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THE
RING AND THE BOOK.

BY

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IN FOUR VOLUMES.

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THE
RING AND THE BOOK.

I.

THE RING AND THE BOOK.

Do you see this Ring?

'T is Rome-work, made to match

(By Castellani's imitative craft)

Etrurian circlets found, some happy morn,

After a dropping April; found alive 5

Spark-like 'mid unearthed slope-side figtree-roots

That roof old tombs at Chiusi: soft, you see,

Yet crisp as jewel-cutting. There's one trick,

(Craftsmen instruct me) one approved device

And but one, fits such slivers of pure gold 10

As this was,—such mere oozings from the mine,
Virgin as oval tawny pendent tear
At beehive-edge when ripened combs o'erflow,—
To bear the file's tooth and the hammer's tap :
Since hammer needs must widen out the round, 15
And file emboss it fine with lily-flowers,
Ere the stuff grow a ring-thing right to wear.
That trick is, the artificer melts up wax
With honey, so to speak ; he mingles gold
With gold's alloy, and, duly tempering both, 20
Effects a manageable mass, then works.
But his work ended, once the thing a ring,
Oh, there 's repristination ! Just a spirt
O' the proper fiery acid o'er its face,
And forth the alloy unfastened flies in fume ; 25
While, self-sufficient now, the shape remains,
The rondure brave, the liliated loveliness,
Gold as it was, is, shall be evermore :
Prime nature with an added artistry—
No carat lost, and you have gained a ring. 30

What of it? 'T is a figure, a symbol, say ;
A thing's sign : now for the thing signified.

Do you see this square old yellow Book, I toss
I' the air, and catch again, and twirl about
By the crumpled vellum covers,—pure crude fact 35
Secreted from man's life when hearts beat hard,
And brains, high-blooded, ticked two centuries since?
Examine it yourselves! I found this book,
Gave a *lira* for it, eightpence English just,
(Mark the predestination!) when a Hand, 40
Always above my shoulder, pushed me once,
One day still fierce 'mid many a day struck calm,
Across a Square in Florence, crammed with booths,
Buzzing and blaze, noontide and market-time ;
Toward Baccio's marble,—ay, the basement-ledge 45
O' the pedestal where sits and menaces
John of the Black Bands with the upright spear,
'Twixt palace and church,—Riccardi where they lived,
His race, and San Lorenzo where they lie.

This book,—precisely on that palace-step 50
 Which, meant for lounging knaves o' the Medici,
 Now serves re-venders to display their ware,—
 'Mongst odds and ends of ravage, picture-frames
 White through the worn gilt, mirror-sconces chipped,
 Bronze angel-heads once knobs attached to chests, 55
 (Handled when ancient dames chose forth brocade)
 Modern chalk drawings, studies from the nude,
 Samples of stone, jet, breccia, porphyry
 Polished and rough, sundry amazing busts
 In baked earth, (broken, Providence be praised !) 60
 A wreck of tapestry, proudly-purposed web
 When reds and blues were indeed red and blue,
 Now offered as a mat to save bare feet
 (Since carpets constitute a cruel cost)
 Treading the chill scagliola bedward : then 65
 A pile of brown-etched prints, two *crazie* each,
 Stopped by a conch a-top from fluttering forth
 —Sowing the Square with works of one and the same
 Master, the imaginative Sienese

Great in the scenic backgrounds—(name and fame 70

None of you know, nor does he fare the worse :)

From these . . . Oh, with a Lionard going cheap

If it should prove, as promised, that Joconde

Whereof a copy contents the Louvre!—these

I picked this book from. Five compeers in flank 75

Stood left and right of it as tempting more—

A dogseared Spicilegium, the fônd tale

O' the Frail One of the Flower, by young Dumas,

Vulgarized Horace for the use of schools,

The Life, Death, Miracles of Saint Somebody, 80

Saint Somebody Else, his Miracles, Death and Life,—

With this, one glance at the lettered back of which,

And “Stall!” cried I : a *lira* made it mine.

Here it is, this I toss and take again ;

Small-quarto size, part print part manuscript : 85

A book in shape but, really, pure crude fact

Secreted from man's life when hearts beat hard,

And brains, high-blooded, ticked two centuries since.

Give it me back ! The thing's restorative
I' the touch and sight.

90

That memorable day,
(June was the month, Lorenzo named the Square)
I leaned a little and overlooked my prize
By the low railing round the fountain-source
Close to the statue, where a step descends : 95
While clinked the cans of copper, as stooped and rose
Thick-ankled girls who brimmed them, and made place
For marketmen glad to pitch basket down,
Dip a broad melon-leaf that holds the wet,
And whisk their faded fresh. And on I read 100
Presently, though my path grew perilous
Between the outspread straw-work, piles of plait
Soon to be flapping, each o'er two black eyes
And swathe of Tuscan hair, on festas fine :
Through fire-irons, tribes of tongs, shovels in sheaves,
Skeleton bedsteads, wardrobe-drawers agape, 106
Rows of tall slim brass lamps with dangling gear,—

And worse, cast clothes a-sweetening in the sun :
 None of them took my eye from off my prize.
 Still read I on, from written title-page 110
 To written index, on, through street and street,
 At the Strozzi, at the Pillar, at the Bridge;
 Till, by the time I stood at home again
 In Casa Guidi by Felice Church,
 Under the doorway where the black begins 115
 With the first stone-slab of the staircase cold,
 I had mastered the contents, knew the whole truth
 Gathered together, bound up in this book,
 Print three-fifths, written supplement the rest.
 “ *Romana Homicidiorum* ”—nay, 120
 Better translate—“ A Roman murder-case :
 “ Position of the entire criminal cause
 “ Of Guido Franceschini, nobleman,
 “ With certain Four the cutthroats in his pay,
 “ Tried, all five, and found guilty and put to death 125
 “ By heading or hanging as befitted ranks,
 “ At Rome on February Twenty Two,

" Since our salvation Sixteen Ninety Eight :
 " Wherein it is disputed if, and when,
 " Husbands may kill adulterous wives, yet 'scape 130
 " The customary forfeit."

Word for word,

So ran the title-page : murder, or else
 Legitimate punishment of the other crime,
 Accounted murder by mistake,—just that 135
 And no more, in a Latin cramp enough
 When the law had her eloquence to launch,
 But interfilleted with Italian streaks
 When testimony stooped to mother-tongue,—
 That, was this old square yellow book about. 140

Now, as the ingot, ere the ring was forged,
 Lay gold, (beseech you, hold that figure fast !)
 So, in this book lay absolutely truth,
 Fanciless fact, the documents indeed,
 Primary lawyer-pleadings for, against, 145

The aforesaid Five ; real summed-up circumstance
Adduced in proof of these on either side,
Put forth and printed, as the practice was,
At Rome, in the Apostolic Chamber's type,
And so submitted to the eye o' the Court 150
Presided over by His Reverence
Rome's Governor and Criminal Judge,—the trial
Itself, to all intents, being then as now
Here in the book and nowise out of it ;
Seeing, there properly was no judgment-bar, 155
No bringing of accuser and accused,
And whoso judged both parties, face to face
Before some court, as we conceive of courts.
There was a Hall of Justice ; that came last :
For justice had a chamber by the hall 160
Where she took evidence first, summed up the same,
Then sent accuser and accused alike,
In person of the advocate of each,
To weigh that evidence' worth, arrange, array
The battle. 'T was the so-styled Fisc began, 165

Pleased (and since he only spoke in print
 The printed voice of him lives now as then)
 The public Prosecutor—"Murder's proved ;
 "With five . . . what we call qualities of bad,
 "Worse, worst, and yet worse still, and still worse yet ;
 "Crest over crest crowning the cockatrice, 171
 "That beggar hell's regalia to enrich
 "Count Guido Franceschini : punish him !"
 Thus was the paper put before the court
 In the next stage, (no noisy work at all,) 175
 To study at ease. In due time like reply
 Came from the so-styled Patron of the Poor,
 Official mouthpiece of the five accused
 Too poor to fee a better,—Guido's luck
 Or else his fellows', which, I hardly know,— 180
 An outbreak as of wonder at the world,
 A fury-fit of outraged innocence,
 A passion of betrayed simplicity :
 "Punish Count Guido? For what crime, what hint
 "O' the colour of a crime, inform us first ! 185

- " Reward him rather ! Recognize, we say,
 " In the deed done, a righteous judgment dealt !
 " All conscience and all courage,—there 's our Count
 " Charactered in a word ; and, what 's more strange,
 " He had companionship in privilege, 190
 " Found four courageous conscientious friends :
 " Absolve, applaud all five, as props of law,
 " Sustainers of society !—perchance
 " A trifle over-hasty with the hand
 " To hold her tottering ark, had tumbled else ; 195
 " But that 's a splendid fault whereat we wink,
 " Wishing your cold correctness sparkled so !"
 Thus paper second followed paper first,
 Thus did the two join issue—nay, the four,
 Each pleader having an adjunct. " True, he killed
 " —So to speak—in a certain sort—his wife, 201
 " But laudably, since thus it happed !" quoth one :
 Whereat, more witness and the case postponed.
 " Thus it happed not, since thus he did the deed,
 " And proved himself thereby portentousest 205

“ Of cutthroats and a prodigy of crime,

“ As the woman that he slaughtered was a saint,

“ Martyr and miracle !” quoth the other to match :

Again, more witness, and the case postponed.

“ A miracle, ay—of lust and impudence ; 210

“ Hear my new reasons !” interposed the first :

“ —Coupled with more of mine !” pursued his peer.

“ Beside, the precedents, the authorities !”

From both at once a cry with an echo, that !

That was a firebrand at each fox’s tail 215

Unleashed in a cornfield : soon spread flare enough,

As hurtled thither and there heaped themselves

From earth’s four corners, all authority

And precedent for putting wives to death,

Or letting wives live, sinful as they seem. 220

How legislated, now, in this respect,

Solon and his Athenians? Quote the code

Of Romulus and Rome ! Justinian speak !

Nor modern Baldo, Bartolo be dumb !

The Roman voice was potent, plentiful ; 225

Cornelia de Sicariis hurried to help

Pompeia de Parricidiis; *Julia de*

Something-or-other jostled *Lex* this-and-that ;

King Solomon confirmed Apostle Paul :

That nice decision of Dolabella, eh ? 230

That pregnant instance of Theodoric, oh !

Down to that choice example Ælian gives

(An instance I find much insisted on)

Of the elephant who, brute-beast though he were,

Yet understood and punished on the spot 235

His master's naughty spouse and faithless friend ;

A true tale which has edified each child,

Much more shall flourish favoured by our court !

Pages of proof this way, and that way proof,

And always—once again the case postponed. 240

Thus wrangled, brangled, jangled they a month,

—Only on paper, pleadings all in print,

Nor ever was, except i' the brains of men,

More noise by word of mouth than you hear now—

Till the court cut all short with "Judged, your cause. 245

"Receive our sentence! Praise God! We pronounce

"Count Guido devilish and damnable:

"His wife Pompilia in thought, word and deed,

"Was perfect pure, he murdered her for that:

"As for the Four who helped the One, all Five— 250

"Why, let employer and hirelings share alike

"In guilt and guilt's reward, the death their due!"

So was the trial at end, do you suppose?

"Guilty you find him, death you doom him to?

"Ay, were not Guido, more than needs, a priest, 255

"Priest and to spare!"—this was a shot reserved;

I learn this from epistles which begin

Here where the print ends,—see the pen and ink

Of the advocate, the ready at a pinch!—

"My client boasts the clerkly privilege, 260

"Has taken minor orders many enough,

"Shows still sufficient chrism upon his pate

"To neutralize a blood-stain: *presbyter*,

- “ *Primæ tonsuræ, subdiaconus,*
 “ *Sacerdos,* so he slips from underneath 265
 “ Your power, the temporal, slides inside the robe
 “ Of mother Church : to her we make appeal
 “ By the Pope, the Church’s head !”
- A parlous plea;
- Put in with noticeable effect, it seems ; 270
 “ Since straight,”—resumes the zealous orator,
 Making a friend acquainted with the facts,—
 “ Once the word ‘ clericality ’ let fall,
 “ Procedure stopped and freer breath was drawn
 “ By all considerate and responsible Rome.” 275
 Quality took the decent part, of course ;
 Held by the husband, who was noble too :
 Or, for the matter of that, a churl would side
 With too-refined susceptibility,
 And honour which, tender in the extreme, 280
 Stung to the quick, must roughly right itself
 At all risks, not sit still and whine for law

As a Jew would, if you squeezed him to the wall,
 Brisk-trotting through the Ghetto. Nay, it seems,
 Even the Emperor's Envoy had his say 285
 To say on the subject ; might not see, unmoved,
 Civility menaced throughout Christendom
 By too harsh measure dealt her champion here.
 Lastly, what made all safe, the Pope was kind,
 From his youth up, reluctant to take life, 290
 If mercy might be just and yet show grace ;
 Much more unlikely then, in extreme age,
 To take a life the general sense bade spare.
 'T was plain that Guido would go scatheless yet.

But human promise, oh, how short of shine ! 295
 How topple down the piles of hope we rear !
 How history proves . . . nay, read Herodotus !
 Suddenly starting from a nap, as it were,
 A dog-sleep with one shut, one open orb,
 Cried the Pope's great self,—Innocent by name 300
 And nature too, and eighty-six years old,

Antonio Pignatelli of Naples, Pope

Who had trod many lands, known many deeds,

Probed many hearts, beginning with his own,

And now was far in readiness for God,— 305

'Twas he who first bade leave those souls in peace,

Those Jansenists, re-nicknamed Molinists,

('Gainst whom the cry went, like a frowsy tune,

Tickling men's ears—the sect for a quarter of an hour

I' the teeth of the world which, clown-like, loves to chew

Be it but a straw twixt work and whistling-while, 311

Taste some vituperation, bite away,

Whether at marjoram-sprig or garlic-clove,

Aught it may sport with, spoil, and then spit forth)

“ Leave them alone,” bade he, “ those Molinists ! 315

“ Who may have other light than we perceive,

“ Or why is it the whole world hates them thus ?”

Also he peeled off that last scandal-rag

Of Nepotism ; and so observed the poor

That men would merrily say, “ Halt, deaf and blind, 320

“ Who feed on fat things, leave the master's self

- " To gather up the fragments of his feast,
 " These be the nephews of Pope Innocent !—
 " His own meal costs but five carlines a day,
 " Poor-priest's allowance, for he claims no more." 325
 —He cried of a sudden, this great good old Pope,
 When they appealed in last resort to him,
 " I have mastered the whole matter : I nothing doubt.
 " Though Guido stood forth priest from head to heel,
 " Instead of, as alleged, a piece of one,— 330
 " And further, were he, from the tonsured scalp
 " To the sandaled sole of him, my son and Christ's,
 " Instead of touching us by finger-tip
 " As you assert, and pressing up so close
 " Only to set a blood-smutch on our robe,— 335
 " I and Christ would renounce all right in him.
 " Am I not Pope, and presently to die,
 " And busied how to render my account,
 " And shall I wait a day ere I decide
 " On doing or not doing justice here? 340
 " Cut off his head to-morrow by this time,

“ Hang up his four mates, two on either hand,

“ And end one business more ! ”

So said, so done—

Rather so writ, for the old Pope bade this, 345

I find, with his particular chirograph,

His own no such infirm hand, Friday night ;

And next day, February Twenty Two,

Since our salvation Sixteen Ninety Eight,

—Not at the proper head-and-hanging-place 350

On bridge-foot close by Castle Angelo,

Where custom somewhat staled the spectacle,

(’Twas not so well i’ the way of Rome, beside,

The noble Rome, the Rome of Guido’s rank)

But at the city’s newer gayer end,— 355

The cavalcading promenading place

Beside the gate and opposite the church

Under the Pincian gardens green with Spring,

’Neath the obelisk ’twixt the fountains in the Square,

Did Guido and his fellows find their fate, 360

All Rome for witness, and—my writer adds—
 Remonstrant in its universal grief,
 Since Guido had the suffrage of all Rome.

This is the bookful ; thus far take the truth,
 The untempered gold, the fact untampered with, 365
 The mere ring-metal ere the ring be made !
 And what has hitherto come of it ? Who preserves
 The memory of this Guido, and his wife
 Pompilia, more than Ademollo's name,
 The etcher of those prints, two *crazie* each, 370
 Saved by a stone from snowing broad the Square
 With scenic backgrounds ? Was this truth of force ?
 Able to take its own part as truth should,
 Sufficient, self-sustaining ? Why, if so—
 Yonder 's a fire, into it goes my book, 375
 As who shall say me nay, and what the loss ?
 You know the tale already : I may ask,
 Rather than think to tell you, more thereof,—
 Ask you not merely who were he and she,

Husband and wife, what manner of mankind, 380
But how you hold concerning this and that
Other yet-unnamed actor in the piece.
The young frank handsome courtly Canon, now,
The priest, declared the lover of the wife,
He who, no question, did elope with her, 385
For certain bring the tragedy about,
Giuseppe Caponsacchi ;—his strange course
I' the matter, was it right or wrong or both ?
Then the old couple, slaughtered with the wife
By the husband as accomplices in crime, 390
Those Comparini, Pietro and his spouse,—
What say you to the right or wrong of that,
When, at a known name whispered through the door
Of a lone villa on a Christmas night,
It opened that the joyous hearts inside 395
Might welcome as it were an angel-guest
Come in Christ's name to knock and enter, sup
And satisfy the loving ones he saved ;
And so did welcome devils and their death ?

I have been silent on that circumstance 400

Although the couple passed for close of kin

To wife and husband, were by some accounts

Pompilia's very parents : you know best.

Also that infant the great joy was for,

That Gaetano, the wife's two-weeks' babe, 405

The husband's first-born child, his son and heir,

Whose birth and being turned his night to day—

Why must the father kill the mother thus

Because she bore his son and saved himself?

Well, British Public, ye who like me not, 410

(God love you !) and will have your proper laugh

At the dark question, laugh it ! I laugh first.

Truth must prevail, the proverb vows ; and truth

—Here is it all i' the book at last, as first

There it was all i' the heads and hearts of Rome 415

Gentle and simple, never to fall nor fade

Nor be forgotten. Yet, a little while,

The passage of a century or so,

- Decads thrice five, and here 's time paid his tax,
 Oblivion gone home with her harvesting, 420
 And all left smooth again as scythe could shave.
 Far from beginning with you London folk,
 I took my book to Rome first, tried truth's power
 On likely people. "Have you met such names?
 "Is a tradition extant of such facts? 425
 "Your law-courts stand, your records frown a-row:
 "What if I rove and rummage?" "—Why, you'll
 waste
 "Your pains and end as wise as you began!"
 Everyone snickered: "names and facts thus old
 "Are newer much than Europe news we find 430
 "Down in to-day's *Diario*. Records, quotha?
 "Why, the French burned them, what else do the
 French?
 "The rap-and-rending nation! And it tells
 "Against the Church, no doubt,—another gird
 "At the Temporality, your Trial, of course?" 435
 "—Quite otherwise this time," submitted I;

- “ Clean for the Church and dead against the world,
“ The flesh and the devil, does it tell for once.”
“ —The rarer and the happier ! All the same,
“ Content you with your treasure of a book, 440
“ And waive what ’s wanting ! Take a friend’s advice !
“ It’s not the custom of the country. Mend
“ Your ways indeed and we may stretch a point :
“ Go get you manned by Manning and new-manned
“ By Newman and, mayhap, wise-manned to boot 445
“ By Wiseman, and we’ll see or else we won’t !
“ Thanks meantime for the story, long and strong,
“ A pretty piece of narrative enough,
“ Which scarce ought so to drop out, one would think,
“ From the more curious annals of our kind. 450
“ Do you tell the story, now, in off-hand style,
“ Straight from the book ? Or simply here and there,
“ (The while you vault it through the loose and large)
“ Hang to a hint ? Or is there book at all,
“ And don’t you deal in poetry, make-believe, 455
“ And the white lies it sounds like ? ”

Yes and no !

From the book, yes ; thence bit by bit I dug
The lingot truth, that memorable day,
Assayed and knew my piecemeal gain was gold,— 460
Yes ; but from something else surpassing that,
Something of mine which, mixed up with the mass,
Made it bear hammer and be firm to file.
Fancy with fact is just one fact the more ;
To-wit, that fancy has informed, transpierced, 465
Thridded and so thrown fast the facts else free,
As right through ring and ring runs the djereed
And binds the loose, one bar without a break.
I fused my live soul and that inert stuff,
Before attempting smithcraft, on the night 470
After the day when,—truth thus grasped and gained,—
The book was shut and done with and laid by
On the cream-coloured massive agate, broad
'Neath the twin cherubs in the tarnished frame
O' the mirror, tall thence to the ceiling-top. 475
And from the reading, and that slab I leant

My elbow on, the while I read and read,
I turned, to free myself and find the world,
And stepped out on the narrow terrace, built
Over the street and opposite the church, 480
And paced its lozenge-brickwork sprinkled cool ;
Because Felice-church-side stretched, a-glow
Through each square window fringed for festival,
Whence came the clear voice of the cloistered ones
Chanting a chant made for midsummer nights— 485
I know not what particular praise of God,
It always came and went with June. Beneath
I' the street, quick shown by openings of the sky
When flame fell silently from cloud to cloud,
Richer than that gold snow Jove rained on Rhodes, 490
The townsmen walked by twos and threes, and talked,
Drinking the blackness in default of air—
A busy human sense beneath my feet :
While in and out the terrace-plants, and round
One branch of tall datura, waxed and waned 495
The lamp-fly lured there, wanting the white flower.

Over the roof o' the lighted church I looked
A bowshot to the street's end, north away
Out of the Roman gate to the Roman road
By the river, till I felt the Apennine. 500
And there would lie Arezzo, the man's town,
The woman's trap and cage and torture-place,
Also the stage where the priest played his part,
A spectacle for angels, —ay, indeed,
There lay Arezzo ! Farther then I fared, 505
Feeling my way on through the hot and dense,
Romeward, until I found the wayside inn
By Castelnuovo's few mean hut-like homes
Huddled together on the hill-foot bleak,
Bare, broken only by that tree or two 510
Against the sudden bloody splendour poured
Cursewise in his departure by the day
On the low house-roof of that squalid inn
Where they three, for the first time and the last,
Husband and wife and priest, met face to face. 515
Whence I went on again, the end was near,

Step by step, missing none and marking all,
Till Rome itself, the ghastly goal, I reached.
Why, all the while,—how could it otherwise?—
The life in me abolished the death of things, 520
Deep calling unto deep : as then and there
Acted itself over again once more
The tragic piece. I saw with my own eyes
In Florence as I trod the terrace, breathed
The beauty and the fearfulness of night, 525
How it had run, this round from Rome to Rome—
Because, you are to know, they lived at Rome,
Pompilia's parents, as they thought themselves,
Two poor ignoble hearts who did their best
Part God's way, part the other way than God's, 530
To somehow make a shift and scramble through
The world's mud, careless if it splashed and spoiled,
Provided they might so hold high, keep clean
Their child's soul, one soul white enough for three,
And lift it to whatever star should stoop, 535
What possible sphere of purer life than theirs

Should come in aid of whiteness hard to save.
I saw the star stoop, that they strained to touch,
And did touch and depose their treasure on,
As Guido Franceschini took away 540
Pompilia to be his for evermore,
While they sang "Now let us depart in peace,
"Having beheld thy glory, Guido's wife!"
I saw the star supposed, but fog o' the fen,
Gilded star-fashion by a glint from hell ; 545
Having been heaved up, haled on its gross way,
By hands unguessed before, invisible help
From a dark brotherhood, and specially
Two obscure goblin creatures, fox-faced this,
Cat-clawed the other, called his next of kin 550
By Guido the main monster,—cloaked and caped,
Making as they were priests, to mock God more,—
Abate Paul, Canon Girolamo.
These who had rolled the starlike pest to Rome
And stationed it to suck up and absorb 555
The sweetness of Pompilia, rolled again

That bloated bubble, with her soul inside,
Back to Arezzo and a palace there—
Or say, a fissure in the honest earth
Whence long ago had curled the vapour first, 560
Blown big by nether fires to appal day :
It touched home, broke, and blasted far and wide.
I saw the cheated couple find the cheat
And guess what foul rite they were captured for,—
Too fain to follow over hill and dale 565
That child of theirs caught up thus in the cloud
And carried by the Prince o' the Power of the Air
Whither he would, to wilderness or sea.
I saw them, in the potency of fear,
Break somehow through the satyr-family 570
(For a grey mother with a monkey-mien,
Mopping and mowing, was apparent too,
As, confident of capture, all took hands
And danced about the captives in a ring)
—Saw them break through, breathe safe, at Rome again,
Saved by the selfish instinct, losing so 576

Their loved one left with haters. These I saw,
In recrudescency of baffled hate,
Prepare to wring the uttermost revenge
From body and soul thus left them : all was sure, 580
Fire laid and cauldron set, the obscene ring traced,
The victim stripped and prostrate : what of God ?
The cleaving of a cloud, a cry, a crash,
Quenched lay their cauldron, cowered i' the dust the crew,
As, in a glory of armour like Saint George, 585
Out again sprang the young good beauteous priest
Bearing away the lady in his arms,
Saved for a splendid minute and no more.
For, whom i' the path did that priest come upon,
He and the poor lost lady borne so brave, 590
—Checking the song of praise in me, had else
Swelled to the full for God's will done on earth—
Whom but a dusk misfeatured messenger,
No other than the angel of this life,
Whose care is lest men see too much at once. 595
He made the sign, such God-glimpse must suffice,

Nor prejudice the Prince o' the Power of the Air,
Whose ministration piles us overhead
What we call, first, earth's roof and, last, heaven's floor,
Now grate o' the trap, then outlet of the cage : 600
So took the lady, left the priest alone,
And once more canopied the world with black.
But through the blackness I saw Rome again,
And where a solitary villa stood
In a lone garden-quarter : it was eve, 605
The second of the year, and oh so cold !
Ever and anon there flittered through the air
A snow-flake, and a scanty couch of snow
Crusted the grass-walk and the garden-mould.
All was grave, silent, sinister,—when, ha ? 610
Glimmeringly did a pack of were-wolves pad
The snow, those flames were Guido's eyes in front,
And all five found and footed it, the track,
To where a threshold-streak of warmth and light
Betrayed the villa-door with life inside, 615
While an inch outside were those blood-bright eyes,

And black lips wrinkling o'er the flash of teeth,
And tongues that lolled—Oh God that madest man !
They parleyed in their language. Then one whined—
That was the policy and master-stroke— 620
Deep in his throat whispered what seemed a name—
“Open to Caponsacchi !” Guido cried :
“Gabriel !” cried Lucifer at Eden-gate.
Wide as a heart, opened the door at once,
Showing the joyous couple, and their child 625
The two-weeks' mother, to the wolves, the wolves
To them. Close eyes ! And when the corpses lay
Stark-stretched, and those the wolves, their wolf-work done,
Were safe-embosomed by the night again,
I knew a necessary change in things ; 630
As when the worst watch of the night gives way,
And there comes duly, to take cognisance,
The scrutinizing eye-point of some star—
And who despairs of a new daybreak now ?
Lo, the first ray protruded on those five ! 635
It reached them, and each felon writhed transfixed.

Awhile they palpitated on the spear

Motionless over Tophet : stand or fall ?

“ I say, the spear should fall—should stand, I say ! ”

Cried the world come to judgment, granting grace 640

Or dealing doom according to world's wont,

Those world's-bystanders grouped on Rome's cross-road

At prick and summons of the primal curse

Which bids man love as well as make a lie.

There prattled they, discoursed the right and wrong, 645

Turned wrong to right, proved wolves sheep and sheep

wolves,

So that you scarce distinguished fell from fleece ;

Till out spoke a great guardian of the fold,

Stood up, put forth his hand that held the crook,

And motioned that the arrested point decline : 650

Horribly off, the wriggling dead-weight reeled,

Rushed to the bottom and lay ruined there.

Though still at the pit's mouth, despite the smoke

O' the burning, tarriers turned again to talk

And trim the balance, and detect at least 655

A touch of wolf in what showed whitest sheep,
A cross of sheep redeeming the whole wolf,—
Vex truth a little longer :—less and less,
Because years came and went, and more and more
Brought new lies with them to be loved in turn. 660
Till all at once the memory of the thing,—
The fact that, wolves or sheep, such creatures were,—
Which hitherto, however men supposed,
Had somehow plain and pillar-like prevailed
I' the midst of them, indisputably fact, 665
Granite, time's tooth should grate against, not graze,—
Why, this proved sandstone, friable, fast to fly
And give its grain away at wish o' the wind.
Ever and ever more diminutive,
Base gone, shaft lost, only entablature, 670
Dwindled into no bigger than a book,
Lay of the column; and that little, left
By the roadside 'mid the ordure, shards and weeds.
Until I haply, wandering that way,
Kicked it up, turned it over, and recognized, 675

For all the crumblement, this abacus,
 This square old yellow book,—could calculate
 By this the lost proportions of the style.

This was it from, my fancy with those facts,
 I used to tell the tale, turned gay to grave, 680
 But lacked a listener seldom ; such alloy,
 Such substance of me interfused the gold
 Which, wrought into a shapely ring therewith,
 Hammered and filed, fingered and favoured, last
 Lay ready for the renovating wash 685
 O' the water. “ How much of the tale was true ? ”
 I disappeared ; the book grew all in all ;
 The lawyers' pleadings swelled back to their size,—
 Doubled in two, the crease upon them yet,
 For more commodity of carriage, see !— 690
 And these are letters, veritable sheets
 That brought posthaste the news to Florence, writ
 At Rome the day Count Guido died, we find,
 To stay the craving of a client there,

Who bound the same and so produced my book. 695

Lovers of dead truth, did ye fare the worse?

Lovers of live truth, found ye false my tale?

Well, now ; there's nothing in nor out o' the world

Good except truth : yet this, the something else,

What's this then, which proves good yet seems untrue?

This that I mixed with truth, motions of mine 701

That quickened, made the inertness malleolable

O' the gold was not mine,—what's your name for this?

Are means to the end, themselves in part the end?

Is fiction which makes fact alive, fact too? 705

The somehow may be thishow.

I find first

Writ down for very A. B. C. of fact,

“ In the beginning God made heaven and earth ;”

From which, no matter with what lisp, I spell 710

And speak you out a consequence—that man,

Man,—as befits the made, the inferior thing,—

Purposed, since made, to grow, not make in turn,

Yet forced to try and make, else fail to grow,—
 Formed to rise, reach at, if not grasp and gain 715
 The good beyond him,—which attempt is growth,—
 Repeats God's process in man's due degree,
 Attaining man's proportionate result,—
 Creates, no, but resuscitates, perhaps.
 Inalienable, the arch-prerogative 720
 Which turns thought, act—conceives, expresses too !
 No less, man, bounded, yearning to be free,
 May so project his surplusage of soul
 In search of body, so add self to self
 By owning what lay ownerless before,— 725
 So find, so fill full, so appropriate forms—
 That, although nothing which had never life
 Shall get life from him, be, not having been,
 Yet, something dead may get to live again,
 Something with too much life or not enough, 730
 Which, either way imperfect, ended once :
 An end whereat man's impulse intervenes,
 Makes new beginning, starts the dead alive,

Completes the incomplete and saves the thing.

Man's breath were vain to light a virgin wick,— 735

Half-burned-out, all but quite-quenched wicks o' the lamp

Stationed for temple-service on this earth,

These indeed let him breathe on and relume !

For such man's feat is, in the due degree,

—Mimic creation, galvanism for life, 740

But still a glory portioned in the scale.

Why did the mage say,—feeling as we are wont

For truth, and stopping midway short of truth,

And resting on a lie,—“ I raise a ghost ? ”

“ Because,” he taught adepts, “ man makes not man.

“ Yet by a special gift, an art of arts, 746

“ More insight and more oversight and much more

“ Will to use both of these than boast my mates,

“ I can detach from me, commission forth

“ Half of my soul ; which in its pilgrimage 750

“ O'er old unwandered waste ways of the world,

“ May chance upon some fragment of a whole,

“ Rag of flesh, scrap of bone in dim disuse,

“ Smoking flax that fed fire once : prompt therein

“ I enter, spark-like, put old powers to play, 755

“ Push lines out to the limit, lead forth last

“ (By a moonrise through a ruin of a crypt)

“ What shall be mistily seen, murmuringly heard,

“ Mistakenly felt : then write my name with Faust's !”

Oh, Faust, why Faust? Was not Elisha once?— 760

Who bade them lay his staff on a corpse-face.

There was no voice, no hearing : he went in

Therefore, and shut the door upon them twain,

And prayed unto the Lord : and he went up

And lay upon the corpse, dead on the couch, 765

And put his mouth upon its mouth, his eyes

Upon its eyes, his hands upon its hands,

And stretched him on the flesh ; the flesh waxed
warm :

And he returned, walked to and fro the house,

And went up, stretched him on the flesh again, 770

And the eyes opened. 'Tis a credible feat

With the right man and way.

Enough of me !

The Book ! I turn its medicinale leaves

In London now till, as in Florence erst, 775

A spirit laughs and leaps through every limb,

And lights my eye, and lifts me by the hair,

Letting me have my will again with these

—How title I the dead alive once more ?

Count Guido Franceschini the Aretine, 780

Descended of an ancient house, though poor,

A beak-nosed bushy-bearded black-haired lord,

Lean, pallid, low of stature yet robust,

Fifty years old,—having four years ago

Married Pompilia Comparini, young, 785

Good, beautiful, at Rome, where she was born,

And brought her to Arezzo, where they lived

Unhappy lives, whatever curse the cause,—

This husband, taking four accomplices,

Followed this wife to Rome, where she was fled 790

From their Arezzo to find peace again,

In convoy, eight months earlier, of a priest,
Aretine also, of still nobler birth,
Giuseppe Caponsacchi,—and caught her there
Quiet in a villa on a Christmas night, 795
With only Pietro and Violante by,
Both her putative parents ; killed the three,
Aged, they, seventy each, and she, seventeen,
And, two weeks since, the mother of his babe
First-born and heir to what the style was worth 800
O' the Guido who determined, dared and did
This deed just as he purposed point by point.
Then, bent upon escape, but hotly pressed,
And captured with his co-mates that same night,
He, brought to trial, stood on this defence— 805
Injury to his honour caused the act ;
That since his wife was false, (as manifest
By flight from home in such companionship,)
Death, punishment deserved of the false wife
And faithless parents who abetted her 810
I' the flight aforesaid, wronged nor God nor man.

“ Nor false she, nor yet faithless they,” replied
The accuser ; “ cloaked and masked this murder glooms ;
“ True was Pompilia, loyal too the pair ;
“ Out of the man’s own heart this monster curled, 815
“ This crime coiled with connivancy at crime,
“ His victim’s breast, he tells you, hatched and reared ;
“ Uncoil we and stretch stark the worm of hell !”
A month the trial swayed this way and that
Ere judgment settled down on Guido’s guilt ; 820
Then was the Pope, that good Twelfth Innocent,
Appealed to : who well weighed what went before,
Affirmed the guilt and gave the guilty doom.

Let this old woe step on the stage again !
Act itself o’er anew for men to judge, 825
Not by the very sense and sight indeed—
(Which take at best imperfect cognizance,
Since, how heart moves brain, and how both move hand,
What mortal ever in entirety saw ?)
—No dose of purer truth than man digests, 830

But truth with falsehood, milk that feeds him now,
 Not strong meat he may get to bear some day—
 To-wit, by voices we call evidence,
 Uproar in the echo, live fact deadened down,
 Talked over, bruited abroad, whispered away, 835
 Yet helping us to all we seem to hear :
 For how else know we save by worth of word ?

Here are the voices presently shall sound
 In due succession. First, the world's outcry
 Around the rush and ripple of any fact 840
 Fallen stonewise, plumb on the smooth face of things ;
 The world's guess, as it crowds the bank o' the pool,
 At what were figure and substance, by their splash :
 Then, by vibrations in the general mind,
 At depth of deed already out of reach. 845
 This threefold murder of the day before,—
 Say, Half-Rome 's feel after the vanished truth ;
 Honest enough, as the way is : all the same,
 Harbours in the centre of its sense

A hidden germ of failure, shy but sure, 850
Should neutralize that honesty and leave
That feel for truth at fault, as the way is too.
Some prepossession such as starts amiss,
By but a hair's breadth at the shoulder-blade,
The arm o' the feeler, dip he ne'er so brave ; 855
And so leads waveringly, lets fall wide
O' the mark his finger meant to find, and fix
Truth at the bottom, that deceptive speck.
With this Half-Rome,—the source of swerving, call
Over-belief in Guido's right and wrong 860
Rather than in Pompilia's wrong and right :
Who shall say how, who shall say why? 'T is there—
The instinctive theorizing whence a fact
Looks to the eye as the eye likes the look.
Gossip in a public place, a sample-speech. 865
Some worthy, with his previous hint to find
A husband's side the safer, and no whit
Aware he is not Æacus the while,—
How such an one supposes and states fact

To whosoever of a multitude 870
 Will listen, and perhaps prolong thereby
 The not-unpleasant flutter at the breast,
 Born of a certain spectacle shut in
 By the church Lorenzo opposite. So, they lounge
 Midway the mouth o' the street, on Corso side, 875
 'Twixt palace Fiano and palace Ruspoli,
 Linger and listen ; keeping clear o' the crowd,
 Yet wishful one could lend that crowd one's eyes,
 (So universal is its plague of squint)
 And make hearts beat our time that flutter false : 880
 —All for the truth's sake, mere truth, nothing else !
 How Half-Rome found for Guido much excuse.

Next, from Rome's other half, the opposite feel
 For truth with a like swerve, like unsuccess,—
 Or if success, by no more skill but luck : 885
 This time, through rather siding with the wife,
 However the fancy-fit inclined that way,
 Than with the husband. One wears drab, one, pink ;

Who wears pink, ask him "Which shall win the
race,

"Of coupled runners like as egg and egg?" 890

"—Why, if I must choose, he with the pink scarf."

Doubtless for some such reason choice fell here.

A piece of public talk to correspond

At the next stage of the story; just a day

Let pass and new day bring the proper change. 895

Another sample-speech i' the market-place

O' the Barberini by the Capucins;

Where the old Triton, at his fountain-sport,

Bernini's creature plated to the paps,

Puffs up steel sleet which breaks to diamond dust, 900

A spray of sparkles snorted from his conch,

High over the caritellas, out o' the way

O' the motley merchandizing multitude.

Our murder has been done three days ago,

The frost is over and gone, the south wind laughs, 905

And, to the very tiles of each red roof

A-smoke i' the sunshine, Rome lies gold and glad :

So, listen how, to the other half of Rome,
Pompilia seemed a saint and martyr both !

Then, yet another day let come and go, 910

With pause prelusive still of novelty,

Hear a fresh speaker !—neither this nor that

Half-Rome aforesaid ; something bred of both :

One and one breed the inevitable three.

Such is the personage harangues you next ; 915

The elaborated product, *tertium quid* :

Rome's first commotion in subsidence gives

The curd o' the cream, flower o' the wheat, as it were,

And finer sense o' the city. Is this plain ?

You get a reasoned statement of the case, 920

Eventual verdict of the curious few

Who care to sift a business to the bran

Nor coarsely bolt it like the simpler sort.

Here, after ignorance, instruction speaks ;

Here, clarity of candour, history's soul, 925

The critical mind, in short : no gossip-guess.

What the superior social section thinks,
 In person of some man of quality
 Who,—breathing musk from lace-work and brocade,
 His solitaire amid the flow of frill, 930
 Powdered peruke on nose, and bag at back,
 And cane dependent from the ruffled wrist,—
 Harangues in silvery and selectest phrase
 'Neath waxlight in a glorified saloon
 Where mirrors multiply the girandole : 935
 Courting the approbation of no mob,
 But Eminence This and All-Illustrious That
 Who take snuff softly, range in well-bred ring,
 Card-table-quitters for observance' sake,
 Around the argument, the rational word— 940
 Still, spite its weight and worth, a sample-speech.
 How quality dissertated on the case.

 So much for Rome and rumour ; smoke comes first :
 Once the smoke risen untroubled, we descry
 Clearlier what tongues of flame may spire and spit 945

To eye and ear, each with appropriate tinge
According to its food, pure or impure.
The actors, no mere rumours of the act,
Intervene. First you hear Count Guido's voice,
In a small chamber that adjoins the court, 950
Where Governor and Judges, summoned thence,
Tommati, Venturini and the rest,
Find the accused ripe for declaring truth.
Soft-cushioned sits he ; yet shifts seat, shirks touch,
As, with a twitchy brow and wincing lip 955
And cheek that changes to all kinds of white,
He proffers his defence, in tones subdued
Near to mock-mildness now, so mournful seems
The obtuser sense truth fails to satisfy ;
Now, moved, from pathos at the wrong endured, 960
To passion ; for the natural man is roused
At fools who first do wrong, then pour the blame
Of their wrong-doing, Satan-like, on Job.
Also his tongue at times is hard to curb ;
Incisive, nigh satiric bites the phrase, 965

Rough-raw, yet somehow claiming privilege
—It is so hard for shrewdness to admit
Folly means no harm when she calls black white !
—Eruption momentary at the most,
Modified forthwith by a fall o' the fire, 970
Sage acquiescence ; for the world 's the world,
And, what it errs in, Judges rectify :
He feels he has a fist, then folds his arms
Crosswise and makes his mind up to be meek.
And never once does he detach his eye 975
From those ranged there to slay him or to save,
But does his best man's-service for himself,
Despite,—what twitches brow and makes lip wince,—
His limbs' late taste of what was called the Cord,
Or Vigil-torture more facetiously. 980
Even so ; they were wont to tease the truth
Out of loath witness (toying, trifling time)
By torture : 'twas a trick, a vice of the age,
Here, there and everywhere, what would you have ?
Religion used to tell Humanity 985

She gave him warrant or denied him course.
And since the course was much to his own mind,
Of pinching flesh and pulling bone from bone
To unhusk truth a-hiding in its hulls,
Nor whisper of a warning stopped the way, 990
He, in their joint behalf, the burly slave,
Bestirred him, mauled and maimed all recusants,
While, prim in place, Religion overlooked ;
And so had done till doomsday, never a sign
Nor sound of interference from her mouth, 995
But that at last the burly slave wiped brow,
Let eye give notice as if soul were there,
Muttered " 'Tis a vile trick, foolish more than vile,
" Should have been counted sin ; I make it so :
" At any rate no more of it for me— 1000
" Nay, for I break the torture-engine thus !"
Then did Religion start up, stare amain,
Look round for help and see none, smile and say
" What, broken is the rack ? Well done of thee !
" Did I forget to abrogate its use ? 1005

“ Be the mistake in common with us both !

“ —One more fault our blind age shall answer for,

“ Down in my book denounced though it must be

“ Somewhere. Henceforth find truth by milder means !”

Ah but, Religion, did we wait for thee 1010

To ope the book, that serves to sit upon,

And pick such place out, we should wait indeed !

That is all history : and what is not now,

Was then, defendants found it to their cost.

How Guido, after being tortured, spoke. 1015

Also hear Caponsacchi who comes next,

Man and priest—could you comprehend the coil !—

In days when that was rife which now is rare.

How, mingling each its multifarious wires,

Now heaven, now earth, now heaven and earth at once,

Had plucked at and perplexed their puppet here, 1021

Played off the young frank personable priest ;

Sworn fast and tonsured plain heaven's celibate,

And yet earth's clear-accepted servitor,

A courtly spiritual Cupid, squire of dames 1025
By law of love and mandate of the mode.
The Church's own, or why parade her seal,
Wherefore that chrism and consecrative work ?
Yet verily the world's, or why go badged
A prince of sonneteers and lutanists, 1030
Show colour of each vanity in vogue
Borne with decorum due on blameless breast ?
All that is changed now, as he tells the court
How he had played the part excepted at ;
Tells it, moreover, now the second time : 1035
Since, for his cause of scandal, his own share
I' the flight from home and husband of the wife,
He has been censured, punished in a sort
By relegation,—exile, we should say,
To a short distance for a little time,— 1040
Whence he is summoned on a sudden now,
Informed that she, he thought to save, is lost,
And, in a breath, bidden re-tell his tale,
Since the first telling somehow missed effect,

And then advise in the matter. There stands he, 1045
While the same grim black-panelled chamber blinks
As though rubbed shiny with the sins of Rome
Told the same oak for ages—wave-washed wall
Whereto has set a sea of wickedness.
There, where you yesterday heard Guido speak, 1050
Speaks Caponsacchi ; and there face him too
Tommati, Venturini and the rest
Who, eight months earlier, scarce repressed the smile,
Forewent the wink ; waived recognition so
Of peccadillos incident to youth, 1055
Especially youth high-born ; for youth means love,
Vows can't change nature, priests are only men,
And love needs stratagem and subterfuge :
Which age, that once was youth, should recognize,
May blame, but needs not press too hard against. 1060
Here sit the old Judges then, but with no grace
Of reverend carriage, magisterial port.
For why ? The accused of eight months since,—the same
Who cut the conscious figure of a fool,

Changed countenance, dropped bashful gaze to
ground,

While hesitating for an answer then,— 1066

Now is grown judge himself, terrifies now

This, now the other culprit called a judge,

Whose turn it is to stammer and look strange,

As he speaks rapidly, angrily, speech that smites : 1070

And they keep silence, bear blow after blow,

Because the seeming-solitary man,

Speaking for God, may have an audience too,

Invisible, no discreet judge provokes.

How the priest Caponsacchi said his say. 1075

Then a soul sighs its lowest and its last

After the loud ones,—so much breath remains

Unused by the four-days'-dying ; for she lived

Thus long, miraculously long, 't was thought,

Just that Pompilia might defend herself. 1080

How, while the hireling and the alien stoop,

Comfort, yet question,—since the time is brief,

And folk, allowably inquisitive,
Encircle the low pallet where she lies
In the good house that helps the poor to die,— 1085
Pompilia tells the story of her life.
For friend and lover,—leech and man of law
Do service ; busy helpful ministrants
As varied in their calling as their mind,
Temper and age : and yet from all of these, 1090
About the white bed under the arched roof,
Is somehow, as it were, evolved a one,—
Small separate sympathies combined and large,
Nothings that were, grown something very much :
As if the bystanders gave each his straw, 1095
All he had, though a trifle in itself,
Which, plaited all together, made a Cross
Fit to die looking on and praying with,
Just as well as if ivory or gold.
So, to the common kindness she speaks, 1100
There being scarce more privacy at the last
For mind than body : but she is used to bear,

And only unused to the brotherly look.
How she endeavoured to explain her life.

Then, since a Trial ensued, a touch o' the same 1105
To sober us, flustered with frothy talk,
And teach our common sense its helplessness.
For why deal simply with divining-rod,
Scrape where we fancy secret sources flow,
And ignore law, the recognized machine, 1110
Elaborate display of pipe and wheel
Framed to unchoak, pump up and pour apace
Truth in a flowery foam shall wash the world?
The patent truth-extracting process,—ha?
Let us make all that mystery turn one wheel, 1115
Give you a single grind of law at least!
One orator, of two on either side,
Shall teach us the puissance of the tongue
—That is, o' the pen which simulated tongue
On paper and saved all except the sound 1120
Which never was. Law's speech beside law's thought?

That were too stunning, too immense an odds :
That point of vantage, law let nobly pass.
One lawyer shall admit us to behold
The manner of the making out a case, 1125
First fashion of a speech ; the chick in egg,
And masterpiece law's bosom incubates.
How Don Giacinto of the Arcangeli,
Called Procurator of the Poor at Rome,
Now advocate for Guido and his mates,— 1130
The jolly learned man of middle age,
Cheek and jowl all in laps with fat and law,
Mirthful as mighty, yet, as great hearts use,
Despite the name and fame that tempt our flesh,
Constant to that devotion of the hearth, 1135
Still captive in those dear domestic ties !—
How he,—having a cause to triumph with,
All kind of interests to keep intact,
More than one efficacious personage
To tranquillize, conciliate and secure, 1140
And above all, public anxiety

To quiet, show its Guido in good hands,—
 Also, as if such burdens were too light,
 A certain family-feast to claim his care,
 The birthday-banquet for the only son— 1145
 Paternity at smiling strife with law—
 How he brings both to buckle in one bond ;
 And, thick at throat, with waterish under-eye,
 Turns to his task and settles in his seat
 And puts his utmost means to practice now : 1150
 Wheezes out law and whiffles Latin forth,
 And, just as though roast lamb would never be,
 Makes logic levigate the big crime small :
 Rubs palm on palm, rakes foot with itchy foot,
 Conceives and inchoates the argument, 1155
 Sprinkling each flower appropriate to the time,
 —Ovidian quip or Ciceronian crank,
 A-bubble in the larynx while he laughs,
 As he had fritters deep down frying there.
 How he turns, twists, and tries the oily thing 1160
 Shall be—first speech for Guido 'gainst the Fisc.

Then with a skip as it were from heel to head,
Leaving yourselves fill up the middle bulk
O' the Trial, reconstruct its shape august,
From such exordium clap we to the close ; 1165
Give you, if we dare wing to such a height,
The absolute glory in some full-grown speech
On the other side, some finished butterfly,
Some breathing diamond-flake with leaf-gold fans,
That takes the air, no trace of worm it was, 1170
Or cabbage-bed it had production from.
Giovambattista o' the Bottini, Fisc,
Pompilia's patron by the chance of the hour,
To-morrow her persecutor,—composite, he,
As becomes who must meet such various calls— 1175
Odds of age joined in him with ends of youth.
A man of ready smile and facile tear,
Improvised hopes, despairs at nod and beck,
And language—ah, the gift of eloquence !
Language that goes as easy as a glove 1180
O'er good and evil, smoothens both to one.

Rashness helps caution with him, fires the straw,
 In free enthusiastic careless fit,
 On the first proper pinnacle of rock
 Which happens, as reward for all that zeal, 1185
 To lure some bark to founder and bring gain :
 While calm sits Caution, rapt with heavenward eye,
 A true confessor's gaze amid the glare,
 Beaconing to the breaker, death and hell.
 " Well done, thou good and faithful ! " she ap-
 proves : 1190
 " Hadst thou let slip a faggot to the beach,
 " The crew had surely spied thy precipice
 " And saved their boat ; the simple and the slow,
 " Who should have prompt forestalled the wrecker's
 fee :
 " Let the next crew be wise and hail in time ! " 1195
 Just so compounded is the outside man,
 Blue juvenile pure eye and pippin cheek,
 And brow all prematurely soiled and seamed
 With sudden age, bright devastated hair.

Ah, but you miss the very tones o' the voice, 1200
The scrannel pipe that screams in heights of head,
As, in his modest studio, all alone,
The tall wight stands a-tiptoe, strives and strains,
Both eyes shut, like the cockerel that would crow,
Tries to his own self amorously o'er 1205
What never will be uttered else than so—
To the four walls, for Forum and Mars' Hill,
Speaks out the poesy which, penned, turns prose.
Clavecinist debarred his instrument,
He yet thrums—shirking neither turn nor trill, 1210
With desperate finger on dumb table-edge—
The sovereign rondo, shall conclude his *Suite*,
Charm an imaginary audience there,
From old Corelli to young Haendel, both
I' the flesh at Rome, ere he perforce go print 1215
The cold black score, mere music for the mind—
The last speech against Guido and his gang,
With special end to prove Pompilia pure.
How the Fisc vindicates Pompilia's fame.

Then comes the all but end, the ultimate 1220
Judgment save yours. Pope Innocent the Twelfth,
Simple, sagacious, mild yet resolute,
With prudence, probity and—what beside
From the other world he feels impress at times,
Having attained to fourscore years and six,— 1225
How, when the court found Guido and the rest
Guilty, but law supplied a subterfuge
And passed the final sentence to the Pope,
He, bringing his intelligence to bear
This last time on what ball behoves him drop 1230
In the urn, or white or black, does drop a black,
Send five souls more to just precede his own,
Stand him in stead and witness, if need were,
How he is wont to do God's work on earth.
The manner of his sitting out the dim 1235
Droop of a sombre February day
In the plain closet where he does such work,
With, from all Peter's treasury, one stool,
One table and one lathen crucifix.

There sits the Pope, his thoughts for company ; 1240
Grave but not sad,—nay, something like a cheer
Leaves the lips free to be benevolent,
Which, all day long, did duty firm and fast.
A cherishing there is of foot and knee, 1244
A chafing loose-skinned large-veined hand with hand,—
What steward but knows when stewardship earns its wage,
May levy praise, anticipate the lord ?
He reads, notes, lays the papers down at last,
Muses, then takes a turn about the room ;
Unclasps a huge tome in an antique guise, 1250
Primitive print and tongue half obsolete,
That stands him in diurnal stead ; opes page,
Finds place where falls the passage to be conned
According to an order long in use :
And, as he comes upon the evening's chance, 1255
Starts somewhat, solemnizes straight his smile,
Then reads aloud that portion first to last,
And at the end lets flow his own thoughts forth
Likewise aloud, for respite and relief,

Till by the dreary relics of the west 1260
Wan through the half-moon window, all his light,
He bows the head while the lips move in prayer,
Writes some three brief lines, signs and seals the same,
Tinkles a hand-bell, bids the obsequious Sir
Who puts foot presently o' the closet-sill 1265
He watched outside of, bear as superscribed
That mandate to the Governor forthwith :
Then heaves abroad his cares in one good sigh,
Traverses corridor with no arm's help,
And so to sup as a clear conscience should. 1270
The manner of the judgment of the Pope.

Then must speak Guido yet a second time,
Satan's old saw being apt here—skin for skin,
All a man hath that will he give for life.
While life was graspable and gainable, free 1275
To bird-like buzz her wings round Guido's brow,
Not much truth stiffened out the web of words
He wove to catch her : when away she flew

And death came, death's breath ravelled up the lies,
Left bare the metal thread, the fibre fine 1280
Of truth, i' the spinning : the true words come last.
How Guido, to another purpose quite,
Speaks and despairs, the last night of his life,
In that New Prison by Castle Angelo
At the bridge-foot : the same man, another voice. 1285
On a stone bench in a close fetid cell,
Where the hot vapour of an agony,
Struck into drops on the cold wall, runs down
Horrible worms made out of sweat and tears—
There crouch, well nigh to the knees in dungeon-straw,
Lit by the sole lamp suffered for their sake, 1291
Two awe-struck figures, this a Cardinal,
That an Abate, both of old styled friends
Of the part-man part-monster in the midst,
So changed is Franceschini's gentle blood. 1295
The tiger-cat screams now, that whined before,
That pried and tried and trod so gingerly,
Till in its silkiness the trap-teeth join ;

Then you know how the bristling fury foams.
They listen, this wrapped in his folds of red, 1300
While his feet fumble for the filth below ;
The other, as beseems a stouter heart,
Working his best with beads and cross to ban
The enemy that comes in like a flood
Spite of the standard set up, verily 1305
And in no trope at all, against him there :
For at the prison-gate, just a few steps
Outside, already, in the doubtful dawn,
Thither, from this side and from that, slow sweep
And settle down in silence solidly, 1310
Crow-wise, the frightful Brotherhood of Death.
Black-hatted and black-hooded huddle they,
Black rosaries a-dangling from each waist ;
So take they their grim station at the door,
Torches alight and cross-bones-banner spread, 1315
And that gigantic Christ with open arms,
Grounded. Nor lacks there aught but that the group
Break forth, intone the lamentable psalm,

“ Out of the deeps, Lord, have I cried to thee ! ”—

When inside, from the true profound, a sign 1320

Shall bear intelligence that the foe is foiled,

Count Guido Franceschini has confessed,

And is absolved and reconciled with God.

Then they, intoning, may begin their march,

Make by the longest way for the People's Square, 1325

Carry the criminal to his crime's award :

A mob to cleave, a scaffolding to reach,

Two gallows and Mannaia crowning all.

How Guido made defence a second time.

Finally, even as thus by step and step 1330

I led you from the level of to-day

Up to the summit of so long ago,

Here, whence I point you the wide prospect round—

Let me, by like steps, slope you back to smooth,

Land you on mother-earth, no whit the worse, 1335

To feed o' the fat o' the furrow : free to dwell,

Taste our time's better things profusely spread

For all who love the level, corn and wine,
 Much cattle and the many-folded fleece.
 Shall not my friends go feast again on sward, 1340
 Though cognizant of country in the clouds
 Higher than wistful eagle's horny eye
 Ever unclosed for, 'mid ancestral crags,
 When morning broke and Spring was back once more,
 And he died, heaven, save by his heart, unreached?
 Yet heaven my fancy lifts to, ladder-like,— 1346
 As Jack reached, holpen of his beanstalk-rungs!

A novel country : I might make it mine
 By choosing which one aspect of the year
 Suited mood best, and putting solely that 1350
 On panel somewhere in the House of Fame,
 Landscaping what I saved, not what I saw :
 —Might fix you, whether frost in goblin-time
 Startled the moon with his abrupt bright laugh,
 Or, August's hair afloat in filmy fire, 1355
 She fell, arms wide, face foremost on the world,

Swooned there and so singed out the strength of things.
Thus were abolished Spring and Autumn both,
The land dwarfed to one likeness of the land,
Life cramped corpse-fashion. Rather learn and love
Each facet-flash of the revolving year!— 1361
Red, green and blue that whirl into a white,
The variance now, the eventual unity,
Which make the miracle. See it for yourselves,
This man's act, changeable because alive! 1365
Action now shrouds, now shows the informing thought;
Man, like a glass ball with a spark a-top,
Out of the magic fire that lurks inside,
Shows one tint at a time to take the eye:
Which, let a finger touch the silent sleep, 1370
Shifted a hair's-breadth shoots you dark for bright,
Suffuses bright with dark, and baffles so
Your sentence absolute for shine or shade.
Once set such orbs,—white styled, black stigmatized,—
A-rolling, see them once on the other side 1375
Your good men and your bad men every one,

From Guido Franceschini to Guy Faux,
Oft would you rub your eyes and change your names.

Such, British Public, ye who like me not,
(God love you!)—whom I yet have laboured for, 1380
Perchance more careful whoso runs may read
Than erst when all, it seemed, could read who ran,—
Perchance more careless whoso reads may praise
Than late when he who praised and read and wrote
Was apt to find himself the self-same me,— 1385
Such labour had such issue, so I wrought
This arc, by furtherance of such alloy,
And so, by one spirt, take away its trace
Till, justifiably golden, rounds my ring.

A ring without a posy, and that ring mine? 1390

O lyric Love, half-angel and half-bird
And all a wonder and a wild desire,—
Boldest of hearts that ever braved the sun,

Took sanctuary within the holier blue,
And sang a kindred soul out to his face,— 1395
Yet human at the red-ripe of the heart—
When the first summons from the darkling earth
Reached thee amid thy chambers, blanched their
blue,
And bared them of the glory—to drop down,
To toil for man, to suffer or to die,— 1400
This is the same voice : can thy soul know change ?
Hail then, and hearken from the realms of help !
Never may I commence my song, my due
To God who best taught song by gift of thee,
Except with bent head and beseeching hand— 1405
That still, despite the distance and the dark,
What was, again may be ; some interchange
Of grace, some splendour once thy very thought,
Some benediction anciently thy smile :
—Never conclude, but raising hand and head 1410
Thither where eyes, that cannot reach, yet yearn
For all hope, all sustainment, all reward,

Their utmost up and on,—so blessing back
In those thy realms of help, that heaven thy home,
Some whiteness which, I judge, thy face makes proud,
Some wanness where, I think, thy foot may fall! 1416

II.

HALF-ROME.

WHAT, you, Sir, come too? (Just the man I'd meet.)

Be ruled by me and have a care o' the crowd:

This way, while fresh folk go and get their gaze:

I'll tell you like a book and save your shins.

Fie, what a roaring day we've had! Whose fault? 5

Lorenzo in Lucina,—here's a church

To hold a crowd at need, accommodate

All comers from the Corso! If this crush

Make not its priests ashamed of what they show

For temple-room, don't prick them to draw purse 10

And down with bricks and mortar, eke us out

The beggarly transept with its bit of apse
Into a decent space for Christian ease,
Why, to-day's lucky pearl is cast to swine.
Listen and estimate the luck they've had ! 15
(The right man, and I hold him.)

Sir, do you see,

They laid both bodies in the church, this morn
The first thing, on the chancel two steps up,
Behind the little marble balustrade ; 20
Disposed them, Pietro the old murdered fool
To the right of the altar, and his wretched wife
On the other side. In trying to count stabs,
People supposed Violante showed the most,
Till somebody explained us that mistake ; 25
His wounds had been dealt out indifferent where,
But she took all her stabbings in the face,
Since punished thus solely for honour's sake,
Honoris causâ, that's the proper term.
A delicacy there is, our gallants hold, 30
When you avenge your honour and only then,

That you disfigure the subject, fray the face,
Not just take life and end, in clownish guise.
It was Violante gave the first offence,
Got therefore the conspicuous punishment : 35
While Pietro, who helped merely, his mere death
Answered the purpose, so his face went free.
We fancied even, free as you please, that face
Showed itself still intolerably wronged ;
Was wrinkled over with resentment yet, 40
Nor calm at all, as murdered faces use,
Once the worst ended : an indignant air
O' the head there was—'tis said the body turned
Round and away, rolled from Violante's side
Where they had laid it loving-husband-like. 45
If so, if corpses can be sensitive,
Why did not he roll right down altar-step,
Roll on through nave, roll fairly out of church,
Deprive Lorenzo of the spectacle,
Pay back thus the succession of affronts 50
Whereto this church had served as theatre ?

For see : at that same altar where he lies,
To that same inch of step, was brought the babe
For blessing after baptism, and there styled
Pompilia, and a string of names beside, 55
By his bad wife, some seventeen years ago,
Who purchased her simply to palm on him,
Flatter his dotage and defraud the heirs.
Wait awhile ! Also to this very step
Did this Violante, twelve years afterward, 60
Bring, the mock-mother, that child-cheat full-grown,
Pompilia, in pursuance of her plot,
And there brave God and man a second time
By linking a new victim to the lie.
There, having made a match unknown to him, 65
She, still unknown to Pietro, tied the knot
Which nothing cuts except this kind of knife ;
Yes, made her daughter, as the girl was held,
Marry a man, and honest man beside,
And man of birth to boot,—clandestinely 70
Because of this, because of that, because

O' the devil's will to work his worst for once,—
Confident she could top her part at need
And, when her husband must be told in turn,
Ply the wife's trade, play off the sex's trick 75
And, alternating worry with quiet qualms,
Bravado with submissiveness, quick fool
Her Pietro into patience : so it proved.
Ay, 'tis four years since man and wife they grew,
This Guido Franceschini and this same 80
Pompilia, foolishly thought, falsely declared
A Comparini and the couple's child :
Just at this altar where, beneath the piece
Of Master Guido Reni, Christ on cross,
Second to nought observable in Rome, 85
That couple lie now, murdered yestereve.
Even the blind can see a providence here.

From dawn till now that it is growing dusk,
A multitude has flocked and filled the church,
Coming and going, coming back again, 90

Till to count crazed one. Rome was at the show.
People climbed up the columns, fought for spikes
O' the chapel-rail to perch themselves upon,
Jumped over and so broke the wooden work
Painted like porphyry to deceive the eye ; 95
Serve the priests right ! The organ-loft was crammed,
Women were fainting, no few fights ensued,
In short, it was a show repaid your pains :
For, though their room was scant undoubtedly,
Yet they did manage matters, to be just, 100
A little at this Lorenzo. Body o' me !
I saw a body exposed once . . . never mind !
Enough that here the bodies had their due.
No stinginess in wax, a row all round,
And one big taper at each head and foot. 105

So, people pushed their way, and took their turn,
Saw, threw their eyes up, crossed themselves, gave place
To pressure from behind, since all the world
Knew the old pair, could talk the tragedy

Over from first to last : Pompilia too, 110
 Those who had known her—what 't was worth to them !
 Guido's acquaintance was in less request ;
 The Count had lounged somewhat too long in Rome,
 Made himself cheap ; with him were hand and glove
 Barbers and blear-eyed, as the ancient sings. 115
 Also he is alive and like to be :
 Had he considerately died,—aha !
 I jostled Luca Cini on his staff,
 Mute in the midst, the whole man one amaze,
 Staring amain and crossing brow and breast. 120
 “ How now ? ” asked I. “ 'Tis seventy years, ” quoth he,
 “ Since I first saw, holding my father's hand,
 “ Bodies set forth : a many have I seen,
 “ Yet all was poor to this I live and see.
 “ Here the world's wickedness seals up the sum : 125
 “ What with Molinos' doctrine and this deed,
 “ Antichrist 's surely come and doomsday near.
 “ May I depart in peace, I have seen my see.”
 “ Depart then, ” I advised, “ nor block the road

" For youngsters still behindhand with such sights!" 130
 " Why no," rejoins the venerable sire,
 " I know it 's horrid, hideous past belief,
 " Burdensome far beyond what eye can bear ;
 " But they do promise, when Pompilia dies
 " I' the course o' the day,—and she can't outlive night,—
 " They'll bring her body also to expose 136
 " Beside the parents, one, two, three a-breast ;
 " That were indeed a sight which, might I see,
 " I trust I should not last to see the like !"
 Whereat I bade the senior spare his shanks, 140
 Since doctors give her till to-night to live
 And tell us how the butchery happened. " Ah,
 " But you can't know !" sighs he, " I'll not despair :
 " Beside I'm useful at explaining things—
 " As, how the dagger laid there at the feet, 145
 " Caused the peculiar cuts ; I mind its make,
 " Triangular i' the blade, a Genoese,
 " Armed with those little hook-teeth on the edge
 " To open in the flesh nor shut again :

“ I like to teach a novice : I shall stay ! ” 150

And stay he did, and stay be sure he will.

A personage came by the private door

At noon to have his look : I name no names :

Well then, His Eminence the Cardinal,

Whose servitor in honourable sort 155

Guido was once, the same who made the match,
(Will you have the truth ?) whereof we see effect.

No sooner whisper ran he was arrived

Than up pops Curate Carlo, a brisk lad,

Who never lets a good occasion slip, 160

And volunteers improving the event.

We looked he'd give the history's self some help,

Treat us to how the wife's confession went

(This morning she confessed her crime, we know)

And, may-be, throw in something of the Priest— 165

If he's not ordered back, punished anew,

The gallant, Caponsacchi, Lucifer

I' the garden where Pompilia, Eve-like, lured

Her Adam Guido to his fault and fall.

Think you we got a sprig of speech akin 170

To this from Carlo, with the Cardinal there?

Too wary, he was, too widely awake, I trow.

He did the murder in a dozen words;

Then said that all such outrages crop forth

I' the course of nature, when Molinos' tares 175

Are sown for wheat, flourish and choke the Church :

So slid on to the abominable sect

And the philosophic sin—we've heard all that,

And the Cardinal too, (who book-made on the same)

But, for the murder, left it where he found. 180

Oh but he's quick, the Curate, minds his game !

And, after all, we have the main o' the fact :

Case could not well be simpler,—mapped, as it were,

We follow the murder's maze from source to sea,

By the red line, past mistake : one sees indeed 185

Not only how all was and must have been,

But cannot other than be to the end of time.

Turn out here by the Ruspoli ! Do you hold

Guido was so prodigiously to blame ?
A certain cousin of yours has told you so ? 190
Exactly ! Here's a friend shall set you right,
Let him but have the handsel of your ear.

These wretched Comparini were once gay
And galiard, of the modest middle class :
Born in this quarter seventy years ago, 195
And married young, they lived the accustomed life,
Citizens as they were of good repute :
And, childless, naturally took their ease
With only their two selves to care about
And use the wealth for : wealthy is the word, 200
Since Pietro was possessed of house and land—
And specially one house, when good days were,
In Via Vittoria, the aspectable street
Where he lived mainly ; but another house
Of less pretension did he buy betimes, 205
The villa, meant for jaunts and jollity,
I' the Pauline district, to be private there—

Just what puts murder in an enemy's head.
Moreover,—and here's the worm i' the core, the germ
O' the rottenness and ruin which arrived,— 210
He owned some usufruct, had moneys' use
Lifelong, but to determine with his life
In heirs' default : so, Pietro craved an heir,
(The story always old and always new)
Shut his fool's-eyes fast on the visible good 215
And wealth for certain, opened them owl-wide
On fortune's sole piece of forgetfulness,
The child that should have been and would not be.

Hence, seventeen years ago, conceive his glee
When first Violante, 'twixt a smile and a blush, 220
With touch of agitation proper too,
Announced that, spite of her unpromising age,
The miracle would in time be manifest,
An heir's birth was to happen : and it did.
Somehow or other,—how, all in good time ! 225
By a trick, a sleight of hand you are to hear,—

A child was born, Pompilia, for his joy,
Plaything at once and prop, a fairy-gift,
A saints' grace or, say, grant of the good God,—
A fiddle-pin's end ! What imbeciles are we ! 230
Look now : if some one could have prophesied,
“ For love of you, for liking to your wife,
“ I undertake to crush a snake I spy
“ Settling itself i' the soft of both your breasts.
“ Give me yon babe to strangle painlessly ! 235
“ She'll soar to the safe : you'll have your crying out,
“ Then sleep, then wake, then sleep, then end your
 days
“ In peace and plenty, mixed with mild regret,
“ Thirty years hence when Christmas takes old
 folk ”—
How had old Pietro sprung up, crossed himself, 240
And kicked the conjuror ! Whereas you and I,
Being wise with after-wit, had clapped our hands ;
Nay, added, in the old fool's interest,
“ Strangle the black-eyed babe, so far so good,

“ But on condition you relieve the man 245
 “ O’ the wife and throttle him Violante too—
 “ She is the mischief!”

We had hit the mark.

She, whose trick brought the babe into the world,
 She it was, when the babe was grown a girl, 250
 Judged a new trick should reinforce the old,
 Send vigour to the lie now somewhat spent
 By twelve years’ service ; lest Eve’s rule decline
 Over this Adam of hers, whose cabbage-plot
 Throve dubiously since turned fools’-paradise, 255
 Spite of a nightingale on every stump.
 Pietro’s estate was dwindling day by day,
 While he, rapt far above such mundane care,
 Crawled all-fours with his baby pick-a-back,
 Sat at serene cats’-cradle with his child, 260
 Or took the measured tallness, top to toe,
 Of what was grown a great girl twelve years old :
 Till sudden at the door a tap discreet,

A visitor's premonitory cough,
And poverty had reached him in her rounds. 265

This came when he was past the working-time,
Had learned to dandle and forgot to dig,
And who must but Violante cast about,
Contrive and task that head of hers again?
She who had caught one fish, could make that catch
A bigger still, in angler's policy : 271
So, with an angler's mercy for the bait,
Her minnow was set wriggling on its barb
And tossed to the mid-stream ; that is, this grown girl
With the great eyes and bounty of black hair 275
And first crisp youth that tempts a jaded taste,
Was whisked i' the way of a certain man, who snapped.

Count Guido Franceschini the Aretine
Was head of an old noble house enough,
Not over-rich, you can't have everything, 280
But such a man as riches rub against,

Readily stick to,—one with a right to them
Born in the blood : 'twas in his very brow
Always to knit itself against the world,
So be beforehand when that stinted due 285
Service and suit : the world ducks and defers.
As such folks do, he had come up to Rome
To better his fortune, and, since many years,
Was friend and follower of a cardinal ;
Waiting the rather thus on providence, 290
That a shrewd younger poorer brother yet,
The Abate Paolo, a regular priest,
Had long since tried his powers and found he swam
With the deffest on the Galilean pool :
But then he was a web-foot, free o' the wave, 295
And no ambiguous dab-chick hatched to strut,
Humbled by any fond attempt to swim
When fiercer fowl usurped his dunghill-top—
A whole priest, Paolo, no mere piece of one
Like Guido tacked thus to the Church's tail ! 300
Guido moreover, as the head o' the house,

Claiming the main prize, not the lesser luck,
The centre lily, no mere chickweed fringe.

He waited and learned waiting, thirty years ;
Got promise, missed performance—what would you have ?
No petty post rewards a nobleman 306

For spending youth in splendid lackey-work,
And there's concurrence for each rarer prize ;
When that falls, rougher hand and readier foot
Push aside Guido spite of his black looks. 310

The end was, Guido, when the warning showed,
The first white hair i' the glass, gave up the game,
Determined on returning to his town,
Making the best of bad incurable,
Patching the old palace up and lingering there 315
The customary life out with his kin,
Where honour helps to spice the scanty bread.

Just as he trimmed his lamp and girt his loins
To go his journey and be wise at home,

In the right mood of disappointed worth, 320
 Who but Violante sudden spied her prey
 (Where was I with that angler-simile?)
 And threw her bait, Pompilia, where he sulked—
 A gleam i' the gloom !

What if he gained thus much,

Wrung out this sweet drop from the bitter Past, 326
 Bore off this rose-bud from the prickly brake
 To justify such torn clothes and scratched hands,
 And, after all, brought something back from Rome ?
 Would not a wife serve at Arezzo well 330
 To light the dark house, lend a look of youth
 To the mother's face grown meagre, left alone
 And famished with the emptiness of hope,
 Old Donna Beatrice? Wife you want
 Would you play family-representative, 335
 Carry you elder-brotherly, high and right
 O'er what may prove the natural petulance
 Of the third brother, younger, greedier still,

Girolamo, also a fledgeling priest,
Beginning life in turn with callow beak 340
Agape for luck, no luck had stopped and stilled.
Such were the pinks and greys about the bait
Persuaded Guido gulp down hook and all.

What constituted him so choice a catch,
You question? Past his prime and poor beside? 345
Ask that of any she who knows the trade.
Why first, here was a nobleman with friends,
A palace one might run to and be safe
When presently the threatened fate should fall,
A big-browed master to block door-way up, 350
Parley with people bent on pushing by
And praying the mild Pietro quick clear scores :
Is birth a privilege and power or no ?
Also,—but judge of the result desired,
By the price paid and manner of the sale. 355
The Count was made woo, win and wed at once :
Asked, and was haled for answer, lest the heat

Should cool, to San Lorenzo, one blind eve,
And had Pompilia put into his arms
O' the sly there, by a hasty candle-blink, 360
With sanction of some priest-confederate
Properly paid to make short work and sure.

So did old Pietro's daughter change her style
For Guido Franceschini's lady-wife
Ere Guido knew it well ; and why this haste 365
And scramble and indecent secrecy ?

“ Lest Pietro, all the while in ignorance,
“ Should get to learn, gainsay and break the match :
“ His peevishness had promptly put aside
“ Such honour and refused the proffered boon, 370
“ Pleased to become authoritative once.

“ She remedied the wilful man's mistake—”
Did our discreet Violante. Rather say,
Thus did she, lest the object of her game,
Guido the gulled one, give him but a chance, 375
A moment's respite, time for thinking twice,

Might count the cost before he sold himself,
And try the clink of coin they paid him with.

But passed, the bargain struck, the business done,
Once the clandestine marriage over thus, 380
All parties made perforce the best o' the fact ;
Pietro could play vast indignation off,
Be ignorant and astounded, dupe alike
At need, of wife, daughter and son-in-law,
While Guido found himself in flagrant fault, 385
Must e'en do suit and service, soothe, subdue
A father not unreasonably chafed,
Bring him to terms by paying son's devoir.
Pleasant initiation !

The end, this : 390

Guido's broad back was saddled to bear all—
Pietro, Violante, and Pompilia too;—
Three lots cast confidently in one lap,
Three dead-weights with one arm to lift the three

Out of their limbo up to life again : 395
 The Roman household was to strike fresh root
 In a new soil, graced with a novel name,
 Gilt with an alien glory, Aretine
 Henceforth and never Roman any more,
 By treaty and engagement : thus it ran : 400
 Pompilia's dowry for Pompilia's self
 As a thing of course,—she paid her own expense ;
 No loss nor gain there : but the couple, you see,
 They, for their part, turned over first of all
 Their fortune in its rags and rottenness 405
 To Guido, fusion and confusion, he
 And his with them and theirs,—whatever rag
 With a coin residuary fell on floor
 When Brother Paolo's energetic shake
 Should do the relics justice : since 'twas thought, 410
 Once vulnerable Pietro out of reach,
 That, left at Rome as representative,
 The Abate, backed by a potent patron here,
 And otherwise with purple flushing him,

Might play a good game with the creditor, 415
 Make up a moiety which, great or small,
 Should go to the common stock—if anything,
 Guido's, so far repayment of the cost
 About to be,—and if, as looked more like,
 Nothing,—why, all the nobler cost were his 420
 Who guaranteed, for better or for worse,
 To Pietro and Violante, house and home,
 Kith and kin, with the pick of company
 And life o' the fat o' the land while life should last.
 How say you to the bargain at first blush? 425
 Why did a middle-aged not-silly man
 Show himself thus besotted all at once?
 Quoth Solomon, one black eye does it all.

They went to Arezzo,—Pietro and his spouse,
 With just the dusk o' the day of life to spend, 430
 Eager to use the twilight, taste a treat,
 Enjoy for once with neither stay nor stint
 The luxury of lord-and-lady-ship,

And realise the stuff and nonsense long
 A-simmer in their noddles ; vent the fume 435
 Born there and bred, the citizen's conceit
 How fares nobility while crossing earth,
 What rampart or invisible body-guard
 Keeps off the taint of common life from such.
 They had not fed for nothing on the tales 440
 Of grandees who give banquets worthy Jove,
 Spending gold as if Plutus paid a whim,
 Served with obeisances as when . . . what God ?
 I'm at the end of my tether ; 'tis enough
 You understand what they came primed to see : 445
 While Guido who should minister the sight,
 Stay all this qualmish greediness of soul
 With apples and with flagons—for his part,
 Was set on life diverse as pole from pole :
 Lust of the flesh, lust of the eye,—what else 450
 Was he just now awake from, sick and sage,
 After the very debauch they would begin?—
 Suppose such stuff and nonsense really were.

That bubble, they were bent on blowing big,
 He had blown already till he burst his cheeks, 455
 And hence found soapsuds bitter to the tongue.
 He hoped now to walk softly all his days
 In soberness of spirit, if haply so,
 Pinching and paring he might furnish forth
 A frugal board, bare sustenance, no more, 460
 Till times, that could not well grow worse, should mend.

Thus minded then, two parties mean to meet
 And make each other happy. The first week,
 And fancy strikes fact and explodes in full.
 "This," shrieked the Comparini, "this the Count, 465
 "The palace, the signorial privilege,
 "The pomp and pageantry were promised us?
 "For this have we exchanged our liberty,
 "Our competence, our darling of a child?
 "To house as spectres in a sepulchre 470
 "Under this black stone heap, the street's disgrace,
 "Grimmest as that is of the gruesome town,

- " And here pick garbage on a pewter plate
 " Or cough at verjuice dripped from earthenware?
 " Oh Via Vittoria, oh the other place 475
 " I' the Pauline, did we give you up for this?
 " Where's the foregone housekeeping good and gay,
 " The neighbourliness, the companionship,
 " The treat and feast when holidays came round,
 " The daily feast that seemed no treat at all, 480
 " Called common by the uncommon fools we were!
 " Even the sun that used to shine at Rome,
 " Where is it? Robbed and starved and frozen too,
 " We will have justice, justice if there be!"
 Did not they shout, did not the town resound! 485
 Guido's old lady-mother Beatrice,
 Who since her husband, Count Tommaso's death,
 Had held sole sway i' the house,—the doited crone
 Slow to acknowledge, curtsey and abdicate,—
 Was recognized of true novercal type, 490
 Dragon and devil. His brother Girolamo
 Came next in order: priest was he? The worse!

No way of winning him to leave his mumps
And help the laugh against old ancestry
And formal habits long since out of date, 495
Letting his youth be patterned on the mode
Approved of where Violante laid down law.
Or did he brighten up by way of change ?
Dispose himself for affability ?
The malapert, too complaisant by half 500
To the alarmed young novice of a bride !
Let him go buzz, betake himself elsewhere
Nor sing his fly-wings in the candle-flame !

Four months' probation of this purgatory,
Dog-snap and cat-claw, curse and counterblast, 505
The devil's self had been sick of his own din ;
And Pietro, after trumpeting huge wrongs
At church and market-place, pillar and post,
Square's corner, street's end, now the palace-step
And now the wine-house bench—while, on her side, 510
Violante up and down was voluble

In whatsoever pair of ears would perk
 From goody, gossip, cater-cousin and sib,
 Curious to peep at the inside of things
 And catch in the act pretentious poverty 515
 At its wits' end to keep appearance up,
 Make both ends meet,—nothing the vulgar loves
 Like what this couple pitched them right and left,—
 Then, their worst done that way, they struck tent, marched:
 —Renounced their share o' the bargain, flung what dues
 Guido was bound to pay, in Guido's face, 521
 Left their hearts'-darling, treasure of the twain
 And so forth, the poor inexperienced bride,
 To her own devices, bade Arezzo rot
 And the life signorial, and sought Rome once more. 525

I see the comment ready on your lip,
 " The better fortune, Guido's—free at least
 " By this defection of the foolish pair,
 " He could begin make profit in some sort
 " Of the young bride and the new quietness, 530

“Lead his own life now, henceforth breathe unplagued.”
 Could he? You know the sex like Guido’s self.
 Learn the Violante-nature!

Once in Rome,

By way of helping Guido lead such life, 535
 Her first act to inaugurate return
 Was, she got pricked in conscience: Jubilee
 Gave her the hint. Our Pope, as kind as just,
 Attained his eighty years, announced a boon
 Should make us bless the fact, held Jubilee— 540
 Short shrift, prompt pardon for the light offence,
 And no rough dealing with the regular crime
 So this occasion were not suffered slip—
 Otherwise, sins commuted as before,
 Without the least abatement in the price. 545
 Now, who had thought it? All this while, it seems,
 Our sage Violante had a sin of a sort
 She must compound for now or not at all:
 Now be the ready riddance! She confessed

Pompilia was a fable not a fact : 550
She never bore a child in her whole life.
Had this child been a changeling, that were grace
In some degree; exchange is hardly theft ;
You take your stand on truth ere leap your lie :
Here was all lie, no touch of truth at all, 555
All the lie hers—not even Pietro guessed
He was as childless still as twelve years since.
The babe had been a find i' the filth-heap, Sir,
Catch from the kennel ! There was found at Rome,
Down in the deepest of our social dregs, 560
A woman who professed the wanton's trade
Under the requisite thin coverture,
Communis meretrix and washer-wife :
The creature thus conditioned found by chance
Motherhood like a jewel in the muck, 565
And straightway either trafficked with her prize
Or listened to the tempter and let be,—
Made pact abolishing her place and part
In womankind, beast-fellowship indeed—

She sold this babe eight months before its birth 570

To our Violante, Pietro's honest spouse,

Well-famed and widely-instanced as that crown

To the husband, virtue in a woman's shape.

She it was, bought and paid for, passed the thing

Off as the flesh and blood and child of her 575

Despite the flagrant fifty years,—and why?

Partly to please old Pietro, fill his cup

With wine at the late hour when lees are left,

And send him from life's feast rejoicingly,—

Partly to cheat the rightful heirs, agape, 580

Each uncle's cousin's brother's son of him,

For that same principal of the usufruct

It vext him he must die and leave behind.

Such was the sin had come to be confessed.

Which of the tales, the first or last, was true? 585

Did she so sin once, or, confessing now,

Sin for the first time? Either way you will.

One sees a reason for the cheat : one sees

A reason for a cheat in owning cheat
 Where no cheat had been. What of the revenge? 590
 What prompted the contrition all at once,
 Made the avowal easy, the shame slight?
 Why, prove they but Pompilia not their child,
 No child, no dowry; this, supposed their child,
 Had claimed what this, shown alien to their blood, 595
 Claimed nowise: Guido's claim was through his wife,
 Null then and void with hers. The biter bit,
 Do you see! For such repayment of the past,
 One might conceive the penitential pair
 Ready to bring their case before the courts, 600
 Publish their infamy to all the world
 And, arm in arm, go chuckling thence content.

Is this your view? 'Twas Guido's anyhow
 And colourable: he came forward then,
 Protested in his very bride's behalf 605
 Against this lie and all it led to, least
 Of all the loss o' the dowry; no! From her

And him alike he would expunge the blot,
Erase the brand of such a bestial birth,
Participate in no hideous heritage 610
Gathered from the gutter to be garnered up
And glorified in a palace. Peter and Paul !
But that who likes may look upon the pair
Exposed in yonder church, and show his skill
By saying which is eye and which is mouth 615
Thro' those stabs thick and threefold,—but for that—
A strong word on the liars and their lie
Might crave expression and obtain it, Sir !
—Though prematurely, since there's more to come,
More that will shake your confidence in things 620
Your cousin tells you,—may I be so bold ?

This makes the first act of the farce,—anon
The stealing sombre element comes in
Till all is black or blood-red in the piece.
Guido, thus made a laughing-stock abroad, 625
A proverb for the market-place at home,

Left alone with Pompilia now, this graft

So reputable on his ancient stock,

This plague-seed set to fester his sound flesh,

What did the Count? Revenge him on his wife? 630

Unfasten at all risks to rid himself

The noisome lazar-badge, fall foul of fate,

And, careless whether the poor rag was ware

O' the part it played, or helped unwittingly,

Bid it go burn and leave his frayed flesh free? 635

Plainly, did Guido open both doors wide,

Spurn thence the cur-cast creature and clear scores

As man might, tempted in extreme like this?

No, birth and breeding, and compassion too

Saved her such scandal. She was young, he thought, 640

Not privy to the treason, punished most

I' the proclamation of it; why make her

A party to the crime she suffered by?

Then the black eyes were now her very own,

Not any more Violante's: let her live, 645

Lose in a new air, under a new sun,

The taint of the imputed parentage
 Truly or falsely, take no more the touch
 Of Pietro and his partner anyhow !
 All might go well yet. 650

So she thought, herself,

It seems, since what was her first act and deed
 When news came how these kindly ones at Rome
 Had stripped her naked to amuse the world
 With spots here, spots there and spots everywhere? 655
 —For I should tell you that they noised abroad
 Not merely the main scandal of her birth,
 But slanders written, printed, published wide,
 Pamphlets which set forth all the pleasantry
 Of how the promised glory was a dream, 660
 The power a bubble and the wealth—why, dust.
 There was a picture, painted to the life,
 Of those rare doings, that superlative
 Initiation in magnificence
 Conferred on a poor Roman family 665

By favour of Arezzo and her first
And famousest, the Franceschini there.
You had the Countship holding head aloft
Bravely although bespattered, shifts and straits
In keeping out o' the way o' the wheels o' the
world, 670

The comic of those home-contrivances
When the old lady-mother's wit was taxed
To find six clamorous mouths in food more real
Than fruit plucked off the cobwebbed family-tree,
Or acorns shed from its gilt mouldered frame— 675
Cold glories served up with three-pauls' worth'
sauce.

What, I ask,—when the drunkenness of hate
Hiccaped return for hospitality,
Befouled the table they had feasted on,
Or say,—God knows I'll not prejudge the case,— 680
Grievances thus distorted, magnified,
Coloured by quarrel into calumny,—
What side did our Pompilia first espouse?

Her first deliberate measure was, she wrote,
Pricked by some loyal impulse, straight to Rome 685
And her husband's brother the Abate there,
Who, having managed to effect the match,
Might take men's censure for its ill success.
She made a clean breast also in her turn ;
She qualified the couple handsomely ! 690
Since whose departure, hell, she said, was heaven,
And the house, late distracted by their peals,
Quiet as Carmel where the lilies live.
Herself had oftentimes complained : but why ?
All her complaints had been their prompting, tales 695
Trumped up, devices to this very end.
Their game had been to thwart her husband's love
And cross his will, malign his words and ways,
So reach this issue, furnish this pretence
For impudent withdrawal from their bond,— 700
Theft, indeed murder, since they meant no less
Whose last injunction to her simple self
Had been—what parents'-precept do you think ?

That she should follow after with all speed,
Fly from her husband's house clandestinely, 705
Join them at Rome again, but first of all
Pick up a fresh companion in her flight,
Putting so youth and beauty to fit use,
Some gay, dare-devil, cloak-and-rapier spark
Capable of adventure,—helped by whom 710
She, some fine eve when lutes were in the air,
Having put poison in the posset-cup,
Laid hands on money, jewels and the like,
And, to conceal the thing with more effect,
By way of parting benediction too, 715
Fired the house,—one would finish famously
I' the tumult, slip out, scurry off and away
And turn up merrily at home once more.
Fact this, and not a dream o' the devil, Sir !
And more than this, a fact none dare dispute, 720
Word for word, such a letter did she write.
And such the Abate read, nor simply read
But gave all Rome to ruminate upon,

In answer to such charges as, I say,
 The couple sought to be beforehand with. 725

The cause thus carried to the courts at Rome,
 Guido away, the Abate had no choice
 But stand forth, take his absent brother's part,
 Defend the honour of himself beside.

He made what head he might against the pair, 730
 Maintained Pompilia's birth legitimate

And all her rights intact—hers, Guido's now—
 And so far by his tactics turned their flank,
 The enemy being beforehand in the place,
 That, though the courts allowed the cheat for fact, 735

Suffered Violante to parade her shame,
 Publish her infamy to heart's content,
 And let the tale o' the feigned birth pass for proved,—
 Yet they stopped there, refused to intervene
 And dispossess the innocents, befooled 740

By gifts o' the guilty, at guilt's new caprice :
 They would not take away the dowry now

Wrongfully given at first, nor bar at all
Succession to the aforesaid usufruct,
Established on a fraud, nor play the game 745
Of Pietro's child and now not Pietro's child
As it might suit the gamester's purpose. Thus
Was justice ever ridiculed in Rome :
Such be the double verdicts favoured here
Which send away both parties to a suit 750
Nor puffed up nor cast down,—for each a crumb
Of right, for neither of them the whole loaf.
Whence, on the Comparini's part, appeal—
Counter-appeal on Guido's,—that's the game :
And so the matter stands, even to this hour, 755
Banded as balls are in a tennis-court,
And so might stand, unless some heart broke
first,
Till doomsday.

Leave it thus, and now revert
To the old Arezzo whence we moved to Rome. 760

We've had enough o' the parents, false or true,
Now for a touch o' the daughter's quality.
The start 's fair henceforth—every obstacle
Out of the young wife's footpath—she's alone—
Left to walk warily now : how does she walk ? 765
Why, once a dwelling's doorpost marked and crossed
In rubric by the enemy on his rounds
As eligible, as fit place of prey,
Baffle him henceforth, keep him out who can !
Stop up the door at the first hint of hoof, 770
Presently at the window taps a horn,
And Satan 's by your fireside, never fear !
Pompilia, left alone now, found herself ;
Found herself young too, sprightly, fair enough,
Matched with a husband old beyond his age 775
(Though that was something like four times her
own)
Because of cares past, present and to come :
Found too the house dull and its inmates dead,
So, looked outside for light and life.

And lo 780

There in a trice did turn up life and light,
 The man with the aureole, sympathy made flesh,
 The all-consoling Caponsacchi, Sir !
 A priest—what else should the consoler be ?
 With goodly shoulderblade and proper leg, 785
 A portly make and a symmetric shape,
 And curls that clustered to the tonsure quite.
 This was a bishop in the bud, and now
 A canon full-blown so far : priest, and priest
 Nowise exorbitantly overworked, 790
 The courtly Christian, not so much Saint Paul
 As a saint of Cæsar's household : there posed he
 Sending his god-glance after his shot shaft,
 Apollos turned Apollo, while the snake
 Pompilia writhed transfixed through all her spires. 795
 He, not a visitor at Guido's house,
 Scarce an acquaintance, but in prime request
 With the magnates of Arezzo, was seen here,
 Heard there, felt everywhere in Guido's path

If Guido's wife's path be her husband's too. 800

Now he threw comfits at the theatre

Into her lap,—what harm in Carnival?

Now he pressed close till his foot touched her gown,

His hand brushed hers,—how help on promenade?

And, ever on weighty business, found his steps 805

Incline to a certain haunt of doubtful fame

Which fronted Guido's palace by mere chance;

While—how do accidents sometimes combine!

Pompilia chose to cloister up her charms

Just in a chamber that o'erlooked the street, 810

Sat there to pray, or peep thence at mankind.

This passage of arms and wits amused the town.

At last the husband lifted eyebrow,—bent

On day-book and the study how to wring

Half the due vintage from the worn-out vines 815

At the villa, tease a quarter the old rent

From the farmstead, tenants swore would tumble soon,—

Pricked up his ear a-singing day and night

And lo 780

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Pricked up his ear a-singing day and night

With "ruin, ruin;"—and so surprised at last—
 Why, what else but a titter? Up he jumps. 820
 Back to mind come those scratchings at the grange,
 Prints of the paw about the outhouse; rife
 In his head at once again are word and wink,
Mum here and *budget* there, the smell o' the fox,
 The musk o' the gallant. "Friends, there's falseness here!"

The proper help of friends in such a strait 826
 Is waggery, the world over. Laugh him free
 O' the regular jealous-fit that's incident
 To all old husbands that wed brisk young wives,
 And he'll go duly docile all his days. 830
 "Somebody courts your wife, Count? Where and when?
 "How and why? Mere horn-madness: have a care!
 "Your lady loves her own room, sticks to it,
 "Locks herself in for hours, you say yourself.
 "And—what, it's Caponsacchi means you harm? 835
 "The Canon? We caress him, he's the world's,
 "A man of such acceptance,—never dream,

- “ Though he were fifty times the fox you fear,
“ He’d risk his brush for your particular chick,
“ When the wide town’s his hen-roost ! Fie o’ the fool ! ”
So they dispensed their comfort of a kind. 841
Guido at last cried “ Something is in the air,
“ Under the earth, some plot against my peace :
“ The trouble of eclipse hangs overhead,
“ How it should come of that officious orb 845
“ Your Canon in my system, you must say :
“ I say—that from the pressure of this spring
“ Began the chime and interchange of bells,
“ Ever one whisper, and one whisper more,
“ And just one whisper for the silvery last, 850
“ Till all at once a-row the bronze-throats burst
“ Into a larum both significant
“ And sinister : stop it I must and will.
“ Let Caponsacchi take his hand away
“ From the wire !—disport himself in other paths 855
“ Than lead precisely to my palace-gate,—
“ Look where he likes except one window’s way

" Where, cheek on hand, and elbow set on sill,
 " Happens to lean and say her litanies
 " Every day and all day long, just my wife— 860
 " Or wife and Caponsacchi may fare the worse ! "

Admire the man's simplicity, " I'll do this,
 " I'll not have that, I'll punish and prevent ! "—
 'Tis easy saying. But to a fray, you see,
 Two parties go. The badger shows his teeth : 865
 The fox nor lies down sheep-like nor dares fight.
 Oh, the wife knew the appropriate warfare well,
 The way to put suspicion to the blush !
 At first hint of remonstrance, up and out
 I' the face of the world, you found her : she could speak,
 State her case,—Franceschini was a name, 871
 Guido had his full share of foes and friends—
 Why should not she call these to arbitrate ?
 She bade the Governor do governance,
 Cried out on the Archbishop,—why, there now, 875
 Take him for sample ! Three successive times,

Had he to reconduct her by main-force
From where she took her station opposite
His shut door,—on the public steps thereto,
Wringing her hands, when he came out to see, 880
And shrieking all her wrongs forth at his foot,—
Back to the husband and the house she fled :
Judge if that husband warmed him in the face
Of friends or frowned on foes as heretofore !
Judge if he missed the natural grin of folk, 885
Or lacked the customary compliment
Of cap and bells, the luckless husband's fit !

So it went on and on till—who was right ?
One merry April morning, Guido woke
After the cuckoo, so late, near noonday, 890
With an inordinate yawning of the jaws,
Ears plugged, eyes gummed together, palate, tongue
And teeth one mud-paste made of poppy-milk ;
And found his wife flown, his scrutoire the worse
For a rummage,—jewelry that was, was not, 895

Some money there had made itself wings too,—
The door lay wide and yet the servants slept
Sound as the dead, or dosed which does as well.
In short, Pompilia, she who, candid soul,
Had not so much as spoken all her life 900
To the Canon, nay, so much as peeped at him
Between her fingers while she prayed in church,—
This lamb-like innocent of fifteen years
(Such she was grown to by this time of day)
Had simply put an opiate in the drink 905
Of the whole household overnight, and then
Got up and gone about her work secure,
Laid hand on this waif and the other stray,
Spoiled the Philistine and marched out of doors
In company of the Canon who, Lord's love, 910
What with his daily duty at the church,
Nightly devoir where ladies congregate,
Had something else to mind, assure yourself,
Beside Pompilia, paragon though she be,
Or notice if her nose were sharp or blunt! 915

Well, anyhow, albeit impossible,
 Both of them were together jollily
 Jaunting it Rome-ward, half-way there by this,
 While Guido was left go and get undrugged,
 Gather his wits up, groaningly give thanks 920
 When neighbours crowded round him to condole.
 " Ah," quoth a gossip, " well I mind me now,
 " The Count did always say he thought he felt
 " He feared as if this very chance might fall !
 " And when a man of fifty finds his corns 925
 " Ache and his joints throb, and foresees a storm,
 " Though neighbours laugh and say the sky is clear,
 " Let us henceforth believe him weatherwise !"
 Then was the story told, I'll cut you short :
 All neighbours knew : no mystery in the world. 930
 The lovers left at nightfall—over night
 Had Caponsacchi come to carry off
 Pompilia,—not alone, a friend of his,
 One Guillichini, the more conversant
 With Guido's housekeeping that he was just 935

A cousin of Guido's and might play a prank—
(Have not you too a cousin that 's a wag?)
—Lord and a Canon also,—what would you have?
Such are the red-clothed milk-swollen poppy-heads
That stand and stiffen 'mid the wheat o' the Church!—
This worthy came to aid, abet his best. 941
And so the house was ransacked, booty bagged,
The lady led downstairs and out of doors
Guided and guarded till, the city passed,
A carriage lay convenient at the gate. 945
Good-bye to the friendly Canon; the loving one
Could peradventure do the rest himself.
In jumps Pompilia, after her the priest,
“Whip, driver! Money makes the mare to go,
“And we've a bagful. Take the Roman road!” 950
So said the neighbours. This was eight hours since.

Guido heard all, swore the befitting oaths,
Shook off the relics of his poison-drench,
Got horse, was fairly started in pursuit

With never a friend to follow, found the track 955
Fast enough, 't was the straight Perugia way,
Trode soon upon their very heels, too late
By a minute only at Camoscia, at
Chiusi, Foligno, ever the fugitives
Just ahead, just out as he galloped in, 960
Getting the good news ever fresh and fresh,
Till, lo, at the last stage of all, last post
Before Rome,—as we say, in sight of Rome
And safety (there's impunity at Rome
For priests, you know) at—what's the little place? 965
What some call Castelnuovo, some just call
The Osteria, because o' the post-house inn,
There, at the journey's all but end, it seems,
Triumph deceived them and undid them both,
Secure they might foretaste felicity 970
Nor fear surprisal : so, they were surprised.
There did they halt at early evening, there
Did Guido overtake them : 't was day-break ;
He came in time enough, not time too much,

Since in the courtyard stood the Canon's self 975
Urging the drowsy stable-grooms to haste
Harness the horses, have the journey end,
The trifling four-hours'-running, so reach Rome.
And the other runaway, the wife? Upstairs,
Still on the couch where she had spent the night, 980
One couch in one room, and one room for both.
So gained they six hours, so were lost thereby,

Sir, what's the sequel? Lover and beloved
Fall on their knees? No impudence serves here?
They beat their breasts and beg for easy death, 985
Confess this, that and the other?—anyhow
Confess there wanted not some likelihood
To the supposition so preposterous,
That, O Pompilia, thy sequestered eyes
Had noticed, straying o'er the prayerbook's edge, 990
More of the Canon than that black his coat,
Buckled his shoes were, broad his hat of brim :
And that, O Canon, thy religious care

Had breathed too soft a *benedicite*
 To banish trouble from a lady's breast 995
 So lonely and so lovely, nor so lean !
 This you expect ? Indeed, then, much you err.
 Not to such ordinary end as this
 Had Caponsacchi flung the cassock far,
 Doffed the priest, donned the perfect cavalier ; 1000
 The die was cast : over shoes over boots :
 And just as she, I presently shall show,
 Pompilia, soon looked Helen to the life,
 Recumbent upstairs in her pink and white,
 So, in the inn-yard, bold as 't were Troy-town, 1005
 There strutted Paris in correct costume,
 Cloak, cap and feather, no appointment missed,
 Even to a wicked-looking sword at side,
 He seemed to find and feel familiar at.
 Nor wanted words as ready and as big 1010
 As the part he played, the bold abashless one.
 " I interposed to save your wife from death,
 " Yourself from shame, the true and only shame :

" Ask your own conscience else !—or, failing that,
 " What I have done I answer, anywhere, 1015
 " Here, if you will ; you see I have a sword :
 " Or, since I have a tonsure as you taunt,
 " At Rome, by all means,—priests to try a priest.
 " Only, speak where your wife's voice can reply !"
 And then he fingered at the sword again. 1020
 So, Guido called, in aid and witness both,
 The Public Force. The Commissary came,
 Officers also ; they secured the priest ;
 Then, for his more confusion, mounted up
 With him, a guard on either side, the stair 1025
 To the bed-room where still slept or feigned a sleep
 His paramour and Guido's wife : in burst
 The company and bade her wake and rise.

 Her defence? This. She woke, saw, sprang upright
 I' the midst and stood as terrible as truth, 1030
 Sprang to her husband's side, caught at the sword
 That hung there useless, since they held each hand

O' the lover, had disarmed him properly,
 And in a moment out flew the bright thing
 Full in the face of Guido,—but for help 1035
 O' the guards who held her back and pinioned her
 With pains enough, she had finished you my tale
 With a flourish of red all round it, pinked her man
 Prettily ; but she fought them one to six.
 They stopped that,—but her tongue continued free : 1040
 She spat forth such invective at her spouse,
 O'erfrothed him with such foam of murderer,
 Thief, pandar—that the popular tide soon turned,
 The favour of the very *sbirri*, straight
 Ebbd from the husband, set toward his wife, 1045
 People cried “ Hands off, pay a priest respect ! ”
 And “ persecuting fiend ” and “ martyred saint ”
 Began to lead a measure from lip to lip.

But facts are facts and flinch not ; stubborn things,
 And the question “ Prithee, friend, how comes my purse
 “ I' the poke of you ? ”—admits of no reply. 1051

Here was a priest found out in masquerade,
 A wife caught playing truant if no more ;
 While the Count, mortified in mien enough,
 And, nose to face, an added palm in length, 1055
 Was plain writ " husband " every piece of him :
 Capture once made, release could hardly be.
 Beside, the prisoners both made appeal,
 " Take us to Rome ! "

Taken to Rome they were ; 1060
 The husband trooping after, piteously,
 Tail between legs, no talk of triumph now—
 No honour set firm on its feet once more
 On two dead bodies of the guilty,—nay,
 No dubious salve to honour's broken pate 1065
 From chance that, after all, the hurt might seem
 A skin-deep matter, scratch that leaves no scar :
 For Guido's first search,—ferreting, poor soul,
 Here, there and everywhere in the vile place
 Abandoned to him when their backs were turned, 1070
 Found,—furnishing a last and best regale,—

All the love-letters bandied twixt the pair
Since the first timid trembling into life
O' the love-star till its stand at fiery full.
Mad prose, mad verse, fears, hopes, triumph, despair,
Avowal, disclaimer, plans, dates, names,—was nought
Wanting to prove, if proof consoles at all, 1077
That this had been but the fifth act o' the piece
Whereof the due proemium, months ago
These playwrights had put forth, and ever since 1080
Matured the middle, added 'neath his nose.
He might go cross himself: the case was clear.

Therefore to Rome with the clear case; there plead
Each party its best, and leave the law do right,
Let her shine forth and show, as God in heaven, 1085
Vice prostrate, virtue pedestalled at last,
The triumph of truth! What else shall glad our gaze
When once authority has knit the brow
And set the brain behind it to decide
Between the wolf and sheep turned litigants? 1090

- " This is indeed a business " law shook head :
 " A husband charges hard things on a wife,
 " The wife as hard o' the husband : whose fault here ?
 " A wife that flies her husband's house, does wrong :
 " The male friend's interference looks amiss, 1095
 " Lends a suspicion : but suppose the wife,
 " On the other hand, be jeopardized at home—
 " Nay, that she simply hold, ill-groundedly,
 " An apprehension she is jeopardized,—
 " And further, if the friend partake the fear, 1100
 " And, in a commendable charity
 " Which trusteth all, trust her that she mistrusts,—
 " What do they but obey the natural law ?
 " Pretence may this be and a cloak for sin,
 " And circumstances that concur i' the close 1105
 " Hint as much, loudly—yet scarce loud enough
 " To drown the answer ' strange may yet be true :'
 " Innocence often looks like guiltiness.
 " The accused declare that in thought, word and deed,
 " Innocent were they both from first to last 1110

- " As male-babe haply laid by female-babe
 " At church on edge of the baptismal font
 " Together for a minute, perfect-pure.
 " Difficult to believe, yet possible,
 " As witness Joseph, the friend's patron-saint. 1115
 " The night at the inn—there charity nigh chokes
 " Ere swallow what they both asseverate ;
 " Though down the gullet faith may feel it go,
 " When mindful of what flight fatigued the flesh
 " Out of its faculty and fleshliness, 1120
 " Subdued it to the soul, as saints assure :
 " So long a flight necessitates a fall
 " On the first bed, though in a lion's den,
 " And the first pillow, though the lion's back :
 " Difficult to believe, yet possible. 1125
 " Last come the letters' bundled beastliness—
 " Authority repugns give glance to twice,
 " Turns head, and almost lets her whip-lash fall ;
 " Yet here a voice cries 'Respite !' from the clouds—
 " The accused, both in a tale, protest, disclaim, 1130

- “ Abominate the horror : ‘ Not my hand ’
- “ Asserts the friend—‘ Nor mine ’ chimes in the wife,
- “ ‘ Seeing I have no hand, nor write at all.’
- “ Illiterate—for she goes on to ask,
- “ What if the friend did pen now verse now prose, 1135
- “ Commend it to her notice now and then ?
- “ ’Twas pearls to swine : she read no more than wrote,
- “ And kept no more than read, for as they fell
- “ She ever brushed the burr-like things away,
- “ Or, better, burned them, quenched the fire in smoke.
- “ As for this fardel, filth and foolishness, 1141
- “ She sees it now the first time : burn it too !
- “ While for his part the friend vows ignorance
- “ Alike of what bears his name and bears hers :
- “ ’Tis forgery, a felon’s masterpiece, 1145
- “ And, as ’tis said the fox still finds the stench,
- “ Home-manufacture and the husband’s work.
- “ Though he confesses, the ingenuous friend,
- “ That certain missives, letters of a sort,
- “ Flighty and feeble, which assigned themselves 1150

- “ To the wife, no less have fallen, far too oft,
“ In his path : wherefrom he understood just this—
“ That were they verily the lady’s own,
“ Why, she who penned them, since he never saw
“ Save for one minute the mere face of her, 1155
“ Since never had there been the interchange
“ Of word with word between them all their life,
“ Why, she must be the fondest of the frail,
“ And fit, she for the ‘ *apage* ’ he flung,
“ Her letters for the flame they went to feed. 1160
“ But, now he sees her face and hears her speech,
“ Much he repents him if, in fancy-freak
“ For a moment the minutest measurable,
“ He coupled her with the first flimsy word
“ O’ the self-spun fabric some mean spider-soul 1165
“ Furnished forth : stop his films and stamp on him !
“ Never was such a tangled knottiness,
“ But thus authority cuts the Gordian through,
“ And mark how her decision suits the need !
“ Here’s troublesomeness, scandal on both sides, 1170

- " Plenty of fault to find, no absolute crime :
 " Let each side own its fault and make amends !
 " What does a priest in cavalier's attire
 " Consorting publicly with vagrant wives
 " In quarters close as the confessional, 1175
 " 'Though innocent of harm ? 'Tis harm enough :
 " Let him pay it, and be relegate a good
 " Three years, to spend in some place not too far
 " Nor yet too near, midway twixt near and far,
 " Rome and Arezzo,—Civita we choose, 1180
 " Where he may lounge away time, live at large,
 " Find out the proper function of a priest,
 " Nowise an exile,—that were punishment,
 " But one our love thus keeps out of harm's way
 " Not more from the husband's anger than, mayhap 1185
 " His own . . . say, indiscretion, waywardness,
 " And wanderings when Easter eves grow warm.
 " For the wife,—well, our best step to take with her,
 " On her own showing, were to shift her root
 " From the old cold shade and unhappy soil 1190

- “ Into a generous ground that fronts the south :
“ Where, since her callow soul, a-shiver late,
“ Craved simply warmth and called mere passers-by
“ To the rescue, she should have her fill of shine.
“ Do house and husband hinder and not help? 1195
“ Why then, forget both and stay here at peace,
“ Come into our community, enroll
“ Herself along with those good Convertites,
“ Those sinners saved, those Magdalens re-made,
“ Accept their ministration, well bestow 1200
“ Her body and patiently possess her soul,
“ Until we see what better can be done.
“ Last for the husband : if his tale prove true,
“ Well is he rid of two domestic plagues—
“ The wife that ailed, do whatsoever he would, 1205
“ And friend of hers that undertook the cure.
“ See, what a double load we lift from breast !
“ Off he may go, return, resume old life,
“ Laugh at the priest here and Pompilia there
“ In limbo each and punished for their pains, 1210

“ And grateful tell the inquiring neighbourhood—

“ In Rome, no wrong but has its remedy.”

The case was closed. Now, am I fair or no

In what I utter? Do I state the facts,

Having forechosen a side? I promised you! 1215

The Canon Caponsacchi, then, was sent

To change his garb, re-trim his tonsure, tie

The clerkly silk round, every plait correct,

Make the impressive entry on his place

Of relegation, thrill his Civita, 1220

As Ovid, a like sufferer in the cause,

Planted a primrose-patch by Pontus: where,

What with much culture of the sonnet-stave

And converse with the aborigines,

Soft savagery of eyes unused to roll, 1225

And hearts that all awry went pit-a-pat

And wanted setting right in charity,

What were a couple of years to while away?

Pompilia, as enjoined, betook herself

- To the aforesaid Convertites, the sisterhood 1230
 In Via Lungara, where the light ones live,
 Spin, pray, then sing like linnets o'er the flax.
 " Anywhere, anyhow, out of my husband's house
 " Is heaven," cried she,—was therefore suited so.
 But for Count Guido Franceschini, he— 1235
 The injured man thus righted—found no heaven
 I' the house when he returned there, I engage,
 Was welcomed by the city turned upside down
 In a chorus of inquiry. " What, back—you ?
 " And no wife ? Left her with the Penitents ? 1240
 " Ah, being young and pretty, 'twere a shame
 " To have her whipped in public : leave the job
 " To the priests who understand ! Such priests as yours—
 " (Pontifex Maximus whipped Vestals once)
 " Our madcap Caponsacchi : think of him ! 1245
 " So, he fired up, showed fight and skill of fence ?
 " Ay, you drew also, but you did not fight !
 " The wiser, 'tis a word and a blow with him,
 " True Caponsacchi, of old Head-i'-the-Sack

“ That fought at Fiesole ere Florence was : 1250

“ He had done enough, to firk you were too much.

“ And did the little lady menace you,

“ Make at your breast with your own harmless sword ?

“ The spitfire ! Well, thank God you’re safe and sound,

“ Have kept the sixth commandment whether or no

“ The lady broke the seventh : I only wish 1256

“ I were as saint-like, could contain me so.

“ I am a sinner, I fear I should have left

“ Sir Priest no nose-tip to turn up at me !”

You, Sir, who listen but interpose no word, 1260

Ask yourself, had you borne a baiting thus ?

Was it enough to make a wise man mad ?

Oh, but I’ll have your verdict at the end !

Well, not enough, it seems : such mere hurt falls,

Frets awhile, and aches long, then less and less, 1265

And so is done with. Such was not the scheme

O’ the pleasant Comparini : on Guido’s wound

Ever in due succession, drop by drop,

Came slow distilment from the alembic here
Set on to simmer by Canidian hate, 1270
Corrosives keeping the man's misery raw.
First fire-drop,—when he thought to make the best
O' the bad, to wring from out the sentence passed,
Poor, pitiful, absurd although it were,
Yet what might eke him out result enough 1275
And make it worth his while he had the right
And not the wrong i' the matter judged at Rome.
Inadequate her punishment, no less
Punished in some slight sort his wife had been ;
Then, punished for adultery, what else ? 1280
On such admitted crime he thought to seize,
And institute procedure in the courts
Which cut corruption of this kind from man,
Cast loose a wife proved loose and castaway :
He claimed in due form a divorce at least. 1285

This claim was met now by a counterclaim :
Pompilia sought divorce from bed and board

Of Guido, whose outrageous cruelty,
Whose mother's malice and whose brother's hate
Were just the white o' the charge, such dreadful depths
Blackened its centre,—hints of worse than hate, 1291
Love from that brother, by that Guido's guile,
That mother's prompting. Such reply was made,
So was the engine loaded, wound up, sprung
On Guido, who received the bolt in breast ; 1295
But no less bore up, giddily perhaps.
He had the Abate Paolo still in Rome,
Brother and friend and fighter on his side :
They rallied in a measure, met the foe
Manlike, joined battle in the public courts, 1300
As if to shame supine law from her sloth :
And waiting her award, let beat the while
Arezzo's banter, Rome's buffoonery,
On this ear and on that ear, deaf alike,
Safe from worse outrage. Let a scorpion nip, 1305
And never mind till he contorts his tail !
But there was sting i' the creature ; thus it struck.

Guido had thought in his simplicity—
That lying declaration of remorse,
That story of the child which was no child 1310
And motherhood no motherhood at all,
—That even this sin might have its sort of good
Inasmuch as no question could be more,
Call it false, call the story true, no claim
Of further parentage pretended now : 1315
The parents had abjured all right, at least,
I' the woman still his wife : to plead right now
Were to declare the abjuration false :
He was relieved from any fear henceforth
Their hands might touch, their breath defile again 1320
Pompilia with his name upon her yet.
Well, no : the next news was, Pompilia's health
Demanded change after full three long weeks
Spent in devotion with the Sisterhood,—
Rendering sojourn,—so the court opined,— 1325
Too irksome, since the convent's walls were high
And windows narrow, nor was air enough

Nor light enough, but all looked prison-like,
 The last thing which had come in the court's
 head.

Propose a new expedient therefore,—this! 1330

She had demanded—had obtained indeed,
 By intervention of whatever friends
 Or perhaps lovers—(beauty in distress,
 In one whose tale is the town-talk beside,
 Never lacks friendship's arm about her neck)— 1335

Not freedom, scarce remitted penalty,
 Solely the transfer to some private place
 Where better air, more light, new food might be—
 Incarcerated (call it, all the same)

At some sure friend's house she must keep inside, 1340

Be found in at requirement fast enough,—

Domus pro carcere, in Roman style.

You keep the house i' the main, as most men do

And all good women : but free otherwise,

Should friends arrive, to lodge and entertain. 1345

And such a *domum*, such a dwelling-place,

Having all Rome to choose from, where chose she?
 What house obtained Pompilia's preference?
 Why, just the Comparini's—just, do you mark,
 Theirs who renounced all part and lot in her 1350
 So long as Guido could be robbed thereby,
 And only fell back on relationship
 And found their daughter safe and sound again
 So soon as that might stab him: yes, the pair
 Who, as I told you, first had baited hook 1355
 With this poor gilded fly Pompilia-thing,
 Then caught the fish, pulled Guido to the shore
 And gutted him,—now found a further use
 For the bait, would trail the gauze wings yet
 again
 I' the way of what new swimmer passed their stand. 1360
 They took Pompilia to their hiding-place—
 Not in the heart of Rome as formerly,
 Under observance, subject to control—
 But out o' the way,—or in the way, who knows?
 That blind mute villa lurking by the gate 1365

At Via Paulina, not so hard to miss
By the honest eye, easy enough to find
In twilight by marauders : where perchance
Some muffled Caponsacchi might repair,
Employ odd moments when he too tried change, 1370
Found that a friend's abode was pleasanter
Than relegation, penance and the rest.

Come, here's the last drop does its worst to wound,
Here's Guido poisoned to the bone, you say,
Your boasted still's full strain and strength : not so! 1375
One master-squeeze from screw shall bring to birth
The hoard i' the heart o' the toad, hell's quintessence.
He learned the true convenience of the change,
And why a convent wants the cheerful hearts
And helpful hands which female straits require, 1380
When, in the blind mute villa by the gate,
Pompilia—what? sang, danced, saw company?
—Gave birth, Sir, to a child, his son and heir,
Or Guido's heir and Caponsacchi's son.

I want your word now : what do you say to this? 1385

What would say little Arezzo and great Rome,

And what did God say and the devil say

One at each ear o' the man, the husband, now

The father? Why, the overburdened mind

Broke down, what was a brain became a blaze. 1390

In fury of the moment—(that first news

Fell on the Count among his vines, it seems,

Doing his farm-work,)—why, he summoned steward,

Called in the first four hard hands and stout
hearts

From field and furrow, poured forth his appeal, 1395

Not to Rome's law and gospel any more,

But this clown with a mother or a wife,

That clodpole with a sister or a son :

And, whereas law and gospel held their peace,

What wonder if the sticks and stones cried out? 1400

All five soon somehow found themselves at Rome,

At the villa door : there was the warmth and light—

The sense of life so just an inch inside—

Some angel must have whispered “ One more chance ! ”

He gave it : bade the others stand aside : 1405

Knocked at the door,—“ Who is it knocks ? ” cried one.

“ I will make,” surely Guido’s angel said,

“ One final essay, last experiment,

“ Speak the word, name the name from out all names

“ Which, if,—as doubtless strong illusions are, 1410

“ And strange disguisings whence even truth seems false,

“ And, for I am a man, I dare not do

“ God’s work until assured I see with God,—

“ If I should bring my lips to breathe that name

“ And they be innocent,—nay, by one touch 1415

“ Of innocence redeemed from utter guilt,—

“ That name will bar the door and bid fate pass.

“ I will not say ‘ It is a messenger,

“ ‘ A neighbour, even a belated man,

“ ‘ Much less your husband’s friend, your husband’s self : ’

“ At such appeal the door is bound to ope. 1421

“ But I will say ”—here’s rhetoric and to spare !
Why, Sir, the stumbling-block is cursed and kicked,
Block though it be ; the name that brought offence
Will bring offence : the burnt child dreads the fire 1425
Although that fire feed on a taper-wick
Which never left the altar nor singed fly :
And had a harmless man tripped you by chance,
How would you wait him, stand or step aside,
When next you heard he rolled your way ? Enough.

“ Giuseppe Caponsacchi ! ” Guido cried ; 1431
And open flew the door : enough again.
Vengeance, you know, burst, like a mountain-wave
That holds a monster in it, over the house,
And wiped its filthy four walls free again 1435
With a wash of hell-fire,—father, mother, wife,
Killed them all, bathed his name clean in their blood,
And, reeking so, was caught, his friends and he,
Haled hither and imprisoned yesternight
O’ the day all this was. 1440

Now the whole is known,
 And how the old couple come to lie in state
 Though hacked to pieces,—never, the expert say,
 So thorough a study of stabbing—while the wife
 Viper-like, very difficult to slay, 1445
 Writhes still through every ring of her, poor wretch,
 At the Hospital hard by—survives, we'll hope,
 To somewhat purify her putrid soul
 By full confession, make so much amends
 While time lasts ; since at day's end die she must. 1450

For Caponsacchi,—why, they'll have him here,
 The hero of the adventure, who so fit
 To tell it in the coming Carnival?
 'Twill make the fortune of whate'er saloon
 Hears him recount, with helpful cheek, and eye 1455
 Hotly indignant now, now dewy-dimmed,
 The incidents of flight, pursuit, surprise,
 Capture, with hints of kisses all between—
 While Guido, the most unromantic spouse,

No longer fit to laugh at since the blood 1460
 Gave the broad farce an all too brutal air,
 Why, he and those our luckless friends of his
 May tumble in the straw this bitter day—
 Laid by the heels i' the New Prison, I hear,
 To bide their trial, since trial, and for the life, 1465
 Follows if but for form's sake : yes, indeed !

But with a certain issue : no dispute,
 " Try him," bids law : formalities oblige :
 But as to the issue,—look me in the face !—
 If the law thinks to find them guilty, Sir, 1470
 Master or men—touch one hair of the five,
 Then I say in the name of all that's left
 Of honour in Rome, civility i' the world
 Whereof Rome boasts herself the central source,—
 There's an end to all hope of justice more. 1475
 Astræa's gone indeed, let hope go too !
 Who is it dares impugn the natural law ?
 Deny God's word " the faithless wife shall die ? "

What, are we blind? How can we fail to see,
 This crowd of miseries make the man a mark, 1480
 Accumulate on one devoted head
 For our example, yours and mine who read
 Its lesson thus—"Henceforward let none dare
 "Stand, like a natural in the public way,
 "Letting the very urchins twitch his beard 1485
 "And tweak his nose, to earn a nickname so,
 "Of the male-Grissel or the modern Job!"
 Had Guido, in the twinkling of an eye,
 Summed up the reckoning, promptly paid himself,
 That morning when he came up with the pair 1490
 At the wayside inn,—exacted his just debt
 By aid of what first mattock, pitchfork, axe
 Came to hand in the helpful stable-yard,
 And with that axe, if providence so pleased,
 Cloven each head, by some Rolando-stroke, 1495
 In one clean cut from crown to clavicle,
 —Slain the priest-gallant, the wife-paramour,
 Sticking, for all defence, in each skull's cleft

The rhyme and reason of the stroke thus dealt,
 To-wit, those letters and last evidence 1500
 Of shame, each package in its proper place,—
 Bidding, who pitied, undistend the skulls,—
 I say, the world had praised the man. But no !
 That were too plain, too straight, too simply just !
 He hesitates, calls law forsooth to help. 1505
 And law, distasteful to who calls in law
 When honour is beforehand and would serve,
 What wonder if law hesitate in turn,
 Plead her disuse to calls o' the kind, reply
 Smiling a little " 'Tis yourself assess 1510
 " The worth of what's lost, sum of damage done :
 " What you touched with so light a finger-tip,
 " You whose concern it was to grasp the thing,
 " Why must law gird herself and grapple with ?
 " Law, alien to the actor whose warm blood 1515
 " Asks heat from law whose veins run lukewarm milk,—
 " What you dealt lightly with, shall law make out
 " Heinous forsooth ?"

Sir, what's the good of law
 In a case o' the kind? None, as she all but
 says. 1520

Call in law when a neighbour breaks your fence,
 Cribs from your field, tampers with rent or lease,
 Touches the purse or pocket, — but woos your
 wife?

No : take the old way trod when men were men !
 Guido preferred the new path,—for his pains, 1525
 Stuck in a quagmire, floundered worse and worse
 Until he managed somehow scramble back
 Into the safe sure rutted road once more,
 Revenged his own wrong like a gentleman.

Once back 'mid the familiar prints, no doubt 1530
 He made too rash amends for his first fault,
 Vaulted too loftily over what barred him late,
 And lit i' the mire again,—the common chance,
 The natural over-energy : the deed

Maladroit yields three deaths instead of one, 1535
 And one life left : for where's the Canon's corpse?

All which is the worse for Guido, but, be frank—
The better for you and me and all the world,
Husbands of wives, especially in Rome.
The thing is put right, in the old place,—ay, 1540
The rod hangs on its nail behind the door,
Fresh from the brine : a matter I commend
To the notice, during Carnival that's near,
Of a certain what's-his-name and jackanapes
Somewhat too civil of eyes with lute and song 1545
About a house here, where I keep a wife.
(You, being his cousin, may go tell him so.)

III.

THE OTHER HALF-ROME.

ANOTHER day that finds her living yet,
Little Pompilia, with the patient brow
And lamentable smile on those poor lips,
And, under the white hospital-array,
A flower-like body, to frighten at a bruise 5
You 'd think, yet now, stabbed through and through again,
Alive i' the ruins. 'T is a miracle.
It seems that, when her husband struck her first,
She prayed Madonna just that she might live
So long as to confess and be absolved ; 10
And whether it was that, all her sad life long,

Never before successful in a prayer,
This prayer rose with authority too dread,—
Or whether, because earth was hell to her,
By compensation, when the blackness broke 15
She got one glimpse of quiet and the cool blue,
To show her for a moment such things were,—
Or else,—as the Augustinian Brother thinks,
The friar who took confession from her lip,—
When a probationary soul that moves 20
From nobleness to nobleness, as she,
Over the rough way of the world, succumbs,
Bloodies its last thorn with unflinching foot,
The angels love to do their work betimes,
Staunch some wounds here nor leave so much for God. 25
Who knows? However it be, confessed, absolved,
She lies, with overplus of life beside
To speak and right herself from first to last,
Right the friend also, lamb-pure, lion-brave,
Care for the boy's concerns, to save the son 30
From the sire, her two-weeks' infant orphaned thus,

And—with best smile of all reserved for him—
Pardon that sire and husband from the heart.
A miracle, so tell your Molinists !

There she lies in the long white lazar-house. 35
Rome has besieged, these two days, never doubt,
Saint Anna's where she waits her death, to hear
Though but the chink o' the bell, turn o' the hinge
When the reluctant wicket opes at last,
Lets in, on now this and now that pretence, 40
Too many by half,—complain the men of art,—
For a patient in such plight. The lawyers first
Paid the due visit—justice must be done ;
They took her witness, why the murder was ;
Then the priests followed properly,—a soul 45
To shrive ; 't was Brother Celestine's own right,
The same who noises thus her gifts abroad :
But many more, who found they were old friends,
Pushed in to have their stare and take their talk
And go forth boasting of it and to boast. 50

Old Monna Baldi chatters like a jay,
Swears—but that, prematurely trundled out
Just as she felt the benefit begin,
The miracle was snapped up by somebody,—
Her palsied limb 'gan prick and promise life 55
At touch o' the bedclothes merely, — how much
more

Had she but brushed the body as she tried !
Cavalier Carlo—well, there 's some excuse
For him—Maratta who paints Virgins so—
He too must see the porter and slip by 60
With pencil cut and paper squared, and straight
There was he figuring away at face—
“ A lovelier face is not in Rome,” cried he,
“ Shaped like a peacock's egg, the pure as pearl,
“ That hatches you anon a snow-white chick.” 65
Then, oh that pair of eyes, that pendent hair,
Black this, and black the other ! Mighty fine—
But nobody cared ask to paint the same,
Nor grew a poet over hair and eyes

Four little years ago when, ask and have, 70
The woman who wakes all this rapture leaned
Flower-like from out her window long enough,
As much uncomplimented as uncropped
By comers and goers in Via Vittoria : eh ?
'T is just a flower's fate : past parterre we trip, 75
Till peradventure someone plucks our sleeve—
“ Yon blossom at the briar's end, that 's the rose
“ Two jealous people fought for yesterday
“ And killed each other : see, there 's undisturbed
“ A pretty pool at the root, of rival red !” 80
Then cry we, “ Ah, the perfect paragon !”
Then crave we, “ Just one keepsake-leaf for us !”

Truth lies between : there 's anyhow a child
Of seventeen years, whether a flower or weed,
Ruined : who did it shall account to Christ— 85
Having no pity on the harmless life
And gentle face and girlish form he found,
And thus flings back : go practise if you please

With men and women : leave a child alone
 For Christ's particular love's sake !—so I say. 90

Somebody, at the bedside, said much more,
 Took on him to explain the secret cause
 O' the crime : quoth he, “ Such crimes are very rife,
 “ Explode nor make us wonder now-a-days,
 “ Seeing that Antichrist disseminates 95
 “ That doctrine of the Philosophic Sin :
 “ Molinos' sect will soon make earth too hot !”
 “ Nay,” groaned the Augustinian, “ what 's there new ?
 “ Crime will not fail to flare up from men's hearts
 “ While hearts are men's and so born criminal ; 100
 “ Which one fact, always old yet ever new,
 “ Accounts for so much crime that, for my part,
 “ Molinos may go whistle to the wind
 “ That waits outside a certain church, you know !”

Though really it does seem as if she here, 105
 Pompilia, living so and dying thus,

Has had undue experience how much crime
A heart can hatch. Why was she made to learn
—Not you, not I, not even Molinos' self—
What Guido Franceschini's heart could hold? 110
Thus saintship is effected probably ;
No sparing saints the process!—which the more
Tends to the reconciling us, no saints,
To sinnership, immunity and all.

For see now : Pietro and Violante's life 115
Till seventeen years ago, all Rome might note
And quote for happy—see the signs distinct
Of happiness as we yon Triton's trump.
What could they be but happy?—balanced so,
Nor low i' the social scale nor yet too high, 120
Nor poor nor richer than comports with ease,
Nor bright and envied, nor obscure and scorned,
Nor so young that their pleasures fell too thick,
Nor old past catching pleasure when it fell,
Nothing above, below the just degree, 125

All at the mean where joy's components mix.
 So again, in the couple's very souls
 You saw the adequate half with half to match,
 Each having and each lacking somewhat, both
 Making a whole that had all and lacked nought; 130
 The round and sound, in whose composure just
 The acquiescent and recipient side
 Was Pietro's, and the stirring striving one
 Violante's : both in union gave the due
 Quietude, enterprise, craving and content, 135
 Which go to bodily health and peace of mind.
 But, as 't is said a body, rightly mixed,
 Each element in equipoise, would last
 Too long and live for ever,—accordingly
 Holds a germ—sand-grain weight too much i' the scale—
 Ordained to get predominance one day 141
 And so bring all to ruin and release,—
 Not otherwise a fatal germ lurked here :
 “ With mortals much must go, but something stays ;
 “ Nothing will stay of our so happy selves.” 145

Out of the very ripeness of life's core
 A worm was bred—" Our life shall leave no fruit."
 Enough of bliss, they thought, could bliss bear seed,
 Yield its like, propagate a bliss in turn
 And keep the kind up ; not supplant themselves 150
 But put in evidence, record they were,
 Show them, when done with, i' the shape of a child.
 "'T is in a child, man and wife grow complete,
 " One flesh : God says so : let him do his work !"

Now, one reminder of this gnawing want, 155
 One special prick o' the maggot at the core,
 Always befell when, as the day came round,
 A certain yearly sum,—our Pietro being,
 As the long name runs, an usufructuary,—
 Dropped in the common bag as interest 160
 Of money, his till death, not afterward,
 Failing an heir : an heir would take and take,
 A child of theirs be wealthy in their place
 To nobody's hurt—the stranger else seized all.

Prosperity rolled river-like and stopped, 165
Making their mill go ; but when wheel wore out,
The wave would find a space and sweep on free
And, half-a-mile off, grind some neighbour's corn.

Adam-like, Pietro sighed and said no more :
Eve saw the apple was fair and good to taste, 170
So, plucked it, having asked the snake advice.
She told her husband God was merciful,
And his and her prayer granted at the last :
Let the old mill-stone moulder,—wheel unworn,
Quartz from the quarry, shot into the stream 175
Adroitly, should go bring grist as before—
Their house continued to them by an heir,
Their vacant heart replenished with a child.
We have her own confession at full length
Made in the first remorse : 't was Jubilee 180
Pealed in the ear o' the conscience and it woke.
She found she had offended God no doubt,
So much was plain from what had happened since,

Misfortune on misfortune ; but she harmed
No one i' the world, so far as she could see. 185
The act had gladdened Pietro to the height,
Her husband—God himself must gladden so
Or not at all—(thus much seems probable
From the implicit faith, or rather say
Stupid credulity of the foolish man 190
Who swallowed such a tale nor strained a whit
Even at his wife's far-over-fifty years
Matching his sixty-and-under.) Him she blessed,
And as for doing any detriment
To the veritable heir,—why, tell her first 195
Who was he? Which of all the hands held up
I' the crowd, would one day gather round their gate,
Did she so wrong by intercepting thus
The ducat, spendthrift fortune thought to fling
For a scramble just to make the mob break shins? 200
She kept it, saved them kicks and cuffs thereby.
While at the least one good work had she wrought,
Good, clearly and incontestably ! Her cheat—

What was it to its subject, the child's self,
But charity and religion? See the girl! 205
A body most like—a soul too probably—
Doomed to death, such a double death as waits
The illicit offspring of a common trull,
Sure to resent and forthwith rid herself
Of a mere interruption to sin's trade, 210
In the efficacious way old Tiber knows.
Was not so much proved by the ready sale
O' the child, glad transfer of this irksome chance?
Well then, she had caught up this castaway:
This fragile egg, some careless wild bird dropped, 215
She had picked from where it waited the foot-fall,
And put in her own breast till forth broke finch
Able to sing God praise on mornings now.
What so excessive harm was done?—she asked.

To which demand the dreadful answer comes— 220
For that same deed, now at Lorenzo's church,
Both agents, conscious and unconscious, lie;

While she, the deed was done to benefit,
Lies also, the most lamentable of things,
Yonder where curious people count her breaths, 225
Calculate how long yet the little life
Unspilt may serve their turn nor spoil the show,
Give them their story, then the church its group.

Well, having gained Pompilia, the girl grew
I' the midst of Pietro here, Violante there, 230
Each, like a semicircle with stretched arms,
Joining the other round her preciousness—
Two walls that go about a garden-plot
Where a chance sliver, branchlet slipt from bole
Of some tongue-leaved eye-figured Eden tree, 235
Filched by two exiles and borne far away,
Patiently glorifies their solitude,—
Year by year mounting, grade by grade surmounts
The builded brick-work, yet is compassed still,
Still hidden happily and shielded safe,— 240
Else why should miracle have graced the ground?

But on the twelfth sun that brought April there
What meant that laugh? The coping-stone was reached ;
Nay, a light tuft of bloom towered above
To be toyed with by butterfly or bee, 245
Done good to or else harm to from outside :
Pompilia's root, stem and a branch or two
Home enclosed still, the rest would be the world's.
All which was taught our couple though obtuse,
Since walls have ears, when one day brought a priest, 250
Smooth-mannered soft-speeched sleek-cheeked visitor,
The notable Abate Paolo—known
As younger brother of a Tuscan house
Whereof the actual representative,
Count Guido, had employed his youth and age 255
In culture of Rome's most productive plant—
A cardinal : but years pass and change comes,
In token of which, here was our Paolo brought
To broach a weighty business. Might he speak?
Yes—to Violante somehow caught alone 260
While Pietro took his after-dinner doze,

And the young maiden, busily as befits,
Minded her broider-frame three chambers off.

So—giving now his great flap-hat a gloss'
With flat o' the hand between-whiles, soothing now 265
The silk from out its creases o'er the calf,
Setting the stocking clerical again,
But never disengaging, once engaged,
The thin clear grey hold of his eyes on her—
He dissertated on that Tuscan house, 270
Those Franceschini,—very old they were—
Not rich however—oh, not rich, at least,
As people look to be who, low i' the scale
One way, have reason, rising all they can
By favour of the money-bag: 't is fair— 275
Do all gifts go together? But do n't suppose
That being not so rich means all so poor!
Say rather, well enough—i' the way, indeed,
Ha, ha, to better fortune than the best,
Since if his brother's patron-friend kept faith, 280

Put into promised play the Cardinalate,
 Their house might wear the red cloth that keeps warm,
 Would but the Count have patience—there 's the point !
 For he was slipping into years apace,
 And years make men restless— they needs must see 285
 Some certainty, some sort of end assured,
 Sparkle, tho' from the topmost beacon-tip
 That warrants life a harbour through the haze.
 In short, call him fantastic as you choose,
 Guido was home-sick, yearned for the old sights 290
 And usual faces,—fain would settle himself
 And have the patron's bounty when it fell
 Irrigate far rather than deluge near,
 Go fertilize Arezzo, not flood Rome.
 Sooth to say, 't was the wiser wish : the Count 295
 Proved wanting in ambition,—let us avouch,
 Since truth is best,—in callousness of heart,
 Winced at those pin-pricks whereby honours hang
 A ribbon o'er each puncture : his—no soul
 Ecclesiastic (here the hat was brushed) 300

Humble but self-sustaining, calm and cold,
Having, as one who puts his hand to the plough,
Renounced the over-vivid family-feel—
Poor brother Guido! All too plain, he pined
Amid Rome's pomp and glare for dinginess 305
And that dilapidated palace-shell
Vast as a quarry and, very like, as bare—
Since to this comes old grandeur now-a-days—
Or that absurd wild villa in the waste
O' the hill side, breezy though, for who likes air, 310
Vittiano, nor unpleasant with its vines,
Outside the city and the summer heats.
And now his harping on this one tense chord
The villa and the palace, palace this
And villa the other, all day and all night 315
Creaked like the implacable cicala's cry
And made one's ear-drum ache: nought else would serve
But that, to light his mother's visage up
With second youth, hope, gaiety again,
He must find straightway, woo and haply win 320

And bear away triumphant back, some wife.
 Well now, the man was rational in his way—
 He, the Abate,—ought he to interpose?
 Unless by straining still his tutelage
 (Priesthood leaps over elder-brotherhood) 325
 Across this difficulty : then let go,
 Leave the poor fellow in peace ! Would that be wrong?
 There was no making Guido great, it seems,
 Spite of himself : then happy be his dole !
 Indeed, the Abate's little interest 330
 Was somewhat nearly touched i' the case, they saw :
 Since if his simple kinsman so were bent,
 Began his rounds in Rome to catch a wife,
 Full soon would such unworldliness surprise
 The rare bird, sprinkle salt on phoenix' tail, 335
 And so secure the nest a sparrow-hawk.
 No lack of mothers here in Rome,—no dread
 Of daughters lured as larks by looking-glass !
 The first name-pecking credit-scratching fowl
 Would drop her unfledged cuckoo in our nest 340

To gather greyness there, give voice at length
And shame the brood . . . but it was long ago
When crusades were, and we sent eagles forth !
No, that at least the Abate could forestall.

He read the thought within his brother's word, 345
Knew what he purposed better than himself.†

We want no name and fame—having our own :
No worldly aggrandizement—such we fly :

But if some wonder of a woman's-heart
Were yet untainted on this grimy earth, 350
Tender and true—tradition tells of such—

Prepared to pant in time and tune with ours—
If some good girl (a girl, since she must take
The new bent, live new life, adopt new modes)

Not wealthy—Guido for his rank was poor— 355
But with whatever dowry came to hand,

There were the lady-love predestinate !

And somehow the Abate's guardian eye—
Scintillant, rutilant, fraternal fire,—

Roving round every way had seized the prize 360

—The instinct of us, we, the spirituality !
 Come, cards on table ; was it true or false
 That here—here in this very tenement—
 Yea, Via Vittoria did a marvel hide,
 Lily of a maiden, white with intact leaf 365
 Guessed thro' the sheath that saved it from the sun ?
 A daughter with the mother's hands still clasped
 Over her head for fillet virginal,
 A wife worth Guido's house and hand and heart ?
 He came to see ; had spoken, he could no less— 370
 (A final cherish of the stockinged calf)
 If harm were,—well, the matter was off his mind.

Then with the great air did he kiss, devout,
 Violante's hand, and rise up his whole height
 (A certain purple gleam about the black) 375
 And go forth grandly,—as if the Pope came next.
 And so Violante rubbed her eyes awhile,
 Got up too, walked to wake her Pietro soon
 And pour into his ear the mighty news

How somebody had somehow somewhere seen 380
Their tree-top-tuft of bloom above the wall,
And came now to apprise them the tree's self
Was no such crab-sort as should feed the swine,
But veritable gold, the Hesperian ball
Ordained for Hercules to haste and pluck, 385
And bear and give the Gods to banquet with—
Hercules standing ready at the door.
Whereon did Pietro rub his eyes in turn,
Look very wise, a little woeful too,
Then, periwig on head, and cane in hand, 390
Sally forth dignifiedly into the Square
Of Spain across Babbuino the six steps,
Toward the Boat-fountain where our idlers lounge,—
Ask, for form's sake, who Hercules might be,
And have congratulation from the world. 395

Heartily laughed the world in his fool's-face
And told him Hercules was just the heir
To the stubble once a corn-field, and brick-heap

Where used to be a dwelling-place now burned.

Guido and Franceschini ; a Count,—ay : 400

But a cross i' the poke to bless the Countship? No!

All gone except sloth, pride, rapacity,

Humours of the imposthume incident

To rich blood that runs thin,—nursed to a head

By the rankly-salted soil—a cardinal's court 405

Where, parasite and picker-up of crumbs,

He had hung on long, and now, let go, said some,

But shaken off, said others,—in any case

Tired of the trade and something worse for wear,

Was wanting to change town for country quick, 410

Go home again : let Pietro help him home!

The brother, Abate Paolo, shrewder mouse,

Had pricked for comfortable quarters, inched

Into the core of Rome, and fattened so ;

But Guido, over-burly for rat's hole 415

Suited to clerical slimness, starved outside,

Must shift for himself : and so the shift was this !

What, was the snug retreat of Pietro tracked,

The little provision for his old age snuffed ?

“ Oh, make your girl a lady, an you list, 420

“ But have more mercy on our wit than vaunt

“ Your bargain as we burgesses who brag !

“ Why, Goodman Dullard, if a friend must speak,

“ Would the Count, think you, stoop to you and yours

“ Were there the value of one penny-piece 425

“ To rattle 'twixt his palms—or likelier laugh,

“ Bid your Pompilia help you black his shoe ? ”

Home again, shaking oft the puzzled pate,

Went Pietro to announce a change indeed,

Yet point Violante where some solace lay 430

Of a rueful sort,—the taper, quenched so soon,

Had ended merely in a snuff, not stink—

Congratulate there was one hope the less

Not misery the more : and so an end.

The marriage thus impossible, the rest 435

Followed : our spokesman, Paolo, heard his fate,

Resignedly Count Guido bore the blow :
Violante wiped away the transient tear,
Renounced the playing Danae to gold dreams,
Praised much her Pietro's prompt sagaciousness, 440
Found neighbours' envy natural, lightly laughed
At gossips' malice, fairly wrapped herself
In her integrity three folds about,
And, letting pass a little day or two,
Threw, even over that integrity, 445
Another wrappage, namely one thick veil
That hid her, matron-wise, from head to foot,
And, by the hand holding a girl veiled too,
Stood, one dim end of a December day,
In Saint Lorenzo on the altar-step— 450
Just where she lies now and that girl will lie—
Only with fifty candles' company
Now—in the place of the poor winking one
Which saw,—doors shut and sacristan made sure,—
A priest—perhaps Abate Paolo—wed 455
Guido clandestinely, irrevocably

To his Pompilia aged thirteen years
And five months,—witness the church register,—
Pompilia, (thus become Count Guido's wife
Clandestinely, irrevocably his,) 460
Who all the while had borne, from first to last,
As brisk a part i' the bargain, as yon lamb,
Brought forth from basket and set out for sale,
Bears while they chaffer, wary market-man
And voluble housewife, o'er it,—each in turn 465
Patting the curly calm unconscious head,
With the shambles ready round the corner there,
When the talk 's talked out and a bargain struck.

Transfer complete, why, Pietro was apprised.
Violante sobbed the sobs and prayed the prayers 470
And said the serpent tempted so she fell,
Till Pietro had to clear his brow apace
And make the best of matters : wrath at first,—
How else ? pacification presently,
Why not ?—could flesh withstand the impurpled one, 475

Bear with them, housemates, pensionaries, pawned
To an alien for fulfilment of their pact.

Guido should at discretion deal them orts, 515

Bread-bounty in Arezzo the strange place,—

They who had lived deliciously and rolled

Rome's choicest comfit 'neath the tongue before.

Into this quag, "jump" bade the Cardinal!

And neck-deep in a minute there flounced they. 520

But they touched bottom at Arezzo: there—

Four months' experience of how craft and greed

Quickened by penury and pretentious hate

Of plain truth, brutify and bestialize,—

Four months' taste of apportioned insolence, 525

Cruelty graduated, dose by dose

Of ruffianism dealt out at bed and board,

And lo, the work was done, success clapped hands.

The starved, stripped, beaten brace of stupid dupes

Broke at last in their desperation loose, 530

Fled away for their lives, and lucky so;

Found their account in casting coat afar
And bearing off a shred of skin at least :
Left Guido lord o' the prey, as the lion is,
And, careless what came after, carried their wrongs 535
To Rome,—I nothing doubt, with such remorse
As folly feels, since pain can make it wise,
But crime, past wisdom, which is innocence,
Needs not be plagued with till a later day.

Pietro went back to beg from door to door, 540
In hope that memory not quite extinct
Of cheery days and festive nights would move
Friends and acquaintance—after the natural laugh,
And tributary “ Just as we foretold—”
To show some bowels, give the dregs o' the cup, 545
Scraps of the trencher, to their host that was,
Or let him share the mat with the mastiff, he
Who lived large and kept open house so long.
Not so Violante : ever a-head i' the march,
Quick at the bye-road and the cut-across, 550

She went first to the best adviser, God—

Whose finger unmistakably was felt

In all this retribution of the past.

Here was the prize of sin, luck of a lie !

But here too was the Holy Year would help, 555

Bound to rid sinners of sin vulgar, sin

Abnormal, sin prodigious, up to sin

Impossible and supposed for Jubilee' sake :

To lift the leadenest of lies, let soar

The soul unhampered by a feather-weight. 560

“ I will ” said she “ go burn out this bad hole

“ That breeds the scorpion, baulk the plague at least

“ Its hope of further creeping progeny :

“ I will confess my fault, be punished, yes,

“ But pardoned too : Saint Peter pays for all.” 565

So, with the crowd she mixed, made for the dome,

Through the great door new-broken for the nonce

Marched, muffled more than ever matron-wise,

Up the left nave to the formidable throne,

Fell into file with this the poisoner 570
And that the parricide, and reached in turn
The poor repugnant Penitentiary
Set at this gully-hole o' the world's discharge
To help the frightfullest of filth have vent,
And then knelt down and whispered in his ear 575
How she had bought Pompilia, palmed the babe
On Pietro, passed the girl off as their child
To Guido, and defrauded of his due
This one and that one,—more than she could name,
Until her solid piece of wickedness 580
Happened to split and spread woe far and wide :
Contritely now she brought the case for cure.

Replied the throne—" Ere God forgive the guilt,
" Make man some restitution ! Do your part !
" The owners of your husband's heritage, 585
" Barred thence by this pretended birth and heir,—
" Tell them, the bar came so, is broken so,
" Theirs be the due reversion as before !

" Your husband who, no partner in the guilt,
 " Suffers the penalty, led blindfold thus 590
 " By love of what he thought his flesh and blood
 " To alienate his all in her behalf,—
 " Tell him too such contract is null and void !
 " Last, he who personates your son-in-law,
 " Who with sealed eyes and stopped ears, tame and mute,
 " Took at your hand that bastard of a whore 596
 " You called your daughter and he calls his wife,—
 " Tell him, and bear the anger which is just !
 " Then, penance so performed, may pardon be !"

Who could gainsay this just and right award ? 600
 Nobody in the world : but, out o' the world,
 Who knows?—might timid intervention be
 From any makeshift of an angel-guide,
 Substitute for celestial guardianship,
 Pretending to take care of the girl's self : 605
 " Woman, confessing crime is healthy work,
 " And telling truth relieves a liar like you,

“ But what of her my unconsidered charge ?

“ No thought of, while this good befalls yourself,

“ What in the way of harm may find out her ?” 610

No least thought, I assure you : truth being truth,

Tell it and shame the devil !

Said and done :

Home went Violante and disbosomed all :

And Pietro who, six months before, had borne 615

Word after word of such a piece of news

Like so much cold steel inched through his breast-blade,

Now at its entry gave a leap for joy,

As who—what did I say of one in a quag?—

Should catch a hand from heaven and spring thereby

Out of the mud, on ten toes stand once more. 621

“ What? All that used to be, may be again?

“ My money mine again, my house, my land,

“ My chairs and tables, all mine evermore?

“ What, the girl's dowry never was the girl's, 625

“ And, unpaid yet, is never now to pay?

“ Then the girl's self, my pale Pompilia child

" That used to be my own with her great eyes—
 " He who drove us forth, why should he keep her
 " When proved as very a pauper as himself? 630
 " Will she come back, with nothing changed at all,
 " And laugh ' But how you dreamed uneasily !
 " ' I saw the great drops stand here on your brow—
 " ' Did I do wrong to wake you with a kiss ?'
 " No, indeed, darling ! No, for wide awake 635
 " I see another outburst of surprise :
 " The lout-lord, bully-beggar, braggart-sneak,
 " Who not content with cutting purse, crops ear—
 " Assuredly it shall be salve to mine
 " When this great news red-letters him, the rogue ! 640
 " Ay, let him taste the teeth o' the trap, this fox,
 " Give us our lamb back, golden fleece and all,
 " Let her creep in and warm our breasts again !
 " What care for the past ?—we three are our old selves,
 " Who know now what the outside world is worth." 645
 And so, he carried case before the courts ;
 And there Violante, blushing to the bone,

Made public declaration of her fault,
Renounced her motherhood, and prayed the law
To interpose, frustrate of its effect 650
Her folly, and redress the injury done.

Whereof was the disastrous consequence,
That though indisputably clear the case
(For thirteen years are not so large a lapse,
And still six witnesses survived in Rome 655
To prove the truth o' the tale)—yet, patent wrong
Seemed Guido's ; the first cheat had chanced on him :
Here was the pity that, deciding right,
Those who began the wrong would gain the good.
Guido pronounced the story one long lie 660
Lied to do robbery and take revenge :
Or say it were no lie at all but truth,
Then, it both robbed the right heirs and shamed him
Without revenge to humanize the deed : 664
What had he done when first they shamed him thus ?
But that were too fantastic : losels they,

And leasing this world's-wonder of a lie,
They lied to blot him though it brand themselves.

So answered Guido through the Abate's mouth.

Wherefore the court, its customary way, 670

Inclined to the middle course the sage affect—

They held the child to be a changeling,—good :

But, lest the husband got no good thereby,

They willed the dowry, though not hers at all,

Should yet be his, if not by right then grace— 675

Part-payment for the plain injustice done.

But then, that other contract, Pietro's work,

Renunciation of his own estate,

That must be cancelled—give him back his goods,

He was no party to the cheat at least ! 680

So ran the judgment :—whence a prompt appeal

On both sides, seeing right is absolute.

Cried Pietro “ Is Pompilia not my child ?

“ Why give her my child's dowry ? ”—“ Have I right

“ To the dowry, why not to the rest as well ? ” 685

Cried Guido, or cried Paolo in his name :
Till law said " Reinvestigate the case !"
And so the matter pends, unto this day.

Hence new disaster—that no outlet seemed ;
Whatever the fortune of the battle-field, 690
No path whereby the fatal man might march
Victorious, wreath on head and spoils in hand,
And back turned full upon the baffled foe,—
Nor cranny whence, desperate and disgraced,
Stripped to the skin, he might be fain to crawl 695
Worm-like, and so away with his defeat
To other fortune and the novel prey.

No, he was pinned to the place there, left alone
With his immense hate and, the solitary
Subject to satisfy that hate, his wife. 700

" Cast her off? Turn her naked out of doors?

" Easily said ! But still the action pends,

" Still dowry, principal and interest,

" Pietro's possessions, all I bargained for,—

" Any good day, be but my friends alert, 705
 " May give them me if she continue mine.
 " Yet, keep her? Keep the puppet of my foes—
 " Her voice that lisps me back their curse—her eye
 " They lend their leer of triumph to—her lip
 " I touch and taste their very filth upon?" 710

In short, he also took the middle course
 Rome taught him—did at last excogitate
 How he might keep the good and leave the bad
 Twined in revenge, yet extricable,—nay
 Make the very hate's eruption, very rush 715
 Of the unpent sluice of cruelty relieve
 His heart first, then go fertilize his field.
 What if the girl-wife, tortured with due care,
 Should take, as though spontaneously, the road
 It were impolitic to thrust her on? 720
 If, goaded, she broke out in full revolt,
 Followed her parents i' the face o' the world,
 Branded as runaway not castaway,

Self-sentenced and self-punished in the act?
 So should the loathed form and detested face 725
 Launch themselves into hell and there be lost
 While he looked o'er the brink with folded arms ;
 So should the heaped-up shames go shuddering back
 O' the head o' the heapers, Pietro and his wife,
 And bury in the breakage three at once : 730
 While Guido, left free, no one right renounced,
 Gain present, gain prospective, all the gain,
 None of the wife except her rights absorbed,
 Should ask law what it was law paused about—
 If law were dubious still whose word to take, 735
 The husband's—dignified and derelict,
 Or the wife's—the . . what I tell you. It should be.

Guido's first step was to take pen, indite
 A letter to the Abate,—not his own,
 His wife's,—she should re-write, sign, seal and send. 740
 She liberally told the household-news,
 Rejoiced her vile progenitors were fled,

Revealed their malice—how they even laid
 A last injunction on her, when they fled,
 That she should forthwith find a paramour, 745
 Complot with him to gather spoil enough
 Then burn the house down,—taking previous care
 To poison all its inmates overnight,—
 And so companioned, so provisioned too,
 Follow to Rome and all join fortunes gay. 750
 This letter, traced in pencil-characters,
 Guido as easily got retraced in ink
 By his wife's pen, guided from end to end,
 As it had been just so much Hebrew, Sir :
 For why? That wife could broider, sing perhaps, 755
 Pray certainly, but no more read than write
 This letter "which yet write she must," he said
 "Being half courtesy and compliment,
 "Half sisterliness : take the thing on trust!"
 She had as readily re-traced the words 760
 Of her own death-warrant,—in some sort 't was so.
 This letter the Abate in due course

Communicated to such curious souls
In Rome as needs must pry into the cause
Of quarrel, why the Comparini fled 765
The Franceschini, whence the grievance grew,
What the hubbub meant: "Nay,—see the wife's own
word,
" Authentic answer! Tell detractors too
" There 's a plan formed, a programme figured here
" —Pray God no after-practice put to proof, 770
" This letter cast no light upon, one day!"

So much for what should work in Rome,—back
now
To Arezzo, go on with the project there,
Forward the next step with as bold a foot,
And plague Pompilia to the height, you see! 775
Accordingly did Guido set himself
To worry up and down, across, around,
The woman, hemmed in by her household-bars,—
Chased her about the coop of daily life,

Having first stopped each outlet thence save one 780
 Which, like bird with a ferret in her haunt,
 She needs must seize as sole way of escape
 Though there was tied and twittering a decoy
 To seem as if it tempted,—just the plumie
 O' the popinjay, and not a respite there 785
 From tooth and claw of something in the dark,—
 Giuseppe Caponsacchi.

Now begins

The tenebrific passage of the tale :
 How hold a light, display the cavern's gorge ? 790
 How, in this phase of the affair, show truth ?
 Here is the dying wife who smiles and says
 " So it was,—so it was not,—how it was,
 " I never knew nor ever care to know—"
 Till they all weep, physician, man of law, 795
 Even that poor old bit of battered brass
 Beaten out of all shape by the world's sins,
 Common utensil of the lazar-house—
 Confessor Celestino groans " 'T is truth,

“ All truth and only truth : there 's something else, 800

“ Some presence in the room beside us all,

“ Something that every lie expires before :

“ No question she was pure from first to last.”

So far is well and helps us to believe :

But beyond, she the helpless, simple-sweet 805

Or silly-sooth, unskilled to break one blow

At her good fame by putting finger forth,—

How can she render service to the truth ?

The bird says “ So I fluttered where a springe

“ Caught me : the springe did not contrive itself, 810

“ That I know : who contrived it, God forgive !”

But we, who hear no voice and have dry eyes,

Must ask,—we cannot else, absolving her,—

How of the part played by that same decoy

I' the catching, caging? Was himself caught

first? 815

We deal here with no innocent at least,

No witless victim,—he's a man of the age

And a priest beside,—persuade the mocking world

Mere charity boiled over in this sort !

He whose own safety too,—(the Pope 's apprised— 820

Good-natured with the secular offence,

The Pope looks grave on priesthood in a scrape)

Our priest's own safety therefore, may-be life,

Hangs on the issue ! You will find it hard.

Guido is here to meet you with fixed foot, 825

Stiff like a statue—" Leave what went before !

" My wife fled i' the company of a priest,

" Spent two days and two nights alone with him :

" Leave what came after !" He is hard to throw.

Moreover priests are merely flesh and blood ; 830

When we get weakness, and no guilt beside,

We have no such great ill-fortune : finding grey,

We gladly call that white which might be black,

Too used to the double-dye. So, if the priest

Moved by Pompilia's youth and beauty, gave 835

Way to the natural weakness. . . . Anyhow

Here be facts, character ; what they spell

Determine, and thence pick what sense you may !

There was a certain young bold handsome priest
Popular in the city, far and wide 840
Famed, for Arezzo 's but a little place,
As the best of good companions, gay and grave
At the decent minute ; settled in his stall,
Or sideling, lute on lap, by lady's couch,
Ever the courtly Canon : see in such 845
A star shall climb apace and culminate,
Have its due handbreadth of the heaven at Rome,
Though meanwhile pausing on Arezzo's edge,
As modest candle 'mid the mountain fog,
To rub off redness and rusticity 850
Ere it sweep chastened, gain the silver-sphere.
Whether through Guido's absence or what else,
This Caponsacchi, favourite of the town,
Was yet no friend of his nor free o' the house,
Though both moved in the regular magnates' march—
Each must observe the other's tread and halt 856
At church, saloon, theatre, house of play.
Who could help noticing the husband's slouch,

The black of his brow—or miss the news that buzzed
Of how the little solitary wife 860
Wept and looked out of window all day long?
What need of minute search into such springs
As start men, set o' the move?—machinery
Old as earth, obvious as the noonday sun.
Why, take men as they come,—an instance now,— 865
Of all those who have simply gone to see
Pompilia on her deathbed since four days,
Half at the least are, call it how you please,
In love with her—I don't except the priests
Nor even the old confessor whose eyes run 870
Over at what he styles his sister's voice
Who died so early and weaned him from the world.
Well, had they viewed her ere the paleness pushed
The last o' the red o' the rose away, while yet
Some hand, adventurous 'twixt the wind and her, 875
Might let the life run back and raise the flower
Rich with reward up to the guardian's face,—
Would they have kept that hand employed the same

At fumbling on with prayer-book pages? No!
 Men are men: why then need I say one word 880
 More than this, that our man the Canon here
 Saw, pitied, loved Pompilia?

This is why;

This startling why: that Caponsacchi's self—
 Whom foes and friends alike avouch, for good 885
 Or ill, a man of truth whate'er betide,
 Intrepid altogether, reckless too
 How his own fame and fortune, tossed to the winds,
 Suffer by any turn the adventure take,
 Nay, more—not thrusting, like a badge to hide, 890
 'Twixt shirt and skin a joy which shown is shame—
 But flirting flag-like i' the face o' the world
 This tell-tale kerchief, this conspicuous love
 For the lady,—oh, called innocent love, I know!
 Only, such scarlet fiery innocence 895
 As most men would try muffle up in shade,—
 —'Tis strange then that this else abashless mouth

Should yet maintain, for truth's sake which is God's,
That it was not he made the first advance,
That, even ere word had passed between the two, 900
Pompilia penned him letters, passionate prayers,
If not love, then so simulating love
That he, no novice to the taste of thyme,
Turned from such over-luscious honey-clot
At end o' the flower, and would not lend his lip 905
Till . . . but the tale here frankly outsoars faith :
There must be falsehood somewhere. For her part,
Pompilia quietly constantly avers
She never penned a letter in her life
Nor to the Canon nor any other man, 910
Being incompetent to write and read :
Nor had she ever uttered word to him, nor he
To her till that same evening when they met,
She on her window-terrace, he beneath
I' the public street, as was their fateful chance, 915
And she adjured him in the name of God
Find out and bring to pass where, when and how

Escape with him to Rome might be contrived.
Means found, plan laid and time fixed, she avers,
And heart assured to heart in loyalty, 920
All at an impulse ! All extemporized
As in romance-books ! Is that credible ?
Well, yes : as she avers this with calm mouth
Dying, I do think "Credible !" you'd cry—
Did not the priest's voice come to break the spell : 925
They questioned him apart, as the custom is,
When first the matter made a noise at Rome,
And he, calm, constant then as she is now,
For truth's sake did assert and reassert
Those letters called him to her and he came, 930
—Which damns the story credible otherwise.
Why should this man,—mad to devote himself,
Careless what comes of his own fame, the first,—
Be studious thus to publish and declare
Just what the lightest nature loves to hide, 935
Nor screen a lady from the byword's laugh
"First spoke the lady, last the cavalier !"

—I say,—why should the man tell truth just here
When graceful lying meets such ready shrift?
Or is there a first moment for a priest 940
As for a woman, when invaded shame
Must have its first and last excuse to show?
Do both contrive love's entry in the mind
Shall look, i' the manner of it, a surprise,
That after, once the flag o' the fort hauled down, 945
Effrontery may sink drawbridge, open gate,
Welcome and entertain the conqueror?
Or what do you say to a touch of the devil's worst?
Can it be that the husband, he who wrote
The letter to his brother I told you of, 950
I' the name of her it meant to criminate,—
What if he wrote those letters to the priest?
Further the priest says, when it first befell,
This folly o' the letters, that he checked the flow,
Put them back lightly each with its reply. 955
Here again vexes new discrepancy:
There never reached her eye a word from him ;

He did write but she could not read—she could
Burn what offended wifehood, womanhood,
So did burn : never bade him come to her, 960
Yet when it proved he must come, let him come,
And when he did come though uncalled, she spoke
Prompt by an inspiration : thus it was.
Will you go somewhat back to understand ?

When first, pursuant to his plan, there sprung, 965
Like an uncaged beast, Guido's cruelty
On the weak shoulders of his wife, she cried
To those whom law appoints resource for such,
The secular guardian—that's the Governor,
And the Archbishop,—that's the spiritual guide, 970
And prayed them take the claws from out her flesh.
Now, this is ever the ill consequence
Of being noble, poor and difficult,
Ungainly, yet too great to disregard,—
That the born peers and friends hereditary 975
Though disinclined to help from their own store

The opprobrious wight, put penny in his poke
From purse of theirs or leave the door ajar
When he goes wistful by at dinner-time,—
Yet, if his needs conduct him where they sit 980
Smugly in office, judge this, bishop that,
Dispensers of the shine and shade o' the place—
And if, the friend's door shut and purse undrawn,
The potentate may find the office-hall
Do as good service at no cost—give help 985
By-the-bye, pay up traditional dues at once
Just through a feather-weight too much i' the scale,
A finger-tip forgot at the balance-tongue,—
Why, only churls refuse, or Molinists.
Thus when, in the first roughness of surprise 990
At Guido's wolf-face whence the sheepskin fell,
The frightened couple, all bewilderment,
Rushed to the Governor,—who else rights wrong?
Told him their tale of wrong and craved redress—
Why, then the Governor woke up to the fact 995
That Guido was a friend of old, poor Count !—

So, promptly paid his tribute, promised the pair,
Wholesome chastisement should soon cure their qualms
Next time they came and prated and told lies :
Which stopped all prating, sent them dumb to Rome.
Well, now it was Pompilia's turn to try : 1001
The troubles pressing on her, as I said,
Three times she rushed, maddened by misery,
To the other mighty man, sobbed out her prayer
At footstool of the Archbishop—fast the friend 1005
Of her husband also ! Oh, good friends of yore !
So, the Archbishop, not to be outdone
By the Governor, break custom more than he,
Thrice bade the foolish woman stop her tongue,
Unloosed her hands from harassing his gout, 1010
Coached her and carried her to the Count again,
—His old friend should be master in his house,
Rule his wife and correct her faults at need !
Well, driven from post to pillar in this wise,
She, as a last resource, betook herself 1015
To one, should be no family-friend at least,

A simple friar o' the city ; confessed to him,
Then told how fierce temptation of release
By self-dealt death was busy with her soul,
And urged that he put this in words, write plain 1020
For one who could not write, set down her prayer
That Pietro and Violante, parent-like
If somehow not her parents, should for love
Come save her, pluck from out the flame the brand
Themselves had thoughtlessly thrust in so deep 1025
To send gay-coloured sparkles up and cheer
Their seat at the chimney-corner. The good friar
Promised as much at the moment ; but, alack,
Night brings discretion : he was no one's friend,
Yet presently found he could not turn about 1030
Nor take a step i' the case and fail to tread
On someone's toe who either was a friend,
Or a friend's friend, or friend's friend thrice-removed,
And woe to friar by whom offences come !
So, the course being plain,—with a general sigh 1035
At matrimony the profound mistake,—

He threw reluctantly the business up,
Having his other penitents to mind.

If then, all outlets thus secured save one,
At last she took to the open, stood and stared 1040
With her wan face to see where God might wait—
And there found Caponsacchi wait as well
For the precious something at perdition's edge,
He only was predestinate to save,—
And if they recognised in a critical flash 1045
From the zenith, each the other, her need of him,
His need of . . . say, a woman to perish for,
The regular way o' the world, yet break no vow,
Do no harm save to himself,—if this were thus?
How do you say? It were improbable; 1050
So is the legend of my patron-saint.

Anyhow, whether, as Guido states the case,
Pompilia,—like a starving wretch i' the street
Who stops and rifles the first passenger

In the great right of an excessive wrong,— 1055
Did somehow call this stranger and he came,—
Or whether the strange sudden interview
Blazed as when star and star must needs go close
Till each hurts each and there is loss in heaven—
Whatever way in this strange world it was,— 1060
Pompilia and Caponsacchi met, in fine,
She at her window, he i' the street beneath,
And understood each other at first look.

All was determined and performed at once.
And on a certain April evening, late 1065
I' the month, this girl of sixteen, bride and wife
Three years and over,—she who hitherto
Had never taken twenty steps in Rome
Beyond the church, pinned to her mother's gown,
Nor, in Arezzo, knew her way through street 1070
Except what led to the Archbishop's door,—
Such an one rose up in the dark, laid hand
On what came first, clothes and a trinket or two,

Belongings of her own in the old day,—
 Stole from the side o' the sleeping spouse—who knows ?
 Sleeping perhaps, silent for certain,—slid 1076
 Ghost-like from great dark room to great dark room,
 In through the tapestries and out again
 And onward, unembarrassed as a fate,
 Descended staircase, gained last door of all, 1080
 Sent it wide open at first push of palm,
 And there stood, first time, last and only time,
 At liberty, alone in the open street,—
 Unquestioned, unmolested found herself
 At the city gate, by Caponsacchi's side, 1085
 Hope there, joy there, life and all good again,
 The carriage there, the convoy there, light there
 Broadening into a full blaze at Rome
 And breaking small what long miles lay between ;
 Up she sprang, in he followed, they were safe. 1090

The husband quotes this for incredible,
 All of the story from first word to last :

Sees the priest's hand throughout upholding hers,
Traces his foot to the alcove, that night,
Whither and whence blindfold he knew the way, 1095
Proficient in all craft and stealthiness ;
And cites for proof a servant, eye that watched
And ear that opened to purse secrets up,
A woman-spy,—suborned to give and take
Letters and tokens, do the work of shame 1100
The more adroitly that herself, who helped
Communion thus between a tainted pair,
Had long since been a leper thick in spot,
A common trull o' the town : she witnessed all,
Helped many meetings, partings, took her wage 1105
And then told Guido the whole matter. Lies !
The woman's life confutes her word,—her word
Confutes itself : " Thus, thus and thus I lied."
" And thus, no question, still you lie," we say.

" Ay, but at last, e'en have it how you will, 1110
" Whatever the means, whatever the way, explodes

" The consummation "—the accusers shriek :
 " Here is the wife avowedly found in flight,
 " And the companion of her flight, a priest ;
 " She flies her husband, he the church his spouse : 1115
 " What is this ? "

Wife and priest alike reply

" This is the simple thing it claims to be,
 " A course we took for life and honour's sake,
 " Very strange, very justifiable." 1120
 She says, " God put it in my head to fly,
 " As when the martin migrates : autumn claps
 " Her hands, cries ' Winter 's coming, will be here,
 " ' Off with you ere the white teeth overtake !
 " ' Flee !' So I fled : this friend was the warm day,
 " The south wind and whatever favours flight ; 1126
 " I took the favour, had the help, how else ?
 " And so we did fly rapidly all night,
 " All day, all night—a longer night—again,
 " And then another day, longest of days, 1130

- “ And all the while, whether we fled or stopped,
“ I scarce know how or why, one thought filled both,
“ ‘ Fly and arrive !’ So long as I found strength
“ I talked with my companion, told him much,
“ Knowing that he knew more, knew me, knew God
“ And God’s disposal of me,—but the sense 1136
“ O’ the blessed flight absorbed me in the main,
“ And speech became mere talking through a sleep,
“ Till at the end of that last longest night
“ In a red daybreak, when we reached an inn 1140
“ And my companion whispered ‘ Next stage—Rome !’
“ Sudden the weak flesh fell like piled-up cards,
“ All the frail fabric at a finger’s touch,
“ And prostrate the poor soul too, and I said
“ ‘ But though Count Guido were a furlong off, 1145
“ ‘ Just on me, I must stop and rest awhile !’
“ Then something like a white wave o’ the sea
“ Broke o’er my brain and buried me in sleep
“ Blessedly, till it ebbed and left me loose,
“ And where was I found but on a strange bed 1150

“ In a strange room like hell, roaring with noise,
“ Ruddy with flame, and filled with men, in front
“ Whom but the man you call my husband, ay—
“ Count Guido once more between heaven and me,
“ For there my heaven stood, my salvation, yes— 1155
“ That Caponsacchi all my heaven of help,
“ Helpless himself, held prisoner in the hands
“ Of men who looked up in my husband’s face
“ To take the fate thence he should signify,
“ Just as the way was at Arezzo : then, 1160
“ Not for my sake but his who had helped me—
“ I sprang up, reached him with one bound, and seized
“ The sword o’ the felon, trembling at his side,
“ Fit creature of a coward, unsheathed the thing
“ And would have pinned him through the poison-bag
“ To the wall and left him there to palpitate, 1166
“ As you serve scorpions, but men interposed—
“ Disarmed me, gave his life to him again
“ That he might take mine and the other lives,
“ And he has done so. I submit myself !” 1170

The priest says—oh, and in the main result
The facts asseverate, he truly says,
As to the very act and deed of him,
However you mistrust the mind o' the man—
The flight was just for flight's sake, no pretext 1175
For aught except to set Pompilia free :
He says “ I cite the husband's self's worst charge
“ In proof of my best word for both of us.
“ Be it conceded that so many times
“ We took our pleasure in his palace : then, 1180
“ What need to fly at all?—or flying no less,
“ What need to outrage the lips sick and white
“ Of a woman, and bring ruin down beside,
“ By halting when Rome lay one stage beyond ?”
So does he vindicate Pompilia's fame, 1185
Confirm her story in all points but one—
This ; that, so fleeing and so breathing forth
Her last strength in the prayer to halt awhile,
She makes confusion of the reddening white
Which was the sunset when her strength gave way, 1190

And the next sunrise and its whitening red
Which she revived in when her husband came :
She mixes both times, morn and eve, in one,
Having lived through a blank of night 'twixt each
Though dead-asleep, unaware as a corpse, 1195
She on the bed above ; her friend below
Watched in the doorway of the inn the while,
Stood i' the red o' the morn, that she mistakes,
In act to rouse and quicken the tardy crew
And hurry out the horses, have the stage 1200
Over, the last league, reach Rome and be safe :
When up came Guido.

Guido's tale begins—

How he and his whole household, drunk to death
By some enchanted potion, popped drugs 1205
Plied by the wife, lay powerless in gross sleep
And left the spoilers unimpeded way,
Could not shake off their poison and pursue,
Till noontide, then made shift to get on horse
And did pursue : which means, he took his time, 1210

Pressed on no more than lingered after, step
By step, just making sure o' the fugitives,
Till at the nick of time, he saw his chance,
Seized it, came up with and surprised the pair.
How he must needs have gnawn lip and gnashed teeth,
Taking successively at tower and town, . 1216
Village and roadside, still the same report
“ Yes, such a pair arrived an hour ago,
“ Sat in the carriage just where your horse stands,
“ While we got horses ready,—turned deaf ear 1220
“ To all entreaty they would even alight ;
“ Counted the minutes and resumed their course.”
Would they indeed escape, arrive at Rome,
Leave no least loop to let damnation through,
And foil him of his captured infamy, 1225
Prize of guilt proved and perfect ? So it seemed :
Till, oh the happy chance, at last stage, Rome
But two short hours off, Castelnovo reached,
The guardian angel gave reluctant place,
Satan stepped forward with alacrity, 1230

Pompilia's flesh and blood succumbed, perforce
A halt was, and her husband had his will.
Perdue he couched, counted out hour by hour
Till he should spy in the east a signal-streak—
Night had been, morrow was, triumph would be. 1235
Do you see the plan deliciously complete?
The rush upon the unsuspecting sleep,
The easy execution, the outcry
Over the deed "Take notice all the world!
"These two dead bodies, locked still in embrace,—
"The man is Caponsacchi and a priest, 1241
"The woman is my wife: they fled me late,
"Thus have I found and you behold them thus,
"And may judge me: do you approve or no?"
Success did seem not so improbable, 1245
But that already Satan's laugh was heard,
His black back turned on Guido—left i' the lurch
Or rather, baulked of suit and service now,
That he improve on both by one deed more,

Burn up the better at no distant day, 1250
Body and soul one holocaust to hell.
Anyhow, of this natural consequence
Did just the last link of the long chain snap :
For his eruption was o' the priest, alive
And alert, calm, resolute and formidable, 1255
Not the least look of fear in that broad brow—
One not to be disposed of by surprise,
And armed moreover—who had guessed as much?
Yes, there stood he in secular costume
Complete from head to heel, with sword at side, 1260
He seemed to know the trick of perfectly.
There was no prompt suppression of the man
As he said calmly “ I have saved your wife
“ From death ; there was no other way but this ;
“ Of what do I defraud you except death ? 1265
“ Charge any wrong beyond, I answer it.”
Guido, the valorous, had met his match,
Was forced to demand help instead of fight,
Bid the authorities o' the place lend aid

And make the best of a broken matter so. 1270
They soon obeyed the summons—I suppose,
Apprized and ready, or not far to seek—
Laid hands on Caponsacchi, found in fault,
A priest yet flagrantly accoutred thus,—
Then, to make good Count Guido's further charge, 1275
Proceeded, prisoner made lead the way,
In a crowd, upstairs to the chamber-door
Where wax-white, dead asleep, deep beyond dream,
As the priest laid her, lay Pompilia yet.

And as he mounted step and step with the crowd 1280
How I see Guido taking heart again !
He knew his wife so well and the way of her—
How at the outbreak she would shroud her shame
In hell's heart, would it mercifully yawn—
How, failing that, her forehead to his foot, 1285
She would crouch silent till the great doom fell,
Leave him triumphant with the crowd to see !
Guilt motionless or writhing like a worm ?

No! Second misadventure, this worm turned,
 I told you : would have slain him on the spot 1290
 With his own weapon, but they seized her hands :
 Leaving her tongue free, as it tolled the knell
 Of Guido's hope so lively late. The past
 Took quite another shape now. She who shrieked
 " At least and for ever I am mine and God's, 1295
 " Thanks to his liberating angel Death—
 " Never again degraded to be yours
 " The ignoble noble, the unmanly man,
 " The beast below the beast in brutishness !"—
 This was the froward child, " the restif lamb 1300
 " Used to be cherished in his breast," he groaned—
 " Eat from his hand and drink from out his
 cup,
 " The while his fingers pushed their loving way
 " Through curl on curl of that soft coat—alas,
 " And she all silverly baaed gratitude 1305
 " While meditating mischief !"—and so forth.
 He must invent another story now !

The ins and outs o' the rooms were searched : he found
Or showed for found the abominable prize—
Love-letters from his wife who cannot write, 1310
Love-letters in reply o' the priest—thank God !—
Who can write and confront his character
With this, and prove the false thing forged throughout :
Spitting whereat, he needs must spatter who
But Guido's self?—that forged and falsified 1315
One letter called Pompilia's, past dispute :
Then why not these to make sure still more sure?

So was the case concluded then and there :
Guido preferred his charges in due form,
Called on the law to adjudicate, consigned 1320
The accused ones to the Prefect of the place.
(Oh mouse-birth of that mountain-like revenge !)
And so to his own place betook himself
After the spring that failed,—the wildcat's way.
The captured parties were conveyed to Rome ; 1325
Investigation followed here i' the court—

Soon to review the fruit of its own work,
 From then to now being eight months and no more.
 Guido kept out of sight and safe at home :
 The Abate, brother Paolo, helped most 1330
 At words when deeds were out of question, pushed
 Nearest the purple, best played deputy,
 So, pleaded, Guido's representative
 At the court shall soon try Guido's self,—what's more,
 The court that also took—I told you, Sir— 1335
 That statement of the couple, how a cheat
 Had been i' the birth of the babe, no child of theirs.
 That was the prelude ; this, the play's first act :
 Whereof we wait what comes, crown, close of all.

 Well, the result was something of a shade 1340
 On the parties thus accused,—how otherwise?
 Shade, but with shine as unmistakable.
 Each had a prompt defence : Pompilia first—
 “ Earth was made hell to me who did no harm :
 “ I only could emerge one way from hell 1345

- " By catching at the one hand held me, so
 " I caught at it and thereby stepped to heaven :
 " If that be wrong, do with me what you will !"
 Then Caponsacchi with a grave grand sweep
 O' the arm as though his soul warned baseness off—
 " If as a man, then much more as a priest 1351
 " I hold me bound to help weak innocence :
 " If so my worldly reputation burst,
 " Being the bubble it is, why, burst it may :
 " Blame I can bear though not blameworthiness. 1355
 " But use your sense first, see if the miscreant here
 " The man who tortured thus the woman, thus
 " Have not both laid the trap and fixed the lure
 " Over the pit should bury body and soul !
 " His facts are lies : his letters are the fact— 1360
 " An infiltration flavoured with himself !
 " As for the fancies—whether . . what is it you say ?
 " The lady loves me, whether I love her
 " In the forbidden sense of your surmise,—
 " If, with the midday blaze of truth above, 1365

- " The unlidded eye of God awake, aware,
 " You needs must pry about and track the course
 " Of each stray beam of light may traverse earth,
 " To the night's sun and Lucifer himself,
 " Do so, at other time, in other place, 1370
 " Not now nor here ! Enough that first to last
 " I never touched her lip nor she my hand
 " Nor either of us thought a thought, much less
 " Spoke a word which the Virgin might not hear.
 " Be that your question, thus I answer it." 1375

Then the court had to make its mind up, spoke.

- " It is a thorny question, and a tale
 " Hard to believe, but not impossible :
 " Who can be absolute for either side ?
 " A middle course is happily open yet. 1380
 " Here has a blot surprised the social blank,—
 " Whether through favour, feebleness or fault,
 " No matter, leprosy has touched our robe
 " And we're unclean and must be purified.

- “ Here is a wife makes holiday from home, 1385
“ A priest caught playing truant to his church,
“ In masquerade moreover : both allege
“ Enough excuse to stop our lifted scourge
“ Which else would heavily fall. On the other hand,
“ Here is a husband, ay and man of mark, 1390
“ Who comes complaining here, demands redress
“ As if he were the pattern of desert—
“ The while those plaguy allegations frown,
“ Forbid we grant him the redress he seeks.
“ To all men be our moderation known ! 1395
“ Rewarding none while compensating each,
“ Hurting all round though harming nobody,
“ Husband, wife, priest, scot-free not one shall 'scape,
“ Yet priest, wife, husband, boast the unbroken head
“ From application of our excellent oil : 1400
“ So that, whatever be the fact, in fine,
“ It makes no miss of justice in a sort.
“ First, let the husband stomach as he may,
“ His wife shall neither be returned him, no—

" Nor branded, whipped and caged, but just consigned
 " To a convent and the quietude she cravse ; 1406
 " So is he rid of his domestic plague :
 " What better thing can happen to a man ?
 " Next, let the priest retire—unshent, unshamed,
 " Unpunished as for perpetrating crime, 1410
 " But relegated (not imprisoned, Sirs !)
 " Sent for three years to clarify his youth
 " At Civita, a rest by the way to Rome :
 " There let his life skim off its last of lees
 " Nor keep this dubious colour. Judged the cause :
 " All parties may retire, content, we hope." 1416
 That's Rome's way, the traditional road of law ;
 Whither it leads is what remains to tell.

The priest went to his relegation-place,
 The wife to her convent, brother Paolo 1420
 To the arms of brother Guido with the news
 And this beside—his charge was countercharged ;
 The Comparini, his old brace of hates,

Were breathed and vigilant and venomous now—
Had shot a second bolt where the first stuck, 1425
And followed up the pending dowry-suit
By a procedure should release the wife
From so much of the marriage-bond as barred
Escape when Guido turned the screw too much
On his wife's flesh and blood, as husband may. 1430
No more defence, she turned and made attack,
Claimed now divorce from bed and board, in short :
Pleaded such subtle strokes of cruelty,
Such slow sure siege laid to her body and soul,
As, proved,—and proofs seemed coming thick and fast,—
Would gain both freedom and the dowry back 1436
Even should the first suit leave them in his grasp :
So urged the Comparini for the wife.
Guido had gained not one of the good things
He grasped at by his creditable plan 1440
O' the flight and following and the rest : the suit
That smouldered late was fanned to fury new,
This adjunct came to help with fiercer fire,

While he had got himself a quite new plague—
Found the world's face an universal grin 1445
At this last best of the Hundred Merry Tales
Of how a young and spritely clerk devised
To carry off a spouse that moped too much,
And cured her of the vapours in a trice :
And how the husband, playing Vulcan's part, 1450
Told by the Sun, started in hot pursuit
To catch the lovers, and came halting up,
Cast his net and then called the Gods to see
The convicts in their rosy impudence—
Whereat said Mercury " Would that I were Mars !" 1455
Oh it was rare, and naughty all the same !
Brief, the wife's courage and cunning,—the priest's show
Of chivalry and adroitness,—last not least,
The husband—how he ne'er showed teeth at all,
Whose bark had promised biting ; but just sneaked 1460
Back to his kennel, tail 'twixt legs, as 't were,—
All this was hard to gulp down and digest.
So pays the devil his liegeman, brass for gold.

But this was at Arezzo : here in Rome
Brave Paolo bore up against it all— 1465
Battled it out, nor wanting to himself
Nor Guido nor the House whose weight he bore
Pillar-like, not by force of arm but brain.
He knew his Rome, what wheels we set to work ;
Plied influential folk, pressed to the ear 1470
Of the efficacious purple, pushed his way
To the old Pope's self,—past decency indeed,—
Praying him take the matter in his hands
Out of the regular court's incompetence ;
But times are changed and nephews out of date 1475
And favouritism unfashionable : the Pope
Said “ Render Cæsar what is Cæsar's due ! ”
As for the Comparini's counter-plea,
He met that by a counter-plea again,
Made Guido claim divorce—with help so far 1480
By the trial's issue : for, why punishment
However slight unless for guiltiness
However slender?—and a molehill serves

Much as a mountain of offence this way.
So was he gathering strength on every side 1485
And growing more and more to menace—when
All of a terrible moment came the blow
That beat down Paolo's fence, ended the play
O' the foil and brought Mannaia on the stage.

Five months had passed now since Pompilia's flight,
Months spent in peace among the Convert nuns : 1491
This,—being, as it seemed, for Guido's sake
Solely, what pride might call imprisonment
And quote as something gained, to friends at home,—
This naturally was at Guido's charge : 1495
Grudge it he might, but penitential fare,
Prayers, preachings, who but he defrayed the cost ?
So, Paolo dropped, as proxy, doit by doit
Like heart's blood, till—what 's here ? What notice
comes ?

The Convent's self makes application bland 1500
That, since Pompilia's health is fast o' the wane,

She may have leave to go combine her cure
 Of soul with cure of body, mend her mind
 Together with her thin arms and sunk eyes
 That want fresh air outside the convent-wall, 1505
 Say in a friendly house,—and which so fit
 As a certain villa in the Pauline way,
 That happens to hold Pietro and his wife,
 The natural guardians? “ Oh, and shift the care
 “ You shift the cost, too ; Pietro pays in turn, 1510
 “ And lightens Guido of a load ! And then,
 “ Villa or convent, two names for one thing,
 “ Always the sojourn means imprisonment,
 “ *Domum pro carcere*—nowise we relax,
 “ Nothing abate : how answers Paolo ?” 1515

You,

What would you answer? All so smooth and fair,
 Even Paul's astuteness sniffed no harm i' the world.
 He authorised the transfer, saw it made
 And, two months after, reaped the fruit of the same,
 Having to sit down, rack his brain and find 1521

What phrase should serve him best to notify
Our Guido that by happy providence
A son and heir, a babe was born to him
I' the villa,—go tell sympathising friends ! 1525
Yes, such had been Pompilia's privilege :
She, when she fled, was one month gone with child,
Known to herself or unknown, either way
Availing to explain (say men of art)
The strange and passionate precipitance 1530
Of maiden startled into motherhood
Which changes body and soul by nature's law.
So when the she-dove breeds, strange yearnings come
For the unknown shelter by undreamed-of shores,
And there is born a blood-pulse in her heart 1535
To fight if needs be, though with flap of wing,
For the wool-flock or the fur-tuft, though a hawk
Contest the prize,—wherefore, she knows not yet.
Anyhow, thus to Guido came the news.
“ I shall have quitted Rome ere you arrive 1540
“ To take the one step left,”—wrote Paolo.

Then did the winch o' the winepress of all hate,
Vanity, disappointment, grudge and greed,
Take the last turn that screws out pure revenge
With a bright bubble at the brim beside— 1545
By an heir's birth he was assured at once
O' the main prize, all the money in dispute :
Pompilia's dowry might revert to her
Or stay with him as law's caprice should point,—
But now—now—what was Pietro's shall be hers, 1550
What was hers shall remain her own,—if hers,
Why then,—oh, not her husband's but—her heir's !
That heir being his too, all grew his at last
By this road or by that road, since they join.
Before, why, push he Pietro out o' the world,— 1555
The current of the money stopped, you see,
Pompilia being proved no Pietro's child :
Or let it be Pompilia's life he quenched,
Again the current of the money stopped,—
Guido debarred his rights as husband soon, 1560
So the new process threatened ;—now, the chance,

Now, the resplendent minute ! Clear the earth,
Cleanse the house, let the three but disappear
A child remains, depositary of all,
That Guido may enjoy his own again ! 1565
Repair all losses by a master-stroke,
Wipe out the past, all done and left undone,
Swell the good present to best evermore,
Die into new life, which let blood baptize !

So, i' the blue of a sudden sulphur-blaze, 1570
And why there was one step to take at Rome,
And why he should not meet with Paolo there,
He saw—the ins and outs to the heart of hell—
And took the straight line thither swift and sure.
He rushed to Vittiano, found four sons o' the soil, 1575
Brutes of his breeding, with one spark i' the clod
That served for a soul, the looking up to him
Or aught called Franceschini as life, death,
Heaven, hell,—lord paramount, assembled these,
Harangued, equipped, instructed, pressed each clod 1580

With his will's imprint; then took horse, plied
spur,
And so arrived, all five of them, at Rome
On Christmas-Eve, and forthwith found themselves
Installed i' the vacancy and solitude
Left them by Paolo, the considerate man 1585
Who, good as his word, disappeared at once
As if to leave the stage free. A whole week
Did Guido spend in study of his part,
Then played it fearless of a failure. One,
Struck the year's clock whereof the hours are days, 1590
And off was rung o' the little wheels the chime
" Good will on earth and peace to man : " but, two,
Proceeded the same bell and, evening come,
The dreadful five felt finger-wise their way
Across the town by blind cuts and black turns 1595
To the little lone suburban villa; knocked—
" Who may be outside ? " called a well-known voice.
" A friend of Caponsacchi's bringing friends
" A letter."

That 's a test, the excusers say :

Ay, and a test conclusive, I return. 1600

What? Had that name brought touch of guilt or
taste

Of fear with it, aught to dash the present joy

With memory of the sorrow just at end,—

She, happy in her parents' arms at length

With the new blessing of the two weeks' babe,— 1605

How had that name's announcement moved the wife?

Or, as the other slanders circulate,

Were Caponsaçchi no rare visitant

On nights and days whither safe harbour lured,

What bait had been i' the name to ope the door? 1610

The promise of a letter? Stealthy guests

Have secret watchwords, private entrances :

The man's own self might have been found inside

And all the scheme made frustrate by a word.

No : but since Guido knew, none knew so well, 1615

The man had never since returned to Rome

Nor seen the wife's face more than villa's front,

So, could not be at hand to warn or save,—
For that, he took this sure way to the end.

“Come in,” bade poor Violante cheerfully, 1620
Drawing the door-bolt: that death was the first,
Stabbed through and through. Pietro, close on her
heels,

Set up a cry—“Let me confess myself!

“Grant but confession!” Cold steel was the grant.

Then came Pompilia’s turn. 1625

Then they escaped.

The noise o’ the slaughter roused the neighbour-
hood.

They had forgotten just the one thing more

Which saves i’ the circumstance, the ticket to-wit

Which puts post-horses at a traveller’s use: 1630

So, all on foot, desperate through the dark

Reeled they like drunkards along open road,

Accomplished a prodigious twenty miles

Homeward, and gained Baccano very near,

Stumbled at last, deaf, dumb, blind through the
 feat, 1635
 Into a grange and, one dead heap, slept there
 Till the pursuers hard upon their trace
 Reached them and took them, red from head to
 heel,
 And brought them to the prison where they lie.
 The couple were laid i' the church two days ago, 1640
 And the wife lives yet by miracle.

All is told.

You hardly need ask what Count Guido says,
 Since something he must say. "I own the deed—"
 (He cannot choose,—but—) "I declare the same 1645
 "Just and inevitable,—since no way else
 "Was left me, but by this of taking life,
 "To save my honour which is more than life.
 "I exercised a husband's rights." To which
 The answer is as prompt—"There was no fault 1650
 "In any one o' the three to punish thus :

- “ Neither i’ the wife, who kept all faith to you,
“ Nor in the parents, whom yourself first duped,
“ Robbed and maltreated, then turned out of doors.
“ You wronged and they endured wrong ; yours the fault.
“ Next, had endurance overpassed the mark 1656
“ And turned resentment needing remedy,—
“ Nay, put the absurd impossible case, for once—
“ You were all blameless of the blame alleged
“ And they blameworthy where you fix all blame, 1660
“ Still, why this violation of the law ?
“ Yourself elected law should take its course,
“ Avenge wrong, or show vengeance not your right ;
“ Why, only when the balance in law’s hand
“ Trembles against you and inclines the way 1665
“ O’ the other party, do you make protest,
“ Renounce arbitrament, flying out of court,
“ And crying ‘ Honour’s hurt the sword must cure ? ’
“ Aha, and so i’ the middle of each suit
“ Trying i’ the courts,—and you had three in play 1670
“ With an appeal to the Pope’s self beside,—

“ What, you may chop and change and right your wrongs

“ Leaving the law to lag as she thinks fit ? ”

That were too temptingly commodious, Count !

One would have still a remedy in reserve 1675

Should reach the safest oldest sinner, you see !

One's honour forsooth ? Does that take hurt alone

From the extreme outrage ? I who have no wife,

Being yet sensitive in my degree

As Guido,—must discover hurt elsewhere 1680

Which, half compounded-for in days gone by,

May profitably break out now afresh,

Need cure from my own expeditious hands.

The lie that was, as it were, imputed me

When you objected to my contract's clause,— 1685

The theft as good as, one may say, alleged,

When you, co-heir in a will, excepted, Sir,

To my administration of effects,

—Aha, do you think law disposed of these ?

My honour's touched and shall deal death around ! 1690

Count, that were too commodious, I repeat !
If any law be imperative on us all,
Of all are you the enemy : out with you
From the common light and air and life of man !

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