

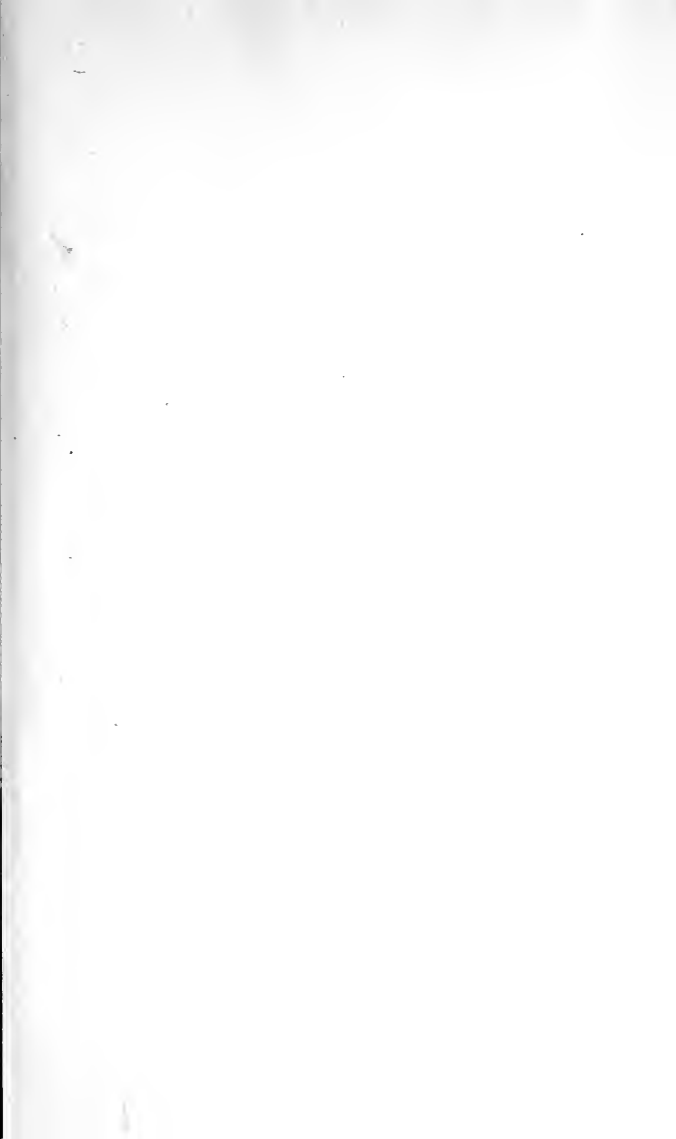


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THE

RING AND THE BOOK.

BY

ROBERT BROWNING.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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SECOND EDITION.

SMITH, ELDER AND CO., LONDON.

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THE RING AND THE BOOK.



IV.

TERTIUM QUID.

TRUE, Excellency—as his Highness says,
Though she 's not dead yet, she 's as good as stretched
Symmetrical beside the other two ;
Though he 's not judged yet, he 's the same as judged,
So do the facts abound and superabound : 5
And nothing hinders that we lift the case
Out of the shade into the shine, allow
Qualified persons to pronounce at last,
Nay, edge in an authoritative word
Between this rabble's-brabble of dolts and fools 10
Who make up reasonless unreasoning Rome.
“ Now for the Trial ! ” they roar : “ the Trial to test

" The truth, weigh husband and weigh wife alike
 " I' the scales of law, make one scale kick the
 beam ! "

Law 's a machine from which, to please the mob, 15
 Truth the divinity must needs descend
 And clear things at the play's fifth act—aha !
 Hammer into their noddles who was who
 And what was what. I tell the simpletons
 " Could law be competent to such a feat 20
 " 'T were done already : what begins next week
 " Is end o' the Trial, last link of a chain
 " Whereof the first was forged three years ago
 " When law addressed herself to set wrong right,
 " And proved so slow in taking the first step 25
 " That ever some new grievance,—tort, retort,
 " On one or the other side,—o'ertook i' the game,
 " Retarded sentence, till this deed of death
 " Is thrown in, as it were, last bale to boat
 " Crammed to the edge with cargo—or passengers? 30
 " ' *Trecentos inseris : ohe, jam satis est !*
 " ' *Huc appelle !* '—passengers, the word must be."
 Long since, the boat was loaded to my eyes.
 To hear the rabble and brabble, you 'd call the case
 Fused and confused past human finding out. 35

One calls the square round, t' other the round square—
 And pardonably in that first surprise
 O' the blood that fell and splashed the diagram :
 But now we 've used our eyes to the violent hue
 Can't we look through the crimson and trace lines? 40
 It makes a man despair of history,
 Eusebius and the established fact—fig's end !
 Oh, give the fools their Trial, rattle away
 With the leash of lawyers, two on either side—
 One barks, one bites,—Masters Arcangeli 45
 And Spreti,—that 's the husband's ultimate hope
 Against the Fisc and the other kind of Fisc,
 Bound to do barking for the wife : bow—wow !
 Why, Excellency, we and his Highness here
 Would settle the matter as sufficiently 50
 As ever will Advocate This and Fiscal That
 And Judge the Other, with even—a word and a wink—
 We well know who for ultimate arbiter.
 Let us beware o' the basset-table—lest
 We jog the elbow of Her Eminence, 55
 Jostle his cards,—he 'll rap you out a . . st !
 By the window-seat ! And here 's the Marquis too !
 Indulge me but a moment : if I fail
 —Favoured with such an audience, understand !—

To set things right, why, class me with the mob 60
As understander of the mind of man !

The mob,—now, that 's just how the error comes !
Bethink you that you have to deal with *plebs*,
The commonalty ; this is an episode
In burgess-life,—why seek to aggrandize, 65
Idealize, denaturalize the class ?
People talk just as if they had to do
With a noble pair that . . Excellency, your ear !
Stoop to me, Highness,—listen and look yourselves !

This Pietro, this Violante, live their life 70
At Rome in the easy way that 's far from worst
Even for their betters,—themselves love themselves,
Spend their own oil in feeding their own lamp
That their own faces may grow bright thereby.
They get to fifty and over : how 's the lamp ? 75
Full to the depth o' the wick,—moneys so much ;
And also with a remnant,—so much more
Of moneys,—which there 's no consuming now,
But, when the wick shall moulder out some day,
Failing fresh twist of tow to use up dregs, 80
Will lie a prize for the passer-by,—to-wit

Anyone that can prove himself the heir,
 Seeing, the couple are wanting in a child :
 Meantime their wick swims in the safe broad bowl
 O' the middle rank,—not raised a beacon's height 85
 For wind to ravage, nor swung till lamp graze ground
 As watchman's cresset, he pokes here and there,
 Going his rounds to probe the ruts i' the road
 Or fish the luck o' the puddle. Pietro's soul
 Was satisfied when crony smirked, "No wine 90
 " Like Pietro's, and he drinks it every day !"
 His wife's heart swelled her boddice, joyed its fill
 When neighbours turned heads wistfully at church,
 Sighed at the load of lace that came to pray.
 Well, having got through fifty years of flare, 95
 They burn out so, indulge so their dear selves,
 That Pietro finds himself in debt at last,
 As he were any lordling of us all :
 And, for the dark begins to creep on day,
 Creditors grow uneasy, talk aside, 100
 Take counsel, then importune all at once.
 For if the good fat rosy careless man,
 Who has not laid a ducat by, decease—
 Let the lamp fall, no heir at hand to catch—
 Why, being childless, there 's a spilth i' the street 105

O' the remnant, there 's a scramble for the dregs
 By the stranger : so, they grant him no long day
 But come in a body, clamour to be paid.

What 's his resource? He asks and straight obtains
 The customary largess, dole dealt out 110
 To, what we call our "poor dear shame-faced ones,"
 In secret once a month to spare the shame
 O' the slothful and the spendthrift,—pauper-saints
 The Pope puts meat i' the mouth of, ravens they,
 And providence he—just what the mob admires ! 115
 That is, instead of putting a prompt foot
 On selfish worthless human slugs whose slime
 Has failed to lubricate their path in life,
 Why, the Pope picks the first ripe fruit that falls
 And gracious puts it in the vermin's way. 120
 Pietro could never save a dollar? Straight
 He must be subsidized at our expense :
 And for his wife—the harmless household sheep
 One ought not to see harassed in her age—
 Judge, by the way she bore adversity, 125
 O' the patient nature you ask pity for !
 How long, now, would the roughest marketman,
 Handling the creatures huddled to the knife,

Harass a mutton ere she made a mouth
 Or menaced biting? Yet the poor sheep here, 130
 Violante, the old innocent burgess-wife,
 In her first difficulty showed great teeth
 Fit to crunch up and swallow a good round crime.
 She meditates the tenure of the Trust,
Fidei commissum is the lawyer-phrase, 135
 These funds that only want an heir to take—
 Goes o'er the gamut o' the creditor's cry
 By semitones from whine to snarl high up
 And growl down low, one scale in sundry keys,—
 Pauses with a little compunction for the face 140
 Of Pietro frustrate of its ancient cheer,—
 Never a bottle now for friend at need,—
 Comes to a stop on her own frittered lace
 And neighbourly condolences thereat,
 Then makes her mind up, sees the thing to do : 145
 And so, deliberate, snaps house-book clasp,
 Posts off to vespers, missal beneath arm,
 Passes the proper San Lorenzo by,
 Dives down a little lane to the left, is lost
 In a labyrinth of dwellings best unnamed, 150
 Selects a certain blind one, black at base,
 Blinking at top,—the sign of we know what,—

One candle in a casement set to wink
 Streetward, do service to no shrine inside,—
 Mounts thither by the filthy flight of stairs, 155
 Holding the cord by the wall, to the tip-top,
 Gropes for the door i' the dark, ajar of course,
 Raps, opens, enters in : up starts a thing
 Naked as needs be—" What, you rogue, 't is you ?
 " Back,—how can I have taken a farthing yet ? 160
 " Mercy on me, poor sinner that I am !
 " Here's . . why, I took you for Madonna's self
 " With all that sudden swirl of silk i' the place !
 " What may your pleasure be, my bonny dame ? "
 Your Excellency supplies aught left obscure ? 165
 One of those women that abound in Rome,
 Whose needs oblige them eke out one poor trade
 By another vile one : her ostensible work
 Was washing clothes, out in the open air
 At the cistern by Citorio ; her true trade— 170
 Whispering to idlers, when they stopped and praised
 The ancles she let liberally shine
 In kneeling at the slab by the fountain-side,
 That there was plenty more to criticise
 At home, that eve, i' the house where candle blinked
 Decorously above, and all was done 176

I' the holy fear of God and cheap beside.
 Violante, now, had seen this woman wash,
 Noticed and envied her propitious shape,
 Tracked her home to her house-top, noted too, 180
 And now was come to tempt her and propose
 A bargain far more shameful than the first
 Which trafficked her virginity away
 For a melon and three pauls at twelve years old.
 Five minutes' talk with this poor child of Eve, 185
 Struck was the bargain, business at an end—
 “ Then, six months hence, that person whom you trust,
 “ Comes, fetches whatsoever babe it be ;
 “ I keep the price and secret, you the babe,
 “ Paying beside for mass to make all straight : 190
 “ Meantime, I pouch the earnest-money-piece.”

Down stairs again goes fumbling by the rope
 Violante, triumphing in a flourish of fire
 From her own brain, self-lit by such success,—
 Gains church in time for the “ *Magnificat* ” 195
 And gives forth “ My reproof is taken away,
 “ And blessed shall mankind proclaim me now,”
 So that the officiating priest turns round
 To see who proffers the obstreperous praise :

Then home to Pietro, the enraptured-much 200
 But puzzled-more when told the wondrous news—
 How orisons and works of charity,
 (Beside that pair of pinner and a coif,
 Birth-day surprise last Wednesday was five weeks)
 Had borne fruit in the Autumn of his life,— 205
 They, or the Orvieto in a double dose.
 Anyhow, she must keep house next six months,
 Lie on the settle, avoid the three-legged stool,
 And, chiefly, not be crossed in wish or whim,
 And the result was like to be an heir. 210

Accordingly, when time was come about,
 He found himself the sire indeed of this
 Francesca Vittoria Pompilia and the rest
 O' the names whereby he sealed her his, next day.
 A crime complete in its way is here, I hope? 215
 Lies to God, lies to man, every way lies
 To nature and civility and the mode :
 Flat robbery of the proper heirs thus foiled
 O' the due succession,—and, what followed thence,
 Robbery of God, through the confessor's ear 220
 Debarred the most note-worthy incident
 When all else done and undone twelve-month through

Was put in evidence at Easter-time.
 All other peccadillos!—but this one
 To the priest who comes next day to dine with us? 225
 'T were inexpedient ; decency forbade.

Is so far clear? You know Violante now,
 Compute her capability of crime
 By this authentic instance? Black hard cold
 Crime like a stone you kick up with your foot 230
 I' the middle of a field?

I thought as much.

But now, a question,—how long does it lie,
 The bad and barren bit of stuff you kick,
 Before encroached on and encompassed round 235
 With minute moss, weed, wild-flower—made alive
 By worm, and fly, and foot of the free bird?
 Your Highness,—healthy minds let bygones be,
 Leave old crimes to grow young and virtuous-like
 I' the sun and air ; so time treats ugly deeds : 240
 They take the natural blessing of all change.
 There was the joy o' the husband silly-sooth,
 The softening of the wife's old wicked heart,
 Virtues to right and left, profusely paid

If so they might compensate the saved sin. 245
 And then the sudden existence, dewy-dear,
 O' the rose above the dungheap, the pure child
 As good as new created, since withdrawn
 From the horror of the pre-appointed lot
 With the unknown father and the mother known 250
 Too well,—some fourteen years of squalid youth,
 And then libertinage, disease, the grave—
 Hell in life here, hereafter life in hell :
 Look at that horror and this soft repose !
 Why, moralist, the sin has saved a soul ! 255
 Then, even the palpable grievance to the heirs—
 'Faith, this was no frank setting hand to throat
 And robbing a man, but . . Excellency, by your leave,
 How did you get that marvel of a gem,
 The sapphire with the Graces grand and Greek? 260
 The story is, stooping to pick a stone
 From the pathway through a vineyard—no-man's-land—
 To pelt a sparrow with, you chanced on this :
 Why now, do those five clowns o' the family
 O' the vinedresser digest their porridge worse 265
 That not one keeps it in his goatskin pouch
 To do flints'-service with the tinder-box ?
 Do n't cheat me, do n't cheat you, do n't cheat a friend !

But are you so hard on who jostles just
 A stranger with no natural sort of claim 270
 To the havings and the holdings (here 's the point)
 Unless by misadventure, and defect
 Of that which ought to be—nay, which there 's none
 Would dare so much as wish to profit by—
 Since who dares put in just so many words 275
 “ May Pietro fail to have a child, please God !
 “ So shall his house and goods belong to me,
 “ The sooner that his heart will pine betimes ? ”
 Well then, God do n't please, nor his heart shall
 pine !
 Because he has a child at last, you see, 280
 Or selfsame thing as though a child it were,
 He thinks, whose sole concern it is to think :
 If he accepts it why should you demur ?
 Moreover, say that certain sin there seem,
 The proper process of unsinning sin 285
 Is to begin well-doing somehow else.
 Pietro,—remember, with no sin at all
 I' the substitution,—why, this gift of God
 Flung in his lap from over Paradise
 Steadied him in a moment, set him straight 290

On the good path he had been straying from.
 Henceforward no more wilfulness and waste,
 Cuppings, carousings,—these a sponge wiped out.
 All sort of self-denial was easy now
 For the child's sake, the chatelaine to be, 295
 Who must want much and might want who knows
 what ?

And so, the debts were paid, habits reformed,
 Expense curtailed, the dowry set to grow.
 As for the wife,—I said, hers the whole sin :
 So, hers the exemplary penance. 'T was a text 300
 Whereon folk preached and praised, the district through :
 " Oh, make us happy and you make us good !
 " It all comes of God giving her a child :
 " Such graces follow God's best earthly gift !"

Here you put by my guard, pass to my heart 305
 By the home-thrust—" There 's a lie at base of all."
 Why, thou exact Prince, is it a pearl or no,
 Yon globe upon the Principessa's neck ?
 That great round glory of pellucid stuff,
 A fish secreted round a grain of grit ! 310
 Do you call it worthless for the worthless core ?
 (She do n't, who well knows what she changed for it !)

So, to our brace of burgesses again !

You see so far i' the story, who was right,

Who wrong, who neither, do n't you? What, you do n't?

Eh? Well, admit there 's somewhat dark i' the case,

Let 's on—the rest shall clear, I promise you. 317

Leap over a dozen years : you find, these passed,

An old good easy creditable sire,

A careful housewife's beaming bustling face, 320

Both wrapped up in the love of their one child,

The strange tall pale beautiful creature grown

Lily-like out o' the cleft i' the sun-smit rock

To bow its white miraculous birth of buds

I' the way of wandering Joseph and his spouse,— 325

So painters fancy: here it was a fact.

And this their lily,—could they but transplant

And set in vase to stand by Solomon's porch

'Twixt lion and lion !—this Pompilia of theirs,

Could they see worthily married, well bestowed, 330

In house and home ! And why despair of this

With Rome to choose from, save the topmost rank?

Themselves would help the choice with heart and soul,

Throw their late savings in a common heap

Should go with the dowry, to be followed in time 335

By the heritage legitimately hers :

And when such paragon was found and fixed,
 Why, they might chant their "*Nunc dimittas*" straight.

Indeed the prize was simply full to a fault,
 Exorbitant for the suitor they should seek,
 And social class to choose among, these cits.
 Yet there 's a latitude : exceptional white
 Amid the general brown o' the species, lurks
 A burgess nearly an aristocrat,

Legitimately in reach: look out for him!
 What banker, merchant, has seen better days,
 What second-rate painter a-pushing up,
 Poet a-slipping down, shall bid the best
 For this young beauty with the thumping purse?
 Alack, were it but one of such as these
 So like the real thing they may pass for it,
 All had gone well ! Unluckily, poor souls,
 It proved to be the impossible thing itself ;
 The truth not sham: hence ruin to them all.

For, Guido Franceschini was the head
 Of an old family in Arezzo, old
 To that degree they could afford be poor
 Better than most: the case is common too.

34

34

35

35

Out of the vast door 'scutcheoned overhead,
 Creeps out a serving-man on Saturdays 360
 To cater for the week,—turns up anon
 I' the market, chaffering for the lamb's least leg,
 Or the quarter-fowl, less entrails, claws and comb :
 Then back again with prize,—a liver begged
 Into the bargain, gizzard overlooked. 365
 He 's mincing these to give the beans a taste,
 When, at your knock, he leaves the simmering soup,
 Waits on the curious stranger-visitant,
 Napkin in half-wiped hand, to show the rooms,
 Point pictures out have hung their hundred years, 370
 " Priceless," he tells you,—puts in his place at once
 The man of money : yes, you 're banker-king
 Or merchant-kaiser, wallow in your wealth
 While patron, the house-master, can 't afford
 To stop our ceiling-hole that rain so rots : 375
 But he 's the man of mark, and there 's his shield,
 And yonder 's the famed Rafael, first in kind,
 The painter painted for his grandfather,
 And you have paid to see : " Good morning, Sir !"
 Such is the law of compensation. Here 380
 The poverty was getting too acute ;
 There gaped so many noble mouths to feed,

Beans must suffice unflavoured of the fowl.
 'The mother,—hers would be a spun-out life
 I' the nature of things ; the sisters had done well 38
 And married men of reasonable rank :
 But that sort of illumination stops,
 Throws back no heat upon the parent-hearth.
 The family instinct felt out for its fire
 To the Church,—the Church traditionally helps 39
 A second son : and such was Paolo,
 Established here at Rome these thirty years,
 Who played the regular game,—priest and Abate,
 Made friends, owned house and land, became of use
 To a personage : his course lay clear enough. 39
 The youngest caught the sympathetic flame,
 And, though unfledged wings kept him still i' the cage,
 Yet he shot up to be a Canon, so
 Clung to the higher perch and crowed in hope.
 Even our Guido, eldest brother, went 40
 As far i' the way o' the Church as safety seemed,
 He being Head o' the House, ordained to wive,—
 So, could but dally with an Order or two
 And testify good-will i' the cause : he clipt
 His top-hair and thus far affected Christ. 40
 But main promotion must fall otherwise,

Though still from the side o' the Church: and here
was he

At Rome, since first youth, worn threadbare of soul
By forty-six years' rubbing on hard life,
Getting fast tired o' the game whose word is—"Wait!"
When one day,—he too having his Cardinal 411
To serve in some ambiguous sort, as serve
To draw the coach the plumes o' the horses' heads,—
The Cardinal saw fit to dispense with him,
Ride with one plume the less; and off it dropped. 415

Guido thus left,—with a youth spent in vain
And not a penny in purse to show for it,
Advised with Paolo, bent no doubt in chafe
The black brows somewhat formidably, growled
"Where is the good I came to get at Rome? 420
"Where the repayment of the servitude
"To a purple popinjay, whose feet I kiss,
"Knowing his father wiped the shoes of mine?"

"Patience," pats Paolo the recalcitrant—
"You have not had, so far, the proper luck, 425
"Nor do my gains suffice to keep us both:
"A modest competency is mine, not more.

- “ You are the Count however, yours the style,
 “ Heirdom and state,—you can ’t expect all good.
 “ Had I, now, held your hand of cards . . well, well—
 “ What ’s yet unplayed, I ’ll look at, by your leave, 431
 “ Over your shoulder,—I who made my game,
 “ Let ’s see, if I can ’t help to handle yours.
 “ Fie on you, all the Honours in your fist,
 “ Countship, Househeadship,—how have you misdealt !
 “ Why, in the first place, these will marry a man ! 436
 “ *Notum tonsoribus!* To the Tonsor then !
 “ Come, clear your looks, and choose your freshest suit,
 “ And, after function ’s done with, down we go
 “ To the woman-dealer in perukes, a wench 440
 “ I and some others settled in the shop
 “ At Place Colonna : she ’s an oracle. Hmm !
 “ ‘ Dear, ’t is my brother : brother, ’t is my dear.
 “ ‘ Dear, give us counsel ! Whom do you suggest
 “ ‘ As properest party in the quarter round, 445
 “ ‘ For the Count here ?—he is minded to take wife,
 “ ‘ And further tells me he intends to slip
 “ ‘ Twenty zecchines under the bottom-scalp
 “ ‘ Of his old wig when he sends it to revive
 “ ‘ For the wedding : and I add a trifle too. 450
 “ ‘ You know what personage I ’m potent with.’

And so plumped out Pompilia's name the first.
 She told them of the household and its ways,
 The easy husband and the shrewder wife
 In Via Vittoria,—how the tall young girl, 455
 With hair black as yon patch and eyes as big
 As yon pomander to make freckles fly,
 Would have so much for certain, and so much more
 In likelihood,—why, it suited, slipt as smooth
 As the Pope's pantoufle does on the Pope's foot. 460
 "I'll to the husband!" Guido ups and cries.
 'Ay, so you'd play your last court-card, no doubt!"
 Puts Paolo in with a groan—"Only, you see,
 "'Tis I, this time, that supervise your lead.
 "Priests play with women, maids, wives, mothers—
 why? 465
 "These play with men and take them off our hands.
 "Did I come, counsel with some cut-beard gruff
 "Or rather this sleek young-old barberess?
 "Go, brother, stand you rapt in the ante-room
 "Of Her Efficacity my Cardinal 470
 "For an hour,—he likes to have lord-suitors lounge,—
 "While I betake myself to the grey mare,
 "The better horse,—how wise the people's word!—
 "And wait on Madam Violante."

Said and done. 475

He was at Via Vittoria in three skips :

Proposed at once to fill up the one want

O' the burgess-family which, wealthy enough,

And comfortable to heart's desire, yet crouched

Outside a gate to heaven,—locked, bolted, barred, 480

Whereof Count Guido had a key he kept

Under his pillow, but Pompilia's hand

Might slide behind his neck and pilfer thence.

The key was fairy ; mention of it, made

Violante feel the thing shoot one sharp ray 485

That reached the heart o' the woman. " I assent :

" Yours be Pompilia, hers and ours that key

" To all the glories of the greater life !

" There's Pietro to convince : leave that to me ! "

Then was the matter broached to Pietro ; then 490

Did Pietro make demand and get response

That in the Countship was a truth, but in

The counting up of the Count's cash, a lie.

He thereupon stroked grave his chin, looked great,

Declined the honour. Then the wife wiped tear, 495

Winked with the other eye turned Paolo-ward,

Whispered Pompilia, stole to church at eve,

Found Guido there and got the marriage done,
 And finally begged pardon at the feet
 Of her dear lord and master. Whereupon 500
 Quoth Pietro—"Let us make the best of things!"
 "I knew your love would licence us," quoth she:
 Quoth Paolo once more, "Mothers, wives and maids,
 "These be the tools wherewith priests manage men."

Now, here take breath and ask,—which bird o' the brace
 Decoyed the other into clapnet? Who 506
 Was fool, who knave? Neither and both, perchance.

There was a bargain mentally proposed
 On each side, straight and plain and fair enough;
 Mind knew its own mind: but when mind must speak,
 The bargain have expression in plain terms, 511
 There was the blunder incident to words,
 And in the clumsy process, fair turned foul.

The straight backbone-thought of the crooked speech
 Were just—"I Guido truck my name and rank 515
 "For so much money and youth and female charms. —
 "We Pietro and Violante give our child
 "And wealth to you for a rise i' the world thereby.

Such naked truth while chambered in the brain
 Shocks nowise: walk it forth by way of tongue,— 520

Out on the cynical unseemliness !

Hence was the need, on either side, of a lie
To serve as decent wrappage : so, Guido gives
Money for money,—and they, bride for groom,

Having, he, not a doit, they, not a child

52

Honestly theirs, but this poor waif and stray.

According to the words, each cheated each ;

But in the inexpressive barter of thoughts,

Each did give and did take the thing designed,

The rank on this side and the cash on that—

53

Attained the object of the traffic, so.

The way of the world, the daily bargain struck

In the first market ! Why sells Jack his ware ?

“ For the sake of serving an old customer.”

Why does Jill buy it ? “ Simply not to break

535

“ A custom, pass the old stall the first time.”

Why, you know where the gist is of the exchange :

Each sees a profit, throws the fine words in.

Do n't be too hard o' the pair ! Had each pretence

Been simultaneously discovered, stripped

54

From off the body o' the transaction, just

As when a cook (will Excellency forgive ?)

Strips away those long superfluous legs

From either side the crayfish, leaving folk

A meal all meat henceforth, no garnishry, 545
 (With your respect, Prince!)—balance had been kept,
 No party blamed the other,—so, starting fair,
 All subsequent fence of wrong returned by wrong
 I' the matrimonial thrust and parry, at least
 Had followed on equal terms. But, as it chanced, 550
 One party had the advantage, saw the cheat
 Of the other first and kept its own concealed :
 And the luck o' the first discovery fell, beside,
 To the least adroit and self-possessed o' the pair.
 'T was foolish Pietro and his wife saw first 555
 The nobleman was penniless, and screamed
 "We are cheated!"

Such unprofitable noise

Angers at all times : but when those who plague,
 Do it from inside your own house and home, 560
 Gnats which yourself have closed the curtain round,
 Noise goes too near the brain and makes you mad.
 The gnats say, Guido used the candle-flame
 Unfairly,—worsened that first bad of his,
 By practise of all kind of cruelty 565
 To oust them and suppress the wail and whine,—
 That speedily he so scared and bullied them,

Fain were they, long before five months were out,
 To beg him grant, from what was once their wealth,
 Just so much as would help them back to Rome 570
 Where, when they had finished paying the last doit
 O' the dowry, they might beg from door to door.
 So say the Comparini—as if it were
 In pure resentment for this worse than bad,
 That then Violante, feeling conscience prick, 575
 Confessed her substitution of the child
 Whence all the harm came,—and that Pietro first
 Bethought him of advantage to himself
 I' the deed, as part revenge, part remedy
 For all miscalculation in the pact. 580

On the other hand "Not so!" Guido retorts—
 "I am the wronged, solely, from first to last,
 "Who gave the dignity I engaged to give,
 "Which was, is, cannot but continue gain.
 "My being poor was a bye-circumstance, 585
 "Miscalculated piece of untowardness,
 "Might end to-morrow did heaven's windows ope,
 "Or uncle die and leave me his estate.
 "You should have put up with the minor flaw,
 "Getting the main prize of the jewel. If wealth, 590

- “ Not rank, had been prime object in your thoughts,
“ Why not have taken the butcher’s son, the boy
“ O’ the baker or candlestick-maker? In all the
rest,
“ It was yourselves broke compact and played false,
“ And made a life in common impossible. 595
“ Show me the stipulation of our bond
“ That you should make your profit of being inside
“ My house, to hustle and edge me out o’ the same,
“ First make a laughing-stock of mine and me,
“ Then round us in the ears from morn to night 600
“ (Because we show wry faces at your mirth)
“ That you are robbed, starved, beaten and what not!
“ You fled a hell of your own lighting-up,
“ Pay for your own miscalculation too:
“ You thought nobility, gained at any price, 605
“ Would suit and satisfy,—find the mistake,
“ And now retaliate, not on yourselves, but me.
“ And how? By telling me, i’ the face of the world,
“ I it is have been cheated all this while,
“ Abominably and irreparably,—my name 610
“ Given to a cur-cast mongrel, a drab’s brat,
“ A beggar’s bye-blow,—thus depriving me
“ Of what yourselves allege the whole and sole

“ Aim on my part i’ the marriage,—money to-wit.

“ This thrust I have to parry by a guard

615

“ Which leaves me open to a counter-thrust

“ On the other side,—no way but there ’s a pass

“ Clean through me. If I prove, as I hope to do,

“ There ’s not one truth in this your odious tale

“ O’ the buying, selling, substituting—prove

620

“ Your daughter was and is your daughter,—well,

“ And her dowry hers and therefore mine,—what
then?

“ Why, where ’s the appropriate punishment for this

“ Enormous lie hatched for mere malice’ sake

“ To ruin me? Is that a wrong or no?

625

“ And if I try revenge for remedy,

“ Can I well make it strong and bitter enough?”

I anticipate however—only ask,

Which of the two here sinned most? A nice point!

Which brownness is least black,—decide who can,

630

Wager-by-battle-of-cheating! What do you say,

Highness? Suppose, your Excellency, we leave

The question at this stage, proceed to the next,

Both parties step out, fight their prize upon,

In the eye o’ the world?

635

They brandish law 'gainst law ;
 The grinding of such blades, each parry of each,
 Throws terrible sparks off, over and above the thrusts,
 And makes more sinister the fight, to the eye,
 Than the very wounds that follow. Beside the tale 640
 Which the Comparini have to re-assert,
 They needs must write, print, publish all abroad
 The straitnesses of Guido's household life—
 The petty nothings we bear privately
 But break down under when fools flock to jeer. 645
 What is it all to the facts o' the couple's case,
 How helps it prove Pompilia not their child,
 If Guido's mother, brother, kith and kin
 Fare ill, lie hard, lack clothes, lack fire, lack food?
 That 's one more wrong than needs. 650

On the other hand,
 Guido,—whose cue is to dispute the truth
 O' the tale, reject the shame it throws on him,—
 He may retaliate, fight his foe in turn
 And welcome, we allow. Ay, but he can 't ! 655
 He 's at home, only acts by proxy here .
 Law may meet law,—but all the gibes and jeers,
 The superfluity of naughtiness,

Those libels on his House,—how reach at them?
 Two hateful faces, grinning all a-glow,
 Not only make parade of spoil they filched,
 But foul him from the height of a tower, you see,
 Unluckily temptation is at hand—
 To take revenge on a trifle overlooked,
 A pet lamb they have left in reach outside,
 Whose first bleat, when he plucks the wool away,
 Will strike the grinners grave : his wife remains
 Who, four months earlier, some thirteen years old,
 Never a mile away from mother's house
 And petted to the height of her desire,
 Was told one morning that her fate was come,
 She must be married—just as, a month before,
 Her mother told her she must comb her hair
 And twist her curls into one knot behind.
 These fools forgot their pet lamb, fed with flowers,
 Then 'ticed as usual by the bit of cake,
 Out of the bower into the butchery.
 Plague her, he plagues them threefold : but how plague
 The world may have its word to say to that :
 You can 't do some things with impunity.
 What remains . . well, it is an ugly thought . .
 But that he drive herself to plague herself—

Herself disgrace herself and so disgrace
 Who seek to disgrace Guido ?

There 's the clue 685

To what else seems gratuitously vile,
 If, as is said, from this time forth the rack
 Was tried upon Pompilia: 't was to wrench
 Her limbs into exposure that brings shame.
 The aim o' the cruelty being so crueller still, 690
 That cruelty almost grows compassion's self
 Could one attribute it to mere return
 O' the parents' outrage, wrong avenging wrong.
 They see in this a deeper deadlier aim,
 Not to vex just a body they held dear, 695
 But blacken too a soul they boasted white,
 And show the world their saint in a lover's arms,
 No matter how driven thither,—so they say.

On the other hand, so much is easily said,
 And Guido lacks not an apologist. 700
 The pair had nobody but themselves to blame,
 Being selfish beasts throughout, no less, no more :
 —Cared for themselves, their supposed good, nought else,
 And brought about the marriage ; good proved bad,

As little they cared for her its victim—nay,
Meant she should stay behind and take the chance,
If haply they might wriggle themselves free.
They baited their own hook to catch a fish
With this poor worm, failed o' the prize, and then
Sought how to unbait tackle, let worm float
Or sink, amuse the monster while they 'scaped.
Under the best stars Hymen brings above,
Had all been honesty on either side,
A common sincere effort to good end,
Still, this would prove a difficult problem, Prince !
—Given, a fair wife, aged thirteen years,
A husband poor, care-bitten, sorrow-sunk,
Little, long-nosed, bush-bearded, lantern-jawed,
Forty-six-years old,—place the two grown one,
She, cut off sheer from every natural aid,
In a strange town with no familiar face—
He, in his own parade-ground or retreat
As need were, free from challenge, much less check
To an irritated, disappointed will—
How evolve happiness from such a match ?
'T were hard to serve up a congenial dish
Out of these ill-agreeing morsels, Duke,
By the best exercise of the cook's craft,

Best interspersions of spice, salt and sweet !
 But let two ghastly scullions concoct mess 730
 With brimstone, pitch, vitriol and devil's-dung—
 Throw in abuse o' the man, his body and soul,
 Kith, kin and generation, shake all slab
 At Rome, Arezzo, for the world to nose,
 Then end by publishing, for fiend's arch-prank, 735
 That, over and above sauce to the meat's self,
 Why, even the meat, bedevilled thus in dish,
 Was never a pheasant but a carrion-crow—
 Prince, what will then the natural loathing be?
 What wonder if this?—the compound plague o' the pair
 Pricked Guido,—not to take the course they hoped, 741
 That is, submit him to their statement's truth,
 Accept its obvious promise of relief,
 And thrust them out of doors the girl again
 Since the girl's dowry would not enter there, 745
 —Quit of the one if balked of the other : no !
 Rather did rage and hate so work in him,
 Their product proved the horrible conceit
 That he should plot and plan and bring to pass
 His wife might, of her own free will and deed, 750
 Relieve him of her presence, get her gone,
 And yet leave all the dowry safe behind,

Confirmed his own henceforward past dispute,
 While blotting out, as by a belch of hell,
 Their triumph in her misery and death.

755

You see, the man was Aretine, had touch
 O' the subtle air that breeds the subtle wit ;
 Was noble too, of old blood thrice-refined
 That shrinks from clownish coarseness in disgust :
 Allow that such an one may take revenge,
 You do n't expect he 'll catch up stone and fling,
 Or try cross-buttock, or whirl quarter-staff ?
 Instead of the honest drubbing clowns bestow,
 When out of temper at the dinner spoilt,
 On meddling mother-in-law and tiresome wife,—
 Substitute for the clown a nobleman,
 And you have Guido, practising, 't is said,
 Immitigably from the very first,
 The finer vengeance : this, they say, the fact
 O' the famous letter shows—the writing traced
 At Guido's instance by the timid wife
 Over the pencilled words himself writ first—
 Wherein she, who could neither write nor read,
 Was made unblushingly declare a tale
 To the brother, the Abate then in Rome,

760

765

770

775

How her putative parents had impressed,
 On their departure, their enjoiment ; bade
 “ We being safely arrived here, follow, you !
 “ Poison your husband, rob, set fire to all,
 “ And then by means o’ the gallant you procure 780
 “ With ease, by helpful eye and ready tongue,
 “ The brave youth ready to dare, do and die,
 “ You shall run off and merrily reach Rome
 “ Where we may live like flies in honey-pot : ”—
 Such being exact the programme of the course 785
 Imputed her as carried to effect.

They also say,—to keep her straight therein,
 All sort of torture was piled, pain on pain,
 On either side Pompilia’s path of life,
 Built round about and over against by fear, 790
 Circumvallated month by month, and week
 By week, and day by day, and hour by hour,
 Close, closer and yet closer still with pain,
 No outlet from the encroaching pain save just
 Where stood one saviour like a piece of heaven, 795
 Hell’s arms would strain round but for this blue gap.
 She, they say further, first tried every chink,
 Every imaginable break i’ the fire,

As way of escape : ran to the Commissary,
 Who bade her not malign his friend her spouse ; 8c
 Flung herself thrice at the Archbishop's feet,
 Where three times the Archbishop let her lie,
 Spend her whole sorrow and sob full heart forth,
 And then took up the slight load from the ground
 And bore it back for husband to chastise,— 8c
 Mildly of course,—but natural right is right.
 So went she slipping ever yet catching at help,
 Missing the high till come to lowest and last,
 To-wit a certain friar of mean degree,
 Who heard her story in confession, wept, 81
 Crossed himself, showed the man within the monk.
 " Then, will you save me, you the one i' the world ?
 " I cannot even write my woes, nor put
 " My prayer for help in words a friend may read,—
 " I no more own a coin than have an hour 81
 " Free of observance,—I was watched to church,
 " Am watched now, shall be watched back presently,—
 " How buy the skill of scribe i' the market-place ?
 " Pray you, write down and send whatever I say
 " O' the need I have my parents take me hence ! " 82
 The good man rubbed his eyes and could not choose—
 Let her dictate her letter in such a sense

That parents, to save breaking down a wall,
Might lift her over : she went back, heaven in her heart.
Then the good man took counsel of his couch, 825
Woke and thought twice, the second thought the best :
“ Here am I, foolish body that I be,
“ Caught all but pushing, teaching, who but I,
“ My betters their plain duty,—what, I dare
“ Help a case the Archbishop would not help, 830
“ Mend matters, peradventure, God loves mar ?
“ What hath the married life but strifes and plagues
“ For proper dispensation ? So a fool
“ Once touched the ark,—poor Hophni that I am !
“ Oh married ones, much rather should I bid, 835
“ In patience all of ye possess your souls !
“ This life is brief and troubles die with it :
“ Where were the prick to soar up homeward else ? ”
So saying, he burnt the letter he had writ,
Said *Ave* for her intention, in its place, 840
Took snuff and comfort, and had done with all.
Then the grim arms stretched yet a little more
And each touched each, all but one streak i' the midst,
Whereat stood Caponsacchi, who cried, “ This way,
“ Out by me ! Hesitate one moment more 845
“ And the fire shuts out me and shuts in you !

“ Here my hand holds you life out ! ” Whereupon
 She clasped the hand, which closed on hers and drew
 Pompilia out o’ the circle now complete.
 Whose fault or shame but Guido’s?—ask her friends. 85

But then this is the wife’s—Pompilia’s tale—
 Eve’s . . . no, not Eve’s, since Eve, to speak the truth,
 Was hardly fallen (our candour might pronounce)
 When simply saying in her own defence
 “ The serpent tempted me and I did eat.” 85
 So much of paradisaical nature, Eve’s !
 Her daughters ever since prefer to urge
 “ Adam so starved me I was fain accept
 “ The apple any serpent pushed my way.”
 What an elaborate theory have we here, 86
 Ingeniously nursed up, pretentiously
 Brought forth, pushed forward amid trumpet-blast,
 To account for the thawing of an icicle,
 Show us there needed *Ætna vomit flame*
 Ere run the crystal into dew-drops ! Else, 86
 How, unless hell broke loose to cause the step,
 How could a married lady go astray ?
 Bless the fools ! And ’t is just this way they are blessed,
 And the world wags still,—because fools are sure

- Oh, not of my wife nor your daughter! No! 870
 But of their own: the case is altered quite.
 Look now,—last week, the lady we all love,—
 Daughter o' the couple we all venerate,
 Wife of the husband we all cap before,
 Mother o' the babes we all breathe blessings on,— 875
 Was caught in converse with a negro page.
 Hell thawed that icicle, else “Why was it—
 “Why?” asked and echoed the fools. “Because, you
 fools,—”
 So did the dame's self answer, she who could,
 With that fine candour only forthcoming 880
 When 't is no odds whether withheld or no—
 “Because my husband was the saint you say,
 “And,—with that childish goodness, absurd faith,
 “Stupid self-satisfaction, you so praise,—
 “Saint to you, insupportable to me. 885
 “Had he,—instead of calling me fine names,
 “Lucretia and Susanna and so forth,
 “And curtaining Correggio carefully.
 “Lest I be taught that Leda had two legs,—
 “—But once never so little tweaked my nose 890
 “For peeping through my fan at Carnival,
 “Confessing thereby ‘I have no easy task—

“ ‘ I need use all my powers to hold you mine,
 “ ‘ And then,—why ’t is so doubtful if they serve,
 “ ‘ That—take this, as an earnest of despair!’ 895

“ Why, we were quits : I had wiped the harm away,
 “ Thought ‘ The man fears me !’ and foregone revenge.”

We must not want all this elaborate work
 To solve the problem why young Fancy-and-flesh
 Slips from the dull side of a spouse in years, 900
 Betakes it to the breast of Brisk-and-bold
 Whose love-scrapes furnish talk for all the town !

Accordingly one word on the other side
 Tips over the piled-up fabric of a tale.
 Guido says—that is, always, his friends say— 905
 It is unlikely from the wickedness,
 That any man treat any woman so.

The letter in question was her very own,
 Unprompted and unaided : she could write—
 As able to write as ready to sin, or free, 910
 When there was danger, to deny both facts.
 He bids you mark, herself from first to last
 Attributes all the so-styled torture just
 To jealousy,—jealousy of whom but just
 This very Caponsacchi ! How suits here . 915

This with the other alleged motive, Prince ?
 Would Guido make a terror of the man
 He meant should tempt the woman, as they charge ?
 Do you fright your hare that you may catch your hare ?
 Consider too, the charge was made and met 920
 At the proper time and place where proofs were plain—
 Heard patiently and disposed of thoroughly
 By the highest powers, possessors of most light,
 The Governor, for the law, and the Archbishop
 For the gospel : which acknowledged primacies, 925
 'T is impudently pleaded, he could warp
 Into a tacit partnership with crime—
 He being the while, believe their own account,
 Impotent, penniless and miserable !
 He further asks—Duke, note the knotty point !— 930
 How he,—concede him skill to play such part
 And drive his wife into a gallant's arms,—
 Could bring the gallant to play his part too
 And stand with arms so opportunely wide ?
 How bring this Caponsacchi,—with whom, friends 935
 And foes alike agree, throughout his life
 He never interchanged a civil word
 Nor lifted courteous cap to—how bend him,
 To such observancy of beck and call,

—To undertake this strange and perilous feat 940
 For the good of Guido, using, as the lure,
 Pompilia whom, himself and she avouch,
 He had nor spoken with nor seen, indeed,
 Beyond sight in a public theatre,
 When she wrote letters (she that could not write !) 945
 The importunate shamelessly-protasted love
 Which brought him, though reluctant, to her feet,
 And forced on him the plunge which, howsoe'er
 She might swim up i' the whirl, must bury him
 Under abysmal black : a priest contrive 950
 No better, no amour to be hushed up,
 But open flight and noon-day infamy ?
 Try and concoct defence for such revolt !
 Take the wife's tale as true, say she was wronged,—
 Pray, in what rubric of the breviary 955
 Do you find it registered the part of a priest
 That to right wrongs he skip from the church-door,
 Go journeying with a woman that 's a wife,
 And be pursued, o'ertaken and captured . . . how ?
 In a lay-dress, playing the kind sentinel 960
 Where the wife sleeps (says he who best should know)
 And sleeping, sleepless, both have spent the night !
 Could no one else be found to serve at need—

No woman—or if man, no safer sort
 Than this not well-reputed turbulence? 965

Then, look into his own account o' the case !
 He, being the stranger and astonished one,
 Yet received protestations of her love
 From lady neither known nor cared about :
 Love, so protested, bred in him disgust 970

After the wonder,—or incredulity,
 Such impudence seeming impossible.
 But, soon assured such impudence might be,
 When he had seen with his own eyes at last
 Letters thrown down to him i' the very street 975

From behind lattice where the lady lurked,
 And read their passionate summons to her side—
 Why then, a thousand thoughts swarmed up and in,—
 How he had seen her once, a moment's space,
 Observed she was both young and beautiful, 980

Heard everywhere report she suffered much
 From a jealous husband thrice her age,—in short
 There flashed the propriety, expediency
 Of treating, trying might they come to terms,
 —At all events, granting the interview 985

Prayed for, one so adapted to assist

Decision as to whether he advance,
 Stand or retire, in his benevolent mood !
 Therefore the interview befell at length ;
 And at this one and only interview, 990
 He saw the sole and single course to take—
 Bade her dispose of him, head, heart and hand,
 Did her behest and braved the consequence,
 Not for the natural end, the love of man
 For woman whether love be virtue or vice, 995
 But, please you, altogether for pity's sake—
 Pity of innocence and helplessness !
 And how did he assure himself of both ?
 Had he been the house-inmate, visitor,
 Eye-witness of the described martyrdom, 1000
 So, competent to pronounce its remedy
 Ere rush on such extreme and desperate course—
 Involving such enormity of harm,
 Moreover, to the husband judged thus, doomed
 And damned without a word in his defence ? 1005
 Not he ! the truth was felt by instinct here,
 —Process which saves a world of trouble and time.
 There 's the priest's story : what do you say to it,
 Trying its truth by your own instinct too,
 Since that 's to be the expeditious mode ? 1010

- " And now, do hear my version," Guido cries :
 " I accept argument and inference both.
 " It would indeed have been miraculous
 " Had such a confidency sprung to birth
 " With no more fanning from acquaintanceship 1015
 " Than here avowed by my wife and this priest.
 " Only, it did not : you must substitute
 " The old stale unromantic way of fault,
 " The commonplace adventure, mere intrigue
 " In prose form with the unpoetic tricks, 1020
 " Cheatings and lies : they used the hackney chair
 " Satan jaunts forth with, shabby and serviceable,
 " No gilded jimcrack-novelty from below,
 " To bowl you along thither, swift and sure.
 " That same officious go-between, the wench 1025
 " That gave and took the letters of the two,
 " Now offers self and service back to me :
 " Bears testimony to visits night by night
 " When all was safe, the husband far and away,—
 " To many a timely slipping out at large 1030
 " By light o' the morning-star, ere he should wake.
 " And when the fugitives were found at last,
 " Why, with them were found also, to belie
 " What protest they might make of innocence,

" All documents yet wanting, if need were, 1035
 " To establish guilt in them, disgrace in me—
 " The chronicle o' the converse from its rise
 " To culmination in this outrage : read !
 " Letters from wife to priest, from priest to wife,—
 " Here they are, read and say where they chime in 1040
 " With the other tale, superlative purity
 " O' the pair of saints ! I stand or fall by these."

But then on the other side again,—how say
 The pair of saints ? That not one word is theirs—
 No syllable o' the batch or writ or sent 1045
 Or yet received by either of the two.
 " Found," says the priest, " because he needed them,
 " Failing all other proofs, to prove our fault :
 " So, here they are, just as is natural.
 " Oh yes—we had our missives, each of us ! 1050
 " Not these, but to the full as vile, no doubt :
 " Hers as from me,—she could not read, so burnt,—
 " Mine as from her,—I burnt because I read.
 " Who forged and found them ? *Cui profuerint !*"
 (I take the phrase out of your Highness' mouth) 1055
 " He who would gain by her fault and my fall,
 " The trickster, schemer and pretender—he

“ Whose whole career was lie entailing lie

“ Sought to be sealed truth by the worst lie last !”

Guido rejoins—“ Did the other end o’ the tale 1060

“ Match this beginning ! ’T is alleged I prove

“ A murderer at the end, a man of force

“ Prompt, indiscriminate, effectual : good !

“ Then what need all this trifling woman’s-work,

“ Letters and embassies and weak intrigue, 1065

“ When will and power were mine to end at once

“ Safely and surely ? Murder had come first

“ Not last with such a man, assure yourselves !

“ The silent *acquetta*, stilling at command—

“ A drop a day i’ the wine or soup, the dose,— 1070

“ The shattering beam that breaks above the bed

“ And beats out brains, with nobody to blame

“ Except the wormy age which eats even oak,—

“ Nay, the staunch steel or trusty cord,—who cares

“ I’ the blind old palace, a pitfall at each step, 1075

“ With none to see, much more to interpose

“ O’ the two, three, creeping house-dog-servant-things

“ Born mine and bred mine ?—had I willed gross death,

“ I had found nearer paths to thrust him prey

“ Than this that goes meandering here and there 1080

- " Through half the world and calls down in its course
 " Notice and noise,—hate, vengeance, should it fail,
 " Derision and contempt though it succeed !
 " Moreover, what o' the future son and heir ?
 " The unborn babe about to be called mine,— 108
 " What end in heaping all this shame on him,
 " Were I indifferent to my own black share ?
 " Would I have tried these crookednesses, say,
 " Willing and able to effect the straight ? "
- " Ay, would you !"—one may hear the priest retort,
 " Being as you are, i' the stock, a man of guile, 109
 " And ruffianism but an added graft.
 " You, a born coward, try a coward's arms,
 " Trick and chicane,—and only when these fail
 " Does violence follow, and like fox you bite 109
 " Caught out in stealing. Also, the disgrace
 " You hardly shrunk at, wholly shrivelled her :
 " You plunged her thin white delicate hand i' the
 flame
 " Along with your coarse horny brutish fist,
 " Held them a second there, then drew out both 110
 " —Yours roughed a little, hers ruined through and
 through.

"Your hurt would heal forthwith at ointment's touch—
 "Namely, succession to the inheritance
 "Which bolder crime had lost you : let things change,
 "The birth o' the boy warrant the bolder crime, 1105
 "Why, murder was determined, dared and done.
 "For me," the priest proceeds with his reply,
 "The look o' the thing, the chances of mistake,
 "All were against me,—that, I knew the first :
 "But, knowing also what my duty was, 1110
 "I did it : I must look to men more skilled
 "In reading hearts than ever was the world."

Highness, decide ! Pronounce, Her Excellency !
 Or . . . even leave this argument in doubt,
 Account it a fit matter, taken up 1115
 With all its faces, manifold enough,
 To ponder on—what fronts us, the next stage,
 Next legal process ? Guido, in pursuit,
 Coming up with the fugitives at the inn,
 Caused both to be arrested then and there 1120
 And sent to Rome for judgment on the case—
 Thither, with all his armoury of proofs
 Betook himself : 't is there we 'll meet him now,
 Waiting the further issue.

- Here you smile 1125
- “ And never let him henceforth dare 'to plead,—
 “ Of all pleas and excuses in the world
 “ For any deed hereafter to be done,—
 “ His irrepressible wrath at honour's wound !
 “ Passion and madness irrepressible ? 1130
 “ Why, Count and cavalier, the husband comes
 “ And catches foe i' the very act of shame !
 “ There 's man to man,—nature must have her way,—
 “ We look he should have cleared things on the spot.
 “ Yes, then, indeed—even tho' it prove he erred— 1135
 “ Though the ambiguous first appearance, mount
 “ Of solid injury, melt soon to mist,
 “ Still,—had he slain the lover and the wife—
 “ Or, since she was a woman and his wife,
 “ Slain him, but stript her naked to the skin 1140
 “ Or at best left no more of an attire
 “ Than patch sufficient to pin paper to,
 “ Some one love-letter, infamy and all,
 “ As passport to the Paphos fit for such,
 “ Safe-conduct to her natural home the stews,— 1145
 “ Good ! One had recognised the power o' the pulse.
 “ But when he stands, the stock-fish,—sticks to law—
 “ Offers the hole in his heart, all fresh and warm,

- " For scrivener's pen to poke and play about—
 " Can stand, can stare, can tell his beads perhaps, 1150
 " Oh, let us hear no syllable o' the rage !
 " Such rage were a convenient afterthought
 " For one who would have shown his teeth belike,
 " Exhibited unbridled rage enough,
 " Had but the priest been found, as was to hope, 1155
 " In serge, not silk, with crucifix, not sword :
 " Whereas the grey innocuous grub, of yore,
 " Had hatched a hornet, tickle to the touch,
 " The priest was metamorphosed into knight.
 " And even the timid wife, whose cue was—shriek, 1160
 " Bury her brow beneath his trampling foot,—
 " She too sprang at him like a pythoness :
 " So, gulp down rage, passion must be postponed,
 " Calm be the word ! Well, our word is—we brand
 " This part o' the business, howsoever the rest 1165
 " Befall."

" Nay," interpose as prompt his friends—

- " This is the world's way ! So you adjudge reward
 " To the forbearance and legality
 " Yourselves begin by inculcating—ay, 1170
 " Exacting from us all with knife at throat !
 " This one wrong more you add to wrong's amount,—

“ You publish all, with the kind comment here,

“ ‘ Its victim was too cowardly for revenge.’ ”

Make it your own case,—you who stand apart ! 1175.

The husband wakes one morn from heavy sleep,

With a taste of poppy in his mouth,—rubs eyes,

Finds his wife flown, his strong box ransacked too,

Follows as he best can, overtakes i’ the end.

You bid him use his privilege : well, it seems 1180

He’s scarce cool-blooded enough for the right move—

Does not shoot when the game were sure, but stands

Bewildered at the critical minute,—since

He has the first flash of the fact alone

To judge from, act with, not the steady lights 1185

Of after-knowledge,—yours who stand at ease

To try conclusions : he’s in smother and smoke,

You outside, with explosion at an end :

The sulphur may be lightning or a squib—

He’ll know in a minute, but till then, he doubts. 1190

Back from what you know to what he knew not !

Hear the priest’s lofty “ I am innocent,”

The wife’s as resolute “ You are guilty ! ” Come !

Are you not staggered ?—pause, and you lose the move !

Nought left you but a low appeal to law, 1195

“ Coward ” tied to your tail for compliment !

Another consideration : have it your way !
 Admit the worst : his courage failed the Count,
 He 's cowardly like the best o' the burgesses
 He 's grown incorporate with,—a very cur, 1200
 Kick him from out your circle by all means !
 Why, trundled down this reputable stair,
 Still, the Church-door lies wide to take him in,
 And the Court-porch also : in he sneaks to each,—
 “ Yes, I have lost my honour and my wife, 1205
 “ And, being moreover an ignoble hound,
 “ I dare not jeopardise my life for them ! ”
 Religion and Law lean forward from their chairs,
 “ Well done, thou good and faithful servant ! ” Ay,
 Not only applaud him that he scorned the world, 1210
 But punish should he dare do otherwise.
 If the case be clear or turbid,—you must say !

Thus, anyhow, it mounted to the stage
 In the law-courts,—let 's see clearly from this point !—
 Where the priest tells his story true or false, 1215
 And the wife her story, and the husband his,
 All with result as happy as before.
 The courts would nor condemn nor yet acquit
 This, that or the other, in so distinct a sense

- As end the strife to either's absolute loss : 1220
- Pronounced, in place of something definite,
- " Each of the parties, whether goat or sheep
- " I' the main, has wool to show and hair to hide.
- " Each has brought somehow trouble, is somehow cause
- " Of pains enough,—even though no worse were proved.
- " Here is a husband, cannot rule his wife 1226
- " Without provoking her to scream and scratch
- " And scour the fields,—causelessly, it may be :
- " Here is that wife,—who makes her sex our plague,
- " Wedlock, our bugbear,—perhaps with cause enough :
- " And here is the truant priest o' the trio, worst 1231
- " Or best—each quality being conceivable.
- " Let us impose a little mulct on each.
- " We punish youth in state of pupilage
- " Who talk at hours when youth is bound to sleep, 1235
- " Whether the prattle turn upon Saint Rose
- " Or Donna Olimpia of the Vatican :
- " 'T is talk, talked wisely or unwisely talked,
- " I' the dormitory where to talk at all,
- " Transgresses, and is mulct : as here we mean. 1240
- " For the wife,—let her betake herself, for rest,
- " After her run, to a House of Convertites—
- " Keep there, as good as real imprisonment :

- " Being sick and tired, she will recover so.
 " For the priest, spritely strayer out of bounds, 1245
 " Who made Arezzo hot to hold him,—Rome
 " Profits by his withdrawal from the scene.
 " Let him be relegate to Civita,
 " Circumscribed by its bounds till matters mend :
 " There he at least lies out o' the way of harm 1250
 " From foes—perhaps from the too friendly fair.
 " And finally for the husband, whose rash rule
 " Has but itself to blame for this ado,—
 " If he be vexed that, in our judgments dealt,
 " He fails obtain what he accounts his right, 1255
 " Let him go comforted with the thought, no less,
 " That, turn each sentence howsoever he may,
 " There 's satisfaction to extract therefrom.
 " For, does he wish his wife proved innocent?
 " Well, she 's not guilty, he may safely urge, 1260
 " Has missed the stripes dishonest wives endure—
 " This being a fatherly pat o' the cheek, no more.
 " Does he wish her guilty? Were she otherwise
 " Would she be locked up, set to say her prayers,
 " Prevented intercourse with the outside world, 1265
 " And that suspected priest in banishment,
 " Whose portion is a further help i' the case?

" Oh, ay, you all of you want the other thing,
 " The extreme of law, some verdict neat, complete,—
 " Either, the whole o' the dowry in your poke 1270
 " With full release from the false wife, to boot,
 " And heading, hanging for the priest, beside—
 " Or, contrary, claim freedom for the wife,
 " Repayment of each penny paid her spouse,
 " Amends for the past, release for the future! Such
 " Is wisdom to the children of this world; 1276
 " But we 've no mind, we children of the light,
 " To miss the advantage of the golden mean,
 " And push things to the steel point." Thus the courts.

Is it settled so far? Settled or disturbed, 1280
 Console yourselves: 't is like . . . an instance, now!
 You 've seen the puppets, of Place Navona, play,—
 Punch and his mate,—how threats pass, blows are dealt,
 And a crisis comes: the crowd or clap or hiss
 Accordingly as disposed for man or wife— 1285
 When down the actors duck awhile perdue,
 Donning what novel rag-and-feather trim
 Best suits the next adventure, new effect:
 And,—by the time the mob is on the move,
 With something like a judgment *pro* and *con*,— 1290

There 's a whistle, up again the actors pop
 In t' other tatter with fresh-tinseled staves,
 To re-engage in one last worst fight more
 Shall show, what you thought tragedy was farce.
 Note, that the climax and the crown of things 1295
 Invariably is, the devil appears himself,
 Armed and accoutred, horns and hoofs and tail !
 Just so, nor otherwise it proved—you 'll see :
 Move to the murder, never mind the rest!

Guido, at such a general duck-down, 1300
 I' the breathing-space,—of wife to convent here,
 Priest to his relegation, and himself
 To Arezzo,—had resigned his part perforce
 To brother Abate, who bustled, did his best,
 Retrieved things somewhat, managed the three suits—
 Since, it should seem, there were three suits-at-law 1306
 Behoved him look to, still, lest bad grow worse :
 First civil suit,—the one the parents brought,
 Impugning the legitimacy of his wife,
 Affirming thence the nullity of her rights : 1310
 This was before the Rota,—Molinès,
 That 's judge there, made that notable decree
 Which partly leaned to Guido, as I said,—

But Pietro had appealed against the same
 To the very court will judge what we judge now— 1315
 Tommati and his fellows,—Suit the first.
 Next civil suit;—demand on the wife's part
 Of separation from the husband's bed
 On plea of cruelty and risk to life—
 Claims restitution of the dowry paid, 1320
 Immunity from paying any more:
 This second, the Vicegerent has to judge.
 Third and last suit,—this time, a criminal one,—
 Answer to, and protection from, both these,—
 Guido's complaint of guilt against his wife 1325
 In the Tribunal of the Governor,
 Venturini, also judge of the present cause.
 Three suits of all importance plaguing him,
 Beside a little private enterprise
 Of Guido's,—essay at a shorter cut. 1330
 For Paolo, knowing the right way at Rome,
 Had, even while superintending these three suits
 I' the regular way, each at its proper court,
 Ingeniously made interest with the Pope
 To set such tedious regular forms aside, 1335
 And, acting the supreme and ultimate judge,
 Declare for the husband and against the wife.

Well, at such crisis and extreme of straits,
 The man at bay, buffeted in this wise,
 Happened the strangest accident of all. 1340

“ Then,” sigh friends, “ the last feather broke his back,
 “ Made him forget all possible remedies
 “ Save one—he rushed to, as the sole relief
 “ From horror and the abominable thing.”

“ Or rather,” laugh foes, “ then did there befall 1345

“ The luckiest of conceivable events,
 “ Most pregnant with impunity for him,
 “ Which henceforth turned the flank of all attack,
 “ And bade him do his wickedest and worst.”

—The wife’s withdrawal from the Convertites, 1350

Visit to the villa where her parents lived,
 And birth there of his babe. Divergence here !
 I simply take the facts, ask what they show.

First comes this thunderclap of a surprise :

Then follow all the signs and silences 1355

Premonitory of earthquake. Paolo first

Vanished, was swept off somewhere, lost to Rome :

(Wells dry up, while the sky is sunny and blue.)

Then Guido girds himself for enterprise,

Hies to Vittiano, counsels with his steward, 1360

Comes to terms with four peasants young and bold,
 And starts for Rome the Holy, reaches her
 At very holiest, for 't is Christmas Eve,
 And makes straight for the Abate's dried-up font,
 The lodge where Paolo ceased to work the pipes. 1365

And then, rest taken, observation made
 And plan completed, all in a grim week,
 The five proceed in a body, reach the place,
 —Pietro's, at the Paolina, silent, lone,
 And stupefied by the propitious snow. 1370

'T is one i' the evening: knock: a voice "Who 's there?"
 "Friends with a letter from the priest your friend."

At the door, straight smiles old Violante's self.
 She falls,—her son-in-law stabs through and through,
 Reaches thro' her at Pietro—"With your son 1375

"This is the way to settle suits, good sire!"
 He bellows "Mercy for heaven, not for earth!"

"Leave to confess and save my sinful soul,
 "Then do your pleasure on the body of me!"

—"Nay, father, soul with body must take its chance!"
 He presently got his portion and lay still. 1381

And last, Pompilia rushes here and there
 Like a dove among lightnings in her brake,
 Falls also: Guido's, this last husband's-act.

He lifts her by the long dishevelled hair, 1385
 Holds her away at arms' length with one hand,
 While the other tries if life come from the mouth—
 Looks out his whole heart's hate on the shut eyes,
 Draws a deep satisfied breath, "So—dead at last!"
 Throws down the burthen on dead Pietro's knees, 1390
 And ends all with "Let us away, my boys!"

And, as they left by one door, in at the other
 Tumbled the neighbours—for the shrieks had pierced
 To the mill and the grange, this cottage and that
 shed.

Soon followed the Public Force ; pursuit began 1395
 Though Guido had the start and chose the road :
 So, that same night was he, with the other four,
 Overtaken near Baccano,—where they sank
 By the way-side, in some shelter meant for beasts,
 And now lay heaped together, nuzzling swine, 1400
 Each wrapped in bloody cloak, each grasping still
 His unwiped weapon, sleeping all the same
 The sleep o' the just,—a journey of twenty miles .
 Brought just and unjust to a level, you see.
 The only one i' the world that suffered aught 1405
 By the whole night's toil and trouble, flight and chase,

Was just the officer who took them, Head
 O' the Public Force,—Patrizj, zealous soul,
 Who, having duty to sustain the flesh,
 Got heated, caught a fever and so died : 1410
 A warning to the over-vigilant,
 —Virtue in a chafe should change her linen quick,
 Lest pleurisy get start of providence.
 (That 's for the Cardinal, and told, I think !)

Well, they bring back the company to Rome. 1415
 Says Guido, " By your leave, I fain would ask
 " How you found out 't was I who did the deed ?
 " What put you on my trace, a foreigner,
 " Supposed in Arezzo,—and assuredly safe
 " Except for an oversight : who told you, pray ?" 1420
 " Why, naturally your wife !" Down Guido drops
 O' the horse he rode,—they have to steady and stay,
 At either side the brute that bore him, bound,
 So strange it seemed his wife should live and speak !
 She had prayed—at least so people tell you now— 1425
 For but one thing to the Virgin for herself,
 Not simply, as did Pietro 'mid the stabs,—
 Time to confess and get her own soul saved—
 But time to make the truth apparent, truth

For God's sake, lest men should believe a lie : 1430
 Which seems to have been about the single prayer
 She ever put up, that was granted her.
 With this hope in her head, of telling truth,—
 Being familiarized with pain, beside,—
 She bore the stabbing to a certain pitch 1435
 Without a useless cry, was flung for dead
 On Pietro's lap, and so attained her point.
 Her friends subjoin this—have I done with them?—
 And cite the miracle of continued life
 (She was not dead when I arrived just now) 1440
 As attestation to her probity.

Does it strike your Excellency? Why, your Highness,
 The self-command and even the final prayer,
 Our candour must acknowledge explicable
 As easily by the consciousness of guilt. 1445
 So, when they add that her confession runs
 She was of wifehood one white innocence
 In thought, word, act, from first of her short life
 To last of it ; praying, i' the face of death,
 That God forgive her other sins—not this, 1450
 She is charged with and must die for, that she failed
 Anyway to her husband : while thereon

- Comments the old Religious—" So much good,
 " Patience beneath enormity of ill,
 " I hear to my confusion, woe is me, 1455
 " Sinner that I stand, shamed in the walk and gait
 " I have practised and grown old in, by a child !"—
 Guido's friends shrug the shoulder, " Just this same
 " Prodigious absolute calm in the last hour
 " Confirms us,—being the natural result 1460
 " Of a life which proves consistent to the close.
 " Having braved heaven and deceived earth throughout,
 " She braves still and deceives still, gains thereby
 " Two ends, she prizes beyond earth or heaven :
 " First sets her lover free, imperilled sore 1465
 " By the new turn things take : he answers yet
 " For the part he played : they have summoned him
 indeed :
 " The past ripped up, he may be punished still :
 " What better way of saving him than this?
 " Then,—thus she dies revenged to the uttermost 1470
 " On Guido, drags him with her in the dark,
 " The lower still the better, do you doubt?
 " Thus, two ways, does she love her love to the end,
 " And hate her hate,—death, hell is no such price
 " To pay for these,—lovers and haters hold." 1475

But there 's another parry for the thrust.

“ Confession,” cry folks—“ a confession, think !

“ Confession of the moribund is true !”

Which of them, my wise friends? This public one,

Or the private other we shall never know? 1480

The private may contain,—your casuists teach,—

The acknowledgment of, and the penitence for,

That other public one, so people say.

However it be,—we trench on delicate ground,

Her Eminence is peeping o'er the cards,— 1485

Can one find nothing in behalf of this

Catastrophe? Deaf folks accuse the dumb !

You criticize the drunken reel, fool's-speech,

Maniacal gesture of the man,—we grant !

But who poured poison in his cup, we ask? 1490

Recall the list of his excessive wrongs,

First cheated in his wife, robbed by her kin,

Rendered anon the laughing-stock o' the world

By the story, true or false, of his wife's birth,—

The last seal publicly apposed to shame 1495

By the open flight of wife and priest,—why, Sirs,

Step out of Rome a furlong, would you know

What another-guess tribunal than ours here,

Mere worldly Court without the help of grace,

Thinks of just that one incident o' the flight? 1505
 Guido preferred the same complaint before
 The court at Arezzo, bar of the Granduke,—
 In virtue of it being Tuscany
 Where the offence had rise and flight began,—
 Self-same complaint he made in the sequel here 1505
 Where the offence grew to the full, the flight
 Ended : offence and flight, one fact judged twice
 By two distinct tribunals,—what result ?
 There was a sentence passed at the same time
 By Arezzo and confirmed by the Granduke, 1510
 Which nothing baulks of swift and sure effect
 But absence of the guilty, (flight to Rome
 Frees them from Tuscan jurisdiction now)
 —Condemns the wife to the opprobrious doom
 Of all whom law just lets escape from death. 1515
 The Stinche, House of Punishment, for life,—
 That 's what the wife deserves in Tuscany :
 Here, she deserves—remitting with a smile
 To her father's house, main object of the flight !
 The thief presented with the thing he steals ! 1520

At this discrepancy of judgments—mad,
 The man took on himself the office, judged ;

And the only argument against the use
 O' the law he thus took into his own hands
 Is . . . what, I ask you?—that, revenging wrong, 1525
 He did not revenge sooner, kill at first
 Whom he killed last! That is the final charge.
 Sooner? What's soon or late i' the case?—ask we.
 A wound i' the flesh no doubt wants prompt redress;
 It smarts a little to-day, well in a week, 1530
 Forgotten in a month; or never, or now, revenge!
 But a wound to the soul? That rankles worse and
 worse.

Shall I comfort you, explaining—"Not this once
 "But now it may be some five hundred times
 "I called you ruffian, pandar, liar and rogue: 1535
 "The injury must be less by lapse of time?"
 The wrong is a wrong, one and immortal too,
 And that you bore it those five hundred times,
 Let it rankle unrevenged five hundred years,
 Is just five hundred wrongs the more and worse! 1540
 Men, plagued this fashion, get to explode this way,
 If left no other.

"But we left this man

"Many another way, and there's his fault,"

'T is answered—" He himself preferred our arm 1545
 " O' the law to fight his battle with. No doubt
 " We did not open him an armoury
 " To pick and choose from, use, and then reject.
 " He tries one weapon and fails,—he tries the next
 " And next: he flourishes wit and common sense, 1550
 " They fail him,—he plies logic doughtily,
 " It fails him too,—thereon, discovers last
 " He has been blind to the combustibles—
 " That all the while he is a-glow with ire,
 " Boiling with irrepressible rage, and so 1555
 " May try explosives and discard cold steel,—
 " So hire assassins, plot, plan, execute!
 " Is this the honest self-forgetting rage
 " We are called to pardon? Does the furious bull
 " Pick out four help-mates from the grazing herd 1560
 " And journey with them over hill and dale
 " Till he find his enemy?"

What rejoinder? save

That friends accept our bull-similitude.
 Bull-like,—the indiscriminate slaughter, rude 1565
 And reckless aggravation of revenge,
 Were all i' the way o' the brute who never once

- Ceases, amid all provocation more,
 To bear in mind the first tormentor, first
 Giver o' the wound that goaded him to fight : 1570
 And, though a dozen follow and reinforce
 The aggressor, wound in front and wound in flank,
 Continues undisturbedly pursuit,
 And only after prostrating his prize
 Turns on the pettier, makes a general prey. 1575
 So Guido rushed against Violante, first
 Author of all his wrongs, *fons et origo*
Malorum—drops first, deluge since,—which done,
 He finished with the rest. Do you blame a bull?
- In truth you look as puzzled as ere I preached! 1580
 How is that? There are difficulties perhaps
On any supposition, and either side.
Each party wants too much, claims sympathy
For its object of compassion, more than just.
 Cry the wife's friends, "O the enormous crime 1585
 "Caused by no provocation in the world!"
 "Was not the wife a little weak?"—inquire—
 "Punished extravagantly, if you please,
 "But meriting a little punishment?
 "One treated inconsiderately, say, 1590

“ Rather than one deserving not at all

“ Treatment and discipline o’ the harsher sort ? ”

No, they must have her purity itself,

Quite angel,—and her parents angels too

Of an aged sort, immaculate, word and deed : 1595

At all events, so seeming, till the fiend,

Even Guido, by his folly, forced from them

The untoward avowal of the trick o’ the birth,

Which otherwise were safe and secret now.

Why, here you have the awfulest of crimes 1600

For nothing ! Hell broke loose on a butterfly !

A dragon born of rose-dew and the moon !

Yet here is the monster ! Why he ’s a mere man—

Born, bred and brought up in the usual way.

His mother loves him, still his brothers stick 1605

To the good fellow of the boyish games ;

The Governor of his town knows and approves,

The Archbishop of the place knows and assists :

Here he has Cardinal This to vouch for the past,

Cardinal That to trust for the future,—match 1610

And marriage were a Cardinal’s making,—in short,

What if a tragedy be acted here

Impossible for malice to improve,

And innocent Guido with his innocent four

Be addéd, all five, to the guilty three, 1615
 That we of these last days be edified
 With one full taste o' the justice of the world?

The long and the short is, truth is what I show :—
 Undoubtedly no pains ought to be spared .
 To give the mob an inkling of our lights. 1620

It seems unduly harsh to put the man
 To the torture, as I hear the court intends,
 Though readiest way of twisting out the truth ;
 He is noble, and he may be innocent.
 On the other hand, if they exempt the man 1625

(As it is also said they hesitate
 On the fair ground, presumptive guilt is weak
 I' the case of nobility and privilege),—
 What crime that ever was, ever will be,
 Deserves the torture? Then abolish it ! 1630
 You see the reduction *ad absurdum*, Sirs?

Her Excellency must pronounce, in fine !
 What, she prefers going and joining play?
 Her Highness finds it late, intends retire?
 I am of their mind : only, all this talk, talked, 1635
 'T was not for nothing that we talked, I hope?

Both know as much about it, now, at least,
As all Rome : no particular thanks, I beg !
(You 'll see, I have not so advanced myself,
After my teaching the two idiots here !)

.1640

V,

COUNT GUIDO FRANCESCHINI.

THANKS, Sir, but, should it please the reverend Court,
I feel I can stand somehow, half sit down
Without help, make shift to even speak, you see,
Fortified by the sip of . . . why, 't is wine,
Velletri,—and not vinegar and gall, 5
So changed and good the times grow! Thanks, kind
Sir!

Oh, but one sip 's enough! I want my head
To save my neck, there 's work awaits me still.

How cautious and considerate . . . aie, aie, aie, *fortune*
Not your fault, sweet Sir! Come, you take to heart 10
An ordinary matter. Law is law.
Noblemen were exempt, the vulgar thought,

*Respect
for law*

From racking, but, since law thinks otherwise,
 I have been put to the rack : all 's over now,
 And neither wrist—what men style, out of joint : 15
 If any harm be, 't is the shoulder-blade,
 The left one, that seems wrong i' the socket,—Sirs,
 Much could not happen, I was quick to faint,
 Being past my prime of life, and out of health.
 In short I thank you,—yes, and mean the word, 20
 Needs must the Court be slow to understand
 How this quite novel form of taking pain,
 This getting tortured merely in the flesh,
 Amounts to almost an agreeable change
 In my case, me fastidious, plied too much 25
 With opposite treatment, used (forgive the joke)
 To the rasp-tooth toying with this brain of mine,
 And, in and out my heart, the play o' the probe.
 Four years have I been operated on
 I' the soul, do you see—its tense or tremulous part— 30
 My self-respect, my care for a good name,
 Pride in an old one, love of kindred—just
 A mother, brothers, sisters, and the like,
 That looked up to my face when days were dim,
 And fancied they found light there—no one spot, 35
 Foppishly sensitive, but has paid its pang.

That, and not this you now oblige me with,
 That was the Vigil-torment, if you please !
 The poor old noble House that drew the rags
 O' the Franceschini's once superb array _____ 40
 Close round her, hoped to slink unchallenged by,—
 Pluck off these ! Turn the drapery inside out
 And teach the tittering town how scarlet wears !
 Show men the lucklessness, the improvidence
 Of the easy-natured Count before this Count, _____ 45
 The father I have some slight feeling for,
 Who let the world slide, nor foresaw that friends
 Then proud to cap and kiss the patron's shoe,
 Would, when the purse he left held spider-webs,
 Properly push his child to wall one day ! _____ 50
 Mimic the tetchy humour, furtive glance
 And brow where half was furious half fatigued,
 O' the same son got to be of middle age,
 Sour, saturnine,—your humble servant here,—
 When things go cross and the young wife, he finds _____ 55
 Take to the window at a whistle's bid,
 And yet demurs thereon, preposterous fool !—
 Whereat the worthies judge he wants advice
 And beg to civilly ask what 's evil here,
 Perhaps remonstrate on the habit they deem _____ 60

*his
troubles*

He 's given unduly to, of beating her
 . . . Oh, sure he beats her—why says John so else,
 Who is cousin to George who is sib to Tecla's self
 Who cooks the meal and combs the lady's hair?
 What! 'T is my wrist you merely dislocate 65
 For the future when you mean me martyrdom?
 —Let the old mother's economy alone,
 How the brocade-strips saved o' the seamy side
 O' the wedding-gown buy raiment for a year?
 —How she can dress and dish up—lordly dish 70
 Fit for a duke, lamb's head and purtenance—
 With her proud hands, feast household so a week?
 No word o' the wine rejoicing God and man
 The less when three-parts water? Then, I say,
 A trifle of torture to the flesh, like yours, 75
 While soul is spared such foretaste of hell-fire,
 Is naught. But I curtail the catalogue
 Through policy,—a rhetorician's trick,—
 Because I would reserve some choicer points
 O' the practice, more exactly parallel 80
 (Having an eye to climax) with what gift,
 Eventual grace the Court may have in store
 I' the way of plague—what crown of punishments.
 When I am hanged or headed, time enough

To prove the tenderness of only that, 85
 Mere heading, hanging,—not their counterpart,
 Not demonstration public and precise
 That I, having married the mongrel of a drab,
 Am bound to grant that mongrel-brat, my wife, *adulteress*
 Her mother's birthright-licence as is just,— *wife*
 Let her sleep undisturbed, i' the family style,
 Her sleep out in the embraces of a priest,
 Nor disallow their bastard as my heir!
 Your sole mistake,—dare I submit so much
 To the reverend Court?—has been in all this pains 95
 To make a stone roll down hill,—rack and wrench.
 And rend a man to pieces, all for what?
 Why—make him ope mouth in his own defence,
 Show cause for what he has done, the irregular deed,
 (Since that he did it, scarce dispute can be) 100
 And clear his fame a little, beside the luck
 Of stopping even yet, if possible,
 Discomfort to his flesh from noose or axe—
 For that, out come the implements of law!
 May it content my lords the gracious Court 105
 To listen only half so patient-long
 As I will in that sense profusely speak,
 And—fie, they shall not call in screws to help!

I killed Pompilia Franceschini, Sirs ;
 Killed too the Comparini, husband, wife, 110
 Who called themselves, by a notorious lie,
 Her father and her mother to ruin me.
 There 's the irregular deed : you want no more
 Than right interpretation of the same,
 And truth so far—am I to understand ? 115
 To that then, with convenient speed,—because
 Now I consider,—yes, despite my boast,
 There is an ailing in this omoplat
 May clip my speech all too abruptly short,
 Whatever the good-will in me. Now for truth ! 120

I' the name of the indivisible Trinity !
 Will my lords, in the plenitude of their light,
 Weigh well that all this trouble has come on me
 Through my persistent treading in the paths
 Where I was trained to go,—wearing that yoke 125
 My shoulder was predestined to receive,
 Born to the hereditary stoop and crease ?
 Noble, I recognized my nobler still,
 The Church, my suzerain ; no mock-mistress, she ;
 The secular owned the spiritual : mates of mine 130
 Have thrown their careless hoofs up at her call

“ Forsake the clover and come drag my wain ! ”

There they go cropping : I protruded nose

To halter, bent my back of docile beast,

*original
image
copy*

And now am wheeled, one wide wound all of me, 135

For being found at the eleventh hour o' the day

Padding the mill-track, not neck-deep in grass :

—My one fault, I am stiffened by my work,

—My one reward, I help the Court to smile !

I am representative of a great line,

One of the first of the old families

*140
nobility*

In Arezzo, ancientest of Tuscan towns.

When my worst foe is fain to challenge this,

His worst exception runs—not first in rank

But second, noble in the next degree 145

Only ; not malice 'self maligns me more.

So, my lord opposite has composed, we know,

A marvel of a book, sustains the point

That Francis boasts the primacy 'mid saints ;

Yet not inaptly hath his argument 150

Obtained response from yon my other lord

In thesis published with the world's applause

—Rather 't is Dominic such post befits :

Why, at the worst, Francis stays Francis still,

Second in rank to Dominic it may be, 155
 Still, very saintly, very like our Lord ;
 And I at least descend from a Guido once
 Homager to the Empire, nought below—
 Of which account as proof that, none o' the line
 Having a single gift beyond brave blood, 160
 Or able to do aught but give, give, give
 In blood and brain, in house and land and cash,
 Not get and garner as the vulgar may,
 We became poor as Francis or our Lord.
 Be that as it likes you, Sirs,—whenever it chanced 165
 Myself grew capable anyway of remark,
 (Which was soon—penury makes wit premature)
 This struck me, I was poor who should be rich
 Or pay that fault to the world which trifles not
 When lineage lacks the flag yet lifts the pole : 170
 On, therefore, I must move forthwith, transfer
 My stranded self, born fish with gill and fin
 Fit for the deep sea, now left flap bare-backed
 In slush and sand, a show to crawlers vile
 Reared of the low-tide and aright therein. 175
 The enviable youth with the old name,
 Wide chest, stout arms, sound brow and pricking veins,
 A heartful of desire, man's natural load,

-while poverty

A brainful of belief, the noble's lot,—
 All this life, cramped and gasping, high and dry 180
 I' the wave's retreat,—the misery, good my lords,
 Which made you merriment at Rome of late,—
 It made me reason, rather—muse, demand
 —Why our bare dropping palace, in the street
 Where such-an-one whose grandfather sold tripe 185
 Was adding to his purchased pile a fourth
 Tall tower, could hardly show a turret sound?
 Why Countess Beatrice, whose son I am,
 Cowered in the winter-time as she spun flax,
 Blew on the earthen basket of live ash, 190
 Instead of jaunting forth in coach and six
 Like such-another widow who ne'er was wed?
 I asked my fellows, how came this about?
 “ Why, Jack, the suttler's child, perhaps the camp's,
 “ Went to the wars, fought sturdily, took a town 195
 “ And got rewarded as was natural.
 “ She of the coach and six—excuse me there!
 “ Why, do n't you know the story of her friend?
 “ A clown dressed vines on somebody's estate,
 “ His boy recoiled from muck, liked Latin more, 200
 “ Stuck to his pen and got to be a priest,
 “ Till one day . . do n't you mind that telling tract.

" Against Molinos, the old Cardinal wrote ?
 " He penned and dropped it in the patron's desk
 " Who, deep in thought and absent much of mind, 205
 " Licensed the thing, allowed it for his own ;
 " Quick came promotion,—*suum cuique*, Count !
 " Oh, he can pay for coach and six, be sure !"
 " —Well, let me go, do likewise : war 's the word—
 " That way the Franceschini worked at first, 210
 " I 'll take my turn, try soldiership."—" What, you ?
 " The eldest son and heir and prop o' the house,
 " So do you see your duty ? Here 's your post,
 " Hard by the hearth and altar. (Roam from roof,
 " This youngster, play the gypsy out of doors, 215
 " And who keeps kith and kin that fall on us ?)
 " Stand fast, stick tight, conserve your gods at home !"
 " —Well then, the quiet course, the contrary trade !
 " We had a cousin amongst us once was Pope,
 " And minor glories manifold. Try the Church, 220
 " The tonsure, and,—since heresy 's but half-slain
 " Even by the Cardinal's tract he thought he wrote,—
 " Have at Molinos !"—" Have at a fool's head !
 " You a priest ? How were marriage possible ?
 " There must be Franceschini till time ends— 225
 " That 's your vocation. Make your brothers priests,

" Paul shall be porporate, and Girolamo step
 " Red-stockinged in the presence when you choose,
 " But save one Franceschini for the age !
 " Be not the vine but dig and dung its root, 230
 " Be not a priest but gird up priesthood's loins,
 " With one foot in Arezzo stride to Rome,
 " Spend yourself there and bring the purchase back
 " Go hence to Rome, be guided ! "

So I was. 235

I turned alike from the hill-side zig-zag thread
 Of way to the table-land a soldier takes,
 Alike from the low-lying pasture-place
 Where churchmen graze, recline and ruminare,
 —Ventured to mount no platform like my lords 240
 Who judge the world, bear brain I dare not brag—
 But stationed me, might thus the expression serve,
 As who should fetch and carry, come and go,
 Meddle and make i' the cause my lords' love most— 244
 The public weal, which hangs to the law, which holds
 By the Church, which happens to be through God
 himself.

Humbly I helped the Church till here I stand,—
 Or would stand but for the omoplat, you see !

Bidden qualify for Rome, I, having a field,
 Went, sold it, laid the sum at Peter's foot : 250
 Which means—I settled home-accounts with speed,
 Set apart just a modicum should suffice
 To keep the villa's head above the waves
 Of weed inundating its oil and wine,
 And prop roof, stanchion wall o' the palace so 255
 It should keep breath i' the body, hold its own
 Amid the advance of neighbouring loftiness—
 (People like building where they used to beg)—
 Till succoured one day,—shared the residue
 Between my mother and brothers and sisters there, 260
 Black-eyed babe Donna This and Donna That,
 As near to starving as might decently be,
 —Left myself journey-charges, change of suit,
 A purse to put i' the pocket of the Groom
 O' the Chamber of the patron, and a glove 265
 With a ring to it for the digits of the niece
 Sure to be helpful in his household,—then
 Started for Rome, and led the life prescribed.
 Close to the Church, though clean of it, I assumed
 Three or four orders of no consequence, 270
 —They cast out evil spirits and exorcise,
 For example ; bind a man to nothing more,

Give clerical savour to his layman's-salt,
 Facilitate his claim to loaf and fish
 Should miracle leave, beyond what feeds the flock, 275
 Fragments to brim the basket of a friend—
 While, for the world's sake, I rode, danced and gamed,
 Quitted me like a courtier, measured mine
 With whatsoever blade had fame in fence,
 —Ready to let the basket go its round 280
 Even though my turn was come to help myself,
 Should Dives count on me at dinner-time
 As just the understander of a joke
 And not immoderate in repartee.
Utrique sic paratus, Sirs, I said 285
 “ Here,” (in the fortitude of years fifteen,
 So good a pedagogue is penury)
 “ Here wait, do service,—serving and to serve !
 “ And, in due time, I nowise doubt at all,
 “ The recognition of my service comes. 290
 “ Next year I 'm only sixteen. I can wait.”

I waited thirty years, may it please the Court :
 Saw meanwhile many a denizen o' the dung
 Hop, skip, jump o'er my shoulder, make him wings
 And fly aloft,—succeed, in the usual phrase. 295

Everyone soon or late comes round by Rome :
 Stand still here, you 'll see all in turn succeed.
 Why, look you, so and so, the physician here,
 My father's lacquey's son we sent to school,
 Doctored and dosed this Eminence and that, 300
 Salved the last Pope his certain obstinate sore,
 Soon bought land as became him, names it now :
 I grasp bell at his griffin-guarded gate,
 Traverse the half-mile avenue,—a term,
 A cypress, and a statue, three and three,— 305
 Deliver message from my Monsignor,
 With varletry at lounge i' the vestibule
 I 'm barred from, who bear mud upon my shoe.
 My father's chaplain's nephew, Chamberlain,—
 Nothing less, please you !—courteous all the same, 310
 —He does not see me though I wait an hour
 At his staircase-landing 'twixt the brace of husts,
 A noseless Sylla, Marius maimed to match,
 My father gave him for a hexastich
 Made on my birth-day,—but he sends me down, 315
 To make amends, that relic I prize most—
 The unburnt end o' the very candle, Sirs,
 Purfled with paint so prettily round and round,
 He carried in such state last Peter's-day,—

In token I, his gentleman and squire, . 320
 Had held the bridle, walked his managed mule
 Without a tittup the procession through.
 Nay, the official,—one you know, sweet lords!—
 Who drew the warrant for my transfer late
 To the New Prisons from Tordinona,—he 325
 Graciously had remembrance—“Francesc . . ha?
 “His sire, now—how a thing shall come about!—
 “Paid me a dozen florins above the fee,
 “For drawing deftly up a deed of sale
 “When troubles fell so thick on him, good heart, 330
 “And I was prompt and pushing! By all means!
 “At the New Prisons be it his son shall lie,—
 “Anything for an old friend!” and thereat
 Signed name with triple flourish underneath.
 These were my fellows, such their fortunes now, 335
 While I—kept fasts and feasts innumerable,
 Matins and vespers, functions to no end
 I’ the train of Monsignor and Eminence,
 As gentleman-squire, and for my zeal’s reward
 Have rarely missed a place at the table-foot 340
 Except when some Ambassador, or such like,
 Brought his own people. Brief, one day I felt
 The tick of time inside me, turning-point

And slight sense there was now enough of this :
 That I was near my seventh climacteric, 345
 Hard upon, if not over, the middle life,
 And, although fed by the east-wind, fulsome-fine
 With foretaste of the Land of Promise, still
 My gorge gave symptom it might play me false ;
 Better not press it further,—be content 350
 With living and dying only a nobleman,
 Who merely had a father great and rich,
 Who simply had one greater and richer yet,
 And so on back and back till first and best
 Began i' the night ; I finish in the day. 355
 “ The mother must be getting old,” I said ;
 “ The sisters are well wedded away, our name
 “ Can manage to pass a sister off, at need,
 “ And do for dowry : both my brothers thrive—
 “ Regular priests they are, nor, bat-like, 'bide 360
 “ 'Twixt flesh and fowl with neither privilege.
 “ My spare revenue must keep me and mine.
 “ I am tired : Arezzo's air is good to breathe ;
 “ Vittiano,—one limes flocks of thrushes there ;
 “ A leathern coat costs little and lasts long : 365
 “ Let me bid hope good-bye, content at home !”
 Thus, one day, I disbosomed me and bowed.

Whereat began the little buzz and thrill ·
 O' the gazers round me ; each face brightened up :
 As when at your Casino, deep in dawn, 370
 A gamester says at last, " I play no more,
 " Forego gain, acquiesce in loss, withdraw
 " Anyhow : " and the watchers of his ways,
 A trifle struck compunctious at the word,
 Yet sensible of relief, breathe free once more, 375
 Break up the ring, venture polite advice—
 " How, Sir ? So scant of heart and hope indeed ?
 " Retire with neither cross nor pile from play ?—
 " So incurious, so short-casting ?—give your chance
 " To a younger, stronger, bolder spirit belike, 380
 " Just when luck turns and the fine throw sweeps all ? "

Such was the chorus : and its goodwill meant—
 " See that the loser leave door handsomely !
 " There 's an ill look,—it 's sinister, spoils sport,
 " When an old bruised and battered year-by-year 385
 " Fighter with fortune, not a penny in poke,
 " Reels down the steps of our establishment
 " And staggers on broad daylight and the world,
 " In shagrag beard and doleful doublet, drops
 " And breaks his heart on the outside: people prate 390
 " ' Such is the profit of a trip upstairs ! '

" Contrive he sidle forth, baulked of the blow
 " Best dealt by way of moral, bidding down
 " No curse but blessings rather on our heads
 " For some poor prize he bears at tattered breast, 395
 " Some palpable sort of kind of good to set
 " Over and against the grievance : give him quick !"
 Whereon protested Paul, " Go hang yourselves !
 " Leave him to me. Count Guido and brother of mine,
 " A word in your ear ! Take courage since faint heart
 " Ne'er won . . . aha, fair lady, do n't men say? 401
 " There 's a *sors*, there 's a right Virgilian dip !
 " Do you see the happiness o' the hint ? At worst,
 " If the Church want no more of you, the Court
 " No more, and the Camp as little, the ingrates,—come,
 " Count you are counted: still you 've coat to back, 406
 " Not cloth of gold and tissue, as we hoped,
 " But cloth with sparks and spangles on its frieze
 " From Camp, Court, Church, enough to make a shine,
 " Entitle you to carry home a wife 410
 " With the proper dowry, let the worst betide !
 " Why, it was just a wife you meant to take !"

Now, Paul's advice was weighty : priests should know :
 And Paul apprised me, ere the week was out,

- That Pietro and Violante, the easy pair, 415
 The cits enough, with stomach to be more,
 Had just the daughter and exact the sum
 To truck for the quality of myself : " She 's young
 " Pretty and rich : you 're noble, classic, choice.
 " Is it to be a match ?" " A match," said I. 420
 Done ! He proposed all, I accepted all,
 And we performed all. So I said and did
 Simply. As simply followed, not at first
 But with the outbreak of misfortune, still
 One comment on the saying and doing—" What ? 425
 " No blush at the avowal you dared buy
 " A girl of age beseems your granddaughter,
 " Like ox or ass ? Are flesh and blood a ware ?
 " Are heart and soul a chattel ?"
 Softly, Sirs ! 430
 Will the Court of its charity teach poor me
 Anxious to learn, of any way i' the world,
 Allowed by custom and convenience, save
 This same which, taught from my youth up, I trod ?
 Take me along with you ; where was the wrong step ?
 If what I gave in barter, style and state 436
 And all that hangs to Franceschinihood,
 Were worthless,—why, society goes to ground,

Its rules are idiot's-rambling. Honour of birth,—
 If that thing has no value, cannot buy. 440
 Something with value of another sort,
 You 've no reward nor punishment to give
 I' the giving or the taking honour ; straight
 Your social fabric, pinnacle to base,
 Comes down a-clatter like a house of cards. 445
 Get honour, and keep honour free from flaw,
 Aim at still higher honour,—gabble o' the goose !
 Go bid a second blockhead like myself
 Spend fifty years in guarding bubbles of breath,
 Soapsuds with air i' the belly, gilded brave, 450
 Guarded and guided, all to break at touch
 O' the first young girl's hand and first old fool's purse !
 All my privation and endurance, all
 Love, loyalty and labour dared and did,
 Fiddle-de-dee !—why, doer and darer both,— 455
 Count Guido Franceschini had hit the mark
 Far better, spent his life with more effect,
 As a dancer or a prizier, trades that pay !
 On the other hand, bid this buffoonery cease,
 Admit that honour is a privilege, 460
 The question follows, privilege worth what ?
 Why, worth the market-price,—now up, now down,

Just so with this as with all other ware :
Therefore essay the market, sell your name,
Style and condition to who buys them best ! 465
“ Does my name purchase,” had I dared inquire,
“ Your niece, my lord ? ” there would have been rebuff
Though courtesy, your Lordship cannot else—
“ Not altogether ! Rank for rank may stand :
“ But I have wealth beside, you—poverty ; 470
“ Your scale flies up there : bid a second bid,
“ Rank too and wealth too ! ” Reasoned like yourself !
But was it to you I went with goods to sell ?
This time ’t was my scale quietly kissed the ground,
Mere rank against mere wealth—some youth beside, 475
Some beauty too, thrown into the bargain, just
As the buyer likes or lets alone. I thought
To deal o’ the square : others find fault, it seems :
The thing is, those my offer most concerned,
Pietro, Violante, cried they fair or foul ? 480
What did they make o’ the terms ? Preposterous terms ?
Why then accede so promptly, close with such
Nor take a minute to chaffer ? Bargain struck,
They straight grew bilious, wished their money back,
Repented them, no doubt : why, so did I, 485
So did your Lordship, if town-talk be true,

Of paying a full farm's worth for that piece
 By Pietro of Cortona—probably
 His scholar Ciro-Ferri may have retouched—
 You caring more for colour than design— 490
 Getting a little tired of cupids too.
 That 's incident to all the folk who buy !
 I am charged, I know, with gilding fact by fraud ;
 I falsified and fabricated, wrote
 Myself down roughly richer than I prove, 495
 Rendered a wrong revenue, ~~—grant it all !~~
 Mere grace, mere coquetry such fraud, I say :
 A flourish round the figures of a sum
 For fashion's sake, that deceives nobody.
 The veritable back-bone, understood 500
 Essence of this same bargain, blank and bare,
 Being the exchange of quality for wealth,—
 What may such fancy-flights be ? Flecks of oil
 Flirted by chapmen where plain dealing grates.
 I may have dripped a drop—" My name I sell ; 505
 " Not but that I too boast my wealth"—as they,
 " —We bring you riches ; still our ancestor
 " Was hardly the rapsallion, folks saw flogged,
 " But heir to we know who, were rights of force !"
 They knew and I knew where the back-bone lurked 510

I' the writhings of the bargain, lords, believe !
 I paid down all engaged for, to a doit,
 Delivered them just that which, their life-long,
 They hungered in the hearts of them to gain—
Incorporation with nobility thus 515
In word and deed : for that they gave me wealth.
But when they came to try their gain, my gift,
Quit Rome and qualify for Arezzo, take
 The tone o' the new sphere that absorbed the old,
 Put away gossip Jack and goody Joan 520
 And go become familiar with the Great,
 Greatness to touch and taste and handle now,—
 Why, then,—they found that all was vanity,
 Vexation, and what Solomon describes !
 The old abundant city-fare was best, 525
 The kindly warmth o' the commons, the glad clap
 Of the equal on the shoulder, the frank grin
 Of the underling at all so many spoons
 Fire-new at neighbourly treat,—best, best and best
 Beyond compare !—down to the loll itself 530
 O' the pot-house settle,—better such a bench
 Than the stiff crucifixion by my dais
 Under the piece-meal damask canopy
 With the coroneted coat of arms a-top !

Poverty and privation for pride's sake, 535
 All they engaged to easily brave and bear,—
 With the fit upon them and their brains a-work,
 Proved unendurable to the sobered sots.
 A banished prince, now, will exude a juice
 And salamander-like support the flame : 540
 He dines on chesnuts, chucks the husks to help
 The broil o' the brazier, pays the due baioc,
 Goes off light-hearted : his grimace begins
 At the funny humours of the christening-feast
 Of friend the money-lender,—then he 's touched 545
 By the flame and frizzles at the babe to kiss !
 Here was the converse trial, opposite mind :
 Here did a petty nature split on rock
 Of vulgar wants predestinate for such—
 One dish at supper and weak wine to boot ! 550
 The prince had grinned and borne : the citizen shrieked,
 Summoned the neighbourhood to attest the wrong,
 Made noisy protest he was murdered,—stoned
 And burned and drowned and hanged,—then broke
 away,
 He and his wife, to tell their Rome the rest. 555
 And this you admire, you men o' the world, my lords ?
 This moves compassion, makes you doubt my faith ?

Why, I appeal to . . . sun and moon? Not I!
 Rather to Plautus, Terence, Boccaccio's Book,
 My townsman, frank Ser Franco's merry Tales,— 560
 To all who strip a vizard from a face,
 A body from its padding, and a soul
 From froth and ignorance it styles itself,—
 If this be other than the daily hap
 Of purblind greed that dog-like still drops bone, 565
 Grasps shadow, and then howls the case is hard!

So much for them so far : now for myself,
 My profit or loss i' the matter : married am I :
 Text whereon friendly censors burst to preach.
 Ay, at Rome even, long ere I was left 570
 To regulate her life for my young bride
 Alone at Arezzo, friendliness outbroke
 (Sifting my future to predict its fault)
 "Purchase and sale being thus so plain a point,
 "How of a certain soul bound up, may-be, 575
 "I' the barter with the body and money-bags?
 "From the bride's soul what is it you expect?"
 Why, loyalty and obedience,—wish and will
 To settle and suit her fresh and plastic mind
 To the novel, not disadvantageous mould! 580

Father and mother shall the woman leave,
 Cleave to the husband, be it for weal or woe :
 There is the law : what sets this law aside
 In my particular case ? My friends submit
 " Guide, guardian, benefactor,—fee, faw, fum, 585
 " The fact is you are forty-five years old,
 " Nor very comely even for that age :
 " Girls must have boys." Why, let girls say so then,
 Nor call the boys and men, who say the same,
 Brute this and beast the other as they do ! 590
 Come, cards on table ! When you chaunt us next
 Epithalamium full to overflow
 With praise and glory of white womanhood,
 The chaste and pure—troll no such lies o'er lip !
 Put in their stead a crudity or two, 595
 Such short and simple statement of the case
 As youth chalks on our walls at spring of year !
 No ! I shall still think nobler of the sex,
 Believe a woman still may take a man
 For the short period that his soul wears flesh, 600
 And, for the soul's sake, understand the fault
 Of armour frayed by fighting. Tush, it tempts
 One's tongue too much ! I 'll say—the law 's the law :
 With a wife I look to find all wifeliness,

As when I buy, timber and twig, a tree— 605
I buy the song o' the nightingale inside.

Such was the pact : Pompilia from the first
Broke it, refused from the beginning day
Either in body or soul to cleave to mine,
And published it forthwith to all the world. 610

No rupture,—you must join ere you can break,—
Before we had cohabited a month
She found I was a devil and no man,—
Made common cause with those who found as much,
Her parents, Pietro and Violante,—moved 615
Heaven and earth to the rescue of all three.

In four months' time, the time o' the parents' stay,
Arezzo was a-ringing, bells in a blaze,
With the unimaginable story rife
I' the mouth of man, woman and child—to-wit 620

My misdemeanour. First the lighter side,
Ludicrous face of things,—how very poor
The Franceschini had become at last,
The meanness and the misery of each shift
To save a soldo, stretch and make ends meet. 625

Next, the more hateful aspect,—how myself
With cruelty beyond Caligula's

Had stripped and beaten, robbed and murdered them,
 The good old couple, I decoyed, abused,
 Plundered and then cast out, and happily so, 630
 Since,—in due course the abominable comes,—
 Woe worth the poor young wife left lonely here !
 Repugnant in my person as my mind,
 I sought,—was ever heard of such revenge ?
 —To lure and bind her to so cursed a couch, 635
 Such co-embrace with sulphur, snake and toad,
 That she was fain to rush forth, call the stones
 O' the common street to save her, not from hate
 Of mine merely, but . . . must I burn my lips
 With the blister of the lie ? . . the satyr-love 640
 Of who but my own brother, the young priest,
 Too long enforced to lenten fare belike,
 Now tempted by the morsel tossed him full
 I' the trencher where lay bread and herbs at best.
 Mark, this yourselves say !—this, none disallows, 645
 Was charged to me by the universal voice
 At the instigation of my four-months' wife !—
 And then you ask “ Such charges so preferred,
 “ (Truly or falsely, here concerns us not)
 “ Pricked you to punish now if not before ?— 650
 “ Did not the harshness double itself, the hate

"Harden?" I answer "Have it your way and will!"
 Say my resentment grew apace : what then?
 Do you cry out on the marvel? When I find
 That pure smooth egg which, laid within my nest, 655
 Could not but hatch a comfort to us all,
 Issues a cockatrice for me and mine,
 Do you stare to see me stamp on it? Swans are soft :
 Is it not clear that she you call my wife,
 That any wife of any husband, caught 660
 Whetting a sting like this against his breast,—
 Speckled with fragments of the fresh-broke shell,
 Married a month and making outcry thus,—
 Proves a plague-prodigy to God and man?
 She married : what was it she married for, 665
 Counted upon and meant to meet thereby?
 "Love" suggests some one, "love, a little word
 "Whereof we have not heard one syllable."
 So, the Pompilia, child, girl, wife, in one,
 Wanted the beating pulse, the rolling eye, 670
 The frantic gesture, the devotion due
 From Thyrsis to Neæra ! Guido's love—
 Why not provençal roses in his shoe,
 Plume to his cap, and trio of guitars
 At casement, with a bravo close beside? 675

Good things all these are, clearly claimable
When the fit price is paid the proper way.
Had it been some friend's wife, now, threw her fan
At my foot, with just this pretty scrap attached,
"Shame, death, damnation—fall these as they may, 680
"So I find you, for a minute! Come this eve!"
—Why, at such sweet self-sacrifice,—who knows?
I might have fired up, found me at my post,
Ardent from head to heel, nor feared catch cough.
Nay, had some other friend's . . . say, daughter, tripped
Upstairs and tumbled flat and frank on me, 686
Bareheaded and barefooted, with loose hair
And garments all at large,—cried "Take me thus!
"Duke So-and-So, the greatest man in Rome—
"To escape his hand and heart have I broke bounds,
"Traversed the town and reached you!"—Then, indeed,
The lady had not reached a man of ice! 692
I would have rummaged, ransacked at the word
Those old odd corners of an empty heart
For remnants of dim love the long disused, 695
And dusty crumbings of romance! But here,
We talk of just a marriage, if you please—
The every-day conditions and no more;
Where do these bind me to bestow one drop

Of blood shall dye my wife's true-love-knot pink? 700

Pompilia was no pigeon, Venus' pet,

That shuffled from between her pressing paps

To sit on my rough shoulder,—but a hawk,

I bought at a hawk's price and carried home

To do hawk's service—at the Rotunda, say,

Where, six o' the callow nestlings in a row,

You pick and choose and pay the price for such.

I have paid my pound, await my penny's worth,

So, hoodwink, starve and properly train my bird,

And, should she prove a haggard,—twist her neck ! 710

Did I not pay my name and style, my hope

And trust, my all ? Through spending these amiss

I am here ! 'T is scarce the gravity of the Court

Will blame me that I never piped a tune,

Treated my falcon-gentle like my finch.

The obligation I incurred was just

To practise mastery, prove my mastership :—

Pompilia's duty was—submit herself,

Afford me pleasure, perhaps cure my bile.

Am I to teach my lords what marriage means,

What God ordains thereby and man fulfils

Who, docile to the dictate, treads the house ?

My lords have chosen the happier part with Paul

705

710

715

720

And neither marry nor burn,—yet priestliness
 Can find a parallel to the marriage-bond 725
 In its own blessed special ordinance
 Whereof indeed was marriage made the type :
 The Church may show her insubordinate,
 As marriage her refractory. How of the Monk
 Who finds the claustral regimen too sharp 730
 After the first month's essay? What 's the mode
 With the Deacon who supports indifferently
 The rod o' the Bishop when he tastes its smart
 Full four weeks? Do you straightway slacken hold
 Of the innocents, the all-unwary ones 735
 Who, eager to profess, mistook their mind?—
 Remit a fast-day's rigour to the Monk
 Who fancied Francis' manna meant roast quails,
 Concede the Deacon sweet society,
 He never thought the Levite-rule renounced,— 740
 Or rather prescribe short chain and sharp scourge
 Corrective of such peccant humours? This—
 I take to be the Church's mode, and mine.
 If I was over-harsh,—the worse i' the wife
 Who did not win from harshness as she ought, 745
 Wanted the patience and persuasion, lore
 Of love, should cure me and console herself.

Put case that I mishandle, flurry and fright
 My hawk through clumsiness in sportsmanship,
 Twitch out five pens where plucking one would serve—
 What, shall she bite and claw to mend the case? 751
 And, if you find I pluck five more for that,
 Shall you weep “How he roughs the turtle there?”

Such was the starting ; now of the further step.
 In lieu of taking penance in good part, 755
 The Monk, with hue and cry, summons a mob
 To make a bonfire of the convent, say,—
 And the Deacon's pretty piece of virtue (save
 The ears o' the Court ! I try to save my head)
 Instructed by the ingenuous postulant, 760
 Taxes the Bishop with adultery, (mud
 Needs must pair off with mud, and filth with filth)—
 Such being my next experience : who knows not—
 The couple, father and mother of my wife,
 Returned to Rome, published before my lords, 765
 Put into print, made circulate far and wide
 That they had cheated me who cheated them ?
 Pompilia, I supposed their daughter, drew
 Breath first 'mid Rome's worst rankness, through the deed
 Of a drab and a rogue, was bye-blow bastard-babe 770

Of a nameless strumpet, passed off, palmed on me
 As the daughter with the dowry. Daughter? Dirt
 O' the kennel! Dowry? Dust o' the street! Nought
 Nought less, nought else but—oh—ah—assuredly [more,
 A Franceschini and my very wife! 775

Now take this charge as you will, for false or true,—
 This charge, preferred before your very selves
 Who judge me now,—I pray you, adjudge again,
 Classing it with the cheats or with the lies,
 By which category I suffer most! 780

But of their reckoning, theirs who dealt with me
 In either fashion,—I reserve my word,
 Justify that in its place; I am now to say,
 Whichever point o' the charge might poison most,
 Pompilia's duty was no doubtful one. 785

You put the protestation in her mouth
 "Henceforward and forevermore, avaunt
 "Ye fiends, who drop disguise and glare revealed
 "In your own shape, no longer father mine
 "Nor mother mine! Too nakedly you hate 790
 "Me whom you looked as if you loved once,—me
 "Whom, whether true or false, your tale now damns,
 "Divulged thus to my public infamy,
 "Private perdition, absolute overthrow.

- " For, hate my husband to your hearts' content, 795
 " I, spoil and prey of you from first to last,
 " I who have done you the blind service, lured
 " The lion to your pit-fall,—I, thus left
 " To answer for my ignorant bleating there,
 " I should have been remembered and withdrawn 800
 " From the first o' the natural fury, not flung loose
 " A proverb and a byeword men will mouth
 " At the cross-way, in the corner, up and down
 " Rome and Arezzo,—there, full in my face,
 " If my lord, missing them and finding me, 805
 " Content himself with casting his reproach
 " To drop i' the street where such impostors die.
 " Ah, but—that husband, what the wonder were !—
 " If, far from casting thus away the rag
 " Smeared with the plague, his hand had chanced upon,
 " Sewn to his pillow by Locusta's wile,— 811
 " Far from abolishing, root, stem and branch,
 " The misgrowth of infectious mistletoe
 " Foisted into his stock for honest graft,—
 " If he, repudiate not, renounce nowise, 815
 " But, guarding, guiding me, maintain my cause
 " By making it his own, (what other way?)
 " —To keep my name for me, he call it his,

- " Claim it of who would take it by their lie,—
 " To save my wealth for me—or babe of mine 820
 " Their lie was framed to beggar at the birth—
 " He bid them loose grasp, give our gold again :
 " If he become no partner with the pair
 " Even in a game which, played adroitly, gives
 " Its winner life's great wonderful new chance,— 825
 " Of marrying, to-wit, a second time,—
 " Ah, did he do thus, what a friend were he !
 " Anger he might show,—who can stamp out flame
 " Yet spread no black o' the brand?—yet, rough albeit
 " In the act, as whose bare feet feel embers scorch, 830
 " What grace were his, what gratitude were mine !"
 Such protestation should have been my wife's.
 Looking for this, do I exact too much ?
 Why, here 's the,—word for word so much, no more,—
 Avowal she made, her pure spontaneous speech 835
 To my brother the Abate at first blush,
 Ere the good impulse had begun to fade—
 So did she make confession for the pair,
 So pour forth praises in her own behalf.
 " Ay, the false letter," interpose my lords— 840
 " The simulated writing,—'t was a trick :
 " You traced the signs, she merely marked the same,

“ The product was not hers but yours.” Alack,
I want no more impulsion to tell truth
From the other trick, the torture inside there ! 845
I confess all—let it be understood—
And deny nothing ! If I baffle you so,
Can so fence, in the plenitude of right,
That my poor lathen dagger puts aside
Each pass o’ the Bilboa, beats you all the same,— 850
What matters inefficiency of blade ?
Mine and not hers the letter,—conceded, lords !
Impute to me that practice !—take as proved
I taught my wife her duty, made her see
What it behoved her see and say and do, 855
Feel in her heart and with her tongue declare,
And, whether sluggish or recalcitrant,
Forced her to take the right step, I myself
Was marching in marital rectitude !
Why, who finds fault here, say the tale be true ? 860
Would not my lords commend the priest whose zeal
Seized on the sick, morose or moribund,
By the palsy-smitten finger, made it cross
His brow correctly at the critical time ?
—Or answered for the inarticulate babe 865
At baptism, in its stead declared the faith,

And saved what else would perish unprofessed?
 True, the incapable hand may rally yet,
 Renounce the sign with renovated strength,—
 The babe may grow up man and Molinist,— 870
 And so Pompilia, set in the good path
 And left to go alone there, soon might see
 That too frank-forward, all too simple-strait
 Her step was, and decline to tread the rough,
 When here lay, tempting foot, the meadow-side, 875
 And there the coppice rang with singing-birds!
 Soon she discovered she was young and fair,
 That many in Arezzo knew as much,—
 Yes, this next cup of bitterness, my lords,
 Had to begin go filling, drop by drop, 880
 Its measure up of full disgust for me,
 Filtered into by every noisome drain—
 Society's sink toward which all moisture runs.
 Would not you prophesy—" She on whose brow is stamped
 " The note of the imputation that we know,— 885
 " Rightly or wrongly mothered with a whore,—
 " Such an one, to disprove the frightful charge,
 " What will she but exaggerate chastity,
 " Err in excess of wifehood, as it were,
 " Renounce even levities permitted youth, 890

“ Though not youth struck to age by a thunderbolt ?

“ Cry ‘ wolf ’ i’ the sheepfold, where ’s the sheep dares
bleat,

“ Knowing the shepherd listens for a growl ? ”

So you expect. How did the devil decree ?

Why, my lords, just the contrary of course ! 895

It was in the house from the window, at the church

From the hassock,—where the theatre lent its lodge,

Or staging for the public show left space,—

That still Pompilia needs must find herself

Launching her looks forth, letting looks reply 900

As arrows to a challenge ; on all sides

Ever new contribution to her lap,

Till one day, what is it knocks at my clenched teeth

But the cup full, curse-collected all for me ?

And I must needs drink, drink this gallant’s praise, 905

That minion’s prayer, the other fop’s reproach,

And come at the dregs to—Caponsacchi ! Sirs,

I,—chin deep in a marsh of misery,

Struggling to extricate my name and fame

And fortune from the marsh would drown them all, 910

My face the sole unstrangled part of me,—

I must have this new gad-fly in that face,

Must free me from the attacking lover too !

Men say I battled ungracefully enough—
 Was harsh, uncouth and ludicrous beyond 915
 The proper part o' the husband: have it so !
 Your lordships are considerate at least—
 You order me to speak in my defence
 Plainly, expect no quavering tuneful trills
 As when you bid a singer solace you,— 920
 Nor look that I shall give it, for a grace,
Stans pede in uno:—you remember well
 In the one case, 't is a plainsong too severe,
 This story of my wrongs,—and that I ache
 And need a chair, in the other. Ask you me 925
 Why, when I felt this trouble flap my face,
 Already pricked with every shame could perch,—
 When, with her parents, my wife plagued me too,—
 Why I enforced not exhortation mild
 To leave whore's-tricks and let my brows alone, 930
 With mulct of comfits, promise of perfume?

“ Far from that ! No, you took the opposite course,
 “ Breathed threatenings, rage and slaughter ! ”, What
 you will !

And the end has come, the doom is verily here,
 Unhindered by the threatening. See fate's flare 935

Full on each face of the dead guilty three !
Look at them well, and now, lords, look at this !
Tell me : if on that day when I found first
That Caponsacchi thought the nearest way
To his church was some half-mile round by my door,
And that he so admired, shall I suppose, 941
The manner of the swallows' come-and-go
Between the props o' the window over-head,—
That window happening to be my wife's,—
As to stand gazing by the hour on high, 945
Of May-eves, while she sat and let him smile,—
If I,—instead of threatening, talking big,
Showing hair-powder, a prodigious pinch,
For poison in a bottle,—making believe
At desperate doings with a bauble-sword, 950
And other bugaboo-and-baby-work,—
Had, with the vulgarest household implement,
Calmly and quietly cut off, clean thro' bone,
But one joint of one finger of my wife,
Saying "For listening to the serenade, 955
" Here 's your ring-finger shorter a full third :
" Be certain I will slice away next joint,
" Next time that anybody underneath
" Seems somehow to be sauntering as he hoped

" A flower would eddy out of your hand to his 960
 " While you please fidget with the branch above
 " O' the rose-tree in the terrace!"—had I done so,
 Why, there had followed a quick sharp scream, some pain,
 Much calling for plaister, damage to the dress,
 A somewhat sulky countenance next day, 965
 Perhaps reproaches,—but reflections too!
 I do n't hear much of harm that Malchus did
 After the incident of the ear, my lords!
 Saint Peter took the efficacious way;
 Malchus was sore but silenced for his life: 970
 He did not hang himself i' the Potter's Field
 Like Judas, who was trusted with the bag
 And treated to sops after he proved a thief.
 So, by this time, my true and obedient wife
 Might have been telling beads with a gloved hand; 975
 Awkward a little at pricking hearts and darts
 On sampler possibly, but well otherwise:
 Not where Rome shudders now to see her lie.
 I give that for the course a wise man takes;
 I took the other however, tried the fool's, 980
 The lighter remedy, brandished rapier dread
 With cork-ball at the tip, boxed Malchus' ear
 Instead of severing the cartilage,

- Called her a terrible nickname, and the like
 And there an end : and what was the end of that? 985
 What was the good effect o' the gentle course?
 Why, one night I went drowsily to bed,
 Dropped asleep suddenly, not suddenly woke,
 But did wake with rough rousing and loud cry,
 To find noon in my face, a crowd in my room, 990
 Fumes in my brain, fire in my throat, my wife
 Gone God knows whither,—rifled vesture-chest,
 And ransacked money-coffer. "What does it mean?"
 The servants had been drugged too, stared and yawned
 "It must be that our lady has eloped!" 995
 —"Whither and with whom?"—"With whom but the
 Canon's self?"
 "One recognizes Caponsacchi there!"—
 (By this time the admiring neighbourhood
 Joined chorus round me while I rubbed my eyes)
 "'T is months since their intelligence began,— 1000
 "A comedy the town was privy to,—
 "He wrote and she wrote, she spoke, he replied,
 "And going in and out your house last night
 "Was easy work for one . . . to be plain with you . . .
 "Accustomed to do both, at dusk and dawn 1005
 "When you were absent,—at the villa, you know,

" Where husbandry required the master-mind.
 " Did not you know? Why, we all knew, you see !"
 And presently, bit by bit, the full and true
 Particulars of the tale were volunteered 1010
 With all the breathless zeal of friendship—" Thus
 " Matters were managed : at the seventh hour of night" . . .
 —" Later, at daybreak " . . . " Caponsacchi came " . . .
 —" While you and all your household slept like death,
 " Drugged as your supper was with drowsy stuff " . . .
 —" And your own cousin Guillichini too— 1016
 " Either or both entered your dwelling-place,
 " Plundered it at their pleasure, made prize of all,
 " Including your wife . . ."—" Oh, your wife led the way,
 " Out of doors, on to the gate . . ."—" But gates are shut,
 " In a decent town, to darkness and such deeds : 1021
 " They climbed the wall—your lady must be lithe—
 " At the gap, the broken bit . ." —" Torrione, true !
 " To escape the questioning guard at the proper gate,
 " Clemente, where at the inn, hard by, ' the Horse,'
 " Just outside, a calash in readiness 1026
 " Took the two principals, all alone at last,
 " To gate San Spirito, which o'erlooks the road,
 " Leads to Perugia, Rome and liberty."
 Bit by bit thus made-up mosaic-wise, 1030

Flat lay my fortune,—tesselated floor,
 Imperishable tracery devils should foot
 And frolic it on, around my broken gods,
 Over my desecrated hearth.

So much

1035

For the terrible effect of threatening, Sirs !

Well, this way I was shaken wide awake,
 Doctored and drenched, somewhat unpoisoned so ;
 Then, set on horseback and bid seek the lost,

I started alone, head of me, heart of me

1040

Fire, and each limb as languid . . ah, sweet lords,

Bethink you !—poison-torture, try persuade

The next refractory Molinist with that ! . . .

Floundered thro' day and night, another day

And yet another night, and so at last,

1045

As Lucifer kept falling to find hell,

Tumbled into the court-yard of an inn

At the end, and fell on whom I thought to find,

Even Caponsacchi,—what part once was priest,

Cast to the winds now with the cassock-rags :

1050

In cape and sword a cavalier confessed,

There stood he chiding dilatory grooms,

Chafing that only horseflesh and no team

Of eagles would supply the last relay,
Whirl him along the league, the one post more 1055
Between the couple and Rome and liberty.

T was dawn, the couple were rested in a sort,
And though the lady, tired,—the tenderer sex,—
Still lingered in her chamber,—to adjust
The limp hair, look for any blush astray,— 1060
She would descend in a twinkling,—“Have you out
“The horses therefore!”

So did I find my wife.

Is the case complete? Do your eyes here see with mine?
Even the parties dared deny no one 1065
Point out of all these points.

What follows next?

“Why, that then was the time,” you interpose,
“Or then or never, while the fact was fresh,
“To take the natural vengeance: there and thus 1070
“They and you,—somebody had stuck a sword
“Beside you while he pushed you on your horse,—
“’T was requisite to slay the couple, Count!”
Just so my friends say—“Kill!” they cry in a breath,
Who presently, when matters grow to a head 1075
And I do kill the offending ones indeed,—
When crime of theirs, only surmised before,

Is patent, proved indisputably now,—
 When remedy for wrong, untried at the time,
 Which law professes shall not fail a friend, 1080
 Is thrice tried now, found threefold worse than null,—
 When what might turn to transient shade, who knows?
 Solidifies into a blot which breaks
Hell's black off in pale flakes for fear of mine,—
 Then, when I claim and take revenge—"So rash?"
 They cry—"so little reverence for the law?" 1086

Listen, my masters, and distinguish here!
 At first, I called in law to act and help:
 Seeing I did so, "Why, 't is clear," they cry,
 "You shrank from gallant readiness and risk, 1090
 "Were coward: the thing's inexplicable else."
 Sweet my lords, let the thing be! I fall flat,
 Play the reed, not the oak, to breath of man.
 Only, inform my ignorance! Say I stand
 Convicted of the having been afraid, 1095
 Proved a poltroon, no lion but a lamb,—
 Does that deprive me of my right of lamb
 And give my fleece and flesh to the first wolf?
 Are eunuchs, women, children, shieldless quite
 Against attack their own timidity tempts? 1100

Cowardice were misfortune and no crime !
 —Take it that way, since I am fallen so low
I scarce dare brush the fly that blows my face,
And thank the man who simply spits not there,—
Unless the Court be generous, comprehend 1105
 How one brought up at the very feet of law
 As I, awaits the grave Gamaliel's nod
 Ere he clench fist at outrage,—much less, stab !
 —How, ready enough to rise at the right time,
 I still could recognise no time mature 1110
 Unsanctioned by a move o' the judgment-seat,
 So, mute in misery, eyed my masters here
 Motionless till the authoritative word
 Pronounced amercement. There 's the riddle solved :
 This is just why I slew nor her nor him, 1115
 But called in law, law's delegate in the place,
 And bade arrest the guilty couple, Sirs !
 We had some trouble to do so—you have heard
 They braved me,—he with arrogance and scorn,
 She, with a volubility of curse, 1120
 A conversancy in the skill of tooth
 And claw to make suspicion seem absurd,
 Nay, an alacrity to put to proof
 At my own throat my own sword, teach me so

- To try conclusions better the next time,— 1125
Which did the proper service with the mob.
They never tried to put on mask at all :
Two avowed lovers forcibly torn apart,
Upbraid the tyrant as in a playhouse scene,
Ay, and with proper clapping and applause 1130
From the audience that enjoys the bold and free.
I kept still, said to myself, " There 's law ! " Anon
We searched the chamber where they passed the night,
Found what confirmed the worst was feared before,
However needless confirmation now— 1135
The witches' circle intact, charms undisturbed
That raised the spirit and succubus,—letters, to-wit,
Love-laden, each the bag o' the bee that bore
Honey from lily and rose to Cupid's hive,—
Now, poetry in some rank blossom-burst, 1140
Now, prose,—“ Come here, go there, wait such a while,
“ He 's at the villa, now he 's back again :
“ We are saved, we are lost, we are lovers all the
same ! ”
All in order, all complete,—even to a clue
To the drowsiness that happed so opportune— 1145
No mystery, when I read “ Of all things, find
“ What wine Sir Jealousy decides to drink—

“ Red wine ? Because a sleeping-potion, dust
 “ Dropped into white, discolours wine and shows.”

—“ Oh, but we did not write a single word ! 1150

“ Somebody forged the letters in our name !—”

Both in a breath protested presently.

Aha, Sacchetti again !—“ Dame,”—quoth the Duke,

“ What meaneth this epistle, counsel me,

“ I pick from out thy placket and peruse, 1155

“ Wherein my page averreth thou art white

“ And warm and wonderful 'twixt pap and pap ?”

“ Sir,” laughed the Lady, “ 't is a counterfeit !

“ Thy page did never stroke but Dian's breast,

“ The pretty hound I nurture for thy sake : 1160

“ To lie were losel,—by my fay, no more !”

And no more say I too, and spare the Court.

Ah, the Court ! yes, I come to the Court's self ;

Such the case, so complete in fact and proof

I laid at the feet of law,—there sat my lords, 1165

Here sit they now, so may they ever sit

In easier attitude than suits my haunch !

In this same chamber did I bare my sores

O' the soul and not the body,—shun no shame,

Shrink from no probing of the ulcerous part, 1170
 Since confident in Nature,—which is God,—
 That she who, for wise ends, concocts a plague,
 Curbs, at the right time, the plague's virulence too :
 Law renovates even Lazarus,—cures me !
 Cæsar thou seekest ? To Cæsar thou shalt go ! 1175
 Cæsar's at Rome : to Rome accordingly !

The case was soon decided : both weights, cast
 I' the balance, vibrate, neither kicks the beam,
 Here away, there away, this now and now that.
 To every one o' my grievances law gave 1180
 Redress, could purblind eye but see the point.
 The wife stood a convicted runagate
 From house and husband,—driven to such a course
 By what she somehow took for cruelty,
 Oppression and imperilment of life— 1185
 Not that such things were, but that so they seemed :
 Therefore, the end conceded lawful, (since
 To save life there's no risk should stay our leap)
 It follows that all means to the lawful end
 Are lawful likewise,—poison, theft and flight. 1190
 As for the priest's part, did he meddle or make,
 Enough that he too thought life jeopardised ;

- Concede him then the colour charity
 Casts on a doubtful course,—if blackish white
 Or whitish black, will charity hesitate? 1195
 What did he else but act the precept out,
 Leave, like a provident shepherd, his safe flock
 To follow the single lamb and strayaway?
 Best hope so and think so,—that the ticklish time
 I' the carriage, the tempting privacy, the last 1200
 Somewhat ambiguous accident at the inn,
 —All may bear explanation : may? then, must!
 The letters,—do they so incriminate?
 But what if the whole prove a prank o' the pen,
 Flight of the fancy, none of theirs at all, 1205
 Bred of the vapours of my brain belike,
 Or at worst mere exercise of scholar's-wit
 In the courtly Caponsacchi : verse, convict?
 Did not Catullus write less seemly once?
 Yet *doctus* and unblemished he abides. 1210
 Wherefore so ready to infer the worst?
 Still, I did righteously in bringing doubts
 For the law to solve,—take the solution now!
 “ Seeing that the said associates, wife and priest,
 “ Bear themselves not without some touch of blame
 “ —Else why the pother, scandal and outcry 1216

- " Which trouble our peace and require chastisement ?
 " We, for complicity in Pompilia's flight
 " And deviation, and carnal intercourse
 " With the same, do set aside and relegate 1220
 " The Canon Caponsacchi for three years
 " At Civita in the neighbourhood of Rome :
 " And we consign Pompilia to the care
 " Of a certain Sisterhood of penitents
 " 'I' the city's self, expert to deal with such." 1225
 Word for word, there 's your judgment ! Read it, lords,
 Re-utter your deliberate penalty
 For the crime yourselves establish ! Your award—
 Who chop a man's right-hand off at the wrist
 For tracing with forefinger words in wine , 1230
 O' the table of a drinking-booth that bear
 Interpretation as they mocked the Church !
 —Who brand a woman black between the breasts
 For sinning by connection with a Jew :
 While for the Jew's self—pudency be dumb ! 1235
 You mete out punishment such and such, yet so
 Punish the adultery of wife and priest !
 Take note of that, before the Molinists do,
 And read me right the riddle, since right must be !
 While I stood rapt away with wonderment, 1240

Voices broke in upon my mood and muse.

“ Do you sleep ? ” began the friends at either ear,

“ The case is settled,—you willed it should be so—

“ None of our counsel, always recollect !

“ With law’s award, budge ! Back into your place !

“ Your betters shall arrange the rest for you. 1246

“ We ’ll enter a new action, claim divorce :

“ Your marriage was a cheat themselves allow :

“ You erred i’ the person,—might have married thus

“ Your sister or your daughter unaware. 1250

“ We ’ll gain you, that way, liberty at least,

“ Sure of so much by law’s own showing. Up

“ And off with you and your unluckiness—

“ Leave us to bury the blunder, sweep things smooth ! ”

I was in humble frame of mind, be sure ! 1255

I bowed, betook me to my place again.

Station by station I retraced the road,

Touched at this hostel, passed this post-house by,

Where, fresh-remembered yet, the fugitives

Had risen to the heroic stature : still— 1260

“ That was the bench they sat on,—there ’s the board

“ They took the meal at,—yonder garden-ground

“ They leaned across the gate of,”—ever a word

O’ the Helen and the Paris, with “ Ha ! you ’re he,

"The . . much-commiserated husband?" Step 1265
 By step, across the pelting, did I reach
 Arezzo, underwent the archway's grin,
 Traversed the length of sarcasm in the street,
 Found myself in my horrible house once more,
 And after a colloquy . . no word assists! 1270
 With the mother and the brothers, stiffened me
 Strait out from head to foot as dead man does,
 And, thus prepared for life as he for hell,
 Marched to the public Square and met the world.
 Apologise for the pincers, palliate screws? 1275
 Ply me with such toy-trifles, I entreat!
 Trust who has tried both sulphur and sops-in-wine!

I played the man as I best might, bade friends
 Put non-essentials by and face the fact.

"What need to hang myself as you advise? 1280
 "The paramour is banished,—the ocean's width,
 "Or the suburb's length,—to Ultima Thule, say,
 "Or Proxima Civitas, what's the odds of name
 "And place? He's banished, and the fact's the thing.
 "Why should law banish innocence an inch? 1285
 "Here's guilt then, what else do I care to know?
 "The adulteress lies imprisoned,—whether in a well

" With bricks above and a snake for company,
 " Or tied by a garter to a bed-post,—much
 " I mind what 's little,—least 's enough and to spare !
 " The little fillip on the coward's cheek 1291
 " Serves as though crab-tree cudgel broke his pate.
 " Law has pronounced there 's punishment, less or more:
 " And I take note o' the fact and use it thus—
 " For the first flaw in the original bond, 1295
 " I claim release. My contract was to wed
 " The daughter of Pietro and Violante. Both
 " Protest they never had a child at all.
 " Then I have never made a contract : good !
 " Cancel me quick the thing pretended one. 1300
 " I shall be free. What matter if hurried over
 " The harbour-boom by a great favouring tide,
 " Or the last of a spent ripple that lifts and leaves ?
 " The Abate is about it. Laugh who wins !
 " You shall not laugh me out of faith in law ! 1305
 " I listen, through all your noise, to Rome ! "

Rome spoké.

In three months letters thence admonished me,
 " Your plan for the divorce is all mistake.
 " It would hold, now, had you, taking thought to wed
 " Rachel of the blue eye and golden hair, 1311

- " Found swarth-skinned Leah cumber couch next day:
 " But Rachel, blue-eyed golden-haired aright,
 " Proving to be only Laban's child, not Lot's,
 " Remains yours all the same for ever more. 1315
 " No whit to the purpose is your plea : you err
 " I' the person and the quality—nowise
 " In the individual,—that 's the case in point !
 " You go to the ground,—are met by a cross-suit
 " For separation, of the Rachel here, 1320
 " From bed and board,—she is the injured one,
 " You did the wrong and have to answer it.
 " As for the circumstance of imprisonment
 " And colour it lends to this your new attack,
 " Never fear, that point is considered too ! 1325
 " The durance is already at an end ;
 " The convent-quiet preyed upon her health,
 " She is transferred now to her parents' house
 " —No-parents, when that cheats and plunders you,
 " But parentage again confessed in full, 1330
 " When such confession pricks and plagues you more—
 " As now—for, this their house is not the house
 " In Via Vittoria wherein neighbours' watch
 " Might incommode the freedom of your wife,
 " But a certain villa smothered up in vines 1335

- " At the town's edge by the gate i' the Pauline way,
 " Out of eye-reach, out of ear-shot, little and lone,
 " Whither a friend,—at Civita, we hope,
 " A good half-dozen-hours' ride off,—might, some eve,
 " Betake himself, and whence ride back, some morn, 1340
 " Nobody the wiser : but be that as it may,
 " Do not afflict your brains with trifles now.
 " You have still three suits to manage, all and each
 " Ruinous truly should the event play false.
 " It is indeed the likelier so to do, 1345
 " That brother Paul, your single prop and stay,
 " After a vain attempt to bring the Pope
 " To set aside procedures, sit himself
 " And summarily use prerogative,
 " Afford us the infallible finger's tact 1350
 " To disentwine your tangle of affairs,
 " Paul,—finding it moreover past his strength
 " To stem the irruption, bear Rome's ridicule
 " Of . . . since friends must speak . . to be round
 with you . . .
 " Of the old outwitted husband, wronged and wroth,
 " Pitted against a brace of juveniles— 1356
 " A brisk priest who is versed in Ovid's art
 " More than his Summa, and a gamesome wife

- " Able to act Corinna without book,
 " Beside the waggish parents who played dupes 1360
 " To dupe the duper—(and truly divers scenes
 " Of the Arezzo palace, tickle rib
 " And teaze eye till the tears come, so we laugh ;
 " Nor wants the shock at the inn its comic force,
 " And then the letters and poetry—*merum sal !*) 1365
 " —Paul, finally, in such a state of things,
 " After a brief temptation to go jump
 " And join the fishes in the Tiber, drowns
 " Sorrow another and a wiser way :
 " House and goods, he has sold all off, is gone, 1370
 " Leaves Rome,—whether for France or Spain, who
 knows ?
 " Or Britain almost divided from our orb.
 " You have lost him anyhow."

Now,—I see my lords

- Shift in their seat,—would I could do the same ! 1375
 They probably please expect my bile was moved
 To purpose, nor much blame me : now, they judge,
 The fiery titillation urged my flesh
 Break through the bonds. By your pardon, no, sweet
 Sirs !

- I got such missives in the public place ; 1380

When I sought home,—with such news, mounted stair
 And sat at last in the sombre gallery,
 ('T was Autumn, the old mother in bed betimes,
 Having to bear that cold, the finer frame
 Of her daughter-in-law had found intolerable— 1385
 The brother, walking misery away
 O' the mountain-side with dog and gun belike)
 As I supped, ate the coarse bread, drank the wine
 Weak once, now acrid with the toad's-head-squeeze,
 My wife's bestowment,—I broke silence thus : 1390
 " Let me, a man, manfully meet the fact,
 " Confront the worst o' the truth, end, and have peace !
 " I am irremediably beaten here,—
 " The gross illiterate vulgar couple,—bah !
 " Why, they have measured forces, mastered mine, 1395
 " Made me their spoil and prey from first to last.
 " They have got my name,—'t is nailed now fast to theirs,
 " The child or changeling is anyway my wife ;
 " Point by point as they plan they execute,
 " They gain all, and I lose all—even to the lure 1400
 " That led to loss,—they have the wealth again
 " They hazarded awhile to hook me with,
 " Have caught the fish and find the bait entire :
 " They even have their child or changeling back

- “ To trade with, turn to account a second time. 1405
- “ The brother, presumably might tell a tale
- “ Or give a warning,—he, too, flies the field,
- “ And with him vanish help and hope of help.
- “ They have caught me in the cavern where I fell,
- “ Covered my loudest cry for human aid 1410
- “ With this enormous paving-stone of shame.
- “ Well, are we demigods or merely clay ?
- “ Is success still attendant on desert ?
- “ Is this, we live on, heaven and the final state,
- “ Or earth which means probation to the end ? 1415
- “ Why claim escape from man’s predestined lot
- “ Of being beaten and baffled ?—God’s decree,
- “ In which I, bowing bruised head, acquiesce.
- “ One of us Franceschini fell long since
- “ I’ the Holy Land, betrayed, tradition runs, 1420
- “ To Paynims by the feigning of a girl
- “ He rushed to free from ravisher, and found
- “ Lay safe enough with friends in ambuscade
- “ Who flayed him while she clapped her hands and
laughed :
- “ Let me end, falling by a like device. 1425
- “ It will not be so hard. I am the last
- “ O’ my line which will not suffer any more.

- " I have attained to my full fifty years,
 " (About the average of us all, 't is said,
 " Though it seems longer to the unlucky man) 1430
 " —Lived through my share of life ; let all end here,
 " Me and the house and grief and shame at once.
 " Friends my informants,—I can bear your blow !"
 And I believe 't was in no unmeet match
 For the stoic's mood, with something like a smile, 1435
 That, when morose December roused me next,
 I took into my hand, broke seal to read
 The new epistle from Rome. " All to no use !
 " Whate'er the turn next injury take," smiled I,
 " Here 's one has chosen his part and knows his cue.
 " I am done with, dead now ; strike away, good friends !
 " Are the three suits decided in a trice? 1442
 " Against me,—there 's no question ! How does it go?
 " Is the parentage of my wife demonstrated
 " Infamous to her wish ? Parades she now 1445
 " Loosed of the cincture that so irked the loin?
 " Is the last penny extracted from my purse
 " To mulct me for demanding the first pound
 " Was promised in return for value paid?
 " Has the priest, with nobody to court beside, 1450
 " Courted the Muse in exile, hitched my hap

- " Into a rattling ballad-rhyme which, bawled
 " At tavern-doors, wakes rapture everywhere,
 " And helps cheap wine down throat this Christmas time,
 " Beating the bagpipes? Any or all of these ! 1455
 " As well, good friends, you cursed my palace here
 " To its old cold stone face,—stuck your cap for crest
 " Over the shield that 's extant in the Square,—
 " Or spat on the statue's cheek, the impatient world
 " Sees cumber tomb-top in our family church : 1460
 " Let him creep under covert as I shall do,
 " Half below-ground already indeed. Good-bye !
 " My brothers are priests, and childless so ; that 's well—
 " And, thank God most for this, no child leave I—
 " None after me to bear till his heart break 1465
 " The being a Franceschini and my son !"
- " Nay," said the letter, " but you have just that !
 " A babe, your veritable son and heir—
 " Lawful,—'t is only eight months since your wife
 " Left you,—so, son and heir, your babe was born 1470
 " Last Wednesday in the villa,—you see the cause
 " For quitting Convent without beat of drum,
 " Stealing a hurried march to this retreat
 " That 's not so savage as the Sisterhood

" To slips and stumbles : Pietro's heart is soft, 1475
 " Violante leans to pity's side,—the pair
 " Ushered you into life a bouncing boy :
 " And he 's already hidden away and safe
 " From any claim on him you mean to make—
 " They need him for themselves,—do n't fear, they know
 " The use o' the bantling,—the nerve thus laid bare
 " To nip at, new and nice, with finger-nail ! " 1482

Then I rose up like fire, and fire-like roared.
 What, all is only beginning not ending now ?
 The worm which wormed its way from skin through flesh
 To the bone and there lay biting, did its best, 1486
 What, it goes on to scrape at the bone's self,
 Will wind to inmost marrow and madden me ?
 There 's to be yet my representative,
 Another of the name shall keep displayed 1490
 The flag with the ordure on it, brandish still
 The broken sword has served to stir a jakes ?
 Who will he be, how will you call the man ?
 A Franceschini,—when who cut my purse,
 Filched my name, hemmed me round, hustled me hard
 As rogues at a fair some fool they strip i' the midst, 1496
 When these count gains, vaunt pillage presently :—

But a Caponsacchi, oh, be very sure !
When what demands its tribute of applause
Is the cunning and impudence o' the pair of cheats,
The lies and lust o' the mother, and the brave 1501
Bold carriage of the priest, worthily crowned
By a witness to his feat i' the following age,—
And how this three-fold cord could hook and fetch
And land leviathan that king of pride ! 1505
Or say, by some mad miracle of chance,
Is he indeed my flesh and blood, this babe ?
Was it because fate forged a link at last
Betwixt my wife and me, and both alike
Found we had henceforth some one thing to love, 1510
Was it when she could damn my soul indeed
She unlatched door, let all the devils o' the dark
Dance in on me to cover her escape ?
Why then, the surplusage of disgrace, the spilth
Over and above the measure of infamy, 1515
Failing to take effect on my coarse flesh
Seasoned with scorn now, saturate with shame,—
Is saved to instil on and corrode the brow,
The baby-softness of my first-born child—
The child I had died to see though in a dream, 1520
The child I was bid strike out for, beat the wave

And baffle the tide of troubles where I swam,
 So I might touch shore, lay down life at last
 At the feet so dim and distant and divine
 Of the apparition, as 't were Mary's babe 1525
 Had held, through night and storm, the torch aloft,—
 Born now in very deed to bear this brand
 On forehead and curse me who could not save !
 Rather be the town-talk true, Square's jest, street's jeer
 True, my own inmost heart's confession true, 1530
 And he 's the priest's bastard and none of mine !
 Ay, there was cause for flight, swift flight and sure !
 The husband gets unruly, breaks all bounds
 When he encounters some familiar face,
 Fashion of feature, brow and eyes and lips 1535
 Where he least looked to find them,—time to fly !
 This bastard then, a nest for him is made,
 As the manner is of vermin, in my flesh—
 Shall I let the filthy pest buzz, flap and sting,
 Busy at my vitals and, nor hand nor foot 1540
 Lift, but let be, lie still and rot resigned ?
 No, I appeal to God,—what says Himself,
 How lessons Nature when I look to learn ?
 Why, that I am alive, am still a man
 With brain and heart and tongue and right-hand too—

Nay, even with friends, in such a cause as this, 1546
To right me if I fail to take my right.

No more of law ; a voice beyond the law
Enters my heart, *Quis est pro Domino ?*

Myself, in my own Vittiano, told the tale 1550

To my own serving-people summoned there :
Told the first half of it, scarce heard to end
By judges who got done with judgment quick
And clamoured to go execute her 'hest—

Who cried " Not one of us that dig your soil 1555

" And dress your vineyard, prune your olive-trees,
" But would have brained the man debauched our wife,
" And staked the wife whose lust allured the man,
" And paunched the Duke, had it been possible,
" Who ruled the land, yet barred us such revenge !"

I fixed on the first whose eyes caught mine, some four,
Resolute youngsters with the heart still fresh, 1562

Filled my purse with the residue o' the coin
Uncaught-up by my wife whom haste made blind,
Donned the first rough and rural garb I found, 1565

Took whatsoever weapon came to hand,
And out we flung and on we ran or reeled
Romeward, I have no memory of our way,

Only that, when at intervals the cloud
 Of horror about me opened to let in life, 1570
 I listened to some song in the ear, some snatch
 Of a legend, relic of religion, stray
 Fragment of record very strong and old
 Of the first conscience, the anterior right,
 The God's-gift to mankind, impulse to quench 1575
 The antagonistic spark of hell and tread
 Satan and all his malice into dust,
 Declare to the world the one law, right is right.
 Then the cloud re-encompassed me, and so
 I found myself, as on the wings of winds, 1580
 Arrived : I was at Rome on Christmas Eve.

Festive bells—everywhere the Feast o' the Babe,
 Joy upon earth, peace and good will to man !
 I am baptized. I started and let drop
 The dagger. "Where is it, His promised peace?" 1585
 Nine days o' the Birth-Feast did I pause and pray
 To enter into no temptation more.
 I bore the hateful house, my brother's once,
 Deserted,—let the ghost of social joy
 Mock and make mouths at me from empty room 1590
 And idle door that missed the master's step,—

Bore the frank wonder of incredulous eyes,
As my own people watched without a word,
Waited, from where they huddled round the hearth
Black like all else, that nod so slow to come— 1595
I stopped my ears even to the inner call
Of the dread duty, only heard the song
“Peace upon earth,” saw nothing but the face
O’ the Holy Infant and the halo there
Able to cover yet another face 1600
Behind it, Satan’s which I else should see.
But, day by day, joy waned and withered off :
The Babe’s face, premature with peak and pine,
Sank into wrinkled ruinous old age,
Suffering and death, then mist-like disappeared, 1605
And showed only the Cross at end of all,
Left nothing more to interpose ’twixt me
And the dread duty,—for the angels’ song,
“Peace upon earth,” louder and louder pealed
“O Lord, how long, how long be unavenged ?” 1610
On the ninth day, this grew too much for man.
I started up—“Some end must be !” At once,
Silence : then, scratching like a death-watch-tick,
Slowly within my brain was syllabled,
“One more concession, one decisive way 1615

“ And but one, to determine thee the truth,—

“ This way, in fine, I whisper in thy ear :

“ Now doubt, anon decide, thereupon act !”

“ That is a way, thou whisperest in my ear !

“ I doubt, I will decide, then act,” said I— 1620

Then beckoned my companions : “ Time is come !”

And so, all yet uncertain save the will

To do right, and the daring aught save leave

Right undone, I did find myself at last

I’ the dark before the villa with my friends, 1625

And made the experiment, the final test,

Ultimate chance that ever was to be

For the wretchedness inside. I knocked—pronounced

The name, the predetermined touch for truth,

“ What welcome for the wanderer ? Open straight—”

To the friend, physician, friar upon his rounds, 1631

Traveller belated, beggar lame and blind ?—

No, but—“ to Caponsacchi !” And the door

Opened.

And then,—why, even then, I think, 1635

I’ the minute that confirmed my worst of fears,

Surely,—I pray God that I think aright !—

Had but Pompilia's self, the tender thing
Who once was good and pure, was once my lamb
And lay in my bosom, had the well-known shape 1640
Fronted me in the door-way,—stood there faint
With the recent pang, perhaps, of giving birth
To what might, though by miracle, seem my child,—
Nay more, I will say, had even the aged fool
Pietro, the dotard, in whom folly and age 1645
Wrought, more than enmity or malevolence,
To practice and conspire against my peace,—
Had either of these but opened, I had paused.
But it was she the hag, she that brought hell
For a dowry with her to her husband's house, 1650
She the mock-mother, she that made the match
And married me to perdition, spring and source
O' the fire inside me that boiled up from heart
To brain and hailed the Fury gave it birth,—
Violante Comparini, she it was, 1655
With the old grin amid the wrinkles yet,
Opened : as if in turning from the Cross,
With trust to keep the sight and save my soul,
I had stumbled, first thing, on the serpent's head
Coiled with a leer at foot of it. 1660

There was the end !

Then was I rapt away by the impulse, one
 Immeasurable everlasting wave of a need
 To abolish that detested life. 'T was done :
 You know the rest and how the folds o' the thing, 1665
 Twisting for help, involved the other two
 More or less serpent-like : how I was mad,
 Blind, stamped on all, the earth-worms with the asp,
 And ended so.

You came on me that night, 1670

Your officers of justice,—caught the crime
 In the first natural frenzy of remorse ?
 Twenty miles off, sound sleeping as a child
 On a cloak i' the straw which promised shelter first,
 With the bloody arms beside me,—was it not so? 1675
 Wherefore not? Why, how else should I be found?
 I was my own self, had my sense again,
 My soul safe from the serpents. I could sleep :
 Indeed and, dear my lords, I shall sleep now,
 Spite of my shoulder, in five minutes' space, 1680
 When you dismiss me, having truth enough !
 It is but a few days are passed, I find,
 Since this adventure. Do you tell me, four ?
 Then the dead are scarce quiet where they lie,
Old Pietro, old Violante, side by side 1685

At the church Lorenzo,—oh, they know it well !
 So do I. But my wife is still alive,
 Has breath enough to tell her story yet,
 Her way, which is not mine, no doubt at all.
 And Caponsacchi, you have summoned him,— 1690
 Was he so far to send for? Not at hand?
 I thought some few o' the stabs were in his heart,
 Or had not been so lavish,—less had served.
 Well, he too tells his story,—florid prose
 As smooth as mine is rough. You see, my lords, 1695
 There will be a lying intoxicating smoke
 Born of the blood,—confusion probably,—
 For lies breed lies—but all that rests with you !
 The trial is no concern of mine ; with me
 The main of the care is over : I at least 1700
 Recognise who took that huge burthen off,
 Let me begin to live again. I did
 God's bidding and man's duty, so, breathe free ;
 Look you to the rest ! I heard Himself prescribe,
 That great Physician, and dared lance the core 1705
 Of the bad ulcer ; and the rage abates,
 I am myself and whole now : I prove cured
 By the eyes that see, the ears that hear again,
 The limbs that have relearned their youthful play,

Key

The healthy taste of food and feel of clothes 1710
 And taking to our common life once more,
 All that now urges my defence from death.
 The willingness to live, what means it else?
 Before,—but let the very action speak!
 Judge for yourselves, what life seemed worth to me
 Who, not by proxy but in person, pitched 1716
 Head-foremost into danger as a fool
 That never cares if he can swim or no—
 So he but find the bottom, braves the brook.
 No man omits precaution, quite neglects 1720
 Secresy, safety, schemes not how retreat,
 Having schemed he might advance. Did I so scheme?
 Why, with a warrant which 't is ask and have,
 With horse thereby made mine without a word,
 I had gained the frontier and slept safe that night. 1725
 Then, my companions,—call them what you please,
 Slave or stipendiary,—what need of one
 To me whose right-hand did its owner's work?
 Hire an assassin yet expose yourself?
 As well buy glove and then thrust naked hand 1730
 I' the thorn-bush. No, the wise man stays at home,
 Sends only agents out, with pay to earn:
 At home, when they come back,—he straight discards

Or else disowns. Why use such tools at all
 When a man's foes are of his house, like mine, 1735
 Sit at his board, sleep in his bed? Why noise,
 When there 's the *acquetta* and the silent way?
 Clearly my life was valueless.

But now

Health is returned, and sanity of soul 1740
 Nowise indifferent to the body's harm.
 I find the instinct bids me save my life ;
 My wits, too, rally round me ; I pick up
 And use the arms that strewed the ground before,
 Unnoticed or spurned aside : I take my stand, 1745
 Make my defence. God shall not lose a life
 May do Him further service, while I speak
 And you hear, you my judges and last hope !
 You are the law : 't is to the law I look.
 I began life by hanging to the law, 1750
 To the law it is I hang till life shall end.
 My brother made appeal to the Pope, 't is true,
 To stay proceedings, judge my cause himself
 Nor trouble law,—some fondness of conceit
 That rectitude, sagacity sufficed 1755
 The investigator in a case like mine,

Dispensed with the machine of law. The Pope
 Knew better, set aside my brother's plea
 And put me back to law,—referred the cause
Ad judices meos,—doubtlessly did well. 1760
 Here, then, I clutch my judges,—I claim law—
 Cry, by the higher law whereof your law
 O' the land is humbly representative,—
 Cry, on what point is it, where either accuse,
 I fail to furnish you defence? I stand 1765
 Acquitted, actually or virtually,
 By every intermediate kind of court
 That takes account of right or wrong in man,
 Each unit in the series that begins
 With God's throne, ends with the tribunal here. 1770
 God breathes, not speaks, his verdicts, felt not heard,
 Passed on successively to each court I call
 Man's conscience, custom, manners, all that make
 More and more effort to promulgate, mark
 God's verdict in determinable words, 1775
 Till last come human jurists—solidify
 Fluid result,—what 's fixable lies forged,
 Statute,—the residue escapes in fume,
 Yet hangs aloft, a cloud, as palpable
 To the finer sense as word the legist welds. 1780

Justinian's Pandects only make precise
What simply sparkled in men's eyes before,
Twitched in their brow or quivered on their lip,
Waited the speech they called but would not come.
These courts then, whose decree your own confirms,—
Take my whole life, not this last act alone, 1786
Look on it by the light reflected thence !
What has Society to charge me with ?
Come, unreservedly,—favour none nor fear,—
I am Guido Franceschini, am I not? 1790
You know the courses I was free to take ?
I took just that which let me serve the Church,
I gave it all my labour in body and soul
Till these broke down i' the service. "Specify?"
Well, my last patron was a Cardinal. 1795
I left him unconvicted of a fault—
Was even helped, by way of gratitude,
Into the new life that I left him for,
This very misery of the marriage,—he
Made it, kind soul, so far as in him lay— 1800
Signed the deed where you yet may see his name.
He is gone to his reward,—dead, being my friend
Who could have helped here also,—that, of course !
So far, there 's my acquittal, I suppose.

Then comes the marriage itself—no question, lords,
Of the entire validity of that! 1806

In the extremity of distress, 't is true,
For after-reasons, furnished abundantly,
I wished the thing invalid, went to you
Only some months since, set you duly forth 1810

My wrong and prayed your remedy, that a cheat
Should not have force to cheat my whole life long.
“ Annul a marriage? ’T is impossible!

“ Though ring about your neck be brass not gold,
“ Needs must it clasp, gangrene you all the same!”

Well, let me have the benefit, just so far, 1816
O’ the fact announced,—my wife then is my wife,
I have allowance for a husband’s right.

I am charged with passing right’s due bound,—such acts
As I thought just, my wife called cruelty, 1820

Complained of in due form,—convoked no court
Of common gossipry, but took her wrongs—

And not once, but so long as patience served—
To the town’s top, jurisdiction’s pride of place,

To the Archbishop and the Governor. 1825

These heard her charge with my reply, and found
That futile, this sufficient : they dismissed

The hysteric querulous rebel, and confirmed

- Authority in its wholesome exercise,
 They, with directest access to the facts. 1830
- “ —Ay, for it was their friendship favoured you,
 “ Hereditary alliance against a breach
 “ I’ the social order : prejudice for the name
 “ Of Franceschini !”—So I hear it said :
 But not here. You, lords, never will you say 1835
 “ Such is the nullity of grace and truth,
 “ Such the corruption of the faith, such lapse
 “ Of law, such warrant have the Molinists
 “ For daring reprehend us as they do,—
 “ That we pronounce it just a common case, 1840
 “ Two dignitaries, each in his degree
 “ First, foremost, this the spiritual head, and that
 “ The secular arm o’ the body politic,
 “ Should, for mere wrongs’ love and injustice’ sake,
 “ Side with, aid and abet in cruelty 1845
 “ This broken beggarly noble,—bribed perhaps
 “ By his watered wine and mouldy crust of bread—
 “ Rather than that sweet tremulous flower-like wife
 “ Who kissed their hands and curled about their feet
 “ Looking the irresistible loveliness 1850
 “ In tears that takes man captive, turns” . . . enough !
 Do you blast your predecessors? What forbids

Posterity to trebly blast yourselves
 Who set the example and instruct their tongue?
 You dreaded the crowd, succumbed to the popular cry,
 Or else, would nowise seem defer thereto 1856
 And yield to public clamour though i' the right!
 You ridded your eye of my unseemliness,
 The noble whose misfortune wearied you,—
 Or, what 's more probable, made common cause 1860
 With the cleric section, punished in myself
 Maladroit uncomplaisant laity,
 Defective in behaviour to a priest
 Who claimed the customary partnership
 I' the house and the wife. Lords, any lie will serve!
 Look to it,—or allow me freed so far! 1866

Then I proceed a step, come with clean hands
 Thus far, re-tell the tale told eight months since.
 The wife, you allow so far, I have not wronged,
 Has fled my roof, plundered me and decamped 1870
 In company with the priest her paramour:
 And I gave chace, came up with, caught the two
 At the wayside inn where both had spent the night,
 Found them in flagrant fault, and found as well,
 By documents with name and plan and date, 1875

The fault was furtive then that 's flagrant now,
Their intercourse a long established crime.

I did not take the license law's self gives

To slay both criminals o' the spot at the time,

But held my hand,—preferred play prodigy 1880

Of patience which the world calls cowardice,

Rather than seem anticipate the law

And cast discredit on its organs,—you—

So, to your bar I brought both criminals,

And made my statement : heard their counter-charge,

Nay,—their corroboration of my tale, 1886

Nowise disputing its allegements, not

I' the main, not more than nature's decency

Compels men to keep silence in this kind,—

Only contending that the deeds avowed 1890

Would take another colour and bear excuse.

You were to judge between us ; so you did.

You disregard the excuse, you breathe away

The colour of innocence and leave guilt black,

“ Guilty ” is the decision of the court, 1895

And that I stand in consequence untouched,

One white integrity from head to heel.

Not guilty ? Why then did you punish them ?'

True, punishment has been inadequate—

'T is not I only, not my friends that joke, 1900
 My foes that jeer, who echo "inadequate"—
 For, by a chance that comes to help for once,
 The same case simultaneously was judged
 At Arezzo, in the province of the Court
 Where the crime had beginning but not end. 1905
 They then, deciding on but half o' the crime,
 The effraction, robbery,—features of the fault
 I never cared to dwell upon at Rome,—
 What was it they adjudged as penalty
 To Pompilia,—the one criminal o' the pair 1910
 Amenable to their judgment, not the priest
 Who is Rome's? Why, just imprisonment for life
 I' the Stinche. There was Tuscany's award
 To a wife that robs her husband : you at Rome
 Having to deal with adultery in a wife 1915
 And, in a priest, breach of the priestly vow,
 Give gentle sequestration for a month
 In a manageable Convent, then release,
 You call imprisonment, in the very house
 O' the very couple, the sole aim and end 1920
 Of the culprits' crime was—there to reach and rest
 And there take solace and defy me : well,—
 This difference 'twixt their penalty and yours

- Is immaterial : make your penalty less—
 Merely that she should henceforth wear black gloves
 And white fan, she who wore the opposite— 1926
 Why, all the same the fact o' the thing subsists.
 Reconcile to your conscience as you may,
 Be it on your own heads, you pronounced one half
 O' the penalty for heinousness like hers 1930
 And his, that pays a fault at Carnival
 Of comfit-pelting past discretion's law,
 Or accident to handkerchief in Lent
 Which falls perversely as a lady kneels
 Abruptly, and but half conceals her neck ! 1935
 I acquiesce for my part,—punished, though
 By a pin-point scratch, means guilty : guilty means
 —What have I been but innocent hitherto?
 Anyhow, here the offence, being punished, ends.
- Ends?—for you deemed so, did you not, sweet lords?
 That was throughout the veritable aim 1941
 O' the sentence light or heavy,—to redress
 Recognised wrong? You righted me, I think?
 Well then,—what if I, at this last of all,
 Demonstrate you, as my whole pleading proves, 1945
 No particle of wrong received thereby

One atom of right?—that cure grew worse disease?
 That in the process you call “justice done”
 All along you have nipped away just inch
 By inch the creeping climbing length of plague 1950
 Breaking my tree of life from root to branch,
 And left me, after all and every act
 Of your interference,—lightened of what load?
 At liberty wherein? Mere words and wind!
 “Now I was saved, now I should feel no more 1955
 “The hot breath, find a respite from fixed eye
 “And vibrant tongue!” Why, scarce your back was
 turned,
 There was the reptile, that feigned death at first,
 Renewing its detested spire and spire
 Around me, rising to such heights of hate 1960
 That, so far from mere purpose now to crush
 And coil itself on the remains of me,
 Body and mind, and there flesh fang content,
 Its aim is now to evoke life from death,
 Make me anew, satisfy in my son 1965
 The hunger I may feed but never sate,
 Tormented on to perpetuity,—
 My son, whom, dead, I shall know, understand,
 Feel, hear, see, never more escape the sight

- In heaven that 's turned to hell, or hell returned 1970
 (So, rather, say) to this same earth again,—
 Moulded into the image and made one,
 Fashioned of soul as featured like in face,
 First taught to laugh and lisp and stand and go
 By that thief, poisoner and adulteress 1975
 I call Pompilia, he calls . . . sacred name,
 Be unpronounced, be unpolluted here !
 And last led up to the glory and prize of hate
 By his . . . foster-father, Caponsacchi's self,
 The perjured priest, pink of conspirators, 1980
 Tricksters and knaves, yet polished, superfine,
 Manhood to model adolescence by . . .
 Lords, look on me, declare,—when, what I show,
 Is nothing more nor less than what you deemed
 And doled me out for justice,—what did you say? 1985
 For reparation, restitution and more,—
 Will you not thank, praise, bid me to your breasts
 For having done the thing you thought to do,
 And thoroughly trampled out sin's life at last ?
 I have heightened phrase to make your soft speech serve,
 Doubled the blow you but essayed to strike, 1991
 Carried into effect your mandate here
 That else had fallen to ground : mere duty done,

Oversight of the master just supplied
 By zeal i' the servant: I, being used to serve, 1995
 Have simply . . . what is it they charge me with?
 Blackened again, made legible once more
 Your own decree, not permanently writ,
 Rightly conceived but all too faintly traced,—
 It reads efficient, now, comminatory, 2000
 A terror to the wicked, answers so
 The mood o' the magistrate, the mind of law.
 Absolve, then, me, law's mere executant !
 Protect your own defender,—save me, Sirs !
 Give me my life, give me my liberty, 2005
 My good name and my civic rights again !
 It would be too fond, too complacent play
 Into the hands o' the devil, should we lose
 The game here, I for God : a soldier-bee
 That yields his life, exenterate with the stroke 2010
 O' the sting that saves the hive. I need that life,
 Oh, never fear ! I 'll find life plenty use
 Though it should last five years more, aches and all !
 For, first thing, there 's the mother's age to help—
 Let her come break her heart upon my breast, 2015
 Not on the blank stone of my nameless tomb !
 The fugitive brother has to be bidden back

To the old routine, repugnant to the tread,
Of daily suit and service to the Church,—
Thro' gibe and jest, those stones that Shimei flung !
Ay, and the spirit-broken youth at home, 2021
The awe-struck altar-ministrant, shall make
Amends for faith now palsied at the source,
Shall see truth yet triumphant, justice yet
A victor in the battle of this world ! 2025
Give me—for last, best gift, my son again,
Whom law makes mine,—I take him at your word,
Mine be he, by miraculous mercy, lords !
Let me lift up his youth and innocence
To purify my palace, room by room 2030
Purged of the memories, lend from his bright brow
Light to the old proud paladin my sire
Shrunk now for shame into the darkest shade
O' the tapestry, showed him once and shrouds him now !
Then may we,—strong from that rekindled smile,—
Go forward, face new times, the better day. 2036
And when, in times made better through your brave
Decision now,—might but Utopia be !—
Rome rife with honest women and strong men,
Manners reformed, old habits back once more, 2040
Customs that recognize the standard worth,—

The wholesome household rule in force again,
 Husbands once more God's representative,
 Wives like the typical Spouse once more, and Priests
 No longer men of Belial, with no aim 2045
 At leading silly women captive, but
 Of rising to such duties as yours now,—
 Then will I set my son at my right-hand
 And tell his father's story to this point,
 Adding "The task seemed superhuman, still 2050
 " I dared and did it, trusting God and law :
 " And they approved of me : give praise to both !"
 And if, for answer, he shall stoop to kiss
 My hand, and peradventure start thereat,—
 I engage to smile " That was an accident 2055
 " I' the necessary process,—just a trip
 " O' the torture-irons in their search for truth,—
 " Hardly misfortune, and no fault at all."

VI.

GIUSEPPE CAPONSACCHI.

ANSWER you, Sirs? Do I understand aright?
Have patience! In this sudden smoke from hell,—
So things disguise themselves,—I cannot see
My own hand held thus broad before my face
And know it again. Answer you? Then that means 5
Tell over twice what I, the first time, told
Six months ago : 't was here, I do believe,
Fronting you same three in this very room,
I stood and told you : yet now no one laughs,
Who then . . . nay, dear my lords, but laugh you did, 10
As good as laugh, what in a judge we style
Laughter—no levity, nothing indecorous, lords!
Only,—I think I apprehend the mood :

There was the blameless shrug, permissible smirk,
 The pen's pretence at play with the pursed mouth, 15
 The titter stifled in the hollow palm
 Which rubbed the eyebrow and caressed the nose,
 When I first told my tale : they meant, you know,
 " The sly one, all this we are bound believe !
 " Well, he can say no other than what he says. 20
 " We have been young, too,—come, there 's greater guilt !
 " Let him but decently disembroil himself,
 " Scramble from out the scrape nor move the mud,—
 " We solid ones may risk a finger-stretch !"
 And now you sit as grave, stare as aghast 25
 As if I were a phantom : now 't is—" Friend,
 " Collect yourself !"—no laughing matter more—
 " Counsel the Court in this extremity,
 " Tell us again !"—tell that, for telling which,
 I got the jocular piece of punishment, 30
 Was sent to lounge a little in the place
 Whence now of a sudden here you summon me
 To take the intelligence from just—your lips
 You, Judge Tommati, who then tittered most,—
 That she I helped eight months since to escape 35
 Her husband, is retaken by the same,
 Three days ago, if I have seized your sense,—

(I being disallowed to interfere,
 Meddle or make in a matter none of mine,
 For you and law were guardians quite enough 40
 O' the innocent, without a pert priest's help)—
 And that he has butchered her accordingly,
 As she foretold and as myself believed,—
 And, so foretelling and believing so,
 We were punished, both of us, the merry way : 45
 Therefore, tell once again the tale ! For what?
 Pompilia is only dying while I speak !
 Why does the mirth hang fire and miss the smile ?
 My masters, there 's an old book, you should con
 For strange adventures, applicable yet, 50
 'T is stuffed with. Do you know that there was once
 This thing : a multitude of worthy folk
 Took recreation, watched a certain group
 Of soldiery intent upon a game,—
 How first they wrangled, but soon fell to play, 55
 Threw dice,—the best diversion in the world.
 A word in your ear,—they are now casting lots,
 Ay, with that gesture quaint and cry uncouth,
 For the coat of One murdered an hour ago !
 I am a priest,—talk of what I have learned. 60
 Pompilia is bleeding out her life belike,

Gasping away the latest breath of all,
This minute, while I talk—not while you laugh?

Yet, being sobered now, what is it you ask
By way of explanation? There 's the fact ! 65

It seems to fill the universe with sight
And sound,—from the four corners of this earth
Tells itself over, to my sense at least.

But you may want it lower set i' the scale,—
Too vast, too close it clangs in the ear, perhaps ; 70

You 'd stand back just to comprehend it more :
Well then, let me, the hollow rock, condense
The voice o' the sea and wind, interpret you
The mystery of this murder. God above !

It is too paltry, such a transference 75
O' the storm's roar to the cranny of the stone !

This deed, you saw begin—why does its end
Surprise you? Why should the event enforce
The lesson, we ourselves learned, she and I,
From the first o' the fact, and taught you, all in vain? 80
This Guido from whose throat you took my grasp,
Was this man to be favoured, now, or feared,
Let do his will, or have his will restrained,

In the relation with Pompilia?—say !
 Did any other man need interpose 85
 —Oh, though first comer, though as strange at the work
 As fribble must be, coxcomb, fool that 's near
 To knave as, say, a priest who fears the world—
 Was he bound brave the peril, save the doomed,
 Or go on, sing his snatch and pluck his flower, 90
 Keep the straight path and let the victim die ?
 I held so ; you decided otherwise,
 Saw no such peril, therefore no such need
 To stop song, loosen flower, and leave path : Law,
 Law was aware and watching, would suffice, 95
 Wanted no priest's intrusion, palpably
 Pretence, too manifest a subterfuge !
 Whereupon I, priest, coxcomb, fribble and fool,
 Ensconced me in my corner, thus rebuked,
 A kind of culprit, over-zealous hound 100
 Kicked for his pains to kennel ; I gave place,
 To you, and let the law reign paramount :
I left Pompilia to your watch and ward,
And now you point me—there and thus she lies !

Men, for the last time, what do you want with me ? 105
 Is it,—you acknowledge, as it were, a use,

A profit in employing me?—at length
 I may conceivably help the august law?
 I am free to break the blow, next hawk that swoops
 On next dove, nor miss much of good repute? 110
 Or what if this your summons, after all,
 Be but the form of mere release, no more,
 Which turns the key and lets the captive go?
 I have paid enough in person at Civita,
 Am free,—what more need I concern me with? 115
 Thank you! I am rehabilitated then,
 A very reputable priest. But she—
 The glory of life, the beauty of the world,
 The splendour of heaven, . . . well, Sirs, does no one
 move?
 Do I speak ambiguously? The glory, I say, 120
 And the beauty, I say, and splendour, still say I,
 Who, priest and trained to live my whole life long
 On beauty and splendour, solely at their source,
 God,—have thus recognized my food in her,
 You tell me, that 's fast dying while we talk, 125
 Pompilia! How does lenity to me,
 Remit one death-bed pang to her? Come, smile!
 The proper wink at the hot-headed youth
 Who lets his soul show, through transparent words,

The mundane love that 's sin and scandal too ! 130
 You are all struck acquiescent now, it seems :
 It seems the oldest, gravest signor here,
 Even the redoubtable Tommati, sits
 Chop-fallen,—understands how law might take
 Service like mine, of brain and heart and hand, 135
 In good part. Better late than never, law !
 You understand of a sudden, gospel too
 Has a claim here, may possibly pronounce
 Consistent with my priesthood, worthy Christ,
 That I endeavoured to save Pompilia? 140

Then,

You were wrong, you see : that 's well to see, though late:
 That 's all we may expect of man, this side
 The grave : his good is—knowing he is bad :
 Thus will it be with us when the books ope 145
 And we stand at the bar on judgment-day.
 Well then, I have a mind to speak, see cause
 To relume the quenched flax by this dreadful light,
 Burn my soul out in showing you the truth.
 I heard, last time I stood here to be judged, 150
 What is priest's-duty,—labour to pluck tares
 And weed the corn of Molinism ; let me

Make you hear, this time, how, in such a case,
 Man, be he in the priesthood or at plough,
 Mindful of Christ or marching step by step 155
 With . . . what's his style, the other potentate
 Who bids have courage and keep honour safe,
 Nor let minuter admonition teaze?—
 How he is bound, better or worse, to act.
 Earth will not end through this misjudgment, no ! 160
 For you and the others like you sure to come,
 Fresh work is sure to follow,—wickedness
 That wants withstanding. Many a man of blood,
 Many a man of guile will clamour yet,
 Bid you redress his grievance,—as he clutched 165
 The prey, forsooth a stranger stepped between,
 And there's the good gripe in pure waste ! My part
 Is done ; i' the doing it, I pass away
 Out of the world. I want no more with earth.
 Let me, in heaven's name, use the very snuff 170
 O' the taper in one last spark shall show truth
 For a moment, show Pompilia who was true !
 Not for her sake, but yours : if she is dead,
 Oh, Sirs, she can be loved by none of you
 Most or least priestly ! Saints, to do us good, 175
 Must be in heaven, I seem to understand :

We never find them saints before, at least.
 Be her first prayer then presently for you—
 She has done the good to me . . .

What is all this? 180

There, I was born, have lived, shall die, a fool !
 This is a foolish outset :—might with cause
 Give colour to the very lie o' the man,
 The murderer,—make as if I loved his wife,
 In the way he called love. He is the fool there ! 185

Why, had there been in me the touch of taint,
 I had picked up so much of knaves'-policy
 As hide it, keep one hand pressed on the place
 Suspected of a spot would damn us both.
 Or no, not her !—not even if any of you 190

Dares think that I, i' the face of death, her death
 That 's in my eyes and ears and brain and heart,
 Lie,—if he does, let him ! I mean to say,
 So he stop there, stay thought from smirching her
 The snow-white soul that angels fear to take 195

Untenderly. But, all the same, I know —
 I too am taintless, and I bare my breast.
 You can 't think, men as you are, all of you,
 But that, to hear thus suddenly such an end
 Of such a wonderful white soul, that comes 200

Of a man and murderer calling the white black,
 Must shake me, trouble and disadvantage. Sirs,
 Only seventeen !

Why, good and wise you are !

You might at the beginning stop my mouth : 205

So, none would be to speak for her, that knew.

I talk impertinently, and you bear,

All the same. This it is to have to do

With honest hearts : they easily may err,

But in the main they wish well to the truth. 210

You are Christians ; somehow, no one ever plucked
 A rag, even, from the body of the Lord,

To wear and mock with, but, despite himself,
 He looked the greater and was the better. Yes,

I shall go on now. Does she need or not 215

I keep calm ? Calm I 'll keep as monk that croons
 Transcribing battle, earthquake, famine, plague,
 From parchment to his cloister's chronicle.

Not one word more from the point now !

I begin. 220

Yes, I am one of your body and a priest.
 Also I am a younger son o' the House

Oldest now, greatest once, in my birth-town
 Arezzo, I recognise no equal there—
 (I want all arguments, all sorts of arms 225
 That seem to serve,—use this for a reason, wait !)
 Not therefore thrust into the Church, because
 O' the piece of bread one gets there. We were first
 Of Fiesole, that rings still with the fame
 Of Capo-in-Sacco our progenitor : 230
 When Florence ruined Fiesole, our folk
 Migrated to the victor-city, and there
 Flourished,—our palace and our tower attest,
 In the Old Mercato,—this was years ago,
 Four hundred, full,—no, it wants fourteen just. 235
 Our arms are those of Fiesole itself,
 The shield quartered with white and red : a branch
 Are the Salviati of us, nothing more.
 That were good help to the Church? But better still—
 Not simply for the advantage of my birth 240
 I' the way of the world, was I proposed for priest ;
 But because there 's an illustration, late
 I' the day, that 's loved and looked to as a saint
 Still in Arezzo, he was bishop of,
 Sixty years since : he spent to the last doit 245
 His bishop's-revenue among the poor,

And used to tend the needy and the sick,
 Barefoot, because of his humility.
 He it was,—when the Granduke Ferdinand
 Swore he would raze our city, plough the place 250
 And sow it with salt, because we Aretines
 Had tied a rope about the neck, to hale
 The statue of his father from its base
 For hate's sake,—he availed by prayers and tears
 To pacify the Duke and save the town. 255
 This was my father's father's brother. You see,
 For his sake, how it was I had a right
 To the self-same office, bishop in the egg,
 So, grew i' the garb and prattled in the school,
 Was made expect, from infancy almost, 260
 The proper mood o' the priest ; till time ran by
 And brought the day when I must read the vows,
 Declare the world renounced and undertake
 To become priest and leave probation,—leap
 Over the ledge into the other life, 265
 Having gone trippingly hitherto up to the height
 O'er the wan water. Just a vow to read !

I stopped short awe-struck. “ How shall holiest flesh
 “ Engage to keep such vow inviolate,

- “ How much less mine,—I know myself too weak, 270
“ Unworthy ! Choose a worthier stronger man !”
And the very Bishop smiled and stopped my mouth
In its mid-protestation. “ Incapable ?
“ Qualmish of conscience ? Thou ingenuous boy !
“ Clear up the clouds and cast thy scruples far ! 275
“ I satisfy thee there ’s an easier sense
“ Wherein to take such vow than suits the first
“ Rough rigid reading. Mark what makes all smooth,
“ Nay, has been even a solace to myself !
“ The Jews who needs must, in their synagogue, 280
“ Utter sometimes the holy name of God,
“ A thing their superstition boggles at,
“ Pronounce aloud the ineffable sacrosanct,—
“ How does their shrewdness help them ? In this wise ;
“ Another set of sounds they substitute, 285
“ Jumble so consonants and vowels—how
“ Should I know ?—that there grows from out the old
“ Quite a new word that means the very same—
“ And o’er the hard place slide they with a smile.
“ Giuseppe Maria Caponsacchi mine, 290
“ Nobody wants you in these latter days
“ To prop the Church by breaking your back-bone,—
“ As the necessary way was once, we know,

- " When Dioclesian flourished and his like ;
 " That building of the buttress-work was done 295
 " By martyrs and confessors : let it bide,
 " Add not a brick, but, where you see a chink,
 " Stick in a sprig of ivy or root a rose
 " Shall make amends and beautify the pile !
 " We profit as you were the painfullest 300
 " O' the martyrs, and you prove yourself a match
 " For the cruellest confessor ever was,
 " If you march boldly up and take your stand
 " Where their blood soaks, their bones yet strew the soil,
 " And cry ' Take notice, I the young and free 305
 " ' And well-to-do i' the world, thus leave the world,
 " ' Cast in my lot thus with no gay young world
 " ' But the grand old Church : she tempts me of the two !'
 " Renounce the world? Nay, keep and give it us !
 " Let us have you, and boast of what you bring. 310
 " We want the pick o' the earth to practise with,
 " Not its offscouring, halt and deaf and blind
 " In soul and body. There 's a rubble-stone
 " Unfit for the front o' the building, stuff to stow
 " In a gap behind and keep us weather-tight ; 315
 " There 's porphyry for the prominent place. Good lack !
 " Saint Paul has had enough and to spare, I trow,

- " Of ragged run-away Onesimus :
 " He wants the right-hand with the signet-ring
 " Of King Agrippa, now, to shake and use. 320
 " I have a heavy scholar cloistered up,
 " Close under lock and key, kept at his task
 " Of letting Fenelon know the fool he is,
 " In a book I promise Christendom next Spring.
 " Why, if he covets so much meat, the clown, 325
 " As a lark's wing next Friday, or, any day,
 " Diversion beyond catching his own fleas,
 " He shall be properly swung, I promise him.
 " But you, who are so quite another paste
 " Of a man,—do you obey me? Cultivate 330
 " Assiduous, that superior gift you have
 " Of making madrigals—(who told me? Ah !)
 " Get done a Marinesque Adoniad straight
 " With a pulse o' the blood a-pricking, here and there,
 " That I may tell the lady, ' And he 's ours ! ' " 335

So I became a priest : those terms changed all,
 I was good enough for that, nor cheated so ;
 I could live thus and still hold head erect.
 Now you see why I may have been before
 A fribble and coxcomb, yet, as priest, break word 340

Nowise, to make you disbelieve me now.
 I need that you should know my truth. Well, then,
 According to prescription did I live,
 —Conformed myself, both read the breviary
 And wrote the rhymes, was punctual to my place 345
 I' the Pieve, and as diligent at my post
 Where beauty and fashion rule. I throve apace,
 Sub-deacon, Canon, the authority
 For delicate play at tarocs, and arbiter
 O' the magnitude of fan-mounts : all the while 350
 Wanting no whit the advantage of a hint
 Benignant to the promising pupil,—thus :
 “ Enough attention to the Countess now,
 “ The young one ; 't is her mother rules the roast,
 “ We know where, and puts in a word : go pay 355
 “ Devoir to-morrow morning after mass !
 “ Break that rash promise to preach, Passion-week !
 “ Has it escaped you the Archbishop grunts
 “ And snuffles when one grieves to tell his Grace
 “ No soul dares treat the subject of the day 360
 “ Since his own masterly handling it (ha, ha !)
 “ Five years ago,—when somebody could help
 “ And touch up an odd phrase in time of need,
 “ (He, he !)—and somebody helps you, my son !

- " Therefore, do n't prove so indispensable 365
 " At the Pieve, sit more loose i' the seat, nor grow
 " A fixture by attendance morn and eve !
 " Arezzo 's just a haven midway Rome—
 " Rome 's the eventual harbour,—make for port,
 " Crowd sail, crack cordage ! And your cargo be 370
 " A polished presence, a genteel manner, wit
 " At will, and tact at every pore of you !
 " I sent our lump of learning, Brother Clout,
 " And Father Slouch, our piece of piety,
 " To see Rome and try suit the Cardinal. 375
 " Thither they clump-clumped, beads and book in
 hand,
 " And ever since 't is meat for man and maid
 " How both flopped down, prayed blessing on bent
 pate
 " Bald many an inch beyond the tonsure's need,
 " Never once dreaming, the two moony dolts, 380
 " There 's nothing moves his Eminence so much
 " As—far from all this awe at sanctitude—
 " Heads that wag, eyes that twinkle, modified mirth
 " At the closet-lectures on the Latin tongue
 " A lady learns so much by, we know where. 385
 " Why, body o' Bacchus, you should crave his rule

" For pauses in the elegiac couplet, chasms
 " Permissible only to Catullus ! There !
 " Now go do duty : brisk, break Priscian's head
 " By reading the day's office—there 's no help. 390
 " You 've Ovid in your poke to plaster that ;
 " Amen 's at the end of all : then sup with me !"

Well, after three or four years of this life,
 In prosecution of my calling, I
 Found myself at the theatre one night 395
 With a brother Canon, in a mood and mind
 Proper enough for the place, amused or no :
 When I saw enter, stand, and seat herself
 A lady, young, tall, beautiful, strange and sad.
 It was as when, in our cathedral once, 400
 As I got yawningly through matin-song,
 I saw *facchini* bear a burden up,
 Base it on the high-altar, break away
 A board or two, and leave the thing inside
 Lofty and lone : and lo, when next I looked, 405
 There was the Rafael ! I was still one stare,
 When—" Nay, I 'll make her give you back your gaze"—
 Said Canon Conti ; and at the word he tossed
 A paper-twist of comfits to her lap,

And dodged and in a trice was at my back 410
 Nodding from over my shoulder. Then she turned,
 Looked our way, smiled the beautiful sad strange smile.
 "Is not she fair? 'T is my new cousin," said he :
 "The fellow lurking there i' the black o' the box
 "Is Guido, the old scapegrace : she 's his wife, 415
 "Married three years since : how his Countship sulks !
 "He has brought little back from Rome beside,
 "After the bragging, bullying. A fair face,
 "And—they do say—a pocket-full of gold
 "When he can worry both her parents dead. 420
 "I don 't go much there, for the chamber 's cold
 "And the coffee pale. I got a turn at first
 "Paying my duty : I observed they crouched
 "—The two old frightened family spectres—close
 "In a corner, each on each like mouse on mouse 425
 "I' the cat's cage : ever since, I stay at home.
 "Hallo, there 's Guido, the black, mean and small,
 "Bends his brows on us—please to bend your own
 "On the shapely nether limbs of Light-skirts there
 "By way of a diversion ! I was a fool 430
 "To fling the sweetmeats. Prudence, for God's love !
 "To-morrow I 'll make my peace, e'en tell some fib,
 "Try if I can't find means to take you there."

That night and next day did the gaze endure,
 Burnt to my brain, as sunbeam thro' shut eyes, 435
 And not once changed the beautiful sad strange smile.
 At vespers Conti leaned beside my seat
 I' the choir,—part said, part sung—“ *In ex-cel-sis*—
 “ All 's to no purpose : I have louted low,
 “ But he saw you staring—*quia sub*—do n't incline 440
 “ To know you nearer : him we would not hold
 “ For Hercules,—the man would lick your shoe
 “ If you and certain efficacious friends
 “ Managed him warily,—but there 's the wife :
 “ Spare her, because he beats her, as it is, 445
 “ She 's breaking her heart quite fast enough—*jam tu*—
 “ So, be you rational and make amends
 “ With little Light-skirts yonder—*in secula*
 “ *Secu-lo-o-o-o-rum*. Ah, you rogue ! Every one knows
 “ What great dame she makes jealous : one against one,
 “ Play, and win both !” 451

Sirs, ere the week was out,

I saw and said to myself “ Light-skirts hides teeth
 “ Would make a dog sick,—the great dame shows spite
 “ Should drive a cat mad : 't is but poor work this— 455
 “ Counting one's fingers till the sonnet 's crowned.
 “ I doubt much if Marino really be

" A better bard than Dante after all.
 " 'T is more amusing to go pace at eve
 " I' the Duomo,—watch the day's last gleam outside 460
 " Turn, as into a skirt of God's own robe,
 " Those lancet-windows' jewelled miracle,—
 " Than go eat the Archbishop's ortolans,
 " Digest his jokes. Luckily Lent is near:
 " Who cares to look will find me in my stall 465
 " At the Pievè, constant to this faith at least—
 " Never to write a canzonet any more."

So, next week, 't was my patron spoke abrupt,
 In altered guise, " Young man, can it be true
 " That after all your promise of sound fruit, 470
 " You have kept away from Countess young or old
 " And gone play truant in church all day long?
 " Are you turning Molinist?" I answered quick
 " Sir, what if I turned Christian? It might be.
 " The fact is, I am troubled in my mind, 475
 " Beset and pressed hard by some novel thoughts.
 " This your Arezzo is a limited world ;
 " There 's a strange Pope,—'t is said, a priest who thinks
 " Rome is the port, you say : to Rome I go.
 " I will live alone, one does so in a crowd, 480

“ And look into my heart a little.” “ Lent
 “ Ended,”—I told friends,—“ I shall go to Rome.”

One evening I was sitting in a muse
 Over the opened “ Summa,” darkened round
 By the mid-March twilight, thinking how my life 485
 Had shaken under me,—broke short indeed
 And showed the gap ’twixt what is, what should be,—
 And into what abysm the soul may slip,
 Leave aspiration here, achievement there,
 Lacking omnipotence to connect extremes— 490
 Thinking moreover . . oh, thinking, if you like,
 How utterly dissociated was I
 A priest and celibate, from the sad strange wife
 Of Guido,—just as an instance to the point,
 Nought more,—how I had a whole store of strengths 495
 Eating into my heart, which craved employ,
 And she, perhaps, need of a finger’s help,—
 And yet there was no way in the wide world
 To stretch out mine and so relieve myself,—
 How when the page o’ the Summa preached its best, 500
 Her smile kept glowing out of it, as to mock
 The silence we could break by no one word,—
 There came a tap without the chamber-door,

And a whisper, when I bade who tapped speak out,
 And, in obedience to my summons, last 505
 In glided a masked muffled mystery,
 Laid lightly a letter on the opened book,
 Then stood with folded arms and foot demure,
 Pointing as if to mark the minutes' flight.

I took the letter, read to the effect 510
 That she, I lately flung the comfits to,
 Had a warm heart to give me in exchange,
 And gave it,—loved me and confessed it thus,
 And bade me render thanks by word of mouth,
 Going that night to such a side o' the house 515
 Where the small terrace overhangs a street
 Blind and deserted, not the street in front:
 Her husband being away, the surly patch,
 At his villa of Vittiano.

“ And you ? ”—I asked: 520
 “ What may you be ? ”—“ Count Guido's kind of maid—
 “ Most of us have two functions in his house.
 “ We all hate him, the lady suffers much,
 “ 'T is just we show compassion, furnish aid,
 “ Specially since her choice is fixed so well. 525

“ What answer may I bring to cheer the sweet
 “ Pompilia ? ”

Then I took a pen and wrote.

“ No more of this ! That you are fair, I know :

“ But other thoughts now occupy my mind. 530

“ I should not thus have played the insensible

“ Once on a time. What made you,—may one ask,—

“ Marry your hideous husband ? ’T was a fault,

“ And now you taste the fruit of it. Farewell.”

“ There ! ” smiled I as she snatched it and was gone—

“ There, let the jealous miscreant,—Guido’s self, 536

“ Whose mean soul grins through this transparent trick,—

“ Be baulked so far, defrauded of his aim !

“ What fund of satisfaction to the knave,

“ Had I kicked this his messenger down stairs, 540

“ Trussed to the middle of her impudence,

“ And set his heart at ease so ! No, indeed !

“ There ’s the reply which he shall turn and twist

“ At pleasure, snuff at till his brain grow drunk,

“ As the bear does when he finds a scented glove 545

“ That puzzles him,—a hand and yet no hand,

“ Of other perfume than his own foul paw !

“ Last month, I had doubtless chosen to play the dupe,
 “ Accepted the mock-invitation, kept
 “ The sham appointment, cudgel beneath cloak, 550
 “ Prepared myself to pull the appointer’s self
 “ Out of the window from his hiding-place
 “ Behind the gown of this part-messenger
 “ Part-mistress who would personate the wife.
 “ Such had seemed once a jest permissible: 555
 “ Now, I am not i’ the mood.”

Back next morn brought

The messenger, a second letter in hand.

“ You are cruel, Thyrasis, and Myrtila moans
 “ Neglected but adores you, makes request 560
 “ For mercy: why is it you dare not come ?
 “ Such virtue is scarce natural to your age:
 “ You must love someone else ; I hear you do,
 “ The Baron’s daughter’ or the Advocate’s wife,
 “ Or both,—all ’s one, would you make me the third—
 “ I take the crumbs from table gratefully 566
 “ Nor grudge who feasts there. ’Faith, I blush and blaze !
 “ Yet if I break all bounds, there ’s reason sure.
 “ Are you determinedly bent on Rome ?
 “ I am wretched here, a monster tortures me : 570
 “ Carry me with you ! Come and say you will !

“ Concert this very evening ! Do not write !

“ I am ever at the window of my room

“ Over the terrace, at the *Ave.* Come !”

I questioned—lifting half the woman’s mask 575
 To let her smile loose. “ So, you gave my line
 “ To the merry lady ?” “ She kissed off the wax,
 “ And put what paper was not kissed away,
 “ In her bosom to go burn : but merry, no !
 “ She wept all night when evening brought no friend, 580
 “ Alone, the unkind missive at her breast ;
 “ Thus Philomel, the thorn at her breast too,
 “ Sings ” . . . “ Writes this second letter ?” “ Even so !
 “ Then she may peep at vespers forth ?”—“ What risk
 “ Do we run o’ the husband ?”—“ Ah,—no risk at all !
 “ He is more stupid even than jealous. Ah— 586
 “ That was the reason ? Why, the man ’s away !
 “ Beside, his bugbear is that friend of yours,
 “ Fat little Canon Conti. He fears him—
 “ How should he dream of you ? I told you truth—590
 “ He goes to the villa at Vittiano—’t is
 “ The time when Spring-sap rises in the vine—
 “ Spends the night there. And then his wife ’s a child,
 “ Does he think a child outwits him ? A mere child :

“ Yet so full grown, a dish for any duke. 595

“ Do n't quarrel longer with such cates, but come !

I wrote “ In vain do you solicit me.

“ I am a priest : and you are wedded wife,

“ Whatever kind of brute your husband prove.

“ I have scruples, in short. Yet should you really show

“ Sign at the window . . . but nay, best be good ! 601

“ My thoughts are elsewhere.”—“ Take her that !”

—“ Again

“ Let the incarnate meanness, cheat and spy,

“ Mean to the marrow of him, make his heart 605

“ His food, anticipate hell's worm once more !

“ Let him watch shivering at the window—ay,

“ And let this hybrid, this his light-of-love

“ And lackey-of-lies,—a sage economy,—

“ Paid with embracings for the rank brass coin,— 610

“ Let her report and make him chuckle o'er

“ The break-down of my resolution now,

“ And lour at disappointment in good time !

“ —So tantalize and so enrage by turns,

“ Until the two fall each on the other like 615

“ Two famished spiders, as the coveted fly

“ That toys long, leaves their net and them at last !”

And so the missives followed thick and fast
 For a month, say,—I still came at every turn
 On the soft sly adder, endlong 'neath my tread. 620

I was met i' the street, made sign to in the church,
 A slip was found i' the door-sill, scribbled word
 'Twixt page and page o' the prayer-book in my place :
 A crumpled thing dropped even before my feet,
 Pushed through the blind, above the terrace-rail, 625

As I passed, by day, the very window once.
 And ever from corners would be peering up
 The messenger, with the self-same demand
 " Obdurate still, no flesh but adamant ?

" Nothing to cure the wound, assuage the throe 630
 " O' the sweetest lamb that ever loved a bear ? "

And ever my one answer in one tone—

" Go your ways, temptress ! Let a priest read, pray,

" Unplagued of vain talk, visions not for him !

" In the end, you 'll have your will and ruin me ! " 635

One day, a variation : thus I read :

" You have gained little by timidity.

" My husband has found out my love at length,

" Sees cousin Conti was the stalking-horse,

" And you the game he covered, poor fat soul ! 640

" My husband is a formidable foe,
 " Will stick at nothing to destroy you. Stand
 " Prepared, or better, run till you reach Rome !
 " I bade you visit me, when the last place
 " My tyrant would have turned suspicious at, 645
 " Or cared to seek you in, was . . why say, where ?
 " But now all 's changed : beside, the season 's past
 " At the villa,—wants the master's eye no more.
 " Anyhow, I beseech you, stay away
 " From the window ! He might well be posted there.'

I wrote—" You raise my courage, or call up 651
 " My curiosity, who am but man.
 " Tell him he owns the palace, not the street
 " Under—that 's his and yours and mine alike.
 " If it should please me pad the path this eve, 655
 " Guido will have two troubles, first to get
 " Into a rage and then get out again.
 " Be cautious, though : at the *Ave!*"

You of the court !

When I stood question here and reached this point 660
 O' the narrative,—search notes and see and say
 If some one did not interpose with smile
 And sneer, " And prithee why so confident

“ That the husband must, of all needs, not the wife,
 “ Fabricate thus,—what if the lady loved ? 665
 “ What if she wrote the letters ? ”

Learned Sir,

I told you there 's a picture in our church.
 Well, if a low-browed verger sidled up
 Bringing me, like a blotch, on his prod's point, 670
 A transfixed scorpion, let the reptile writhe,
 And then said, “ See a thing that Rafael made—
 “ This venom issued from Madonna's mouth ! ”
 I should reply, “ Rather, the soul of you
 “ Has issued from your body, like from like, 675
 “ By way of the ordure-corner ! ”

But no less,

I tired of the same long black teasing lie
 Obtruded thus at every turn ; the pest
 Was far too near the picture, anyhow : 680
 One does Madonna service, making clowns
 Remove their dung-heap from the sacristy.
 “ I will to the window, as he tempts,” said I :
 “ Yes, whom the easy love has failed allure,
 “ This new bait of adventure tempts,—thinks he. 685
 “ Though the imprisoned lady keeps afar,
 “ There will they lie in ambush, heads alert,

“ Kith, kin, and Count mustered to bite my heel.
 “ No mother nor brother viper of the brood
 “ Shall scuttle off without the instructive bruise !” 690

So, I went : crossed street and street : “ The next street’s
 turn,

“ I stand beneath the terrace, see, above,
 “ The black of the ambush-window. Then, in place
 “ Of hand’s throw of soft prelude over lute
 “ And cough that clears way for the ditty last,”— 695
 I began to laugh already—“ he will have
 “ ‘ Out of the hole you hide in, on to the front,
 “ ‘ Count Guido Franceschini, show yourself !
 “ ‘ Hear what a man thinks of a thing like you,
 “ ‘ And after, take this foulness in your face !’ ” 700

The words lay living on my lip, I made
 The one turn more—and there at the window stood,
 Framed in its black square length, with lamp in hand,
 Pompilia ; the same great, grave, grievful air
 As stands i’ the dusk, on altar that I know, 705
 Left alone with one moonbeam in her cell,
 Our Lady of all the Sorrows. Ere I knelt—
 Assured myself that she was flesh and blood—
 She had looked one look and vanished.

I thought—" Just so :

" It was herself, they have set her there to watch— 711

" Stationed to see some wedding-band go by,

" On fair pretence that she must bless the bride,

" Or wait some funeral with friends wind past,

" And crave peace for the corpse that claims its due. 715

" She never dreams they used her for a snare,

" And now withdraw the bait has served its turn.

" Well done, the husband, who shall fare the worse !"

And on my lip again was—" Out with thee,

" Guido !" When all at once she re-appeared ; 720

But, this time, on the terrace overhead,

So close above me, she could almost touch

My head if she bent down ; and she did bend,

While I stood still as stone, all eye, all ear.

She began—" You have sent me letters, Sir : 725

" I have read none, I can neither read nor write ;

" But she you gave them to, a woman here,

" One of the people in whose power I am,

" Partly explained their sense, I think, to me

" Obligated to listen while she inculcates 730

" That you, a priest, can dare love me, a wife,

" Desire to live or die as I shall bid,

- “ (She makes me listen if I will or no)
“ Because you saw my face a single time.
“ It cannot be she says the thing you mean ; 735
“ Such wickedness were deadly to us both :
“ But good true love would help me now so much—
“ I tell myself, you may mean good and true.
“ You offer me, I seem to understand,
“ Because I am in poverty and starve, 740
“ Much money, where one piece would save my life.
“ The silver cup upon the altar-cloth
“ Is neither yours to give nor mine to take ;
“ But I might take one bit of bread therefrom,
“ Since I am starving, and return the rest, 745
“ Yet do no harm : this is my very case.
“ I am in that strait, I may not dare abstain
“ From so much of assistance as would bring
“ The guilt of theft on neither you nor me ;
“ But no superfluous particle of aid. 750
“ I think, if you will let me state my case,
“ Even had you been so fancy-fevered here,
“ Not your sound self, you must grow healthy now—
“ Care only to bestow what I can take.
“ That it is only you in the wide world, 755
“ Knowing me nor in thought nor word nor deed,

- “ Who, all unprompted save by your own heart,
“ Come proffering assistance now,—were strange
“ But that my whole life is so strange : as strange
“ It is, my husband whom I have not wronged 760
“ Should hate and harm me. For his own soul’s sake,
“ Hinder the harm ! But there is something more,
“ And that the strangest : it has got to be
“ Somehow for my sake too, and yet not mine,
“ —This is a riddle—for some kind of sake 765
“ Not any clearer to myself than you,
“ And yet as certain as that I draw breath,—
“ I would fain live, not die—oh no, not die !
“ My case is, I was dwelling happily
“ At Rome with those dear Comparini, called 770
“ Father and mother to me ; when at once
“ I found I had become Count Guido’s wife :
“ Who then, not waiting for a moment, changed
“ Into a fury of fire, if once he was
“ Merely a man : his face threw fire at mine, 775
“ He laid a hand on me that burned all peace,
“ All joy, all hope, and last all fear away,
“ Dipping the bough of life, so pleasant once,
“ In fire which shrivelled leaf and bud alike,
“ Burning not only present life but past, 780

" Which you might think was safe beyond his reach.
 " He reached it, though, since that beloved pair,
 " My father once, my mother all those years,
 " That loved me so, now say I dreamed a dream
 " And bid me wake, henceforth no child of theirs, 785
 " Never in all the time their child at all.
 " Do you understand? I cannot: yet so it is.
 " Just so I say of you that proffer help:
 " I cannot understand what prompts your soul,
 " I simply needs must see that it is so, 790
 " Only one strange and wonderful thing more.
 " They came here with me, those two dear ones, kept
 " All the old love up, till my husband, till
 " His people here so tortured them, they fled.
 " And now, is it because I grow in flesh 795
 " And spirit one with him their torturer,
 " That they, renouncing him, must cast off me?
 " If I were graced by God to have a child,
 " Could I one day deny God graced me so?
 " Then, since my husband hates me, I shall break 800
 " No law that reigns in this fell house of hate,
 " By using—letting have effect so much
 " Of hate as hides me from that whole of hate
 " Would take my life which I want and must have—

- “ Just as I take from your excess of love 805
 “ Enough to save my life with, all I need.
 “ The Archbishop said to murder me were sin :
 “ My leaving Guido were a kind of death
 “ With no sin,—more death, he must answer for.
 “ Hear now what death to him and life to you 810
 “ I wish to pay and owe. Take me to Rome !
 “ You go to Rome, the servant makes me hear.
 “ Take me as you would take a dog, I think,
 “ Masterless left for strangers to maltreat :
 “ Take me home like that—leave me in the house 815
 “ Where the father and the mother are ; and soon
 “ They ’ll come to know and call me by my name,
 “ Their child once more, since child I am, for all
 “ They now forget me, which is the worst o’ the dream—
 “ And the way to end dreams is to break them, stand,
 “ Walk, go : then help me to stand, walk and go ! 821
 “ The Governor said the strong should help the weak :
 “ You know how weak the strongest women are.
 “ How could I find my way there by myself ?
 “ I cannot even call out, make them hear— 825
 “ Just as in dreams : I have tried and proved the fact.
 “ I have told this story and more to good great men,
 “ The Archbishop and the Governor : they smiled.

- “ ‘ Stop your mouth, fair one ! ’—presently they frowned,
“ ‘ Get you gone, disengage you from our feet ! ’ 830
“ I went in my despair to an old priest,
“ Only a friar, no great man like these two,
“ But good, the Augustinian, people name
“ Romano,—he confessed me two months since :
“ He fears God, why then needs he fear the world ? 835
“ And when he questioned how it came about
“ That I was found in danger of a sin—
“ Despair of any help from providence,—
“ ‘ Since, though your husband outrage you,’ said he,
“ ‘ That is a case too common, the wives die 840
“ ‘ Or live, but do not sin so deep as this ’—
“ Then I told—what I never will tell you—
“ How, worse than husband’s hate, I had to bear
“ The love,—soliciting to shame called love,—
“ Of his brother,—the young idle priest i’ the house 845
“ With only the devil to meet there. ‘ This is grave—
“ ‘ Yes, we must interfere : I counsel,—write
“ ‘ To those who used to be your parents once,
“ ‘ Of dangers here, bid them convey you hence ! ’
“ ‘ But,’ said I, ‘ when I neither read nor write ? ’ 850
“ Then he took pity and promised ‘ I will write.’
“ If he did so,—why, they are dumb or dead :

- " Either they give no credit to the tale,
 " Or else, wrapped wholly up in their own joy
 " Of such escape, they care not who cries, still 855
 " I' the clutches. Anyhow, no word arrives.
 " All such extravagance and dreadfulness
 " Seems incident to dreaming, cured one way,—
 " Wake me ! The letter I received this morn,
 " Said—if the woman spoke your very sense— 860
 " ' You would die for me : ' I can believe it now :
 " For now the dream gets to involve yourself.
 " First of all, you seemed wicked and not good,
 " In writing me those letters : you came in
 " Like a thief upon me. I this morning said 865
 " In my extremity, entreat the thief !
 " Try if he have in him no honest touch !
 " A thief might save me from a murderer.
 " 'T was a thief said the last kind word to Christ :
 " Christ took the kindness and forgave the theft : 870
 " And so did I prepare what I now say.
 " But now, that you stand and I see your face,
 " Though you have never uttered word yet,—well, I know,
 " Here too has been dream-work, delusion too,
 " And that at no time, you with the eyes here, 875
 " Ever intended to do wrong by me,

" Nor wrote such letters therefore. It is false,
 " And you are true, have been true, will be true.
 " To Rome then,—when is it you take me there ?
 " Each minute lost is mortal. When ?—I ask." 880

I answered " It shall be when it can be.

" I will go hence and do your pleasure, find
 " The sure and speedy means of travel, then
 " Come back and take you to your friends in Rome.
 " There wants a carriage, money and the rest,— 885
 " A day's work by to-morrow at this time.
 " How shall I see you and assure escape ? "

She replied, " Pass, to-morrow at this hour.

" If I am at the open window, well :
 " If I am absent, drop a handkerchief 890
 " And walk by ! I shall see from where I watch,
 " And know that all is done. Return next eve,
 " And next, and so till we can meet and speak ! '
 " To-morrow at this hour I pass," said I.

She was withdrawn. 895

Here is another point

I bid you pause at. When I told thus far,
 Someone said, subtly, " Here at least was found

" Your confidence in error,—you perceived
 " The spirit of the letters, in a sort, 900
 " Had been the lady's, if the body should be
 " Supplied by Guido : say, he forged them all !
 " Here was the unforged fact—she sent for you,
 " Spontaneously elected you to help,
 " —What men call, loved you : Guido read her mind,
 " Gave it expression to assure the world 906
 " The case was just as he foresaw : he wrote,
 " She spoke."

Sirs, that first simile serves still,—
 That falsehood of a scorpion hatched, I say, 910
 Nowhere i' the world but in Madonna's mouth.
 Go on ! Suppose, that falsehood foiled, next eve
 Pictured Madonna raised her painted hand,
 Fixed the face Rafael bent above the Babe,
 On my face as I flung me at her feet : 915
 Such miracle vouchsafed and manifest,
 Would that prove the first lying tale was true ?
 Pompilia spoke, and I at once received,
 Accepted my own fact, my miracle
 Self-authorised and self-explained,—she chose 920
 To summon me and signify her choice.
 Afterward,—oh ! I gave a passing glance

To a certain ugly cloud-shape, goblin-shred
Of hell-smoke hurrying past the splendid moon
Out now to tolerate no darkness more, 925
And saw right through the thing that tried to pass
For truth and solid, not an empty lie :
“ So, he not only forged the words for her
“ But words for me, made letters he called mine :
“ What I sent, he retained, gave these in place, 930
“ All by the mistress-messenger ! As I
“ Recognized her, at potency of truth,
“ So she, by the crystalline soul, knew me,
“ Never mistook the signs. Enough of this—
“ Let the wraith go to nothingness again, 935
“ Here is the orb, have only thought for her !”

“ Thought ? ” nay, Sirs, what shall follow was not thought :
I have thought sometimes, and thought long and hard.
I have stood before, gone round a serious thing,
Tasked my whole mind to touch and clasp it close, 940
As I stretch forth my arm to touch this bar.
God and man, and what duty I owe both,—
I dare to say I have confronted these
In thought : but no such faculty helped here.
I put forth no thought,—powerless, all that night 945

I paced the city : it was the first Spring.
By the invasion I lay passive to,
In rushed new things, the old were rapt away ;
Alike abolished—the imprisonment
Of the outside air, the inside weight o' the world 950
That pulled me down. Death meant, to spurn the ground,
Soar to the sky,—die well and you do that.
The very immolation made the bliss ;
Death was the heart of life, and all the harm
My folly had crouched to avoid, now proved a veil 955
Hiding all gain my wisdom strove to grasp :
As if the intense centre of the flame
Should turn a heaven to that devoted fly
Which hitherto, sophist alike and sage,
Saint Thomas with his sober grey goose-quill, 960
And sinner Plato by Cephisian reed,
Would fain, pretending just the insect's good,
Whisk off, drive back, consign to shade again.
Into another state, under new rule
I knew myself was passing swift and sure ; 965
Whereof the initiatory pang approached,
Felicitous annoy, as bitter-sweet
As when the virgin-band, the victors chaste,
Feel at the end the earthly garments drop,

And rise with something of a rosy shame 970
Into immortal nakedness : so I
Lay, and let come the proper throe would thrill
Into the ecstasy and outthrob pain.

I' the grey of dawn it was I found myself
Facing the pillared front o' the Pieve—mine, 975
My church : it seemed to say for the first time
“But am not I the Bride, the mystic love
“O' the Lamb, who took thy plighted troth, my priest,
“To fold thy warm heart on my heart of stone
“And freeze thee nor unfasten any more? 980
“This is a fleshly woman,—let the free
“Bestow their life-blood, thou art pulseless now !”
See ! Day by day I had risen and left this church
At the signal waved me by some foolish fan,
With half a curse and half a pitying smile 985
For the monk I stumbled over in my haste,
Prostrate and corpse-like at the altar-foot
Intent on his *corona* : then the church
Was ready with her quip, if word conduced,
To quicken my pace nor stop for prating—“There ! 990
“Be thankful you are no such ninny, go
“Rather to teach a black-eyed novice cards

“Than gabble Latin and protrude that nose
 “Smoothed to a sheep’s through no brains and much
 faith !”

That sort of incentive ! Now the church changed tone—
 Now, when I found out first that life and death 996

Are means to an end, that passion uses both,
 Indisputably mistress of the man

Whose form of worship is self-sacrifice—

Now, from the stone lungs sighed the scarnel voice

“Leave that live passion, come be dead with me !”

As if, i’ the fabled garden, I had gone 1002

On great adventure, plucked in ignorance

Hedge-fruit, and feasted to satiety,

Laughing at such high fame for hips and haws, 1005

And scorned the achievement : then come all at once

O’ the prize o’ the place, the thing of perfect gold,

The apple’s self : and, scarce my eye on that,

Was ’ware as well o’ the seven-fold dragon’s watch.

Sirs, I obeyed. Obedience was too strange,— 1010

This new thing that had been struck into me

By the look o’ the lady,—to dare disobey

The first authoritative word. ’T was God’s.

I had been lifted to the level of her,

Could take such sounds into my sense. I said 1015
 "We two are cognizant o' the Master now ;
 "It is she bids me bow the head : how true,
 "I am a priest ! I see the function here ;
 "I thought the other way self-sacrifice :
 "This is the true, seals up the perfect sum. 1020
 "I pay it, sit down, silently obey."

So, I went home. Dawn broke, noon broadened, I—
 I sat stone-still, let time run over me.

The sun slanted into my room, had reached
 The west. I opened book,—Aquinas blazed 1025
 With one black name only on the white page.
 I looked up, saw the sunset : vespers rang :
 "She counts the minutes till I keep my word
 "And come say all is ready. I am a priest.
 "Duty to God is duty to her : I think 1030
 "God, who created her, will save her too
 "Some new way, by one miracle the more,
 "Without me. Then, prayer may avail perhaps."
 I went to my own place i' the Pieve, read
 The office : I was back at home again 1035
 Sitting i' the dark. "Could she but know—but know
 "That, were there good in this distinct from God's,

" Really good as it reached her, though procured
 " By a sin of mine,—I should sin : God forgives.
 " She knows it is no fear withholds me : fear? 1040
 " Of what? Suspense here is the terrible thing.
 " If she should, as she counts the minutes, come
 " On the fantastic notion that I fear
 " The world now, fear the Archbishop, fear perhaps
 " Count Guido, he who, having forged the lies, 1045
 " May wait the work, attend the effect,—I fear
 " The sword of Guido ! Let God see to that—
 " Hating lies, let not her believe a lie ! "

Again the morning found me. " I will work,
 " Tie down my foolish thoughts. Thank God so far !
 " I have saved her from a scandal, stopped the tongues
 " Had broken else into a cackle and hiss 1052
 " Around the noble name. Duty is still
 " Wisdom : I have been wise." So the day wore.

At evening—" But, achieving victory, 1055
 " I must not blink the priest's peculiar part,
 " Nor shrink to counsel, comfort : priest and friend—
 " How do we discontinue to be friends?
 " I will go minister, advise her seek

- “ Help at the source,—above all, not despair : 1060
 “ There may be other happier help at hand.
 “ I hope it,—wherefore then neglect to say ? ”

There she stood—leaned there, for the second time,
 Over the terrace, looked at me, then spoke :

- “ Why is it you have suffered me to stay 1065
 “ Breaking my heart two days more than was need ?
 “ Why delay help, your own heart yearns to give ?
 “ You are again here, in the self-same mind,
 “ I see here, steadfast in the face of you,—
 “ You grudge to do no one thing that I ask. 1070
 “ Why then is nothing done ? You know my need.
 “ Still, through God’s pity on me, there is time
 “ And one day more : shall I be saved or no ? ”
 I answered—“ Lady, waste no thought, no word
 “ Even to forgive me ! Care for what I care— 1075
 “ Only ! Now follow me as I were fate !
 “ Leave this house in the dark to-morrow night,
 “ Just before daybreak :—there ’s new moon this eve—
 “ It sets, and then begins the solid black.
 “ Descend, proceed to the Torrione, step 1080
 “ Over the low dilapidated wall,
 “ Take San Clemente, there ’s no other gate

“Unguarded at the hour : some paces thence
 “An inn stands ; cross to it ; I shall be there.”

She answered, “If I can but find the way. 1085

“But I shall find it. Go now !”

I did go,

Took rapidly the route myself prescribed,
 Stopped at Torrione, climbed the ruined place,
 Proved that the gate was practicable, reached 1090

The inn, no eye, despite the dark, could miss,
 Knocked there and entered, made the host secure :

“With Caponsacchi it is ask and have ;

“I know my betters. Are you bound for Rome ?

“I get swift horse and trusty man,” said he. 1095

Then I retraced my steps, was found once more

In my own house for the last time : there lay

The broad pale opened Summa. “Shut his book,

“There’s other showing ! ’T was a Thomas too

“Obtained,—more favoured than his namesake here,—

“A gift, tied faith fast, foiled the tug of doubt,— 1101

“Our Lady’s girdle ; down he saw it drop

“As she ascended into heaven, they say :

' He kept that safe and bade all doubt adieu.

" I too have seen a lady and hold a grace." 1105

I know not how the night passed : morning broke

Presently came my servant. " Sir, this eve—

" Do you forget ? " I started.—" How forget ?

" What is it you know ? "—" With due submission, Sir

" This being last Monday in the month but one 1110

" And a vigil, since to-morrow is Saint George,

" And feast day, and moreover day for copes,

" And Canon Conti now away a month,

" And Canon Crispi sour because, forsooth,

" You let him sulk in stall and bear the brunt 1115

" Of the octave. . . Well, Sir, 't is important !"

" True !

" Hearken, I have to start for Rome this night.

" No word, lest Crispi overboil and burst !

" Provide me with a laic dress ! Throw dust 1120

" I' the Canon's eye, stop his tongue's scandal so !

" See there 's a sword in case of accident."

I knew the knave, the knave knew me.

And thus

Through each familiar hindrance of the day 1125

Did I make steadily for its hour and end,—
 Felt time's old barrier-growth of right and fit
 Give way through all its twines, and let me go.
 Use and wont recognized the excepted man,
 Let speed the special service,—and I sped 1130
 Till, at the dead between midnight and morn,
 There was I at the goal, before the gate,
 With a tune in the ears, low leading up to loud,
 A light in the eyes, faint that would soon be flare,
 Ever some spiritual witness new and new 1135
 In faster frequency, crowding solitude
 To watch the way o' the warfare,—till, at last,
 When the ecstatic minute must bring birth,
 Began a whiteness in the distance, waxed
 Whiter and whiter, near grew and more near, 1140
 Till it was she : there did Pompilia come :
 The white I saw shine through her was her soul's,
 Certainly, for the body was one black,
 Black from head down to foot. She did not speak,
 Glided into the carriage,—so a cloud 1145
 Gathers the moon up. “ By San Spirito,
 “ To Rome, as if the road burned underneath !
 “ Reach Rome, then hold my head in pledge, I pay
 “ The run and the risk to heart's content ! ” Just that,

I said,—then, in another tick of time, 1150
Sprang, was beside her, she and I alone.

So it began, our flight thro' dusk to clear,
Through day and night and day again to night
Once more, and to last dreadful dawn of all.
Sirs, how should I lie quiet in my grave 1155
Unless you suffer me wring, drop by drop,
My brain dry, make a riddance of the drench
Of minutes with a memory in each,
Recorded motion, breath or look of hers,
Which poured forth would present you one pure glass,
Mirror you plain,—as God's sea, glassed in gold, 1161
His saints,—the perfect soul Pompilia? Men,
You must know that a man gets drunk with truth
Stagnant inside him! Oh, they've killed her, Sirs!
Can I be calm? 1165

Calmly! Each incident

Proves, I maintain, that action of the flight
For the true thing it was. The first faint scratch
O' the stone will test its nature, teach its worth
To idiots who name Parian, coprolite. 1170
After all, I shall give no glare—at best
Only display you certain scattered lights

Lamping the rush and roll of the abyss—
 Nothing but here and there a fire-point pricks
 Wavelet from wavelet : well ! 1175

For the first hour

We both were silent in the night, I know :
 Sometimes I did not see nor understand.
 Blackness engulfed me,—partial stupor, say—
 Then I would break way, breathe through the surprise,
 And be aware again, and see who sat 1181

In the dark vest with the white face and hands.
 I said to myself—“ I have caught it, I conceive
 “ The mind o’ the mystery : ’t is the way they wake
 “ And wait, two martyrs somewhere in a tomb 1185

“ Each by each as their blessing was to die ;
 “ Some signal they are promised and expect,—
 “ When to arise before the trumpet scares :
 “ So, through the whole course of the world they wait
 “ The last day, but so fearless and so safe ! 1190

“ No otherwise, in safety and not fear,
 “ I lie, because she lies too by my side.”
 You know this is not love, Sirs,—it is faith,
 The feeling that there ’s God, he reigns and rules
 Out of this low world : that is all ; no harm ! 1195
 At times she drew a soft sigh—music seemed

Always to hover just above her lips
Not settle,—break a silence music too.

In the determined morning, I first found
Her head erect, her face turned full to me, 1200
Her soul intent on mine through two wide eyes.
I answered them. “ You are saved hitherto.
“ We have passed Perugia,—gone round by the wood,
“ Not through, I seem to think,—and opposite
“ I know Assisi ; this is holy ground.” 1205
Then she resumed. “ How long since we both left
“ Arezzo ? ”—“ Years—and certain hours beside.”

It was at . . . ah, but I forget the names !
’T is a mere post-house and a hovel or two,—
I left the carriage and got bread and wine 1210
And brought it her.—“ Does it detain to eat ? ”
“ —They stay perforce, change horses,—therefore eat !
“ We lose no minute : we arrive, be sure ! ”
She said—I know not where—there ’s a great hill
Close over, and the stream has lost its bridge, 1215
One fords it. She began—“ I have heard say
“ Of some sick body that my mother knew,
“ ’T was no good sign when in a limb diseased

" All the pain suddenly departs,—as if
 " The guardian angel discontinued pain 1220
 " Because the hope of cure was gone at last :
 " The limb will not again exert itself,
 " It needs be pained no longer : so with me,
 " —My soul whence all the pain is past at once :
 " All pain must be to work some good in the end. 1225
 " True, this I feel now, this may be that good,
 " Pain was because of,—otherwise, I fear !”

She said,—a long while later in the day,

When I had let the silence be,—abrupt—

“ Have you a mother ? ”—“ She died, I was born.” 1230

“ A sister then ? ”—“ No sister.”—“ Who was it—

“ What woman were you used to serve this way,

“ Be kind to, till I called you and you came ? ”

I did not like that word. Soon afterward—

“ Tell me, are men unhappy, in some kind 1235

“ Of mere unhappiness at being men,

“ As women suffer, being womanish ?

“ Have you, now, some unhappiness, I mean,

“ Born of what may be man’s strength overmuch,

“ To match the undue susceptibility, 1240

“ The sense at every pore when hate is close ?

" It hurts us if a baby hides its face
 " Or child strikes at us punily, calls names
 " Or makes a mouth,—much more if stranger men 1244
 " Laugh or frown,—just as that were much to bear !
 " Yet rocks split,—and the blow-ball does no more,
 " Quivers to feathery nothing at a touch ;
 " And strength may have its drawback, weakness
 scapes."

Once she asked " What is it that made you smile,
 " At the great gate with the eagles and the snakes, 1250
 " Where the company entered, 't is a long time since?"
 " —Forgive—I think you would not understand :
 " Ah, but you ask me,—therefore, it was this.
 " 'That was a certain bishop's villa-gate,
 " I knew it by the eagles,—and at once 1255
 " Remembered this same bishop was just he
 " People of old were wont to bid me please
 " If I would catch preferment : so, I smiled
 " Because an impulse came to me, a whim—
 " What if I prayed the prelate leave to speak, 1260
 " Began upon him in his presence-hall
 " —' What, still at work so grey and obsolete?
 " ' Still rocheted and mitred more or less?

“ ‘ Do n't you feel all that out of fashion now ?

“ ‘ I find out when the day of things is done ! ’ ” 1265

At eve we heard the *angelus* : she turned—

“ I told you I can neither read nor write.

“ My life stopped with the play-time ; I will learn,

“ If I begin to live again : but you—

“ Who are a priest—wherefore do you not read 1270

“ The service at this hour ? Read Gabriel's song,

“ The lesson, and then read the little prayer

“ To Raphael, proper for us travellers ! ”

I did not like that, neither, but I read.

When we stopped at Foligno it was dark. 1275

The people of the post came out with lights :

The driver said, “ This time to-morrow, may

“ Saints only help, relays continue good,

“ Nor robbers hinder, we arrive at Rome.”

I urged,—“ Why tax your strength a second night ? 1280

“ Trust me, alight here and take brief repose !

“ We are out of harm's reach, past pursuit : go sleep

“ If but an hour ! I keep watch, guard the while

“ Here in the doorway.” But her whole face changed,

The misery grew again about her mouth, 1285

The eyes burned up from faintness, like the fawn's
 Tired to death in the thicket, when she feels
 The probing spear o' the huntsman. "Oh, no stay!"
 She cried, in the fawn's cry, "On to Rome, on, on—
 "Unless 't is you who fear,—which cannot be!" 1290

We did go on all night ; but at its close
 She was troubled, restless, moaned low, talked at whiles
 To herself, her brow on quiver with the dream :
 Once, wide awake, she menaced, at arms' length
 Waved away something—"Never again with you ! 1295
 "My soul is mine, my body is my soul's :
 "You and I are divided ever more
 "In soul and body : get you gone !" Then I—
 "Why, in my whole life I have never prayed !
 "Oh, if the God, that only can, would help ! 1300
 "Am I his priest with power to cast out fiends?
 "Let God arise and all his enemies
 "Be scattered !" By morn, there was peace, no sigh
 Out of the deep sleep.

When she woke at last, 1305

I answered the first look—"Scarce twelve hours more,
 "Then, Rome ! There probably was no pursuit,

"There cannot now be peril : bear up brave !
 "Just some twelve hours to press through to the prize—
 "Then, no more of the terrible journey !" "Then,
 "No more o' the journey : if it might but last ! 1311
 "Always, my life-long, thus to journey still !
 "It is the interruption that I dread,—
 "With no dread, ever to be here and thus !
 "Never to see a face nor hear a voice ! 1315
 "Yours is no voice ; you speak when you are dumb ;
 "Nor face, I see it in the dark. I want
 "No face nor voice that change and grow unkind."
 That I liked, that was the best thing she said.

In the broad day, I dared entreat, "Descend !" 1320
 I told a woman, at the garden-gate
 By the post-house, white and pleasant in the sun,
 "It is my sister,—talk with her apart !
 "She is married and unhappy, you perceive ;
 "I take her home because her head is hurt ; 1325
 "Comfort her as you women understand !"
 So, there I left them by the garden-wall,
 Paced the road, then bade put the horses to,
 Came back, and there she sat : close to her knee,
 A black-eyed child still held the bowl of milk, 1330

Wondered to see how little she could drink,
And in her arms the woman's infant lay.
She smiled at me "How much good this has done !
"This is a whole night's rest and how much more !
"I can proceed now, though I wish to stay. 1335
"How do you call that tree with the thick top
"That holds in all its leafy green and gold
"The sun now like an immense egg of fire ?"
(It was a million-leaved mimosa.) "Take
"The babe away from me and let me go !" 1340
And in the carriage "Still a day, my friend !
"And perhaps half a night, the woman fears.
"I pray it finish since it cannot last.
"There may be more misfortune at the close,
"And where will you be? God suffice me then !" 1345
And presently—for there was a roadside-shrine—
"When I was taken first to my own church
"Lorenzo in Lucina, being a girl,
"And bid confess my faults, I interposed
"But teach me what fault to confess and know !" 1350
"So, the priest said—"You should bethink yourself :
"Each human being needs must have done wrong !"
"Now, be you candid and no priest but friend—
"Were I surprised and killed here on the spot,

- " A runaway from husband and his home, 1355
 " Do you account it were in sin I died ?
 " My husband used to seem to harm me, not . . .
 " Not on pretence he punished sin of mine,
 " Nor for sin's sake and lust of cruelty,
 " But as I heard him bid a farming-man 1360
 " At the villa take a lamb once to the wood
 " And there ill-treat it, meaning that the wolf
 " Should hear its cries, and so come, quick be caught,
 " Enticed to the trap : he practised thus with me
 " That so, whatever were his gain thereby, 1365
 " Others than I might become prey and spoil.
 " Had it been only between our two selves,—
 " His pleasure and my pain,—why, pleasure him
 " By dying, nor such need to make a coil !
 " But this was worth an effort, that my pain 1370
 " Should not become a snare, prove pain threefold
 " To other people—strangers—or unborn—
 " How should I know ? I sought release from that—
 " I think, or else from,—dare I say, some cause
 " Such as is put into a tree, which turns 1375
 " Away from the north wind with what nest it holds,—
 " The woman said that trees so turn : now, friend,
 " Tell me, because I cannot trust myself !

“You are a man : what have I done amiss?”

You must conceive my answer,—I forget— 1380

Taken up wholly with the thought, perhaps,

This time she might have said,—might, did not say—

“You are a priest.” She said, “my friend.”

Day wore,

We passed the places, somehow the calm went, 1385

Again the restless eyes began to rove

In new fear of the foe mine could not see :

She wandered in her mind,—addressed me once

“Gaetano!”—that is not my name : whose name?

I grew alarmed, my head seemed turning too : 1390

I quickened pace with promise now, now threat :

Bade drive and drive, nor any stopping more.

“Too deep i’ the thick of the struggle, struggle through !

“Then drench her in repose though death’s self pour

“The plenitude of quiet,—help us, God, 1395

“Whom the winds carry !”

Suddenly I saw.

The old tower, and the little white-walled clump

Of buildings and the cypress-tree or two,—

“Already Castelnuovo—Rome !” I cried, 1400

“As good as Rome,—Rome is the next stage, think !

"This is where travellers' hearts are wont to beat.
 "Say you are saved, sweet lady!" Up she woke.
 The sky was fierce with colour from the sun
 Setting. She screamed out "No, I must not die! 1405
 "Take me no farther, I should die : stay here !
 "I have more life to save than mine !"

She swooned.

We seemed safe : what was it foreboded so?
 Out of the coach into the inn I bore 1410
 The motionless and breathless pure and pale
 Pompilia,—bore her through a pitying group
 And laid her on a couch, still calm and cured
 By deep sleep of all woes at once. The host
 Was urgent "Let her stay an hour or two! 1415
 "Leave her to us, all will be right by morn!"
 Oh, my foreboding! But I could not choose.

I paced the passage, kept watch all night long.
 I listened,—not one movement, not one sigh.
 "Fear not : she sleeps so sound!" they said—but I
 Feared, all the same, kept fearing more and more, 1421
 Found myself throb with fear from head to foot,
 Filled with a sense of such impending woe,
 That, at first pause of night, pretence of gray,

I made my mind up it was morn.—“ Reach Rome, 1425
 “ Lest hell reach her ! A dozen miles to make,
 “ Another long breath, and we emerge ! ” I stood
 I’ the court-yard, roused the sleepy grooms. “ Have out
 “ Carriage and horse, give haste, take gold ! ”—said I.
 While they made ready in the doubtful morn,— 1430
 ’T was the last minute,—needs must I ascend
 And break her sleep ; I turned to go.

And there

Faced me Count Guido, there posed the mean man
 As master,—took the field, encamped his rights, 1435
 Challenged the world : there leered new triumph, there
 Scowled the old malice in the visage bad
 And black o’ the scamp. Soon triumph suppld the
 tongue

A little, malice glued to his dry throat,
 And he part howled, part hissed . . oh, how he kept
 Well out o’ the way, at arm’s length and to spare ! —
 “ My salutation to your priestship ! What ? 1442
 “ Matutinal, busy with book so soon
 “ Of an April day that ’s damp as tears that now
 “ Deluge Arezzo at its darling’s flight?— 1445
 “ ’T is unfair, wrongs feminity at large,
 “ To let a single dame monopolize

- " A heart the whole sex claims, should share alike :
 " Therefore I overtake you, Canon ! Come !
 " The lady,—could you leave her side so soon ? 1450
 " You have not yet experienced at her hands
 " My treatment, you lay down undrugged, I see !
 " Hence this alertness—hence no death-in-life
 " Like what held arms fast when she stole from mine.
 " To be sure, you took the solace and repose 1455
 " That first night at Foligno !—news abound
 " O' the road by this time,—men regaled me much,
 " As past them I came halting after you,
 " Vulcan pursuing Mars, as poets sing,—
 " Still at the last here pant I, but arrive, 1460
 " Vulcan—and not without my Cyclops too,
 " The Commissary and the unpoisoned arm
 " O' the Civil Force, should Mars turn mutineer.
 " Enough of fooling : capture the culprits, friend !
 " Here is the lover in the smart disguise 1465
 " With the sword,—he is a priest, so mine lies still :
 " There upstairs hides my wife the runaway,
 " His leman : the two plotted, poisoned first,
 " Plundered me after, and eloped thus far 1469
 " Where now you find them. Do your duty quick !
 " Arrest and hold him ! That 's done : now catch her ! "

During this speech of that man,—well, I stood 1472
 Away, as he managed,—still, I stood as near
 The throat of him,—with these two hands, my own,—
 As now I stand near yours, Sir,—one quick spring, 1475
 One great good satisfying gripe, and lo !
 There had he lain abolished with his lie,
 Creation purged o' the miscreate, man redeemed,
 A spittle wiped off from the face of God !
 I, in some measure, seek a poor excuse 1480
 For what I left undone, in just this fact
 That my first feeling at the speech I quote
 Was—not of what a blasphemy was dared,
 Not what a bag of venom'd purulence
 Was split and noisome,—but how splendidly 1485
 Mirthful, what ludicrous a lie was launched !
 Would Molière's self wish more than hear such man
 Call, claim such woman for his own, his wife
 Even though, in due amazement at the boast,
 He had stammered, she moreover was divine ? 1490
 She to be his,—were hardly less absurd
 Than that he took her name into his mouth,
 Licked, and then let it go again, the beast,
 Signed with his slaver. Oh, she poisoned him,
 Plundered him, and the rest ! Well, what I wished 1495

Was, that he would but go on, say once more
 So to the world, and get his meed of men,
 The fist's reply to the filth. And while I mused,
 The minute, oh the misery, was gone !
 On either idle hand of me there stood 1500
 Really an officer, nor laughed i' the least
 They rendered justice to his reason, laid
 Logic to heart, as 't were submitted them
 " Twice two makes four."

" And now, catch her !"—he cried.

That sobered me. " Let myself lead the way— 1506
 " Ere you arrest me, who am somebody,
 " And, as you hear, a priest and privileged,—
 " To the lady's chamber ! I presume you—men
 " Expert, instructed how to find out truth, 1510
 " Familiar with the guise of guilt. Detect
 " Guilt on her face when it meets mine, then judge
 " Between us and the mad dog howling there !"
 Up we all went together, in they broke
 O' the chamber late my chapel. There she lay, 1515
 Composed as when I laid her, that last eve,
 O' the couch, still breathless, motionless, sleep's self,
 Wax-white, seraphic, saturate with the sun
 O' the morning that now flooded from the front

And filled the window with a light like blood. 1520

“ Behold the poisoner, the adulteress,

“ —And feigning sleep too ! Seize, bind ! ”—Guido hissed.

She started up, stood erect, face to face

With the husband : back he fell, was buttressed there

By the window all a-flame with morning-red, 1525

He the black figure, the opprobrious blur

Against all peace and joy and light and life.

“ Away from between me and hell ! ”—she cried :

“ Hell for me, no embracing any more !

“ I am God’s, I love God, God—whose knees I clasp,

“ Whose utterly most just award I take, 1531

“ But bear no more love-making devils : hence ! ”

I may have made an effort to reach her side

From where I stood i’ the door-way,—anyhow

I found the arms, I wanted, pinioned fast, 1535

Was powerless in the clutch to left and right

O’ the rabble pouring in, rascality

Enlisted, rampant on the side of hearth

Home and the husband,—pay in prospect too !

They heaped themselves upon me.—“ Ha !—and him

“ Also you outrage ? Him, too, my sole friend, 1541

“ Guardian and saviour ? That I baulk you of,

" Since—see how God can help at last and worst !"
 She sprung at the sword that hung beside him, seized,
 Drew, brandished it, the sunrise burned for joy 1545
 O' the blade, " Die," cried she, " devil, in God's name !"
 Ah, but they all closed round her, twelve to one
 —The unmanly men, no woman-mother made,
 Spawned somehow ! Dead-white and disarmed she lay.
 No matter for the sword, her word sufficed 1550
 To spike the coward through and through : he shook,
 Could only spit between the teeth—" You see ?
 " You hear ? Bear witness, then ! Write down . . but no—
 " Carry these criminals to the prison-house,
 " For first thing ! I begin my search meanwhile 1555
 " After the stolen effects, gold, jewels, plate,
 " Money and clothes, they robbed me of and fled
 " With no few amorous pieces, verse and prose,
 " I have much reason to expect to find."

When I saw that—no more than the first mad speech,
 Made out the speaker mad and a laughing-stock, 1561
 So neither did this next device explode
 One listener's indignation,—that a scribe
 Did sit down ; set himself to write indeed,
 And sundry knaves began to peer and pry 1565

In corner and hole,—that Guido, wiping brow
 And getting him a countenance, was fast
 Losing his fear, beginning to strut free
 O' the stage of his exploit, snuff here, sniff there,—
 Then I took truth in, guessed sufficiently 1570
 The service for the moment. “ What I say,
 “ Slight at your peril ! We are aliens here,
 “ My adversary and I, called noble both ;
 “ I am the nobler, and a name men know.
 “ I could refer our cause to our own court 1575
 “ In our own country, but prefer appeal
 “ To the nearer jurisdiction. Being a priest,
 “ Though in a secular garb,—for reasons good
 “ I shall adduce in due time to my peers,—
 “ I demand that the Church I serve, decide 1580
 “ Between us, right the slandered lady there.
 “ A Tuscan noble, I might claim the Duke :
 “ A priest, I rather choose the Church,—bid Rome
 “ Cover the wronged with her inviolate shield.”

There was no refusing this : they bore me off, 1585
 They bore her off, to separate cells o' the same
 Ignoble prison, and, separate, thence to Rome.
 Pompilia's face, then and thus, looked on me

The last time in this life : not one sight since,
 Never another sight to be ! And yet 1590
 I thought I had saved her. I appealed to Rome :
 It seems I simply sent her to her death.
 You tell me she is dying now, or dead ;
 I cannot bring myself to quite believe
 This is a place you torture people in : 1595
 What if this your intelligence were just
 A subtlety, an honest wile to work
 On a man at unawares ? 'T were worthy you.
 No, Sirs, I cannot have the lady dead !
 That erect form, flashing brow, fulgurant eye, 1600
 That voice immortal (oh, that voice of hers !)
 That vision in the blood-red day-break—that
 Leap to life of the pale electric sword
 Angels go armed with,—that was not the last
 O' the lady ! Come, I see through it, you find— 1605
 Know the manoeuvre ! Also herself said
 I had saved her : do you dare say she spoke false ?
 Let me see for myself if it be so !
 Though she were dying, a Priest might be of use,
 The more when he's a friend too,—she called me 1610
 Far beyond "friend." Come, let me see her—indeed
 It is my duty, being a priest : I hope

I stand confessed, established, proved a priest?
My punishment had motive that, a priest
I, in a laic garb, a mundane mode, 1615
Did what were harmlessly done otherwise.
I never touched her with my finger-tip
Except to carry her to the couch, that eve,
Against my heart, beneath my head, bowed low,
As we priests carry the paten : that is why 1620
—To get leave and go see her of your grace—
I have told you this whole story over again.
Do I deserve grace? For I might lock lips,
Laugh at your jurisdiction : what have you
To do with me in the matter? I suppose 1625
You hardly think I donned a bravo's dress
To have a hand in the new crime ; on the old,
Judgment's delivered, penalty imposed,
I was chained fast at Civita hand and foot—
She had only you to trust to, you and Rome, 1630
Rome and the Church, and no pert meddling priest
Two days ago, when Guido, with the right,
Hacked her to pieces. One might well be wroth ;
I have been patient, done my best to help :
I come from Civita and punishment 1635
As friend of the court—and for pure friendship's sake

Have told my tale to the end,—nay, not the end—
For, wait—I'll end—not leave you that excuse !

When we were parted,—shall I go on there ?

I was presently brought to Rome—yes, here I stood
Opposite yonder very crucifix—

1641

And there sat you and you, Sirs, quite the same.

I heard charge, and bore question, and told tale
Noted down in the book there,—turn and see

If, by one jot or tittle, I vary now !

1645

I' the colour the tale takes, there 's change perhaps ;

'T is natural, since the sky is different,

Eclipse in the air now ; still, the outline stays.

I showed you how it came to be my part

To save the lady. Then your clerk produced

1650

Papers, a pack of stupid and impure

Banalities called letters about love—

Love, indeed,—I could teach who stiled them so,

Better, I think, though priest and loveless both !

“ —How was it that a wife, young, innocent,

1655

“ And stranger to your person, wrote this page ? ”—

“ —She wrote it when the Holy Father wrote

“ The bestiality that posts thro' Rome,

“ Put in his mouth by Pasquin.”—“ Nor perhaps

- “ Did you return these answers, verse and prose, 1660
“ Signed, sealed and sent the lady? There’s your hand !”
“ —This precious piece of verse, I really judge
“ Is meant to copy my own character,
“ A clumsy mimic ; and this other prose,
“ Not so much even ; both rank forgery : 1665
“ Verse, quotha ? Bembo’s verse ! When Saint John wrote
“ The tract ‘ *De Tribus*,’ I wrote this to match.”
“ —How came it, then, the documents were found
“ At the inn on your departure ? ” — “ I opine,
“ Because there were no documents to find 1670
“ In my presence,—you must hide before you find.
“ Who forged them, hardly practised in my view ;
“ Who found them, waited till I turned my back.”
“ —And what of the clandestine visits paid,
“ Nocturnal passage in and out the house 1675
“ With its lord absent ? ’T is alleged you climbed . . .
“ —Flew on a broomstick to the man i’ the moon !
“ Who witnessed or will testify this trash ? ”
“ —The trusty servant, Margherita’s self,
“ Even she who brought you letters, you confess, 1680
“ And, you confess, took letters in reply :
“ Forget not we have knowledge of the facts ! ”
“ —Sirs, who have knowledge of the facts, defray

- " The expenditure of wit I waste in vain,
 " Trying to find out just one fact of all ! 1685
 " She who brought letters from who could not write,
 " And took back letters to who could not read,—
 " Who was that messenger, of your charity?"
 " —Well, so far favours you the circumstance
 " That this same messenger . . . how shall we say? . . .
 " *Sub imputatione meretricis* 1691
 " *Laborat*,—which makes accusation null :
 " We waive this woman's :—nought makes void the
 next.
 " Borsi, called Venerino, he who drove,
 " O' the first night when you fled away, at length 1695
 " Deposits to your kissings in the coach,
 " —Frequent, frenetic . . . " "When deposed he so?"
 " After some weeks of sharp imprisonment . . ."
 " —Granted by friend the Governor, I engage—"
 " —For his participation in your flight ! 1700
 " At length his obduracy melting made
 " The avowal mentioned . . ." "Was dismissed forthwith
 " To liberty, poor knave, for recompense.
 " Sirs, give what credit to the lie you can !
 " For me, no word in my defence I speak, 1705
 " And God shall argue for the lady ! "

So

Did I stand question, and make answer, still
 With the same result of smiling disbelief,
 Polite impossibility of faith 1710
 In such affected virtue in a priest ;
 But a showing fair play, an indulgence, even,
 To one no worse than others after all—
 Who had not brought disgrace to the order, played
 Discreetly, ruffled gown nor ripped the cloth 1715
 In a bungling game at romps : I have told you, Sirs—
 If I pretended simply to be pure
 Honest and Christian in the case,—absurd !
 As well go boast myself above the needs
 O' the human nature, careless how meat smells, 1720
 Wine tastes,—a saint above the smack ! But once
 Abate my crest, own flaws i' the flesh, agree
 To go with the herd, be hog no more nor less,
 Why, hogs in common herd have common rights—
 I must not be unduly borne upon, 1725
 Who just romanced a little, sowed wild oats,
 But 'scaped without a scandal, flagrant fault.
 My name helped to a mirthful circumstance :
 “ Joseph ” would do well to amend his plea :
 Undoubtedly—some toying with the wife, 1730

But as for ruffian violence and rape,
 Potiphar pressed too much on the other side !
 The intrigue, the elopement, the disguise,—well charged !
 The letters and verse looked hardly like the truth.
 Your apprehension was—of guilt enough 1735
 To be compatible with innocence,
 So, punished best a little and not too much.
 Had I struck Guido Franceschini's face,
 You had counselled me withdraw for my own sake,
 Baulk him of bravo-hiring. Friends came round, 1740
 Congratulated, " Nobody mistakes !
 " The pettiness o' the forfeiture defines
 " The peccadillo : Guido gets his share :
 " His wife is free of husband and hook-nose,
 " The mouldy viands and the mother-in-law. 1745
 " To Civita with you and amuse the time,
 " Travesty us '*De Raptu Helenæ* !'
 " A funny figure must the husband cut
 " When the wife makes him skip,—too ticklish, eh ?
 " Do it in Latin, not the Vulgar, then ! 1750
 " Scazons—we 'll copy and send his Eminence !
 " Mind—one iambus in the final foot !
 " He 'll rectify it, be your friend for life !"
 Oh, Sirs, depend on me for much new light

- Thrown on the justice and religion here 1755
 By this proceeding, much fresh food for thought !
- And I was just set down to study these
 In relegation, two short days ago,
 Admiring how you read the rules, when, clap,
 A thunder comes into my solitude— 1760
 I am caught up in a whirlwind and cast here,
 Told of a sudden, in this room where so late
 You dealt out law adroitly, that those scales,
 I meekly bowed to, took my allotment from,
 Guido has snatched at, broken in your hands, 1765
 Metes to himself the murder of his wife,
 Full measure, pressed down, running over now !
 Can I assist to an explanation?—Yes,
 I rise in your esteem, sagacious Sirs,
 Stand up a renderer of reasons, not 1770
 The officious priest would personate Saint George
 For a mock Princess in undragoned days.
 What, the blood startles you? What, after all
 The priest who needs must carry sword on thigh
 May find imperative use for it? Then, there was 1775
 A Princess, was a dragon belching flame,
 And should have been a Saint George also? Then,

There might be worse schemes than to break the bonds
 At Arezzo, lead her by the little hand,
 Till she reached Rome, and let her try to live? 1780
 But you were law and gospel,—would one please
 Stand back, allow your faculty elbow-room?
 You blind guides who must needs lead eyes that see!
 Fools, alike ignorant of man and God! 1784
 What was there here should have perplexed your wit
 For a wink of the owl-eyes of you? How miss, then,
 What's now forced on you by this flare of fact—
 As if Saint Peter failed to recognise
 Nero as no apostle, John or James,
 Till someone burned a martyr, made a torch 1790
 O' the blood and fat to show his features by!
 Could you fail read this cartulary aright
 On head and front of Franceschini there,
 Large-lettered like hell's masterpiece of print,—
 That he, from the beginning pricked at heart 1795
 By some lust, letch of hate against his wife,
 Plotted to plague her into overt sin
 And shame, would slay Pompilia body and soul,
 And save his mean self—miserably caught
 I' the quagmire of his own tricks, cheats and lies? 1800
 —That himself wrote those papers,—from himself

To himself,—which, i' the name of me and her,
 His mistress-messenger gave her and me,
 Touching us with such pustules of the soul
 That she and I might take the taint, be shown 1805
 To the world and shuddered over, speckled so?
 —That the agent put her sense into my words,
 Made substitution of the thing she hoped,
 For the thing she had and held, its opposite,
 While the husband in the background bit his lips 1810
 At each fresh failure of his precious plot?
 —That when at the last we did rush each on each,
 By no chance but because God willed it so—
The spark of truth was struck from out our souls—
 Made all of me, descried in the first glance, 1815
 Seem fair and honest and permissible love
 O' the good and true—as the first glance told me
 There was no duty patent in the world
 Like daring try be good and true myself,
 Leaving the shows of things to the Lord of Show 1820
 And Prince o' the Power of the Air. Our very flight,
 Even to its most ambiguous circumstance,
 Irrefragably proved how futile, false . . .
 Why, men—men and not boys—boys and not babes—
 Babes and not beasts—beasts and not stocks and stones!—

*Went to the
1810
1815*

Had the liar's lie been true one pin-point speck, 1826
Were I the accepted suitor, free o' the place,
Disposer of the time, to come at a call
And go at a wink as who should say me nay,—
What need of flight, what were the gain therefrom 1830
But just damnation, failure or success?
Damnation pure and simple to her the wife
And me the priest—who bartered private bliss
For public reprobation, the safe shade
For the sunshine which men see to pelt me by : 1835
What other advantage,—we who led the days
And nights alone i' the house,—was flight to find?
In our whole journey did we stop an hour,
Diverge a foot from strait road till we reached
Or would have reached—but for that fate of ours— 1840
'The father and mother, in the eye of Rome,
The eye of yourselves we made aware of us
At the first fall of misfortune? And indeed
You did so far give sanction to our flight,
Confirm its purpose, as lend helping hand, 1845
Deliver up Pompilia not to him
She fled, but those the flight was ventured for.
Why then could you, who stopped short, not go on
One poor step more, and justify the means,

Having allowed the end?—not see and say 1850
 “ Here ’s the exceptional conduct that should claim
 “ To be exceptionally judged on rules
 “ Which, understood, make no exception here ”—
 Why play instead into the devil’s hands
 By dealing so ambiguously as gave 1855
 Guido the power to intervene like me,
 Prove one exception more? I saved his wife
 Against law : against law he slays her now :
 Deal with him !

I have done with being judged. 1860

I stand here guiltless in thought, word and deed,
 To the point that I apprise you,—in contempt
 For all misapprehending ignorance
 O’ the human heart, much more the mind of Christ,—
 That I assuredly did bow, was blessed 1865
 By the revelation of Pompilia. There !
 Such is the final fact I fling you, Sirs,
 To mouth and mumble and misinterpret : there !
 “ The priest ’s in love,” have it the vulgar way !
 Unpriest me, rend the rags o’ the vestment, do— 1870
 Degrade deep, disenfranchise all you dare—
 Remove me from the midst, no longer priest

And fit companion for the like of you—
 Your gay Abati with the well-turned leg
 And rose i' the hat-rim, Canons, cross at neck 1875
 And silk mask in the pocket of the gown,
 Brisk bishops with the world's musk still unbrushed
 From the rochet ; I 'll no more of these good things :
 There 's a crack somewhere, something that 's unsound
 I' the rattle ! 1880

For Pompilia—be advised,
 Build churches, go pray ! You will find me there,
 I know, if you come,—and you will come, I know.
 Why, there 's a Judge weeping ! Did not I say
 You were good and true at bottom ? You see the truth—
 I am glad I helped you : she helped me just so. 1886

But for Count Guido,—you must counsel there !
 I bow my head, bend to the very dust,
 Break myself up in shame of faultiness.
 I had him one whole moment, as I said— 1890
 As I remember, as will never out
 O' the thoughts of me,—I had him in arm's reach
 There,—as you stand, Sir, now you cease to sit,—
 I could have killed him ere he killed his wife,

And did not : he went off alive and well . 1895
 And then effected this last feat—through me !
 Me—not through you—dismiss that fear ! 'T was you
 Hindered me staying here to save her,—not
 From leaving you and going back to him
 And doing service in Arezzo. Come, 1900
 Instruct me in procedure ! I conceive—
 In all due self-abasement might I speak—
 How you will deal with Guido : oh, not death !
 Death, if it let her life be : otherwise
 Not death,—your lights will teach you clearer ! I 1905
 Certainly have an instinct of my own
 I' the matter : bear with me and weigh its worth !
 Let us go away—leave Guido all alone
 Back on the world again that knows him now !
 I think he will be found (indulge so far !) 1910
 Not to die so much as slide out of life,
 Pushed by the general horror and common hate
 Low, lower,—left o' the very ledge of things,
 I seem to see him catch convulsively
 One by one at all honest forms of life, 1915
 At reason, order, decency and use—
 To cramp him and get foothold by at least ;
 And still they disengage them from his clutch.

"What, you are he, then, had Pompilia once
 "And so forwent her? Take not up with us!" 1920
 And thus I see him slowly and surely edged
 Off all the table-land whence life upsprings
 Aspiring to be immortality,
 As the snake, hatched on hill-top by mischance,
 Despite his wriggling, slips, slides, slidders down 1925
 Hill-side, lies low and prostrate on the smooth
 Level of the outer place, lapsed in the vale:
 So I lose Guido in the loneliness,
 Silence and dusk, till at the doleful end,
 At the horizontal line, creation's verge, 1930
 From what just is to absolute nothingness—
 Whom is it, straining onward still, he meets?
 What other man deep further in the fate,
 Who, turning at the prize of a footfall
 To flatter him and promise fellowship, 1935
 Discovers in the act a frightful face—
 Judas, made monstrous by much solitude!
 The two are at one now! Let them love their love
 That bites and claws like hate, or hate their hate
 That mops and mows and makes as it were love! 1940
 There, let them each tear each in devil's-fun,
 Or fondle this the other while malice aches—

- Both teach, both learn detestability !
 Kiss him the kiss, Iscariot ! Pay that back,
 That smatch o' the slaver blistering on your lip, 1945
 By the better trick, the insult he spared Christ—
 Lure him the lure o' the letters, Aretine !
 Lick him o'er slimy-smooth with jelly-filth
 O' the verse-and-prose pollution in love's guise !
 The cockatrice is with the basilisk ! 1950
 There let them grapple, denizens o' the dark,
 Foes or friends, but indissolubly bound,
 In their one spot out of the ken of God
 Or care of man, for ever and ever more !
- Why, Sirs, what 's this ? Why, this is sorry and strange !
 Futility, divagation : this from me 1956
 Bound to be rational, justify an act
 Of sober man !—whereas, being moved so much,
 I give you cause to doubt the lady's mind :
 A pretty sarcasm for the world ! I fear 1960
 You do her wit injustice,—all through me !
 Like my fate all through,—ineffective help !
 A poor rash advocate I prove myself.
 You might be angry with good cause : but sure
 At the advocate,—only at the undue zeal 1965

That spoils the force of his own plea, I think ?
 My part was just to tell you how things stand,
 State facts and not be flustered at their fume.
 But then 't is a priest speaks : as for love,—no !
 If you let buzz a vulgar fly like that 1970
 About your brains, as if I loved, forsooth,
 Indeed, Sirs, you do wrong ! We had no thought
 Of such infatuation, she and I :
 There are many points that prove it : do be just !
 I told you,—at one little roadside-place 1975
 I spent a good half-hour, paced to and fro
 The garden ; just to leave her free awhile,
 I plucked a handful of Spring herb and bloom :
 I might have sat beside her on the bench
 Where the children were : I wish the thing had been,
 Indeed : the event could not be worse, you know : 1981
 One more half-hour of her saved ! She 's dead now, Sirs !
 While I was running on at such a rate,
 Friends should have plucked me by the sleeve : I went
 Too much o' the trivial outside of her face 1985
 And the purity that shone there—plain to me,
 Not to you, what more natural ? Nor am I
 Infatuated,—oh, I saw, be sure !
 Her brow had not the right line, leaned too much,

Painters would say ; they like the straight-up Greek :
 This seemed bent somewhat with an invisible crown
 Of martyr and saint, not such as art approves. 1992
 And how the dark orbs dwelt deep underneath,
 Looked out of such a sad sweet heaven on me—
 The lips, compressed a little, came forward too, 1995
 Careful for a whole world of sin and pain.
 That was the face, her husband makes his plea,
 He sought just to disfigure,—no offence
 Beyond that ! Sirs, let us be rational !
 He needs must vindicate his honour,—ay, 2000
 Yet shirks, the coward, in a clown's disguise,
 Away from the scene, endeavours to escape.
 Now, had he done so, slain and left no trace
 O' the slayer,—what were vindicated, pray ?
 You had found his wife disfigured or a corpse, 2005
 For what and by whom ? It is too palpable !
 Then, here's another point involving law :
 I use this argument to show you meant
 No calumny against us by that title
 O' the sentence,—liars try to twist it so : 2010
 What penalty it bore, I had to pay
 Till further proof should follow of innocence—
Probationis ob defectum, —proof ?

How could you get proof without trying us ?
You went through the preliminary form, 2015
Stopped there, contrived this sentence to amuse
The adversary. If the title ran
For more than fault imputed and not proved,
That was a simple penman's error, else
A slip i' the phrase,—as when we say of you 2020
“ Charged with injustice ”—which may either be
Or not be,—'tis a name that sticks meanwhile.
Another relevant matter : fool that I am !
Not what I wish true, yet a point friends urge :
It is not true,—yet, since friends think it helps,— 2025
She only tried me when some others failed—
Began with Conti, whom I told you of,
And Guillichini, Guido's kinsfolk both,
And when abandoned by them, not before,
Turned to me. That 's conclusive why she turned. 2030
Much good they got by the happy cowardice !
Conti is dead, poisoned a month ago :
Does that much strike you as a sin ? Not much,
After the present murder,—one mark more
On the Moor's skin,—what is black by blacker still ?
Conti had come here and told truth. And so 2036
With Guillichini ; he's condemned of course

To the galleys, as a friend in this affair,
Tried and condemned for no one thing i' the world,
A fortnight since by who but the Governor?— 2040
The just judge, who refused Pompilia help
At first blush, being her husband's friend, you know.
There are two tales to suit the separate courts,
Arezzo and Rome : he tells you here, we fled
Alone, unhelped,—lays stress on the main fault, 2045
The spiritual sin, Rome looks to : but elsewhere
He likes best we should break in, steal, bear off,
Be fit to brand and pillory and flog—
That's the charge goes to the heart of the Governor :
If these unpriest me, you and I may yet 2050
Converse, Vincenzo Marzi-Medici !
Oh, Sirs, there are worse men than you, I say !
More easily duped, I mean ; this stupid lie,
Its liar never dared propound in Rome,
He gets Arezzo to receive,—nay more, 2055
Gets Florence and the Duke to authorise !
This is their Rota's sentence, their Granduke
Signs and seals ! Rome for me henceforward—Rome,
Where better men are,—most of all, that man
The Augustinian of the Hospital, 2060
Who writes the letter,—he confessed, he says,

Many a dying person, never one
So sweet and true and pure and beautiful.
A good man ! Will you make him Pope one day ?
Not that he is not good too, this we have— 2065
But old,—else he would have his word to speak,
His truth to teach the world : I thirst for truth,
But shall not drink it till I reach the source.

Sirs, I am quiet again. You see, we are
So very pitiable, she and I, 2070
Who had conceivably been otherwise.
Forget distemperature and idle heat !
Apart from truth's sake, what 's to move so much ?
Pompilia will be presently with God ;
I am, on earth, as good as out of it, 2075
A relegated priest ; when exile ends,
I mean to do my duty and live long.
She and I are mere strangers now : but priests
Should study passion ; how else cure mankind,
Who come for help in passionate extremes ? 2080
I do but play with an imagined life
Of who, unfettered by a vow, unblessed
By the higher call,—since you will have it so,—
Leads it companioned by the woman there.

- To live, and see her learn, and learn by her, 2085
 Out of the low obscure and petty world—
 Or only see one purpose and one will
 Evolve themselves i' the world, change wrong to right :
 To have to do with nothing but the true,
 The good, the eternal—and these, not alone 2090
 In the main current of the general life,
 But small experiences of every day,
 Concerns of the particular hearth and home :
 To learn not only by a comet's rush
 But a rose's birth,—not by the grandeur, God— 2095
 But the comfort, Christ. All this, how far away !
 Mere delectation, meet for a minute's dream !—
 Just as a drudging student trims his lamp,
 Opens his Plutarch, puts him in the place
 Of Roman, Grecian ; draws the patched gown close,
 Dreams, “ Thus should I fight, save or rule the world ! ”—
 Then smilingly, contentedly, awakes 2102
 To the old solitary nothingness.
 So I, from such communion, pass content . . .
- O great, just, good God ! Miserable me ! 2105

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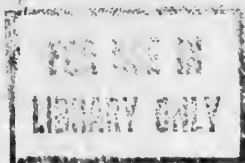




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