curls be red enough without thy cheeks ;  
And, some day, there'll be found a man to dote  
On red curls.—Lucy Gresham swooned last night,  
Dropped sudden in the street while going home ;  
And now the baker says, who took her up  
And laid her by her grandmother in bed,  
He'll give her a week to die in. Pass the silk.  
Let's hope he gave her a loaf too, within reach,  
For otherwise they'll starve before they die,  
That funny pair of bedfellows ! Miss Bell,  
I'll thank you for the scissors. The old crone  
Is paralytic—that's the reason why  
Our Lucy's thread went faster than her breath,  
Which went too quick, we all know. Marian Erle !  
Why, Marian Erle, you're not the fool to cry ?  
Your tears spoil Lady Waldemar's new dress,  
You piece of pity ! ”



Marian rose up straight,  
And, breaking through the talk and through the work,  
Went outward, in the face of their surprise,  
To Lucy's home, to nurse her back to life  
Or down to death. She knew, by such an act,  
All place and grace were forfeit in the house,  
Whose mistress would supply the missing hand  
With necessary, not inhuman haste,  
And take no blame. But pity, too, had dues :  
She could not leave a solitary soul  
To founder in the dark, while she sate still  
And lavished stitches on a lady's hem,  
As if no other work were paramount.  
"Why, God," thought Marian, "has a missing hand  
This moment : Lucy wants a drink, perhaps.  
Let others miss me ! never miss me, God !"

So Marian sate by Lucy's bed, content  
With duty, and was strong, for recompense,  
To hold the lamp of human love arm-high  
To catch the death-strained eyes and comfort them,  
Until the angels, on the luminous side  
Of death, had got theirs ready. And she said,  
When Lucy thanked her sometimes, called her kind,  
It touched her strangely. "Marian Erle, called kind !  
What, Marian, beaten and sold, who could not die !  
'Tis verily good fortune to be kind.  
Ah, you," she said, "who are born to such a grace,  
Be sorry for the unlicensed class, the poor,  
Reduced to think the best good fortune means  
That others, simply, should be kind to them."

From sleep to sleep while Lucy slid away  
So gently, like the light upon a hill,  
Of which none names the moment that it goes.  
Though all see when 'tis gone,—a man came in  
And stood beside the bed. The old idiot wretch  
Screamed feebly, like a baby overlain,  
"Sir, sir, you won't mistake me for the corpse ?  
Don't look at *me*, sir ! never bury *me* !  
Although I lie here, I'm alive as you,  
Except my legs and arms,—I eat and drink,  
And understand—(that you're the gentleman  
Who fits the funerals up, Heaven speed you, sir)

And certainly I should be livelier still  
 If Lucy here . . . sir, Lucy is the corpse . . .  
 Had worked more properly to buy me wine :  
 But Lucy, sir, was always slow at work,  
 I shan't lose much by Lucy. Marian Erle,  
 Speak up and show the gentleman the corpse."

And then a voice said, "Marian Erle." She rose ;  
 It was the hour for angels—there, stood hers !  
 She scarcely marvelled to see Romney Leigh.  
 As light November snows to empty nests,  
 As grass to graves, as moss to mildewed stones,  
 As July suns to ruins, through the rents,  
 As ministering spirits to mourners, through a loss,  
 As Heaven itself to men, through pangs of death,  
 He came uncalled wherever grief had come.  
 "And so," said Marian Erle, "we met anew,"  
 And added softly, "so, we shall not part."

He was not angry that she had left the house  
 Wherein he placed her. Well—she had feared it might  
 Have vexed him. Also, and when he found her set  
 On keeping, though the dead was out of sight,  
 That half-dead, half-live body left behind  
 With cankerous heart and flesh,—which took your best,  
 And cursed you for the little good it did  
 (Could any leave the bedrid wretch alone,  
 So joyless, she was thankless even to God,  
 Much less to you?) he did not say 'twas well,  
 Yet Marian thought he did not take it ill,  
 Since day by day he came, and, every day,  
 She felt within his utterance and his eyes  
 A closer, tender presence of the soul,  
 Until at last he said, "We shall not part."

On that same day, was Marian's work complete :  
 She had smoothed the empty bed, and swept the floor  
 Of coffin sawdust, set the chairs anew  
 The dead had ended gossip in, and stood  
 In that poor room so cold and orderly,  
 The door-key in her hand, prepared to go  
 As *they* had, howbeit not their way. He spoke.

"Dear Marian, of one clay God made us all,  
 And though men push and poke and paddle in't  
 (As children play at fashioning dirt-pies)

And call their fancies by the name of facts,  
 Assuming difference, lordship, privilege,  
 When all's plain dirt,—they come back to it at last ;  
 The first grave-digger proves it with a spade,  
 And pats all even. Need we wait for this,  
 You, Marian, and I, Romney ?” She, at that,  
 Looked blindly in his face, as when one looks  
 Through driving autumn-rains to find the sky.  
 He went on speaking.

“Marian, I being born  
 What men call noble, and you, issued from  
 The noble people,—though the tyrannous sword,  
 Which pierced Christ's heart, has cleft the world in twain  
 'Twixt class and class, opposing rich to poor,—  
 Shall *we* keep parted ? Not so. Let us lean  
 And strain together rather, each to each,  
 Compress the red lips of this gaping wound,  
 As far as two souls can,—ay, lean and league,  
 I, from my superabundance,—from your want,  
 You,—joining in a protest 'gainst the wrong  
 On both sides !”—

All the rest, he held her hand  
 In speaking, which confused the sense of much ;  
 Her heart, against his words, beat out so thick,  
 They might as well be written on the dust  
 Where some poor bird, escaping from hawk's beak,  
 Has dropped, and beats its shuddering wings,—the lines  
 Are rubbed so,—yet 'twas something like to this  
 —“That they two, standing at the two extremes  
 Of social classes, had received one seal,  
 Been dedicate and drawn beyond themselves  
 To mercy and ministration,—he, indeed,  
 Through what he knew, and she, through what she felt ;  
 He, by man's conscience, she, by woman's heart,  
 Relinquishing their several 'vantage posts  
 Of wealthy ease and honourable toil,  
 To work with God at love. And, since God willed  
 That, putting out his hand to touch this ark,  
 He found a woman's hand there, he'd accept  
 The sign too, hold the tender fingers fast,  
 And say, ‘My fellow-worker, be my wife !’”

She told the tale with simple, rustic turns,—  
 Strong leaps of meaning in her sudden eyes,

That took the gaps of any imperfect phrase  
 Of the unschooled speaker : I have rather writ  
 The thing I understood so, than the thing  
 I heard so. And I cannot render right  
 Her quick gesticulation, wild yet soft,  
 Self-startled from the habitual mood she used,  
 Half sad, half languid,—like dumb creatures (now  
 A rustling bird, and now a wandering deer,  
 Or squirrel against the oak-gloom flashing up  
 His sidelong burnished head, in just her way  
 Of savage spontaneity) that stir  
 Abruptly the green silence of the woods,  
 And make it stranger, holier, more profound ;  
 As Nature's general heart confessed itself  
 Of life, and then fell backward on repose.

I kissed the lips that ended.—“ So indeed  
 He loves you, Marian ? ”

“ Loves me ! ” She looked up  
 With a child's wonder when you ask him first  
 Who made the sun—a puzzled blush, that grew,  
 Then broke off in a rapid radiant smile  
 Of sure solution. “ Loves me ! he loves all,—  
 And me, of course. He had not asked me else  
 To work with him for ever, and be his wife.”

Her words reproved me. This perhaps was love—  
 To have its hands too full of gifts to give,  
 For putting out a hand to take a gift ;  
 To love so much, the perfect round of love  
 Includes, in strict conclusion, the being loved ;  
 As Eden-dew went up and fell again,  
 Enough for watering Eden. Obviously  
 She had not thought about his love at all :  
 The cataracts of her soul had poured themselves,  
 And risen self-crowned in rainbow ; would she ask  
 Who crowned her ?—it sufficed that she was crowned,  
 With women of my class, 'tis otherwise :  
 We haggle for the small change of our gold,  
 And so much love accord, for so much love,  
 Rialto-prices. Are we therefore wrong ?  
 If marriage be a contract, look to it then,  
 Contracting parties should be equal, just ;

But if, a simple fealty on one side,  
 A mere religion,—right to give, is all,  
 And certain brides of Europe duly ask  
 To mount the pile, as Indian widows do,  
 The spices of their tender youth heaped up,  
 The jewels of their gracious virtues worn,  
 More gems, more glory,—to consume entire  
 For a living husband! as the man's alive,  
 Not dead,—the woman's duty, by so much,  
 Advanced in England, beyond Hindostan.

I sate there, musing, till she touched my hand  
 With hers, as softly as a strange white bird  
 She feared to startle in touching. "You are kind  
 But are you, peradventure, vexed at heart  
 Because your cousin takes me for a wife?  
 I know I am not worthy—nay, in truth,  
 I'm glad on't, since for that he chooses me,  
 He likes the poor things of the world the best;  
 I would not therefore, if I could, be rich.  
 It pleasures him to stoop for buttercups;  
 I would not be a rose upon the wall  
 A queen might stop at, near the palace-door,  
 To say to a courtier, 'Pluck that rose for me,  
 'It's prettier than the rest.' O Romney Leigh!  
 I'd rather far be trodden by his foot,  
 Than lie in a great queen's bosom."

Out of breath

She paused.

"Sweet Marian, do you disavow  
 The roses with that face?"

She dropt her head,  
 As if the wind had caught that flower of her,  
 And bent it in the garden,—then looked up  
 With grave assurance. "Well, you think me bold!  
 But so we all are, when we're praying God,  
 And if I'm bold—yet, lady, credit me,  
 That, since I know myself for what I am,  
 Much fitter for his handmaid than his wife,  
 I'll prove the handmaid and the wife at once,  
 Serve tenderly, and love obediently,  
 And be a worthier mate, perhaps, than some  
 Who are wooed in silk among their learned books;  
 While *I* shall set myself to read his eyes,

Till such grow plainer to me than the French  
 To wisest ladies. Do you think I'll miss  
 A letter, in the spelling of his mind?  
 No more than they do, when they sit and write  
 Their flying words with flickering wild-fowl tails,  
 Nor ever pause to ask how many *l's*,  
 Should that be *y* or *i*—they know't so well :  
 I've seen them writing, when I brought a dress  
 And waited, —floating out their soft white hands  
 On shining paper. But they're hard sometimes,  
 For all those hands!—we've used out many nights,  
 And worn the yellow daylight into shreds  
 Which flapped and shivered down our aching eyes  
 Till night appeared more tolerable, just  
 That pretty ladies might look beautiful,  
 Who said at last . . . 'You're lazy in that house!  
 'You're slow in sending home the work,—I count  
 'I've waited near an hour for't.' Pardon me,—  
 I do not blame them, madam, nor misprize ;  
 They are fair and gracious ; ay, but not like you,  
 Since none but you has Mister Leigh's own blood,  
 Both noble and gentle,—and, without it . . . well,  
 They are fair, I said ; so fair, it scarce seems strange  
 That, flashing out in any looking-glass  
 The wonder of their glorious brows and breasts,  
 They are charmed so, they forget to look behind  
 And mark how pale we've grown, we pitiful  
 Remainers of the world. And so, perhaps,  
 If Mister Leigh had chosen a wife from these,  
 She might . . . although he's better than her best,  
 And dearly she would know it . . . steal a thought  
 Which should be all this, an eye-glance from his face,  
 To plunge into the mirror opposite,  
 In search of her own beauty's pearl : while *I* . . .  
 Ah, dearest lady, serge will outweigh silk  
 For winter-wear, when bodies feel a-cold,  
 And I'll be a true wife to your cousin Leigh."

Before I answered, he was there himself,  
 I think he had been standing in the room,  
 And listened probably to half her talk,  
 Arrested, turned to stone,—as white as stone,  
 Will tender sayings make men look so white?  
 He loves her then profoundly.

“You are here  
Aurora? Here I meet you!”—We clasped hands.

“Even so, dear Romney. Lady Waldemar  
Has sent me in haste to find a cousin of mine  
Who shall be.”

“Lady Waldemar is good.”

“Here’s one, at least, who is good,” I sighed, and  
touched

Poor Marian’s happy head, as, doglike, she  
Most passionately patient, waited on,  
A-tremble for her turn of greeting words;  
“I’ve sate a full hour with your Marian Erle,  
And learnt the thing by heart,—and, from my heart,  
Am therefore competent to give you thanks  
For such a cousin.”

“You accept at last  
A gift from me, Aurora, without scorn?  
At last I please you?”—How his voice was changed!

“You cannot please a woman against her will,  
And once you vexed me. Shall we speak of that?  
We’ll say, then, you were noble in it all,  
And I not ignorant—let it pass. And now,  
You please me, Romney, when you please yourself;  
So, please you, be fanatical in love,  
And I’m well pleased. Ah, cousin! at the old hall,  
Among the gallery portraits of our Leighs,  
We shall not find a sweeter signory  
Than this pure forehead’s.”

Not a word he said.  
How arrogant men are!—Even philanthropists,  
Who try to take a wife up in the way  
They put down a subscription-cheque,—if once  
She turns and says, “I will not tax you so,  
Most charitable sir,”—feel ill at ease,  
As though she had wronged them somehow. I suppose  
We women should remember what we are,  
And not throw back an obolus inscribed  
With Cæsar’s image, lightly. I resumed:

“It strikes me, some of those sublime Vandykes  
Were not too proud, to make good saints in heaven

And, if so, then they're not too proud to-day  
 To bow down (now the ruffs are off their necks)  
 And own this good, true, noble Marian, . . . yours,  
 And mine, I'll say!—For poets (bear the word)  
 Half-poets even, are still whole democrats,—  
 Oh, not that we're disloyal to the high,  
 But loyal to the low, and cognisant  
 Of the less scrutable majesties. For me,  
 I comprehend your choice—I justify  
 Your right in choosing."

"No, no, no," he sighed,  
 With a sort of melancholy impatient scorn,  
 As some grown man, who never had a child,  
 Puts by some child who plays at being a man;  
 —"You did not, do not, cannot comprehend  
 My choice, my ends, my motives, nor myself:  
 No matter now—we'll let it pass, you say.  
 I thank you for your generous cousinship  
 Which helps this present; I accept for her  
 Your favourable thoughts. We're fallen on days,  
 We two, who are not poets, when to wed  
 Requires less mutual love than common love,  
 For two together to bear out at once  
 Upon the loveless many. Work in pairs,  
 In galley-couplings or in marriage-rings,  
 The difference lies in the honour, not the work,—  
 And such we're bound to, I and she. But love  
 (You poets are benighted in this age;  
 The hour's too late for catching even moths,  
 You've gnats instead) love!—love's fool-paradise  
 Is out of date, like Adam's. Set a swan  
 To swim the Trenton, rather than true love  
 To float its fabulous plumage safely down  
 The cataracts of this loud transition-time,—  
 Whose roar, for ever, henceforth in my ears,  
 Must keep me deaf to music."

There, I turned  
 And kissed poor Marian, out of discontent.  
 The man had baffled, chafed me, till I flung  
 For refuge to the woman,—as, sometimes,  
 Impatient of some crowded room's close smell,  
 You throw a window open, and lean out  
 To breathe a long breath in the dewy night,  
 And cool your angry forehead. She, at least,



Was not built up, as walls are, brick by brick ;  
 Each fancy squared, each feeling ranged by line,  
 The very heat of burning youth applied  
 To indurate forms and systems ! excellent bricks,  
 A well-built wall,—which stops you on the road,  
 And into which you cannot see an inch  
 Although you beat your head against it—pshaw !

“ Adieu,” I said, “ for this time, cousins both ;  
 And, cousin Romney, pardon me the word,  
 Be happy !—oh, in some esoteric sense  
 Of course !—I mean no harm in wishing well.  
 Adieu, my Marian :—may she come to me,  
 Dear Romney, and be married from my house ?  
 It is not part of your philosophy  
 To keep your bird upon the blackthorn ? ”

“ Ay,”

He answered, “ but it is :—I take my wife  
 Directly from the people,—and she comes,  
 As Austria’s daughter to imperial France,  
 Betwixt her eagles, blinking not her race.  
 From Margaret’s Court at garret-height, to meet  
 And wed me at St. James’s, nor put off  
 Her gown of serge for that. The things we do,  
 We do : we’ll wear no mask, as if we blushed.”

“ Dear Romney, you’re the poet,” I replied,—  
 But felt my smile too mournful for my word,  
 And turned and went. Ay, masks, I thought,—beware  
 Of tragic masks, we tie before the glass,  
 Uplifted on the cothurn half a yard  
 Above the natural stature ! we would play  
 Heroic parts to ourselves,—and end, perhaps,  
 As impotently as Athenian wives  
 Who shrieked in fits at the Eumenides.

His foot pursued me down the stair. “ At least,  
 You’ll suffer me to walk with you beyond  
 These hideous streets, these graves, where men alive,  
 Packed close with earthworms, burr unconsciously  
 About the plague that slew them ; let me go.  
 The very women pelt their souls in mud  
 At any woman who walks here alone.  
 How came you here alone ?—you are ignorant.”

We had a strange and melancholy walk :  
 The night came drizzling downward in dark rain :  
 And, as we walked, the colour of the time,  
 The act, the presence, my hand upon his arm,  
 His voice in my ear, and mine to my own sense,  
 Appeared unnatural. We talked modern books,  
 And daily papers : Spanish marriage-schemes,  
 And English climate—was't so cold last year ?  
 And will the wind change by to-morrow morn ?  
 Can Guizot stand ? is London full ? is trade  
 Competitive ? has Dickens turned his hinge  
 A-pinch upon the fingers of the great ?  
 And are potatoes to grow mythical  
 Like moly ? will the apple die out too ?  
 Which way is the wind to-night ? south-east ? due east ?  
 We talked on fast, while every common word  
 Seemed tangled with the thunder at one end,  
 And ready to pull down upon our heads  
 A terror out of sight. And yet to pause  
 Were surelier mortal : we tore greedily up  
 All silence, all the innocent breathing-points,  
 As if, like pale conspirators in haste,  
 We tore up papers where our signatures  
 Imperilled us to an ugly shame or death.

I cannot tell you why it was. 'Tis plain  
 We have not loved nor hated : wherefore dread  
 To spill gunpowder on ground safe from fire ?  
 Perhaps we have lived too closely, to diverge  
 So absolutely : leave two clocks, they say,  
 Wound up to different hours, upon one shelf,  
 And slowly, through the interior wheels of each,  
 The blind mechanic motion sets itself  
 A-throb, to feel out for the mutual time.  
 It was not so with us, indeed. While he  
 Struck midnight, I kept striking six at dawn :  
 While he marked judgment, I, redemption-day ;  
 And such exception to a general law,  
 Imperious upon inert matter even,  
 Might make us, each to either, insecure,  
 A beckoning mystery, or a troubling fear.

I mind me, when we parted at the door,  
 How strange his good-night sounded,—like good-night

Beside a death-bed, where the morrow's sun  
Is sure to come too late for more good-days :--  
And all that night I thought. . . " Good-night," said he.

And so, a month passed. Let me set it down  
At once,—I have been wrong, I have been wrong.  
We are wrong always, when we think too much  
Of what we think or are ; albeit our thoughts  
Be verily bitter as self-sacrifice,  
We're no less selfish. If we sleep on rocks  
Or roses, sleeping past the hour of noon  
We're lazy. This I write against myself,  
I had done a duty in the visit paid  
To Marian, and was ready otherwise  
To give the witness of my presence and name  
Whenever she should marry.—Which, I thought,  
Sufficed. I even had cast into the scale  
An overweight of justice toward the match ;  
The Lady Waldemar had missed her tool,  
Had broken it in the lock as being too straight  
For a crooked purpose, while poor Marian Erle  
Missed nothing in my accents or my acts :  
I had not been ungenerous on the whole,  
Nor yet untender ; so, enough. I felt  
Tired, overworked : this marriage somewhat jarred ;  
Or, if it did not, all the bridal noise . . .  
The pricking of the map of life with pins,  
In schemes of . . . " Here we'll go," and " There we'll stay."  
And " Everywhere we'll prosper in our love,"  
Was scarce my business. Let them order it ;  
Who else should care ? I threw myself aside,  
As one who had done her work and shuts her eyes  
To rest the better. I, who should have known,  
Forereckoned mischief ! Where we disavow  
Being keeper to our brother, we're his Cain.

^ might have held that poor child to my heart  
A little longer ! 'twould have hurt me much  
To have hastened by its beats the marriage-day,  
And kept her safe meantime from tampering hands  
Or, peradventure, traps ? What drew me back  
From telling Romney plainly, the designs  
Of Lady Waldemar, as spoken out  
To me . . . me ? had I any right, ay, right,

With womanly compassion and reserve  
 To break the fall of woman's impudence?—  
 To stand by calmly, knowing what I knew,  
 And hear him call her *good*?

Distrust that word.

"There is none good save God," said Jesus Christ.  
 If He once, in the first creation-week,  
 Called creatures good,—for ever, afterward,  
 The Devil only has done it, and his heirs,  
 The knaves who win so, and the fools who lose;  
 The word's grown dangerous. In the middle age,  
 I think they called malignant fays and imps  
 Good people. A good neighbour, even in this,  
 Is fatal sometimes, cuts your morning up  
 To mince-meat of the very smallest talk,  
 Then helps to sugar her bohea at night  
 With your reputation. I have known good wives,  
 As chaste, or nearly so, as Potiphar's:  
 And good, good mothers, who would use a child  
 To better an intrigue; good friends, beside  
 (Very good), who hung succinctly round your neck  
 And sucked your breath, as cats are fabled to do  
 By sleeping infants. And we all have known  
 Good critics, who have stamped out poets' hopes;  
 Good statesmen, who pulled ruin on the state;  
 Good patriots, who, for a theory, risked a cause;  
 Good kings, who disembowelled for a tax;  
 Good popes, who brought all good to jeopardy;  
 Good Christians, who sate still in easy chairs,  
 And damned the general world for standing up.—  
 Now, may the good God pardon all good men!

How bitterly I speak,—how certainly  
 The innocent white milk in us is turned,  
 By much persistent shining of the sun!—  
 Shake up the sweetest in us long enough  
 With men, it drops to foolish curd, too sour  
 To feed the most untender of Christ's lambs.

I should have thought . . . a woman of the world  
 Like her I'm meaning,—centre to herself,  
 Who has wheeled on her own pivot half a life  
 In isolated self-love and self-will,  
 As a windmill seen at distance radiating

Its delicate white vans against the sky,  
 So soft and soundless, simply beautiful,—  
 Seen nearer . . . what a roar and tear it makes,  
 How it grinds and bruises ! . . . if she loves at last,  
 Her love's a re-adjustment of self-love,  
 No more ; a need felt of another's use  
 To her one advantage,—as the mill wants grain,  
 The fire wants fuel, the very wolf wants prey ;  
 And none of these is more unscrupulous  
 Than such a charming woman when she loves.  
 She'll not be thwarted by an obstacle  
 So trifling as . . . her soul is, . . . much less yours !—  
 Is God a consideration ?—she loves *you*,  
 Not God ; she will not flinch for Him indeed :  
 She did not for the Marchioness of Perth,  
 When wanting tickets for the birthnight-ball.  
 She loves you, sir, with passion, to lunacy ;  
 She loves you like her diamonds . . . almost.

Well,

A month passed so, and then the notice came ;  
 On such a day the marriage at the church.  
 I was not backward.

Half St. Giles in frieze

Was bidden to meet St. James in cloth of gold,  
 And, after contract at the altar, pass  
 To eat a marriage-feast on Hampstead Heath.  
 Of course the people came in uncompelled,  
 Lame, blind, and worse—sick, sorrowful, and worse,  
 The humours of the peccant social wound  
 All pressed out, poured out upon Pimlico,  
 Exasperating the unaccustomed air  
 With hideous interfusion : you'd suppose  
 A finished generation, dead of plague,  
 Swept outward from their graves into the sun,  
 The moil of death upon them. What a sight !  
 A holiday of miserable men  
 Is sadder than a burial-day of kings.

They clogged the streets, they oozed into the church  
 In a dark slow stream, like blood. To see that sight,  
 The noble ladies stood up in their pews,  
 Some pale for fear, a few as red for hate,  
 Some simply curious, some just insolent,  
 And some in wondering scorn,—“ What next ? what next ? ”

These crushed their delicate rose-lips from the smile  
 That misbecame them in a holy place,  
 With broidered hems of perfumed handkerchiefs ;  
 Those passed the salts with confidence of eyes  
 And simultaneous shiver of moiré silk ;  
 While all the aisles, alive and black with heads,  
 Crawled slowly toward the altar from the street,  
 As bruised snakes crawl and hiss out of a hole  
 With shuddering involutions, swaying slow  
 From right to left, and then from left to right,  
 In pants and pauses. What an ugly crest  
 Of faces rose upon you everywhere,  
 From that crammed mass ! you did not usually  
 See faces like them in the open day :  
 They hide in cellars, not to make you mad  
 As Romney Leigh is.—Faces !—O my God,  
 We call those, faces ? men's and women's . . . ay,  
 And children's ;—babies, hanging like a rag  
 Forgotten on their mother's neck,—poor mouths,  
 Wiped clean of mother's milk by mother's blow,  
 Before they are taught her cursing. Faces ! . . . phew,  
 We'll call them vices festering to despairs,  
 Or sorrows petrifying to vices : not  
 A finger-touch of God left whole on them ;  
 All ruined, lost—the countenance worn out  
 As the garments, the will dissolute as the acts,  
 The passions loose and dragging in the dirt  
 To trip the foot up at the first free step !—  
 Those, faces ! 'twas as if you had stirred up hell  
 To heave its lowest dreg-fiends uppermost  
 In fiery swirls of slime,—such strangled fronts,  
 Such obdurate jaws were thrown up constantly,  
 To twit you with your race, corrupt your blood,  
 And grind to devilish colours all your dreams  
 Henceforth, . . . though, haply, you should drop asleep  
 By clink of silver waters, in a muse  
 On Raffael's mild Madonna of the Bird.

I've waked and slept through many nights and days  
 Since then,—but still that day will catch my breath  
 Like a nightmare. There are fatal days, indeed,  
 In which the fibrous years have taken root  
 So deeply, that they quiver to their tops  
 Whene'er you stir the dust of such a day.

My cousin met me with his eyes and hand,  
 And then, with just a word, . . . that "Marian Erle  
 Was coming with her bridesmaids presently,"  
 Made haste to place me by the altar-stair,  
 Where he and other noble gentlemen  
 And high-born ladies waited for the bride.

We waited. It was early : there was time  
 For greeting, and the morning's compliment ;  
 And gradually a ripple of women's talk  
 Arose and fell, and tossed about a spray  
 Of English s's, soft as a silent hush,  
 And, notwithstanding, quite as audible  
 As louder phrases thrown out by the men.

—"Yes, really, if we've need to wait in church,  
 We've need to talk there."—"She? 'Tis Lady Ayr,  
 In blue—not purple! that's the dowager."

—"She looks as young."—"She flirts as young, you mean!  
 Why, if you had seen her upon Thursday night,  
 You'd call Miss Norris modest."—"You again!

I waltzed with you three hours back. Up at six,  
 Up still at ten : scarce time to change one's shoes.  
 I feel as white and sulky as a ghost,

So pray don't speak to me, Lord Belcher."—"No,  
 I'll look at you instead, and it's enough  
 While you have that face." "In church, my lord! fie, fie!"

—"Adair, you stayed for the Division?"—"Lost  
 By one." "The devil it is! I'm sorry for't.

And if I had not promised Mistress Grove" . . .

—"You might have kept your word to Liverpool."

"Constituents must remember, after all,  
 We're mortal."—"We remind them of it."—"Hark,  
 The bride comes! Here she comes, in a stream of milk!"

—"There? Dear, you are asleep still; don't you know  
 The five Miss Granvilles? always dressed in white  
 To show they're ready to be married."—"Lower!

The aunt is at your elbow."—"Lady Maud,

Did Lady Waldemar tell you she had seen

This girl of Leigh's?" "No,—wait! 'twas Mrs. Brookes,  
 Who told me Lady Waldemar told her—

No, 'twasn't Mrs. Brookes."—"She's pretty?"—"Who?

Mrs. Brookes? Lady Waldemar?"—"How hot!

Pray is't the law to-day we're not to breathe?

You're treading on my shawl—I thank you, sir."

—“ They say the bride’s a mere child, who can’t read,  
But knows the things she shouldn’t, with wide-awake  
Great eyes. I’d go through fire to look at her.”

—“ You do, I think.”—“ And Lady Waldemar  
(You see her ; sitting close to Romney Leigh ;  
How beautiful she looks, a little flushed !)  
Has taken up the girl, and organised  
Leigh’s folly. Should I have come here, you suppose,  
Except she’d asked me ? ”—“ She’d have served him more  
By marrying him herself.”—“ Ah—there she comes,  
The bride, at last ! ”

“ Indeed, no. Past eleven.

She puts off her patched petticoat to-day  
And puts on May-fair manners, so begins  
By setting us to wait.”—“ Yes, yes, this Leigh  
Was always odd ; it’s in the blood, I think ;  
His father’s uncle’s cousin’s second son  
Was, was . . . you understand me—and for him,  
He’s stark !—has turned quite lunatic upon  
This modern question of the poor—the poor :  
An excellent subject when you’re moderate ;  
You’ve seen Prince Albert’s model lodging-house ?  
Does honour to his Royal Highness. Good !  
But would he stop his carriage in Cheapside  
To shake a common fellow by the fist  
Whose name was . . . Shakspeare ? no. We draw a line.  
And if we stand not by our order, we  
In England, we fall headlong. Here’s a sight,—  
A hideous sight, a most indecent sight !  
My wife would come, sir, or I had kept her back.  
By heaven, sir, when poor Damiens’ trunk and limbs  
Were torn by horses, women of the court  
Stood by and stared, exactly as to-day  
On this dismembering of society,  
With pretty troubled faces.”

“ Now, at last.

She comes now.”

“ Where ? who sees ? you push me, sir,  
Beyond the point of what is mannerly.  
You’re standing, madam, on my second flounce—  
I do beseech you.”

“ No—it’s not the bride.

Half-past eleven. How late. The bridegroom, mark,  
Gets anxious and goes out.



“ And as I said . . .

These Leighs ! our best blood running in the rut !  
 It's something awful. We had pardoned him  
 A simple misalliance, got up aside  
 For a pair of sky-blue eyes ; our House of Lords  
 Has winked at such things, and we've all been young.  
 But here's an inter-marriage reasoned out,  
 A contract (carried boldly to the light,  
 To challenge observation, pioneer  
 Good acts by a great example) 'twixt the extremes  
 Of martyrised society,—on the left,  
 The well-born,—on the right, the merest mob,  
 To treat as equals !—'tis anarchical !  
 It means more than it says—'tis damnable !  
 Why, sir, we can't have even our coffee good,  
 Unless we strain it.”

“ Here, Miss Leigh ! ”

“ Lord Howe,

You're Romney's friend. What's all this waiting for ? ”

“ I cannot tell. The bride has lost her head  
 (And way, perhaps !) to prove her sympathy  
 With the bridegroom.”

“ What,—you also, disapprove ! ”

“ Oh, I approve of nothing in the world,”  
 He answered ; “ not of you, still less of me,  
 Nor even of Romney—though he's worth us both.  
 We're all gone wrong. The tune in us is lost :  
 And whistling in back alleys to the moon,  
 Will never catch it.”

Let me draw Lord Howe ;

A born aristocrat, bred radical,  
 And educated socialist, who still  
 Goes floating, on traditions of his kind,  
 Across the theoretic flood from France,—  
 Though, like a drenchèd Noah on a rotten deck,  
 Scarce safer for his place there. He, at least,  
 Will never land on Ararat, he knows,  
 To recommence the world on the old plan :  
 Inde-d, he thinks, said world had better end ;  
 He sympathises rather with the fish  
 Outside, than with the drowned paired beasts within  
 Who cannot couple again or multiply :

And that's the sort of Noah he is, Lord Howe.  
 He never could be anything complete,  
 Except a loyal, upright gentleman,  
 A liberal landlord, graceful diner-out,  
 And entertainer more than hospitable,  
 Whom authors dine with and forget the port.  
 Whatever he believes, and it is much,  
 But no-wise certain . . . now here and now there, . . .  
 He still has sympathies beyond his creed,  
 Diverting him from action. In the House,  
 No party counts upon him, and all praise,  
 All like his books too (he has written books),  
 Which, good to lie beside a bishop's chair,  
 So oft outreach themselves with jets of fire  
 At which the foremost of the progressists  
 May warm audacious hands in passing by.  
 —Of stature over-tall, lounging for ease;  
 Light hair, that seems to carry a wind in it,  
 And eyes that, when they look on you, will lean  
 Their whole weight half in indolence, and half  
 In wishing you unmitigated good,  
 Until you know not if to flinch from him  
 Or thank him.—'Tis Lord Howe.

“We're all gone wrong,”

Said he, “and Romney, that dear friend of ours,  
 Is no-wise right. There's one true thing on earth;  
 That's love! He takes it up, and dresses it,  
 And acts a play with it, as Hamlet did,  
 To show what cruel uncles we have been,  
 And how we should be uneasy in our minds,  
 While he, Prince Hamlet, weds a pretty maid  
 (Who keeps us too long waiting, we'll confess)  
 By symbol, to instruct us formally  
 To fill the ditches up 'twixt class and class,  
 And live together in phalansteries.  
 What then?—he's mad, our Hamlet! clap his play,  
 And bind him.”

“Ah, Lord Howe, this spectacle  
 Pulls stronger at us than the Dane's. See there!  
 The crammed aisles heave and strain and steam with life—  
 Dear Heaven, what life!”

“Why, yes,—a poet sees;  
 Which makes him different from a common man.  
 I, too, see somewhat, though I cannot sing.”

I should have been a poet, only that  
 My mother took fright at the ugly world,  
 And bore me tongue-tied. If you'll grant me now  
 That Romney gives us a fine actor-piece  
 To make us merry on his marriage-morn,  
 The fable's worse than Hamlet's, I'll concede.  
 The terrible people, old and poor and blind,  
 Their eyes eat out with plague and poverty  
 From seeing beautiful and cheerful sights,  
 We'll liken to a brutalised King Lear,  
 Led out,—by no means to clear scores with wrongs—  
 His wrongs are so far back, . . . he has forgot;  
 All's past like youth; but just to witness here  
 A simple contract—lie, upon his side,  
 And Regan with her sister Goneril  
 And all the dappled courtiers and court-fools  
 On their side. Not that any of these would say  
 They're sorry, neither. What is done, is done,  
 And violence is now turned privilege,  
 As cream turns cheese, if buried long enough.  
 What could such lovely ladies have to do  
 With the old man there, in those ill-odorous rags,  
 Except to keep the wind-side of him? Lear  
 Is flat and quiet, as a decent grave;  
 He does not curse his daughters in the least.  
*Be* these his daughters? Lear is thinking of  
 His porridge chiefly . . . is it getting cold  
 At Hampstead? will the ale be served in pots?  
 Poor Lear, poor daughters! Bravo, Romney's play!"

A murmur and a movement drew around;  
 A naked whisper touched us. Something wrong!  
 What's wrong? The black crowd, as an over-strained  
 Cord, quivered in vibrations, and I saw . . .  
 Was that *his* face I saw? . . . his . . . Romney Leigh's . . .  
 Which tossed a sudden horror like a sponge  
 Into all eyes,—while himself stood white upon  
 The topmost altar-stair, and tried to speak,  
 And failed, and lifted higher above his head  
 A letter, . . . as a man who drowns and gasps.

"My brothers, bear with me! I am very weak.  
 I meant but only good. Perhaps I meant

Too proudly,—and God snatched the circumstance  
 And changed it therefore. There's no marriage—none.  
 She leaves me,—she departs,—she disappears,—  
 I lose her. Yet I never forced her 'ay,'  
 To have her 'no' so cast into my teeth,  
 In manner of an accusation, thus.  
 My friends, you are all dismissed. Go, eat and drink  
 According to the programme,—and farewell!"

He ended. There was silence in the church ;  
 We heard a baby sucking in its sleep  
 At the farthest end of the aisle. Then spoke a man :  
 "Now, look to it, coves, that all the beef and drink  
 Be not filched from us like the other fun ;  
 For beer's spilt easier than a woman is !  
 This gentry is not honest with the poor ;  
 They bring us up, to trick us."—"Go it, Jim,"  
 A woman screamed back,—“I'm a tender soul ;  
 I never banged a child at two years old  
 And drew blood from him, but I sobbed for it  
 Next moment,—and I've had a plague of seven.  
 I'm tender ; I've no stomach even for beef,  
 Until I know about the girl that's lost,  
 That's killed, mayhap. I did misdoubt, at first,  
 The fine lord meant no good by her, or us.  
 He, maybe, got the upper hand of her  
 By holding up a wedding-ring, and then . . .  
 A choking finger on her throat, last night,  
 And just a clever tale to keep us still,  
 As she is, poor lost innocent. 'Disappear !'  
 Who ever disappears except a ghost ?  
 And who believes a story of a ghost ?  
 I ask you,—would a girl go off, instead  
 Of staying to be married ? a fine tale !  
 A wicked man, I say, a wicked man !  
 For my part I would rather starve on gin  
 Than make my dinner on his beef and beer.”—  
 At which a cry rose up—“We'll have our rights  
 We'll have the girl, the girl ! Your ladies there  
 Are married safely and smoothly every day,  
 And *she* shall not drop through into a trap  
 Because she's poor and of the people : shame !  
 We'll have no tricks played off by gentlefolks ;  
 We'll see her righted.”

Through the rage and roar  
 I heard the broken words which Romney flung  
 Among the turbulent masses, from the ground  
 He held still, with his masterful pale face—  
 As huntsmen throw the ration to the pack,  
 Who, falling on it headlong, dog on dog  
 In heaps of fury, rend it, swallow it up  
 With yelling hound-jaws,—his indignant words,  
 His piteous words, his most pathetic words,  
 Whereof I caught the meaning here and there  
 By his gesture . . . torn in morsels, yelled across,  
 And so devoured. From end to end, the church  
 Rocked round us like the sea in storm, and then  
 Broke up like the earth in earthquake. Men cried out  
 "Police"—and women stood and shrieked for God,  
 Or dropt and swooned; or, like a herd of deer  
 (For whom the black woods suddenly grow alive,  
 Unleashing their wild shadows down the wind  
 To hunt the creatures into corners, back  
 And forward) madly fled, or blindly fell,  
 Trod screeching underneath the feet of those  
 Who fled and screeched.

The last sight left to me  
 Was Romney's terrible calm face above  
 The tumult!—the last sound was "Pull him down!  
 Strike—kill him!" Stretching my unreasoning arms,  
 As men in dreams, who vainly interpose  
 'Twixt gods and their undoing, with a cry  
 I struggled to precipitate myself  
 Head-foremost to the rescue of my soul  
 In that white face, . . . till some one caught me back,  
 And so the world went out,—I felt no more.

What followed, was told after by Lord Howe,  
 Who bore me senseless from the strangling crowd,  
 In church and street, and then returned alone  
 To see the tumult quelled. The men of law  
 Had fallen as thunder on a roaring fire,  
 And made all silent,—while the people's smoke  
 Passed eddying slowly from the emptied aisles.

Here's Marian's letter, which a ragged child  
 Brought running, just as Romney at the porch  
 Looked out expectant of the bride. He sent  
 The letter to me by his friend Lord Howe

Some two hours after, folded in a sheet  
 On which his well-known hand had left a word.  
 Here's Marian's letter :

“ Noble friend, dear saint,  
 Be patient with me. Never think me vile,  
 Who might to-morrow morning be your wife,  
 But that I loved you more than such a name.  
 Farewell, my Romney. Let me write it once,—  
 My Romney.

“ 'Tis so pretty a coupled word,  
 I have no heart to pluck it with a blot.  
 We say 'my God' sometimes, upon our knees,  
 Who is not therefore vexed : so bear with it . . .  
 And me. I know I'm foolish, weak, and vain ;  
 Yet most of all I'm angry with myself  
 For losing your last footstep on the stair,  
 That last time of your coming,—yesterday !  
 The very first time I lost step of yours  
 (Its sweetness comes the next to what you speak),  
 But yesterday sobs took me by the throat,  
 And cut me off from music.

“ Mister Leigh,  
 You'll set me down as wrong in many things.  
 You've praised me, sir, for truth,—and now you'll learn  
 I had not courage to be rightly true.  
 I once began to tell you how she came,  
 The woman . . . and you stared upon the floor  
 In one of your fixed thoughts . . . which put me out  
 For that day. After, some one spoke of me,  
 So wisely, and of you, so tenderly,  
 Persuading me to silence for your sake . . .  
 Well, well ! it seems this moment I was wrong  
 In keeping back from telling you the truth :  
 There might be truth betwixt us two, at least,  
 If nothing else. And yet 'twas dangerous.  
 Suppose a real angel came from heaven  
 To live with men and women ! he'd go mad,  
 If no considerate hand should tie a blind  
 Across his piercing eyes. 'Tis thus with you :  
 You see us too much in your heavenly light ;  
 I always thought so, angel,—and indeed  
 There's danger that you beat yourself to death  
 Against the edges of this alien world  
 In some divine and fluttering pity

“Yes,  
 It would be dreadful for a friend of yours,  
 To see all England thrust you out of doors  
 And mock you from the windows. You might say,  
 Or think (that’s worse), ‘There’s some one in the house  
 I miss and love still.’ Dreadful!

“Very kind,  
 I pray you mark, was Lady Waldemar.  
 She came to see me nine times, rather ten—  
 So beautiful, she hurts me like the day  
 Let suddenly on sick eyes.

“Most kind of all,  
 Your cousin!—ah, most like you! Ere you came  
 She kissed me mouth to mouth: I felt her soul  
 Dip through her serious lips in holy fire.  
 God help me, but it made me arrogant;  
 I almost told her that you would not lose  
 By taking me to wife: though, ever since,  
 I’ve pondered much a certain thing she asked . . .  
 ‘He loves you, Marian?’ . . . in a sort of mild  
 Derisive sadness . . . as a mother asks  
 Her babe, ‘You’ll touch that star, you think?’

“Farewell!  
 I know I never touched it. This is worst:  
 Babes grow, and lose the hope of things above;  
 A silver threepence sets them leaping high—  
 But no more stars! mark that.

“I’ve writ all night,  
 And told you nothing. God, if I could die,  
 And let this letter break off innocent  
 Just here! But no—for your sake . . .

“Here’s the last:  
 I never could be happy as your wife,  
 I never could be harmless as your friend,  
 I never will look more into your face,  
 Till God says, ‘Look!’ I charge you, seek me not,  
 Nor vex yourself with lamentable thoughts  
 That peradventure I have come to grief;  
 Be sure I’m well, I’m merry, I’m at ease,  
 But such a long way, long way, long way off,  
 I think you’ll find me sooner in my grave,  
 And that’s my choice, observe. For what remains,  
 An over-generous friend will care for me,  
 And keep me happy . . . happier . . .

“ There’s a blot !

This ink runs thick . . . we light girls lightly weep . . .  
 And keep me happier . . . was the thing to say, . . .  
 Than as your wife I could be!—O, my star,  
 My saint, my soul! for surely you’re my soul,  
 Through whom God touched me! I am not so lost  
 I cannot thank you for the good you did,  
 The tears you stopped, which fell down bitterly,  
 Like these—the times you made me weep for joy  
 At hoping I should learn to write your notes  
 And save the tiring of your eyes, at night;  
 And most for that sweet thrice you kissed my lips  
 And said ‘ Dear Marian.’

“ ’Twould be hard to read,  
 This letter, for a reader half as learn’d,  
 But you’ll be sure to master it, in spite  
 Of ups and downs. My hand shakes, I am blind,  
 I’m poor at writing, at the best,—and yet  
 I tried to make my *g*’s the way you showed.  
 Farewell—Christ love you.—Say ‘ poor Marian ’ now.”

Poor Marian!—wanton Marian!—was it so,  
 Or so? For days, her touching, foolish lines  
 We mused on with conjectural fantasy,  
 As if some riddle of a summer-cloud  
 On which one tries unlike similitudes  
 Of now a spotted Hydra-skin cast off,  
 And now a screen of carven ivory  
 That shuts the heavens’ conventual secrets up  
 From mortals over-bold. We sought the sense:  
 She loved him so perhaps (such words mean love)  
 That, worked on by some shrewd perfidious tongue  
 (And then I thought of Lady Waldemar),  
 She left him, not to hurt him; or perhaps  
 She loved one in her class, or did not love,  
 But mused upon her wild bad tramping life,  
 Until the free blood fluttered at her heart,  
 And black bread eaten by the road-side hedge  
 Seemed sweeter than being put to Romney’s school  
 Of philanthropical self-sacrifice,  
 Irrevocably.—Girls are girls, beside,  
 Thought I, and like a wedding by one rule.  
 You seldom catch these birds, except with chaff:  
 They feel it almost an immoral thing



To go out and be married in broad day,  
 Unless some winning special flattery should  
 Excuse them to themselves for't, . . . "No one parts  
 Her hair with such a silver line as you,  
 One moonbeam from the forehead to the crown!"  
 Or else . . . "You bite your lip in such a way,  
 It spoils me for the smiling of the rest"—  
 And so on. Then a worthless gaud or two,  
 To keep for love,—a ribbon for the neck,  
 Or some glass pin,—they have their weight with girls.

And Romney sought her many days and weeks :  
 He sifted all the refuse of the town,  
 Explored the trains, inquired among the ships,  
 And felt the country through from end to end ;  
 No Marian!—Though I hinted what I knew,—  
 A friend of his had reasons of her own  
 For throwing back the match—he would not hear :  
 The lady had been ailing ever since,  
 The shock had harmed her. Something in his tone  
 Repressed me ; something in me shamed my doubt  
 To a sigh, repressed too. He went on to say  
 That, putting questions where his Marian lodged,  
 He found she had received for visitors,  
 Besides himself and Lady Waldemar  
 And, that once, me—a dubious woman dressed  
 Beyond us both. The rings upon her hands  
 Had dazed the children when she threw them pence ;  
 "She wore her bonnet as the queen might hers,  
 To show the crown," they said,—“a scarlet crown  
 Of roses that had never been in bud.”

When Romney told me that,—for now and then  
 He came to tell me how the search advanced,  
 His voice dropped : I bent forward for the rest :  
 The woman had been with her, it appeared,  
 At first from week to week, then day by day,  
 And last, 'twas sure . . .

I looked upon the ground

To escape the anguish of his eyes, and asked,  
 As low as when you speak to mourners new  
 Of those they cannot bear yet to call dead,  
 "If Marian had as much as named to him  
 A certain Rose, an early friend of hers,  
 A ruined creature.”

“Never.”—Starting up,  
 He strode from side to side about the room,  
 Most like some prisoned lion sprung awake,  
 Who has felt the desert sting him through his dreams.  
 “What was I to her, that she should tell me aught?  
 A friend! was I a friend? I see all clear.  
 Such devils would pull angels out of heaven,  
 Provided they could reach them; 'tis their pride;  
 And that's the odds 'twixt soul and body-plague!  
 The veriest slave who drops in Cairo's street,  
 Cries, 'Stand off from me,' to the passengers;  
 While these blotched souls are eager to infect,  
 And blow their bad breath in a sister's face  
 As if they got some ease by it.”

I broke through.

“Some natures catch no plagues. I've read of babes  
 Found whole and sleeping by the spotted breast  
 Of one a full day dead. I hold it true,  
 As I'm a woman and know womanhood,  
 That Marian Erle, however lured from place,  
 Deceived in way, keeps pure in aim and heart,  
 As snow that's drifted from the garden-bank  
 To the open road.”

'Twas hard to hear him laugh.

“The figure's happy. Well—a dozen carts  
 And trampers will secure you presently  
 A fine white snow-drift. Leave it there, your snow!  
 'Twill pass for soot ere sunset. Pure in aim?  
 She's pure in aim, I grant you,—like myself,  
 Who thought to take the world upon my back  
 To carry it o'er a chasm of social ill,  
 And end by letting slip through impotence  
 A single soul, a child's weight in a soul,  
 Straight down the pit of hell! yes, I and she  
 Have reason to be proud of our pure aims.”  
 Then softly, as the last repenting drops  
 Of a thunder-shower, he added, “The poor child;  
 Poor Marian! 'twas a luckless day for her,  
 When first she chanced on my philanthropy.”

He drew a chair beside me, and sate down;  
 And I, instinctively, as women use  
 Before a sweet friend's grief,—when, in his ear,  
 They hum the tune of comfort, though themselves

Most ignorant of the special words of such,  
 And quiet so and fortify his brain  
 And give it time and strength for feeling out  
 To reach the availing sense beyond that sound,—  
 Went murmuring to him, what, if written here,  
 Would seem not much, yet fetched him better help  
 Than, peradventure, if it had been more.

I've known the pregnant thinkers of this time,  
 And stood by breathless, hanging on their lips,  
 When some chromatic sequence of fine thought  
 In learned modulation phrased itself  
 To an un conjectured harmony of truth.  
 And yet I've been more moved, more raised, I say,  
 By a simple word . . . a broken easy thing,  
 A three-years' infant might say after you,—  
 A look, a sigh, a touch upon the palm,  
 Which meant less than "I love you" . . . than by all  
 The full-voiced rhetoric of those master-mouths.

"Ah dear Aurora," he began at last,  
 His pale lips fumbling for a sort of smile,  
 "Your printer's devils have not spoilt your heart :  
 That's well. And who knows but, long years ago,  
 When you and I talked, you were somewhat right  
 In being so peevish with me? You, at least,  
 Have ruined no one through your dreams! Instead,  
 You've helped the facile youth to live youth's day  
 With innocent distraction, still perhaps  
 Suggestive of things better than your rhymes.  
 The little shepherd-maiden, eight years old,  
 I've seen upon the mountains of Vaucluse,  
 Asleep i' the sun, her head upon her knees,  
 The flocks all scattered,—is more laudable  
 Than any sheep-dog trained imperfectly,  
 Who bites the kids through too much zeal."

"I look

As if I had slept, then?"

He was touched at once  
 By something in my face. Indeed 'twas sure  
 That he and I,—despite a year or two  
 Of younger life on my side, and on his,  
 The heaping of the years' work on the days,—  
 The three-hour speeches from the member's seat,

The hot committees, in and out the House,  
 The pamphlets, "Arguments," "Collective Views,"  
 Tossed out as straw before sick houses, just  
 To show one's sick and so be trod to dirt,  
 And no more use,—through this world's underground,  
 The burrowing, groping effort, whence the arm  
 And heart come bleeding,—sure, that he and I  
 Were, after all, unequally fatigued!  
 That he, in his developed manhood, stood  
 A little sunburnt by the glare of life;  
 While I . . . it seemed no sun had shone on me,  
 So many seasons I had forgot my Springs;  
 My cheeks had pined and perished from their orbs,  
 And all the youth-blood in them had grown white  
 As dew on autumn cyclamens: alone  
 My eyes and forehead answered for my face.

He said . . . "Aurora, you are changed—are ill!"

"Not so, my cousin,—only not asleep!"  
 I answered, smiling gently. "Let it be.  
 You scarcely found the poet of Vacluse  
 As drowsy as the shepherds. What is art,  
 But life upon the larger scale, the higher,  
 When, graduating up in a spiral line  
 Of still expanding and ascending gyres,  
 It pushes toward the intense significance  
 Of all things, hungry for the Infinite?  
 Art's life,—and where we live, we suffer and toil."

He seemed to sift me with his painful eyes.  
 "Alas! you take it gravely; you refuse  
 Your dreamland, right of common, and green rest.  
 You break the mythic turf where danced the nymphs,  
 With crooked ploughs of actual life,—let in  
 The axes to the legendary woods,  
 To pay the head-tax. You are fallen indeed  
 On evil days, you poets, if yourselves  
 Can praise that art of yours no otherwise;  
 And if you cannot, . . . better take a trade  
 And be of use! 'twere cheaper for your youth."

"Of use!" I softly echoed, "there's the point  
 We sweep about for ever in argument;

Like swallows, which the exasperate, dying year  
Sets spinning in black circles, round and round,  
Preparing for far flights o'er unknown seas.  
And we . . . where tend we?"

"Where?" he said, and sighed.

"The whole creation, from the hour we are born,  
Perplexes us with questions. Not a stone  
But cries behind us, every weary step,  
'Where, where?' I leave stones to reply to stones.  
Enough for me and for my fleshly heart  
To hearken the invocations of my kind,  
When men catch hold upon my shuddering nerves,  
And shriek, 'What help? what hope? what bread i' the  
house,

'What fire i' the frost?' There must be some response,  
Though mine fail utterly. This social Sphinx,  
Who sits between the sepulchres and stews,  
Makes mock and now against the crystal heavens,  
And bullies God,—exacts a word at least  
From each man standing on the side of God,  
However paying a sphinx-price for it.  
We pay it also if we hold our peace,  
In pangs and pity. Let me speak and die.  
Alas! you'll say, I speak and kill, instead."

I pressed in there; "The best men, doing their best,  
Know peradventure least of what they do:  
Men usefulest i' the world, are simply used;  
The nail that holds the wood, must pierce it first,  
And He alone who wields the hammer, sees  
The work advanced by the earliest blow. Take heart."  
"Ah, if I could have taken yours!" he said,  
"But that's past now." Then rising . . . "I will take  
At least your kindness and encouragement.  
I thank you. Dear, be happy. Sing your songs,  
If that's your way! but sometimes slumber too,  
Nor tire too much with following, out of breath,  
The rhymes upon your mountains of Delight.  
Reflect, if Art be, in truth, the higher life,  
You need the lower life to stand upon,  
In order to reach up unto that higher;  
And none can stand a-tiptoe in the place  
He cannot stand in with two stable feet.  
Remember then!—for Art's sake, hold your life."

We parted so. I held him in respect.  
 I comprehended what he was in heart  
 And sacrificial greatness. Ay, but *he*  
 Supposed me a thing too small to deign to know :  
 He blew me, plainly, from the crucible,  
 As some intruding, interrupting fly  
 Not worth the pains of his analysis  
 Absorbed on nobler subjects. Hurt a fly!  
 He would not for the world : he's pitiful  
 To flies even. "Sing," says he, "and tease me still,  
 If that's your way, poor insect." That's your way !

## FIFTH BOOK.

AURORA LEIGH, be humble. Shall I hope  
 To speak my poems in mysterious tune  
 With man and nature,—with the lava-lymph  
 That trickles from successive galaxies  
 Still drop by drop adown the finger of God,  
 In still new worlds?—with summer-days in this,  
 That scarce dare breathe, they are so beautiful?—  
 With spring's delicious trouble in the ground  
 Tormented by the quickened blood of roots,  
 And softly pricked by golden crocus-sheaves  
 In token of the harvest-time of flowers?—  
 With winters and with autumns,—and beyond,  
 With the human heart's large seasons,—when it hopes  
 And fears, joys, grieves, and loves?—with all that strain  
 Of sexual passion, which devours the flesh  
 In a sacrament of souls? with mother's breasts,  
 Which, round the new-made creatures hanging there,  
 Throb luminous and harmonious like pure spheres?—  
 With multitudinous life, and finally  
 With the great out-goings of ecstatic souls,  
 Who, in a rush of too long prisoned flame,  
 Their radiant faces upward, burn away  
 This dark of the body, issuing on a world  
 Beyond our mortal?—can I speak my verse  
 So plainly in tune to these things and the rest,  
 That men shall feel it catch them on the quick,  
 As having the same warrant over them  
 To hold and move them, if they will or no,

Alike imperious as the primal rhythm  
 Of that theurgic nature? I must fail,  
 Who fail at the beginning to hold and move  
 One man,—and he my cousin, and he my friend,  
 And he born tender, made intelligent,  
 Inclined to ponder the precipitous sides  
 Of difficult questions; yet, obtuse to *me*,—  
 Of *me*, incurious! likes me very well,  
 And wishes me a paradise of good,  
 Good looks, good means, and good digestion!—ay,  
 But otherwise evades me, puts me off  
 With kindness, with a tolerant gentleness,—  
 Too light a book for a grave man's reading! Go,  
 Aurora Leigh: be humble.

There it is;

We women are too apt to look to one,  
 Which proves a certain impotence in art.  
 We strain our natures at doing something great,  
 Far less because it's something great to do,  
 Than, haply, that we, so, commend ourselves  
 As being not small, and more appreciable  
 To some one friend. We must have mediators  
 Betwixt our highest conscience and the judge;  
 Some sweet saint's blood must quicken in our palms,  
 Or all the life in heaven seems slow and cold:  
 Good only, being perceived as the end of good,  
 And God alone pleased,—that's too poor, we think,  
 And not enough for us, by any means.  
 Ay—Romney, I remember, told me once  
 We miss the abstract, when we comprehend!  
 We miss it most when we aspire, . . . and fail.

Yet, so, I will not.—This vile woman's way  
 Of trailing garments, shall not trip me up.  
 I'll have no traffic with the personal thought  
 In Art's pure temple. Must I work in vain,  
 Without the approbation of a man?  
 It cannot be; it shall not. Fame itself,  
 That approbation of the general race,  
 Presents a poor end (though the arrow speed,  
 Shot straight with vigorous finger to the white),  
 And the highest fame was never reached except  
 By what was aimed above it. Art for art,  
 And good for God Himself, the essential Good!

We'll keep our aims sublime, our eyes erect,  
 Although our woman-hands should shake and fail;  
 And if we fail . . . But must we?—

Shall I fail?

The Greeks said grandly in their tragic phrase,  
 "Let no one be called happy till his death."  
 To which I add,—Let no one till his death  
 Be called unhappy. Measure not the work  
 Until the day's out and the labour done;  
 Then bring your gauges. If the day's work's scant,  
 Why, call it scant; affect no compromise;  
 And, in that we have nobly striven at least,  
 Deal with us nobly, women though we be,  
 And honour us with truth, if not with praise.

My ballads prospered; but the ballad's race  
 Is rapid for a poet who bears weights  
 Of thought and golden image. He can stand  
 Like Atlas, in the sonnet,—and support  
 His own heavens pregnant with dynastic stars;  
 But then he must stand still nor take a step.

In that descriptive poem called "The Hills,"  
 The prospects were too far and indistinct.  
 'Tis true my critics said, "A fine view, that!"  
 The public scarcely cared to climb the book  
 For even the finest; and the public's right,  
 A tree's mere firewood, unless humanised;  
 Which well the Greeks knew, when they stirred the bark,  
 With close-pressed bosoms of subsiding nymphs,  
 And made the forest-rivers garrulous  
 With babble of gods. For us, we are called to mark  
 A still more intimate humanity  
 In this inferior nature,—or, ourselves,  
 Must fall like dead leaves trodden underfoot  
 By veritabler artists. Earth, shut up  
 By Adam, like a fakir in a box  
 Left too long buried, remained stiff and dry,  
 A mere dumb corpse, till Christ the Lord came down,  
 Unlocked the doors, forced open the blank eyes,  
 And used His kingly chrisms to straighten out  
 The leathery tongue turned back into the throat:  
 Since when, she lives, remembers, palpitates  
 In every limb, aspires in every breath,



Embraces infinite relations. Now,  
 We want no half-gods, Panomphæan Joves,  
 Fauns, Naiads, Tritons, Oreads, and the rest,  
 To take possession of a senseless world  
 To unnatural vampire-uses. See the earth,  
 The body of our body, the green earth,  
 Indubitably human, like this flesh  
 And these articulated veins through which  
 Our heart drives blood! there's not a flower of spring,  
 That dies ere June, but vaunts itself allied  
 By issue and symbol, by significance  
 And correspondence, to that spirit-world  
 Outside the limits of our space and time,  
 Whereto we are bound. Let poets give it voice  
 With human meanings; else they miss the thought,  
 And henceforth step down lower, stand confessed  
 Instructed poorly for interpreters,—  
 Thrown out by an easy cowslip in the text.

Even so my pastoral failed: it was a book  
 Of surface-pictures—pretty, cold, and false  
 With literal transcript,—the worse done, I think,  
 For being not ill-done. Let me set my mark  
 Against such doings, and do otherwise.  
 This strikes me.—If the public whom we know,  
 Could catch me at such admissions, I should pass  
 For being right modest. Yet how proud we are,  
 In daring to look down upon ourselves!

The critics say that epics have died out  
 With Agamemnon and the goat-nursed gods—  
 I'll not believe it. I could never dream  
 As Payne Knight did (the mythic mountaineer  
 Who travelled higher than he was born to live,  
 And showed sometimes the goitre in his throat  
 Discoursing of an image seen through fog),  
 That Homer's heroes measured twelve feet high.  
 They were but men!—his Helen's hair turned gray  
 Like any plain Miss Smith's, who wears a front;  
 And Hector's infant blubbered at a plume  
 As yours last Friday at a turkey-cock.  
 All men are possible heroes: every age,  
 Heroic in proportions, double-faced,  
 Looks backward and before, expects a morn  
 And claims an epos.

Ay, but every age,  
 Appears to souls who live in it (ask Carlyle)  
 Most unheroic. Ours, for instance, ours!  
 The thinkers scout it, and the poets abound  
 Who scorn to touch it with a finger-tip :  
 A pewter age,—mixed metal, silver washed ;  
 An age of scum, spooned off the richer past ;  
 An age of patches for old gaberdines ;  
 An age of mere transition, meaning nought,  
 Except that what succeeds must shame it quite,  
 If God please. That's wrong thinking to my mind,  
 And wrong thoughts make poor poems.

Every age,  
 Through being beheld too close, is ill-discerned  
 By those who have not lived past it. We'll suppose  
 Mount Athos carved, as Persian Xerxes schemed,  
 To some colossal statue of a man :  
 The peasants, gathering brushwood in his ear,  
 Had guessed as little of any human form  
 Up there, as would a flock of browsing goats.  
 They'd have, in fact, to travel ten miles off  
 Or ere the giant image broke on them,  
 Full human profile, nose and chin distinct,  
 Mouth, muttering rhythms of silence up the sky.  
 And fed at evening with the blood of suns ;  
 Grand torso,—hand, that flung perpetually  
 The largesse of a silver river down  
 To all the country pastures. 'Tis even thus  
 With times we live in,—evermore too great  
 To be apprehended near.

But poets should  
 Exert a double vision ; should have eyes  
 To see near things as comprehensively  
 As if afar they took their point of sight,  
 And distant things, as intimately deep,  
 As if they touched them. Let us strive for this.  
 I do distrust the poet who discerns  
 No character or glory in his times,  
 And trundles back his soul five hundred years,  
 Past moat and drawbridge, into a castle-court,  
 Oh, not to sing of lizards or of toads  
 Alive i' the ditch there !—'twere excusable ;  
 But of some black chief, half knight, half sheep-lifter.  
 Some beauteous dame, half chattel and half queen,

As dead as must be, for the greater part,  
The poems made on their chivalric bones,  
And that's no wonder : death inherits death.

Nay, if there's room for poets in the world  
A little overgrown (I think there is),  
Their sole work is to represent the age,  
Their age, not Charlemagne's,—this live, throbbing age,  
That brawls, cheats, maddens, calculates, aspires,  
And spends more passion, more heroic heat,  
Betwixt the mirrors of its drawing-rooms,  
Than Roland with his knights, at Roncesvalles.  
To flinch from modern varnish, coat or founce,  
Cry out for togas and the picturesque,  
Is fatal,—foolish too. King Arthur's self  
Was commonplace to Lady Guenever ;  
And Camelot to minstrels seemed as flat,  
As Regent Street to poets.

Never flinch,  
But still, unscrupulously epic, catch  
Upon the burning lava of a song,  
The full-veined, heaving, double-breasted Age :  
That, when the next shall come, the men of that  
May touch the impress with reverent hand, and say  
“ Behold,—behold the paps we all have sucked !  
That bosom seems to beat still, or at least  
It sets ours beating. This is living art,  
Which thus presents, and thus records true life.”

What form is best for poems ? Let me think  
Of forms less, and the external. Trust the spirit,  
As sovran nature does, to make the form ;  
For otherwise we only imprison spirit,  
And not embody. Inward evermore  
To outward,—so in life, and so in art.  
Which still is life.

Five acts to make a play.  
And why not fifteen ? why not ten ? or seven ?  
What matter for the number of the leaves,  
Supposing the tree lives and grows ? exact  
The literal unities of time and place,  
When 'tis the essence of passion to ignore  
Both time and place ? Absurd. Keep up the fire,  
And leave the generous flames to shape themselves.

'Tis true the stage requires obsequiousness  
 To this or that convention ; "exit" here  
 And "enter" there ; the points for clapping, fixed,  
 Like Jacob's white-peeled rods before the rams ;  
 And all the close-curved imagery clipped  
 In manner of their fleece at shearing-time.  
 Forget to prick the galleries to the heart  
 Precisely at the fourth act,—culminate  
 Our five pyramidal acts with one act more,—  
 We're lost so ! Shakspeare's ghost could scarcely plead  
 Against our just damnation. Stand aside ;  
 We'll muse for comfort that, last century,  
 On this same tragic stage on which we have failed,  
 A wigless Hamlet would have failed the same.

And whosoever writes good poetry,  
 Looks just to art. He does not write for you  
 Or me,—for London or for Edinburgh ;  
 He will not suffer the best critic known  
 To step into his sunshine of free thought  
 And self-absorbed conception, and exact  
 An inch-long swerving of the holy lines.  
 If virtue done for popularity  
 Defiles like vice, can art for praise or hire  
 Still keep its splendour, and remain pure art ?  
 Eschew such serfdom. What the poet writes,  
 He writes : mankind accepts it, if it suits,  
 And that's success : if not, the poem's passed  
 From hand to hand, and yet from hand to hand,  
 Until the unborn snatch it, crying out  
 In pity on their fathers' being so dull,  
 And that's success too.

I will write no plays,  
 Because the drama, less sublime in this,  
 Makes lower appeals, defends more menially,  
 Adopts the standard of the public taste  
 To chalk its height on, wears a dog-chain round  
 Its regal neck, and learns to carry and fetch  
 The fashions of the day to please the day ;  
 Fawns close on pit and boxes, who clap hands,  
 Commending chiefly its docility  
 And humour in stage-tricks ; or else indeed  
 Gets hissed at, howled at, stamped at like a dog,  
 Or worse, we'll say. For dogs, unjustly kicked,

Yell, bite at need ; but if your dramatist  
 (Being wronged by some five hundred nobodies  
 Because their grosser brains most naturally  
 Misjudge the fineness of his subtle wit)  
 Shows teeth an almond's breadth, protests the length  
 Of a modest phrase,—“ My gentle countrymen,  
 There's something in it, haply, of your fault,”—  
 Why then, besides five hundred nobodies,  
 He'll have five thousand, and five thousand more,  
 Against him,—the whole public,—all the hoofs  
 Of King Saul's father's asses, in full drove,—  
 And obviously deserve it. He appealed  
 To these,—and why say more if they condemn,  
 Than if they praised him ?—Weep, my Æschylus,  
 But low and far, upon Sicilian shores !  
 For since 'twas Athens (so I read the myth)  
 Who gave commission to that fatal weight,  
 The tortoise, cold and hard, to drop on thee  
 And crush thee,—better cover thy bald head ;  
 She'll hear the softest hum of Hyblan bee  
 Before thy loud'st protesting.—For the rest,  
 The risk's still worse upon the modern stage :  
 I could not, in so little, accept success,  
 Nor would I risk so much, in ease and calm,  
 For manifest gains ; let those who prize,  
 Pursue them : *I* stand off.

And yet, forbid,  
 That any irreverent fancy or conceit  
 Should litter in the Drama's throne-room, where  
 The rulers of our heart, in whose full veins  
 Dynastic glories mingle, sit in strength  
 And do their kingly work,—conceive, command,  
 And, from the imagination's crucial heat,  
 Catch up their men and women all a-flame  
 For action, all alive, and forced to prove  
 Their life by living out heart, brain, and nerve,  
 Until mankind makes witness, “ These be men  
 As we are,” and vouchsafes the kiss that's due  
 To Imogen and Juliet—sweetest kin  
 On art's side.

'Tis that, honouring to its worth  
 The drama, I would fear to keep it down  
 To the level of the footlights. Dies no more  
 The sacrificial goat, for Bacchus slain,—

His filmed eyes fluttered by the whirling white  
 Of choral vestures, troubled in his blood,  
 While tragic voices that clanged keen as swords,  
 Leapt high together with the altar-flame,  
 And made the blue air wink. The waxen mask,  
 Which set the grand still front of Themis' son  
 Upon the puckered visage of a player ;—  
 The buskin, which he rose upon and moved,  
 As some tall ship, first conscious of the wind,  
 Sweeps slowly past the piers ;—the mouthpiece, where  
 The mere man's voice with all its breaths and breaks  
 Went sheathed in brass, and clashed on even heights  
 Its phrased thunders ;—these things are no more,  
 Which once were. And concluding, which is clear,  
 The growing drama has outgrown such toys  
 Of simulated stature, face, and speech,  
 It also, peradventure, may outgrow  
 The simulation of the painted scene,  
 Boards, actors, prompters, gaslight, and costume ;  
 And take for a worthier stage the soul itself,  
 Its shifting fancies and celestial lights,  
 With all its grand orchestral silences  
 To keep the pauses of the rhythmic sounds.

Alas, I still see something to be done,  
 And what I do falls short of what I see  
 Though I waste myself on doing. Long green days,  
 Worn bare of grass and sunshine,—long calm nights,  
 From which the silken sleeps were fretted out,—  
 Be witness for me, with no amateur's  
 Irreverent haste and busy idleness  
 I've set myself to art ! What then ? what's done ?  
 What's done, at last ?

Behold, at last, a book.

If life-blood's necessary,—which it is  
 (By that blue vein athrob on Mahomet's brow,  
 Each prophet-poet's book must show man's blood !)  
 If life-blood's fertilising, I wrung mine  
 On every leaf of this,—unless the drops  
 Slid heavily on one side and left it dry.  
 That chances often : many a fervid man  
 Writes books as cold and flat as graveyard stones  
 From which the lichen's scraped ; and if St. Preux  
 Had written his own letters, as he might,

We had never wept to think of the little mole  
 'Neath Julie's drooping eyelid. Passion is  
 But something suffered, after all.

While Art

Sets action on the top of suffering :  
 The artist's part is both to be and do,  
 Transfixing with a special, central power  
 The flat experience of the common man,  
 And turning outward, with a sudden wrench,  
 Half agony, half ecstasy, the thing  
 He feels the inmost : never felt the less  
 Because he sings it. Does a torch less burn  
 For burning next reflectors of blue steel,  
 That *he* should be the colder for his place  
 'Twixt two incessant fires,—his personal life's,  
 And that intense refraction which burns back  
 Perpetually against him from the round  
 Of crystal conscience he was born into  
 If artist-born ? O sorrowful great gift  
 Conferred on poets, of a twofold life,  
 When one life has been found enough for pain !  
 We, staggering 'neath our burden as mere men,  
 Being called to stand up straight as demi-gods,  
 Support the intolerable strain and stress  
 Of the universal, and send clearly up  
 With voices broken by the human sob,  
 Our poems to find rhymes among the stars !

But soft !—a "poet" is a word soon said ;  
 A book's a thing soon written. Nay, indeed,  
 The more the poet shall be questionable,  
 The more unquestionably comes his book !  
 And this of mine—well, granting to myself  
 Some passion in it, furrowing up the flats,  
 Mere passion will not prove a volume worth  
 Its gall and rags even. Bubbles round a keel  
 Mean nought, excepting that the vessel moves,  
 There's more than passion goes to make a man,  
 Or book, which is a man too.

I am sad.

I wonder if Pygmalion had these doubts,  
 And, feeling the hard marble first relent,  
 Grow supple to the straining of his arms,  
 And tingle through its cold to his burning lip,

Supposed his senses mocked, and that the toil  
 Of stretching past the known and seen, to reach  
 The archetypal Beauty out of sight,  
 Had made his heart beat fast enough for two,  
 And with his own life dazed and blinded him!  
 Not so; Pygmalion loved,—and whose loves  
 Believes the impossible.

And I am sad .

I cannot thoroughly love a work of mine,  
 Since none seems worthy of my thought and hope  
 More highly mated. He has shot them down,  
 My Phœbus Apollo, soul within my soul,  
 Who judges, by the attempted, what's attained,  
 And with the silver arrow from his height,  
 Has struck down all my works before my face,  
 While *I* said nothing. Is there aught to say?  
 I called the artist but a greatened man:  
 He may be childless also, like a man.

I laboured on alone. The wind and dust  
 And sun of the world beat blistering in my face;  
 And hope, now for me, now against me, dragged  
 My spirits onward,—as some fallen balloon  
 Which, whether caught by blossoming tree or bare,  
 Is torn alike. I sometimes touched my aim,  
 Or seemed,—and generous souls cried out, “Be strong,  
 Take courage; now you're on our level,—now!  
 The next step saves you!” I was flushed with praise,  
 But, pausing just a moment to draw breath,  
 I could not choose but murmur to myself  
 “Is this all? all that's done? and all that's gained?  
 If this then be success, 'tis dismaller  
 Than any failure.”

O my God, my God,  
 O supreme Artist, who as sole return  
 For all the cosmic wonder of Thy work,  
 Demandest of us just a word . . . a name,  
 “My Father!”—Thou hast knowledge, only Thou,  
 How dreary 'tis for women to sit still  
 On winter nights by solitary fires,  
 And hear the nations praising them far off,  
 Too far! ay, praising our quick sense of love,  
 Our very heart of passionate womanhood,  
 Which could not beat so in the verse without



Being present also in the un-kissed lips,  
 And eyes undried because there's none to ask  
 The reason they grew moist.

To sit alone,  
 And think, for comfort, how, that very night,  
 Affianced lovers, leaning face to face  
 With sweet half-listenings for each other's breath,  
 Are reading haply from some page of ours,  
 To pause with a thrill, as if their cheeks had touched,  
 When such a stanza, level to their mood,  
 Seems floating their own thought out—"So I feel  
 For thee,"—"And I, for thee: this poet knows  
 What everlasting love is!"—how, that night,  
 A father, issuing from the misty roads  
 Upon the luminous round of lamp and hearth  
 And happy children, having caught up first  
 The youngest there until it shrunk and shrieked  
 To feel the cold chin prick its dimples through  
 With winter from the hills, may throw i' the lap  
 Of the eldest (who has learnt to drop her lids  
 To hide some sweetness newer than last year's)  
 Our book and cry, . . . "Ah you, you care for rhymes;  
 So here be rhymes to pore on under trees,  
 When April comes to let you! I've been told  
 They are not idle as so many are,  
 But set hearts beating pure as well as fast:  
 It's yours, the book: I'll write your name in it,—  
 That so you may not lose, however lost  
 In poet's lore and charming reverie,  
 The thought of how your father thought of *you*  
 In riding from the town."

To have our books  
 Appraised by love, associated with love,  
 While *we* sit loveless! is it hard, you think?  
 At least 'tis mournful. Fame, indeed, 'twas said,  
 Means simply love. It was a man said that.  
 And then, there's love and love: the love of all  
 (To risk, in turn, a woman's paradox)  
 Is but a small thing to the love of one.  
 You bid a hungry child be satisfied  
 With a heritage of many corn-fields: nay,  
 He says he's hungry,—he would rather have  
 That little barley-cake you keep from him  
 While reckoning up his harvests. So with us

(Here, Romney, too, we fail to generalise !)  
We're hungry.

Hungry ! but it's pitiful  
To wail like unweaned babes and suck our thumbs  
Because we're hungry. Who, in all this world  
(Wherein we are haply set to pray and fast,  
And learn what good is by its opposite)  
Has never hungered ? Woe to him who has found  
The meal enough ! if Ugolino's full,  
His teeth have crunched some foul unnatural thing :  
For here satiety proves penury  
More utterly irremediable. And since  
We needs must hunger,—better, for man's love,  
Than God's truth ! better, for companions sweet,  
Than great convictions ! let us bear our weights,  
Preferring dreary hearths to desert souls.  
Well, well ! they say we're envious, we who rhyme ;  
But I, because I am a woman perhaps,  
And so rhyme ill, am ill at envying.  
I never envied Graham his breadth of style,  
Which gives you, with a random smutch or two  
(Near-sighted critics analyse to smutch),  
Such delicate perspectives of full life ;  
Nor Belmore, for the unity of aim  
To which he cuts his cedarn poems, fine  
As sketchers do their pencils ; nor Mark Gage,  
For that caressing colour and trancing tone  
Whereby you're swept away and melted in  
The sensual element, which, with a back wave,  
Restores you to the level of pure souls  
And leaves you with Plotinus. None of these,  
For native gifts or popular applause,  
I've envied ; but for this,—that when, by chance,  
Says some one,—“ There goes Belmore, a great man !  
He leaves clean work behind him, and requires  
No sweeper up of the chips,” . . . a girl I know,  
Who answers nothing, save with her brown eyes,  
Smiles unaware, as if a guardian saint  
Smiled in her :—for this, too,—that Gage comes home  
And lays his last book's prodigal review  
Upon his mother's knees, where, years ago,  
He had laid his childish spelling-book and learned  
To chirp and peck the letters from her mouth,  
As young birds must. “ Well done,” she murmured then,

She will not say it now more wonderingly ;  
 And yet the last " Well done " will touch him more,  
 As catching up to-day and yesterday  
 In a perfect chord of love ; and so, Mark Gage,  
 I envy you your mother !—and you, Graham,  
 Because you have a wife who loves you so,  
 She half forgets, at moments, to be proud  
 Of being Graham's wife, until a friend observes,  
 " The boy here, has his father's massive brow,  
 Done small in wax . . . if we push back the curls."

Who loves *me*? Dearest father,—mother sweet,—  
 I speak the names out sometimes by myself,  
 And make the silence shiver : they sound strange,  
 As Hindostanee to an Ind-born man  
 Accustomed many years to English speech ;  
 Or lovely poet-words grown obsolete,  
 Which will not leave off singing. Up in heaven  
 I have my father,—with my mother's face  
 Beside him in a blotch of heavenly light ;  
 No more for earth's familiar, household use,  
 No more ! The best verse written by this hand,  
 Can never reach them where they sit, to seem  
 Well-done to *them*. Death quite unfellows us,  
 Sets dreadful odds betwixt the live and dead,  
 And makes us part as those at Babel did,  
 Through sudden ignorance of a common tongue.  
 A living Cæsar would not dare to play  
 At bowls, with such as my dead father is.

And yet, this may be less so than appears,  
 This change and separation. Sparrows five  
 For just two farthings, and God cares for each.  
 If God is not too great for little cares,  
 Is any creature, because gone to God?  
 I've seen some men, veracious, nowise mad,  
 Who have thought or dreamed, declared and testified,  
 They've heard the Dead a-ticking like a clock  
 Which strikes the hours of the eternities,  
 Beside them, with their natural ears,—and known  
 That human spirits feel the human way,  
 And hate the unreasoning awe which waves them off  
 From possible communion. ' It may be.

At least, earth separates as well as heaven.  
 For instance, I have not seen Romney Leigh  
 Full eighteen months . . . add six, you get two years.  
 They say he's very busy with good works,—  
 Has parted Leigh Hall into almshouses,  
 He made an almshouse of his heart one day,  
 Which ever since is loose upon the latch  
 For those who pull the string.—I never did.

It always makes me sad to go abroad ;  
 And now I'm sadder that I went to-night  
 Among the lights and talkers at Lord Howe's.  
 His wife is gracious, with her glossy braids,  
 And even voice, and gorgeous eyeballs, calm  
 As her other jewels. If she's somewhat cold,  
 Who wonders, when her blood has stood so long  
 In the ducal reservoir she calls her line  
 By no means arrogantly ? she's not proud ;  
 Not prouder than the swan is of the lake  
 He has always swum in ;—'tis her element,  
 And so she takes it with a natural grace,  
 Ignoring tadpoles. She just knows, perhaps,  
 There *are* men, move on without outriders,  
 Which isn't her fault. Ah, to watch her face,  
 When good Lord Howe expounds his theories  
 Of social justice and equality—  
 'Tis curious, what a tender, tolerant bend  
 Her neck takes : for she loves him, likes his talk,  
 " Such clever talk—that dear, odd Algernon !"  
 She listens on, exactly as if he talked  
 Some Scandinavian myth of Lemures,  
 Too pretty to dispute, and too absurd.

She's gracious to me as her husband's friend,  
 And would be gracious, were I not a Leigh,  
 Being used to smile just so, without her eyes,  
 On Joseph Strangways, the Leeds mesmerist,  
 And Delia Dobbs, the lecturer from " the States "  
 Upon the " Woman's question." Then, for him,  
 I like him . . . he's my friend. And all the rooms  
 Were full of crinkling silks that swept about  
 The fine dust of most subtle courtesies.  
 What then ?—why then, we come home to be sad.

How lovely One I love not, looked to-night !  
 She's very pretty, Lady Waldemar.  
 Her maid must use both hands to twist that coil  
 Of tresses, then be careful lest the rich  
 Bronze rounds should slip:—she missed, though, a gray  
 hair,

A single one,—I saw it; otherwise  
 The woman looked immortal. How they told,  
 Those alabaster shoulders and bare breasts,  
 On which the pearls, drowned out of sight in milk,  
 Were lost, excepting for the ruby-clasp !  
 They split the amaranth velvet-bodice down  
 To the waist, or nearly, with the audacious press  
 Of full-breathed beauty. If the heart within  
 Were half as white !—but, if it were, perhaps  
 The breast were closer covered, and the sight  
 Less respectable, by half, too.

I heard

The young man with the German student's look—  
 A sharp face, like a knife in a cleft stick,  
 Which shot up straight against the parting line  
 So equally dividing the long hair,—  
 Say softly to his neighbour (thirty-five  
 And mediæval), “ Look that way, Sir Blaise.  
 She's Lady Waldemar—to the left,—in red—  
 Whom Romney Leigh, our ablest man just now,  
 Is soon about to marry.”

Then replied

Sir Blaise Delorme, with quiet, priest-like voice,  
 Too used to syllable damnations round  
 To make a natural emphasis worth while :  
 “ Is Leigh your ablest man? the same, I think,  
 Once jilted by a recreant pretty maid  
 Adopted from the people? Now, in change,  
 He seems to have plucked a flower from the other side  
 Of the social hedge.”

“ A flower, a flower,” exclaimed  
 My German student,—his own eyes full-blown  
 Bent on her. He was twenty, certainly.

Sir Blaise resumed with gentle arrogance,  
 As if he had dropped his alms into a hat,  
 And had the right to counsel,—“ My young friend,  
 I doubt your ablest man's ability

To get the least good or help meet for him,  
For pagan phalanstery or Christian home,  
From such a flowery creature."

" Beautiful ! "

My student murmured, rapt,—“ Mark how she stirs !  
Just waves her head, as if a flower indeed,  
Touched far off by the vain breath of our talk.”

At which that bilious Grimwald (he who writes  
For the Renovator), who had seemed absorbed  
Upon the table-book of autographs  
(I dare say mentally he crunched the bones  
Of all those writers, wishing them alive  
To feel his tooth in earnest), turned short round  
With low carnivorous laugh,—“ A flower, of course !  
She neither sews nor spins,—and takes no thought  
Of her garments . . . falling off.”

The student flinched,  
Sir Blaise, the same ; then both, drawing back their chairs  
As if they spied black-beetles on the floor,  
Pursued their talk, without a word being thrown  
To the critic.

Good Sir Blaise's brow is high  
And noticeably narrow : a strong wind,  
You fancy, might unroof him suddenly,  
And blow that great top attic off his head  
So piled with feudal relics. You admire  
His nose in profile, though you miss his chin ;  
But, though you miss his chin, you seldom miss  
His golden cross worn innermost (carved  
For penance, by a saintly Styrian monk  
Whose flesh was too much with him), slipping through  
Some unaware unbuttoned casualty  
Of the under-waistcoat. With an absent air  
Sir Blaise sate fingering it and speaking low,  
While I, upon the sofa, heard it all.

“ My dear young friend, if we could bear our eyes  
Like blessedest St. Lucy, on a plate,  
They would not trick us into choosing wives,  
As doublets, by the colour. Otherwise  
Our fathers chose,—and therefore, when they had hung  
Their household keys about a lady's waist,  
The sense of duty gave her dignity :

She kept her bosom holy to her babes ;  
 And if a moralist reprov'd her dress,  
 'Twas, " Too much starch ! "—and not " Too little lawn ! "

" Now, pshaw ! " returned the other in a heat,  
 A little fretted by being called " young friend,"  
 Or so I took it,—“ for St. Lucy's sake,  
 If she's the saint to curse by, let us leave  
 Our fathers,—plagued enough about our sons ! ”  
 (He stroked his beardless chin) “ yes, plagued, sir, plagued :  
 The future generations lie on us  
 As heavy as the nightmare of a seer ;  
 Our meat and drink grow painful prophecy :  
 I ask you,—have we leisure, if we liked,  
 To hollow out our weary hands to keep  
 Your intermittent rushlight of the past  
 From draughts in lobbies ? Prejudice of sex,  
 And marriage-laws . . . the socket drops them through  
 While we two speak,—however may protest  
 Some over-delicate nostrils, like your own,  
 'Gainst odours thence arising.”

“ You are young,”

Sir Blaise objected.

“ If I am,” he said

With fire,—“ though somewhat less so than I seem,  
 The young run on before, and see the thing  
 That's coming. Reverence for the young, I cry.  
 In that new church for which the world's near ripe,  
 You'll have the younger in the elder's chair,  
 Presiding with his ivory front of hope  
 O'er foreheads clawed by cruel carrion birds  
 Of life's experience.”

“ Pray your blessing, sir,”

Sir Blaise replied good-humouredly,—“ I plucked  
 A silver hair this morning from my beard,  
 Which left me your inferior. Would I were  
 Eighteen, and worthy to admonish you !  
 If young men of your order run before  
 To see such sights as sexual prejudice  
 And marriage-law dissolved,—in plainer words,  
 A general concubinage expressed  
 In a universal pruriency,—the thing  
 Is scarce worth running fast for, and you'd gain  
 By loitering with your elders.”

“ Ah,” he said,  
 “ Who, getting to the top of Pisgah-hill,  
 Can talk with one at bottom of the view,  
 To make it comprehensible? Why, Leigh  
 Himself, although our ablest man, I said,  
 Is scarce advanced to see as far as this,  
 Which some are : he takes up imperfectly  
 The social question—by one handle—leaves  
 The rest to trail. A Christian socialist,  
 Is Romney Leigh, you understand.” “ Not I.  
 I disbelieve in Christian-pagans, much  
 As you in women-fishes. If we mix  
 Two colours, we lose both, and make a third  
 Distinct from either. Mark you! to mistake  
 A colour is the sign of a sick brain,  
 And mine, I thank the saints, is clear and cool :  
 A neutral tint is here impossible.  
 The church,—and by the church, I mean, of course,  
 The catholic, apostolic, mother-church,—  
 Draws lines as plain and straight as her own wall ;  
 Inside of which, are Christians, obviously,  
 And outside . . . dogs.”

“ We thank you. Well I know  
 The ancient mother-church would fain still bite,  
 For all her toothless gums,—as Leigh himself  
 Would fain be a Christian still, for all his wit ;  
 Pass that ; you two may settle it, for me.  
 You're slow in England. In a month I learnt  
 At Göttingen, enough philosophy  
 To stock your English schools for fifty years ;  
 Pass that, too. Here, alone, I stop you short,  
 —Supposing a true man like Leigh could stand  
 Unequal in the stature of his life  
 To the height of his opinions. Choose a wife  
 Because of a smooth skin?—not he, not he !  
 He'd rail at Venus' self for creaking shoes,  
 Unless she walked his way of righteousness :  
 And if he takes a Venus Meretrix  
 (No imputation on the lady there),  
 Be sure that, by some sleight of Christian art,  
 He has metamorphosed and converted her  
 To a Blessed Virgin.”

“ Soft !” Sir Blaise drew breath  
 As if it hurt him,—“ Soft ! no blasphemy, I pray you” !



“The first Christians did the thing ;  
 Why not the last ?” asked he of Göttingen,  
 With just that shade of sneering on the lip,  
 Compensates for the lagging of the beard,—  
 “And so the case is. If that fairest fair  
 Is talked of as the future wife of Leigh,  
 She’s talked of, too, at least as certainly,  
 As Leigh’s disciple. You may find her name  
 On all his missions and commissions, schools,  
 Asylums, hospitals,—he has had her down,  
 With other ladies whom her starry lead  
 Persuaded from their spheres, to his country-place  
 In Shropshire, to the famed phalanstery  
 At Leigh Hall, christianised from Fourier’s own  
 (In which he has planted out his sapling stocks  
 Of knowledge into social nurseries),  
 And there, they say, she has tarried half a week,  
 And milked the cows, and churned, and pressed the curd,  
 And said ‘my sister’ to the lowest drab  
 Of all the assembled castaways ; such girls !  
 Ay, sided with them at the washing-tub—  
 Conceive, Sir Blaise, those naked perfect arms,  
 Round glittering arms, plunged elbow-deep in suds,  
 Like wild swans hid in lilies all a-shake.”

Lord Howe came up. “What, talking poetry  
 So near the image of the unfavouring Muse ?  
 That’s you, Miss Leigh : I’ve watched you half an hour,  
 Precisely as I watched the statue called  
 A Pallas in the Vatican ;—you mind  
 The face, Sir Blaise ?—intensely calm and sad,  
 As wisdom cut it off from fellowship,—  
 But *that* spoke louder. Not a word from *you* !  
 And these two gentlemen were bold, I marked,  
 And unabashed by even your silence.”

“Ah,”

Said I, “my dear Lord Howe, you shall not speak  
 To a printing woman who has lost her place  
 (The sweet safe corner of the household fire  
 Behind the heads of children), compliments,  
 As if she were a woman. We who have clipt  
 The curls before our eyes, may see at least  
 As plain as men do : speak out, man to man ;  
 No compliments, beseech you.”

"Friend to friend,  
 Let that be. We are sad to-night, I saw,  
 (—Good-night, Sir Blaise! Ah, Smith—he has slipped away)  
 I saw you across the room, and stayed, Miss Leigh,  
 To keep a crowd of lion-hunters off,  
 With faces toward your jungle. There were three;  
 A spacious lady, five feet ten and fat,  
 Who has the devil in her (and there's room)  
 For walking to and fro upon the earth,  
 From Chipewa to China; she requires  
 Your autograph upon a tinted leaf  
 'Twixt Queen Pomare's and Emperor Soulouque's;  
 Pray give it; she has energies, though fat:  
 For me, I'd rather see a rick on fire  
 Than such a woman angry. Then a youth  
 Fresh from the backwoods, green as the under-boughs,  
 Asks modestly, Miss Leigh, to kiss your shoe,  
 And adds, he has an epic, in twelve parts,  
 Which when you've read, you'll do it for his boot,—  
 All which I saved you, and absorb next week  
 Both manuscript and man, because a lord  
 Is still more potent than a poetess,  
 With any extreme republican. Ah, ah,  
 You smile at last, then." "Thank you."

"Leave the smile.

I'll lose the thanks for't,—ay, and throw you in  
 My transatlantic girl, with golden eyes,  
 That draw you to her splendid whiteness, as  
 The pistil of a water-lily draws,  
 Adust with gold. Those girls across the sea  
 Are tyrannously pretty,—and I swore  
 (She seemed to me an innocent, frank girl)  
 To bring her to you for a woman's kiss,  
 Not now, but on some other day or week:  
 —We'll call it perjury; I give her up."

"No, bring her."

"Now," said he, "you make it hard  
 To touch such goodness with a grimy palm.  
 I thought to tease you well, and fret you cross,  
 And steel myself, when rightly vexed with you,  
 For telling you a thing to tease you more."

"Of Romney?"

“No, no ; nothing worse,” he cried,  
 “Of Romney Leigh, than what is buzzed about,—  
 That *he* is taken in an eye-trap too,  
 Like many half as wise. The thing I mean  
 Refers to you, not him.”

“Refers to me.”

He echoed,—“Me! You sound it like a stone  
 Dropped down a dry well very listlessly,  
 By one who never thinks about the toad  
 Alive at the bottom. Presently perhaps  
 You’ll sound your ‘me’ more proudly—till I shrink.”

“Lord Howe’s the toad, then, in this question?”

“Brief,

We’ll take it graver. Give me sofa-room,  
 And quiet hearing. You know Eglinton,  
 John Eglinton of Eglinton in Kent?”

“Is *he* the toad? he’s rather like the snail;  
 Known chiefly for the house upon his back:  
 Divide the man and house—you kill the man;  
 That’s Eglinton of Eglinton, Lord Howe.”

He answered grave: “A reputable man,  
 An excellent landlord of the olden stamp,  
 If somewhat slack in new philanthropies;  
 Who keeps his birthdays with a tenants’ dance,  
 Is hard upon them when they miss the church  
 Or keep their children back from catechism,  
 But not ungentle when the aged poor  
 Pick sticks at hedge-sides; nay, I’ve heard him say,  
 ‘The old dame has a twinge because she stoops:  
 ‘That’s punishment enough for felony.’”

“O tender-hearted landlord! May I take  
 My long lease with him, when the time arrives  
 For gathering winter-faggots!”

“He likes art,  
 Buys books and pictures . . . of a certain kind;  
 Neglects no patent duty; a good son” . . .

“To a most obedient mother. Born to wear  
 His father’s shoes, he wears her husband’s too:  
 Indeed, I’ve heard it’s touching. Dear Lord Howe,

You shall not praise *me* so against your heart,  
When I'm at worst for praise and faggots."

"Be  
Less bitter with me, for . . . in short," he said,  
"I have a letter, which he urged me so  
To bring you . . . I could scarcely choose but yield :  
Insisting that a new love passing through  
The hand of an old friendship, caught from it  
Some reconciling perfume."

"Love, you say?  
My lord, I cannot love. I only find  
The rhymes for love,—and that's not love, my lord.  
Take back your letter."

"Pause : you'll read it first ?"

"I will not read it : it is stereotyped ;  
The same he wrote to,—anybody's name,—  
Anne Blythe, the actress, when she had died so true,  
A duchess fainted in a private box :  
Pauline, the dancer, after the great *pas*,  
In which her little feet winked overhead  
Like other fire-flies, and amazed the pit :  
Or Baldinacci, when her F in alt  
Had touched the silver tops of heaven itself  
With such a pungent soul-dart, even the Queen  
Laid softly, each to each, her white-gloved palms,  
And sighed for joy : or else (I thank your friend)  
Aurora Leigh,—when some indifferent rhymes,  
Like those the boys sang round the holy ox  
On Memphis-road, have chanced, perhaps, to set  
Our Apis-public lowing. Oh, he wants,  
Instead of any worthy wife at home,  
A star upon his stage of Eglinton !  
Advise him that he is not overshrewd  
In being so little modest : a dropped star  
Makes bitter waters, says a Book I've read,—  
And there's his unread letter."

"My dear friend,"  
Lord Howe began . . .

In haste I tore the phrase.  
"You mean your friend of Eglinton, or me ?"

"I mean you, you," he answered with some fire.  
"A happy life means prudent compromise ;

The tare runs through the farmer's garnered sheaves ;  
 But though the gleaner's apron holds pure wheat,  
 We count her poorer. Tare with wheat, we cry,  
 And good with drawbacks. You, you love your art,  
 And, certain of vocation, set your soul  
 On utterance. Only, . . . in this world we have made  
 (They say God made it first, but, if He did,  
 'Twas so long since, . . . and, since, we have spoiled it so,  
 He scarce would know it, if He looked this way,  
 From hells we preach of, with the flames blown out),  
 In this bad, twisted, topsy-turvy world,  
 Where all the heaviest wrongs get uppermost,—  
 In this uneven, unfostering England here,  
 Where ledger-strokes and sword-strokes count indeed,  
 But soul-strokes merely tell upon the flesh  
 They strike from,—it is hard to stand for art,  
 Unless some golden tripod from the sea  
 Be fished up, by Apollo's divine chance,  
 To throne such feet as yours, my prophetess,  
 At Delphi. Think,—the god comes down as fierce  
 As twenty bloodhounds ! shakes you, strangles you,  
 Until the oracular shriek shall ooze in froth !  
 At best it's not all ease,—at worst too hard :  
 A place to stand on is a 'vantage gained,  
 And here's your tripod. To be plain, dear friend,  
 You're poor, except in what you richly give ;  
 You labour for your own bread painfully,  
 Or ere you pour our wine. For art's sake, pause."

I answered slow,—as some wayfaring man,  
 Who feels himself at night too far from home,  
 Makes steadfast face against the bitter wind :  
 "Is art so less a thing than virtue is,  
 That artists first must cater for their ease  
 Or ever they make issue past themselves  
 To generous use ? alas, and is it so  
 That we, who would be somewhat clean, must sweep  
 Our ways as well as walk them, and no friend  
 Confirm us nobly,—'Leave results to God,  
 But you, be clean ?' What ! 'prudent compromise  
 Makes acceptable life,' you say instead,  
 You, you, Lord Howe ?—in things indifferent, well.  
 For instance, compromise the wheaten bread  
 For rye, the meat for lentils, silk for serge,

And sleep on down, if needs, for sleep on straw ;  
 But there, end compromise. I will not bate  
 One artist-dream, on straw or down, my lord,  
 Nor pinch my liberal soul, though I be poor,  
 Nor cease to love high, though I live thus low."

So speaking, with less anger in my voice  
 Than sorrow, I rose quickly to depart ;  
 While he, thrown back upon the noble shame  
 Of such high-stumbling natures, murmured words,  
 The right words after wrong ones. Ah, the man  
 Is worthy, but so given to entertain  
 Impossible plans of superhuman life,—  
 He sets his virtues on so raised a shelf,  
 To keep them at the grand millennial height,  
 He has to mount a stool to get at them ;  
 And, meantime, lives on quite the common way,  
 With everybody's morals.

As we passed,  
 Lord Howe insisting that his friendly arm  
 Should oar me across the sparkling, brawling stream  
 Which swept from room to room,—we fell at once  
 On Lady Waldemar. "Miss Leigh," she said,  
 And gave me such a smile, so cold and bright,  
 As if she tried it in a 'tiring glass  
 And liked it ; "all to-night I've strained at you,  
 As babes at baubles held up out of reach  
 By spiteful nurses ('Never snatch,' they say),  
 And there you sate, most perfectly shut in  
 By good Sir Blaise and clever Mister Smith,  
 And then our dear Lord Howe ! at last, indeed,  
 I almost snatched. I have a world to speak  
 About your cousin's place in Shropshire, where  
 I've been to see his work . . . our work,—you heard  
 I went? . . . and of a letter, yesterday,  
 In which, if I should read a page or two,  
 You might feel interest, though you're locked of course  
 In literary toil.—You'll like to hear  
 Your last book lies at the phalanstery,  
 As judged innocuous for the elder girls  
 And younger women who still care for books.  
 We all must read, you see, before we live :  
 But slowly the ineffable light comes up,  
 And, as it deepens, drowns the written word,—

So said your cousin, while we stood and felt  
 A sunset from his favourite beech-tree seat :  
 He might have been a poet if he would,  
 But then he saw the higher thing at once,  
 And climbed to it. I think he looks well now,  
 Has quite got over that unfortunate . . .  
 Ah, ah . . . I know it moved you. Tender-heart !  
 You took a liking to the wretched girl.  
 Perhaps you thought the marriage suitable,  
 Who knows? a poet hankers for romance,  
 And so on. As for Romney Leigh, 'tis sure  
 He never loved her,—never. By the way,  
 You have not heard of *her* . . . ? quite out of sight,  
 And out of saving? lost in every sense?"

She might have gone on talking half an hour,  
 And I stood still, and cold, and pale, I think,  
 As a garden-statue a child pelts with snow  
 For pretty pastime. Every now and then  
 I put in "yes," or "no," I scarce knew why ;  
 The blind man walks wherever the dog pulls,  
 And so I answered. Till Lord Howe broke in ;  
 "What penance takes the wretch who interrupts  
 The talk of charming women? I, at last,  
 Must brave it. Pardon, Lady Waldemar !  
 The lady on my arm is tired, unwell,  
 And loyally I've promised she shall say  
 No harder word this evening, than . . . good-night ;  
 The rest her face speaks for her."—Then we went.

And I breathe large at home. I drop my cloak,  
 Unclasp my girdle, loose the band that ties  
 My hair . . . now could I but unloose my soul !  
 We are sepulchred alive in this close world,  
 And want more room.

The charming woman there—  
 This reckoning up and writing down her talk  
 Affects me singularly. How she talked  
 To pain me ! woman's spite !—You wear steel-mail ;  
 A woman takes a housewife from her breast,  
 And plucks the delicatest needle out  
 As 'twere a rose, and pricks you carefully  
 'Neath nails, 'neath eyelids, in your nostrils,—say,  
 A beast would roar so tortured,—but a man,

A human creature, must not, shall not flinch,  
No, not for shame.

What vexes, after all  
Is just that such as she, with such as I,  
Knows how to vex. Sweet heaven, she takes me up  
As if she had fingered me and dog-eared me  
And spelled me by the fireside, half a life!  
She knows my turns, my feeble points.—What then?  
The knowledge of a thing implies the thing;  
Of course, she found *that* in me, she saw *that*,  
Her pencil underscored *this* for a fault,  
And I, still ignorant. Shut the book up! close!  
And crush that beetle in the leaves.

O heart,

At last we shall grow hard too, like the rest,  
And call it self-defence because we are soft.

And after all, now, why should I be pained,  
That Romney Leigh, my cousin, should espouse  
This Lady Waldemar? And, say, she held  
Her newly-blossomed gladness in my face, . . .  
'Twas natural surely, if not generous,  
Considering how, when winter held her fast,  
I helped the frost with mine, and pained her more  
Than she pains me. Pains me!—but wherefore pained?  
'Tis clear my cousin Romney wants a wife,—  
So, good!—The man's need of the woman, here,  
Is greater than the woman's of the man,  
And easier served; for where the man discerns  
A sex (ah, ah, the man can generalise,  
Said he) we see but one, ideally  
And really: where we yearn to lose ourselves  
And melt likewhite pearls in another's wine,  
He seeks to double himself by what he loves,  
And makes his drink more costly by our pearls.  
At board, at bed, at work, and holiday,  
It is not good for man to be alone,—  
And that's his way of thinking, first and last;  
And thus my cousin Romney wants a wife.

But then my cousin sets his dignity  
On personal virtue. If he understands  
By love, like others, self-aggrandisement,  
It is that he may verily be great



By doing rightly and kindly. Once he thought,  
 For charitable ends set duly forth  
 In Heaven's white judgment-book, to marry . . . ah,  
 We'll call her name Aurora Leigh, although  
 She's changed since then!—and once, for social ends,  
 Poor Marian Erle, my sister Marian Erle,  
 My woodland sister, sweet maid Marian,  
 Whose memory moans on in me like the wind  
 Through ill-shut casements, making me more sad  
 Than ever I find reasons for. Alas,  
 Poor pretty plaintive face, embodied ghost,  
 He finds it easy, then, to clap thee off  
 From pulling at his sleeve and book and pen,—  
 He locks thee out at night into the cold,  
 Away from butting with thy horny eyes  
 Against his crystal dreams,—that, now, he's strong  
 To love anew? that Lady Waldemar  
 Succeeds my Marian?

After all, why not?

He loved not Marian, more than once he loved  
 Aurora. If he loves, at last, that Third,  
 Albeit she proves as slippery as spilt oil  
 On marble floors, I will not augur him  
 I'll luck for that. Good love, how'er ill-placed,  
 Is better for a man's soul in the end,  
 Than if he loved ill what deserves love well.  
 A pagan, kissing, for a step of Pan,  
 The wild-goat's hoof-print on the loamy down,  
 Exceeds our modern thinker who turns back  
 The strata . . . granite, limestone, coal, and clay,  
 Concluding coldly with, "Here's law! Where's God?"

And then at worst,—if Romney loves her not,—  
 At worst,—if he's incapable of love,  
 Which may be—then indeed, for such a man,  
 Incapable of love, she's good enough;  
 For she, at worst too, is a woman still  
 And loves him . . . as the sort of woman can.

My loose long hair began to burn and creep,  
 Alive to the very ends, about my knees:  
 I swept it backward as the wind sweeps flame,  
 With the passion of my hands. Ah, Romney laughed  
 One day . . . (how full the memories come up!)

“—Your Florence fire-flies live on in your hair,”  
 He said, “it gleams so.” Well, I wrung them out,  
 My fire-flies ; made a knot as hard as life,  
 Of those loose, soft, impracticable curls,  
 And then sat down and thought . . . “She shall not think  
 Her thought of me,”—and drew my desk and wrote.

“Dear Lady Waldemar, I could not speak  
 With people round me, nor can sleep to-night  
 And not speak, after the great news I heard  
 Of you and of my cousin. May you be  
 Most happy ; and the good he meant the world,  
 Replenish his own life. Say what I say,  
 And let my word be sweeter for your mouth,  
 As you are *you* . . . I only Aurora Leigh.”

That’s quiet, guarded ! though she hold it up  
 Against the light, she’ll not see through it more  
 Than lies there to be seen. So much for pride ;  
 And now for peace, a little ! Let me stop  
 All writing back . . . “Sweet thanks, my sweetest friend  
 “You’ve made more joyful my great joy itself.”  
 —No, that’s too simple ! she would twist it thus,  
 “My joy would still be as sweet as thyme in drawers,  
 However shut up in the dark and dry ;  
 But violets, aired and dewed by love like yours,  
 Out-smell all thyme ! we keep that in our clothes,  
 But drop the other down our bosoms, till  
 They smell like ” . . . ah, I see her writing back  
 Just so. She’ll make a nosegay of her words,  
 And tie it with blue ribbons at the end  
 To suit a poet ;—pshaw !

And then we’ll have  
 The call to church ; the broken, sad, bad dream  
 Dreamed out at last ; the marriage-vow complete  
 With the marriage-breakfast ; praying in white gloves,  
 Drawn off in haste for drinking pagan toasts  
 In somewhat stronger wine than any sipped  
 By gods, since Bacchus had his way with grapes.

A postscript stops all that, and rescues me.  
 “You need not write. I have been overworked,  
 And think of leaving London, England even,  
 And hastening to get nearer to the sun,

Where men sleep better. So, adieu."—I fold  
 And seal,—and now I'm out of all the coil ;  
 I breathe now ; I spring upward like a branch,  
 A ten-years school-boy with a crooked stick  
 May pull down to his level, in search of nuts,  
 But cannot hold a moment. How we twang  
 Back on the blue sky, and assert our height,  
 While he stares after ! Now, the wonder seems  
 That I could wrong myself by such a doubt.  
 We poets always have uneasy hearts ;  
 Because our hearts, large-rounded as the globe,  
 Can turn but one side to the sun at once.  
 We are used to dip our artist-hands in gall  
 And potash, trying potentialities  
 Of alternated colour, till at last  
 We get confused, and wonder for our skin  
 How nature tinged it first. Well—here's the true  
 Good flesh-colour ; I recognise my hand,—  
 Which Romney Leigh may clasp as just a friend's,  
 And keep his clean.

And now, my Italy.

Alas, if we could ride with naked souls,  
 And make no noise and pay no price at all,  
 I would have seen thee sooner, Italy,—  
 For still I have heard thee crying through my life,  
 Thou piercing silence of ecstatic graves,  
 Men call that name !

But even a witch, to-day,  
 Must melt down golden pieces in the nard  
 Wherewith to anoint her broomstick ere she rides ;  
 And poets evermore are scant of gold,  
 And, if they find a piece behind the door,  
 It turns by sunset to a withered leaf.  
 The Devil himself scarce trusts his patented  
 Gold-making art to any who make rhymes,  
 But culls his Faustus from philosophers  
 And not from poets. "Leave my Job," said God.  
 And so, the Devil leaves him without pence,  
 And poverty proves, plainly, special grace.  
 In these new, just, administrative times  
 Men clamour for an order of merit. Why ?  
 Here's black bread on the table, and no wine !  
 At least I am a poet in being poor ;

Thank God. I wonder if the manuscript  
 Of my long poem, if 'twere sold outright,  
 Would fetch enough to buy me shoes, to go  
 A-foot (thrown in, the necessary patch  
 For the other side the Alps)? it cannot be :  
 I fear that I must sell this residue  
 Of my father's books ; although the Elzevirs  
 Have fly-leaves over-written by his hand,  
 In faded notes as thick and fine and brown  
 As cobwebs on a tawny monument  
 Of the old Greeks—*conferenda hæc cum his—*  
*Corruptè citat—lege potiùs,*  
 And so on, in the scholar's regal way  
 Of giving judgment on the parts of speech,  
 As if he sate on all twelve thrones up-piled,  
 Arraigning Israel. Ay, but books and notes  
 Must go together. And this Proclus too,  
 In quaintly dear contracted Grecian types,  
 Fantastically crumpled, like his thoughts  
 Which would not seem too plain ; you go round twice  
 For one step forward, then you take it back,  
 Because you're somewhat giddy ! there's the rule  
 For Proclus. Ah, I stained this middle leaf  
 With pressing in't my Florence iris-bell,  
 Long stalk and all : my father chided me  
 For that stain of blue blood,—I recollect  
 The peevish turn his voice took,—“ Silly girls,  
 Who plant their flowers in our philosophy  
 To make it fine, and only spoil the book !  
 No more of it, Aurora.” Yes—no more !  
 Ah, blame of love, that's sweeter than all praise  
 Of those who love not ! 'tis so lost to me,  
 I cannot, in such beggared life, afford  
 To lose my Proclus. Not for Florence, even.

The kissing Judas, Wolff, shall go instead,  
 Who builds us such a royal book as this  
 To honour a chief-poet, folio-built,  
 And writes above, “ The house of Nobody : ”  
 Who floats in cream, as rich as any sucked  
 From Juno's breasts, the broad Homeric lines,  
 And, while with their spondaic prodigious mouths  
 They lap the lucent margins as babe-gods,  
 Proclaims them bastards. Wolff's an atheist ;

And if the Iliad fell out, as he says,  
By mere fortuitous concourse of old songs,  
We'll guess as much, too, for the universe.

That Wolff, those Platos : sweep the upper shelves  
As clean as this, and so I am almost rich,  
Which means, not forced to think of being poor  
In sight of ends. To-morrow : no delay.  
I'll wait in Paris till good Carrington  
Dispose of such, and, having chaffered for  
My book's price with the publisher, direct  
All proceeds to me. Just a line to ask  
His help.

And now I come, my Italy,  
My own hills! Are you 'ware of me, my hills,  
How I burn toward you? do you feel to-night  
The urgency and yearning of my soul,  
As sleeping mothers feel the sucking babe  
And smile?—Nay, not so much as when, in heat,  
Vain lightnings catch at your inviolate tops,  
And tremble while ye are steadfast. Still, ye go  
Your own determined, calm, indifferent way  
Toward sunrise, shade by shade, and light by light ;  
Of all the grand progression nought left out ;  
As if God verily made you for yourselves,  
And would not interrupt your life with ours.

### SIXTH BOOK.

THE English have a scornful insular way  
Of calling the French light. The levity  
Is in the judgment only, which yet stands ;  
For say a foolish thing but oft enough  
(And here's the secret of a hundred creeds,—  
Men get opinions as boys learn to spell,  
By reiteration chiefly) the same thing  
Shall pass at last for absolutely wise,  
And not with fools exclusively. And so,  
We say the French are light, as if we said  
The cat mews, or the milch-cow gives us milk :  
Say rather, cats are milked, and milch-cows mew ;  
For what is lightness but inconsequence,

Vague fluctuation 'twixt effect and cause,  
 Compelled by neither? Is a bullet light,  
 That dashes from the gun-mouth, while the eye  
 Winks, and the heart beats one, to flatten itself  
 To a wafer on the white speck on a wall  
 A hundred paces off? Even so direct,  
 So sternly undivertible of aim,  
 Is this French people.

All, idealists  
 Too absolute and earnest, with them all  
 The idea of a knife cuts real flesh ;  
 And still, devouring the safe interval  
 Which Nature placed between the thought and act,  
 With those too fiery and impatient souls,  
 They threaten conflagration to the world  
 And rush with most unscrupulous logic on  
 Impossible practice. Set your orators  
 To blow upon them with loud windy mouths  
 Through watchword phrases, jest or sentiment,  
 Which drive our burly brutal English mobs  
 Like so much chaff, whichever way they blow,—  
 This light French people will not thus be driven.  
 They turn, indeed ; but then they turn upon  
 Some central pivot of their thought and choice,  
 And veer out by the force of holding fast.  
 —That's hard to understand, for Englishmen  
 Unused to abstract questions, and untrained  
 To trace the involutions, valve by valve,  
 In each orb'd bulb-root of a general truth,  
 And mark what subtly fine integument  
 Divides opposed compartments. Freedom's self  
 Comes concrete to us, to be understood,  
 Fixed in a feudal form incarnately  
 To suit our ways of thought and reverence,  
 The special form, with us, being still the thing.  
 With us, I say, though I'm of Italy  
 By mother's birth and grave, by father's grave  
 And memory ; let it be,—a poet's heart  
 Can swell to a pair of nationalities,  
 However ill-lodged in a woman's breast.

And so I am strong to love this noble France,  
 This poet of the nations, who dreams on  
 And wails on (while the household goes to wreck)



As worth an artist's study for the folds,  
 As that bronze opposite I nay, the bronze has faults ;  
 Art's here too artful,—conscious as a maid,  
 Who leans to mark her shadow on the wall  
 Until she lose a 'vantage in her step.  
 Yet Art walks forward, and knows where to walk :  
 The artists also, are idealists,  
 'Too absolute for nature, logical  
 To austerity in the application of  
 The special theory : not a soul content  
 To paint a crooked pollard and an ass,  
 As the English will, because they find it so,  
 And like it somehow.—Ah, the old Tuileries  
 Is pulling its high cap down on its eyes,  
 Confounded, conscience-stricken, and amazed  
 By the apparition of a new fair face  
 In those devouring mirrors. Through the grate,  
 Within the gardens, what a heap of babes,  
 Swept up like leaves beneath the chestnut-trees,  
 From every street and alley of the town,  
 By the ghosts perhaps, that blow too bleak this way  
 A-looking for their heads. Dear pretty babes ;  
 I'll wish them luck to have their ball-play out  
 Before the next change comes.—And, farther on,  
 What statues, poised upon their columns fine,  
 As if to stand a moment were a feat,  
 Against that blue ! What squares ! what breathing-room  
 For a nation that runs fast,—ay, runs against  
 The dentist's teeth at the corner, in pale rows,  
 Which grin at progress in an epigram.

I walked the day out, listening to the chink  
 Of the first Napoleon's dry bones, as they lay  
 In his second grave beneath the golden dome  
 That caps all Paris like a bubble. " Shall  
 These dry bones live," thought Louis Philippe once,  
 And lived to know. Herein is argument  
 For kings and politicians, but still more  
 For poets, who bear buckets to the well,  
 Of ampler draught.

These crowds are very good  
 For meditation (when we are very strong),  
 Though love of beauty makes us timorous,  
 And draws us backward from the coarse town-sights



To count the daisies upon dappled fields,  
 And hear the streams bleat on among the hills  
 In innocent and indolent repose ;  
 While still with silken elegiac thoughts  
 We wind out from us the distracting world,  
 And die into the chrysalis of a man,  
 And leave the best that may, to come of us,  
 In some brown moth. Be, rather, bold, and bear  
 To look into the swarthiest face of things,  
 For God's sake who has made them.

Seven days' work ;

The last day shutting 'twixt its dawn and eve,  
 The whole work bettered, of the previous six !  
 Since God collected and resumed in man  
 The firmaments, the strata, and the lights,  
 Fish, fowl, and beast, and insect,—all their trains  
 Of various life caught back upon His arm,  
 Reorganised, and constituted MAN,  
 The microcosm, the adding up of works ;  
 Within whose fluttering nostrils, then, at last,  
 Consummating Himself, the Maker sighed,  
 As some strong winner at the foot-race sighs  
 Touching the goal.

Humanity is great ;

And, if I would not rather pore upon  
 An ounce of common, ugly, human dust,  
 An artisan's palm, or a peasant's brow,  
 Unsmooth, ignoble, save to me and God,  
 Than track old Nilus to his silver roots,  
 And wait on all the changes of the moon  
 Among the mountain-peaks of Thessaly  
 (Until her magic crystal round itself  
 For many a witch to see in)—set it down  
 As weakness,—strength by no means. How is this,  
 That men of science, osteologists  
 And surgeons, beat some poets, in respect  
 For nature,—count nought common or unclean,  
 Spend raptures upon perfect specimens  
 Of indurated veins, distorted joints,  
 Or beautiful new cases of curved spine ;  
 While we, we are shocked at nature's falling off,  
 We dare to shrink back from her warts and blains,  
 We will not, when she sneezes, look at her,

Not even to say "God bless her"? That's our wrong;  
 For that, she will not trust us often with  
 Her larger sense of beauty and desire,  
 But tethers us to a lily or a rose  
 And bids us diet on the dew inside,—  
 Left ignorant that the hungry beggar-boy  
 (Who stares unseen against our absent eyes,  
 And wonders at the gods that we must be,  
 To pass so careless for the oranges!)  
 Bears yet a breastful of a fellow-world  
 To this world, undisparaged, undespoiled,  
 And (while we scorn him for a flower or two,  
 As being, Heaven help us, less poetical)  
 Contains, himself, both flowers and firmaments  
 And surging seas and aspectable stars,  
 And all that we would push him out of sight  
 In order to see nearer. Let us pray  
 God's grace to keep God's image in repute;  
 That so, the poet and philanthropist  
 (Even I and Romney) may stand side by side,  
 Because we both stand face to face with men,  
 Contemplating the people in the rough,—  
 Yet each so follow a vocation,—his  
 And mine.

I walked on, musing with myself  
 On life and art, and whether, after all,  
 A larger metaphysics might not help  
 Our physics, a completer poetry  
 Adjust our daily life and vulgar wants,  
 More fully than the special outside plans,  
 Phalansteries, material institutes,  
 The civil conscriptions and lay monasteries  
 Preferred by modern thinkers, as they thought  
 The bread of man indeed made all his life,  
 And washing seven times in the "People's Baths"  
 Were sovereign for a people's leprosy,—  
 Still leaving out the essential prophet's word  
 That comes in power. On which, we thunder down,  
 We prophets, poets,—Virtue's in the *word!*  
 The maker burnt the darkness up with His,  
 To inaugurate the use of vocal life  
 And, plant a poet's word even, deep enough  
 In any man's breast, looking presently  
 For offshoots, you have done more for the man,

Than if you dressed him in a broad-cloth coat  
 And warmed his Sunday potage at your fire.  
 Yet Romney leaves me . . .

God! what face is that?

O Romney, O Marian!

Walking on the quays

And pulling thoughts to pieces leisurely,  
 As if I caught at grasses in a field,  
 And bit them slow between my absent lips,  
 And shred them with my hands . . .

What face is that?

What a face, what a look, what a likeness! Full on mine  
 The sudden blow of it came down, till all  
 My blood swam, my eyes dazzled. Then I sprang—

It was as if a meditative man  
 Were dreaming out a summer afternoon  
 And watching gnats a-prick upon a pond,  
 When something floats up suddenly, out there,  
 Turns over . . . a dead face, known once alive—  
 So old, so new! It would be dreadful now  
 To lose the sight and keep the doubt of this.  
 He plunges—ha! he has lost it in the splash.

I plunged—I tore the crowd up, either side,  
 And rushed on,—forward, forward . . . after her.  
 Her? whom?

A woman sauntered slow, in front,  
 Munching an apple,—she left off amazed  
 As if I had snatched it: that's not she, at least.  
 A man walked arm-linked with a lady veiled,  
 Both heads dropped closer than the need of talk:  
 They started; he forgot her with his face,  
 And she, herself,—and clung to him as if  
 My look were fatal. Such a stream of folk,  
 And all with cares and business of their own!  
 I ran the whole quay down against their eyes;  
 No Marian; nowhere Marian. Almost, now,  
 I could call Marian, Marian, with the shriek  
 Of desperate creatures calling for the Dead.  
 Where is she, was she? was she anywhere?  
 I stood still, breathless, gazing, straining out  
 In every uncertain distance, till, at last,  
 A gentleman abstracted as myself

Came full against me, then resolved the clash  
 In voluble excuses,—obviously  
 Some learned member of the Institute  
 Upon his way there, walking, for his health,  
 While meditating on the last "Discourse ;"  
 Pinching the empty air 'twixt finger and thumb,  
 From which the snuff being ousted by that shock,  
 Defiled his snow-white waistcoat, duly pricked  
 At the button-hole with honourable red ;  
 "Madame, your pardon,"—there, he swerved from me  
 A metre, as confounded as he had heard  
 That Dumas would be chosen to fill up  
 The next chair vacant, by his "men *in us*."  
 Since when was genius found respectable ?  
 It passes in its place, indeed,—which means  
 The seventh floor back, or else the hospital :  
 Revolving pistols are ingenious things,  
 But prudent men (Academicians are)  
 Scarce keep them in the cupboard, next the prunes.

And so, abandoned to a bitter mirth,  
 I loitered to my inn. O world, O world,  
 O jurists, rhymers, dreamers, what you please,  
 We play a weary game of hide-and-seek !  
 We shape a figure of our fantasy,  
 Call nothing something, and run after it  
 And lose it, lose ourselves too in the search ;  
 Till, clash against us, comes a somebody  
 Who also has lost something and is lost,  
 Philosopher against philanthropist,  
 Academician against poet, man  
 Against woman, against the living, the dead,—  
 Then home, with a bad headache and worse jest !

To change the water for my heliotropes  
 And yellow roses. Paris has such flowers.  
 But England, also. 'Twas a yellow rose,  
 By that south window of the little house,  
 My cousin Romney gathered with his hand  
 On all my birthdays for me, save the last ;  
 And then I shook the tree too rough, too rough,  
 For roses to stay after.

Now, my maps.  
 I must not linger here from Italy

Till the last nightingale is tired of song,  
 And the last fire-fly dies off in the maize.  
 My soul's in haste to leap into the sun  
 And scorch and seethe itself to a finer mood,  
 Which here, in this chill north, is apt to stand  
 Too stiffly in former moulds.

That face persists.

It floats up, it turns over in my mind,  
 As like to Marian, as one dead is like  
 The same alive. In very deed a face  
 And not a fancy, though it vanished so ;  
 The small fair face between the darks of hair,  
 I used to liken, when I saw her first,  
 To a point of moonlit water down a well :  
 The low brow, the frank space between the eyes,  
 Which always had the brown pathetic look  
 Of a dumb creature who had been beaten once,  
 And never since was easy with the world.  
 Ah, ah—now I remember perfectly  
 Those eyes, to-day,—how overlarge they seemed,  
 As if some patient passionate despair  
 (Like a coal dropt and forgot on tapestry,  
 Which slowly burns a widening circle out)  
 Had burnt them larger, larger. And those eyes  
 To-day, I do remember, saw me too,  
 As I saw them, with conscious lids astrain  
 In recognition. Now, a fantasy,  
 A simple shade or image of the brain,  
 Is merely passive, does not retro-act,  
 Is seen, but sees not.

'Twas a real face,

Perhaps a real Marian.

Which being so,

I ought to write to Romney, "Marian's here.  
 Be comforted for Marian."

My pen fell,

My hands struck sharp together, as hands do  
 Which hold at nothing. Can I write to *him*  
 A half truth? can I keep my own soul blind  
 To the other half, . . . the worse? What are our souls,  
 If still, to run on straight a sober pace  
 Nor start at every pebble or dead leat,  
 They must wear blinkers, ignore facts, suppress  
 Six tenths of the road? Confront the truth, my soul!

And oh, as truly as that was Marian's face,  
The arms of that same Marian clasped a thing  
. . . Not hid so well beneath the scanty shawl,  
I cannot name it now for what it was.

A child. Small business has a cast-away  
Like Marian, with that crown of prosperous wives,  
At which the gentlest she grows arrogant  
And says "my child." Who'll find an emerald ring  
On a beggar's middle finger, and require  
More testimony to convict a thief?  
A child's too costly for so mere a wretch;  
She filched it somewhere; and it means, with her,  
Instead of honour, blessing, . . . merely shame.

I cannot write to Romney, "Here she is,  
Here's Marian found! I'll set you on her track:  
I saw her here, in Paris, . . . and her child.  
She put away your love two years ago,  
But, plainly, not to starve. You suffered then;  
And, now that you've forgot her utterly  
As any last year's annual, in whose place  
You've planted a thick flowering evergreen,  
I choose, being kind, to write and tell you this  
To make you wholly easy—she's not dead,  
But only . . . damned."

Stop there: I go too fast;  
I'm cruel like the rest,—in haste to take  
The first stir in the arras for a rat,  
And set my barking, biting thoughts upon't.  
—A child! what then? Suppose a neighbour's sick  
And asked her, "Marian, carry out my child  
In this Spring air,"—I punish her for that?  
Or say, the child should hold her round the neck  
For good child-reasons, that he liked it so  
And would not leave her—she had winning ways—  
I brand her therefore, that she took the child?  
Not so.

I will not write to Romney Leigh.  
For now he's happy,—and she may indeed  
Be guilty,—and the knowledge of her fault  
Would draggle his smooth time. But I, whose days  
Are not so fine they cannot bear the rain,  
And who, moreover, having seen her face,

Must see it again, . . . *will* see it, by my hopes  
 Of one day seeing heaven too. The police  
 Shall track her, hound her, ferret their own soil ;  
 We'll dig this Paris to its catacombs  
 But certainly we'll find her, have her out,  
 And save her, if she will or will not—child  
 Or no child,—if a child, then one to save !

The long weeks passed on without consequence.  
 As easy find a footstep on the sand  
 The morning after spring-tide, as the trace  
 Of Marian's feet between the incessant surfs  
 Of this live flood. She may have moved this way,—  
 But so the star-fish does, and crosses out  
 The dent of her small shoe. The foiled police  
 Renounced me ; “ Could they find a girl and child,  
 No other signalment but girl and child ?  
 No data shown, but noticeable eyes  
 And hair in masses, low upon the brow,  
 As if it were an iron crown and pressed ?  
 Friends heighten, and suppose they specify :  
 Why, girls with hair and eyes, are everywhere  
 In Paris ; they had turned me up in vain  
 No Marian Erle indeed, but certainly  
 Mathildes, Justines, Victoires, . . . or, if I sought  
 The English, Betsis, Saras, by the score.  
 They might as well go out into the fields  
 To find a speckled bean, that's somehow specked,  
 And somewhere in the pod.”—They left me so.  
 Shall *I* leave Marian ? have I dreamed a dream ?

—I thank God I have found her ! I must say  
 “ Thank God,” for finding her, although 'tis true  
 I find the world more sad and wicked for't.  
 But she—

I'll write about her, presently ;  
 My hand's a-tremble as I had just caught up  
 My heart to write with, in the place of it.  
 At least you'd take these letters to be writ  
 At sea, in storm,—wait now . . .

A simple chance  
 Did all. I could not sleep last night, and, tired  
 Of turning on my pillow and harder thoughts,  
 Went out at early morning, when the air

Is delicate with some last starry touch,  
 To wander through the Market-place of Flowers  
 (The prettiest haunt in Paris), and make sure  
 At worst, that there were roses in the world.  
 So, wandering, musing, with the artist's eye,  
 That keeps the shade-side of the thing it loves,  
 Half-absent, whole-observing, while the crowd  
 Of young vivacious and black-braided heads  
 Dipped, quick as finches in a blossomed tree,  
 Among the nosegays, cheapening this and that  
 In such a cheerful twitter of rapid speech,—  
 My heart leapt in me, startled by a voice  
 That slowly, faintly, with long breaths that marked  
 The interval between the wish and word,  
 Inquired in stranger's French, "Would *that* be much,  
 That branch of flowering mountain-gorse?"—"So much?  
 Too much for me, then!" turning the face round  
 So close upon me, that I felt the sigh  
 It turned with.

"Marian, Marian!"—face to face—  
 "Marian! I find you. Shall I let you go?"  
 I held her two slight wrists with both my hands;  
 "Ah Marian, Marian, can I let you go?"  
 —She fluttered from me like a cyclamen,  
 As white, which, taken in a sudden wind,  
 Beats on against the palisade.—"Let pass,"  
 She said at last. "I will not," I replied;  
 "I lost my sister Marian many days,  
 And sought her ever in my walks and prayers,  
 And, now I find her . . . do we throw away  
 The bread we worked and prayed for,—crumble it  
 And drop it, . . . to do even so by thee  
 Whom still I've hungered after more than bread,  
 My sister Marian?—can I hurt thee, dear?  
 Then why distrust me? Never tremble so.  
 Come with me rather, where we'll talk and live,  
 And none shall vex us. I've a home for you  
 And me and no one else" . . .

She shook her head.

"A home for you and me and no one else  
 Ill-suits one of us: I prefer to such,  
 A roof of grass on which a flower might spring,  
 Less costly to me than the cheapest here;  
 And yet I could not, at this hour, afford



A like home, even. That you offer yours,  
 I thank you. You are good as heaven itself—  
 As good as one I knew before . . . Farewell.”  
 I loosed her hands.—“ In *his* name, no farewell ! ”  
 (She stood as if I held her.) “ For his sake,  
 For his sake, Romney’s ! by the good he meant,  
 Ay, always ! by the love he pressed for once,—  
 And by the grief, reproach, abandonment,  
 He took in change ” . . .

“ He, Romney ! who grieved *him* ?  
 Who had the heart for’t ? what reproach touch’d *him* ?  
 Be merciful,—speak quickly.”

“ Therefore come,”  
 I answered with authority,—“ I think  
 We dare to speak such things, and name such names,  
 In the open squares of Paris ! ”

Not a word  
 She said, but, in a gentle humbled way  
 (As one who had forgot herself in grief)  
 Turned round and followed closely where I went,  
 As if I led her by a narrow plank  
 Across devouring waters, step by step,—  
 And so in silence we walked on a mile.

And then she stopped : her face was white as wax.  
 “ We go much farther ? ”

“ You are ill,” I asked,  
 “ Or tired ? ”

She looked the whiter for her smile.  
 “ There’s one at home,” she said, “ has need of me  
 By this time,—and I must not let him wait.”

“ Not even,” I asked, “ to hear of Romney Leigh ? ”  
 “ Not even,” she said, “ to hear of Mister Leigh.”  
 “ In that case,” I resumed, “ I go with you,  
 And we can talk the same thing there as here.  
 None waits for me : I have my day to spend.”

Her lips moved in a spasm without a sound,—  
 But then she spoke. “ It shall be as you please ;  
 And better so—’tis shorter seen than told.  
 And though you will not find me worth your pains,  
*That*, even, may be worth some pains to know,  
 For one as good as you are.” Then she led

P The way, and I, as by a narrow plank

Across devouring waters, followed her,  
 Stepping by her footsteps, breathing by her breath,  
 And holding her with eyes that would not slip ;  
 And so, without a word, we walked a mile,  
 And so, another mile, without a word.

Until the peopled streets being all dismissed,  
 House-rows and groups all scattered like a flock,  
 The market-gardens thickened, and the long  
 White walls beyond, like spiders' outside threads,  
 Stretched, feeling blindly toward the country-fields  
 Through half-built habitations and half-dug  
 Foundations,—intervals of trenchant chalk,  
 That bite betwixt the grassy uneven turfs  
 Where goats (vine-tendrils trailing from their mouths)  
 Stood perched on edges of the cellarage  
 Which should be, staring as about to leap  
 To find their coming Bacchus. All the place  
 Seemed less a cultivation than a waste :  
 Men work here, only,—scarce begin to live :  
 All's sad, the country struggling with the town,  
 Like an untamed hawk upon a strong man's fist,  
 That beats its wings and tries to get away,  
 And cannot choose be satisfied so soon  
 To hop through court-yards with its right foot tied,  
 The vintage plains and pastoral hills in sight !

We stopped beside a house too high and slim  
 To stand there by itself, but waiting till  
 Five others, two on this side, three on that,  
 Should grow up from the sullen second floor  
 They pause at now, to build it to a row.  
 The upper windows partly were unglazed  
 Meantime,—a meagre, unripe house : a line  
 Of rigid poplars elbowed it behind,  
 And, just in front, beyond the lime and bricks  
 That wronged the grass between it and the road,  
 A great acacia, with its slender trunk  
 And overpoise of multitudinous leaves  
 (In which a hundred fields might spill their dew  
 And intense verdure, yet find room enough)  
 Stood, reconciling all the place with green.

I followed up the stair upon her step.  
 She hurried upward, shot across a face,

A woman's on the landing,—“How now, now!  
 Is no one to have holidays but you?  
 You said an hour, and stay three hours, I think,  
 And Julie waiting for your betters here?  
 Why, if he had waked, he might have waked, for me.”  
 —Just murmuring an excusing word she passed  
 And shut the rest out with the chamber-door,  
 Myself shut in beside her.

'Twas a room  
 Scarce larger than a grave, and near as bare;  
 Two stools, a pallet-bed; I saw the room:  
 A mouse could find no sort of shelter in't,  
 Much less a greater secret; curtainless,—  
 The window fixed you with its torturing eye,  
 Defying you to take a step apart,  
 If peradventure you would hide a thing.  
 I saw the whole room, I and Marian there  
 Alone.

Alone? She threw her bonnet off,  
 Then sighing as 'twere sighing the last time,  
 Approached the bed, and drew a shawl away:  
 You could not peel a fruit you fear to bruise  
 More calmly and more carefully than so,—  
 Nor would you find within, a rosier flushed  
 Pomegranate—

There he lay, upon his back,  
 The yearling creature, warm and moist with life  
 To the bottom of his dimples,—to the ends  
 Of the lovely tumbled curls about his face;  
 For since he had been covered over-much  
 To keep him from the light-glare, both his cheeks  
 Were hot and scarlet as the first live rose  
 The shepherd's heart-blood ebb'd away into,  
 The faster for his love. And love was here  
 As instant! in the pretty baby-mouth,  
 Shut close as if for dreaming that it suck'd;  
 The little naked feet drawn up the way  
 Of nestled birdlings; everything so soft  
 And tender,—to the little holdfast hands,  
 Which, closing on a finger into sleep,  
 Had kept the mould of't.

While we stood there dumb,—  
 For oh, that it should take such innocence  
 To prove just guilt, I thought, and stood there dumb;

The light upon his eyelids pricked them wide,  
 And, staring out at us with all their blue,  
 As half perplexed between the angelhood  
 He had been away to visit in his sleep,  
 And our most mortal presence,—gradually  
 He saw his mother's face, accepting it  
 In change for heaven itself, with such a smile  
 As might have well been learnt there,—never moved,  
 But smiled on, in a drowse of ecstasy,  
 So happy (half with her and half with heaven)  
 He could not have the trouble to be stirred,  
 But smiled and lay there. Like a rose, I said:  
 As red and still indeed as any rose,  
 That blows in all the silence of its leaves,  
 Content, in blowing, to fulfil its life.

She leaned above him (drinking him as wine)  
 In that extremity of love, 'twill pass  
 For agony or rapture, seeing that love  
 Includes the whole of nature, rounding it  
 To love . . . no more,—since more can never be  
 Than just love. Self-forgot, cast out of self,  
 And drowning in the transport of the sight,  
 Her whole pale passionate face, mouth, forehead, eyes,  
 One gaze, she stood! then, slowly as he smiled,  
 She smiled too, slowly, smiling unaware,  
 And drawing from his countenance to hers  
 A fainter red, as if she watched a flame  
 And stood in it a-glow. "How beautiful,"  
 Said she.

I answered, trying to be cold  
 (Must sin have compensations, was my thought,  
 As if it were a holy thing like grief?  
 And is a woman to be fooled aside  
 From putting vice down, with that woman's toy,  
 A baby?)—"Ay! the child is well enough,"  
 I answered. "If his mother's palms are clean,  
 They need be glad, of course, in clasping such:  
 But if not,—I would rather lay my hand,  
 Were I she,—on God's brazen altar-bars  
 Red-hot with burning sacrificial lambs,  
 Than touch the sacred curls of such a child."

She plunged her fingers in his clustering locks,  
 As one who would not be afraid of fire;

And then, with indrawn steady utterance, said,—  
 “ My lamb, my lamb ! although, through such as thou,  
 The most unclean got courage and approach  
 To God, once,—now they cannot, even with men,  
 Find grace enough for pity and gentle words.”

“ My Marian,” I made answer, grave and sad,  
 “ The priest who stole a lamb to offer Him,  
 Was still a thief. And if a woman steals  
 (Through God’s own barrier-hedges of true love,  
 Which fence out licence in securing love)  
 A child like this, that smiles so in her face,  
 She is no mother, but a kidnapper,  
 And he’s a dismal orphan . . . not a son ;  
 Whom all her kisses cannot feed so full  
 He will not miss hereafter a pure home  
 To live in, a pure heart to lean against,  
 A pure good mother’s name and memory  
 To hope by, when the world grows thick and bad,  
 And he feels out for virtue.”

“ Oh,” she smiled

With bitter patience, “ the child takes his chance,—  
 Not much worse off in being fatherless  
 Than I was, fathered. He will say, belike,  
 His mother was the saddest creature born ;  
 He’ll say his mother lived so contrary  
 To joy, that even the kindest, seeing her,  
 Grew sometimes almost cruel : he’ll not say  
 She flew contrarious in the face of God  
 With bat-wings of her vices. Stole my child,—  
 My flower of earth, my only flower on earth,  
 My sweet, my beauty !” . . . Up she snatched the child,  
 And, breaking on him in a storm of tears,  
 Drew out her long sobs from their shivering roots,  
 Until he took it for a game, and stretched  
 His feet, and flapped his eager arms like wings,  
 And crowed and gurgled through his infant laugh :  
 “ Mine, mine,” she said ; “ I have as sure a right  
 As any glad proud mother in the world,  
 Who sets her darling down to cut his teeth  
 Upon her church-ring. If she talks of law,  
 I talk of law ! I claim my mother-dues  
 By law,—the law which now is paramount ;  
 The common law, by which the poor and weak

Are trodden underfoot by vicious men,  
 And loathed for ever after by the good  
 Let pass! I did not filch . . . I found the child."

"You found him, Marian?"

"Ay, I found him where  
 I found my curse,—in the gutter, with my shame!  
 What have you, any of you, to say to that,  
 Who all are happy, and sit safe and high,  
 And never spoke before to arraign my right  
 To grief itself? What, what, . . . being beaten down  
 By hoofs of maddened oxen into a ditch,  
 Half-dead, whole mangled . . . when a girl, at last,  
 Breathes, sees . . . and finds there, bedded in her flesh,  
 Because of the overcoming shock perhaps,  
 Some coin of price! . . . and when a good man comes  
 (That's God! the best men are not quite as good)  
 And says, 'I dropped the coin there: take it, you,  
 'And keep it,—it shall pay you for the loss,'—  
 You all put up your finger—'See the thief!  
 'Observe that precious thing she has come to filch!  
 'How bad those girls are!' Oh, my flower, my pet,  
 I dare forget I have you in my arms,  
 And fly off to be angry with the world,  
 And fright you, hurt you with my tempers, till  
 You double up your lip? Ah, that indeed  
 Is bad: a naughty mother!"

"You mistake,"

I interrupted; "if I loved you not,  
 I should not, Marian, certainly be here."

"Alas," she said, "you are so very good;  
 And yet I wish, indeed, you had never come  
 To make me sob until I vex the child.  
 It is not wholesome for these pleasure-plants  
 To be so early watered by our brine.  
 And then, who knows? he may not like me now  
 As well, perhaps, as ere he saw me fret,—  
 One's ugly fretting! he has eyes the same  
 As angels, but he cannot see as deep,  
 And so I've kept for ever in his sight  
 A sort of smile to please him,—as you place  
 A green thing from the garden in a cup,  
 To make believe it grows there. Look, my sweet,

My cowslip-ball! we've done with that cross face,  
 And here's the face come back you used to like.  
 Ah, ah! he laughs! he likes me. Ah, Miss Leigh,  
 You're great and pure; but were you purer still,—  
 As if you had walked, we'll say, no otherwhere  
 Than up and down the New Jerusalem,  
 And held your trailing lutestring up yourself  
 From brushing the twelve stones, for fear of some  
 Small speck as little as a needle-prick,  
 White stitched on white,—the child would keep to *me*,  
 Would choose his poor lost Marian, like me best,  
 And, though you stretched your arms, cry back and cling,  
 As we do, when God says it's time to die  
 And bids us go up higher. Leave us, then;  
 We two are happy. Does *he* push me off?  
 He's satisfied with me, as I with him."

"So soft to one, so hard to others! Nay,"  
 I cried, more angry that she melted me,  
 "We make henceforth a cushion of our faults  
 To sit and practise easy virtues on?  
 I thought a child was given to sanctify  
 A woman,—set her in the sight of all  
 The clear-eyed Heavens, a chosen minister  
 To do their business and lead spirits up  
 The difficult blue heights. A woman lives,  
 Not bettered, quickened toward the truth and good  
 Through being a mother? . . . then she's none! although  
 She damps her baby's cheeks by kissing them,  
 As we kill roses."

"Kill! O Christ," she said,  
 And turned her wild sad face from side to side.  
 With most despairing wonder in it—"What,  
 What have you in your souls against me then,  
 All of you? am I wicked, do you think?  
 God knows me, trusts me with the child! but you,  
 You think me really wicked?"

"Complaisant,"  
 I answered softly, "to a wrong you've done,  
 Because of certain profits,—which is wrong  
 Beyond the first wrong, Marian. When you left  
 The pure place and the noble heart, to take  
 The hand of a seducer" . . .

“Whom? whose hand?”

I took the hand of” . . .

Springing up erect,  
 And lifting up the child at full arm's length,  
 As if to bear him like an oriflamme  
 Unconquerable to armies of reproach,—  
 “By *him*,” she said, “my child's head and its curls,  
 By those blue eyes no woman born could dare  
 A perjury on, I make my mother's oath,  
 That if I left that Heart, to lighten it,  
 The blood of mine was still, except for grief!  
 No cleaner maid than I was, took a step  
 To a sadder end,—no matron-mother now  
 Looks backward to her early maidenhood  
 Through chaster pulses. I speak steadily:  
 And if I lie so, . . . if, being fouled in will  
 And paltered with in soul by devil's lust,  
 I dared to bid this angel take my part, . . .  
 Would God sit quiet, let us think, in heaven,  
 Nor strike me dumb with thunder? Yet I speak:  
 He clears me therefore. What, ‘seduced’ 's your word?  
 Do wolves seduce a wandering fawn in France?  
 Do eagles, who have pinched a lamb with claws,  
 Seduce it into carrion? So with me.  
 I was not ever, as you say, seduced,  
 But simply, murdered.”

There she paused, and sighed,  
 With such a sigh as drops from agony  
 To exhaustion,—sighing while she let the babe  
 Slide down upon her bosom from her arms,  
 And all her face's light fell after him,  
 Like a torch quenched in falling. Down she sank,  
 And sate upon the bedside with the child.

But I, convicted, broken utterly,  
 With woman's passion clung about her waist,  
 And kissed her hair and eyes,—“I have been wrong,  
 Sweet Marian” . . . (weeping in a tender rage)  
 “Sweet holy Marian! And now, Marian, now,  
 I'll use your oath although my lips are hard,  
 And by the child, my Marian, by the child,  
 I'll swear his mother shall be innocent  
 Before my conscience, as in the open Book  
 Of Him who reads for judgment. Innocent,



My sister ! let the night be ne'er so dark,  
 The moon is surely somewhere in the sky ;  
 So surely is your whiteness to be found  
 Through all dark facts. But pardon, pardon me,  
 And smile a little, Marian,—for the child,  
 If not for me, my sister."

The poor lip

Just motioned for the smile and let it go :  
 And then, with scarce a stirring of the mouth,  
 As if a statue spoke that could not breathe,  
 But spoke on calm between its marble lips,—  
 "I'm glad, I'm very glad you clear me so.  
 I should be sorry that you set me down  
 With harlots, or with even a better name  
 Which misbecomes his mother. For the rest,  
 I am not on a level with your love,  
 Nor ever was, you know,—but now am worse,  
 Because that world of yours has dealt with me  
 As when the hard sea bites and chews a stone  
 And changes the first form of it. I've marked  
 A shore of pebbles bitten to one shape  
 From all the various life of madrepores ;  
 And so, that little stone, called Marian Erle,  
 Picked up and dropped by you and another friend,  
 Was ground and tortured by the incessant sea  
 And bruised from what she was,—changed ! death's  
 a change,  
 And she, I said, was murdered ; Marian's dead.  
 What can you do with people when they are dead,  
 But, if you are pious, sing a hymn and go,  
 Or, if you are tender, heave a sigh and go,  
 But go by all means,—and permit the grass  
 To keep its green feud up 'twixt them and you ?  
 Then leave me,—let me rest. I'm dead, I say.  
 And if, to save the child from death as well,  
 The mother in me has survived the rest,  
 Why, that's God's miracle you must not tax,—  
 I'm not less dead for that : I'm nothing more  
 But just a mother. Only for the child,  
 I'm warm, and cold, and hungry, and afraid,  
 And smell the flowers a little, and see the sun,  
 And speak still, and am silent,—just for him !  
 I pray you therefore to mistake me not,  
 And treat me, haply, as I were alive ;

For though you ran a pin into my soul,  
 I think it would not hurt nor trouble me.  
 Here's proof, dear lady,—in the market-place  
 But now, you promised me to say a word  
 About . . . a friend, who once, long years ago,  
 Took God's place toward me, when He draws and  
 loves

And does not thunder, . . . whom at last I left,  
 As all of us leave God. You thought perhaps  
 I seemed to care for hearing of that friend?  
 Now, judge me! we have sate here half an hour  
 And talked together of the child and me,  
 And I not asked as much as, 'What's the thing  
 'You had to tell me of the friend . . . the friend?'  
 He's sad, I think you said,—he's sick perhaps?  
 It's nought to Marian if he's sad or sick.  
 Another would have crawled beside your foot  
 And prayed your words out. Why, a beast, a dog,  
 A starved cat, if he had fed it once with milk,  
 Would show less hardness. But I'm dead, you see,  
 And that explains it."

Poor, poor thing, she spoke  
 And shook her head, as white and calm as frost  
 On days too cold for raining any more,  
 But still with such a face, so much alive,  
 I could not choose but take it on my arm  
 And stroke the placid patience of its cheeks,—  
 Then told my story out, of Romney Leigh,  
 How, having lost her, sought her, missed her still,  
 He, broken-hearted for himself and her,  
 Had drawn the curtains of the world awhile  
 As if he had done with morning. There I stopped,  
 For when she gasped, and pressed me with her eyes,  
 "And now . . . how is it with him? tell me now,"—  
 I felt the shame of compensated grief,  
 And chose my words with scruple—slowly stepped  
 Upon the slippery stones set here and there  
 Across the sliding water. "Certainly,  
 As evening empties morning into night,  
 Another morning takes the evening up  
 With healthful, providential interchange;  
 And, though he thought still of her,"—

"Yes, she knew,

She understood: she had supposed, indeed,

That, as one stops a hole upon a flute,  
 At which a new note comes and shapes the tune,  
 Excluding her would bring a worthier in.  
 And, long ere this, that Lady Waldemar  
 He loved so" . . .

"Loved," I started,—“loved her so!  
 Now tell me" . . .

"I will tell you," she replied:  
 "But since we're taking oaths, you'll promise first  
 That he, in England, he, shall never learn  
 In what a dreadful trap his creature here,  
 Round whose unworthy neck he had meant to tie  
 The honourable ribbon of his name,  
 Fell unaware, and came to butchery:  
 Because,—I know him,—as he takes to heart  
 The grief of every stranger, he's not like  
 To banish mine as far as I should choose  
 In wishing him most happy. Now he leaves  
 To think of me, perverse, who went my way,  
 Unkind, and left him,—but if once he knew . . .  
 Ah, then, the sharp nail of my cruel wrong  
 Would fasten me for ever in his sight,  
 Like some poor curious bird, through each spread wing  
 Nailed high up over a fierce hunter's fire,  
 To spoil the dinner of all tenderer folk  
 Come in by chance. Nay, since your Marian's dead,  
 You shall not hang her up, but dig a hole  
 And bury her in silence! ring no bells."

I answered gaily, though my whole voice wept;  
 "We'll ring the joy-bells, not the funeral-bells,  
 Because we have her back, dead or alive."

She never answered that, but shook her head;  
 Then low and calm, as one who, safe in heaven,  
 Shall tell a story of his lower life,  
 Unmoved by shame or anger,—so she spoke.  
 She told me she had loved upon her knees,  
 As others pray, more perfectly absorbed  
 In the act and aspiration. She felt his,  
 For just his uses, not her own at all,  
 His stool, to sit on, or put up his foot,  
 His cup, to fill with wine or vinegar,  
 Whichever drink might please him at the chance,

For that should please her always : let him write  
 His name upon her . . . it seemed natural ;  
 It was most precious, standing on his shelf,  
 To wait until he chose to lift his hand.  
 Well, well,—I saw her then, and must have seen  
 How bright her life went, floating on her love,  
 Like wicks the housewives send afloat on oil,  
 Which feeds them to a flame that lasts the night.

To do good seemed so much his business,  
 That, having done it, she was fain to think,  
 Must fill up his capacity for joy.  
 At first she never mooted with herself  
 If *he* was happy, since he made her so,  
 Or if *he* loved her, being so much beloved :  
 Who thinks of asking if the sun is light,  
 Observing that it lightens ? who's so bold,  
 To question God of His felicity ?  
 Still less. And thus she took for granted first,  
 What first of all she should have put to proof,  
 And sinned against him so, but only so.  
 "What could you hope," she said, "of such as she ?  
 You take a kid you like, and turn it out  
 In some fair garden ; though the creature's fond  
 And gentle, it will leap upon the beds  
 And break your tulips, bite your tender trees :  
 The wonder would be if such innocence  
 Spoiled less. A garden is no place for kids."

And, by degrees, when he who had chosen her,  
 Brought in his courteous and benignant friends  
 To spend their goodness on her, which she took  
 So very gladly, as a part of his,—  
 By slow degrees, it broke on her slow sense,  
 That she, too, in that Eden of delight  
 Was out of place, and, like the silly kid,  
 Still did most mischief where she meant most love.  
 A thought enough to make a woman mad  
 (No beast in this, but she may well go mad)  
 That, saying "I am thine to love and use,"  
 May blow the plague in her protesting breath  
 To the very man for whom she claims to die,—  
 That, clinging round his neck, she pulls him down  
 And drowns him,—and that, lavishing her soul,

She hales perdition on him. "So, being mad,"  
Said Marian . . .

"Ah—who stirred such thoughts, you ask?  
Whose fault it was, that she should have such thoughts?  
None's fault, none's fault. The light comes, and we see :  
But if it were not truly for our eyes,  
There would be nothing seen, for all the light ;  
And so with Marian. If she saw at last,  
The sense was in her,—Lady Waldemar  
Had spoken all in vain else."

"O my heart,  
O prophet in my heart," I cried aloud,  
"Then Lady Waldemar spoke !"

"*Did she speak,*"  
Mused Marian softly—"or did she only sign?  
Or did she put a word into her face  
And look, and so impress you with the word?  
Or leave it in the foldings of her gown,  
Like rosemary smells, a movement will shake out  
When no one's conscious? who shall say, or guess?  
One thing alone was certain,—from the day  
The gracious lady paid a visit first,  
She, Marian, saw things different,—felt distrust  
Of all that sheltering roof of circumstance  
Her hopes were building into with clay nests :  
Her heart was restless, pacing up and down  
And fluttering, like dumb creatures before storms,  
Not knowing wherefore she was ill at ease."

"And still the lady came," said Marian Erle,  
"Much oftener than *he* knew it, Mister Leigh.  
She bade me never tell him that she had come,  
She liked to love me better than he knew,  
So very kind was Lady Waldemar :  
And every time she brought with her more light,  
And every light made sorrow clearer . . . Well,  
Ah, well! we cannot give her blame for that ;  
"Twould be the same thing if an angel came,  
Whose right should prove our wrong. And every time  
The lady came, she looked more beautiful,  
And spoke more like a flute among green trees,  
Until at last, as one, whose heart being sad  
On hearing lovely music, suddenly  
Dissolves in weeping, I brake out in tears

Before her . . . asked her counsel . . . 'had I erred  
 'In being too happy? would she set me straight?  
 'For she, being wise and good and born above  
 'The flats I had never climbed from, could perceive  
 'If such as I might grow upon the hills;  
 'And whether such poor herb sufficed to grow,  
 'For Romney Leigh to break his fast upon't,—  
 'Or would he pine on such, or haply starve?'  
 She wrapt me in her generous arms at once,  
 And let me dream a moment how it feels  
 To have a real mother, like some girls:  
 But when I looked, her face was younger . . . ay,  
 Youth's too bright not to be a little hard,  
 And beauty keeps itself still uppermost,  
 That's true!—Though Lady Waldemar was kind,  
 She hurt me, hurt, as if the morning-sun  
 Should smite us on the eyelids when we sleep,  
 And wake us up with headache. Ay, and soon  
 Was light enough to make my heart ache too:  
 She told me truths I asked for . . . 'twas my fault . . .  
 'That Romney could not love me, if he would,  
 'As men call loving; there are bloods that flow  
 'Together, like some rivers, and not mix,  
 'Through contraries of nature. He indeed  
 'Was set to wed me, to espouse my class,  
 'Act out a rash opinion,—and, once wed,  
 'So just a man and gentle, could not choose  
 'But make my life as smooth as marriage-ring,  
 'Bespeak me mildly, keep me a cheerful house,  
 'With servants, brooches, all the flowers I liked,  
 'And pretty dresses, silk the whole year round' . . .  
 At which I stopped her,—'This for me. And now  
 'For *him*.'—She murmured,—truth grew difficult;  
 She owned, 'Twas plain a man like Romney Leigh  
 'Required a wife more level to himself.  
 'If day by day he had to bend his height  
 'To pick up sympathies, opinions, thoughts,  
 'And interchange the common talk of life  
 'Which helps a man to live as well as talk,  
 'His days were heavily taxed. Who buys a staff  
 'To fit the hand, that reaches but the knee?  
 'He'd feel it bitter to be forced to miss  
 'The perfect joy of married suited pairs,  
 'Who, bursting through the separating hedge

'Of personal dues with that sweet eglantine  
 'Of equal love, keep saying, "So *we* think,  
 "'It strikes *us*,—that's *our* fancy."—When I asked  
 If earnest will, devoted love, employed  
 In youth like mine, would fail to raise me up,—  
 As two strong arms will always raise a child  
 To a fruit hung overhead? she sighed and sighed . . .  
 'That could not be,' she feared. 'You take a pink,  
 'You dig about its roots and water it,  
 'And so improve it to a garden-pink,  
 'But will not change it to a heliotrope :  
 'The kind remains. And then, the harder truth—  
 'This Romney Leigh, so rash to leap a pale,  
 'So bold for conscience, quick for martyrdom,  
 'Would suffer steadily and never flinch,  
 'But suffer surely and keenly, when his class  
 'Turned shoulder on him for a shameful match,  
 'And set him up as nine-pin in their talk,  
 'To bowl him down with jestings.'—There, she paused ;  
 And when I used the pause in doubting that  
 We wronged him after all in what we feared—  
 'Suppose such things should never touch him, more  
 'In his high conscience (if the things should be)  
 'Than, when the queen sits in an upper room,  
 'The horses in the street can spatter her !'—  
 A moment, hope came,—but the lady closed  
 That door and nicked the lock, and shut it out,  
 Observing wisely that, 'the tender heart  
 'Which made him over-soft to a lower class,  
 'Could scarcely fail to make him sensitive  
 'To a higher,—how they thought, and what they felt.'

"Alas, alas," said Marian, rocking slow  
 The pretty baby who was near asleep,  
 The eyelids creeping over the blue balls,—  
 "She made it clear, too clear—I saw the whole !  
 And yet who knows if I had seen my way  
 Straight out of it, by looking, though 'twas clear,  
 Unless the generous lady, 'ware of this,  
 Had set her own house all a-fire for me,  
 To light me forwards? Leaning on my face  
 Her heavy agate eyes which crushed my will,  
 She told me tenderly (as when men come  
 To a bedside to tell people they must die)

'She knew of knowledge,—ay, of knowledge, knew,  
 'That Romney Leigh had loved *her* formerly;  
 'And *she* loved *him*, she might say, now the chance  
 'Was past . . . but that, of course, he never guessed,—  
 'For something came between them . . . something thin—  
 'As a cobweb . . . catching every fly of doubt  
 'To hold it buzzing at the window-pane  
 'And help to dim the daylight. Ah, man's pride  
 'Or woman's—which is greatest? most averse  
 'To brushing cobwebs? Well, but she and he  
 'Remained fast friends; it seemed not more than so,  
 'Because he had bound his hands and could not stir:  
 'An honourable man, if somewhat rash;  
 'And she, not even for Romney, would she spill  
 'A blot . . . as little even as a tear . . .  
 'Upon his marriage-contract,—not to gain  
 'A better joy for two than came by that!  
 'For, though I stood between her heart and heaven,  
 'She loved me wholly.'”

Did I laugh or curse?

I think I sate there silent, hearing all,  
 Ay, hearing double,—Marian's tale, at once,  
 And Romney's marriage-vow, "*I'll keep to THEE,*"  
 Which means that woman-serpent. Is it time  
 For church now?

“Lady Waldemar spoke more,”

Continued Marian, “but, as when a soul  
 Will pass out through the sweetness of a song  
 Beyond it, voyaging the uphill road,—  
 Even so, mine wandered from the things I heard,  
 To those I suffered. It was afterward  
 I shaped the resolution to the act.  
 For many hours we talked. What need to talk?  
 The fate was clear and close; it touched my eyes;  
 But still the generous lady tried to keep  
 The case afloat, and would not let it go,  
 And argued, struggled upon Marian's side,  
 Which was not Romney's! though she little knew  
 What ugly monster would take up the end,—  
 What griping death within the drowning death  
 Was ready to complete my sum of death.”

I thought,—Perhaps he's sliding now the ring  
 Upon that woman's finger . . .



She went on :

“The lady, failing to prevail her way,  
 Uppgathered my torn wishes from the ground,  
 And pieced them with her strong benevolence ;  
 And, as I thought I could breathe freer air  
 Away from England, going without pause,  
 Without farewell,—just breaking with a jerk  
 The blossomed offshoot from my thorny life,—  
 She promised kindly to provide the means,  
 With instant passage to the colonies  
 And full protection,—‘ would commit me straight  
 ‘ To one who once had been her waiting-maid  
 ‘ And had the customs of the world, intent  
 ‘ On changing England for Australia  
 ‘ Herself, to carry out her fortune so.’  
 For which I thanked the Lady Waldemar,  
 As men upon their death-beds thank last friends  
 Who lay the pillow straight : it is not much,  
 And yet ’tis all of which they are capable,  
 This lying smoothly in a bed to die.  
 And so, twas fixed ;—and so, from day to day,  
 The woman named, came in to visit me.”

Just then, the girl stopped speaking,—sate erect,  
 And stared at me as if I had been a ghost  
 (Perhaps I looked as white as any ghost)  
 With large-eyed horror. “Does God make,” she said,  
 “All sorts of creatures, really, do you think?  
 Or is it that the Devil slavers them  
 So excellently, that we come to doubt  
 Who’s strongest, He who makes, or he who mars?  
 I never liked the woman’s face, or voice,  
 Or ways : it made me blush to look at her ;  
 It made me tremble if she touched my hand ;  
 And when she spoke a fondling word, I shrank,  
 As if one hated me, who had power to hurt ;  
 And, every time she came, my veins ran cold,  
 As somebody were walking on my grave.  
 At last I spoke to Lady Waldemar :  
 ‘ Could such an one be good to trust ? ’ I asked.  
 Whereat the lady stroked my cheek and laughed  
 Her silver-laugh—(one must be born to laugh,  
 To put such music in it) ‘ Foolish girl,  
 ‘ Your scattered wits are gathering wool beyond

'The sheep-walk reaches!—leave the thing to me.'  
 And therefore, half in trust, and half in scorn  
 That I had heart still for another fear  
 In such a safe despair, I left the thing.

"The rest is short. I was obedient:  
 I wrote my letter which delivered *him*  
 From Marian, to his own prosperities,  
 And followed that bad guide. The lady?—hush,—  
 I never blame the lady. Ladies who  
 Sit high, however willing to look down,  
 Will scarce see lower than their dainty feet:  
 And Lady Waldemar saw less than I,  
 With what a Devil's daughter I went forth  
 The swine's road, headlong over a precipice,  
 In such a curl of hell-foam caught and choked,  
 No shriek of soul in anguish could pierce through  
 To fetch some help. They say there's help in heaven  
 For all such cries. But if one cries from hell . . .  
 What then?—the heavens are deaf upon that side.

"A woman . . . hear me,—let me make it plain,—  
 A woman . . . not a monster . . . both her breasts  
 Made right to suckle babes . . . she took me off,  
 A woman also, young and ignorant,  
 And heavy with my grief, my two poor eyes  
 Near washed away with weeping, till the trees,  
 The blessed unaccustomed trees and fields,  
 Ran either side the train, like stranger dogs  
 Unworthy of any notice,—took me off,  
 So dull, so blind, and only half alive,  
 Not seeing by what road, nor by what ship,  
 Nor toward what place, nor to what end of all.—  
 Men carry a corpse thus,—past the doorway, past  
 The garden-gate, the children's playground, up  
 The green lane,—then they leave it in the pit,  
 To sleep and find corruption, cheek to cheek  
 With him who stinks since Friday.

"But suppose;  
 To go down with one's soul into the grave,—  
 To go down half dead, half alive, I say,  
 And wake up with corruption, . . . cheek to cheek  
 With him who stinks since Friday! There it is,  
 And that's the horror of 't, Miss Leigh.

“You feel?”

You understand?—no, do not look at me,  
 But understand. The blank, blind, weary way  
 Which led . . . where'er it led . . . away, at least;  
 The shifted ship . . . to Sydney or to France . . .  
 Still bound, wherever else, to another land;  
 The swooning sickness on the dismal sea,  
 The foreign shore, the shameful house, the night,  
 The feeble blood, the heavy-headed grief, . . .  
 No need to bring their damnable drugged cup,  
 And yet they brought it! Hell's so prodigal  
 Of devil's gifts . . . hunts liberally in packs,  
 Will kill no poor small creature of the wilds  
 But fifty red white throats must smoke at it,—  
 As HIS at me . . . when waking up at last . . .  
 I told you that I waked up in the grave.

“Enough so!—it is plain enough so. True,  
 We wretches cannot tell out all our wrong,  
 Without offence to decent happy folk.  
 I know that we must scrupulously hint  
 With half-words, delicate reserves, the thing  
 Which no one scrupled we should feel in full.  
 Let pass the rest, then; only leave my oath  
 Upon this sleeping child,—man's violence,  
 Not man's seduction, made me what I am,  
 As lost as . . . I told *him* I should be lost;  
 When mothers fail us, can we help ourselves?  
 That's fatal!—And you call it being lost,  
 That down came next day's noon and caught me there  
 Half gibbering and half raving on the floor,  
 And wondering what had happened up in heaven,  
 That suns should dare to shine when God Himself  
 Was certainly abolished.

“I was mad,—

How many weeks, I know not,—many weeks.  
 I think they let me go, when I was mad,  
 They feared my eyes and loosed me, as boys might  
 A mad dog which they had tortured. Up and down  
 I went, by road and village, over tracts  
 Of open foreign country, large and strange,  
 Crossed everywhere by long thin poplar-lines  
 Like fingers of some ghastly skeleton Hand  
 Through sunlight and through moonlight evermore.

Pushed out from hell itself to pluck me back,  
 And resolute to get me, slow and sure ;  
 While every roadside Christ upon his cross  
 Hung reddening through his gory wounds at me,  
 And shook his nails in anger, and came down  
 To follow a mile after, wading up  
 The low vines and green wheat, crying ' Take the girl !  
 ' She's none of mine from henceforth.' Then, I knew  
 (But this is somewhat dimmer than the rest),  
 The charitable peasants gave me bread,  
 And leave to sleep in straw : and twice they tied,  
 At parting, Mary's image round my neck—  
 How heavy it seemed ! as heavy as a stone ;  
 A woman has been strangled with less weight :  
 I threw it in a ditch to keep it clean  
 And ease my breath a little, when none looked ;  
 I did not need such safeguards :—brutal men  
 Stopped short, Miss Leigh, in insult, when they had seen  
 My face,—I must have had an awful look.  
 And so I lived : the weeks passed on,—I lived.  
 'Twas living my old tramp-life o'er again,  
 But, this time, in a dream, and hunted round  
 By some prodigious Dream-fear at my back  
 Which ended, yet : my brain cleared presently,  
 And there I sate, one evening, by the road,  
 I, Marian Erle, myself, alone, undone,  
 Facing a sunset low upon the flats,  
 As if it were the finish of all time,—  
 The great red stone upon my sepulchre,  
 Which angels were too weak to roll away.

## SEVENTH BOOK.

" THE woman's motive ? shall we daub ourselves  
 With finding roots for nettles ? 'tis soft clay  
 And easily explored. She had the means,  
 The monies, by the lady's liberal grace,  
 In trust for that Australian scheme and me,  
 Which so, that she might clutch with both her hands,  
 And chink to her naughty uses undisturbed,  
 She served me (after all it was not strange ;  
 'Twas only what my mother would have done)  
 A motherly, unmerciful, good turn.

“ Well, after. There are nettles everywhere,  
 But smooth green grasses are more common still ;  
 The blue of heaven is larger than the cloud ;  
 A miller’s wife at Clichy took me in  
 And spent her pity on me,—made me calm,  
 And merely very reasonably sad.  
 She found me a servant’s place in Paris where  
 I tried to take the cast-off life again,  
 And stood as quiet as a beaten ass,  
 Who, having fallen through overloads, stands up  
 To let them charge him with another pack.

“ A few months, so. My mistress, young and light,  
 Was easy with me, less for kindness than  
 Because she led, herself, an easy time  
 Betwixt her lover and her looking-glass,  
 Scarce knowing which way she was praised the most.  
 She felt so pretty and so pleased all day,  
 She could not take the trouble to be cross,  
 But, sometimes, as I stooped to tie her shoe,  
 Would tap me softly with her slender foot,  
 Still restless with the last night’s dancing in’t,  
 And say, ‘ Fie, pale-face ! are you English girls  
 ‘ All grave and silent ? mass-book still, and Lent ?  
 ‘ And first-communion colours on your cheeks,  
 ‘ Worn past the time for’t ? little fool, be gay !’  
 At which she vanished, like a fairy, through  
 A gap of silver laughter.

“ Came an hour  
 When all went otherwise. She did not speak,  
 But clenched her brows, and clipped me with her eyes  
 As if a viper with a pair of tongs,  
 Too far for any touch, yet near enough  
 To view the writhing creature,—then at last ;  
 ‘ Stand still there, in the holy Virgin’s name,  
 ‘ Thou Marian ; thou’rt no reputable girl,  
 ‘ Although sufficient dull for twenty saints !  
 ‘ I think thou mock’st me and my house,’ she said ;  
 ‘ Confess, thou’lt be a mother in a month,  
 ‘ Thou mask of saintship.’

“ Could I answer her ?  
 The light broke in so : it meant *that* then, *that* ?  
 I had not thought of that, in all my thoughts,—  
 Through all the cold, numb aching of my brow,

Through all the heaving of impatient life  
 Which threw me on death at intervals,—through all  
 The upbreak of the fountains of my heart  
 The rains had swelled too large : it could mean *that* ?  
 Did God make mothers out of victims, then,  
 And set such pure amens to hideous deeds ?  
 Why not ? He overblows an ugly grave  
 With violets which blossom in the spring.  
 And *I* could be a mother in a month !  
 I hope it was not wicked to be glad.  
 I lifted up my voice and wept, and laughed,  
 To heaven, not her, until it tore my throat.  
 ‘Confess, confess !’ what was there to confess,  
 Except man’s cruelty, except my wrong ?  
 Except this anguish, or this ecstasy ?  
 This shame, or glory ? The light woman there  
 Was small to take it in : an acorn-cup  
 Would take the sea in sooner.

“ ‘Good,’ she cried ;  
 ‘Unmarried and a mother, and she laughs !  
 ‘These unchaste girls are always impudent.  
 ‘Get out, intriguer ! leave my house, and trot :  
 ‘I wonder you should look me in the face,  
 ‘With such a filthy secret.’

“Then I rolled  
 My scanty bundle up, and went my way,  
 Washed white with weeping, shuddering head and foot  
 With blind hysteric passion, staggering forth  
 Beyond those doors. ‘Twas natural, of course,  
 She should not ask me where I meant to sleep ;  
 I might sleep well beneath the heavy Seine,  
 Like others of my sort ; the bed was laid  
 For us. But any woman, womanly,  
 Had thought of him who should be in a month,  
 The sinless babe that should be in a month,  
 And if by chance he might be warmer housed  
 Than underneath such dreary, dripping eaves.”

I broke on Marian there. “Yet she herself,  
 A wife, I think, had scandals of her own,  
 A lover, not her husband.”

“Ay,” she said,  
 “But gold and meal are measured otherwise ;  
 I learnt so much at school,” said Marian Erle.

“O crooked world,” I cried, “ridiculous  
 If not so lamentable! It’s the way  
 With these light women of a thrifty vice,  
 My Marian,—always hard upon the rent  
 In any sister’s virtue! while they keep  
 Their chastity so darned with perfidy,  
 That, though a rag itself, it looks as well  
 Across a street, in balcony or coach,  
 As any stronger stuff might. For my part,  
 I’d rather take the wind-side of the stews  
 Than touch such women with my finger-end!  
 They top the poor street-walker by their lie,  
 And look the better for being so much worse:  
 The devil’s most devilish when respectable.  
 But you, dear, and your story?”

“All the rest  
 Is here,” she said, and signed upon the child.  
 “I found a mistress-sempstress who was kind,  
 And let me sew in peace among her girls;  
 And what was better than to draw the threads  
 All day and half the night, for him, and him?  
 And so I lived for him, and so he lives,  
 And so I know, by this time, God lives too.”

She smiled beyond the sun, and ended so,  
 And all my soul rose up to take her part  
 Against the world’s successes, virtues, fames.  
 “Come with me, sweetest sister,” I returned,  
 “And sit within my house, and do me good  
 From henceforth, thou and thine! ye are my own  
 From henceforth. I am lonely in the world,  
 And thou art lonely, and the child is half  
 An orphan. Come,—and, henceforth, thou and I  
 Being still together, will not miss a friend,  
 Nor he a father, since two mothers shall  
 Make that up to him. I am journeying south,  
 And in my Tuscan home I’ll find a niche,  
 And set thee there, my saint, the child and thee,  
 And burn the lights of love before thy face,  
 And ever at thy sweet look cross myself  
 From mixing with the world’s prosperities;  
 That so, in gravity and holy calm,  
 We two may live on toward the truer life.”

She looked me in the face and answered not,  
 Nor signed she was unworthy, nor gave thanks,  
 But took the sleeping child and held it out  
 To meet my kiss, as if requiting me  
 And trusting me at once. And thus, at once,  
 I carried him and her to where I lived ;  
 She's there now, in the little room, asleep,  
 I hear the soft child-breathing through the door ;  
 And all three of us, at to-morrow's break,  
 Pass onward, homeward, to our Italy.  
 Oh, Romney Leigh, I have your debts to pay,  
 And I'll be just and pay them.

But yourself!

To pay your debts is scarcely difficult ;  
 To buy your life is nearly impossible,  
 Being sold away to Lamia. My head aches ;  
 I cannot see my road along this dark ;  
 Nor can I creep and grope, as fits the dark,  
 For these foot-catching robes of womanhood :  
 A man might walk a little . . . but I !—He loves  
 The Lamia-woman,—and I, write to him  
 What stops his marriage, and destroys his peace,—  
 Or what, perhaps, shall simply trouble him,  
 Until she only need to touch his sleeve  
 With just a finger's tremulous white flame,  
 Saying, " Ah,—Aurora Leigh ! a pretty tale,  
 A very pretty poet ! I can guess  
 The motive "—then, to catch his eyes in hers,  
 And vow she does not wonder,—and they two  
 To break in laughter, as the sea along  
 A melancholy coast, and float up higher,  
 In such a laugh, their fatal weeds of love !  
 Ay, fatal, ay. And who shall answer me  
 Fate has not hurried tides ; and if to-night  
 My letter would not be a night too late,—  
 An arrow shot into a man that's dead,  
 To prove a vain intention ? Would I show  
 The new wife vile, to make the husband mad ?  
 No, Lamia ! shut the shutters, bar the doors  
 From every glimmer on thy serpent-skin !  
 I will not let thy hideous secret out  
 To agonise the man I love—I mean  
 The friend I love . . . as friends love. It is strange,  
 To-day while Marian told her story, like



To absorb most listeners, how I listened chief  
 To a voice not hers, nor yet that enemy's,  
 Nor God's in wrath, . . . but one that mixed with mine  
 Long years ago, among the garden-trees,  
 And said to *me*, to *me* too, "Be my wife,  
 Aurora!" It is strange, with what a swell  
 Of yearning passion, as a snow of ghosts  
 Might beat against the impervious doors of heaven,  
 I thought, "Now, if I had been a woman, such  
 As God made women, to save men by love,—  
 By just my love I might have saved this man,  
 And made a nobler poem for the world  
 Than all I have failed in." But I failed besides  
 In this; and now he's lost! through me alone!  
 And, by my only fault, his empty house  
 Sucks in, at this same hour, a wind from hell  
 To keep his hearth cold, make his casements creak  
 For ever to the tune of plague and sin—  
 O Romney, O my Romney, O my friend!  
 My cousin and friend! my helper, when I would,  
 My love, that might be! mine!

Why, how one weeps  
 When one's too weary! Were a witness by,  
 He'd say some folly . . . that I loved the man,  
 Who knows? . . . and make me laugh again for scorn.  
 At strongest, women are as weak in flesh,  
 As men, at weakest, vilest, are in soul:  
 So, hard for women to keep pace with men!  
 As well give up at once, sit down at once,  
 And weep as I do. Tears, tears! *why*, we weep?  
 'Tis worth inquiry?—That we've shamed a life,  
 Or lost a love, or missed a world, perhaps?  
 By no means. Simply, that we've walked too far,  
 Or talked too much, or felt the wind i' the east,—  
 And so we weep, as if both body and soul  
 Broke up in water—this way.

Poor mixed rags  
 Forsooth we're made of, like those other dolls  
 That lean with pretty faces into fairs.  
 It seems as if I had a man in me,  
 Despising such a woman.

Yet indeed,  
 To see a wrong or suffering moves us all  
 To undo it, though we should undo ourselves;

Ay, all the more, that we undo ourselves ;  
 That's womanly, past doubt, and not ill-moved.  
 A natural movement, therefore, on my part,  
 To fill the chair up of my cousin's wife,  
 And save him from a devil's company !  
 We're all so,—made so—'tis our woman's trade  
 To suffer torment for another's ease.  
 The world's male chivalry has perished out,  
 But women are knights-errant to the last ;  
 And, if Cervantes had been greater still,  
 He had made his Don a Donna.

So it clears,

And so we rain our skies blue. Put away  
 This weakness. If, as I have just now said,  
 A man's within me,—let him act himself,  
 Ignoring the poor conscious trouble of blood  
 That's called the woman merely. I will write  
 Plain words to England,—if too late, too late,—  
 If ill-accounted, then accounted ill ;  
 We'll trust the heavens with something.

“Dear Lord Howe,

You'll find a story on another leaf  
 That's Marian Erle's,—what noble friend of yours  
 She trusted once, through what flagitious means  
 To what disastrous ends ;—the story's true.  
 I found her wandering on the Paris quays,  
 A babe upon her breast—unnatural,  
 Unseasonable outcast on such snow  
 Unthawed to this time. I will tax in this  
 Your friendship, friend,—if that convicted She  
 Be not his wife yet, to denounce the facts  
 To himself,—but, otherwise, to let them pass  
 On tip-toe like escaping murderers,  
 And tell my cousin, merely—Marian lives,  
 Is found, and finds her home with such a friend,  
 Myself, Aurora. Which good news, 'She's found,'  
 Will help to make him merry in his love :  
 I send it, tell him, for my marriage gift,  
 As good as orange-water for the nerves,  
 Or perfumed gloves for headaches,—though aware  
 That he, except of love, is scarcely sick ;  
 I mean the new love this time, . . . since last year.  
 Such quick forgetting on the part of men !  
 Is any shrewder trick upon the cards

To enrich them? pray instruct me how it's done.  
 First, clubs,—and while you look at clubs, it's spades;  
 That's prodigy. The lightning strikes a man,  
 And when we think to find him dead and charred . . .  
 Why, there he is on a sudden, playing pipes  
 Beneath the splintered elm-tree! Crime and shame  
 And all their hoggerly trample your smooth world,  
 Nor leave more footmarks than Apollo's kine,  
 Whose hoofs were muffled by the thieving god  
 In tamarisk-leaves and myrtle. I'm so sad,  
 So weary and sad to-night, I'm somewhat sour,—  
 Forgive me. To be blue and shrew at once,  
 Exceeds all toleration except yours;  
 But yours, I know, is infinite. Farewell.  
 To-morrow we take train for Italy.  
 Speak gently of me to your gracious wife,  
 As one, however far, shall yet be near  
 In loving wishes to your house." I sign.  
 And now I'll loose my heart upon a page,  
 This—

“Lady Waldemar, I'm very glad  
 I never liked you; which you knew so well,  
 You spared me, in your turn, to like me much.  
 Your liking surely had done worse for me  
 Than has your loathing, though the last appears  
 Sufficiently unscrupulous to hurt,  
 And not afraid of judgment. Now, there's space  
 Between our faces,—I stand off, as if  
 I judged a stranger's portrait and pronounced  
 Indifferently the type was good or bad:  
 What matter to me that the lines are false,  
 I ask you? Did I ever ink my lips  
 By drawing your name through them as a friend's,  
 Or touch your hands as lovers do? thank God  
 I never did: and, since you're proved so vile,  
 Ay, vile, I say,—we'll show it presently,—  
 I'm not obliged to nurse my friend in you,  
 Or wash out my own blots, in counting yours,  
 Or even excuse myself to honest souls  
 Who seek to touch my lip or clasp my palm,—  
 'Alas, but Lady Waldemar came first!'”

“'Tis true, by this time, you may near me so  
 That you're my cousin's wife. You've gambled deep

As Lucifer, and won the morning-star  
 In that case,—and the noble house of Leigh  
 Must henceforth with its good roof shelter you :  
 I cannot speak and burn you up between  
 Those rafters, I who am born a Leigh,—nor speak  
 And pierce your breast through Romney's, I who live  
 His friend and cousin !—so, you are safe. You two  
 Must grow together like the tares and wheat  
 Till God's great fire.—But make the best of time.

“ And hide this letter ! Let it speak no more  
 Then I shall, how you tricked poor Marian Erle,  
 And set her own love digging her own grave  
 Within her green hope's pretty garden-ground ;  
 Ay, sent her forth with some one of your sort  
 To a wicked house in France,—from which she fled  
 With curses in her eyes and ears and throat,  
 Her whole soul choked with curses,—mad, in short,  
 And madly scouring up and down for weeks  
 The foreign hedgeless country, lone and lost,—  
 So innocent, male-fiends might slink within  
 Remote hell-corners, seeing her so defiled !

“ But you,—you are a woman and more bold.  
 To do you justice, you'd not shrink to face . . .  
 We'll say, the unfledged life in the other room,  
 Which, treading down God's corn, you trod in sight  
 Of all the dogs, in reach of all the guns,—  
 Ay, Marian's babe, her poor unfathered child,  
 Her yearling babe !—you'd face him when he wakes  
 And opens up his wonderful blue eyes :  
 You'd meet them and not wink perhaps, nor fear  
 God's triumph in them and supreme revenge,  
 So, righting His creation's balance-scale  
 (You pulled as low as Tophet) to the top  
 Of most celestial innocence ! For me,  
 Who am not as bold, I own those infant eyes  
 Have set me praying.

“ While they look at heaven,  
 No need of protestation in my words  
 Against the place you've made them ! let them look !  
 They'll do your business with the heavens, to be sure :  
 I spare you common curses.

“ Ponder this.

If haply you're the wife of Romney Leigh  
 (For which inheritance beyond your birth  
 You sold that poisonous porridge called your soul),  
 I charge you, be his faithful and true wife!  
 Keep warm his hearth and clean his board, and, when  
 He speaks, be quick with your obedience;  
 Still grind your paltry wants and low desires  
 To dust beneath his heel; though, even thus,  
 The ground must hurt him,—it was writ of old,  
 ‘Ye shall not yoke together ox and ass,’  
 The nobler and ignobler. Ay, but you  
 Shall do your part as well as such ill things  
 Can do aught good. You shall not vex him,—mark,  
 You shall not vex him, . . . jar him when he's sad,  
 Or cross him when he's eager. Understand  
 To trick him with apparent sympathies,  
 Nor let him see thee in the face too near  
 And unlearn thy sweet seeming. Pay the price  
 Of lies, by being constrained to lie on still;  
 'Tis easy for thy sort: a million more  
 Will scarcely damn thee deeper.

“ Doing which,  
 You are very safe from Marian and myself:  
 We'll breathe as softly as the infant here,  
 And stir no dangerous embers. Fail a point,  
 And show our Romney wounded, ill-content,  
 Tormented in his home, . . . we open mouth,  
 And such a noise will follow, the last trump's  
 Will scarcely seem more dreadful, even to you;  
 You'll have no pipers after: Romney will  
 (I know him) push you forth as none of his,  
 All other men declaring it well done;  
 While women, even the worst, your like, will draw  
 Their skirts back, not to brush you in the street;  
 And so I warn you. I'm . . . Aurora Leigh.”

The letter written, I felt satisfied.  
 The ashes, smouldering in me, were thrown out  
 By handfuls from me: I had writ my heart  
 And wept my tears, and now was cool and calm;  
 And, going straightway to the neighbouring room,  
 I lifted up the curtains of the bed  
 Where Marian Erle, the babe upon her arm,

Both faces leaned together like a pair  
 Of folded innocences, self-complete,  
 Each smiling from the other, smiled and slept.  
 There seemed no sin, no shame, no wrath, no grief.  
 I felt, she too, had spoken words that night,  
 But softer certainly, and said to God,—  
 Who laughs in heaven, perhaps, that such as I  
 Should make ado for such as she.—“Defiled”  
 I wrote? “defiled” I thought her? Stoop,  
 Stoop lower, Aurora! get the angels’ leave  
 To creep in somewhere, humbly, on your knees,  
 Within this round of sequestration white  
 In which they have wrapt earth’s foundlings, heaven’s  
 elect!

The next day, we took train to Italy  
 And fled on southward in the roar of steam.  
 The marriage-bells of Romney must be loud,  
 To sound so clear through all! I was not well;  
 And truly, though the truth is like a jest,  
 I could not choose but fancy, half the way,  
 I stood alone i’ the belfry, fifty bells  
 Of naked iron, mad with merriment  
 (As one who laughs and cannot stop himself)  
 All clanking at me, in me, over me,  
 Until I shrieked a shriek I could not hear,  
 And swooned with noise,—but still, along my swoon,  
 Was ’ware the baffled changes backward rang,  
 Prepared, at each emerging sense, to beat  
 And crash it out with clangour. I was weak;  
 I struggled for the posture of my soul  
 In upright consciousness of place and time,  
 But evermore, ’twixt waking and asleep,  
 Slipped somehow, staggered, caught at Marian’s eyes  
 A moment (it is very good for strength  
 To know that some one needs you to be strong)  
 And so recovered what I called myself,  
 For that time.

I just knew it when we swept  
 Above the old roofs of Dijon. Lyons dropped  
 A spark into the night, half trodden out  
 Unseen. But presently the winding Rhone  
 Washed out the moonlight large along his banks,  
 Which strained their yielding curves out clear and clean

To hold it—shadow of town and castle blurred  
 Upon the hurrying river. Such an air  
 Blew thence upon the forehead—half an air  
 And half a water,—that I leaned and looked ;  
 Then, turning back on Marian, smiled to mark  
 That she looked only on her child, who slept,  
 His face towards the moon too.

So we passed  
 The liberal open country and the close,  
 And shot through tunnels, like a lightning-wedge  
 By great Thor-hammers driven through the rock,  
 Which, quivering through the intestine blackness, splits,  
 And lets it in at once : the train swept in  
 Athrob with effort, trembling with resolve,  
 The fierce denouncing whistle wailing on  
 And dying off smothered in the shuddering dark,  
 While we, self-awed, drew troubled breath, oppressed  
 As other Titans, underneath the pile  
 And nightmare of the mountains. Out, at last,  
 To catch the dawn afloat upon the land !  
 —Hills, slung forth broadly and gauntly everywhere,  
 Not cramped in their foundations, pushing wide  
 Rich outspreads of the vineyards and the corn  
 (As if they entertained i' the name of France)  
 While, down their straining sides streamed manifest  
 A soil as red as Charlemagne's knightly blood,  
 To consecrate the verdure. Some one said,  
 "Marseilles !" And lo, the city of Marseilles,  
 With all her ships behind her, and beyond,  
 The scimitar of ever-shining sea,  
 For right-hand use, bared blue against the sky !

That night we spent between the purple heaven  
 And purple water : I think Marian slept ;  
 But I, as a dog a-watch for his master's foot,  
 Who cannot sleep or eat before he hears.  
 I sate upon the deck and watched all night,  
 And listened through the stars for Italy,  
 Those marriage-bells I spoke of, sounded far,  
 As some child's go-cart in the street beneath  
 To a dying man who will not pass the day,  
 And knows it, holding by a hand he loves,  
 I, too, sate quiet, satisfied with death,  
 Sate silent : I could hear my own soul speak,

And had my friend,—for Nature comes sometimes  
 And says, “I am ambassador for God.”  
 I felt the wind soft from the land of souls ;  
 The old miraculous mountains heaved in sight,  
 One straining past another along the shore,  
 The way of grand dull Odyssean ghosts  
 Athirst to drink the cool blue wine of seas  
 And stare on voyagers. Peak pushing peak  
 They stood : I watched beyond that Tyrian belt  
 Of intense sea betwixt them and the ship,  
 Down all their sides the misty olive-woods  
 Dissolving in the weak congenial moon,  
 And still disclosing some brown convent-tower  
 That seems as if it grew from some brown rock,—  
 Or many a little lighted village, dropt  
 Like a fallen star, upon so high a point,  
 You wonder what can keep it in its place  
 From sliding headlong with the waterfalls  
 Which drop and powder all the myrtle-groves  
 With spray of silver. Thus my Italy  
 Was stealing on us. Genoa broke with day ;  
 The Doria's long pale palace striking out,  
 From green hills in advance of the white town,  
 A marble finger dominant to ships,  
 Seen glimmering through the uncertain gray of dawn.

But then I did not think, “my Italy ;”  
 I thought, “my father !” O my father's house,  
 Without his presence !—Places are too much  
 Or else too little, for immortal man ;  
 Too little, when love's May o'ergrows the ground,—  
 Too much, when that luxuriant wealth of green  
 Is rustling to our ankles in dead leaves.  
 'Tis only good to be, or here or there,  
 Because we had a dream on such a stone,  
 Or this or that,—but, once being wholly waked,  
 And come back to the stone without the dream,  
 We trip upon't,—alas ! and hurt ourselves ;  
 Or else it falls on us and grinds us flat,  
 The heaviest grave-stone on this burying earth.  
 —But while I stood and mused, a quiet touch  
 Fell light upon my arm, and, turning round,  
 A pair of moistened eyes convicted mine.  
 “What, Marian ! is the babe astir so soon ?”



“He sleeps,” she answered; “I have crept up thrice,  
 And seen you sitting, standing, still at watch.  
 I thought it did you good till now, but now” . . .  
 “But now,” I said, “you leave the child alone.”  
 “And *you’re* alone,” she answered,—and she looked  
 As if I, too, were something. Sweet the help  
 Of one we have helped! Thanks, Marian, for that help.

I found a house, at Florence, on the hill  
 Of Bellosguardo. ’Tis a tower that keeps  
 A post of double-observation o’er  
 The valley of Arno (holding as a hand  
 The outspread city) straight toward Fiesole  
 And Mount Morello and the setting sun,—  
 The Vallombrosan mountains to the right,  
 Which sunrise fills as full as crystal cups  
 Wine-filled, and red to the brim because it’s red.  
 No sun could die, nor yet be born, unseen  
 By dwellers at my villa: morn and eve  
 Were magnified before us in the pure  
 Illimitable space and pause of sky,  
 Intense as angels’ garments blanched with God,  
 Less blue than radiant. From the outer wall  
 Of the garden, dropped the mystic floating gray  
 Of olive-trees (with interruptions green  
 From maize and vine), until ’twas caught and torn  
 On that abrupt black line of cypresses  
 Which signed the way to Florence. Beautiful  
 The city lay along the ample vale,  
 Cathedral, tower and palace, piazza and street;  
 The river trailing like a silver cord  
 Through all, and curling loosely, both before  
 And after, over the whole stretch of land  
 Sown whitely up and down its opposite slopes,  
 With farms and villas.

Many weeks had passed,

No word was granted.—Last, a letter came  
 From Vincent Carrington:—“My dear Miss Leigh,  
 You’ve been as silent as a poet should,  
 When any other man is sure to speak.  
 If sick, if vexed, if dumb, a silver-piece  
 Will split a man’s tongue,—straight he speaks and says,  
 ‘Received that cheque.’ But you! . . . I send you funds  
 To Paris, and you make no sign at all.

Remember I'm responsible and wait  
A sign of you, Miss Leigh.

“ Meantime your book

Is eloquent as if you were not dumb ;  
And common critics, ordinarily deaf  
To such fine meanings, and, like dear men, loth  
To seem deaf, answering chance-wise, yes or no,  
'It must be,' or 'it must not' (most pronounced  
When least convinced), pronounce for once aright :  
You'd think they really heard,—and so they do . . .  
The burr of three or four who really hear  
And praise your book aright : Fame's smallest trump  
Is a great ear-trumpet for the deaf as posts,  
No other being effective. Fear not, friend ;  
We think, here, you have written a good book  
And you, a woman ! It was in you—yes,  
I felt 'twas in you : yet I doubted half  
If that od-force of German Reichenbach  
Which still from female finger-tips burns blue,  
Could strike out, as our masculine white heats,  
To quicken a man. Forgive me. All my heart  
Is quick with yours, since, just a fortnight since,  
I read your book and loved it.

“ Will you love

My wife, too ? Here's my secret, I might keep  
A month more from you ! but I yield it up  
Because I know you'll write the sooner for't,—  
Most women (of your height even) counting love  
Life's only serious business. Who's my wife  
That shall be in a month ? you ask ? nor guess ?  
Remember what a pair of topaz eyes  
You once detected, turned against the wall,  
That morning, in my London painting-room ;  
The face half-sketched, and slurred ; the eyes alone !  
But you . . . you caught them up with yours, and said,

‘Kate Ward’s eyes, surely.’—Now, I own the truth.  
I had thrown them there to keep them safe from Jove ;  
They would so naughtily find out their way  
To both the heads of both my Danaës,  
Where just it made me mad to look at them.  
Such eyes ! I could not paint or think of eyes  
But those,—and so I flung them into paint  
And turned them to the wall’s care. Ay, but now  
I’ve let them out, my Kate’s ! I’ve painted her  
(I’ll change my style, and leave mythologies)  
The whole sweet face ; it looks upon my soul  
Like a face on water, to beget itself.  
A half-length portrait, in a hanging cloak  
Like one you wore once ; ’tis a little frayed ;  
I pressed, too, for the nude harmonious arm—  
But she . . . she’d have her way, and have her cloak ;  
She said she could be like you only so,  
And would not miss the fortune. Ah, my friend.  
You’ll write and say she shall not miss your love  
Through meeting mine ? in faith, she would not change :  
She has your books by heart, more than my words,  
And quotes you up against me till I’m pushed  
Where, three months since, her eyes were ! nay, in fact,  
Nought satisfied her but to make me paint  
Your last book folded in her dimpled hands,  
Instead of my brown palette, as I wished  
(And, grant me, the presentment had been newer),  
She’d grant me nothing : I’ve compounded for  
The naming of the wedding-day next month,  
And gladly too. ’Tis pretty to remark  
How women can love women of your sort,  
And tie their hearts with love-knots to your feet,  
Grow insolent about you against men,  
And put us down by putting up the lip,  
As if a man,—there *are* such, let us own,

Who write not ill,—remains a man, poor wretch,  
 While you——! Write far worse than Aurora Leigh,  
 And there'll be women who believe of you  
 (Besides my Kate) that if you walked on sand  
 You would not leave a foot-print.

“Are you put  
 To wonder by my marriage, like poor Leigh?  
 ‘Kate Ward!’ he said. ‘Kate Ward!’ he said anew.  
 ‘I thought . . .’ he said and stopped,—‘I did not think . . .  
 And then he dropped to silence.

“Ah, he's changed.  
 I had not seen him, you're aware, for long,  
 But went of course. I have not touched on this  
 Through all this letter,—conscious of your heart,  
 And writing lightlier for the heavy fact,  
 As clocks are voluble with lead.

“How weak,  
 To say I'm sorry. Dear Leigh, dearest Leigh!  
 In those old days of Shropshire,—pardon me,—  
 When he and you fought many a field of gold  
 On what you should do, or you should not do,  
 Make bread or verses (it just came to that),  
 I thought you'd one day draw a silken peace  
 Through a golden ring. I thought so. Foolishly,  
 The event proved,—for you went more opposite  
 To each other, month by month, and year by year,  
 Until this happened. God knows best, we say,  
 But hoarsely. When the fever took him first,  
 Just after I had writ to you in France,  
 They tell me Lady Waldemar mixed drinks  
 And counted grains, like any salaried nurse,  
 Excepting that she wept too. Then Lord Howe,  
 You're right about Lord Howe! Lord Howe's a trump;  
 And yet, with such in his hand, a man like Leigh  
 May lose, as *he* does. There's an end to all,—

Yes, even this letter, though the second sheet  
May find you doubtful. Write a word for Kate :  
Even now she reads my letters like a wife,  
And, if she sees her name, I'll see her smile,  
And share the luck. So, bless you, friend of two !  
I will not ask you what your feeling is  
At Florence, with my pictures. I can hear  
Your heart a-flutter over the snow-hills ;  
And, just to pace the Pitti with you once,  
I'd give a half-hour of to-morrow's walk  
With Kate . . . I think so. Vincent Carrington."

The noon was hot ; the air scorched like the sun,  
And was shut out. The closed persiani threw  
Their long-scored shadows on my villa-floor,  
And interlined the golden atmosphere  
Straight, still,—across the pictures on the wall,  
The statuette on the console (of young Love  
And Psyche made one marble by a kiss),  
The low couch where I leaned, the table near,  
The vase of lilies, Marian pulled last night  
(Each green leaf and each white leaf ruled in black  
As if for writing some new text of fate),  
And the open letter, rested on my knee,—  
But there, the lines swerved, trembled, though I sate  
Untroubled . . . plainly, . . . reading it again  
And three times. Well, he's married ; that is clear.  
No wonder that he's married, nor much more  
That Vincent's therefore, " sorry." Why, of course,  
The lady nursed him when he was not well,  
Mixed drinks,—unless nepenthe was the drink,  
'Twas scarce worth telling. But a man in love  
Will see the whole sex in his mistress' hood,  
The prettier for its lining of fair rose ;  
Although he catches back, and says at last,

"I'm sorry." Sorry. Lady Waldemar  
 At prettiest, under the said hood, preserved  
 From such a light as I could hold to her face  
 To flare its ugly wrinkles out to shame,—  
 Is scarce a wife for Romney, as friends judge,  
 Aurora Leigh, or Vincent Carrington,—  
 That's plain. And if he's "conscious of my heart" . . .  
 Perhaps it's natural, though the phrase is strong  
 (One's apt to use strong phrases, being in love);  
 And even that stuff of "fields of gold," "gold rings,"  
 And what he "thought," poor Vincent! what he "thought,"  
 May never mean enough to ruffle me.

—Why, this room stifles. Better burn than choke;  
 Best have air, air, although it comes with fire,  
 Throw open blinds and windows to the noon,  
 And take a blister on my brow instead  
 Of this dead weight! best, perfectly be stunned  
 By those insufferable cicale, sick  
 And hoarse with rapture of the summer-heat,  
 That sing like poets, till their hearts break, . . . sing  
 Till men say, "It's too tedious."

Books succeed,  
 And lives fail. Do I feel it so, at last?  
 Kate loves a worn-out cloak for being like mine,  
 While I live self-despised for being myself,  
 And yearn toward some one else, who yearns away  
 From what he is, in his turn. Strain a step  
 For ever, yet gain no step? Are we such,  
 We cannot, with our admirations even,  
 Our tip-toe aspirations, touch a thing  
 That's higher than we? is all a dismal flat,  
 And God alone above each,—as the sun  
 O'er level lagunes, to make them shine and stink,—  
 Laying stress upon us with immediate flame,  
 While we respond with our miasmal fog,

And call it mounting higher, because we grow  
More highly fatal?

Tush, Aurora Leigh!

You wear your sackcloth looped in Cæsar's way,  
And brag your failings as mankind's. Be still.  
There *is* what's higher, in this very world,  
Than you can live, or catch at. Stand aside,  
And look at others—instance little Kate!  
She'll make a perfect wife for Carrington.  
She always has been looking round the earth  
For something good and green to alight upon  
And nestle into, with those soft-winged eyes  
Subsiding now beneath his manly hand  
'Twixt trembling lids of inexpressive joy:  
I will not scorn her, after all, too much,  
That so much she should love me. A wise man  
Can pluck a leaf, and find a lecture in't;  
And I, too, . . . God has made me,—I've a heart  
That's capable of worship, love, and loss;  
We say the same of Shakspeare's. I'll be meek,  
And learn to reverence, even this poor myself.

The book, too—pass it. "A good book," says he,  
"And you a woman." I had laughed at that,  
But long since. I'm a woman,—it is true;  
Alas, and woe to us, when we feel it most!  
Then, least care have we for the crowns and goals,  
And compliments on writing our good books.

The book has some truth in it, I believe:  
And truth outlives pain, as the soul does life.  
I know we talk our Phædons to the end  
Through all the dismal faces that we make,  
O'er-wrinkled with dishonouring agony  
From any mortal drug. I have written truth,

And I a woman ; feebly, partially,  
 Inaptly in presentation, Romney'll add,  
 Because a woman. For the truth itself,  
 That's neither man's nor woman's, but just God's ;  
 None else has reason to be proud of truth ;  
 Himself will see it sifted, disenthralled,  
 And kept upon the height and in the light,  
 As far as, and no farther, than 'tis truth ;  
 For,—now He has left off calling firmaments  
 And strata, flowers and creatures, very good,—  
 He says it still of truth, which is His own.

Truth, so far, in my book ;—the truth which draws  
 Through all things upwards ; that a twofold world  
 Must go to a perfect cosmos. Natural things  
 And spiritual,—who separates those two  
 In art, in morals, or the social drift,  
 Tears up the bond of nature and brings death,  
 Paints futile pictures, writes unreal verse,  
 Leads vulgar days, deals ignorantly with men,  
 Is wrong, in short, at all points. We divide  
 This apple of life, and cut it through the pips,—  
 The perfect round which fitted Venus' hand  
 Has perished utterly as if we ate  
 Both halves. Without the spiritual, observe,  
 The natural's impossible ;—no form,  
 No motion ! Without sensuous, spiritual  
 Is inappreciable ;—no beauty or power !  
 And in this twofold sphere the twofold man  
 (And still the artist is intensely a man)  
 Holds firmly by the natural, to reach  
 The spiritual beyond it,—fixes still  
 The type with mortal vision, to pierce through,  
 With eyes immortal, to the antetype  
 Some call the ideal,—better called the real,



And certain to be called so presently  
When things shall have their names. Look long enough  
On any peasant's face here, coarse and lined,  
You'll catch Antinous somewhere in that clay,  
As perfect-featured as he yearns at Rome  
From marble pale with beauty ; then persist,  
And, if your apprehension's competent,  
You'll find some fairer angel at his back,  
As much exceeding him, as he the boor,  
And pushing him with empyreal disdain  
For ever out of sight. Ay, Carrington  
Is glad of such a creed ! an artist must,  
Who paints a tree, a leaf, a common stone,  
With just his hand, and finds it suddenly  
A-piece with and conterminous to his soul.  
Why else do these things move him, leaf or stone ?  
The bird's not moved, that pecks at a spring-shoot ;  
Nor yet the horse, before a quarry, a-graze :  
But man, the twofold creature, apprehends  
The twofold manner, in and outwardly,  
And nothing in the world comes single to him,  
A mere itself,—cup, column, or candle-stick,  
All patterns of what shall be in the Mount ;  
The whole temporal show related royally,  
And built up to eterne significance  
Through the open arms of God.

“ There's nothing great

Nor small,” has said a poet of our day  
(Whose voice will ring beyond the curfew of eve  
And not be thrown out by the matin's bell),  
And truly, I reiterate, . . . nothing's small !  
No lily-muffled hum of a summer-bee,  
But finds some coupling with the spinning stars ;  
No pebble at your foot, but proves a sphere ;

No chaffinch, but implies the cherubim :  
 And,—glancing on my own thin, veined wrist,—  
 In such a little tremour of the blood  
 The whole strong clamour of a vehement soul  
 Doth utter itself distinct. Earth's crammed with heaven,  
 And every common bush afire with God :  
 But only he who sees, takes off his shoes ;  
 The rest sit round it, and pluck blackberries,  
 And daub their natural faces unaware  
 More and more, from the first similitude.

Truth, so far, in my book ! a truth which draws  
 From all things upwards. I, Aurora, still  
 Have felt it hound me through the wastes of life.  
 As Jove did Io : and, until that Hand  
 Shall overtake me wholly, and, on my head,  
 Lay down its large unfluctuating peace,  
 The feverish gad-fly pricks me up and down,  
 It must be. Art's the witness of what Is  
 Behind this show. If this world's show were all,  
 Then imitation would be all in Art ;  
 There, Jove's hand gripes us !—For we stand here, we,  
 If genuine artists, witnessing for God's  
 Complete, consummate, undivided work :  
 —That not a natural flower can grow on earth,  
 Without a flower upon the spiritual side,  
 Substantial, archetypal, all aglow  
 With blossoming causes,—not so far away,  
 That we, whose spirit-sense is somewhat cleared,  
 May not catch something of the bloom and breath,—  
 Too vaguely apprehended, though indeed  
 Still apprehended, consciously or not,  
 And still transferred to picture, music, verse,  
 For thrilling audient and beholding souls  
 By signs and touches which are known to souls,—

How known, they know not,—why, they cannot find,  
 So straight call out on genius, say, “A man  
 Produced this,”—when much rather they should say,  
 “’Tis insight, and he saw this.”

Thus is Art

Self-magnified in magnifying a truth  
 Which, fully recognised, would change the world  
 And shift its morals. If a man could feel,  
 Not one day, in the artist’s ecstasy,  
 But every day, feast, fast, or working-day,  
 The spiritual significance burn through  
 The hieroglyphic of material shows,  
 Henceforward he would paint the globe with wings,  
 And reverence fish and fowl, the bull, the tree,  
 And even his very body as a man,—  
 Which now he counts so vile, that all the towns  
 Make offal of their daughters for its use  
 On summer-nights, when God is sad in heaven  
 To think what goes on in His recreant world  
 He made quite other ; while that moon He made  
 To shine there, at the first love’s covenant,  
 Shines still, convictive as a marriage-ring  
 Before adulterous eyes. How sure it is,  
 That, if we say a true word, instantly  
 We feel ’tis God’s, not ours, and pass it on  
 As bread at sacrament, we taste and pass  
 Nor handle for a moment, as indeed  
 We dared to set up any claim to such !  
 And I—my poem ;—let my readers talk ;  
 I’m closer to it—I can speak as well :  
 I’ll say, with Romney, that the book is weak,  
 The range uneven, the points of sight obscure,  
 The music interrupted.

Let us go.

The end of woman (or of man, I think)

Is not a book. Alas, the best of books  
 Is but a word in Art, which soon grows cramped,  
 Stiff, dubious-statured with the weight of years,  
 And drops an accent or digamma down  
 Some cranny of unfathomable time,  
 Beyond the critic's reaching. Art itself,  
 We've called the higher life, still must feel the soul  
 Live past it. For more's felt than is perceived,  
 And more's perceived than can be interpreted,  
 And Love strikes higher with his lambent flame  
 Than Art can pile the faggots.

Is it so ?

When Jove's hand meets us with composing touch,  
 And when, at last, we are hushed and satisfied,—  
 Then, Io does not call it truth, but love ?

Well, well ! my father was an Englishman :  
 My mother's blood in me is not so strong  
 That I should bear this stress of Tuscan noon  
 And keep my wits. The town, there, seems to seethe  
 In this Medæan boil-pot of the sun,  
 And all the patient hills are bubbling round  
 As if a prick would leave them flat. Does heaven  
 Keep far off, not to set us in a blaze ?  
 Not so,—let drag your fiery fringes, heaven,  
 And burn us up to quiet ! Ah, we know  
 Too much here, not to know what's best for peace ;  
 We have too much light here, not to want more fire  
 To purify and end us. We talk, talk,  
 Conclude upon divine philosophies,  
 And get the thanks of men for hopeful books ;  
 Whereat we take our own life up, and . . . pshaw !  
 Unless we piece it with another's life  
 (A yard of silk to carry out our lawn),  
 As well suppose my little handkerchief

Would cover Samminiato, church and all,  
If out I threw it past the cypresses,  
As, in this ragged, narrow life of mine,  
Contain my own conclusions.

But at least  
We'll shut up the persiani, and sit down,  
And when my head's done aching, in the cool,  
Write just a word to Kate and Carrington.  
May joy be with them ! she has chosen well,  
And he not ill.

I should be glad, I think,  
Except for Romney. Had *he* married Kate,  
I surely, surely, should be very glad.  
This Florence sits upon me easily  
With native air and tongue. My graves are calm,  
And do not too much hurt me. Marian's good,  
Gentle and loving,—lets me hold the child,  
Or drags him up the hills to find me flowers  
And fill those vases, ere I'm quite awake,—  
The grandiose red tulips, which grow wild,  
Or else my purple lilies, Dante blew  
To a larger bubble with his prophet-breath ;  
Or one of those tall flowering reeds which stand  
In Arno like a sheaf of sceptres, left  
By some remote dynasty of dead gods,  
To suck the stream for ages and get green,  
And blossom wheresoe'er a hand divine  
Had warmed the place with ichor. Such I've found  
At early morning, laid across my bed,  
And woke up pelted with a childish laugh  
Which even Marian's low precipitous "hush"  
Had vainly interposed to put away,—  
While I, with shut eyes, smile and motion for  
The dewy kiss that's very sure to come  
From mouth and cheeks, the whole child's face at once

Dissolved on mine,—as if a nosegay burst  
 Its string with the weight of roses over-blown,  
 And dropt upon me. Surely I should be glad.  
 The little creature almost loves me now,  
 And calls my name . . . “Alola,” stripping off  
 The r’s like thorns, to make it smooth enough  
 To take between his dainty, milk-fed lips,  
 God love him ! I should certainly be glad,  
 Except, God help me, that I’m sorrowful,  
 Because of Romney. Romney, Romney ! Well,  
 This grows absurd !—too like a tune that runs  
 I’ the head, and forces all things in the world,  
 Wind, rain, the creaking gnat or stuttering fly,  
 To sing itself and vex you ;—yet perhaps  
 A paltry tune you never fairly liked,  
 Some “ I’d be a butterfly,” or “ C’est l’amour ” :  
 We’re made so,—not such tyrants to ourselves,  
 We are not slaves to nature. Some of us  
 Are turned, too, overmuch like some poor verse  
 With a trick of ritournelle : the same thing goes  
 And comes back ever.

Vincent Carrington

Is “ sorry,” and I’m sorry ; but *he’s* strong  
 To mount from sorrow to his heaven of love,  
 And when he says at moments, “ Poor, poor Leigh,  
 Who’ll never call his own, so true a heart,  
 So fair a face even,”—he must quickly lose  
 The pain of pity in the blush he has made  
 By his very pitying eyes. The snow, for him,  
 Has fallen in May, and finds the whole earth warm,  
 And melts at the first touch of the green grass.

But Romney,—he has chosen, after all.  
 I think he had as excellent a sun  
 To see by, as most others, and perhaps

Has scarce seen really worse than some of us,  
 When all's said. Let him pass. I'm not too much  
 A woman, not to be a man for once,  
 And bury all my Dead like Alaric,  
 Depositing the treasures of my soul  
 In this drained water-course, and, letting flow  
 The river of life again, with commerce-ships  
 And pleasure-barges, full of silks and songs.  
 Blow, winds, and help us.

Ah, we mock ourselves  
 With talking of the winds! perhaps as much  
 With other resolutions. How it weighs,  
 This hot, sick air! and how I covet here  
 The Dead's provision on the river's couch,  
 With silver curtains drawn on tinkling rings!  
 Or else their rest in quiet crypts,—laid by  
 From heat and noise!—from those cicale, say,  
 And this more vexing heart-beat.

So it is:

We covet for the soul, the body's part,  
 To die and rot. Even so, Aurora, ends  
 Our aspiration, who bespoke our place  
 So far in the east. The occidental flats  
 Had fed us fatter, therefore? we have climbed  
 Where herbage ends?—we want the beast's part now,  
 And tire of the angel's?—Men define a man,  
 The creature who stands front-ward to the stars,  
 The creature who looks inward to himself,  
 The tool-wright, laughing creature. 'Tis enough:  
 We'll say instead, the inconsequent creature, man,—  
 For that's his specialty. What creature else  
 Conceives the circle, and then walks the square?  
 Loves things proved bad, and leaves a thing proved good?  
 You think the bee makes honey half a year,  
 To loathe the comb in winter, and desire

The little ant's food rather? But a man—  
 Note men!—they are but women after all,  
 As women are but Auroras!—there are men  
 Born tender, apt to pale at a trodden worm,  
 Who paint for pastime, in their favourite dream,  
 Spruce auto-vestments flowered with crocus-flames :  
 There are, too, who believe in hell, and lie :  
 There are, who waste their souls in working out  
 Life's problem on these sands betwixt two tides,  
 And end,—“ Now give us the beast's part, in death.”

Alas, long-suffering and most patient God,  
 Thou need'st be surelier God to bear with us  
 Than even to have made us ! thou, aspire, aspire  
 From henceforth for me ! thou who hast, Thyself,  
 Endured this fleshhood, knowing how, as a soaked  
 And sucking vesture, it would drag us down,  
 And choke us in the melancholy Deep,  
 Sustain me, that, with Thee, I walk these waves,  
 Resisting!—breathe me upward, Thou for me  
 Aspiring, who art the way, the truth, the life,—  
 That no truth henceforth seem indifferent,  
 No way to truth laborious, and no life,  
 Not even this life I live, intolerable !

The days went by. I took up the old days  
 With all their Tuscan pleasures, worn and spoiled,—  
 Like some lost book we dropt in the long grass  
 On such a happy summer-afternoon  
 When last we read it with a loving friend,  
 And find in autumn, when the friend is gone,  
 The grass cut short, the weather changed, too late,  
 And stare at, as at something wonderful  
 For sorrow,—thinking how two hands, before,  
 Had held up what is left to only one,



And how we smiled when such a vehement nail  
Impressed the tiny dint here, which presents  
This verse in fire for ever ! Tenderly  
And mournfully I lived. I knew the birds  
And insects,—which look fathered by the flowers  
And emulous of their hues : I recognised  
The moths, with that great overpoise of wings  
Which makes a mystery of them how at all  
They can stop flying : butterflies, that bear  
Upon their blue wings such red embers round,  
They seem to scorch the blue air into holes  
Each flight they take : and fire-flies, that suspire  
In short soft lapses of transported flame  
Across the tingling Dark, while overhead  
The constant and inviolable stars  
Outburn those lights-of-love : melodious owls  
(If music had but one note and was sad,  
'Twould sound just so), and all the silent swirl  
Of bats, that seem to follow in the air  
Some grand circumference of a shadowy dome  
To which we are blind : and then, the nightingales,  
Which pluck our heart across a garden-wall  
(When walking in the town), and carry it  
So high into the bowery almond-trees,  
We tremble and are afraid, and feel as if  
The golden flood of moonlight unaware  
Dissolved the pillars of the steady earth  
And made it less substantial. And I knew  
The harmless opal snakes, and large-mouthed frogs  
(Those noisy vaunters of their shallow streams),  
And lizards, the green lightnings of the wall,  
Which, if you sit down still, nor sigh too loud,  
Will flatter you and take you for a stone,  
And flash familiarly about your feet  
With such prodigious eyes in such small heads !—

I knew them, though they had somewhat dwindled from  
 My childish imagery,—and kept in mind  
 How last I sate among them equally,  
 In fellowship and mateship, as a child  
 Will bear him still toward insect, beast, and bird,  
 Before the Adam in him has foregone  
 All privilege of Eden,—making friends  
 And talk, with such a bird or such a goat,  
 And buying many a two-inch-wide rush-cage  
 To let out the caged cricket on a tree,  
 Saying, “Oh, my dear grillino, were you cramped?  
 And are you happy with the ilex-leaves?  
 And do you love me who have let you go?  
 Say *yes* in singing, and I’ll understand.”

But now the creatures all seemed farther off,  
 No longer mine, nor like me; only *there*,  
 A gulf between us. I could yearn indeed,  
 Like other rich men, for a drop of dew  
 To cool this heat,—a drop of the early dew,  
 The irrecoverable child-innocence  
 (Before the heart took fire and withered life)  
 When childhood might pair equally with birds;  
 But now . . . the birds were grown too proud for us!  
 Alas, the very sun forbids the dew.

And I, I had come back to an empty nest  
 Which every bird’s too wise for. How I heard  
 My father’s step on that deserted ground,  
 His voice along that silence, as he told  
 The names of bird and insect, tree and flower,  
 And all the presentations of the stars  
 Across Valdarno, interposing still  
 ‘My child,’ ‘my child.’ When fathers say “my child,”  
 ‘Tis easier to conceive the universe,  
 And life’s transitions down the steps of law.

I rode once to the little mountain-house  
As fast as if to find my father there,  
But, when in sight of't, within fifty yards,  
I dropped my horse's bridle on his neck  
And paused upon his flank. The house's front  
Was cased with lingots of ripe Indian corn  
In tessellated order, and device  
Of golden patterns : not a stone of wall  
Uncovered,—not an inch of room to grow  
A vine-leaf. The old porch had disappeared ;  
And, in the open doorway, sate a girl  
At plaiting straws,—her black hair strained away  
To a scarlet kerchief caught beneath her chin  
In Tuscan fashion,—her full ebon eyes,  
Which looked too heavy to be lifted so,  
Still dropt and lifted toward the mulberry-tree  
On which the lads were busy with their staves  
In shout and laughter, stripping all the boughs  
As bare as winter, of those summer leaves  
My father had not changed for all the silk  
In which the ugly silkworms hide themselves.  
Enough. My horse recoiled before my heart—  
I turned the rein abruptly. Back we went  
As fast, to Florence.

That was trial enough  
Of graves. I would not visit, if I could,  
My father's, or my mother's any more,  
To see if stone-cutter or lichen beat  
So early in the race, or throw my flowers,  
Which could not out-smell heaven, or sweeten earth.  
They live too far above, that I should look  
So far below to find them : let me think  
That rather they are visiting my grave,  
This life here (undeveloped yet to life),  
And that they drop upon me, now and then,

For token or for solace, some small weed  
Least odorous of the growths of paradise,  
To spare such pungent scents as kill with joy.  
My old Assunta, too, was dead, was dead—  
O land of all men's past! for me alone,  
It would not mix its tenses. I was past,  
It seemed, like others,—only not in heaven.  
And, many a Tuscan eve, I wandered down  
The cypress alley, like a restless ghost  
That tries its feeble ineffectual breath  
Upon its own charred funeral-brands put out  
Too soon,—where, black and stiff, stood up the trees  
Against the broad vermilion of the skies.  
Such skies!—all clouds abolished in a sweep  
Of God's skirt, with a dazzle to ghosts and men,  
As down I went, saluting on the bridge  
The hem of such, before 'twas caught away  
Beyond the peaks of Lucca. Underneath,  
'The river, just escaping from the weight  
Of that intolerable glory, ran  
In acquiescent shadow murmuringly :  
And up, beside it, streamed the festa-folk  
With fellow-murmurs from their feet and fans,  
(With *issimo* and *ino* and sweet poise  
Of vowels in their pleasant scandalous talk)  
Returning from the grand-duke's dairy-farm  
Before the trees grew dangerous at eight  
(For, "trust no tree by moonlight," Tuscans say),  
To eat their ice at Doni's tenderly,—  
Each lovely lady close to a cavalier  
Who holds her dear fan while she feeds her smile  
On meditative spoonfuls of vanille,  
He breathing hot protesting vows of love,  
Enough to thaw her cream, and scorch his beard.  
'Twas little matter. I could pass them by

Indifferently, not fearing to be known  
No danger of being wrecked upon a friend,  
And forced to take an iceberg for an isle !  
The very English, here, must wait to learn  
To hang the cobweb of their gossip out  
And catch a fly. I'm happy. It's sublime,  
This perfect solitude of foreign lands !  
To be, as if you had not been till then,  
And were then, simply that you chose to be :  
To spring up, not be brought forth from the ground,  
Like grasshoppers at Athens, and skip thrice  
Before a woman makes a pounce on you  
And plants you in her hair !—possess, yourself,  
A new world all alive with creatures new,  
New sun, new moon, new flowers, new people—ah,  
And be possessed by none of them ! no right  
In one, to call your name, inquire your where,  
Or what you think of Mister Some-one's book,  
Or Mister Other's marriage, or decease,  
Or how's the headache which you had last week,  
Or why you look so pale still, since it's gone ?  
—Such most surprising riddance of one's life  
Comes next one's death ; it's disembodiment  
Without the pang. I marvel, people choose  
To stand stock-still like fakirs, till the moss  
Grows on them, and they cry out, self-admired,  
“ How verdant and how virtuous ! ” Well, I'm glad ;  
Or should be, if grown foreign to myself  
As surely as to others.

Musing so,

I walked the narrow unrecognising streets,  
Where many a palace-front peers gloomily  
Through stony vizors iron-barred (prepared  
Alike, should foe or lover pass that way,  
For guest or victim) and came wandering out

Upon the churches with mild open doors  
And plaintive wail of vespers, where a few,  
Those chiefly women, sprinkled round in blots  
Upon the dusky pavement, knelt and prayed  
Toward the altar's silver glory. Oft a ray  
(I liked to sit and watch) would tremble out,  
Just touch some face more lifted, more in need,  
Of course a woman's—while I dreamed a tale  
To fit its fortunes. There was one who looked  
As if the earth had suddenly grown too large  
For such a little humpbacked thing as she ;  
The pitiful black kerchief round her neck  
Sole proof she had had a mother. One, again,  
Looked sick for love,—seemed praying some soft saint  
To put more virtue in the new fine scarf  
She spent a fortnight's meals on, yesterday,  
That cruel Gigi might return his eyes  
From Giuliana. There was one, so old,  
So old, to kneel grew easier than to stand,—  
So solitary, she accepts at last  
Our Lady for her gossip, and frets on  
Against the sinful world which goes its rounds  
In marrying and being married, just the same  
As when 'twas almost good and had the right  
(Her Gian alive, and she herself eighteen).  
And yet, now even, if Madonna willed,  
She'd win a tern in Thursday's lottery,  
And better all things. Did she dream for nought,  
That, boiling cabbage for the fast-day's soup,  
It smelt like blessed entrails? such a dream  
For nought? would sweetest Mary cheat her so,  
And lose that certain candle, straight and white  
As any fair grand-duchess in her teens,  
Which otherwise should flare here in a week?  
*Benigna sis*, thou beauteous Queen of heaven!

I sate there musing, and imagining  
 Such utterance from such faces : poor blind souls  
 That writhed toward heaven along the devil's trail,—  
 Who knows, I thought, but He may stretch His hand  
 And pick them up ? 'tis written in the Book,  
 He heareth the young ravens when they cry ;  
 And yet they cry for carrion.—O my God,—  
 And we, who make excuses for the rest,  
 We do it in our measure. Then I knelt,  
 And dropped my head upon the pavement too,  
 And prayed, since I was foolish in desire  
 Like other creatures, craving offal-food,  
 That He would stop His ears to what I said,  
 And only listen to the run and beat  
 Of this poor, passionate, helpless blood—

And then

I lay, and spoke not. But He heard in heaven.

So many Tuscan evenings passed the same !  
 I could not lose a sunset on the bridge,  
 And would not miss a vigil in the church,  
 And liked to mingle with the out-door crowd  
 So strange and gay and ignorant of my face,  
 For men you know not, are as good as trees.  
 And only once, at the Santissima,  
 I almost chanced upon a man I knew,  
 Sir Blaise Delorme. He saw me certainly,  
 And somewhat hurried, as he crossed himself,  
 The smoothness of the action,—then half bowed,  
 But only half, and merely to my shade,  
 I slipped so quick behind the porphyry plinth.  
 And left him dubious if 'twas really I,  
 Or peradventure Satan's usual trick  
 To keep a mounting saint uncanonised.  
 But I was safe for that time, and he too ;

The argent angels in the altar-flare  
Absorbed his soul next moment. The good man !  
In England we were scarce acquaintances,  
That here in Florence he should keep my thought  
Beyond the image on his eye, which came  
And went : and yet his thought disturbed my life :  
For, after that, I oftener sate at home  
On evenings, watching how they fined themselves  
With gradual conscience to a perfect night,  
Until the moon, diminished to a curve,  
Lay out there, like a sickle for His hand  
Who cometh down at last to reap the earth.  
At such times, ended seemed my trade of verse ;  
I feared to jingle bells upon my robe  
Before the four-faced silent cherubim :  
With God so near me, could I sing of God ?  
I did not write, nor read, nor even think.  
But sate absorbed amid the quickening glooms,  
Most like some passive broken lump of salt  
Dropt in by chance to a bowl of œnomel,  
To spoil the drink a little, and lose itself,  
Dissolving slowly, slowly, until lost.



## EIGHTH BOOK.

ONE eve it happened, when I sate alone,  
Alone, upon the terrace of my tower,  
A book upon my knees, to counterfeit  
The reading that I never read at all,  
While Marian, in the garden down below,  
Knelt by the fountain (I could just hear thrill  
The drowsy silence of the exhausted day)  
And peeled a new fig from that purple heap  
In the grass beside her,—turning out the red  
To feed her eager child, who sucked at it  
With vehement lips across a gap of air  
As he stood opposite, face and curls a-flame  
With that last sun-ray, crying, “give me, give,”  
And stamping with imperious baby-feet  
(We’re all born princes)—something startled me,—  
The laugh of sad and innocent souls, that breaks  
Abruptly, as if frightened at itself;  
’Twas Marian laughed. I saw her glance above  
In sudden shame that I should hear her laugh.  
And straightway dropped my eyes upon my book,  
And knew, the first time, ’twas Boccaccio’s tales,  
The Falcon’s,—of the lover who for love  
Destroyed the best that loved him. Some of us  
Do it still, and then we sit and laugh no more.  
Laugh *you*, sweet Marian! you’ve the right to laugh,  
Since God Himself is for you, and a child!  
For me there’s somewhat less,—and so, I sigh.

The heavens were making room to hold the night,  
The sevenfold heavens unfolding all their gates  
To let the stars out slowly (prophesied  
In close-approaching advent, not discerned),  
While still the cue-owls from the cypresses

Of the Poggio called and counted every pulse  
 Of the skyey palpitation. Gradually  
 The purple and transparent shadows slow  
 Had filled up the whole valley to the brim,  
 And flooded all the city, which you saw  
 As some drowned city in some enchanted sea,  
 Cut off from nature,—drawing you who gaze,  
 With passionate desire, to leap and plunge,  
 And find a sea-king with a voice of waves,  
 And treacherous soft eyes, and slippery locks  
 You cannot kiss but you shall bring away  
 Their salt upon your lips. The duomo-bell  
 Strikes ten, as if it struck ten fathoms down,  
 So deep; and fifty churches answer it  
 The same, with fifty various instances.  
 Some gaslights tremble along squares and streets;  
 The Pitti's palace-front is drawn in fire;  
 And, past the quays, Maria Novella's Place,  
 In which the mystic obelisks stand up  
 Triangular, pyramidal, each based  
 On a single trine of brazen tortoises,  
 To guard that fair church, Buonarroti's Bride,  
 That stares out from her large blind dial-eyes,  
 Her quadrant and armillary dials, black  
 With rhythms of many suns and moons, in vain  
 Inquiry for so rich a soul as his,—  
 Methinks I have plunged, I see it all so clear . . .  
 And, oh my heart, . . . the sea-king!

In my ears

The sound of waters. There he stood, my king!

I felt him, rather than beheld him. Up  
 I rose, as if he were my king indeed,  
 And then sate down, in trouble at myself,  
 And struggling for my woman's empery.

'Tis pitiful ; but women are so made :  
We'll die for you, perhaps, 'tis probable ;  
But we'll not spare you an inch of our full height :  
We'll have our whole just stature,—five feet four,  
Though laid out in our coffins : pitiful !  
“—You, Romney !—Lady Waldemar is here ?”

He answered in a voice which was not his.  
“I have her letter ; you shall read it soon :  
But first, I must be heard a little, I,  
Who have waited long and travelled far for that,  
Although you thought to have shut a tedious book  
And farewell. Ah, you dog-eared such a page,  
And here you find me.” Did he touch my hand,  
Or but my sleeve ? I trembled, hand and foot,—  
He must have touched me.—“Will you sit ?” I asked,  
And motioned to a chair ; but down he sate,  
A little slowly, as a man in doubt,  
Upon the couch beside me,—couch and chair  
Being wheeled upon the terrace. “You are come,  
My cousin Romney ?—this is wonderful.  
But all is wonder on such summer-nights ;  
And nothing should surprise us any more,  
Who see that miracle of stars. Behold.”

I signed above, where all the stars were out,  
As if an urgent heat had started there  
A secret writing from a sombre page,  
A blank last moment, crowded suddenly  
With hurrying splendours.

“Then you do not know”

He murmured.

“Yes, I know,” I said, “I know.

I had the news from Vincent Carrington.  
And yet I did not think you'd leave the work

In England, for so much even,—though, of course,  
 You'll make a work-day of your holiday,  
 And turn it to our Tuscan people's use,—  
 Who much need helping since the Austrian boar  
 (So bold to cross the Alp by Lombardy  
 And dash his brute front unabashed against  
 The steep snow-bosses of that shield of God  
 Who soon shall rise in wrath and shake it clear)  
 Came hither also,—raking up our vines  
 And olive-gardens with his tyrannous tusks,  
 And rolling on our maize with all his swine."

"You had the news from Vincent Carrington,"  
 He echoed,—picking up the phrase beyond,  
 As if he knew the rest was merely talk  
 To fill a gap and keep out a strong wind,  
 "You had, then, Vincent's personal news?"

"His own,"

I answered. "All that ruined world of yours  
 Seems crumbling into marriage. Carrington  
 Has chosen wisely." "Do *you* take it so?"  
 He cried, "and is it possible at last" . . .  
 He paused there,—and then, inward to himself,  
 "Too much at last, too late!—yet certainly" . . .  
 (And there his voice swayed as an Alpine plank  
 That feels a passionate torrent underneath)  
 "The knowledge, if I had known it, first or last,  
 Had never changed the actual case for *me*,  
 And best, for *her*, at this time."

Nay, I thought,  
 He loves Kate Ward, it seems, now, like a man,  
 Because he has married Lady Waldemar.  
 Ah, Vincent's letter said how Leigh was moved  
 To hear that Vincent was betrothed to Kate.  
 With what cracked pitchers go we to deep wells

In this world! Then I spoke,—“I did not think,  
My cousin, you had ever known Kate Ward.”

“In fact I never knew her. 'Tis enough  
That Vincent did, before he chose his wife  
For other reasons than those topaz eyes  
I've heard of. Not to undervalue them,  
For all that. One takes up the world with eyes.”

—Including Romney Leigh, I thought again,  
Albeit he knows them only by repute.  
How vile must all men be, since *he's* a man.

His deep pathetic voice, as if he guessed  
I did not surely love him, took the word;  
“You never got a letter from Lord Howe  
A month back, dear Aurora?”

“None,” I said.

“I felt it was so,” he replied: “Yet, strange!  
Sir Blaise Delorme has passed through Florence?”

“Ay,

By chance I saw him in Our Lady's church  
(I saw him, mark you, but he saw not me),  
Clean-washed in holy water from the count  
Of things terrestrial,—letters and the rest;  
He had crossed us out together with his sins.  
Ay, strange; but only strange that good Lord Howe  
Preferred him to the post because of pauls.  
For me I'm sworn to never trust a man—  
At least with letters.”

“There were facts to tell,—  
To smooth with eye and accent. Howe supposed. . .  
Well, well, no matter! there was dubious need;  
You heard the news from Vincent Carrington.  
And yet perhaps you had been startled less

To see me, dear Aurora, if you had read  
That letter."

—Now he sets me down as vexed.

I think I've draped myself in woman's pride  
To a perfect purpose. Oh, I'm vexed, it seems!  
My friend Lord Howe deposes his friend Sir Blaise,  
To break as softly as a sparrow's egg  
That lets a bird out tenderly, the news  
Of Romney's marriage to a certain saint;  
To *smooth with eye and accent*,—indicate  
His possible presence. Excellently well  
You've played your part, my Lady Waldemar,—  
As I've played mine.

"Dear Romney," I began,  
"You did not use of old, to be so like  
A Greek king coming from a taken Troy,  
'Twas needful that precursors spread your path  
With three-piled carpets, to receive your foot  
And dull the sound of 't. For myself, be sure,  
Although it frankly ground the gravel here,  
I still could bear it. Yet I'm sorry, too,  
To lose this famous letter, which Sir Blaise  
Has twisted to a lighter absently  
To fire some holy taper with: Lord Howe  
Writes letters good for all things but to lose;  
And many a flower of London gossipry  
Has dropt wherever such a stem broke off,—  
Of course I know that, lonely among my vines  
Where nothing's talked of, save the blight again,  
And no more Chianti! Still the letter's use  
As preparation. . . . Did I start indeed?  
Last night I started at a cockchafer,  
And shook a half-hour after. Have you learnt  
No more of women, 'spite of privilege,  
Than still to take account too seriously

Of such weak flutterings? Why, we like it, sir,—  
 We get our powers and our effects that way.  
 The trees stand stiff and still at time of frost,  
 If no wind tears them; but, let summer come,  
 When trees are happy,—and a breath avails  
 To set them trembling through a million leaves  
 In luxury of emotion. Something less  
 It takes to move a woman: let her start  
 And shake at pleasure,—nor conclude at yours,  
 The winter's bitter,—but the summer's green."

He answered, "Be the summer ever green  
 With you, Aurora!—though you sweep your sex  
 With somewhat bitter gusts from where you live  
 Above them,—whirling downward from your heights  
 Your very own pine-cones, in a grand disdain  
 Of the lowland burrs with which you scatter them.  
 So high and cold to others and yourself,  
 A little less to Romney, were unjust,  
 And thus, I would not have you. Let it pass:  
 I feel content, so. You can bear indeed  
 My sudden step beside you: but for me,  
 'Twould move me sore to hear your softened voice,—  
 Aurora's voice,—if softened unaware  
 In pity of what I am." Ah friend, I thought,  
 As husband of the Lady Waldemar  
 You're granted very sorely pitiable!  
 And yet Aurora Leigh must guard her voice  
 From softening in the pity of your case,  
 As if from lie or licence. Certainly  
 We'll soak up all the slush and soil of life  
 With softened voices, ere we come to *you*.

At which I interrupted my own thought  
 And spoke out calmly. "Let us ponder, friend,

Whate'er our state, we must have made it first ;  
 And though the thing displease us, ay, perhaps  
 Displease us warrantably, never doubt  
 That other states, thought possible once, and then  
 Rejected by the instinct of our lives,—  
 If then adopted, had displeased us more  
 Than this, in which the choice, the will, the love,  
 Has stamped the honour of a patent act  
 From henceforth. What we choose, may not be good ;  
 But, that we choose it, proves it good for *us*  
 Potentially, fantastically, now  
 Or last year, rather than a thing we saw  
 And saw no need for choosing. Moths will burn  
 Their wings,—which proves that light is good for moths,  
 Or else they had flown not, where they agonise.”

“Ay, light is good,” he echoed, and there paused.  
 And then abruptly, . . . “Marian. Marian’s well?”

I bowed my head, but found no word. ’Twas hard  
 To speak of *her* to Lady Waldemar’s  
 New husband. How much did he know, at last ?  
 How much ? how little ?—He would take no sign,  
 But straight repeated,—“Marian. Is she well ?”

“She’s well,” I answered.

She was there in sight  
 An hour back, but the night had drawn her home ;  
 Where still I heard her in an upper room,  
 Her low voice singing to the child in bed,  
 Who, restless with the summer-heat and play  
 And slumber snatched at noon, was long sometimes



At falling off, and took a score of songs  
At mother-hushes, ere she saw him sound.

“She’s well,” I answered.

“Here?” he asked. “Yes, here.”

He stopped and sighed. “That shall be presently,  
But now this must be. I have words to say,  
And would be alone to say them, I with you,  
And no third troubling.”

“Speak then,” I returned,  
“She will not vex you.”

At which, suddenly  
He turned his face upon me with its smile,  
As if to crush me. “I have read your book,  
Aurora.”

“You have read it,” I replied,  
“And I have writ it,—we have done with it.  
And now the rest?”

“The rest is like the first,”  
He answered,—“for the book is in my heart,  
Lives in me, wakes in me, and dreams in me:  
My daily bread tastes of it,—and my wine  
Which has no smack of it, I pour it out;  
It seems unnatural drinking.” Bitterly  
I took the word up; “Never waste your wine.  
The book lived in me ere it lived in you;  
I know it closer than another does,  
And that it’s foolish, feeble, and afraid,  
And all unworthy so much compliment.  
Beseech you, keep your wine,—and, when you drink,  
Still wish some happier fortune to your friend,  
Than even to have written a far better book.”

He answered gently, "That is consequent :  
 The poet looks beyond the book he has made,  
 Or else he had not made it. If a man  
 Could make a man, he'd henceforth be a god  
 In feeling what a little thing is man :  
 It is not my case. And this special book,  
 I did not make it, to make light of it :  
 It stands above my knowledge, draws me up ;  
 'Tis high to me. It may be that the book  
 Is not so high, but I so low, instead ;  
 Still high to me. I mean no compliment :  
 I will not say there are not, young or old,  
 Male writers, ay, or female,—let it pass,  
 Who'll write us richer and completer books.  
 A man may love a woman perfectly,  
 And yet by no means ignorantly maintain  
 A thousand women have not larger eyes :  
 Enough that she alone has looked at him  
 With eyes that, large or small, have won his soul.  
 And so, this book, Aurora,—so, your book."

"Alas," I answered, "is it so, indeed ?"  
 And then was silent.

"Is it so, indeed,"  
 He echoed, "that *alas* is all your word ?"  
 I said,—"I'm thinking of a far-off June,  
 When you and I, upon my birthday once,  
 Discoursed of life and art, with both untried.  
 I'm thinking, Romney, how 'twas morning then,  
 And now 'tis night."

"And now," he said, "'tis night."

"I'm thinking," I resumed, "'tis somewhat sad,  
 That if I had known, that morning in the dew,

My cousin Romney would have said such words  
 On such a night, at close of many years,  
 In speaking of a future book of mine,  
 It would have pleased me better as a hope,  
 Than as an actual grace it can at all.  
 That's sad, I'm thinking."

"Ay," he said, "'tis night."

"And there," I added lightly, "are the stars!  
 And here, we'll talk of stars, and not of books."

"You have the stars," he murmured,—*"it is well:*  
*Be like them! shine, Aurora, on my dark,*  
*Though high and cold and only like a star,*  
*And for this short night only,—you, who keep*  
*The same Aurora of the bright June day*  
*That withered up the flowers before my face,*  
*And turned me from the garden evermore*  
*Because I was not worthy. Oh, deserved,*  
*Deserved! That I, who verily had not learnt*  
*God's lesson half, attaining as a dunce*  
*To obliterate good words with fractious thumbs*  
*And cheat myself of the context,—I should push*  
*Aside, with male ferocious impudence,*  
*The world's Aurora who had conned her part*  
*On the other side the leaf! ignore her so,*  
*Because she was a woman and a queen,*  
*And had no beard to bristle through her song,—*  
*My teacher, who has taught me with a book,*  
*My Miriam, whose sweet mouth, when nearly drowned*  
*I still heard singing on the shore! Deserved,*  
*That here I should look up unto the stars*  
*And miss the glory" . . .*

"Can I understand?"

I broke in. "You speak wildly, Romney Leigh,

Or I hear wildly. In that morning-time  
 We recollect, the roses were too red,  
 The trees too green, reproach too natural  
 If one should see not what the other saw :  
 And now, it's night, remember ; we have shades  
 In place of colours ; we are now grown cold,  
 And old, my cousin Romney. Pardon me,—  
 I'm very happy that you like my book,  
 And very sorry that I quoted back  
 A ten years' birthday ; 'twas so mad a thing  
 In any woman, I scarce marvel much  
 You took it for a venturous piece of spite,  
 Provoking such excuses, as indeed  
 I cannot call you slack in."

"Understand,"

He answered sadly, "something, if but so.  
 This night is softer than an English day,  
 And men may well come hither when they're sick  
 To draw in easier breath from larger air.  
 'Tis thus with me ; I've come to you,—to you,  
 My Italy of women, just to breathe  
 My soul out once before you, ere I go,  
 As humble as God makes me at the last  
 (I thank Him), quite out of the way of men,  
 And yours, Aurora,—like a punished child,  
 His cheeks all blurred with tears and naughtiness,  
 To silence in a corner. I am come  
 To speak, beloved" . . .

"Wisely, cousin Leigh,  
 And worthily of us both!"

"Yes, worthily ;  
 For this time I must speak out and confess  
 That I, so truculent in assumption once,  
 So absolute in dogma, proud in aim,  
 And fierce in expectation—I, who felt

The whole world tugging at my skirts for help,  
 As if no other man than I, could pull,  
 Nor woman, but I led her by the hand,  
 Nor cloth hold, but I had it in my coat,—  
 Do know myself to-night for what I was  
 On that June-day, Aurora. Poor bright day,  
 Which meant the best . . . a woman and a rose, . . .  
 And which I smote upon the cheek with words,  
 Until it turned and rent me! Young you were,  
 That birthday, poet, but you talked the right :  
 While I, . . . I built up follies like a wall  
 To intercept the sunshine and your face.  
 Your face ! that's worse."

"Speak wisely, cousin Leigh."

"Yes, wisely, dear Aurora, though too late :  
 But then, not wisely. I was heavy then,  
 And stupid, and distracted with the cries  
 Of tortured prisoners in the polished brass  
 Of that Phalarian bull, society,—  
 Which seems to bellow bravely like ten bulls,  
 But, if you listen, moans and cries instead  
 Despairingly, like victims tossed and gored  
 And trampled by their hoofs. I heard the cries  
 Too close : I could not hear the angels lift  
 A fold of rustling air, nor what they said  
 To help my pity. I beheld the world  
 As one great famishing carnivorous mouth,—  
 A huge, deserted, callow, black, bird Thing,  
 With piteous open beak that hurt my heart,  
 Till down upon the filthy ground I dropped,  
 And tore the violets up to get the worms.  
 Worms, worms, was all my cry : an open mouth,  
 A gross want, bread to fill it to the lips,

No more ! That poor men narrowed their demands  
 To such an end, was virtue, I supposed,  
 Adjudicating that to see it so  
 Was reason. Oh, I did not push the case  
 Up higher, and ponder how it answers, when  
 The rich take up the same cry for themselves,  
 Professing equally,—‘an open mouth,  
 A gross want, food to fill us, and no more !’  
 Why that’s so far from virtue, only vice  
 Finds reason for it ! That makes libertines :  
 That slurs our cruel streets from end to end  
 With eighty-thousand women in one smile,  
 Who only smile at night beneath the gas ;  
 The body’s satisfaction and no more,  
 Being used for argument against the soul’s,  
 Here too ! the want, here too, implying the right.  
 —How dark I stood that morning in the sun,  
 My best Aurora, though I saw your eyes,—  
 When first you told me . . . oh, I recollect  
 The words . . . and how you lifted your white hand,  
 And how your white dress and your burnished curls  
 Went greatening round you in the still blue air,  
 As if an inspiration from within  
 Had blown them all out when you spoke the same,  
 Even these,—‘ You will not compass your poor ends  
 ‘ Of barley-feeding and material ease,  
 ‘ Without the poet’s individualism  
 ‘ To work your universal. It takes a soul,  
 ‘ To move a body,—it takes a high-souled man,  
 ‘ To move the masses . . . even to a cleaner styte :  
 ‘ It takes the ideal, to blow an inch inside  
 ‘ The dust of the actual : and your Fouriers failed,  
 ‘ Because not poets enough to understand  
 ‘ That life develops from within.’ I say  
 Your words,—I could say other words of yours !

For none of all your words has been more lost  
Than sweet verbena, which, being brushed against,  
Will hold you three hours after by the smell,  
In spite of long walks on the windy hills.  
But these words dealt in sharper perfume,—these  
Were ever on me, stinging through my dreams,  
And saying themselves for ever o'er my acts  
Like some unhappy verdict. That I failed,  
Is certain. Stye or no stye, to contrive  
The swine's propulsion towards the precipice,  
Proved easy and plain. I subtly organised  
And ordered, built the cards up higher and higher,  
Till, some one breathing, all fell flat again ;  
In setting right society's wide wrong,  
Mere life's so fatal ! So I failed indeed  
Once, twice, and oftener,—hearing through the rents  
Of obstinate purpose, still those words of yours,  
' *You will not compass your poor ends, not you !*'  
But harder than you said them ; every time  
Still farther from your voice until they came  
To overcrow me with triumphant scorn  
Which vexed me to resistance. Set down this  
For condemnation,—I was guilty here :  
I stood upon my deed and fought my doubt,  
As men will,—for I doubted,—till at last  
My deed gave way beneath me suddenly,  
And left me what I am. The curtain dropped,  
My part quite ended, all the footlights quenched,  
My own soul hissing at me through the dark,  
I, ready for confession,—I was wrong,  
I've sorely failed ; I've slipped the ends of life,  
I yield ; you have conquered."

"Stay," I answered him :  
"I've something for your hearing, also.  
Have failed too."

“You!” he said, “you’re very great ;  
 The sadness of your greatness fits you well :  
 As if the plume upon a hero’s casque  
 Should nod a shadow upon his victor face.”

I took him up austerely,—“You have read  
 My book, but not my heart ; for recollect,  
 ’Tis writ in Sanscrit, which you bungle at.  
 I’ve surely failed, I know ; if failure means  
 To look back sadly on work gladly done,—  
 To wander on my mountains of Delight,  
 So called (I can remember a friend’s words  
 As well as you, sir) weary and in want  
 Of even a sheep-path, thinking bitterly . . .  
 Well, well ! no matter. I but say so much,  
 To keep you, Romney Leigh, from saying more,  
 And let you feel I am not so high indeed,  
 That I can bear to have you at my foot,—  
 Or safe, that I can help you. That June-day,  
 Too deeply sunk in craterous sunsets now  
 For you or me to dig it up alive ;  
 To pluck it out all bleeding with spent flame  
 At the roots, before those moralising stars  
 We have got instead,—that poor lost day, you said  
 Some words as truthful as the thing of mine  
 You care to keep in memory : and I hold  
 If I, that day, and, being the girl I was,  
 Had shown a gentler spirit, less arrogance,  
 It had not hurt me. Ah, you’ll not mistake  
 The point here. I but only think, you see,  
 More justly, that’s more humbly, of myself,  
 That when I tried a crown on and supposed . . .  
 Nay, laugh, sir,—I’ll laugh with you !—pray you, laugh.  
 I’ve had so many birthdays since that day,  
 I’ve learnt to prize mirth’s opportunities,



Which come too seldom. Was it you who said  
 I was not changed? the same Aurora? Ah,  
 We could laugh there, too! Why, Ulysses' dog  
 Knew *him*, and wagged his tail and died: but if  
 I had owned a dog, I too, before my Troy,  
 And, if you brought him here, . . . I warrant you  
 He'd look into my face, bark lustily,  
 And live on stoutly, as the creatures will  
 Whose spirits are not troubled by long loves.  
 A dog would never know me, I'm so changed;  
 Much less a friend . . . except that you're misled  
 By the colour of the hair, the trick of the voice,  
 Like that Aurora Leigh's."

"Sweet trick of voice!

I would be a dog for this, to know it at last,  
 And die upon the falls of it. O love,  
 O best Aurora! are you then so sad,  
 You scarcely had been sadder as my wife?"

"Your wife, sir! I must certainly be changed,  
 If I, Aurora, can have said a thing  
 So light, it catches at the knightly spurs  
 Of a noble gentleman like Romney Leigh,  
 And trips him from his honourable sense  
 Of what befits." . . .

"You wholly misconceive,"

He answered. I returned,—“I'm glad of it;  
 But keep from misconception, too, yourself:  
 I am not humbled to so low a point,  
 Nor so far saddened. If I am sad at all,  
 Ten layers of birthdays on a woman's head,  
 Are apt to fossilise her girlish mirth,  
 Though ne'er so merry: I'm perforce more wise,  
 And that, in truth, means sadder. For the rest,  
 Look here, sir: I was right upon the whole,

That birthday morning. 'Tis impossible  
To get at men excepting through their souls,  
However open their carnivorous jaws ;  
And poets get directlier at the soul,  
Than any of our œconomists :—for which,  
You must not overlook the poet's work  
When scheming for the world's necessities.  
The soul's the way. Not even Christ Himself  
Can save man else than as He holds man's soul ;  
And therefore did He come into our flesh,  
As some wise hunter creeping on his knees  
With a torch, into the blackness of some cave,  
To face and quell the beast there,—take the soul,  
And so possess the whole man, body and soul.  
I said, so far, right, yes ; not farther, though :  
We both were wrong that June-day,—both as wrong  
As an east wind had been. I who talked of art,  
And you who grieved for all men's griefs . . . what then ?  
We surely make too small a part for God  
In these things. What we are, imports us more  
Than what we eat ; and life, you've granted me,  
Develops from within. But innermost  
Of the inmost, most interior of the interne,  
God claims His own, Divine humanity  
Renewing nature,—or the piercingest verse,  
Prest in by subtlest poet, still must keep  
As much upon the outside of a man,  
As the very bowl in which he dips his beard.  
—And then, . . . the rest. I cannot surely speak.  
Perhaps I doubt more than you doubted then,  
If I, the poet's veritable charge,  
Have borne upon my forehead. If I have,  
It might feel somewhat liker to a crown,  
The foolish green one even.—Ah, I think,  
And chiefly when the sun shines, that I've failed.

But what then, Romney? Though we fail indeed,  
 You . . . I . . . a score of such weak workers, . . . He  
 Fails never. If He cannot work by us,  
 He will work over us. Does He want a man,  
 Much less a woman, think you? Every time  
 The star winks there, so many souls are born,  
 Who all shall work too. Let our own be calm:  
 We should be ashamed to sit beneath those stars,  
 Impatient that we're nothing."

"Could we sit

Just so for ever, sweetest friend," he said,  
 "My failure would seem better than success.  
 And yet, indeed, your book has dealt with me  
 More gently, cousin, than you ever will!  
 The book brought down entire the bright June-day,  
 And set me wandering in the garden-walks,  
 And let me watch the garland in a place,  
 You blushed so . . . nay, forgive me; do not stir:  
 I only thank the book for what it taught,  
 And what, permitted. Poet, doubt yourself;  
 But never doubt that you're a poet to me  
 From henceforth. Ah, you've written poems, sweet,  
 Which moved me in secret, as the sap is moved  
 In still March-branches, signless as a stone:  
 But this last book o'ercame me like soft rain  
 Which falls at midnight, when the tightened bark  
 Breaks out into unhesitating buds,  
 And sudden protestations of the spring.  
 In all your other books, I saw but *you*:  
 A man may see the moon so, in a pond,  
 And not be nearer therefore to the moon,  
 Nor use the sight . . . except to drown himself:  
 And so I forced my heart back from the sight;  
 For what had *I*, I thought, to do with *her*,—  
 Aurora . . . Romney? But, in this last book,

You showed me something separate from yourself,  
Beyond you ; and I bore to take it in,  
And let it draw me. You have shown me truths,  
O June-day friend, that help me now at night,  
When June is over ! truths not yours, indeed,  
But set within my reach by means of you :  
Presented by your voice and verse the way  
To take them clearest. Verily I was wrong ;  
And verily, many thinkers of this age,  
Ay, many Christian teachers, half in heaven,  
Are wrong in just my sense, who understood  
Our natural world too insularly, as if  
No spiritual counterpart completed it  
Consummating its meaning, rounding all  
To justice and perfection, line by line,  
Form by form, nothing single, nor alone,—  
The great below clenched by the great above ;  
Shade here authenticating substance there ;  
The body proving spirit, as the effect  
The cause : we, meantime, being too grossly apt  
To hold the natural, as dogs a bone  
(Though reason and nature beat us in the face) ;  
So obstinately, that we'll break our teeth  
Or ever we let go. For everywhere  
We're too materialistic,—eating clay  
(Like men of the west), instead of Adam's corn  
And Noah's wine ; clay by handfuls, clay by lumps,  
Until we're filled up to the throat with clay,  
And grow the grimy colour of the ground  
On which we are feeding. Ay, materialist  
The age's name is. God Himself, with some,  
Is apprehended as the bare result  
Of what His hand materially has made,  
Expressed in such an algebraic sign,  
Called God ;—that is, to put it otherwise,

They add up nature to a naught of God  
 And cross the quotient. There are many, even,  
 Whose names are written in the Christian church  
 To no dishonour,—diet still on mud,  
 And splash the altars with it. You might think  
 The clay, Christ laid upon their eyelids when,  
 Still blind, He called them to the use of sight,  
 Remained there to retard its exercise  
 With clogging incrustations. Close to heaven,  
 They see, for mysteries, through the open doors,  
 Vague puffs of smoke from pots of earthenware ;  
 And fain would enter, when their time shall come,  
 With quite a different body than St. Paul  
 Has promised,—husk and chaff, the whole barley-corn,  
 Or where's the resurrection ? ”

“ Thus it is, ”

I sighed. And he resumed with mournful face.  
 “ Beginning so, and filling up with clay  
 The wards of this great key, the natural world,  
 And fumbling vainly therefore at the lock  
 Of the spiritual,—we feel ourselves shut in  
 With all the wild-beast roar of struggling life,  
 The terrors and compunctions of our souls,  
 As saints with lions,—we who are not saints,  
 And have no heavenly lordship in our stare  
 To awe them backward ! Ay, we are forced, so pent,  
 To judge the whole too partially, . . . confound  
 Conclusions. Is there any common phrase  
 Significant, when the adverb's heard alone,  
 The verb being absent, and the pronoun out ?  
 But we, distracted in the roar of life,  
 Still insolently at God's adverb snatch,  
 And bruit against Him that His thought is void,  
 His meaning hopeless ;—cry, that everywhere  
 The government is slipping from his hand,

Unless some other Christ . . . say Romney Leigh . . .  
 Come up, and toil and moil, and change the world,  
 For which the First has proved inadequate,  
 However we talk bigly of His work  
 And piously of His person. We blaspheme  
 At last, to finish that doxology,  
 Despairing on the earth for which He died."

"So now," I asked, "you have more hope of men?"

"I hope," he answered: "I am come to think  
 That God will have His work done, as you said,  
 And that we need not be disturbed too much  
 For Romney Leigh or others having failed  
 With this or that quack nostrum,—recipes  
 For keeping summits by annulling depths,  
 For learning wrestling with long lounging sleeves,  
 And perfect heroism without a scratch.  
 We fail,—what then? Aurora, if I smiled  
 To see you, in your lovely morning-pride,  
 Try on the poet's wreath which suits the noon  
 (Sweet cousin, walls must get the weather-stain  
 Before they grow the ivy!)—certainly  
 I stood myself there worthier of contempt,  
 Self-rated, in disastrous arrogance,  
 As competent to sorrow for mankind  
 And even their odds. A man may well despair,  
 Who counts himself so needful to success.  
 I failed. I throw the remedy back on God,  
 And sit down here beside you, in good hope."

"And yet, take heed," I answered, "lest we lean  
 Too dangerously on the other side,  
 And so fail twice. Be sure, no earnest work  
 Of any honest creature, howbeit weak,

Imperfect, ill-adapted, fails so much,  
 It is not gathered as a grain of sand  
 To enlarge the sum of human action used  
 For carrying out God's end. No creature works  
 So ill, observe, that therefore he's cashiered.  
 The honest earnest man must stand and work ;  
 The woman also ; otherwise she drops  
 At once below the dignity of man,  
 Accepting serfdom. Free men freely work :  
 Whoever fears God, fears to sit at ease."

He cried, "True. After Adam, work was curse ;  
 The natural creature labours, sweats, and frets.  
 But, after Christ, work turns to privilege ;  
 And henceforth one with our humanity,  
 The Six-day Worker, working still in us,  
 Has called us freely to work on with Him  
 In high companionship. So, happiest !

I count that Heaven itself is only work  
 To a surer issue. Let us work, indeed,—  
 But, no more, work as Adam . . . nor as Leigh  
 Erewhile, as if the only man on earth,  
 Responsible for all the thistles blown  
 And tigers couchant,—struggling in amaze  
 Against disease and winter,—snarling on  
 For ever, that the world's not paradise.

Oh cousin, let us be content, in work,  
 To do the thing we can, and not presume  
 To fret because it's little. 'Twill employ  
 Seven men, they say, to make a perfect pin :  
 Who makes the head, content to miss the point,—  
 Who makes the point, agreed to leave the join :  
 And if a man should cry, ' I want a pin,  
 And I must make it straightway, head and point,'—  
 His wisdom is not worth the pin he wants.

Seven men to a pin,—and not a man too much !  
 Seven generations, haply, to this world,  
 To right it visibly, a finger's breadth,  
 And mend its rents a little. Oh, to storm  
 And say,—‘ This world here is intolerable ;  
 ‘ I will not eat this corn, nor drink this wine,  
 ‘ Nor love this woman, flinging her my soul  
 ‘ Without a bond for't, as a lover should,  
 ‘ Nor use the generous leave of happiness,  
 ‘ As not too good for using generously ’—  
 (Since virtue kindles at the touch of joy,  
 Like a man's cheek laid on a woman's hand ;  
 And God, who knows it, looks for quick returns  
 From joys) !—to stand and claim to have a life  
 Beyond the bounds of the individual man,  
 And raze all personal cloisters of the soul  
 To build up public stores and magazines,  
 As if God's creatures otherwise were lost,  
 The builder surely saved by any means !  
 To think,—I have a pattern on my nail,  
 And I will carve the world new after it,  
 And solve so, these hard social questions,—nay,  
 Impossible social questions,—since their roots  
 Strike deep in Evil's own existence here,  
 Which God permits because the question's hard  
 To abolish evil nor attain free-will.  
 Ay, hard to God, but not to Romney Leigh !  
 For Romney has a pattern on his nail  
 (Whatever may be lacking on the Mount),  
 And not being overnice to separate  
 What's element from what's convention, hastes  
 By line on line, to draw you out a world,  
 Without your help indeed, unless you take  
 His yoke upon you and will learn of him,—  
 So much he has to teach ! so good a world !



The same, the whole creation's groaning for !  
 No rich nor poor, no gain nor loss nor stint,  
 No pottage in it able to exclude  
 A brother's birthright, and no right of birth,  
 The pottage,—both secured to every man ;  
 And perfect virtue dealt out like the rest,  
 Gratuitously, with the soup at six,  
 To whoso does not seek it."

"Softly, sir,"

I interrupted,—“ I had a cousin once  
 I held in reverence. If he strained too wide,  
 It was not to take honour, but give help ;  
 The gesture was heroic. If his hand  
 Accomplished nothing . . . (well, it is not proved)  
 That empty hand thrown impotently out  
 Were sooner caught, I think, by One in heaven,  
 Than many a hand that reaped a harvest in  
 And keeps the scythe's glow on it. Pray you, then,  
 For my sake merely, use less bitterness  
 In speaking of my cousin."

"Ah," he said,

"Aurora ! when the prophet beats the ass,  
 The angel intercedes." He shook his head—  
 "And yet to mean so well, and fail so foul,  
 Expresses ne'er another beast than man ;  
 The antithesis is human. Harken, dear ;  
 There's too much abstract willing, purposing,  
 In this poor world. We talk by aggregates,  
 And think by systems ; and, being used to face  
 Our evils in statistics, are inclined  
 To cap them with unreal remedies  
 Drawn out in haste on the other side the slate."

"That's true," I answered, fain to throw up thought,  
 And make a game of't ; "Oh, we generalise

Enough to please you. If we pray at all,  
 We pray no longer for our daily bread,  
 But next centenary's harvest. If we give,  
 Our cup of water is not tendered till  
 We lay down pipes and found a Company  
 With Branches. Ass or angel, 'tis the same :  
 A woman cannot do the thing she ought,  
 Which means whatever perfect thing she can,  
 In life, in art, in science, but she fears  
 To let the perfect action take her part  
 And rest there : she must prove what she can do  
 Before she does it,—prate of woman's rights,  
 Of woman's mission, woman's function, till  
 The men (who are prating, too, on their side) cry,  
 'A woman's function plainly is . . . to talk.'  
 Poor souls, they are very reasonably vexed !  
 They cannot hear each other speak."

"And you,

An artist, judge so?"

"I, an artist,—yes,  
 Because, precisely, I'm an artist, sir,  
 And woman,—if another sate in sight,  
 I'd whisper,—Soft, my sister ! not a word !  
 By speaking we prove only we can speak ;  
 Which he, the man here, never doubted. What  
 He doubts, is whether he can *do* the thing  
 With decent grace, we've not yet done at all :  
 Now, do it ; bring your statue,—you have room !  
 He'll see it even by the starlight here ;  
 And if 'tis e'er so little like the god  
 Who looks out from the marble silently  
 Along the track of his own shining dart  
 Through the dusk of ages,—there's no need to speak ;  
 The universe shall henceforth speak for you,  
 And witness, 'She who did this thing, was born

' To do it,—claims her license in her work.  
 —And so with more works. Whoso cures the plague,  
 Though twice a woman, shall be called a leech :  
 Who rights a land's finances, is excused  
 For touching coppers, though her hands be white,—  
 But we, we talk !”

“ It is the age's mood,”

He said ; “ we boast, and do not. We put up  
 Hostelry signs where'er we lodge a day,—  
 Some red colossal cow, with mighty paps  
 A Cyclops' fingers could not strain to milk ;  
 Then bring out presently our saucerful  
 Of curds. We want more quiet in our works,  
 More knowledge of the bounds in which we work ;  
 More knowledge that each individual man  
 Remains an Adam to the general race,  
 Constrained to see, like Adam, that he keep  
 His personal state's condition honestly,  
 Or vain all thoughts of his to help the world,  
 Which still must be developed from its *one*,  
 If bettered in its many. We, indeed,  
 Who think to lay it out new like a park,  
 We take a work on us which is not man's ;  
 For God alone sits far enough above,  
 To speculate so largely. None of us  
 (Not Romney Leigh) is mad enough to say,  
 We'll have a grove of oaks upon that slope  
 And sink the need of acorns. Government,  
 If veritable and lawful, is not given  
 By imposition of the foreign hand,—  
 Nor chosen from a pretty pattern-book  
 Of some domestic ideologue, who sits  
 And coldly chooses empire, where as well  
 He might republic. Genuine government  
 Is but the expression of a nation, good

Or less good,—even as all society,  
 Howe'er unequal, monstrous, crazed, and cursed,  
 Is but the expression of men's single lives,  
 The loud sum of the silent units. What,  
 We'd change the aggregate and yet retain  
 Each separate figure? Whom do we cheat by that?  
 Now, not even Romney."

"Cousin, you are sad.  
 Did all your social labour at Leigh Hall  
 And elsewhere, come to nought then?"

"It *was* nought,"

He answered mildly. "There is room indeed,  
 For statues still, in this large world of God's,  
 But not for vacuums,—so I am not sad:  
 Not sadder than is good for what I am.  
 My vain phalanstery dissolved itself;  
 My men and women of disordered lives,  
 I brought in orderly to dine and sleep,  
 Broke up those waxen masks I made them wear,  
 With fierce contortions of the natural face;  
 And cursed me for my tyrannous constraint  
 In forcing crooked creatures to live straight;  
 And set the country hounds upon my back  
 To bite and tear me for my wicked deed  
 Of trying to do good without the church  
 Or even the squires, Aurora. Do you mind  
 Your ancient neighbours? The great book-club teems  
 With 'sketches,' 'summaries,' and 'last tracts' but twelve,  
 On Socialistic troublers of close bonds  
 Betwixt the generous rich and grateful poor.  
 The vicar preached from 'Revelations,' (till  
 The doctor woke) and found me with 'the frogs'  
 On three successive Sundays; ay, and stopped  
 To weep a little (for he's getting old)  
 That such perdition should o'ertake a man

Of such fair acres,—in the parish, too !  
 He printed his discourses ‘by request ;’  
 And if your book shall sell as his did, then  
 Your verses are less good than I suppose.  
 The women of the neighbourhood subscribed,  
 And sent me a copy bound in scarlet silk,  
 Tooled edges, blazoned with the arms of Leigh :  
 I own that touched me.”

“What, the pretty ones ?

Poor Romney !” “Otherwise the effect was small.  
 I had my windows broken once or twice  
 By liberal peasants, naturally incensed  
 At such a vexer of Arcadian peace,  
 Who would not let men call their wives their own  
 To kick like Britons,—and made obstacles  
 When things went smoothly as a baby drugged,  
 Toward freedom and starvation ; bringing down  
 The wicked London tavern-thieves and drabs,  
 To affront the blessed hillside drabs and thieves  
 With mended morals, quotha,—fine new lives !—  
 My windows paid for’t. I was shot at, once,  
 By an active poacher who had hit a hare  
 From the other barrel, tired of springeing game  
 So long upon my acres, undisturbed,  
 And restless for the country’s virtue (yet  
 He missed me)—ay, and pelted very oft  
 In riding through the village. ‘There he goes,  
 ‘Who’d drive away our Christian gentlefolks,  
 ‘To catch us undefended in the trap  
 ‘He baits with poisonous cheese, and lock us up  
 ‘In that pernicious prison of Leigh Hall  
 ‘With all his murderers ! Give another name,  
 ‘And say Leigh Hell, and burn it up with fire.’  
 And so they did, at last, Aurora.”

“Did ?”

“ You never heard it, cousin ? Vincent’s news  
Came stinted, then.”

“ They did ? they burnt Leigh Hall ? ”

“ You’re sorry, dear Aurora ? Yes, indeed,  
They did it perfectly : a thorough work,  
And not a failure, this time. Let us grant  
'Tis somewhat easier, though, to burn a house  
Than build a system ;—yet that’s easy, too,  
In a dream. Books, pictures,—ay, the pictures ! what,  
You think your dear Vandykes would give them pause ?  
Our proud ancestral Leighs, with those peaked beards,  
Or bosoms white as foam thrown up on rocks  
From the old-spent wave. Such calm defiant looks  
They flared up with ! now, nevermore they’ll twit  
The bones in the family-vault with ugly death,  
Not one was rescued, save the Lady Maud,  
Who threw you down, that morning you were born,  
The undeniable lineal mouth and chin,  
To wear for ever for her gracious sake ;  
For which good deed I saved her : the rest went :  
And you, you’re sorry, cousin. Well, for me,  
With all my phalansterians safely out  
(Poor hearts, they helped the burners, it was said,  
And certainly a few clapped hands and yelled)  
The ruin did not hurt me as it might,—  
As when, for instance, I was hurt one day,  
A certain letter being destroyed. In fact,  
To see the great house flare so . . . oaken floors,  
Our fathers made so fine with rushes once,  
Before our mothers furbished them with trains,—  
Carved wainscots, panelled walls, the favourite slide  
For draining off a martyr (or a rogue),  
The echoing galleries, half a half-mile long,  
And all the various stairs that took you up

And took you down, and took you round about  
 Upon their slippery darkness, recollect,  
 All helping to keep up one blazing jest ;  
 The flames through all the casements pushing forth,  
 Like red-hot devils crinkled into snakes,  
 All signifying,—‘ Look you, Romney Leigh,  
 ‘ We save the people from your saving, here,  
 ‘ Yet so as by fire ! we make a pretty show  
 ‘ Besides,—and that’s the best you’ve ever done.’  
 —To see this, almost moved myself to clap !  
 The ‘ vale et plaude ’ came, too, with effect,  
 When in the roof fell, and the fire, that paused,  
 Stunned momentarily beneath the stroke of slates  
 And tumbling rafters, rose at once and roared,  
 And wrapping the whole house (which disappeared  
 In a mounting whirlwind of dilated flame),  
 Blew upward, straight, its drift of fiery chaff  
 In the face of Heaven, . . . which blenched, and ran up higher.’

“ Poor Romney ! ”

“ Sometimes when I dream,” he said,  
 “ I hear the silence after ; ’twas so still.  
 For all those wild beasts, yelling, cursing round,  
 Were suddenly silent, while you counted five !  
 So silent, that you heard a young bird fall  
 From the top-nest in the neighbouring rookery  
 Through edging over-rashly toward the light.  
 The old rooks had already fled too far,  
 To hear the screech they fled with, though you saw  
 Some flying on still, like scatterings of dead leaves  
 In autumn-gusts, seen dark against the sky :  
 All flying,—ousted, like the House of Leigh.”

“ Dear Romney ! ”

“ Evidently ’twould have been

A fine sight for a poet, sweet, like you,  
 To make the verse blaze after. I myself,  
 Even I, felt something in the grand old trees,  
 Which stood that moment like brute Druid gods  
 Amazed upon the rim of ruin, where,  
 As into a blackened socket, the great fire  
 Had dropped,—still throwing up splinters now and then,  
 To show them gray with all their centuries,  
 Left there to witness that on such a day  
 The house went out."

"Ah!"

"While you counted five  
 I seemed to feel a little like a Leigh,—  
 But then it passed, Aurora. A child cried;  
 And I had enough to think of what to do  
 With all those houseless wretches in the dark,  
 And ponder where they'd dance the next time, they  
 Who had burnt the viol."

"Did you think of that?"

Who burns his viol will not dance, I know,  
 To cymbals, Romney."

"O my sweet sad voice,"

He cried,—“O voice that speaks and overcomes!  
 The sun is silent, but Aurora speaks.”

“Alas,” I said; “I speak I know not what:  
 I’m back in childhood, thinking as a child,  
 A foolish fancy—will it make you smile?  
 I shall not from the window of my room  
 Catch sight of those old chimneys any more.”

“No more,” he answered. “If you pushed one day  
 Through all the green hills to our fathers’ house,  
 You’d come upon a great charred circle where  
 The patient earth was singed an acre round;



With one stone-stair, symbolic of my life,  
 Ascending, winding, leading up to nought !  
 'Tis worth a poet's seeing. Will you go ? ”

I made no answer. Had I any right  
 To weep with this man, that I dared to speak ?  
 A woman stood between his soul and mine,  
 And waved us off from touching evermore  
 With those unclean white hands of hers. Enough.  
 We had burnt our viols and were silent.

So,

The silence lengthened till it pressed. I spoke,  
 To breathe : “ I think you were ill afterward.”

“ More ill,” he answered, “ had been scarcely ill.  
 I hoped this feeble fumbling at life's knot  
 Might end concisely,—but I failed to die,  
 As formerly I failed to live,—and thus  
 Grew willing, having tried all other ways,  
 To try just God's. Humility's so good,  
 When pride's impossible. Mark us, how we make  
 Our virtues, cousin, from our worn-out sins,  
 Which smack of them from henceforth. Is it right,  
 For instance, to wed here, while you love there ?  
 And yet because a man sins once, the sin  
 Cleaves to him, in necessity to sin ;  
 That if he sin not so, to damn himself,  
 He sins so, to damn others with himself :  
 And thus, to wed here, loving there, becomes  
 A duty. Virtue buds a dubious leaf  
 Round mortal brows ; your ivy's better, dear.  
 —Yet she, 'tis certain, is my very wife ;  
 The very lamb left mangled by the wolves  
 Through my own bad shepherding : and could I choose  
 But take her on my shoulder past this stretch

Of rough, uneasy wilderness, poor lamb,  
 Poor child, poor child?—Aurora, my belov'd,  
 I will not vex you any more to-night;  
 But, having spoken what I came to say,  
 The rest shall please you. What she can, in me,—  
 Protection, tender liking, freedom, ease,  
 She shall have surely, liberally, for her  
 And hers, Aurora. Small amends they'll make  
 For hideous evils (which she had not known  
 Except by me) and for this imminent loss,  
 This forfeit presence of a gracious friend,  
 Which also she must forfeit for my sake,  
 Since, . . . drop your hand in mine a moment, sweet,  
 We're parting!—Ah, my snowdrop, what a touch,  
 As if the wind had swept it off! you grudge  
 Your gelid sweetness on my palm but so,  
 A moment? angry, that I could not bear  
 You . . . speaking, breathing, living, side by side  
 With some one called my wife . . . and live, myself?  
 Nay, be not cruel—you must understand!  
 Your lightest footfall on a floor of mine  
 Would shake the house, my lintel being uncrossed  
 'Gainst angels: henceforth it is night with me,  
 And so, henceforth, I put the shutters up;  
 Auroras must not come to spoil my dark."

He smiled so feebly, with an empty hand  
 Stretched sideways from me,—as indeed he looked  
 To any one but me to give him help,—  
 And, while the moon came suddenly out full,  
 The double-rose of our Italian moons,  
 Sufficient, plainly, for the heaven and earth  
 (The stars, struck dumb and washed away in dews  
 Of golden glory, and the mountains steeped  
 In divine languor), he, the man, appeared

So pale and patient, like the marble man  
A sculptor puts his personal sadness in  
To join his grandeur of ideal thought,—  
As if his mallet struck me from my height  
Of passionate indignation, I who had risen  
Pale,—doubting, paused, . . . Was Romney mad indeed?  
Had all this wrong of heart made sick the brain?

Then quiet, with a sort of tremulous pride,  
“Go, cousin,” I said coldly. “A farewell  
Was sooner spoken ’twixt a pair of friends  
In those old days, than seems to suit you now :  
And if, since then, I’ve writ a book or two,  
I’m somewhat dull still in the manly art  
Of phrase and metaphrase. Why, any man  
Can carve a score of white Loves out of snow,  
As Buonarroti down in Florence there,  
And set them on the wall in some safe shade,  
As safe, sir, as your marriage! very good ;  
Though if a woman took one from the ledge  
To put on the table by her flowers,  
And let it mind her of a certain friend,  
’Twould drop at once (so better), would not bear  
Her nail-mark even, where she took it up  
A little tenderly ; so best, I say :  
For me, I would not touch so light a thing,  
And risk to spoil it half an hour before  
The sun shall shine to melt it : leave it there.  
I’m plain at speech, direct in purpose : when  
I speak, you’ll take the meaning as it is,  
And not allow for puckerings in the silks  
By clever stitches. I’m a woman, sir,  
And use the woman’s fingers naturally,  
As you, the male license. So, I wish you well.  
I’m simply sorry for the griefs you’ve had—

And not for your sake, only but mankind's.  
 This race is never grateful : from the first,  
 One fills their cup at supper with pure wine,  
 Which back they give at cross-time on a sponge,  
 In bitter vinegar."

" If gratefuller,"

He murmured,—“by so much less pitiable !  
 God's self would never have come down to die,  
 Could man have thanked Him for it.” “ Happily  
 'Tis patent that, whatever,” I resumed,  
 “ You suffered from this thanklessness of men,  
 You sink no more than Moses' bulrush boat,  
 When once relieved of Moses ; for you're light,  
 You're light, my cousin ! which is well for you,  
 And manly. For myself,—now mark me, sir,  
 They burnt Leigh Hall : but if, consummated  
 To devils, heightened beyond Lucifers,  
 They had burnt instead a star or two, of those  
 We saw above there just a moment back,  
 Before the moon abolished them,—destroyed  
 And riddled them in ashes through a sieve  
 On the head of the foundering universe,—what then ?  
 If you and I remained still you and I,  
 It would not shift our places as mere friends,  
 Nor render decent you should toss a phrase  
 Beyond the point of actual feeling !—nay  
 You shall not interrupt me : as you said,  
 We're parting. Certainly, not once or twice,  
 To-night you've mocked me somewhat, or yourself ;  
 And, I, at least, have not deserved it so  
 That I should meet it unsurprised. But now,  
 Enough : we're parting . . . parting. Cousin Leigh,  
 I wish you well through all the acts of life  
 And life's relations, wedlock, not the least ;  
 And it shall ' please me,' in your words, to know

You yield your wife, protection, freedom, ease,  
And very tender liking. May you live  
So happy with her, Romney, that your friends  
May praise her for it. Meantime, some of us  
Are wholly dull in keeping ignorant  
Of what she has suffered by you, and what debt  
Of sorrow your rich love sits down to pay :  
But if 'tis sweet for love to pay its debt,  
'Tis sweeter still for love to give its gift ;  
And you, be liberal in the sweeter way,—  
You can, I think. At least, as touches me,  
You owe her, Cousin Romney, no amends ;  
She is not used to hold my gown so fast,  
You need entreat her now to let it go :  
The lady never was a friend of mine,  
Nor capable,—I thought you knew as much,—  
Of losing for your sake so poor a prize  
As such a worthless friendship. Be content,  
Good cousin, therefore, both for her and you !  
I'll never spoil your dark, nor dull your noon,  
Nor vex you when you're merry, nor when you rest :  
You shall not need to put a shutter up  
To keep out this Aurora. Ah, your north  
Can make Auroras which vex nobody,  
Scarce known from evenings ! also, let me say,  
My larks fly higher than some windows. Right ;  
You've read your Leighs. Indeed, 'twould shake a house,  
If such as I came in with outstretched hand,  
Still warm and thrilling from the clasp of one . . .  
Of one we know, . . . to acknowledge, palm to palm,  
As mistress there . . . the Lady Waldemar."

"Now God be with us" . . . with a sudden clash  
Of voice he interrupted—"what name's that?  
You spoke a name, Aurora."

“ Pardon me ;

I would that, Romney, I could name your wife  
Nor wound you, yet be worthy.”

“ Are we mad ? ”

He echoed—“ wife ! mine ! Lady Waldemar !  
I think you said my wife.” He sprang to his feet,  
And threw his noble head back toward the moon  
As one who swims against a stormy sea,  
And laughed with such a helpless, hopeless scorn,  
I stood and trembled.

“ May God judge me so, ”

He said at last,—“ I came convicted here,  
And humbled sorely if not enough. I came,  
Because this woman from her crystal soul  
Had shown me something which a man calls light :  
Because too, formerly, I sinned by her  
As, then and ever since, I have, by God,  
Through arrogance of nature,—though I loved . . .  
Whom best, I need not say, . . . since that is writ  
Too plainly in the book of my misdeeds ;  
And thus I came here to abase myself,  
And fasten, kneeling, on her regent brows  
A garland which I startled thence one day  
Of her beautiful June-youth. But here again  
I'm baffled !—fail in my abasement as  
My aggrandisement : there's no room left for me,  
At any woman's foot, who misconceives  
My nature, purpose, possible actions. What !  
Are you the Aurora who made large my dreams  
To frame your greatness ? you conceive so small ?  
You stand so less than woman, though being more,  
And lose your natural instinct, like a beast,  
Through intellectual culture ? since indeed  
I do not think that any common she  
Would dare adopt such fancy-forgeries

For the legible life-signature of such  
 As I, with all my blots : with all my blots !  
 At last then, peerless cousin, we are peers—  
 At last we're even. Ah, you've left your height ;  
 And here upon my level we take hands,  
 And here I reach you to forgive you, sweet,  
 And that's a fall, Aurora. Long ago  
 You seldom understood me,—but, before,  
 I could not blame you. Then, you only seemed  
 So high above, you could not see below ;  
 But now I breathe,—but now I pardon!—nay,  
 We're parting. Dearest, men have burnt my house,  
 Maligned my motives,—but not one, I swear,  
 Has wronged my soul as this Aurora has,  
 Who called the Lady Waldemar my wife.”

“ Not married to her ! yet you said ” . . .

“ Again ?

Nay, read the lines ” (he held a letter out)

“ She sent you through me.”

By the moonlight there,

I tore the meaning out with passionate haste

Much rather than I read it. Thus it ran.

## NINTH BOOK.

EVEN thus. I pause to write it out at length,  
The letter of the Lady Waldemar.—

“ I prayed your cousin Leigh to take you this,  
He says he'll do it. After years of love,  
Or what is called so,—when a woman frets  
And fools upon one string of a man's name,  
And fingers it for ever till it breaks,—  
He may perhaps do for her such a thing,  
And she accept it without detriment,  
Although she should not love him any more.  
And I, who do not love him, nor love you,  
Nor you, Aurora,—choose you shall repent  
Your most ungracious letter, and confess,  
Constrained by his convictions (he's convinced),  
You've wronged me foully. Are you made so ill,  
You woman—to impute such ill to *me*?  
We both had mothers,—lay in their bosom once.  
Why, after all, I thank you, Aurora Leigh,  
For proving to myself that there are things  
I would not do, . . . not for my life . . . nor him . . .  
Though something I have somewhat overdone,—  
For instance, when I went to see the gods  
One morning on Olympus, with a step  
That shook the thunder in a certain cloud,  
Committing myself vilely. Could I think,  
The Muse I pulled my heart out from my breast  
To soften, had herself a sort of heart,  
And loved my mortal? He, at least, loved her;  
I heard him say so; 'twas my recompense,  
When, watching at his bedside fourteen days,  
He broke out ever like a flame at whiles  
Between the heats of fever . . . 'Is it thou?



' Breathe closer, sweetest mouth ! ' and when at last  
 The fever gone, the wasted face extinct  
 As if it irked him much to know me there,  
 He said, ' 'Twas kind, 'twas good, 'twas womanly,'  
 (And fifty praises to excuse one love)  
 ' But was the picture safe he had ventured for ? '  
 And then, half wandering . . . ' I have loved her well,  
 ' Although she could not love me.'—' Say instead,'  
 I answered, ' that she loves you.'—'Twas my turn  
 To rave (I would have married him so changed,  
 Although the world had jeered me properly  
 For taking up with Cupid at his worst,  
 The silver quiver worn off on his hair :)  
 ' No, no,' he murmured, ' no, she loves me not ;  
 ' Aurora Leigh does better : bring her book  
 ' And read it softly, Lady Waldemar,  
 ' Until I thank your friendship more for that,  
 ' Than even for harder service.' So I read  
 Your book, Aurora, for an hour, that day :  
 I kept its pauses, marked its emphasis ;  
 My voice, empaled upon rhyme's golden hooks,  
 Not once would writhe, nor quiver, nor revolt ;  
 I read on calmly,—calmly shut it up,  
 Observing, ' There's some merit in the book.  
 ' And yet the merit in't is thrown away  
 ' As chances still with women, if we write  
 ' Or write not : we want string to tie our flowers,  
 ' So drop them as we walk, which serves to show  
 ' The way we went. Good morning, Mister Leigh ;  
 ' You'll find another reader the next time.  
 ' A woman who does better than to love,  
 ' I hate ; she will do nothing very well :  
 ' Male poets are preferable, tiring less  
 ' And teaching more.' I triumphed o'er you both,  
 And left him.

“ When I saw him afterward,  
I had read your shameful letter, and my heart.  
He came with health recovered, strong though pale,  
Lord Howe and he, a courteous pair of friends,  
To say what men dare say to women, when  
Their debtors. But I stopped them with a word;  
And proved I had never trodden such a road,  
To carry so much dirt upon my shoe.  
Then, putting into it something of disdain,  
I asked forsooth his pardon, and my own,  
For having done no better than to love,  
And that, not wisely,—though ’twas long ago,  
And though ’twas altered perfectly since then.  
I told him, as I tell you now, Miss Leigh,  
And proved I took some trouble for his sake  
(Because I knew he did not love the girl)  
To spoil my hands with working in the stream  
Of that poor bubbling nature,—till she went,  
Consigned to one I trusted, my own maid,  
Who once had lived full five months in my house  
(Dressed hair superbly), with a lavish purse  
To carry to Australia where she had left  
A husband, said she. If the creature lied,  
The mission failed, we all do fail and lie  
More or less—and I’m sorry—which is all  
Expected from us when we fail the most,  
And go to church to own it. What I meant,  
Was just the best for him, and me, and her . . .  
Best even for Marian!—I am sorry for’t,  
And very sorry. Yet my creature said  
She saw her stop to speak in Oxford Street  
To one . . . no matter! I had sooner cut  
My hand off (though ’twere kissed the hour before,  
And promised a pearl troth-ring for the next)  
Than crush her silly head with so much wrong.

Poor child ! I would have mended it with gold,  
Until it gleamed like St. Sophia's dome  
When all the faithful troop to morning prayer :  
But he, he nipped the bud of such a thought  
With that cold Leigh look which I fancied once,  
And broke in, ' Henceforth she was called his wife.  
' His wife required no succour : he was bound  
' To Florence, to resume this broken bond :  
' Enough so. Both were happy, he and Howe,  
' To acquit me of the heaviest charge of all—'  
—At which I shot my tongue against my fly  
And struck him ; ' Would he carry,—he was just,—  
' A letter from me to Aurora Leigh,  
' And ratify from his authentic mouth  
' My answer to her accusation ? '—' Yes,  
' If such a letter were prepared in time.'  
—He's just, your cousin,—ay, abhorrently.  
He'd wash his hands in blood, to keep them clean.  
And so, cold, courteous, a mere gentleman,  
He bowed, we parted. " Parted. Face no more,  
Voice no more, love no more ! wiped wholly out  
Like some ill scholar's scrawl from heart and slate,—  
Ay, spit on and so wiped out utterly  
By some coarse scholar ! I have been too coarse,  
Too human. Have we business, in our rank,  
With blood i' the veins ? I will have henceforth none ;  
Not even to keep the colour at my lip.  
A rose is pink and pretty without blood ;  
Why not a woman ? When we've played in vain  
The game, to adore,—we have resources still,  
And can play on at leisure, being adored :  
Here's Smith already swearing at my feet  
That I'm the typic She. Away with Smith !—  
Smith smacks of Leigh,—and, henceforth, I'll admit  
No socialist within three crinolines,

To live and have his being. But for you,  
 Though insolent your letter and absurd,  
 And though I hate you frankly,—take my Smith !  
 For when you have seen this famous marriage tied,  
 A most unspotted Erle to a noble Leigh  
 (His love astray on one he should not love),  
 Howbeit you should not want his love, beware,  
 You'll want some comfort. So I leave you Smith ;  
 Take Smith !—he talks Leigh's subjects, somewhat worse ;  
 Adopts a thought of Leigh's, and dwindles it ;  
 Goes leagues beyond, to be no inch behind ;  
 Will mind you of him, as a shoe-string may,  
 Of a man : and women, when they are made like you,  
 Grow tender to a shoe-string, footprint even,  
 Adore averted shoulders in a glass,  
 And memories of what, present once, was loathed.  
 And yet, you loathed not Romney,—though you've played  
 At ' fox and goose ' about him with your soul :  
 Pass over fox, you rub out fox,—ignore  
 A feeling, you eradicate it,—the act's  
 Identical.

“ I wish you joy, Miss Leigh.

You've made a happy marriage for your friend ;  
 And all the honour, well-assorted love,  
 Derives from you who love him, whom he loves !  
 You need not wish *me* joy to think of it,  
 I have so much. Observe, Aurora Leigh ;  
 Your droop of eyelid is the same as his,  
 And, but for you, I might have won his love,  
 And, to you, I have shown my naked heart,—  
 For which three things I hate, hate, hate you. Hush,  
 Suppose a fourth !—I cannot choose but think  
 That, with him, I were virtuouser than you  
 Without him : so I hate you from this gulf  
 And hollow of my soul, which opens out

To what, except for you, had been my heaven,  
And is instead, a place to curse by! LOVE."

An active kind of curse. I stood there cursed—  
Confounded. I had seized and caught the sense  
Of the letter with its twenty stinging snakes,  
In a moment's sweep of eyesight, and I stood  
Dazed.—"Ah!—not married." "You mistake," he said;  
"I'm married. Is not Marian Erle my wife?  
As God sees things, I have a wife and child;  
And I, as I'm a man who honours God,  
Am here to claim them as my child and wife."

I felt it hard to breathe, much less to speak.  
Nor word of mine was needed. Some one else  
Was there for answering. "Romney," she began,  
"My great good angel, Romney." Then at first,  
I knew that Marian Erle was beautiful.  
She stood there, still and pallid as a saint,  
Dilated, like a saint in ecstasy,  
As if the floating moonshine interposed  
Betwixt her foot and the earth, and raised her up  
To float upon it. "I had left my child,  
Who sleeps," she said, "and, having drawn this way,  
I heard you speaking, . . . friend!—Confirm me now.  
You take this Marian, such as wicked men  
Have made her, for your honourable wife?"

The thrilling, solemn, proud, pathetic voice.  
He stretched his arms out toward the thrilling voice,  
As if to draw it on to his embrace.  
—"I take her as God made her, and as men  
Must fail to unmake her, for my honoured wife."

She never raised her eyes, nor took a step,  
But stood there in her place, and spoke again.

—“ You take this Marian’s child, which is her shame  
 In sight of men and women, for your child,  
 Of whom you will not ever feel ashamed ? ”

The thrilling, tender, proud, pathetic voice.  
 He stepped on toward it, still with outstretched arms,  
 As if to quench upon his breast that voice.

—“ May God so father me, as I do him,  
 And so forsake me as I let him feel  
 He’s orphaned haply. Here I take the child  
 To share my cup, to slumber on my knee,  
 To play his loudest gambol at my foot,  
 To hold my finger in the public ways,  
 Till none shall need inquire, ‘ Whose child is this ? ’  
 The gesture saying so tenderly, ‘ My own. ’ ”

She stood a moment silent in her place ;  
 Then, turning toward me, very slow and cold—  
 —“ And you,—what say you ?—will you blame me much  
 If, careful for that outcast child of mine,  
 I catch this hand that’s stretched to me and him,  
 Nor dare to leave him friendless in the world  
 Where men have stoned me ? Have I not the right  
 To take so mere an aftermath from life,  
 Else found so wholly bare ? Or is it wrong  
 To let your cousin, for a generous bent,  
 Put out his ungloved fingers among briars  
 To set a tumbling bird’s-nest somewhat straight ?  
 You will not tell him, though we’re innocent  
 We are not harmless ? . . . and that both our harms  
 Will stick to his good smooth noble life like burrs,  
 Never to drop off though you shake the cloak ?  
 You’ve been my friend : you will not now be his ?  
 You’ve known him, that’s he worthy of a friend ;  
 And you’re his cousin, lady, after all,

And therefore more than free to take his part,  
Explaining, since the nest is surely spoilt,  
And Marian what you know her,—though a wife,  
The world would hardly understand her case  
Of being just hurt and honest ; while for him,  
'Twould ever twit him with his bastard child  
And married harlot. Speak, while yet there's time :  
You would not stand and let a good man's dog  
Turn round and rend him, because his, and reared  
Of a generous breed,—and will you let his act,  
Because it's generous ? Speak. I'm bound to you,  
And I'll be bound by only you, in this."

The thrilling, solemn voice, so passionless,  
Sustained, yet low, without a rise or fall,  
As one who had authority to speak,  
And not as Marian. I looked up to feel  
If God stood near me, and beheld His heaven  
As blue as Aaron's priestly robe appeared  
To Aaron when he took it off to die.  
And then I spoke—"Accept the gift, I say,  
My sister Marian, and be satisfied.  
The hand that gives, has still a soul behind  
Which will not let it quail for having given,  
Though foolish worldlings talk they know not what,  
Of what they know not. Romney's strong enough  
For this : do you be strong to know he's strong :  
He stands on Right's side ; never flinch for him,  
As if he stood on the other. You'll be bound  
By me ? I am a woman of repute ;  
No fly-blown gossip ever specked my life ;  
My name is clean and open as this hand,  
Whose glove there's not a man dares blab about,  
As if he had touched it freely :—here's my hand  
To clasp your hand, my Marian, owned as pure !

As pure,—as I'm a woman and a Leigh !—  
 And, as I'm both, I'll witness to the world  
 That Romney Leigh is honoured in his choice,  
 Who chooses Marian for his honoured wife."

Her broad wild woodland eyes shot out a light ;  
 Her smile was wonderful for rapture. " Thanks,  
 My great Aurora." Forward then she sprang,  
 And dropping her impassioned spaniel head  
 With all its brown abandonment of curls  
 On Romney's feet, we heard the kisses drawn  
 Through sobs upon the foot, upon the ground—  
 " O Romney ! O my angel ! O unchanged,  
 Though, since we've parted, I have past the grave !  
 But Death itself could only better *thee*,  
 Not change thee !—*Thee* I do not thank at all :  
 I but thank God who made thee what thou art,  
 So wholly godlike."

When he tried in vain  
 To raise her to his embrace, escaping thence  
 As any leaping fawn from a huntsman's grasp,  
 She bounded off and 'lighted beyond reach,  
 Before him, with a staglike majesty  
 Of soft, serene defiance,—as she knew  
 He could not touch her, so was tolerant  
 He had cared to try. She stood there with her great  
 Drowned eyes, and dripping cheeks, and strange  
 sweet smile

That lived through all, as if one held a light  
 Across a waste of waters,—shook her head  
 To keep some thoughts down deeper in her soul,—  
 Then, white and tranquil as a summer-cloud  
 Which, having rained itself to a tardy peace,  
 Stands still in heaven as if it ruled the day,  
 Spoke out again—" Although, my generous friend,



Since last we met and parted, you're unchanged,  
And, having promised faith to Marian Erle,  
Maintain it, as she were not changed at all ;  
And though that's worthy, though that's full of balm  
To any conscious spirit of a girl  
Who once has loved you as I loved you once,—  
Yet still it will not make her . . . if she's dead,  
And gone away where none can give or take  
In marriage,—able to revive, return  
And wed you,—will it, Romney? Here's the point ;  
O friend, we'll see it plainer : you and I  
Must never, never, never join hands so.  
Nay, let me say it,—for I said it first  
To God, and placed it, rounded to an oath,  
Far, far above the moon there, at His feet,  
As surely as I wept just now at yours,—  
We never, never, never join hands so.  
And now, be patient with me ; do not think  
I'm speaking from a false humility.  
The truth is, I am grown so proud with grief,  
And He has said so often through His nights  
And through His mornings, ' Weep a little still.  
' Thou foolish Marian, because women must,  
' But do not blush at all except for sin,'—  
That I, who felt myself unworthy once  
Of virtuous Romney and his high-born race,  
Have come to learn, . . . a woman, poor or rich,  
Despised or honoured, is a human soul ;  
And what her soul is,—that, she is herself,  
Although she should be spit upon of men,  
As is the pavement of the churches here,  
Still good enough to pray in. And, being chaste  
And honest, and inclined to do the right,  
And love the truth, and live my life out green  
And smooth beneath his steps, I should not fear

To make him, thus, a less uneasy time  
 Than many a happier woman. Very proud  
 You see me. Pardon, that I set a trap  
 To hear a confirmation in your voice . . .  
 Both yours and yours. It is so good to know  
 'Twas really God who said the same before :  
 For thus it is in heaven, that first God speaks,  
 And then His angels. Oh, it does me good,  
 It wipes me clean and sweet from devil's dirt,  
 That Romney Leigh should think me worthy still  
 Of being his true and honourable wife !  
 Henceforth I need not say, on leaving earth,  
 I had no glory in it. For the rest,  
 The reason's ready (master, angel, friend,  
 Be patient with me) wherefore you and I  
 Can never, never, never join hands so.  
 I know you'll not be angry like a man  
 (For *you* are none) when I shall tell the truth,—  
 Which is, I do not love you, Romney Leigh,  
 I do not love you. Ah well! catch my hands,  
 Miss Leigh, and burn into my eyes with yours,—  
 I swear I do not love him. Did I once ?  
 'Tis said that women have been bruised to death,  
 And yet, if once they loved, that love of theirs  
 Could never be drained out with all their blood :  
 I've heard such things and pondered. Did I indeed  
 Love once ? or did I only worship ? Yes,  
 Perhaps, O friend, I set you up so high  
 Above all actual good or hope of good,  
 Or fear of evil, all that could be mine,  
 I haply set you above love itself,  
 And out of reach of these poor woman's arms,  
 Angelic Romney. What was in my thought ?  
 To be your slave, your help, your toy, your tool.  
 To be your love . . . I never thought of that.

To give you love . . . still less. I gave you love ?  
I think I did not give you anything ;  
I was but only yours,—upon my knees,  
All yours, in soul and body, in head and heart,—  
A creature you had taken from the ground,  
Still crumbling through your fingers to your feet  
To join the dust she came from. Did I love,  
Or did I worship ? judge, Aurora Leigh !  
But, if indeed I loved, 'twas long ago,—  
So long ! before the sun and moon were made,  
Before the hells were open,—ah, before  
I heard my child cry in the desert night,  
And knew he had no father. It may be,  
I'm not as strong as other women are,  
Who, torn and crushed, are not undone from love.  
It may be, I am colder than the dead,  
Who, being dead, love always. But for me  
Once killed, . . . this ghost of Marian loves no more,  
No more . . . except the child ! . . . no more at all.  
I told your cousin, sir, that I was dead ;  
And now, she thinks I'll get up from my grave,  
And wear my chin-cloth for a wedding-veil,  
And glide along the churchyard like a bride,  
While all the dead keep whispering through the withes  
' You would be better in your place with us,  
' You pitiful corruption !' At the thought,  
The damps break out on me like leprosy,  
Although I'm clean. Ay, clean as Marian Erle :  
As Marian Leigh, I know, I were not clean :  
I have not so much life that I should love,  
. . . Except the child. Ah God ! I could not bear  
To see my darling on a good man's knees,  
And know by such a look, or such a sigh,  
Or such a silence, that he thought sometimes,  
' This child was fathered by some cursed wretch' . . .

For, Romney,—angels are less tender-wise  
 Than God and mothers : even *you* would think  
 What *we* think never. He is ours, the child ;  
 And we would sooner vex a soul in heaven  
 By coupling with it the dead body's thought,  
 It left behind it in a last month's grave,  
 Than, in my child, see other than . . . my child.  
 We only never call him fatherless  
 Who has God and his mother. O my babe,  
 My pretty, pretty blossom, an ill-wind  
 Once blew upon my breast ! can any think  
 I'd have another,—one called happier,  
 A fathered child, with father's love and race  
 That's worn as bold and open as a smile,  
 To vex my darling when he's asked his name  
 And has no answer ? What ! a happier child  
 Than mine, my best,—who laughed so loud to-night  
 He could not sleep for pastime ? Nay, I swear  
 By life and love, that, if I lived like some,  
 And loved like . . . *some* . . . ay, loved you, Romney  
 Leigh,

As some love (eyes that have wept so much, see clear),  
 I've room for no more children in my arms ;  
 My kisses are all melted on one mouth ;  
 I would not push my darling to a stool  
 To dandle babies. Here's a hand, shall keep  
 For ever clean without a marriage-ring,  
 To tend my boy, until he cease to need  
 One steadying finger of it, and desert  
 (Not miss) his mother's lap, to sit with men.  
 And when I miss him (not he me) I'll come  
 And say, ' Now give me some of Romney's work,  
 ' To help your outcast orphans of the world,  
 ' And comfort grief with grief.' For you, meantime,  
 Most noble Romney, wed a noble wife,

And open on each other your great souls,—  
 I need not farther bless you. If I dared  
 But strain and touch her in her upper sphere,  
 And say, ‘Come down to Romney—pay my debt !  
 I should be joyful with the stream of joy  
 Sent through me. But the moon is in my face . . .  
 I dare not,—though I guess the name he loves ;  
 I’m learned with my studies of old days,  
 Remembering how he crushed his under-lip  
 When some one came and spoke, or did not come :  
 Aurora, I could touch her with my hand,  
 And fly, because I dare not.” She was gone.

He smiled so sternly that I spoke in haste.  
 “Forgive her—she sees clearly for herself :  
 Her instinct’s holy.” “*I* forgive ?” he said,  
 “I only marvel how she sees so sure,  
 While others” . . . there he paused,—then hoarse,  
 abrupt,—

“Aurora ! you forgive us, her and me ?  
 For her, the thing she sees, poor loyal child,  
 If once corrected by the thing I know,  
 Had been unspoken ; since she loves you well,  
 Has leave to love you :—while for me, alas,  
 If once or twice I let my heart escape  
 This night, . . . remember, where hearts slip and fall  
 They break beside : we’re parting,—parting,—ah,  
 You do not love, that you should surely know  
 What that word means. Forgive, be tolerant ;  
 It had not been, but that I felt myself  
 So safe in impuissance and despair,  
 I could not hurt you though I tossed my arms  
 And sighed my soul out. The most utter wretch  
 Will choose his postures when he comes to die,  
 However in the presence of a queen ;

And you'll forgive me some unseemly spasms  
 Which meant no more than dying. Do you think  
 I had ever come here in my perfect mind,  
 Unless I had come here, in my settled mind,  
 Bound Marian's, bound to keep the bond, and give  
 My name, my house, my hand, the things I could,  
 To Marian? For even *I* could give as much ;  
 Even I, affronting her exalted soul  
 By a supposition that she wanted these,  
 Could act the husband's coat and hat set up  
 To creak i' the wind and drive the world-crows off  
 From pecking in her garden. Straw can fill  
 A hole to keep out vermin. Now, at last,  
 I own heaven's angels round her life suffice  
 To fight the rats of our society,  
 Without this Romney : I can see it at last ;  
 And here is ended my pretension which  
 The most pretended. Over-proud of course,  
 Even so !—but not so stupid . . . blind . . . that I,  
 Whom thus the great Taskmaster of the world  
 Has set to meditate mistaken work,  
 My dreary face against a dim blank wall  
 Throughout man's natural lifetime,—could pretend  
 Or wish . . . O love, I have loved you ! O my soul,  
 I have lost you !—but I swear by all yourself,  
 And all you might have been to me these years,  
 If that June-morning had not failed my hope,—  
 I'm not so bestial, to regret that day  
 This night,—this night, which still to you is fair ;  
 Nay, not so blind, Aurora. I attest  
 Those stars above us, which I cannot see . . .”

“You cannot” . . .

“That if Heaven itself should stoop,  
 Remix the lots, and give me another chance,

I'd say, 'No other!'—I'd record my blank.  
Aurora never should be wife of mine."

"Not see the stars?"

"'Tis worse still, not to see  
To find your hand, although we're parting, dear.  
A moment let me hold it, ere we part;  
And understand my last words—these, at last!  
I would not have you thinking, when I'm gone,  
That Romney dared to hanker for your love,  
In thought or vision, if attainable  
(Which certainly for me it never was),  
And wish to use it for a dog to-day,  
To help the blind man stumbling. God forbid!  
And now I know He held you in His palm,  
And kept you open-eyed to all my faults,  
To save you at last from such a dreary end.  
Believe me, dear, that if I had known, like Him,  
What loss was coming on me, I had done  
As well in this as He has.—Farewell, you,  
Who are still my light,—farewell! How late it is:  
I know that, now: you've been too patient, sweet.  
I will but blow my whistle toward the lane,  
And some one comes . . . the same who brought me here.  
Get in—Good-night."

"A moment. Heavenly Christ!  
A moment. Speak once, Romney. 'Tis not true.  
I hold your hands, I look into your face—  
You see me?"

"No more than the blessed stars.  
Be blessed too, Aurora. Ah, my sweet,  
You tremble. Tender-hearted! Do you mind  
Of yore, dear, how you used to cheat old John,  
And let the mice out slyly from his traps,  
Until he marvelled at the soul in mice

Which took the cheese and left the snare? The same  
 Dear soft heart always! 'Twas for this, I grieved  
 Howe's letter never reached you. Ah, you had heard  
 Of illness,—not the issue . . . not the extent :  
 My life long sick with tossings up and down ;  
 The sudden revulsion in the blazing house,—  
 The strain and struggle both of body and soul,  
 Which left fire running in my veins, for blood :  
 Scarce lacked that thunderbolt of the falling beam,  
 Which nicked me on the forehead as I passed  
 The gallery-door with a burden. Say heaven's bolt,  
 Not William Erle's ; not Marian's father's ; tramp  
 And poacher, whom I found for what he was,  
 And, eager for her sake to rescue him,  
 Forth swept from the open highway of the world,  
 Road-dust and all,—till, like a woodland boar  
 Most naturally unwilling to be tamed,  
 He notched me with his tooth. But not a word  
 To Marian ! and I do not think, besides,  
 He turned the tilting of the beam my way,—  
 And if he laughed, as many swear, poor wretch,  
 Nor he nor I supposed the hurt so deep.  
 We'll hope his next laugh may be merrier,  
 In a better cause."

“Blind, Romney?”

“Ah, my friend,

You'll learn to say it in a cheerful voice.  
 I, too, at first desponded. To be blind,  
 Turned out of nature, mulcted as a man,  
 Refused the daily largesse of the sun  
 To humble creatures ! When the fever's heat  
 Dropped from me, as the flame did from my house,  
 And left me ruined like it, stripped of all  
 The hues and shapes of aspectable life,  
 A mere bare blind stone in the blaze of day,



A man, upon the outside of the earth,  
As dark as ten feet under, in the grave,—  
Why, that seemed hard.”

“No hope?”

“A tear! you weep,

Divine Aurora? tears upon my hand!  
I've seen you weeping for a mouse, a bird,—  
But, weep for me, Aurora? Yes, there's hope.  
Not hope of sight,—I could be learned, dear,  
And tell you in what Greek and Latin name  
The visual nerve is withered to the root,  
Though the outer eyes appear indifferent,  
Unspotted in their crystals. But there's hope.  
The spirit, from behind this dethroned sense,  
Sees, waits in patience, till the walls break up  
From which the bas-relief and fresco have dropt:  
There's hope. The man here, once so arrogant  
And restless, so ambitious, for his part,  
Of dealing with statistically packed  
Disorders (from a pattern on his nail),  
And packing such things quite another way,—  
Is now contented. From his personal loss  
He has come to hope for others when they lose,  
And wear a gladder faith in what we gain . . .  
Through bitter experience, compensation sweet,  
Like that tear, sweetest. I am quiet now,—  
As tender surely for the suffering world,  
But quiet,—sitting at the wall to learn,  
Content, henceforth, to do the thing I can:  
For, though as powerless, said I, as a stone,  
A stone can still give shelter to a worm,  
And it is worth while being a stone for that:  
There's hope, Aurora.”

“Is there hope for me?”

For me?—and is there room beneath the stone

For such a worm?—And if I came and said . . .  
 What all this weeping scarce will let me say,  
 And yet what women cannot say at all,  
 But weeping bitterly . . . (the pride keeps up,  
 Until the heart breaks under it) . . . I love,—  
 I love you, Romney” . . .

“Silence!” he exclaimed.

“A woman’s pity sometimes makes her mad.  
 A man’s distraction must not cheat his soul  
 To take advantage of it. Yet, ’tis hard—  
 Farewell, Aurora.”

“But I love you, sir ;

And when a woman says she loves a man,  
 The man must hear her, though he love her not,  
 Which . . . hush ! . . . he has leave to answer in his turn ;  
 She will not surely blame him. As for me,  
 You call it pity,—think I’m generous?  
 T’were somewhat easier, for a woman proud  
 As I am, and I’m very vilely proud,  
 To let it pass as such, and press on you  
 Love born of pity,—seeing that excellent loves  
 Are born so, often, nor the quicklier die,—  
 And this would set me higher by the head  
 Than now I stand. No matter : let the truth  
 Stand high ; Aurora must be humble : no,  
 My love’s not pity merely. Obviously  
 I’m not a generous woman, never was,  
 Or else, of old, I had not looked so near  
 To weights and measures, grudging you the power  
 To give, as first I scorned your power to judge  
 For me, Aurora : I would have no gifts  
 Forsooth, but God’s,—and I would use *them*, too,  
 According to my pleasure and my choice,  
 As He and I were equals,—you, below,  
 Excluded from that level of interchange

Admitting benefaction. You were wrong  
In much? you said so. I was wrong in most.  
Oh, most! You only thought to rescue men  
By half-means, half-way, seeing half their wants,  
While thinking nothing of your personal gain.  
But I who saw the human nature broad,  
At both sides, comprehending, too, the soul's,  
And all the high necessities of Art,  
Betrayed the thing I saw, and wronged my own life  
For which I pleaded. Passioned to exalt  
The artist's instinct in me at the cost  
Of putting down the woman's,—I forgot  
No perfect artist is developed here  
From any imperfect woman. Flower from root,  
And spiritual from natural, grade by grade  
In all our life. A handful of the earth  
To make God's image! the despised poor earth,  
The healthy odorous earth,—I missed, with it,  
The divine Breath that blows the nostrils out  
To ineffable inflatus: ay, the breath  
Which love is. Art is much, but Love is more.  
O Art, my Art, thou'rt much, but Love is more!  
Art symbolises heaven, but Love is God  
And makes heaven. I, Aurora, fell from mine:  
I would not be a woman like the rest,  
A simple woman who believes in love,  
And owns the right of love because she loves,  
And, hearing she's beloved, is satisfied  
With what contents God: I must analyse,  
Confront, and question; just as if a fly  
Refused to warm itself in any sun  
Till such was *in leone*: I must fret,  
Forsooth, because the month was only May  
Be faithless of the kind of proffered love,  
And captious, lest it miss my dignity,

And scornful, that my lover sought a wife  
To use . . . to use! O Romney, O my love,  
I am changed since then, changed wholly,—for indeed,  
If now you'd stoop so low to take my love,  
And use it roughly, without stint or spare,  
As men use common things with more behind  
(And, in this, ever would be more behind),  
To any mean and ordinary end,—  
The joy would set me like a star, in heaven,  
So high up, I should shine because of height  
And not of virtue. Yet in one respect,  
Just one, beloved, I am in nowise changed :  
I love you, loved you . . . loved you first and last,  
And love you on for ever. Now I know  
I loved you always, Romney. She who died  
Knew that, and said so ; Lady Waldemar  
Knows that ; . . . and Marian : I had known the same  
Except that I was prouder than I knew,  
And not so honest. Ay, and, as I live,  
I should have died so, crushing in my hand  
This rose of love, the wasp inside and all,—  
Ignoring ever to my soul and you  
Both rose and pain,—except for this great loss,  
This great despair,—to stand before your face  
And know I cannot win a look of yours.  
You think, perhaps, I am not changed from pride,  
And that I chiefly bear to say such words,  
Because you cannot shame me with your eyes?  
O calm, grand eyes, extinguished in a storm,  
Blown out like lights o'er melancholy seas,  
Though shrieked for by the shipwrecked,—O my Dark,  
My Cloud,—to go before me every day  
While I go ever toward the wilderness,—  
I would that you could see me bare to the soul!—  
If this be pity, 'tis so for myself,

And not for Romney : *he* can stand alone ;  
 A man like *him* is never overcome :  
 No woman like me, counts him pitiable  
 While saints applaud him. He mistook the world :  
 But I mistook my own heart,—and that slip  
 Was fatal. Romney,—will you leave me here ?  
 So wrong, so proud, so weak, so unconsolated,  
 So mere a woman ! and I love you so,—  
 I love you, Romney.”

Could I see his face,  
 I wept so ? Did I drop against his breast,  
 Or did his arms constrain me ? Were my cheeks  
 Hot, overflowed, with my tears, or his ?  
 And which of our two large explosive hearts  
 So shook me ? That, I know not. There were words  
 That broke in utterance . . . melted, in the fire ;  
 Embrace, that was convulsion, . . . then a kiss . . .  
 As long and silent as the ecstatic night,—  
 And deep, deep, shuddering breaths, which meant beyond  
 Whatever could be told by word or kiss.

But what he said . . . I have written day by day,  
 With somewhat even writing. Did I think  
 That such a passionate rain would intercept  
 And dash this last page ? What he said, indeed,  
 I fain would write it down here like the rest,  
 To keep it in my eyes, as in my ears,  
 The heart's sweet scripture, to be read at night  
 When weary, or at morning when afraid,  
 And lean my heaviest oath on when I swear  
 That, when all's done, all tried, all counted here,  
 All great arts, and all good philosophies,—  
 This love just puts its hand out in a dream,  
 And straight outreaches all things. What he said,  
 I fain would write. But if an angel spoke

In thunder, should we, haply, know much more  
 Than that it thundered? If a cloud came down  
 And wrapt us wholly, could we draw its shape,  
 As if on the outside, and not overcome?  
 And so he spake. His breath against my face  
 Confused his words, yet made them more intense,—  
 As when the sudden finger of the wind  
 Will wipe a row of single city-lamps  
 To a pure white line of flame, more luminous  
 Because of obliteration; more intense,—  
 The intimate presence carrying in itself  
 Complete communication, as with souls  
 Who, having put the body off, perceive  
 Through simply being. Thus, 'twas granted me  
 To know he loved me to the depth and height  
 Of such large natures, ever competent  
 With grand horizons by the land or sea,  
 To love's grand sunrise. Small spheres hold small fires:  
 But he loved largely, as a man can love  
 Who, baffled in his love, dares live his life,  
 Accept the ends which God loves, for his own,  
 And lift a constant aspect.

From the day

I had brought to England my poor searching face  
 (An orphan even of my father's grave),  
 He had loved me, watched me, watched his soul in mine,  
 Which in me grew and heightened into love.  
 For he, a boy still, had been told the tale  
 Of how a fairy bride from Italy,  
 With smells of oleanders in her hair,  
 Was coming through the vines to touch his hand;  
 Whereat the blood of boyhood on the palm  
 Made sudden heats. And when at last I came,  
 And lived before him, lived, and rarely smiled,  
 He smiled and loved me for the thing I was,

As every child will love the year's first flower  
(Not certainly the fairest of the year,  
But, in which, the complete year seems to blow),  
The poor sad snowdrop,—growing between drifts,  
Mysterious medium 'twixt the plant and frost,  
So faint with winter while so quick with spring,  
So doubtful if to thaw itself away  
With that snow near it. Not that Romney Leigh  
Had loved me coldly. If I thought so once,  
It was as if I had held my hand in fire  
And shook for cold. But now I understood  
For ever, that the very fire and heat  
Of troubling passion in him, burned him clear,  
And shaped, to dubious order, word and act :  
That, just because he loved me over all,  
All wealth, all lands, all social privilege,  
To which chance made him unexpected heir,—  
And, just because on all these lesser gifts,  
Constrained by conscience and the sense of wrong,  
He had stamped with steady hand God's arrow-mark  
Of dedication to the human need,  
He thought it should be so too, with his love ;  
He, passionately loving, would bring down  
His love, his life, his best (because the best)  
His bride of dreams, who walked so still and high  
Through flowery poems as through meadow-grass,  
The dust of golden lilies on her feet,  
That *she* should walk beside him on the rocks  
In all that clang and hewing out of men,  
And help the work of help which was his life,  
And prove he kept back nothing,—not his soul.  
And when I failed him,—for I failed him, I—  
And when it seemed he had missed my love,—he thought,  
“Aurora makes room for a working-noon ;”  
And so, self-girded with torn strips of hope,

Took up his life, as if it were for death  
 (Just capable of one heroic aim),  
 And threw it in the thickest of the world,—  
 At which men laughed as if he had drowned a dog :  
 No wonder,—since Aurora failed him first !  
 The morning and the evening made his day.

But oh, the night ! oh, bitter-sweet ! oh, sweet !  
 O dark, O moon and stars, O ecstasy  
 Of darkness ! O great mystery of love,—  
 In which absorbed, loss, anguish, treason's self  
 Enlarges rapture,—as a pebble dropt  
 In some full wine-cup, over-brims the wine !  
 While we two sate together, leaned that night  
 So close, my very garments crept and thrilled  
 With strange electric life ; and both my cheeks  
 Grew red, then pale, with touches from my hair  
 In which his breath was ; while the golden moon  
 Was hung before our faces as the badge  
 Of some sublime inherited despair,  
 Since ever to be seen by only one,—  
 A voice said, low and rapid as a sigh,  
 Yet breaking, I felt conscious, from a smile,—  
 “Thank God, who made me blind, to make me see !  
 Shine on, Aurora, dearest light of souls,  
 Which rul'st for evermore both day and night !  
 I am happy.”

I flung closer to his breast,  
 As sword that, after battle, flings to sheathe ;  
 And, in that hurtle of united souls,  
 The mystic motions which in common moods  
 Are shut beyond our sense, broke in on us,  
 And, as we sate, we felt the old earth spin,  
 And all the starry turbulence of worlds  
 Swing round us in their audient circles, till



If that same golden moon were overhead  
Or if beneath our feet, we did not know.

And then calm, equal, smooth with weights of joy,  
His voice rose, as some chief musician's song  
Amid the old Jewish temple's Selah-pause,  
And bade me mark how we two met at last  
Upon this moon-bathed promontory of earth,  
To give up much on each side, then take all.  
"Beloved," it sang, "we must be here to work ;  
And men who work, can only work for men,  
And, not to work in vain, must comprehend  
Humanity, and, so, work humanly,  
And raise men's bodies still by raising souls,  
As God did, first."

"But stand upon the earth,"  
I said, "to raise them—(this is human too ;  
There's nothing high which has not first been low ;  
My humbleness, said One, has made Me great !)  
As God did, last."

"And work all silently,  
And simply," he returned, "as God does all ;  
Distort our nature never, for our work,  
Nor count our right hands stronger for being hoofs.  
The man most man, with tenderest human hands,  
Works best for men,—as God in Nazareth."

He paused upon the word, and then resumed ;  
"Fewer programmes ; we who have no prescience.  
Fewer systems ; we who are held and do not hold.  
Less mapping out of masses, to be saved,  
By nations or by sexes. Fourier's void,  
And Comte is dwarfed,—and Cabet, puerile.  
Subsists no law of life outside of life ;  
No perfect manners, without Christian souls :

The Christ Himself had been no Lawgiver  
Unless He had given the life, too, with the law."

I echoed thoughtfully—"The man, most man,  
Works best for men : and, if most man indeed,  
He gets his manhood plainest from his soul :  
While, obviously, this stringent soul itself  
Obeys our old rules of development ;  
The Spirit ever witnessing in ours,  
And Love, the soul of soul, within the soul,  
Evolving it sublimely. First, God's love."

"And next," he smiled, "the love of wedded souls,  
Which still presents that mystery's counterpart.  
Sweet shadow-rose, upon the water of life,  
Of such a mystic substance, Sharon gave  
A name to ! human, vital, fructuous rose,  
Whose calyx holds the multitude of leaves,—  
Loves filial, loves fraternal, neighbour-loves,  
And civic, . . . all fair petals, all good scents,  
All reddened, sweetened from one central Heart !"

"Alas," I cried, "it was not long ago,  
You swore this very social rose smelt ill."

"Alas," he answered, "is it a rose at all ?  
The filial's thankless, the fraternal's hard,  
The rest is lost. I do but stand and think,  
Across dim waters of a troubled life  
The Flower of Heaven so vainly overhangs,—  
What perfect counterpart would be in sight,  
If tanks were clearer. Let us clean the tubes,  
And wait for rains. O poet, O my love,  
Since *I* was too ambitious in my deed,  
And thought to distance all men in success,  
Till God came on me, marked the place, and said,  
'Ill-doer, henceforth keep within this line,

Attempting less than others,'—and I stand  
And work among Christ's little ones, content,—  
Come thou, my compensation, my dear sight,  
My morning-star, my morning ! rise and shine,  
And touch my hills with radiance not their own ;  
Shine out for two, Aurora, and fulfil  
My falling-short that must be ! work for two,  
As I, though thus restrained, for two, shall love !  
Gaze on, with inscient vision toward the sun,  
And, from his visceral heat, pluck out the roots  
Of light beyond him. Art's a service,—mark :  
A silver key is given to thy clasp,  
And thou shalt stand unwearied, night and day,  
And fix it in the hard, slow-turning wards,  
And open, so, that intermediate door  
Betwixt the different planes of sensuous form  
And form insensuous, that inferior men  
May learn to feel on still through these to those,  
And bless thy ministration. The world waits  
For help. Beloved, let us love so well,  
Our work shall still be better for our love,  
And still our love be sweeter for our work,  
And both, commended, for the sake of each,  
By all true workers and true lovers born.  
Now press the clarion on thy woman's lip  
(Love's holy kiss shall still keep consecrate)  
And breathe the fine keen breath along the brass,  
And blow all class-walls level as Jericho's  
Past Jordan ; crying from the top of souls,  
To souls, that they assemble on earth's flats  
To get them to some purer eminence  
Than any hitherto beheld for clouds !  
What height we know not,—but the way we know,  
And how by mounting aye, we must attain,  
And so climb on. It is the hour for souls ;

That bodies, leavened by the will and love,  
 Be lightened to redemption. The world's old ;  
 But the old world waits the hour to be renewed :  
 Toward which, new hearts in individual growth  
 Must quicken, and increase to multitude  
 In new dynasties of the race of men,—  
 Developed whence, shall grow spontaneously  
 New churches, new œconomies, new laws  
 Admitting freedom, new societies  
 Excluding falsehood. HE shall make all new."

My Romney!—Lifting up my hand in his,  
 As wheeled by Seeing spirits toward the east,  
 He turned instinctively,—where, faint and fair,  
 Along the tingling desert of the sky,  
 Beyond the circle of the conscious hills,  
 Were laid in jasper-stone as clear as glass  
 The first foundations of that new, near Day  
 Which should be builded out of heaven, to God.

He stood a moment with erected brows,  
 In silence, as a creature might, who gazed :  
 Stood calm, and fed his blind, majestic eyes  
 Upon the thought of perfect noon. And when  
 I saw his soul saw,—“Jasper first,” I said,  
 “And second, sapphire ; third, chalcedony ;  
 The rest in order, . . . last, an amethyst.”

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