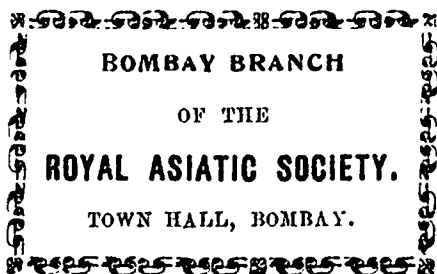


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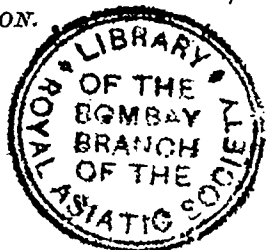
ROBERT BROWNING.

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Paracelsus, Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day, Sordello.

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CONTENTS.

	Page
PARACELsus	1
CHRISTMAS-EVE, AND EASTER-DAY	163
SORDELLO	252

Paracelsus, Christmas Eve and Easter
Day, Sordello.

PARACELSUS.

INSCRIBED TO

AMÉDÉE DE RIPERT-MONCLAR,

BY HIS AFFECTIONATE FRIEND,

March 15th, 1835.

R. B.

PERSONS.

AUREOLUS PARACELUS, a student.

FESTUS and MICHAL, his friends.

APRILE, an Italian poet.

I. PARACELUS ASPIRES.

SCENE, Würzburg ; a garden in the environs. 1512.

FESTUS, PARACELUS, MICHAL.

Par. Come close to me, dear friends ; still closer ;
thus !

Close to the heart which, though long time roll by

Ere it again beat quicker, pressed to yours,
 As now it beats—perchance a long, long time—
 At least henceforth your memories shall make
 Quiet and fragrant as befits their home.
 Nor shall my memory want a home in yours—
 Alas, that it requires too well such free
 Forgiving love as shall embalm it there!
 For if you would remember me aright,
 As I was born to be, you must forget
 All fitful, strange and moody waywardness
 Which e'er confused my better spirit, to dwell
 Only on moments such as these, dear friends!
 —My heart no truer, but my words and ways
 More true to it: as Michal, some months hence,
 Will say, “this autumn was a pleasant time,”
 For some few sunny days; and overlook
 Its bleak wind, hankering after pining leaves.
 Autumn would fain be sunny; I would look
 Liker my nature's truth: and both are frail,
 And both beloved, for all their frailty.

Mich.

Aureole!

Par. Drop by drop! she is weeping like a child!
 Not so! I am content—more than content;
 Nay, autumn wins you best by this its mute
 Appeal to sympathy for its decay:
 Look up, sweet Michal, nor esteem the less
 Yourstained and drooping vines their grapes bow down,
 Nor blame those creaking trees bent with their fruit,
 That apple-tree with a rare after-birth

Of peeping blooms sprinkled its wealth among !
 Then for the winds—what wind that ever raved
 Shall vex that ash which overlooks you both,
 So proud it wears its berries? Ah, at length,
 The old smile meet for her, the lady of this
 Sequestered nest!—this kingdom, limited
 Alone by one old populous green wall
 Tenanted by the ever-busy flies,
 Grey crickets and shy lizards and quick spiders,
 Each family of the silver-threaded moss—
 Which, look through near, this way, and it appears
 A stubble-field or a cane-brake, a marsh
 Of bulrush whitening in the sun : laugh now !
 Fancy the crickets, each one in his house,
 Looking out, wondering at the world—or best,
 You painted snail with his gay shell of dew,
 Travelling to see the glossy balls high up
 Hung by the caterpillar, like gold lamps.

Mich. In truth we have lived carelessly and well.

Par. And shall, my perfect pair!—each, trust me,
 born

For the other ; nay, your very hair, when mixed,
 Is of one hue. For where save in this nook
 Shall you too walk, when I am far away,
 And wish me prosperous fortune? Stay : that plant
 Shall never wave its tangles lightly and softly,
 As a queen's languid and imperial arm
 Which scatters crowns among her lovers, but you
 Shall be reminded to predict to me

Some great success! Ah, see, the sun sinks broad
Behind Saint Saviour's: wholly goné, at last!

Fest. Now, Aureole, stay those wandering eyes
awhile!

You are ours to-night at least; and while you spoke
Of Michal and her tears, I thought that none
Could willingly leave what he so seemed to love:
But that last look destroys my dream—that look
As if, where'er you gazed, there stood a star!
How far was Würzburg with its church and spire
And garden-walls and all things they contain,
From that look's far alighting?

Par. I but spoke
And looked alike from simple joy to see
The beings I love best, shut in so well
From all rude chances like to be my lot,
That, when afar, my weary spirit,—disposed
To lose awhile its care in soothing thoughts
Of them, their pleasant features, looks and words,—
Needs never hesitate, nor apprehend
Encroaching trouble may have reached them too,
Nor have recourse to fancy's busy aid
And fashion even a wish in their behalf
Beyond what they possess already here;
But, unobstructed, may at once forget
Itself in them, assured how well they fare.
Beside, this Festus knows he holds me one
Whom quiet and its charms arrest in vain,
One scarce aware of all the joys I quit,

Too filled with airy hopes to make account
 Of soft delights his own heart garners up :
 Whereas, behold how much our sense of all
 That's beauteous proves alike ! When Festus learns
 That every common pleasure of the world
 Affects me as himself ; that I have just
 As varied appetite for joy derived
 From common things ; a stake in life, in short,
 Like his ; a stake which rash pursuit of aims
 That life affords not, would as soon destroy ;—
 He may convince himself that, this in view,
 I shall act well advised. And last, because,
 Though heaven and earth and all things were at stake,
 Sweet Michal must not weep, our parting eve.

Fest. True : and the eve is deepening, and we sit
 As little anxious to begin our talk
 As though to-morrow I could hint of it
 As we paced arm-in-arm the cheerful town
 At sun-dawn ; or could whisper it by fits
 (Trithemius busied with his class the while)
 In that dim chamber where the noon-streaks peer
 Half-frightened by the awful tomes around ;
 Or in some grassy lane unbosom all
 From even-blush to midnight : but, to-morrow !
 Have I full leave to tell my inmost mind ?
 We have been brothers, and henceforth the world
 Will rise between us :—all my freest mind ?
 'Tis the last night, dear Aureole !

Par.

Oh, say on !

Devise some test of love, some arduous feat
 To be performed for you: say on! If night
 Be spent the while, the better! Recall how oft
 My wondrous plans and dreams and hopes and fears
 Have—never wearied you, oh no!—as I
 Recall, and never vividly as now,
 Your true affection, born when Einsiedeln
 And its green hills were all the world to us;
 And still increasing to this night which ends,
 My further stay at Würzburg. Oh, one day
 You shall be very proud! Say on, dear friends!

Fest. In truth? 'Tis for my proper peace, indeed,
 Rather than yours; for vain all projects seem
 To stay your course: I said my latest hope
 Is fading even now. A story tells
 Of some far embassy dispatched to win
 The favour of an eastern king, and how
 The gifts they offered proved but dazzling dust
 Shed from the ore-beds native to his clime.
 Just so, the value of repose and love,
 I meant should tempt you, better far than I
 You seem to comprehend; and yet desist
 No whit from projects where repose nor love
 Have part.

Par. Once more? Alas! as I forebode.

Fest. A solitary briar the bank puts forth
 To save our swan's nest floating out to sea.

Par. Dear Festus, hear me. What is it you wish?
 That I should lay aside my heart's pursuit,

Abandon the sole ends for which I live,
 Reject God's great commission, and so die!
 You bid me listen for your true love's sake:
 Yet how has grown that love? Even in a long
 And patient cherishing of the selfsame spirit
 It now would quell; as though a mother hoped
 To stay the lusty manhood of the child
 Once weak upon her knees. I was not born
 Informed and fearless from the first, but shrank
 From aught which marked me out apart from men:
 I would have lived their life, and died their death,
 Lost in their ranks, eluding destiny:
 But you first guided me through doubt and fear,
 Taught me to know mankind and know myself;
 And now that I am strong and full of hope,
 That, from my soul, I can reject all aims
 Save those your earnest words made plain to me,
 Now that I touch the brink of my design,
 When I would have a triumph in their eyes,
 A glad cheer in their voices—Michal weeps,
 And Festus ponders gravely!

Fest.

When you deign .

To hear my purpose . . .

Par.

Hear it? I can say

Beforehand all this evening's conference!
 'Tis this way, Michal, that he uses: first,
 Or he declares, or I, the leading points
 Of our best scheme of life, what is man's end,
 And what God's will; no two faiths e'er agreed

As his with mine. Next, each of us allows
 Faith should be acted on as best we may ;
 Accordingly, I venture to submit
 My plan, in lack of better, for pursuing
 The path which God's will seems to authorize :
 Well, he discerns much good in it, avows
 This motive worthy, that hope plausible,
 A danger here to be avoided, there
 An oversight to be repaired : in fine
 Our two minds go together—all the good
 Approved by him, I gladly recognize,
 All he counts bad, I thankfully discard,
 And nought forbids my looking up at last
 For some stray comfort in his cautious brow.
 When, lo ! I learn that, spite of all, there lurks
 Some innate and inexplicable germ
 Of failure in my scheme ; so that at last
 It all amounts to this—the sovereign proof
 That we devote ourselves to God, is seen
 In living just as though no God there were ;
 A life which, prompted by the sad and blind
 Folly of man, Festus abhors the most ;
 But which these tenets sanctify at once,
 Though to less subtle wits it seems the same,
 Consider it how they may.

Mich.

It is so, Festus ?

He speaks so calmly and kindly : is it so ?

Par. Reject those glorious visions of God's love
 And man's design ; laugh loud that God should send

Vast longings to direct us; say how soon
 Power satiates these, or lust, or gold; I know
 The world's cry well, and how to answer it!..
 But this ambiguous warfare . . .

Fest. . . . Wearies so
 That you will grant no last leave to your friend
 To urge it?—for his sake, not yours? I wish
 To send my soul in good hopes after you;
 Never to sorrow that uncertain words
 Erringly apprehended, a new creed
 Ill understood, begot rash trust in you,
 Had share in your undoing.

Par. Choose your side,
 Hold or renounce: but meanwhile blame me not
 Because I dare to act on your own views,
 Nor shrink when they point onward, nor espy
 A peril where they most ensure success.

Fest. Prove that to me—but that! Prove, you abide
 Within their warrant, nor presumptuous boast
 God's labour laid on you; prove, all you covet
 A mortal may expect; and, most of all,
 Prove the strange course you now affect, will lead
 To its attainment—and I bid you speed,
 Nay, count the minutes till you venture forth!
 You smile; but I had gathered from slow thought—
 Much musing on the fortunes of my friend—
 Matter I deemed could not be urged in vain;
 But it all leaves me at my need: in shreds
 And fragments I must venture what remains.

Mich. Ask at once, Festus, wherefore he should
scorn . . .

Fest. Stay, Michal: Aureole, I speak guardedly
And gravely, knowing well, whate'er your error,
This is no ill-considered choice of yours,
No sudden fancy of an ardent boy.
Not from your own confiding words alone
Am I aware your passionate heart long since
Gave birth to, nourished, and at length matures
This scheme, I will not speak of Einſiedeln,
Where I was born your elder by some years
Only to watch you fully from the first:
In all beside, our mutual tasks were fixed
Even then—'t was mine to have you in my view
As you had your own soul and those intents
Which filled it when, to crown your dearest wish,
With a tumultuous heart, you left with me
Our childhood's home to join the favoured few
Whom, here, Trithemius condescends to teach
A portion of his lore: and not one youth
Of those so favoured, whom you now despise,
Came earnest as you came, resolved, like you,
To grasp all, and retain all, and deserve
By patient toil a wide renown like his.
Now, this new ardour which supplants the old,
I watched, too; 't was significant and strange,
In one matched to his soul's content at length
With rivals in the search for wisdom's prize,
To see the sudden pause, the total change;

From contest, the transition to repose—
From pressing onward as his fellows pressed,
To a blank idleness, yet most unlike
The dull stagnation of a soul, content,
Once foiled, to leave betimes a thriveless quest.
That careless bearing, free from all pretence
Even of contempt for what it ceased to seek—
Smiling humility, praising much, yet waiving
What it professed to praise—though not so well
Maintained but that rare outbreaks, fierce and brief,
Revealed the hidden scorn, as quickly curbed.
That ostentatious show of past defeat,
That ready acquiescence in contempt,
I deemed no other than the letting go
His shivered sword, of one about to spring
Upon his foe's throat; but it was not thus:
Not that way looked your brooding purpose then.
For after-signs disclosed, what you confirmed,
That you prepared to task to the uttermost
Your strength, in furtherance of a certain aim
Which—while it bore the name your rivals gave
Their own most puny efforts—was so vast
In scope that it included their best flights,
Combined them, and desired to gain one prize
In place of many,—the secret of the world,
Of man, and man's true purpose, path, and fate.
—That you, not nursing as a mere vague dream
This purpose, with the sages of the Past,
Have struck upon a way to this, if all

You trust be true, which following, heart and soul,
 You, if a man may, dare aspire to KNOW :
 And that this aim shall differ from a host
 Of aims alike in character and kind,
 Mostly in this,—that in itself alone,
 Shall its reward be, not an alien end
 Blending therewith ; no hope, nor fear, nor joy,
 Nor woe, to elsewhere move you, but this pure
 Devotion to sustain you or betray :
 Thus you aspire.

Par. You shall not state it thus :
 I should not differ from the dreamy crew
 You speak of. I profess no other share
 In the selection of my lot, than this
 My ready answer to the will of God
 Who summons me to be His organ. All
 Whose innate strength supports them shall succeed
 No better than your sages.

Fest. Such the aim, then,
 God sets before you ; and 't is doubtless need
 That He appoint no less the way of praise
 Than the desire to praise ; for, though I hold
 With you, the setting forth such praise to be
 The natural end and service of a man,
 And hold such praise is best attained when man
 Attains the general welfare of his kind—
 Yet, this, the end, is not the instrument.
 Presume not to serve God apart from such
 Appointed channel as He wills shall gather

Imperfect tributes, for that sole obedience
 Valued, perchance. He seeks not that His altars
 Blaze, careless how, so that they do but blaze.
 Suppose this, then ; that God selected you
 To KNOW (heed well your answers, for my faith
 Shall meet implicitly what they affirm)
 I cannot think you dare annex to such
 Selection aught beyond a steadfast will,
 An intense hope ; nor let your gifts create
 Scorn or neglect of ordinary means
 Conducive to success, make destiny
 Dispense with man's endeavour. Now, dare you search
 Your inmost heart, and candidly avow
 Whether you have not rather wild desire
 For this distinction, than security
 Of its existence ? whether you discern
 The path to the fulfilment of your purpose
 Clear as that purpose—and again, that purpose
 Clear as your yearning to be singled out
 For its pursuer. Dare you answer this ?

Par. [after a pause.] No, I have nought to fear !

Who will may know

The secret'st workings of my soul. What though
 It be so ?—if indeed the strong desire
 Eclipse the aim in me ?—if splendour break
 Upon the outset of my path alone,
 And duskest shade succeed ? What fairer seal
 Shall I require to my authentic mission
 Than this fierce energy ?—this instinct striving

Because its nature is to strive?—enticed
By the security of no broad course,
Without success forever in its eyes!
How know I else such glorious fate my own,
But in the restless irresistible force
That works within me? Is it for human will
To institute such impulses?—still less,
To disregard their promptings? What should I
Do, kept among you all; your loves, your cares,
Your life—all to be mine? Be sure that God
Ne'er dooms to waste the strength He deigns impart!
Ask the gier-eagle why she stoops at once
Into the vast and unexplored abyss,
What full-grown power informs her from the first,
Why she not marvels, strenuously beating
The silent boundless regions of the sky!
Be sure they sleep not whom God needs! Nor fear
Their holding light His charge, when every hour
That finds that charge delayed, is a new death.
This for the faith in which I trust; and hence
I can abjure so well the idle arts
These pedants strive to learn and teach; Black Arts,
Great Works, the Secret and Sublime, forsooth—
Let others prize: too intimate a tie
Connects me with our God! A sullen fiend
To do my bidding, fallen and hateful sprites
To help me—what are these, at best, beside
God helping, God directing everywhere,
So that the earth shall yield her secrets up,

And every object there be charged to strike,
 Teach, gratify her master God appoints ?
 And I am young, my Festus, happy and free !
 I can devote myself ; I have a life
 To give ; I, singled out for this, the One !
 Think, think ; the wide East, where all Wisdom sprung ;
 The bright South, where she dwelt ; the hopeful North,
 All are passed o'er—it lights on me ! 'T is time
 New hopes should animate the world, new light
 Should dawn from new revealings to a race
 Weighed down so long, forgotten so long ; thus shall
 The heaven reserved for us at last receive
 Creatures whom no unwonted splendours blind,
 But ardent to confront the unclouded blaze
 Whose beams not seldom blessed their pilgrimage,
 Not seldom glorified their life below.

Fest. My words have their old fate and make faint stand
 Against your glowing periods. Call this, truth—
 Why not pursue it in a fast retreat,
 Some one of Learning's many palaces,
 After approved example ?—seeking there
 Calm converse with the great dead, soul to soul,
 Who laid up treasure with the like intent
 —So lift yourself into their airy place,
 And fill out full their unfulfilled careers,
 Unravelling the knots their baffled skill
 Pronounced inextricable, true !—but left
 Far less confused. A fresh eye, a fresh hand,
 Might do much at their vigour's waning-point ;

Succeeding with new-breathed, new-hearted force,
 As at old games a runner snatched the torch
 From runner still : this way success might be.
 But you have coupled with your enterprise,
 An arbitrary self-repugnant scheme
 Of seeking it in strange and untried paths.
 What books are in the desert ? writes the sea
 The secret of her yearning in vast caves
 Where yours will fall the first of human feet ?
 Has Wisdom sat there and recorded aught
 You press to read ? Why turn aside from her
 To visit, where her vesture never glanced,
 Now—solitudes consigned to barrenness
 By God's decree, which who shall dare impugn ?
 Now—ruins where she paused but would not stay,
 Old ravaged cities that, renouncing her;
 She called an endless curse on, so it came :
 Or worst of all, now—men you visit, men,
 Ignoblest troops who never heard her voice,
 Or hate it, men without one gift from Rome
 Or Athens,—these shall Aureole's teachers be !
 Rejecting past example, practice, precept,
 Aidless 'mid these he thinks to stand alone :
 Thick like a glory round the Stagirite
 Your rivals throng, the sages : here stand you !
 Whatever you may protest, knowledge is not
 Paramount in your love ; or for her sake
 You would collect all help from every source—
 Rival, assistant, friend, foe, all would merge

In the broad class of those who showed her haunts,
And those who showed them not.

Par.

What shall I say ?

Festus, from childhood I have been possessed
By a fire—by a true fire, or faint or fierce,
As from without some master, so it seemed,
Repressed or urged its current: this but ill
Expresses what I would convey: but rather
I will believe an angel ruled me thus,
Than that my soul's own workings, own high nature,
So became manifest. I knew not then
What whispered in the evening, and spoke out
At midnight. If some mortal, born too soon,
Were laid away in some great trance—the ages
Coming and going all the while—till dawned
His true time's advent; and could then record
The words they spoke who kept watch by his bed,—
Then I might tell more of the breath so light
Upon my eyelids, and the fingers warm
Among my hair. Youth is confused; yet never
So dull was I but, when that spirit passed,
I turned to him, scarce consciously, as turns
A water-snake when fairies cross his sleep,
And having this within me and about me
While Einsiedeln, its mountains, lakes and woods
Confined me—what oppressive joy was mine
When life grew plain, and I first viewed the thronged,
The everlasting concourse of mankind!
Believe that ere I joined them, ere I knew

The purpose of the pageant, 'or the place
Consigned me in its ranks—while, just awake,
Wonder was freshest and delight most pure—
'T was then that least supportable appeared
A station with the brightest of the crowd,
A portion with the proudest of them all.
And from the tumult in my breast, this only,
Could I collect, that I must thenceforth die,
Or elevate myself far, far above
The gorgeous spectacle. I seemed to long
At once to trample on, yet save mankind,
To make some unexampled sacrifice:
In their behalf, to wring some wondrous good
From heaven or earth for them, to perish, winning
Eternal weal in the act: as who should dare
Pluck out the angry thunder from its cloud,
That, all its gathered flame discharged on him,
No storm might threaten summer's azure sleep:
Yet never to be mixed with men so much
As to have part even in my own work, share
In my own largess. Once the feat achieved,
I would withdraw from their officious praise,
Would gently put aside their profuse thanks.
Like some knight traversing a wilderness,
Who, on his way, may chance to free a tribe
Of desert-people from their dragon-foe;
When all the swarthy race press round to kiss
His feet, and choose him for their king, and yield
Their poor tents, pitched among the sand-hills, for

His realm : and he points, smiling, to his scarf
 Heavy with riveled gold, his burgonet
 Gay set with twinkling stones—and to the East,
 Where these must be displayed !

Fest. Good : let us hear
 No more about your nature, “ which first shrank
 “ From all that marked you out apart from men !”

Par. I touch on that ; these words but analyse
 The first mad impulse : ’t was as brief as fond,
 For as I gazed again upon the show,
 I soon distinguished here and there a shape
 Palm-wreathed and radiant, forehead and full eye.
 Well pleased was I their state should thus at once
 Interpret my own thoughts : —“ Behold the clue
 “ To all,” I rashly said, “ and what I pine
 “ To do, these have accomplished : we are peers.
 “ They know, and therefore rule : I, too, will know !”
 You were beside me, Festus, as you say ;
 You saw me plunge in their pursuits whom fame
 Is lavish to attest the lords of mind ;
 Not pausing to make sure the prize in view
 Would satiate my cravings when obtained,
 But since they strove I strove. Then came a slow
 And strangling failure. We aspired alike,
 Yet not the meanest plodder, Tritheim counts
 A marvel, but was all-sufficient, strong,
 Or staggered only at his own vast wits ;
 While I was restless, nothing satisfied,
 Distrustful, most perplexed. I would slur over

That struggle ; suffice it, that I loathed myself
As weak compared with them, yet felt somehow
A mighty power was brooding, taking shape
Within me ; and this lasted till one night
When, as I sat revolving it more and more,
A still voice from without said—" Seest thou not,
" Desponding child, whence spring defeat and loss ?
" Even from thy strength. Consider : hast thou gazed
" Presumptuously on Wisdom's countenance,
" No veil between ; and can thy faltering hands
" Unguided by thy brain the sight absorbs
" Pursue their task as earnest blinkers do
" Whom radiance ne'er distracted ? Live their life
" If thou wouldst share their fortune, choose their eyes
" Unfed by splendour. Let each task present
" Its petty good to thee. Waste not thy gifts
" In profitless waiting for the gods' descent,
" But have some idol of thine own to dress
" With their array. Know, not for knowing's sake,
" But to become a star to men for ever ;
" Know, for the gain it gets, the praise it brings,
" The wonder it inspires, the love it breeds :
" Look one step onward, and secure that step !"
And I smiled as one never smiles but once ;
Then first discovering my own aim's extent,
Which sought to comprehend the works of God,
And God himself, and all God's intercourse
With the human mind ; I understood, no less,
My fellows' studies, whose true worth I saw,

But smiled not, well aware Who stood by me.
 And softer came the voice—"There is a way:
 "'T is hard for flesh to tread therein, imbued
 "With frailty—hopeless, if indulgence first
 "Have ripened inborn germs of sin to strength:
 "Wilt thou adventure for my sake and man's,
 "Apart from all reward?" And last it breathed—
 "Be happy, my good soldier; I am by thee,
 "Be sure, even to the end!"—I answered not,
 Knowing Him. As he spoke, I was endued
 With comprehension and a steadfast will;
 And when He ceased, my brow was sealed His own.
 If there took place no special change in me,
 How comes it all things wore a different hue
 Thenceforward?—pregnant with vast consequence,
 Teeming with grand result, loaded with fate?
 So that when quailing at the mighty range
 Of secret truths which yearn for birth, I haste
 To contemplate undazzled some one truth,
 Its bearings and effects alone—at once
 What was a speck expands into a star,
 Asking a life to pass exploring thus,
 Till I near craze. I go to prove my soul!
 I see my way as birds their trackless way.
 I shall arrive! what time, what circuit first,
 I ask not: but unless God send His hail
 Or blinding fireballs, sleet or stifling snow,
 In some time, His good time, I shall arrive:
 He guides me and the bird. In His good time!

Mich. Vex him no further, Festus; is it so!

Fest. Just thus you help me ever. This would hold
Were it the trackless air, and not a path
Inviting you, distinct with footprints yet
Of many a mighty marcher gone that way.
You may have purer views than theirs, perhaps,
But they were famous in their day—the proofs
Remain. At least accept the light they lend.

Par. Their light! the sum of all is briefly this;
They laboured and grew famous, and the fruits
Are best seen in a dark and groaning earth
Given over to a blind and endless strife
With evils, what of all their lore abates?
No; I reject and spurn them utterly
And all they teach. Shall I still sit beside
Their dry wells, with a white lip and filmed eye,
While in the distance heaven is blue above
Mountains where sleep the unsunned tarns?

Fest.

And yet

As strong delusions have prevailed ere now.
Men have set out as gallantly to seek
Their ruin. I have heard of such: yourself
Avow all hitherto have failed and fallen.

Mich. Nay, Festus, when but as the pilgrims faint
Through the drear way, do you expect to see
Their city dawn amid the clouds afar?

Par. Ay, sounds it not like some old well-known tale?
For me, I estimate their works and them
So rightly, that at times I almost dream

I too have spent a life the sages' way,
 And tread once more familiar paths. Perchance
 I perished in an arrogant self-reliance
 Ages ago ; and in that act, a prayer
 For one more chance went up so earnest, so
 Instinct with better light let in by death,
 That life was blotted out—not so completely
 But scattered wrecks enough of it remain,
 Dim memories, as now, when seems once more
 The goal in sight again. All which, indeed,
 Is foolish, and only means—the flesh I wear,
 The earth I tread, are not more clear to me
 Than my belief, explained to you or no.

Fest. And who am I, to challenge and dispute
 That clear belief ? I will divest all fear.

Mich. Then Aureole is God's commissary ! he shall
 Be great and grand—and all for us !

Par. No, Sweet !

Not great and grand. If I can serve mankind
 'T is well ; but there our intercourse must end :
 I never will be served by those I serve.

Fest. Look well to this ; here is a plague-spot, here,
 Disguise it how you may ! 'T is true, you utter
 This scorn while by our side and loving us ;
 'T is but a spot as yet : but it will break
 Into a hideous blotch if overlooked.
 How can that course be safe which from the first
 Produces carelessness to human love ?
 It seems you have abjured the helps which men

Who overpass their kind, as you would do,
 Have humbly sought ; I dare not thoroughly probe
 This matter, lest I learn too much. Let be,
 That popular praise would little instigate
 Your efforts, nor particular approval
 Reward you ; put reward aside ; alone
 You shall go forth upon your arduous task,
 None shall assist you, none partake your toil,
 None share your triumph : still you must retain
 Some one to cast your glory on, to share
 Your rapture with. Were I elect like you,
 I would encircle me with love, and raise
 A rampart of my fellows ; it should seem
 Impossible for me to fail, so watched
 By gentle friends who made my cause their own.
 They should ward off fate's envy—the great gift,
 Extravagant when claimed by me alone,
 Being so a gift to them as well as me.
 If danger daunted me or ease seduced,
 How calmly their sad eyes should gaze reproach !

Mich. O Aureole, can I sing when all alone,
 Without first calling, in my fancy, both
 To listen by my side—even I ! And you ?
 Do you not feel this ? Say that you feel this !

Par. I feel 't is pleasant that my aims, at length
 Allowed their weight, should be supposed to need
 A further strengthening in these goodly helps !
 My course allures for its own sake—its sole
 Intrinsic worth ; and ne'er shall boast of mine

Adventure forth for gold and apes at once.
 Your sages say, "if human, therefore weak :"
 If weak, more need to give myself entire
 To my pursuit ; and by its side, all else . . .
 No matter ! I deny myself but little
 In waiving all assistance save its own.
 Would there were some real sacrifice to make !
 Your friends the sages threw their joys away,
 While I must be content with keeping mine.

Fest. But do not cut yourself from human weal !
 You cannot thrive—a man that dares affect
 To spend his life in service to his kind,
 For no reward of theirs, unbound to them
 By any tie ; nor do so, Aureole ! No—
 There are strange punishments for such. Give up
 (Although no visible good flow thence) some part
 Of the glory to another ; hiding thus,
 Even from yourself, that all is for yourself.
 Say, say almost to God—"I have done all
 "For her, not for myself !"

Par. And who, but lately,
 Was to rejoice in my success like you ?
 Whom should I love but both of you ?

Fest. I know not :
 But know this, you, that 't is no will of mine
 You should abjure the lofty claims you make ;
 And this the cause—I can no longer seek
 To overlook the truth, that there would be
 A monstrous spectacle upon the earth,

Beneath the pleasant sun, among the trees :
 —A being knowing not what love is. Hear me !
 You are endowed with faculties which bear
 Annexed to them as 't were a dispensation
 To summon meaner spirits to do their will,
 And gather round them at their need ; inspiring
 Such with a love themselves can never feel,
 Passionless 'mid their passionate votaries.
 I know not if you joy in this or no,
 Or ever dream that common men can live
 On objects you prize lightly, but which make
 Their heart's sole treasure : the affections seem
 Beauteous at most to you, which we must taste
 Or die : and this strange quality accords,
 I know not how, with you ; sits well upon
 That luminous brow, though in another it scowls
 An eating brand, a shame. I dare not judge you.
 The rules of right and wrong thus set aside,
 There 's no alternative—I own you one
 Of higher order, under other laws
 Than bind us ; therefore, curb not one bold glance !
 'Tis best aspire. Once mingled with us all . . .

Mich. Stay with us, Aureole ! cast those hopes away,
 And stay with us ! An angel warns me, too,
 Man should be humble ; you are very proud :
 And God, dethroned, has doleful plagues for such !
 —Warns me to have in dread no quick repulse,
 No slow defeat, but a complete success :
 You will find all you seek, and perish so !

Par. [after a pause.] Are these the barren firstfruits
of my quest ?

Is love like this the natural lot of all ?
How many years of pain might one such hour
O'erbalance ? Dearest Michal, dearest Festus,
What shall I say, if not that I desire
To justify your love ; and will, dear friends,
In swerving nothing from my first resolves.
See, the great moon ! and ere the mottled owls
Were wide awake, I was to go. It seems
You acquiesce at last in all save this—
If I am like to compass what I seek
By the untried career I choose ; and then,
If that career, making but small account
Of much of life's delight, will yet retain
Sufficient to sustain my soul—for thus
I understand these fond fears just expressed.
And first ; the lore you praise and I neglect,
The labours and the precepts of old time,
I have not lightly disesteemed. But, friends,
Truth is within ourselves ; it takes no rise
From outward things, whate'er you may believe.
There is an inmost centre in us all,
Where truth abides in fulness ; and around,
Wall upon wall, the gross flesh hems it in,
This perfect, clear perception—which is truth.
A baffling and perverting carnal mesh
Blinds it, and makes all error : and, " *to know* "
Rather consists in opening out a way

Whence the imprisoned splendour may escape,
Than in effecting entry for a light
Supposed to be without. Watch narrowly
The demonstration of a truth, its birth,
And you trace back the effluence to its spring
And source within us; where broods radiance vast,
To be elicited ray by ray, as chance
Shall favour: chance—for hitherto, your sage
Even as he knows not how those beams are born,
As little knows he what unlocks their fount.
And men have oft grown old among their books
To die case-hardened in their ignorance,
Whose careless youth had promised what long years
Of unremitted labour ne'er performed:
While, contrary, it has chanced some idle day,
To autumn loiterers just as fancy-free
As the midges in the sun, gives birth at last
To truth—produced mysteriously as cape
Of cloud grown out of the invisible air.
Hence, may not truth be lodged alike in all,
The lowest as the highest? some slight film
The interposing bar which binds a soul
And makes the idiot, just as makes the sage
Some film removed, the happy outlet whence
Truth issues proudly? See this soul of ours!
How it strives weakly in the child, is loosed
In manhood, clogged by sickness, back-compelled
By age and waste, set free at last by death:
Why is it, flesh enthrals it or enthrones?

What is this flesh we have to penetrate ?
Oh, not alone when life flows still, do truth
And power emerge, but also when strange chance
Ruffles its current ; in unused conjuncture,
When sickness breaks the body—hunger, watching,
Excess, or languor—oftenest death's approach,
Peril, deep joy or woe. One man shall crawl
Through life, surrounded with all stirring things,
Unmoved—and he goes mad ; and from the wreck
Of what he was, by his wild talk alone,
You first collect how great a spirit he hid.
Therefore, set free the soul alike in all,
Discovering the true laws by which the flesh
Accloys the spirit ! We may not be doomed
To cope with seraphs, but at least the rest
Shall cope with us. Make no more giants, God,
But elevate the race at once ! We ask
To put forth just our strength, our human strength,
All starting fairly, all equipped alike,
Gifted alike, all eagle-eyed, true-hearted—
See if we cannot beat thine angels yet !
Such is my task. I go to gather this
The sacred knowledge, here and there dispersed
About the world, long lost or never found.
And why should I be sad, or lorn of hope ?
Why ever make man's good distinct from God's,
Or, finding they are one, why dare mistrust ?
Who shall succeed if not one pledged like me ?
Mine is no mad attempt to build a world

Apart from His, like those who set themselves
To find the nature of the spirit they bore,
And, taught betimes that all their gorgeous dreams
Were only born to vanish in this life,
Refused to fit them to its narrow sphere,
But chose to figure forth another world
And other frames meet for their vast desires,—
And all a dream! Thus was life scorned; but life
Shall yet be crowned: twine amaranth! I am priest!
And all for yielding with a lively spirit
A poor existence, parting with a youth
Like theirs who squander every energy
Convertible to good, on painted toys,
Breath-bubbles, gilded dust! And though I spurn
All adventitious aims, from empty praise
To love's award, yet whoso deems such helps
Important, and concerns himself for me,
May know even these will follow with the rest—
As in the steady rolling Mayne, asleep
Yonder, is mixed its mass of schistous ore.
My own affections, laid to rest awhile,
Will waken purified, subdued alone
By all I have achieved. Till then—till then . . .
Ah! the time-wiling loitering of a page
Through bower and over lawn, till eve shall bring
The stately lady's presence whom he loves—
The broken sleep of the fisher whose rough coat
Enwraps the queenly pearl—these are faint types!
See, see they look on me: I triumph now!

But one thing, Festus, Michal! I have told
 All I shall e'er disclose to mortal: say—
 Do you believe I shall accomplish this?

Fest. I do believe!

Mich. I ever did believe!

Par. Those words shall never fade from out my brain!
 This earnest of the end shall never fade!
 Are there not, Festus, are there not, dear Michal,
 Two points in the adventure of the diver:
 One—when, a beggar, he prepares to plunge,
 One—when, a prince, he rises with his pearl?
 Festus, I plunge!

Fest. We wait you when you rise!

II. PARACELSUS ATTAINS.

SCENE, *Constantinople; the House of a Greek conjuror.* 1521.

PARACELSUS.

Over the waters in the vaporous West
 The sun goes down as in a sphere of gold
 Behind the arm of the city, which between,
 With all that length of domes and minarets,
 Athwart the splendour, black and crooked runs
 Like a Turk verse along a scimitar.
 There lie, sullen memorial, and no more
 Possess my aching sight. 'T is done at last!
 Strange—and the juggles of a sallow cheat
 Have won me to this act! 'T is as yon cloud

Should voyage unwreck'd o'er many a mountain-top
And break upon a molehill. I have dared
Come to a pause with knowledge; scan for once
The heights already reached, without regard
To the extent above; fairly compute
All I have clearly gained; for once excluding
A brilliant future to supply and perfect
All half-gains and conjectures and crude hopes—
And all, because a fortune-teller wills
His credulous seekers should inscribe thus much,
Their previous life's attainment, in his roll,
Before his promised secret, as he vaunts,
Make up the sum: and here, amid the scrawled
Uncouth recordings of the dupes of this
Old arch-genethliac, lie my life's results!

A few blurred characters suffice to note
A stranger wandered long through many lands
And reaped the fruit he coveted in a few
Discoveries, as appended here and there,
The fragmentary produce of much toil,
In a dim heap, fact and surmise together
Confusedly massed as when acquired; he was
Intent on gain to come too much to stay
And scrutinize the little gained: the whole
Slipt in the blank space 'twixt an idiot's gibber
And a mad lover's ditty—there it lies.

And yet those blottings chronicle a life—

A whole life,—and my life! Nothing to do,
 No problem for the fancy, but a life
 Spent and decided, wasted past retrieve
 Or worthy beyond peer. Stay, what does this
 Remembrancer set down concerning “life”?
 “‘Time fleets, youth fades, life is an empty dream.’
 “It is the echo of time; and he whose heart
 “Beat first beneath a human heart, whose speech
 “Was copied from a human tongue, can never
 “Recall when he was living yet knew not this.
 “Nevertheless long seasons pass o’er him
 “Till some one hour’s experience shows what nothing,
 “It seemed, could clearer show; and ever after,
 “An altered brow and eye and gait and speech
 “Attest that now he knows the adage true
 “‘Time fleets, youth fades, life is an empty dream.’”

Ay, my brave chronicler, and this same hour
 As well as any: now, let my time be!

Now! I can go no farther; well or ill,
 ’T is done. I must desist and take my chance.
 I cannot keep on the stretch; ’t is no back-shrinking—
 For let but some assurance beam, some close
 To my toil grow visible, and I proceed
 At any price, though closing it, I die.
 Else, here I pause. The old Greek’s prophecy
 Is like to turn out true: “I shall not quit
 “His chamber till I know what I desire!”

Was it the light wind sang it o'er the sea?

An end, a rest! strange how the notion, once
 Encountered, gathers strength by moments! Rest!
 Where has it kept so long? this throbbing brow
 To cease, this beating heart to cease, all cruel
 And gnawing thoughts to cease! To dare let down
 My strung, so high-strung brain, to dare unnerve
 My harassed o'ertasked frame, to know my place!
 My portion, my reward, even my failure,
 Assigned, made sure for ever! To lose myself
 Among the common creatures of the world,
 To draw some gain from having been a man,
 Neither to hope nor fear, to live at length!
 Even in failure, rest! But rest in truth
 And power and recompense . . . I hoped that once!

What, sunk insensibly so deep? Has all
 Been undergone for this? This the request
 My labour qualified me to present
 With no fear of refusal? Had I gone
 Slightly through my task, and so judged fit
 To moderate my hopes; nay, were it now
 My sole concern to exculpate myself,
 End things or mend them,—why, I could not choose
 A humbler mood to wait for the event!
 No, no, there needs not this; no, after all,
 At worst I have performed my share of the task;
 The rest is God's concern; mine, merely this,

To know that I have obstinately held
By my own work. . The mortal whose brave foot
Has trod, unscathed, the temple-court so far
That he descries at length the shrine of shrines,
Must let no sneering of the demons' eyes,
Whom he could pass unquailing, fasten now
Upon him, fairly past their power ; no, no—
He must not stagger, faint, fall down at last,
Having a charm to baffle them ; behold,
He bares his front : a mortal ventures thus
Serene amid the echoes, beams and glooms !
If he be priest henceforth, if he wake up
The god of the place to ban and blast him there,
Both well ! What's failure or success to me ?
I have subdued my life to the one purpose
Whereto I ordained it ; there alone I spy,
No doubt, that way I may be satisfied.
Yes, well have I subdued my life ! beyond
The obligation of my strictest vows,
The contemplation of my wildest bond,
Which gave my nature freely up, in truth,
But in its actual state, consenting fully
All passionate impulses its soil was formed
To rear, should wither ; but foreseeing not
The tract, doomed to perpetual barrenness,
Would seem one day, remembered as it was,
Beside the parched sand-waste which now it is,
Already strewn with faint blooms, viewless then.
I ne'er engaged to root up loves so frail

I felt them not ; yet now, 't is very plain
 Some soft spots had their birth in me at first,
 If not love, say, like love : there was a time
 When yet this wolfish hunger after knowledge
 Set not remorselessly love's claims aside.
 This heart was human once, or why recall
 Einsiedeln, now, and Würzburg, which the Mayne
 Forsakes her course to fold as with an arm ?

And Festus—my poor Festus, with his praise,
 And counsel and grave fears—where is he now
 With the sweet maiden, long ago, his bride ?
 I surely loved them—that last night, at least,
 When we . . . gone ! gone ! the better. I am saved
 The sad review of an ambitious youth
 Choked by vile lusts, unnoticed in their birth,
 But let grow up and wind around a will
 Till action was destroyed. No, I have gone
 Purgng my path successively of aught
 Wearing the distant likeness of such lusts.
 I have made life consist of one idea :
 Ere that was master,* up till that was born,
 I bear a memory of a pleasant life
 Whose small events I treasure ; till one morn
 I ran o'er the seven little grassy fields,
 Startling the flocks of nameless birds, to tell
 Poor Festus, leaping all the while for joy,
 To leave all trouble for my future plans,
 Since I had just determined to become

The greatest and most glorious man on earth.
And since that morn all life has been forgotten ;
All is one day, one only step between
The outset and the end : one tyrant all-
Absorbing aim fills up the interspace,
One vast unbroken chain of thought, kept up
Through a career apparently adverse
To its existence : life, death, light and shadow,
The shows of the world, were bare receptacles
Or indices of truth to be wrung thence,
Not ministers of sorrow or delight :
A wondrous natural robe in which she went.
For some one truth would dimly beacon me
From mountains rough with pines, and flit and wink
O'er dazzling wastes of frozen snow, and tremble
Into assured light in some branching mine
Where ripens, swathed in fire, the liquid gold—
And all the beauty, all the wonder fell
On either side the truth, as its mere robe ;
I see the robe now—then I saw the form.
So far, then, I have voyaged with success,
So much is good, then, in this working sea
Which parts me from that happy strip of land :
But o'er that happy strip a sun shone, too !
And fainter gleams it as the waves grow rough,
And still more faint as the sea widens ; last
I sicken on a dead gulf streaked with light
From its own putrefying depths alone.
Then, God was pledged to take me by the hand ;

Now, any miserable juggle can bid
 My pride depart. All is alike at length :
 God may take pleasure in confounding pride
 By hiding secrets with the scorned and base—
 I am here, in short : so little have I paused
 Throughout. I never glanced behind to know
 If I had kept my primal light from wane,
 And thus insensibly am—what I am !

Oh, bitter ; very bitter !

And more bitter, ''

To fear a deeper curse, an inner ruin,
 Plague beneath plague, the last turning the first
 To light beside its darkness. Let me weep
 My youth and its brave hopes, all dead and gone,
 In tears which burn ! Would I were sure to win
 Some startling secret in their stead, a tincture
 Of force to flush old age with youth, or breed
 Gold, or imprison moonbeams till they change
 To opal shafts !—only that, hurling it
 Indignant back, I might convince myself
 My aims remained supreme and pure as ever !
 Even now, why not desire, for mankind's sake,
 That if I fail, some fault may be the cause,
 That, though I sink, another may succeed ?
 O God, the despicable heart of us !
 Shut out this hideous mockery from my heart !

'Twas politic in you, Aureole, to reject

Single rewards, and ask them in the lump ;
 At all events, once launched, to hold straight on :
 For now 't is all or nothing. Mighty profit
 Your gains will bring if they stop short of such
 Full consummation ! As a man, you had
 A certain share of strength ; and that is gone
 Already in the getting these you boast.
 Do not they seem to laugh, as who should say—
 “ Great master, we are here indeed, dragged forth
 “ To light ; this hast thou done : be glad ! Now, seek
 “ The strength to use which thou hast spent in getting ! ”

And yet 't is much, surely 't is very much,
 Thus to have emptied youth of all its gifts,
 To feed a fire meant to hold out till morn
 Arrived with inexhaustible light ; and lo,
 I have heaped up my last, and day dawns not !
 And I am left with grey hair, faded hands,
 And furrowed brow. Ha, have I, after all,
 Mistaken the wild nursling of my breast ?
 Knowledge it seemed, and Power, and Recompense !
 Was she who glided through my room of nights,
 Who laid my head on her soft knees and smoothed
 The damp locks,—whose sly soothings just began
 When my sick spirit craved repose awhile—
 God ! was I fighting Sleep off for Death's sake ?

God ! Thou art Mind ! Unto the Master-Mind
 Mind should be precious. Spare my mind alone !

All else I will endure ; if, as I stand
Here, with my gains, Thy thunder smite me down,
I bow me ; 't is Thy will, Thy righteous will ;
I o'erpass life's restrictions, and I die ;
And if no trace of my career remain,
Save a thin corpse at pleasure of the wind
In these bright chambers level with the air,
See Thou to it ! But if my spirit fail,
My once proud spirit forsake me at the last,
Hast Thou done well by me ? So do not Thou !
Crush not my mind, dear God, though I be crushed !
Hold me before the frequency of Thy seraphs
And say—"I crushed him, lest he should disturb
"My law. Men must not know their strength : behold,
"Weak and alone, how he had raised himself !"

But if delusions trouble me ; and Thou,
Not seldom felt with rapture in Thy help
Throughout my toils and wanderings, dost intend
To work man's welfare through my weak endeavour,
To crown my mortal forehead with a beam
From Thine own blinding crown, to smile, and guide
This puny hand, and let the work so wrought
Be styled my work,—hear me ! I covet not
An influx of new power, an angel's soul :
It were no marvel then—but I have reached
Thus far, a man ; let me conclude, a man !
Give but one hour of my first energy,
Of that invincible faith, but only one !

That I may cover with an eagle-glance
 The truths I have, and spy some certain way
 To mould them, and completing them, possess!

Yet God is good: I started sure of that,
 And why dispute it now? I'll not believe
 But some undoubted warning long ere this
 Had reached me: a fire-labarum was not deemed
 Too much for the old founder of these walls.
 Then, if my life has not been natural,
 It has been monstrous: yet, till late, my course
 So ardently engrossed me, that delight,
 A pausing and reflecting joy, 't is plain,
 Could find no place in it. True, I am worn;
 But Who clothes summer, Who is Life itself?
 God, that created all things, can renew!
 And then, though after-life to please me now
 Must have no likeness to the past, what hinders
 Reward from springing out of toil, as changed
 As bursts the flower from earth and root and stalk?
 What use were punishment, unless some sin
 Be first detected? let me know that first!
 No man could ever offend as I have done . . .

[*A voice from within.*]

I hear a voice, perchance I heard
 Long ago, but all too low,
 So that scarce a care it stirred
 If the voice was real or no:
 I heard it in my youth when first
 The waters of my life outburst:

But now their stream ebbs faint, I hear
 That voice, still low but fatal-clear—
 As if all Poets, God ever meant
 Should save the world, and therefore lent
 Great gifts to, but who, proud, refused
 To do His work, or lightly used
 Those gifts, or failed through weak endeavour,
 So, mourn cast off by Him for ever,—
 As if these leaned in airy ring
 To take me; this the song they sing.

“ Lost, lost! yet come,
 With our wan troop make thy home.
 Come, come! for we
 Will not breathe, so much as breathe
 Reproach to thee,
 Knowing what thou sink’st beneath.
 So sank we in those old years,
 We who bid thee, come! thou last
 Who, living yet, hast life o’erpast
 And altogether we, thy peers,
 Will pardon ask for thee, the last
 Whose trial is done, whose lot is cast
 With those who watch but work no more,
 Who gaze on life but live no more.
 Yet we trusted thou shouldst speak
 The message which our lips, too weak,
 Refused to utter,—shouldst redeem
 Our fault: such trust, and all a dream!

Yet we chose thee a birthplace
Where the richness ran to flowers ;
Couldst not sing one song for grace ?
Not make one blossom man's and ours ?
Must one more recreant to his race
Die with unexerted powers,
And join us, leaving as he found
The world, he was to loosen, bound ?
Anguish ! ever and for ever ;
Still beginning, ending never !
Yet, lost and last one, come !
How couldst understand, alas,
What our pale ghosts strove to say,
As their shades did glance and pass
Before thee, night and day ?
Thou wast blind as we were dumb :
Once more, therefore, come, O come !
How shall we clothe, how arm the spirit
Who next shall thy post of life inherit—
How guard him from thy speedy ruin ?
Tell us of thy sad undoing
Here, where we sit, ever pursuing
Our weary task, ever renewing
Sharp sorrow, far from God who gave
Our powers, and man they could not save !”

APRILE enters.

Ha, ha ! our king that wouldst be, here at last ?
Art thou the Poet who shall save the world ?

Thy hand to mine. Stay, fix thine eyes on mine.
Thou wouldst be king? Still fix thine eyes on mine!

Par. Ha, ha! why crouchest not? Am I not king?
So torture is not wholly unavailing!

Have my fierce spasms compelled thee from thy lair?
Art thou the sage I only seemed to be,

Myself of after-time, my very self

With sight a little clearer, strength more firm,

Who robes him in my robe and grasps my crown

For just a fault, a weakness, a neglect?

I scarcely trusted God with the surmise

That such might come, and thou didst hear the while!

Apr. Thine eyes are lustreless to mine; my hair

Is soft, nay silken soft, to talk with thee

Flushes my cheek, and thou art ashy-pale.

Truly, thou hast laboured, hast withstood her lips,

The siren's? Yes, 't is like thou hast attained!

Tell me, dear master, wherefore now thou comest?

I thought thy solemn songs would have their meed

In after-time; that I should hear the earth

Exult in thee; and echo with thy praise,

While I was laid forgotten in my grave.

Par. Ah fiend! I know thee, I am not thy dupe!

Thou art ordained to follow in my track,

Reaping my sowing, as I scorned to reap

The harvest sown by sages passed away:

Thou art the sober searcher, cautious striver,

As if, except through me, thou hadst searched or
striven!

Ay, tell the world! Degrade me, after all,
To an aspirant after fame, not truth—
To all but envy of thy fate, be sure!

Apr. Nay, sing them to me; I shall envy not:
Thou shalt be king! Sing, thou, and I will sit
Beside, and call deep silence for thy songs,
And worship thee, as I had ne'er been meant
To fill thy throne: but none shall ever know!
Sing to me; for already thy wild eyes
Unlock my heart-springs, as some crystal-shaft
Reveals by some chance blaze its parent fount
After long time: so thou reveal'st my soul—
All will flash forth at last, with thee to hear!

Par. (His secret? I shall get his secret—fool!)
I am he that aspired to know; and thou'rt

Apr. I would LOVE infinitely, and be loved!

Par. Poor slave! I am thy king, indeed.

Apr.

Thou deem'st

That—born a spirit; dowered even as thou,
Born for thy fate—because I could not curb
My yearnings to possess at once the full
Enjoyment, but neglected all the means
Of realizing even the frailest joy;
Gathering no fragments to appease my want,
Yet nursing up that want, till thus I die—
Thou deem'st I cannot trace thy safe, sure march,
O'er perils that overwhelm me, triumphing,
Neglecting nought below for aught above,
Despising nothing and ensuring all—

Nor that I could (my time to come again)
 Lead thus my spirit securely as thine own.
 Listen, and thou shalt see I know thee well.
 I would love infinitely . . . Ah, lost! lost!

O ye who armed me at such cost,
 How shall I look on all of ye
 With your gifts even yet on me?

Par. (Ah, 't is some moonstruck creature after all!
 Such fond fools as are like to haunt this den :
 They spread contagion, doubtless : yet he seemed
 To echo one foreboding of my heart
 So truly, that . . . no matter ! How he stands
 With eve's last sunbeam staying on his hair
 Which turns to it, as if they were akin ;
 And those clear smiling eyes of saddest blue
 Nearly set free, so far they rise above
 The painful fruitless striving of the brow
 And enforced knowledge of the lips, firm-set
 In slow despondency's eternal sigh !
 Has he, too, missed life's end, and learned' the cause ?)
 I charge thee, by thy fealty, be calm !
 Tell me what thou wouldst be, and what I am.

Apr. I would love infinitely, and be loved.
 First : I would carve in stone, or cast in brass,
 The forms of earth. No ancient hunter lifted
 Up to the gods by his renown, no nymph
 Supposed the sweet soul of a woodland tree
 Or sapphire spirit of a twilight star,
 Should be too hard for me ; no shepherd-king

Regal for his white locks ; no youth who stands
Silent and very calm amid the throng,
His right hand ever hid beneath his robe
Until the tyrant pass ; no lawgiver,
No swan-soft woman rubbed with lucid oils
Given by a god for love of her—too hard !
Every passion sprung from man, conceived by man,
Would I express and clothe it in its right form,
Or blend with others struggling in one form,
Or show repressed by an ungainly form.
Oh, if you marvelled at some mighty spirit
With a fit frame to execute its will—
Even unconsciously to work its will—
You should be moved no less beside some strong,
Rare spirit, fettered to a stubborn body,
Endeavouring to subdue it and inform it
With its own splendour ! All this I would do ;
And I would say, this done, “ His spirits created,
“ God grants to each a sphere to be its world,
“ Appointed with the various objects needed
“ To satisfy its own peculiar want ;
“ So, I create a world for these my shapes
“ Fit to sustain their beauty and their strength ! ”
And, at the word, I would contrive and paint
Woods, valleys, rocks and plains, dells, sands and wastes,
Lakes which, when morn breaks on their quivering bed,
Blaze like a wyvern flying round the sun,
And ocean-isles so small, the dog-fish tracking
A dead whale, who should find them, would swim thrice

Around them, and fare onward—all to hold
The offspring of my brain. Nor these alone :
Bronze labyrinth, palace, pyramid and crypt,
Baths, galleries, courts, temples and terraces,
Marts, theatres and wharfs—all filled with men !
Men everywhere ! And this performed in turn,
When those who looked on, pined to hear the hopes
And fears and hates and loves which moved the crowd,
I would throw down the pencil as the chisel,
And I would speak ; no thought which ever stirred
A human breast should be untold ; all passions,
All soft emotions, from the turbulent stir
Within a heart fed with desires like mine,
To the last comfort shutting the tired lids
Of him who sleeps the sultry noon away
Beneath the tent-tree by the wayside well :
And this in language as the need should be,
Now poured at once forth in a burning flow,
Now piled up in a grand array of words.
This done, to perfect and consummate all,
Even as a luminous haze links star to star,
I would supply all chasms with music, breathing
Mysterious motions of the soul, no way
To be defined save in strange melodies.
Last, having thus revealed all I could love,
Having received all love bestowed on it,
I would die : preserving so throughout my course
God full on me, as I was full on men :
He would approve my prayer, “ I have gone through

“The loveliness of life; create for me
 “If not for men, or take me to Thyself,
 “Eternal, infinite Love!”

If thou hast ne'er
 Conceived this mighty aim, this full desire,
 Thou hast not passed my trial, and thou art
 No king of mine.

Par. Ah me!

Apr. But thou art here!
 Thou didst not gaze like me upon that end
 Till thine own powers for compassing the bliss
 Were blind with glory; nor grow mad to grasp
 At once the prize long patient toil should claim,
 Nor spurn all granted short of that. And I
 Would do as thou, a second time: nay, listen!
 Knowing ourselves, our world, our task so great
 Our time so brief, 't is clear if we refuse
 The means so limited, the tools so rude
 To execute our purpose, life will fleet,
 And we shall fade, and leave our task undone.
 We will be wise in time: what though our work
 Be fashioned in despite of their ill-service,
 Be crippled every way? 'T were little praise
 Did full resources wait on our goodwill
 At every turn. Let all be as it is.
 Some say the earth is even so contrived
 That tree and flower, a vesture gay, conceal
 A bare and skeleton framework. Had we means
 Answering to our mind! But now I seem

Wrecked on a savage isle : how rear thereon
My palace ? Branching palms the props shall be,
Fruit glossy mingling ; gems are for the East ;
Who heeds them ? I can pass them. Serpents' scales,
And painted birds' down, furs and fishes' skins
Must help me ; and a little here and there
Is all I can aspire to : still my art
Shall show its birth was in a gentler clime.
" Had I green jars of malachite, this way
" I'd range them : where those sea-shells glisten above,
" Cressets should hang, by right : this way we set
" The purple carpets, as these mats are laid,
" Woven of fern and rush and blossoming flag."
Or if, by fortune, some completer grace
Be spared to me, some fragment, some slight sample
Of the prouder workmanship my own home boasts,
Some trifle little heeded there, but here
The place's one perfection—with what joy
Would I enshrine the relic, cheerfully
Foregoing all the marvels out of reach !
Could I retain one strain of all the psalm
Of the angels, one word of the fiat of God,
To let my followers know what such things are !
I would adventure nobly for their sakes :
When nights were still, and still the moaning sea,
And far away I could descry the land
Whence I departed, whither I return,
I would dispart the waves, and stand once more
At home, and load my bark, and hasten back,

And fling my gains to them, worthless or true—
“ Friends,” I would say, “ I went far, far for them,
“ Past the high rocks the haunt of doves, the mounds
“ Of red earth from whose sides strange trees grow out,
“ Past tracts of milk-white minute blinding sand,
“ Till, by a mighty moon, I tremblingly -
“ Gathered these magic herbs, berry and bud,
“ In haste, not pausing to reject the weeds,
“ But happy plucking them at any price.
“ To me, who have seen them bloom in their own soil,
“ They are scarce lovely : plait and wear them, you !
“ And guess, from what they are, the springs that fed
 them,
“ The stars that sparkled o’er them, night by night,
“ The snakes that travelled far to sip their dew !”
Thus for my higher loves ; and thus even weakness
Would win me honour. But not these alone
Should claim my care ; for common life, its wants
And ways, would I set forth in beauteous hues :
The lowest hind should not possess a hope,
A fear, but I’d be by him, saying better
Than he his own heart’s language. I would live
For ever in the thoughts I thus explored,
As a discoverer’s memory is attached
To all he finds ; they should be mine henceforth,
Imbued with me, though free to all before :
For clay, once cast into my soul’s rich mine
Should come up crusted o’er with gems. Nor this
Would need a meaner spirit, than the first ;

Nay, 't would be but the selfsame spirit, clothed
In humbler guise, but still the selfsame spirit :
As one spring wind unbinds the mountain snow
And comforts violets in their hermitage.
But, master, poet, who hast done all this,
How didst thou 'scape the ruin whelming me ?
Didst thou, when nerving thee to this attempt,
Ne'er range thy mind's extent, as some wide hall,
Dazzled by shapes that filled its length with light,
Shapes clustered there to rule thee, not obey,
That will not wait thy summons, will not rise
Singly, nor when thy practised eye and hand
Can well transfer their loveliness, but crowd
By thee for ever, bright to thy despair ?
Didst thou ne'er gaze on each by turns, and ne'er
Resolve to single out one, though the rest
Should vanish, and to give that one, entire
In beauty, to the world ; forgetting, so,
Its peers, whose number baffles mortal power ?
And, this determined, wast thou ne'er seduced
By memories and regrets and passionate love,
To glance once more farewell ? and did their eyes
Fasten thee, brighter and more bright, until
Thou couldst but stagger back unto their feet,
And laugh that man's applause or welfare ever
Could tempt thee to forsake them ? Or when years
Had passed and still their love possessed thee wholly,
When from without some murmur startled thee
Of darkling mortals famished for one ray

Of thy so-hoarded luxury of light,
 Didst thou ne'er strive even yet to break those spells
 And prove thou couldst recover and fulfil
 Thy early mission, long ago renounced,
 And, to that end, select some shape once more?
 And did not mist-like influences, thick films,
 Faint memories of the rest that charmed so long
 Thine eyes, float fast, confuse thee, bear thee off,
 As whirling snow-drifts blind a man who treads
 A mountain ridge, with guiding spear, through storm?
 Say, though I fell, I had excuse to fall;
 Say, I was tempted sorely: say but this,
 Dear lord, Aprile's lord!

Par. Clasp me not thus,
 Aprile! That the truth should reach me thus!
 We are weak dust. Nay, clasp not or I faint!

Apr. My king! and envious thoughts could outrage
 thee!

Lo, I forget my ruin, and rejoice
 In thy success, as thou! Let our God's praise
 Go bravely through the world at last! What care
 Through me or thee? I feel thy breath. Why, tears?
 Tears in the darkness, and from thee to me?

Par. Love me henceforth, Aprile, while I learn
 To love; and, merciful God, forgive us both!
 We wake at length from weary dreams; but both
 Have slept in fairy-land: though dark and drear
 Appears the world before us, we no less
 Wake with our wrists and ankles jewelled still.

I too have sought to KNOW as thou to LOVE—
 Excluding love as thou refusedst knowledge.
 Still thou hast beauty and I, power. We wake :
 What penance canst devise for both of us ?

Apr. I hear thee faintly. The thick darkness ! Even
 Thine eyes are hid. 'T is as I knew : I speak,
 And now I die. But I have seen thy face !
 O poet, think of me, and sing of me !
 But to have seen thee and to die so soon !

Par. Die not, Aprile ! We must never part.
 Are we not halves of one dissevered world,
 Whom this strange chance unites once more ? Part ?
 never !

Till thou, the lover, know ; and I, the knower,
 Love—until both are saved. Aprile, hear !
 We will accept our gains, and use them—now !
 God, he will die upon my breast ! Aprile !

Apr. To speak but once, and die ! yet by his side.
 Hush ! hush !

Ha ! go you ever girt about
 With phantoms, powers ? I have created such,
 But these seem real as I ?

Par. Whom can you see
 Through the accursed darkness ?

Apr. Stay ; I know,
 I know them : who should know them well as I ?
 White brows, lit up with glory ; poets all !

Par. Let him but live, and I have my reward !

Apr. Yes ; I see now. God is the perfect Poet,

Who in His person acts His own creations.

Had you but told me this at first! Hush! hush!

Par. Live! for my sake, because of my great sin,
To help my brain, oppressed by these wild words
And their deep import. Live! 't is not too late:

I have a quiet home for us, and friends.

Michal shall smile on you. Hear you? Lean thus,
And breathe my breath. I shall not lose one word
Of all your speech, one little word, Aprile!

Apr. No, no. Crown me? I am not one of you!
'T is he, the king, you seek. I am not one.

Par. Thy spirit, at least, Aprile! let me love!

I have attained, and now I may depart.

III. PARACELSUS.

SCENE, *Basil; a chamber in the house of Paracelsus.* 1526.

PARACELSUS, FESTUS.

Par. Heap logs, and let the blaze laugh out!

Fest.

True, true!

'T is very fit all, time and chance and change
Have wrought since last we sat thus, face to face
And soul to soul—all cares, far-looking fears,
Vague apprehensions, all vain fancies bred
By your long absence, should be cast away,
Forgotten in this glad unhop'd renewal
Of our affections.

Par. Oh, omit not aught
Which witnesses your own and Michal's own
Affection : spare not that ! Only forget
The honours and the glories and what not,
It pleases you to tell profusely out.

Fest. Nay, even your honours, in a sense, I waive :
The wondrous Paracelsus, life's dispenser,
Fate's commissary, idol of the schools
And courts, shall be no more than Aureole still,
Still Aureole and my friend, as when we parted
Some twenty years ago, and I restrained
As best I could the promptings of my spirit
Which secretly advanced you, from the first,
To the pre-eminent rank which, since, your own
Adventurous ardour, nobly triumphing,
Has won for you.

Par. Yes, yes. And Michal's face
Still wears that quiet and peculiar light
Like the dim circlet floating round a pearl ?

Fest. Just so.

Par. And yet her calm sweet countenance,
Though saintly, was not sad ; for she would sing
Alone. Does she still sing alone, bird-like,
Not dreaming you are near ? Her carols dropt
In flakes through that old leafy bower built under
The sunny wall at Würzburg, from her lattice
Among the trees above, while I, unseen,
Sat conning some rare scroll from Tritheim's shelves,
Much wondering notes so simple could divert

My mind from study. Those were happy days.
Respect all such as sing when all alone!

Fest. Scarcely alone: her children, you may guess,
Are wild beside her.

Par. Ah, those children quite
Unsettled the pure picture in my mind:
A girl, she was so perfect, so distinct.
No change, no change! Not but this added grace
May blend and harmonize with its compeers,
And Michal may become her motherhood;
But 't'is a change, and I detest all change,
And most a change in aught I loved long since.
So, Michal—you have said she thinks of me?

Fest. O very proud will Michal be of you!
Imagine how we sat, long winter-nights,
Scheming and wondering, shaping your presumed
Adventure, or devising its reward;
Shutting out fear with all the strength of hope.
For it was strange how, even when most secure
In our domestic peace, a certain dim
And flitting shade could sadden all; it seemed
A restlessness of heart, a silent yearning,
A sense of something wanting, incomplete—
Not to be put in words, perhaps avoided
By mute consent—but, said or unsaid, felt
To point to one so loved and so long lost.
And then the hopes rose and shut out the fears—
How you would laugh should I recount them now!
I still predicted your return at last,

With gifts beyond the greatest of them all,
 All Tritheim's wondrous troop; did one of which
 Attain renown by any chance, I smiled,
 As well aware of who would prove his peer.
 Michal was sure some woman, long ere this,
 As beautiful as you were sage, had loved . . .

Par. Far-seeing, truly, to discern so much
 In the fantastic projects and day-dreams
 Of a raw, restless boy!

Fest. Oh, no: the sunrise
 Well warranted our faith in this full noon!
 Can I forget the anxious voice which said,
 "Festus, have thoughts like these e'er shaped them-
 selves

"In other brains than mine? have their possessors
 "Existed in like circumstance? were they weak
 "As I, or ever constant from the first,
 "Despising youth's allurements and rejecting
 "As spider-films the shackles I endure?
 "Is there hope for me?"—and I answered gravely
 As an acknowledged elder, calmer, wiser,
 More gifted mortal. O you must remember,
 For all your glorious . . .

Par. Glorious? ay, this hair,
 These hands—nay, touch them, they are mine! Recall
 With all the said recallings, times when thus
 To lay them by your own ne'er turned you pale
 As now. Most glorious, are they not?

Fest.

Why—why—

Something must be subtracted from success
 So wide, no doubt. He would be scrupulous, truly,
 Who should object such drawbacks. Still, still, Aureole,
 You are changed, very changed! 'T were losing nothing
 To look well to it: you must not be stolen
 From the enjoyment of your well-won meed.

Par. My friend! you seek my pleasure, past a doubt:
 You will best gain your point, by talking, not
 Of mé, but of yourself.

Fest. Have I not said
 All touching Michal and my children? Sure
 You know, by this, full well how Aennchen looks
 Gravely, while one disparts her thick brown hair;
 And Aureole's glee when some stray gannet builds
 Amid the birch-trees by the lake. Small hope
 Have I that he will honour (the wild imp)
 His namesake! Sigh not! 't is too much to ask
 That all we love should reach the same proud fate.
 But you are very kind to humour me
 By showing interest in my quiet life;
 You, who of old could never tame yourself
 To tranquil pleasures, must at heart despise . . .

Par. Festus, strange secrets are let out by Death,
 Who blabs so oft the follies of this world:
 And I am Death's familiar, as you know.
 I helped a man to die, some few weeks since,
 Warped even from his go-cart to one end—
 The living on princes' smiles, reflected from
 A mighty herd of favourites. No mean trick

He left untried, and truly well-nigh wormed
 All traces of God's finger out of him :
 Then died, grown old. And just an hour before,
 Having lain long with blank and soulless eyes,
 He sat up suddenly, and with natural voice
 Said that in spite of thick air and closed doors
 God told him it was June; and he knew well,
 Without such telling, harebells grew in June;¹
 And all that kings could ever give or take
 Would not be precious as those blooms to him.
 Just so, allowing I am passing sage,
 It seems to me much worthier argument
 Why pansies,* eyes that laugh, bear beauty's prize
 From violets, eyes that dream—(your Michal's choice)—
 Than all fools find to wonder at in me,
 Or in my fortunes. And be very sure
 I say this from no prurient restlessness,
 No self-complacency, itching to turn,
 Vary, and view its pleasure from all points,
 And, in this instance, willing other men
 Should be at pains, demonstrate to itself
 The realness of the very joy it tastes.
 What should delight me like the news of friends
 Whose memories were a solace to me oft,
 As mountain-baths to wild fowls in their flight ?
 Offer than you had wasted thought on me
 Had you been wise, and rightly valued bliss !
 But there's no taming nor repressing hearts :

* *Citrinula (flammula) herba Paracelso multum familiaris.* DORN.

God knows I need such!—So, you heard me speak?

Fest. Speak? when?

Par. When but this morning at my class?
There was noise and crowd enough. I saw you not.
Surely you know I am engaged to fill
The chair here?—that 't is part of my proud fate
To lecture to as many thick-skulled youths
As please, each day, to throng the theatre,
To my great reputation, and no small
Danger of Basil's benches, long unused
To crack beneath such honour?

Fest. I was there;

I mingled with the throng: shall I avow
Small care was mine to listen?—too intent
On gathering from the murmurs of the crowd
A full corroboration of my hopes!
What can I learn about your powers? but they
Know, care for nought beyond your actual state,
Your actual value; yet they worship you,
Those various natures whom you sway as one!
But ere I go, be sure I shall attend. . .

Par. Stop, o' God's name: the thing's by no means
yet

Past remedy! Shall I read this morning's labour
—At least in substance? Nought so worth the gaining
As an apt scholar! Thus then, with all due
Precision and emphasis—you, besides, are clearly
Guiltless of understanding more, a whit,
The subject than your stool—allowed to be

A notable advantage.

Fest. Surely, Aureole,

You laugh at me!

Par. I laugh? Ha, ha! thank heaven,
I charge you, if 't be so! for I forget
Much, and what laughter should be like! No less,
However, I forego that luxury
Since it alarms the friend who brings it back.
True, laughter like my own must echo strangely
To thinking men; a smile were better far;
So, make me smile! If the exulting look
You wore but now be smiling, 't is so long
Since I have smiled! Alas, such smiles are born
Alone of hearts like yours, or herdsmen's souls
Of ancient time, whose eyes, calm as their flocks,
Saw in the stars mere garnishry of heaven,
In earth a stage for altars, nothing more.
Never change, Festus: I say, never change!

Fest. My God, if he be wretched after all!

Par. When last we parted, Festus, you declared,
—Or Michal, yes, her soft lips whispered words
I have preserved. She told me she believed
I should succeed (meaning, that in the search
I then engaged in, I should meet success),
And yet be wretched: now, she augured false.

Fest. Thank Heaven! but you spoke strangely:
could I venture

To think bare apprehension lest your friend,
Dazzled by your resplendent course, might find

Was hued with triumph: every spirit then
 Praising, *his* heart on flame the while:—a tale!
 Well, Festus, what discover you, I pray?

Fest. Some foul deed sullies then a life which else
 Were raised supreme?

Par. Good: I do well, most well!
 Why strive to make men hear, feel, fret themselves
 With what 't is past their power to comprehend?
 I should not strive now: only, having nursed
 The faint surmise that one yet walked the earth,
 One, at least, not the utter fool of show,
 Not absolutely formed to be the dupe
 Of shallow plausibilities alone;
 One who, in youth found wise enough to choose
 The happiness his riper years approve,
 Was yet so anxious for another's sake,
 That, ere his friend could rush upon a mad
 And ruinous course, the converse of his own,
 His gentle spirit essayed, prejudged for him
 The perilous path, foresaw its destiny,
 And warned the weak one in such tender words,
 Such accents—his whole heart in every tone—
 That oft their memory comforted that friend
 When it by right should have increased despair:
 —Having believed, I say, that this one man
 Could never lose the light thus from the first
 His portion—how should I refuse to grieve
 At even my gain if it disturb our old
 Relation, if it make me out more wise?

Therefore, once more reminding him how well
 He prophesied, I note the single flaw
 That spoils his prophet's title. In plain words.
 You were deceived, and thus were you deceived—
 I have not been successful, and yet am
 Most miserable; 't is said at last; nor you
 Give credit, lest you force me to concede
 That common sense yet lives upon the world.

Fest. You surely do not mean to banter me?

Par. You know, or—if you have been wise enough
 To cleanse your memory of such matters—knew,
 As far as words of mine could make it clear,
 That 't was my purpose to find joy or grief
 Solely in the fulfilment of my plan
 Or plot or whatso'er it was; rejoicing
 Alone as it proceeded prosperously,
 Sorrowing then only when mischance retarded
 Its progress. That was in those Würzburg days!
 Not to prolong a theme I thoroughly hate,
 I have pursued this plan with all my strength;
 And having failed therein most signally,
 Cannot object to ruin utter and drear
 As all-excelling would have been the prize
 Had fortune favoured me. I scarce have right
 To vex your frank good spirit, late so glad
 In my supposed prosperity, I know,
 And, were I lucky in a glut of friends,
 Would well agree to let your error live,
 Nay, strengthen it with fables of success.

But mine is no condition to refuse
 The transient solace of so rare a godsend,
 My solitary luxury, my one friend :
 Accordingly I venture to put off
 The wearisome vest of falsehood galling me,
 Secure when he is by. I lay me bare,
 Prone at his mercy—but he is my friend !
 Not that he needs retain his aspect grave ;
 That answers not my purpose ; for 't is like,
 Some sunny morning—Basil being drained
 Of its wise population, every corner
 Of the amphitheatre crammed with learned clerks,
 Here Œcolampadius, looking worlds of wit,
 Here Castellanus, as profound as he,
 Munsterus here, Frobenius there, all squeezed,
 And staring,—that the zany of the show,
 Even Paracelsus, shall put off before them
 His trappings with a grace but seldom judged
 Expedient in such cases :—the grim smile
 That will go round ! Is it not therefore best
 To venture a rehearsal like the present
 In a small way ? Where are the signs I seek,
 The first-fruits and fair sample of the scorn
 Due to all quacks ? Why, this will never do !

Fest. These are foul vapours, Aureole ; nought
 beside !

The effect of watching, study, weariness.
 Were there a spark of truth in the confusion
 Of these wild words, you would not outrage thus

Your youth's companion. I shall ne'er regard
 These wanderings, bred of faintness and much study.
 'T is not thus you would trust a trouble to me,
 To Michal's friend.

Par. I have said it, dearest Festus!
 For the manner, 't is ungracious, probably;
 You may have it told in broken sobs, one day,
 And scalding tears, ere long: but I thought best
 To keep that off as long as possible.
 Do you wonder still?

Fest. No; it must oft fall out
 That one whose labour perfects any work,
 Shall rise from it with eye so worn, that he
 Of all men least can measure the extent
 Of what he has accomplished. He alone,
 Who, nothing tasked, is nothing weary too,
 May clearly scan the little he effects:
 But we, the bystanders, untouched by toil,
 Estimate each aright.

Par. This worthy Festus
 Is one of them, at last! 'T is so with all!
 First, they set down all progress as a dream,
 And next, when he, whose quick discomfiture
 Was counted on, accomplishes some few
 And doubtful steps in his career,—behold,
 They look for every inch of ground to vanish
 Beneath his tread, so sure they spy success!

Fest. Few doubtful steps? when death retires before
 Your presence—when the noblest of mankind,

Broken in body or subdued in soul,
 May through your skill renew their vigour, raise
 The shattered frame to pristine stateliness ?
 When men in racking pain may purchase dreams
 Of what delights them most, swooning at once
 Into a sea of bliss, or rapt along
 As in a flying sphere of turbulent light ?
 When we may look to you as one ordained
 To free the flesh from fell disease, as frees
 Our Luther's burning tongue the fettered soul ?
 When . . .

Par. When and where, the devil, did you get
 This notable news ?

Fest. Even from the common voice ;
 From those whose envy, daring not dispute
 The wonders it decries, attributes them
 To magic and such folly.

Par. Folly ? Why not
 To magic, pray ? You find a comfort doubtless
 In holding, God ne'er troubles Him about
 Us or our doings : once we were judged worth
 The devil's tempting . . . I offend : forgive me,
 And rest content. Your prophecy on the whole
 Was fair enough as prophesyings go ;
 At fault a little in detail, but quite
 Precise enough in the main ; and hereupon
 I pay due homage : you guessed long ago
 (The prophet !) I should fail—and I have failed.

Fest. You mean to tell me, then, the hopes which fed

Your youth have not been realized as yet ?
 Some obstacle has barred them hitherto ?
 Or that their innate . . .

Par. As I said but now,
 You have a very decent prophet's fame,
 So you but shun details here. Little matter
 Whether those hopes were mad,—the aims they sought,
 Safe and secure from all ambitious fools ;
 Or whether my weak wits are overcome
 By what a better spirit would scorn : I fail.
 And now methinks 't were best to change a theme,
 I am a sad fool to have stumbled on.
 I say confusedly what comes uppermost ;
 But there are times when patience proves at fault,
 As now : this morning's strange encounter—you
 Beside me once again ! you, whom I guessed
 Alive, since hitherto (with Luther's leave)
 No friend have I among the saints at peace,
 To judge by any good their prayers effect—
 I knew you would have helped me!—Why not He,
 My strange competitor in enterprise,
 Bound for the same end by another path,
 Arrived, or ill or well, before the time,
 At our disastrous journey's doubtful close ?
 How goes it with Aprile ? Ah, they miss
 Your lone, sad, sunny idleness of Heaven,
 Our martyrs for the world's sake ; Heaven shuts fast :
 The poor mad poet is howling by this time !
 Since you are my sole friend then, here or there,

I could not quite repress the varied feelings
 This meeting wakens ; they have had their vent,
 And now forget them. Do the rear-nice still
 Hang like a fret-work on the gate (or what
 In my time was a gate) fronting the road
 From Einsiedeln to Lachen ?

Fest.

Trifle not :

Answer me, for my sake alone. You smiled
 Just now, when I supposed some deed, unworthy
 Yourself, might blot the else so bright result ;
 Yet if your motives have continued pure,
 Your will unfaltering, and in spite of this,
 You have experienced a defeat, why, then
 I say not, you would cheerfully withdraw.
 From contest—mortal hearts are not so fashioned—
 But surely you would, ne'ertheless, withdraw.
 You sought not fame, nor gain, nor even love ;
 No end distinct from knowledge,—I repeat
 Your very words : once satisfied that knowledge
 Is a mere dream, you would announce as much,
 Yourself the first. But how is the event ?
 You are defeated—and I find you here !

Par. As though " here " did not signify defeat !
 I spoke not of my little labours here,
 But of the break-down of my general aims :
 For you, aware of their extent and scope,
 To look on these sage lecturings, approved
 By beardless boys, and bearded dotards worse,
 As a fit consummation of such aims,

Is worthy notice! A professorship
At Basil! Since you see so much in it,
And think my life was reasonably drained
Of life's delights to render me a match
For duties arduous as such post demands,—
Be it far from me to deny my power
To fill the petty circle lotted out
Of infinite space, or justify the host
Of honours thence accruing. So, take notice,
This jewel dangling from my neck preserves
The features of a prince, my skill restored
To plague his people some few years to come:
And all through a pure whim. He had eased the earth
For me, but that the droll despair which seized
The vermin of his household, tickled me.
I came to see. Here, drivelled the physician,
Whose most infallible nostrum was at fault;
There quaked the astrologer, whose horoscope
Had promised him interminable years;
Here a monk fumbled at the sick man's mouth
With some undoubted relic—a sudary
Of the Virgin; while another piebald knave
Of the same brotherhood (he loved them ever)
Was actively preparing 'neath his nose
Such a suffumigation as, once fired,
Had stunk the patient dead ere he could groan.
I cursed the doctor, and upset the brother;
Brushed past the conjurer; vowed that the first gust
Of stench from the ingredients just alight

Would raise a cross-grained devil in my sword,
 Not easily laid: and ere an hour, the prince
 Slept as he never slept since prince he was.
 A day—and I was posting for my life,
 Placarded through the town as one whose spite
 Had near availed to stop the blessed effects
 Of the doctor's nostrum, which, well seconded
 By the sudary, and most by the costly smoke—
 Not leaving out the strenuous prayers sent up
 Hard by, in the abbey—raised the prince to life;
 To the great reputation of the seer
 Who, confident, expected all along . . .
 The glad event—the doctor's recompense—
 Much largess from his highness to the monks—
 And the vast solace of his loving people,
 Whose general satisfaction to increase,
 The prince was pleased no longer to defer
 The burning of some dozen heretics,
 Remanded till God's mercy should be shown
 Touching his sickness: last of all were joined
 Ample directions to all loyal folk
 To swell the complement, by seizing me
 Who—doubtless some rank sorcerer—had endeavoured
 To thwart these pious offices, obstruct
 The prince's cure, and frustrate Heaven by help
 Of certain devils dwelling in his sword.
 By luck, the prince in his first fit of thanks
 Had forced this bauble on me as an earnest
 Of further favours. This one case may serve

To give sufficient taste of many such,
 So let them pass. Those shelves support a pile
 Of patents, licences, diplomas, titles,
 From Germany, France, Spain and Italy
 They authorize some honour; ne'ertheless,
 I set more store by this Erasmus sent;
 He trusts me; our Frobenius is his friend,
 And him "I raised" (nay, read it) "from the dead."
 I weary you, I see. I merely sought
 To show, there's no great wonder after all
 That while I fill the class-room, and attract
 A crowd to Basil, I get leave to stay;
 And therefore need not scruple to accept
 The utmost they can offer—if I please:
 For 't is but right the world should be prepared
 To treat with favour e'en fantastic wants
 Of one like me, used up in serving her,
 Just as the mortal, whom the gods in part
 Devoured, received in place of his lost limb
 Some virtue or other—cured disease, I think;
 You mind the fables we have read together.

Fest. You do not think I comprehend a word.
 The time was, Aureole, you were apt enough
 To clothe the airiest thoughts in specious breath.
 But surely you must feel how vague and strange
 These speeches sound.

Par. Well, then: you know my hopes;
 I am assured, at length, those hopes were vain;
 That truth is just as far from me as ever

That I have thrown my life away ; that sorrow
 On that account is idle, and further effort
 To mend and patch what 's marred beyond repairing,
 As useless : and all this was taught to me
 By the convincing, good old-fashioned method
 Of force—by sheer compulsion. Is that plain ?

Fest. Dear Aureole ! can it be my fears were just ?
 God wills not . . .

Par. Now, 't is this I most admire—
 The constant talk men of your stamp keep up
 Of God's will, as they style it ; one would swear
 Man had but merely to uplift his eye,
 And see the will in question charactered
 On the heaven's vault. 'T is hardly wise to moot
 Such topics : doubts are many and faith is weak.
 I know as much of any will of God's
 As knows some dumb and tortured brute what Man,
 His stern lord, wills from the perplexing blows
 That plague him every way ; but there, of course,
 Where least he suffers, longest he remains—
 My case ; and for such reasons I plod on,
 Subdued, but not convinced. I know as little
 Why I deserve to fail, as why I hoped
 Better things in my youth. I simply know
 I am no master here, but trained and beaten
 Into the path I tread ; and here I stay,
 Until some further intimation reach me,
 Like an obedient drudge. Though I prefer
 To view the whole thing as a task imposed,

Which, whether dull or pleasant, must be done—
 Yet, I deny not, there is made provision
 Of joys which tastes less jaded might affect;
 Nay, some which please me too, for all my pride—
 Pleasures that once were pains: the iron ring
 Festering about a slave's neck grows at length
 Into the flesh it eats. I hate no longer
 A host of petty, vile delights, undreamed of
 Or spurned before; such now supply the place
 Of my dead aims: as in the autumn woods
 Where tall trees used to flourish, from their roots
 Springs up a fungous brood, sickly and pale,
 Chill mushrooms, coloured like a corpse's cheek.

Fest. If I interpret well your words, I own
 It troubles me but little that your aims,
 Vast in their dawning, and most likely grown
 Extravagantly since, have baffled you.
 Perchance I am glad; you merit greater praise;
 Because they are too glorious to be gained,
 You do not blindly cling to them and die;
 You fell, but have not sullenly refused
 To rise, because an angel worsted you
 In wrestling, though the world holds not your peer;
 And though too harsh and sudden is the change
 To yield content as yet, still you pursue
 The ungracious path as though 't were rosy strewn.
 'T is well: and your reward, or soon or late,
 Will come from Him whom no man serves in vain.

Par. Ah, very fine! For my part, I conceive

The very pausing from all further toil,
Which you find heinous, would become a seal!
To the sincerity of all my deeds.
To be consistent I should die at once;
I calculated on no after-life;
Yet (how crept in, how fostered, I know not)
Here am I with as passionate regret
For youth and health and love so vainly lavished,
As if their preservation had been first
And foremost in my thoughts; and this strange fact
Humbled me wondrously, and had due force
In rendering me the less averse to follow
A certain counsel, a mysterious warning—
You will not understand—but 't was a man
With aims not mine and yet pursued like mine,
With the same fervour and no more success,
Perishing in my sight; who summoned me
As I would shun the ghastly fate I saw,
To serve my race at once; to wait no longer
That God should interfere in my behalf,
But to distrust myself, put pride away,
And give my gains, imperfect as they were,
To men. I have not leisure to explain
How since, a singular series of events
Has raised me to the station you behold,
Wherein I seem to turn to most account
The mere wreck of the Past,—perhaps receive
Some feeble glimmering token that God views
And may approve my penance: therefore here

You find me, doing most good or least harm.
 And if folks wonder much and profit little
 'T is not my fault ; only, I shall rejoice -
 When my part in the farce is shuffled through,
 And the curtain falls : I must hold out till then.

Fest. Till when, dear Aureole ?

Par. Till I'm fairly thrust
 From my proud eminence. Fortune is fickle
 And even professors fall : should that arrive,
 I see no sin in ceding to my bent.
 You little fancy what rude shocks apprise us
 We sin : God's intimations rather fail
 In clearness than in energy : 't were well
 Did they but indicate the course to take
 Like that to be forsaken. I would fain
 Be spared a further sample ! Here I stand,
 And here I stay, be sure, till forced to flit.

Fest. Be you but firm on that head ; long ere then
 All I expect will come to pass, I trust :
 The cloud that wraps you will have disappeared.
 Meantime, I see small chance of such event :
 They praise you here as one whose lore, already
 Divulged, eclipses all the Past can show,
 But whose achievements, marvellous as they be,
 Are faint anticipations of a glory
 About to be revealed. When Basil's crowds
 Dismiss their teacher, I shall be content
 That he depart.

Par. This favour at their hands

I look for earlier than your view of things
 Would warrant. Of the crowd you saw to-day,
 Remove the full half sheer amazement draws,
 Mere novelty, nought else; and next, the tribe
 Whose innate blockish dulness just perceives
 That unless miracles (as seem my works)
 Be wrought in their behalf, their chance is slight
 To puzzle the devil; next, the numerous set
 Who bitterly hate established schools, and help
 The teacher that oppugns them, till he once
 Have planted his own doctrine, when the teacher
 May reckon on their rancour in his turn;
 Take, too, the sprinkling of sagacious knaves
 Whose cunning runs not counter to the vogue,
 But seeks, by flattery and crafty nursing,
 To force my system to a premature
 Short-lived development. Why swell the list?
 Each has his end to serve, and his best way
 Of serving it: remove all these, remains
 A scantling, a poor dozen at the best,
 Worthy to look for sympathy and service,
 And likely to draw profit from my pains.

Fest. 'Tis no encouraging picture: still these few
 Redeem their fellows. Once the germ implanted,
 Its growth, if slow, is sure.

Par. God grant it so!
 I would make some amends: but if I fail,
 The luckless rogues have this excuse to urge,
 That much is in my method and my manner,

My uncouth habits, my impatient spirit,
 Which hinders of reception and result
 My doctrine : much to say, small skill to speak !
 These old aims suffered not a looking-off,
 Though for an instant ; therefore, only when
 I thus renounced them and resolved to reap
 Some present fruit—to teach mankind some truth
 So dearly purchased—only then I found
 Such teaching was an art requiring cares
 And qualities peculiar to itself ;
 That to possess was one thing—to display
 Another. Had renown been in my thoughts,
 Or popular praise, I had soon discovered it !
 One grows but little apt to learn these things.

Fest. If it be so, which nowise I believe,
 There needs no waiting fuller dispensation
 To leave a labour to so little use.
 Why not throw up the irksome charge at once ?

Par. A task, a task !

But wherefore hide the whole
 Extent of degradation, once engaged
 In the confessing vein ? Despite of all
 My fine talk of obedience, and repugnance,
 Docility, and, what not, 't is yet to learn
 If when the task shall really be performed,
 My inclination free to choose once more,
 I shall do aught but slightly modify
 The nature of the hated task I quit.
 In plain words, I am spoiled : my life still tends

As first it tended. I am broken and trained
To my old habits ; they are part of me.
I know, and none so well, my darling ends
Are proved impossible : no less, no less,
Even now what humours me, fond fool, as when
Their faint ghosts sit with me, and flatter me,
And send me back content to my dull round?
How can I change this soul?—this apparatus
Constructed solely for their purposes
So well adapted to their every want,
To search out and discover, prove and perfect;
This intricate machine whose most minute
And meanest motions have their charm to me
Though to none else—an aptitude I seize,
An object I perceive, a use, a meaning,
A property, a fitness, I explain,
And I alone :—how can I change my soul?
And this wronged body, worthless save when tasked
Under that soul's dominion—used to care
For its bright master's cares, and quite subdue
Its proper cravings—not to ail nor pine,
So he but prosper—whither drag this poor,
Tried, patient body? God! how I essayed,
To live like that mad poet, for a while,
To love alone ; and how I felt too warped
And twisted and deformed! What should I do,
Even tho' released from drudgery, but return
Faint, as you see, and halting, blind and sore,
To my old life—and die as I began!

I cannot feed on beauty, for the sake
 Of beauty only; nor can drink in balm
 From lovely objects for their loveliness;
 My nature cannot lose her first imprint;
 I still must hoard and heap and class all truths
 With one ulterior purpose: I must know!
 Would God translate me to His throne, believe
 That I should only listen to His words
 'To further my own aims! For other men,
 Beauty is prodigally strewn around,
 And I were happy could I quench as they
 This mad and thriveless longing, and content me
 With beauty for itself alone: alas!
 I have addressed a frock of heavy mail,
 Yet may not join the troop of sacred knights;
 And now the forest-creatures fly from me,
 The grass-banks cool, the sunbeams warm no more.
 Best follow, dreaming that ere night arrive,
 I shall o'ertake the company, and ride
 Glittering as they!

Fest. I think I apprehend
 What you would say: if you, in truth, design
 To enter once more on the life thus left,
 Seek not to hide that all this consciousness
 Of failure is assumed.

Par. My friend, my friend,
 I tell, you listen; I explain, perhaps
 You understand: there our communion ends.
 Have you learnt nothing from to-day's discourse?

When we would thoroughly know the sick man's state
 We feel awhile the fluttering pulse, press soft
 The hot brow, look upon the languid eye,
 And thence divine the rest. Must I lay bare
 My heart, hideous and beating, or tear up
 My vitals for your gaze, ere you will deem
 Enough made known? You! who are you, forsooth?
 That is the crowning operation claimed
 By the arch-demonstrator—heaven the hall,
 And earth the audience. Let Aprile and you
 Secure good places: 't will be worth the while.

Fest. Are you mad, Aureole? What can I have said
 To call for this? I judged from your own words.

Par. Oh, doubtless! A sick wretch describes the ape
 That mocks him from the bed-foot, and all gravely
 You thither turn at once: or he recounts
 The perilous journey he has late performed,
 And you are puzzled much how that could be!
 You find me here, half stupid and half mad;
 It makes no part of my delight to search
 Into these things, much less to undergo
 Another's scrutiny; but so it chances
 That I am led to trust my state to you:
 And the event is, you combine, contrast,
 And ponder on my foolish words, as though
 They thoroughly conveyed all hidden here—
 Here, loathsome with despair, and hate, and rage!
 Is there no fear, no shrinking or no shame?
 Will you guess nothing? will you spare me nothing?

Must I go deeper? Ay or no? . . .

Fest. Dear friend . . .

Par. True: I am brutal—'t is a part of it;
 The plague's sign—you are not a lazar-haunter,
 How should you know? Well then, you think it strange
 I should profess to have failed utterly,
 And yet propose an ultimate return
 To courses void of hope: and this, because
 You know not what temptation is, nor how
 'T is like to ply men in the sickliest part.
 You are to understand, that we who make
 Sport for the gods, are hunted to the end:
 There is not one sharp volley shot at us,
 Which 'scaped with life, though hurt, we slacken pace
 And gather by the wayside herbs and roots
 To staunch our wounds, secure from further harm:
 We are assailed to life's extremest verge.
 It will be well indeed if I return,
 A harmless busy fool, to my old ways!
 I would forget hints of another fate,
 Significant enough, which silent hours
 Have lately scared me with.

Fest. Another! and what?

Par. After all, Festus, you say well: I am
 A man yet: I need never humble me.
 I would have been—something, I know not what;
 But though I cannot soar, I do not crawl.
 There are worse portions than this one of mine.
 You say well!

Fest. Ah! .

Par. And deeper degradation!

If the mean stimulants of vulgar praise,
 And vanity, should become the chosen food
 Of a sunk mind; should stifle even the wish
 To find its early aspirations true;
 Should teach it to breathe falsehood like life-breath—
 An atmosphere of craft and trick and lies;
 Should make it proud to emulate or surpass
 Base natures in the practices which woke
 Its most indignant loathing once . . . No, no!
 Utter damnation is reserved for Hell!
 I had immortal feelings: such shall never
 Be wholly quenched: no, no!

My friend, you wear

A melancholy face, and, certain 't is
 There's little cheer in all this dismal work.
 But 't was not my desire to set abroad
 Such memories and forebodings: I foresaw
 Where they would drive. 'T were better to discuss
 News of Lucerne or Zurich; or to tell
 Of Egypt's flaring sky or Spain's cork-groves.

Fest. I have thought: trust me, this mood will pass
 away.

I know you, and the lofty spirit you bear,
 And easily ravel out a clue to all.
 These are the trials meet for such as you,
 Nor must you hope exemption: to be mortal
 Is to be plied with trials manifold.

Look round ! The obstacles which kept the rest
 From your ambition, have been spurned by you ;
 Their fears, their doubts, the chains that bind them
 all,

Were flax before your resolute soul, which nought
 Avails to awe, save these delusions bred
 From its own strength, its selfsame strength disguised—
 Mocking itself. Be brave, dear Aureole ! Since
 The rabbit has his shade to frighten him,
 The fawn a rustling bough, mortals their cares,
 And higher natures yet would slight and laugh
 At these entangling fantasies, as you
 At trammels of a weaker intellect,—
 Measure your mind's height by the shade it casts !
 I know you.

Par. And I know you, dearest Festus !
 And how you love unworthily ; and how
 All admiration renders blind.

Fest. You hold
 That admiration blinds ?

Par. Ay and alas !

Fest. Nought blinds you less than admiration will.
 Whether it be that all love renders wise
 In its degree ; from love which blends with love—
 Heart answering heart—to love which spends itself
 In silent mad idolatry of some
 Pre-eminent mortal, some great soul of souls,
 Which ne'er will know how well it is adored.
 I say, such love is never blind ; but rather

Alive to every the minutest spot
Which mars its object, and which hate (supposed
So vigilant and searching) dreams not of.
Love broods on such: what then? When first perceived,
Is there no sweet strife to forget, to change,
To overflush those blemishes with all
The glow of general goodness they disturb?
—To make those very defects an endless source
Of new affection grown from hopes and fears?
And, when all fails, is there no gallant stand
Made even for much proved weak? no shrinking-back
Lest, since all love assimilates the soul
To what it loves, it should at length become
Almost a rival of its idol? Trust me,
If there be fiends who seek to work our hurt,
To ruin and drag down earth's mightiest spirits
Even at God's foot, 't will be from such as love,
Their zeal will gather most to serve their cause;
And least from those who hate, who most essay
By contumely and scorn to blot the light
Which forces entrance even to their hearts:
For thence will our defender tear the veil
And show within each heart, as in a shrine,
The giant image of Perfection, grown
In hate's despite, whose calumnies were spawned
In the untroubled presence of its eyes!
True admiration blinds not; nor am I
So blind. I call your sin exceptional;
It springs from one whose life has passed the bounds

Prescribed to life. Compound that fault with God !
 I speak of men ; to common men like me
 The weakness you confess endears you more ;
 Like the far traces of decay in suns.
 I bid you have good cheer !

Par.

Præclarè ! Optimè !

Think of a quiet mountain-cloistered priest
 Instructing Paracelsus ! yet, 't is so.
 Come, I will show you where my merit lies.
 'T is in the advance of individual minds
 That the slow crowd should ground their expectation
 Eventually to follow ; as the sea
 Waits ages in its bed, 'till some one wave
 Out of the multitudinous mass, extends
 The empire of the whole, some feet perhaps,
 Over the strip of sand which could confine
 Its fellows so long time : thenceforth the rest,
 Even to the meanest, hurry in at once,
 And so much is clear gained. I shall be glad
 If all my labours, failing of aught else,
 Suffice to make such inroad and procure
 A wider range for thought : nay, they do this ;
 For, whatso'er my notions of true knowledge
 And a legitimate success, may be,
 I am not blind to my undoubted rank
 When classed with others : I precede my age :
 And whoso wills, is very free to mount
 These labours as a platform, whence his own
 May have a prosperous outset. But, alas !

My followers—they are noisy as you heard,
 But for intelligence the best of them
 So clumsily wield the weapons I supply
 And they extol, that I begin to doubt
 Whether their own rude clubs and pebble-stones
 Would not do better service than my arms
 Thus vilely swayed—if error will not fall
 Sooner before the old awkward batterings
 Than my more subtle warfare, not half learned.

Fest. I would supply that art, then, and withhold
 Its arms until you teach their mystery.

Par. Content you, 't is my wish ; I have recourse
 To the simplest training. Day by day I seek
 To wake the mood, the spirit which alone
 Can make those arms of any use to men.
 Of course, they are for swaggering forth at once
 Graced with Ulysses' bow, Achilles' shield—
 Flash on us, all in armour, thou Achilles !
 Make our hearts dance to thy resounding step !
 A proper sight to scare the crows away !

Fest. Pity you choose not, then, some other method
 Of coming at your point. The marvellous art
 At length established in the world bids fair
 To remedy all hindrances like these :
 Trust to Frobenius' press the precious lore
 Obscured by uncouth manner, or unfit
 For raw beginners ; let his types secure
 A deathless monument to after-times ;
 Meanwhile wait confidently and enjoy

The ultimate effect : sooner or later,
You shall be all-revealed.

Par. The old dull question
In a new form ; no more. Thus : I possess
Two sorts of knowledge ; one,—vast, shadowy,
Hints of the unbounded aim I once pursued :
The other consists of many secrets, caught
While bent on nobler prize,—perhaps a few
Prime principles which may conduct to much :
These last I offer to my followers here.
Now, bid me chronicle the first of these,
My ancient study, and in effect you bid me
Revert to the wild courses just abjured :
I must go find them scattered through the world.
Then, for the principles, they are so simple
(Being chiefly of the overturning sort),
That one time is as propër to propound them
As any other—to-morrow at my class,
Or half a century hence embalmed in print.
For if mankind intend to learn at all,
They must begin by giving faith to them,
And acting on them ; and I do not see
But that my lectures serve indifferent well :
No doubt these dogmas fall not to the earth,
For all their novelty and rugged setting.
I think my class will not forget the day
I let them know the gods of Israel,
Aëtius, Oribasius, Galen, Rhasis,
Serapion, Avicenna, Averröes,—

Were blocks!

Fest. And that reminds me, I heard something
About your waywardness: you burned their books,
It seems, instead of answering those sages.

Par. And who said that?

Fest. Some I met yesternight
With *Œcolampadius*. As you know, the purpose
Of this short stay at Basil was to learn
His pleasure touching certain missives sent
For our *Zuinglius* and himself. 'T was he
Apprised me that the famous teacher here
Was my old friend.

Par. Ah, I forgot: you went . . .

Fest. From Zurich with advices for the ear
Of Luther, now at Wittenburg—(you know,
I make no doubt, the differences of late
With *Carolostadius*)—and returning sought
Basil and . . .

Par. I remember. Here's a case, now,
Will teach you why I answer not, but burn
The books you mention: pray, does Luther dream
His arguments convince by their own force
The crowds that own his doctrine? No, indeed:
His plain denial of established points
Ages had sanctified and men supposed
Could never be oppugned while earth was under
And heaven above them—points which chance or time
Affected not—did more than the array
Of argument which followed. Boldly deny!

There is much breath-stopping, hair stiffening
 Awhile; then, amazed glances, mute awaiting
 The thunderbolt which does not come; and next,
 Reproachful wonder and inquiry: those
 Who else had never stirred, are able now
 To find the rest out for themselves—perhaps
 To outstrip him who set the whole at work,
 —As never will my wise class its instructor.
 And you saw Luther?

Fest. 'Tis a wondrous soul!

Par. True: the so-heavy chain which galled mankind
 Is shattered, and the noblest of us all
 Must bow to the deliverer—nay, the worker
 Of our own project—we who long before
 Had burst our trammels, but forgot the crowd,
 We should have taught, still groaned beneath the load:
 This he has done and nobly. Speed that may!
 Whatever be my chance or my mischance,
 What benefits mankind must glad me too:
 And men seem made, though not as I believed,
 For something better than the times produce.
 Witness these gangs of peasants your new lights
 From Suabia have possessed, whom Münzer leads,
 And whom the duke, the landgrave and the elector
 Will calm in blood! Well, well—'t is not my world!

Fest. Hark!

Par. 'Tis the melancholy wind astir
 Within the trees; the embers too are grey:
 Morn must be near.

Fest. Best ope the casement: see,
The night, late strewn with clouds and flying stars,
Is blank and motionless: how peaceful sleep
The tree-tops all together! Like an asp,
The wind slips whispering from bough to bough.

Par. Ay; you would gaze on a wind-shaken tree
By the hour, nor count time lost.

Fest. So you shall gaze:
Those happy times will come again.

Par. Gone, gone,
Those pleasant times! Does not the moaning wind
Seem to bewail that we have gained such gains
And bartered sleep for them?

Fest. It is our trust
That there is yet another world to mend
All error and mischance.

Par. Another world!
And why this world, this common world, to be
A make-shift, a mere foil, how fair soever,
To some fine life to come? Man must be fed
With angel's food, forsooth; and some few traces
Of a diviner nature which look out
Through his corporeal baseness, warrant him
In a supremè contempt of all provision
For his inferior tastes—some straggling marks
Which constitute his essence, just as truly
As here and there a gem would constitute
The rock, their barren bed, one diamond.
But were it so—were man all mind—he gains

A station little enviable. From God
 Down to the lowest spirit ministrant,
 Intelligence exists which casts our mind
 Into immeasurable shade. No, no :
 Love, hope, fear, faith—these make humanity ;
 These are its sign and note and character,
 And these I have lost !—gone, shut from me for ever,
 Like a dead friend, safe from unkindness more !
 See, morn at length. The heavy darkness seems
 Diluted ; grey and clear without the stars ;
 The shrubs bestir and rouse themselves, as if
 Some snake, that weighed them down all night, let go
 His hold ; and from the East, fuller and fuller
 Day, like a mighty river, is flowing in ;
 But clouded, wintry, desolate and cold.
 Yet see how that broad prickly star-shaped plant,
 Half down in the crevice, spreads its woolly leaves,
 All thick and glistening with diamond dew.
 And you depart for Einsiedeln this day :
 And we have spent all night in talk like this !
 If you would have me better for your love,
 Revert no more to these sad themes.

Fest.

One favour,

And I have done. I leave you, deeply moved ;
 Unwilling to have fared so well, the while
 My friend has changed so sorely. If this mood
 Shall pass away, if light once more arise
 Where all is darkness now, if you see fit
 To hope, and trust again, and strive again,

You will remember—not our love alone—
 But that my faith in God's desire that man
 Should trust on His support, (as I must think
 You trusted,) is obscured and dim through you;
 For you are thus, and this is no reward.
 Will you not call me to your side, dear Aureole?

IV. PARACELUS ASPIRES.

SCENE, *Colmar in Alsatia; an Inn.* 1528.

PARACELUS, FESTUS.

Par. [To JOHANNES OPORINUS, *his secretary.*] *Sicutur ad astra!* Dear Von Visenburg
 Is scandalized, and poor Torinus paralysed,
 And every honest soul that Basil holds
 Aghast; and yet we live, as one may say,
 Just as though Liechtenfels had never set
 So true a value on his sorry carcass,
 And learned Pütter had not frowned us dumb.
 We live; and shall as surely start to-morrow
 For Nuremburg, as we drink speedy scathe
 To Basil in this mantling wine, suffused
 A delicate blush, no fainter tinge is born
 I' th' shut heart of a bud. Pledge me, good John—
 "Basil; a hot plague ravage it, and Pütter
 "Oppose the plague!" Even so? Do you too share
 Their panic, the reptiles? Ha, ha; faint through these,

Desist for these! They manage matters so
 At Basil 't is like: but others may find means
 To bring the stoutest braggart of the tribe
 Once more to crouch in silence—means to breed
 A stupid wonder in each fool again,
 Now big with admiration at the skill
 Which stript a vain pretender of his plumes;
 And, that done,—means to brand each slavish brow
 So deeply, surely, ineffaceably,
 That henceforth flattery shall not pucker it
 Out of the furrow; there that stamp shall stay
 To show the next they fawn on, what they are,
 This Basil with its magnates,—fill my cup,—
 Whom I curse soul and limb. And now dispatch,
 Dispatch, my trusty John; and what remains
 To do, whate'er arrangements for our trip
 Are yet to be completed, see you hasten
 This night; we'll weather the storm at least: to-morrow
 For Nuremburg! Now leave us; this grave clerk
 Has divers weighty matters for my ear:

[OPORINUS goes out.]

And spare my lungs. At last, my gallant Festus,
 I am rid of this arch-knave that dogs my heels
 As a gaunt crow a gasping sheep; at last
 May give a loose to my delight. How kind,
 How very kind, my first, best, only friend!
 Why, this looks like fidelity. Embrace me!
 Not a hair silvered yet? Right! you shall live
 Till I am worth your love; you shall be proud,

And I—but let time show. Did you not wonder?
 I sent to you because our compact weighed
 Upon my conscience—(you recall the night
 At Basil, which the gods confound!)—because
 Once more I aspire. I call you to my side;
 You come. You thought my message strange?

Fest.

So strange

That I must hope, indeed, your messenger
 Has mingled his own fancies with the words
 Purporting to be yours.

Par.

He said no more,

'T is probable, than the precious folks I leave
 Said fiftyfold more roughly. Well-a-day,

'T is true! poor Paracelsus is exposed

At last; a most egregious quack he proves:

And those he overreached must spit their hate

On one who, utterly beneath contempt,

Could yet deceive their topping wits. You heard

Bare truth; and at my bidding you come here

To speed me on my enterprise, as once

Your lavish wishes sped me, my own friend!

Fest. What is your purpose, Aureole?

Par.

Oh, for purpose,

There is no lack of precedents in a case

Like mine; at least, if not precisely mine,

The case of men cast off by those they sought

To benefit.

Fest. They really cast you off?

I only heard a vague tale of some priest,

Cured by your skill, who wrangled at your claim,
 Knowing his life's worth best ; and how the judge
 The matter was referred to, saw no cause
 To interfere, nor you to hide your full
 Contempt of him ; nor he, again, to smother
 His wrath thereat, which raised so fierce a flame
 That Basil soon was made no place for you.

Par. The affair of Liechtenfels? the shallowest fable,
 The last and silliest outrage—mere pretence !
 I knew it, I foretold it from the first,
 How soon the stupid wonder you mistook
 For genuine loyalty—a cheering promise
 Of better things to come—would pall and pass ;
 And every word comes true. Saul is among
 The prophets! Just so long as I was pleased
 To play off the mere antics of my art,
 Fantastic gambols leading to no end,
 I got huge praise: but one can ne'er keep down
 Our foolish nature's weakness. There they flocked,
 Poor devils, jostling, swearing and perspiring,
 Till the walls rang again ; and all for me !
 I had a kindness for them, which was right ;
 But then I stopped not till I tacked to that
 A trust in them and a respect—a sort
 Of sympathy for them : I must needs begin
 To teach them, not amaze them, “ to impart
 “ The spirit which should instigate the search
 “ Of truth,” just what you bade me ! I spoke out.
 Forthwith a mighty squadron, in disgust,

Filed off—"the sifted chaff of the sack," I said, '
Redoubling my endeavours to secure
The rest. When lo! one man had tarried so long
Only to ascertain if I supported
This tenet of his, or that; another loved
To hear impartially before he judged,
And having heard, now judged; this bland disciple
Passed for my dupe, but all along, it seems,
Spied error where his neighbours marvelled most;
That fiery doctor who had hailed me friend,
Did it because my by-paths, once proved wrong
And beacons properly, would commend again
The good old ways our sires jogged safely o'er,
Though not their squeamish sons; the other worthy
Discovered divers verses of St. John,
Which, read successively, refreshed the soul,
But, muttered backwards, cured the gout, the stone,
The colic, and what not. *Quid multa?* The end
Was a clear class-room, and a quiet leer
From grave folk, and a sour reproachful glance
From those in chief who, cap in hand, installed
The new professor scarce a year before;
And a vast flourish about patient merit
Obscured awhile by flashy tricks, but sure
Sooner or later to emerge in splendour—
Of which the example was some luckless wight
Whom my arrival had discomfited,
But now, it seems, the general voice recalled
To fill my chair and so efface the stain.

Basil had long incurred. I sought no better,
 Only a quiet dismissal from my post,
 And from my heart I wished them better suited
 And better served. Good night to Basil, then!
 But fast as I proposed to rid the tribe
 Of my obnoxious back, I could not spare them
 The pleasure of a parting kick.

Fest. You smile :
 Despise them as they merit !

Par. If I smile,
 'Tis with as very contempt as ever turned
 Flesh into stone. This courteous recompense
 This grateful . . . Festus, were your nature fit
 To be defiled, your eyes the eyes to ache
 At gangrene-blotches, eating poison-blains,
 The ulcerous barky scurf of leprosy
 Which finds—a man, and leaves—a hideous thing
 That cannot but be mended by hell fire,
 —I would lay bare to you the human heart
 Which God cursed long ago, and devils make since
 Their pet nest and their never-tiring home.
 O, sages have discovered we are born
 For various ends—to love, to know : has ever
 One stumbled, in his search, on any signs
 Of a nature in us formed to hate ? To hate ?
 If that be our true object which evokes
 Our powers in fullest strength, be sure 't is hate !
 Yet men have doubted if the best and bravest
 Of spirits can nourish him with hate alone.

I had not the monopoly of fools,
It seems at Basil.

Fest. But your plans, your plans !
I have yet to learn your purpose, Aureole !

Par. Whether to sink beneath such ponderous
shame,
To shrink up like a crushed snail, undergo
In silence and desist from further toil
And so subside into a monument
Of one their censure blasted ? or to bow
Cheerfully as submissively, to lower
My old pretensions even as Basil dictates,
To drop into the rank her wits assign me
And live as they prescribe and make that use
Of my poor knowledge which their rules allow,
Proud to be patted now and then, and careful
To practise the true posture for receiving
The amplest benefit from their hoofs' appliance
When they shall condescend to tutor me ?
Then one may feel resentment like a flame
Within, and deck false systems in truth's garb,
And tangle and entwine mankind with error,
And give them darkness for a dower and falsehood
For a possession, ages : or one may mope
Into a shade through thinking, or else drowse
Into a dreamless sleep and so die off.
But I,—now Festus shall divine !—but I
Am merely setting out once more, embracing
My earliest aims again ! What thinks he now ?

Fest. Your aims? the aims?—to Know? and where
is found

The early trust . . .

Par. Nay, not so fast; I say,
The aims—not the old means. You know they made
me

A laughing-stock; I was a fool; you know
The when and the how: hardly those means again!
Not but they had their beauty; who should know
Their passing beauty, if not I? But still
They were dreams, so let them vanish, yet in beauty,
If that may be. Stay: thus they pass in song!

[*He sings.*

Heap cassia, sandal-buds and stripes
Of labdanum, and aloe-balls,
Smear'd with dull nard an Indian wipes
From out her hair: such balsam falls
Down sea-side mountain pedestals,
From tree-tops where tired winds are fain,
Spent with the vast and howling main,
To treasure half their island-gain.

And strew faint sweetness from some old
Egyptian's fine worm-eaten shroud
Which breaks to dust when once unrolled;
Or shredded perfume, like a cloud
From closet long to quiet vowed,
With moth'd and dropping arras hung,
Mouldering her lute and books among,
As when a queen, long dead, was young.

Mine, every word! And on such pile shall die
 My lovely fancies, with fair perished things,
 Themselves fair and forgotten; yes, forgotten,
 Or why abjure them? So, I made this rhyme
 That fitting dignity might be preserved;
 No little proud was I; though the list of drugs
 Smacks of my old vocation, and the verse
 Halts like the best of Luther's psalms.

Fest.

But, Aureole,

Talk not thus wildly and madly. I am here—
 Did you know all! I have travelled far, indeed,
 To learn your wishes. Be yourself again!
 For in this mood I recognize you less
 Than in the horrible despondency
 I witnessed last. You may account this, joy;
 But rather let me gaze on that despair
 Than hear these incoherent words and see
 This flushed cheek and intensely-sparkling eye.

Par. Why, man, I was light-hearted in my prime,
 I am light-hearted now; what would you have?
 Aprile was a poet, I make songs—
 'Tis the very augury of success I want!
 Why should I not be joyous now as then?

Fest. Joyous! and how? and what remains for joy?
 You have declared the ends (which I am sick
 Of naming) are impracticable.

Par.

Ay,

Pursued as I pursued them—the arch-fool!
 Listen: my plan will please you not, 't is like,

But you are little versed in the world's ways.
 This is my plan—(first drinking its good luck)—
 I will accept all helps; all I despised
 So rashly at the outset, equally
 With early impulses, late years have quenched:
 I have tried each way singly: now for both!
 All helps! no one sort shall exclude the rest.
 I seek to know and to enjoy at once,
 Not one without the other as before.
 Suppose my labour should seem God's own cause
 Once more, as first I dreamed,—it shall not baulk me
 Of the meanest, earthliest, sensualest delight
 That may be snatched; for every joy is gain,
 And gain is gain, however small. My soul
 Can die then, nor be taunted—"what was gained?"
 Nor, on the other hand, should pleasure follow
 As though I had not spurned her hitherto,
 Shall she o'ercloud my spirit's rapt communion
 With the tumultuous Past, the teeming Future,
 Glorious with visions of a full success!

Fest. Success!

Par. And wherefore not? Why not prefer
 Results obtained in my best state of being,
 To those derived alone from seasons dark
 As the thoughts they bred? When I was best, my youth
 Unwasted, seemed success not surest too?
 It is the nature of darkness to obscure.
 I am a wanderer: I remember well
 One journey, how I feared the track was missed,

So long the city I desired to reach
 Lay hid; when suddenly its spires afar
 Flashed through the circling clouds; you may conceive
 My transport. Soon the vapours closed again,
 But I had seen the city, and one such glance
 No darkness could obscure: nor shall the Present—
 A few dull hours, a passing shame or two,
 Destroy the vivid memories of the Past.
 I will fight the battle out!—a little spent
 Perhaps, but still an able combatant.
 You look at my grey hair and furrowed brow?
 But I can turn even weakness to account:
 Of many tricks I know, 't is not the least
 To push the ruins of my frame, whereon
 The fire of vigour trembles scarce alive,
 Into a heap, and send the flame aloft!
 What should I do with age? So, sickness lends
 An aid; it being, I fear, the source of all
 We boast of: mind is nothing but disease
 And natural health is ignorance.

Fest.

I see

But one good symptom in this notable scheme:
 I feared your sudden journey had in view
 To wreak immediate vengeance on your foes;
 'T is not so: I am glad.

Par.

And if I please

To spit on them, to trample them, what then?
 'T is sorry warfare truly, but the fools
 Provoke it. I would spare their self-conceit,

But if they must provoke me, cannot suffer
 Forbearance on my part, if I may keep
 No quality in the shade, must needs put forth
 Power to match power, my strength against their
 strength,

And teach them their own game with their own arms—

Why, be it so and let them take their chance!

I am above them like a god, there's no

Hiding the fact: what idle scruples, then,

Were those that ever bade me soften it,

Communicate it gently to the world,

Instead of proving my supremacy,

Taking my natural station o'er their heads,

Then owning all the glory was a man's!

—And in my elevation man's would be.

But live and learn, though life's short, learning, hard!

And therefore, though the wreck of my past self,

I fear, dear Pütter, that your lecture-room

Must wait awhile for its best ornament,

The penitent empiric, who set up

For somebody, but soon was taught his place;

Now, but too happy to be let confess

His error, snuff the candles, and illustrate

(*Fiat experientia corpore vili*)

Your medicine's soundness in his person. Wait,

Good Pütter!

Fest. He who sneers thus, is a god!

Par. Ay, ay, laugh at me! I am very glad
 You are not gulled by all this swaggering; you

Can see the root of the matter!—how I strive
 To put a good face on the overthrow
 I have experienced, and to bury and hide
 My degradation in its length and breadth ;
 How the mean motives I would make you think
 Just mingle as is due with nobler aims,
 The appetites I modestly allow
 May influence me as being mortal still—
 Do goad me, drive me on, and fast supplant
 My youth's desires. You are no stupid dupe :
 You find me out ! Yes, I had sent for you
 To palm these childish lies upon you, Festus !
 Laugh—you shall laugh at me !

Fest.

The Past, then, Aureole,
 Proves nothing ? Is our interchange of love
 Yet to begin ? Have I to swear I mean
 No flattery in this speech or that ? For you,
 Whate'er you say, there is no degradation ;
 These low thoughts are no inmates of your mind,
 Or wherefore this disorder ? You are vexed
 As much by the intrusion of base views,
 Familiar to your adversaries, as they
 Were troubled should your qualities alight
 Amid their murky souls : not otherwise,
 A stray wolf which the winter forces down
 From our bleak hills, suffices to affright
 A village in the vales—while foresters
 Sleep calm though all night long the famished troops
 Snuff round and scratch against their crazy huts.

These evil thoughts are monsters, and will flee.

Par. May you be happy, Festus, my own friend !

Fest. Nay, further ; the delights you fain would think

The superseders of your nobler aims,
Though ordinary and harmless stimulants,
Will ne'er content you . . .

Par. Hush ! I once despised them,
But that soon passes. We are high at first,
In our demands, nor will abate a jot
Of toil's strict value ; but time passes o'er,
And humbler spirits accept what we refuse :
In short, when some such comfort is doled out
As these delights, we cannot long retain
The bitter contempt which urges us at first
To hurl it back, but hug it to our breast
And thankfully retire. This life of mine
Must be lived out and a grave thoroughly earned :
I am just fit for that and nought beside.
I told you once, I cannot now enjoy,
Unless I deem my knowledge gains through joy ;
Nor can I know, but straight warm tears reveal
My need of linking also joy to knowledge :
So, on I drive, enjoying all I can,
And knowing all I can. I speak, of course,
Confusedly ; this will better explain—feel here ! .
Quick beating, is it not ?—a fire of the heart
To work off some way, this as well as any.
So, Festus sees me fairly launched ; his calm

Compassionate look might have disturbed me once,
But now, far from rejecting, I invite
What bids me press the closer, lay myself
Open before him, and be soothed with pity ;
I hope, if he command hope ; and believe
As he directs me—satiating myself
With his enduring love. And Festus quits me
To give place to some credulous disciple
Who holds that God is wise, but Paracelsus
Has his peculiar merits : I suck in
That homage, chuckle o'er that admiration,
And then dismiss the fool ; for night is come.
And I betake myself to study again,
Till patient searchings after hidden lore
Half wring some bright truth from its prison ; my frame
Trembles, my forehead's veins swell out, my hair
Tingles for triumph ! Slow and sure the morn
Shall break on my pent room and dwindling lamp
And furnace dead, and scattered earths and ores ;
When, with a failing heart and throbbing brow,
I must review my captured truth, sum up
Its value, trace what ends to what begins,
Its present power with its eventual bearings,
Latent affinities, the views it opens,
And its full length in perfecting my scheme.
I view it sternly circumscribed, cast down
From the high place my fond hopes yielded it,
Proved worthless—which, in getting, yet had cost
Another wrench to this fast-falling frame.

Then, quick, the cup to quaff, that chases sorrow!
 I lapse back into youth, and take again
 My fluttering pulse, for evidence that God
 Means good to me, will make my cause His own.
 See! I have cast off this remorseless care
 Which clogged a spirit born to soar so free,
 And my dim chamber has become a tent,
 Festus is sitting by me, and his Michal . . .
 Why do you start? I say, she listening here,
 (For yonder's Würzburg through the orchard-boughs)
 Motions as though such ardent words should find
 No echo in a maiden's quiet soul,
 But her pure bosom heaves, her eyes fill fast
 With tears, her sweet lips tremble all the while!
 Ha, ha!

Fest. It seems, then, you expect to reap
 No unreal joy from this your present course,
 But rather . . .

Par. Death! To die! I owe that much
 To what, at least, I was. I should be sad
 To live contented after such a fall,
 To thrive and fatten after such reverse!
 The whole plan is a makeshift, but will last
 My time.

Fest. And you have never mused and said,
 "I had a noble purpose, and the strength
 "To compass it; but I have stopped half-way,
 "And wrongly given the firstfruits of my toil
 "To objects little worthy of the gift.

“ Why linger round them still ? why clench my fault !

“ Why seek for consolation in defeat,

“ In vain endeavours to derive a beauty

“ From ugliness ? why seek to make the most

“ Of what no power can change, nor strive instead

“ With mighty effort to redeem the Past

“ And, gathering up the treasures thus cast down,

“ To hold a steadfast course till I arrive

“ At their fit destination and my own ? ”

You have never pondered thus ?

Par.

Have I, you ask ?

Often at midnight, when most fancies come,

Would some such airy project visit me :

But ever at the end . . . or will you hear

The same thing in a tale, a parable ?

You and I, wandering over the world wide,

Chance to set foot upon a desert coast.

Just as we cry, “ No human voice before

Broke the inveterate silence of these rocks ! ”

—Their querulous echo startles us ; we turn :

What ravaged structure still looks o’er the sea ?

Some characters remain, too ! While we read,

The sharp salt wind, impatient for the last

Of even this record, wistfully comes and goes,

Or sings what we recover, mocking it.

This is the record ; and my voice, the wind’s.

[*He sings.*

Over the sea our galleys went,

With cleaving prows in order brave,

To a speeding wind and a bounding wave,
• A gallant armament :
Each bark built out of a forest-tree,
 Left leafy and rough as first it grew,
And nailed all over the gaping sides,
Within and without, with black bull-hides,
Seethed in fat and suppléd in flame,
To bear the playful billows' game :
So, each good ship was rude to see,
Rude and bare to the outward view,
 . But each upbore a stately tent
Where cedar-pales in scented row
Kept out the flakes of the dancing brine,
And an awning drooped the mast below,
In fold on fold of the purple fine,
That neither noontide nor star-shine
Nor moonlight cold which maketh mad,
 Might pierce the regal tenement.
When the sun dawned, oh, gay and glad
We set the sail and plied the oar ;
But when the night-wind blew like breath,
For joy of one day's voyage more,
We sang together on the wide sea,
Like men at peace on a peaceful shore ;
Each sail was loosed to the wind so free,
Each helm made sure by the twilight star,
And in a sleep as calm as death,
We, the voyagers from afar,
 Lay stretched along, each weary crew

In a circle round its wondrous tent
Whence gleamed soft light and curled rich scent,
 And with light and perfume, music too :
So the stars wheeled round, and the darkness past,
And at morn we started beside the mast,
And still each ship was sailing fast !

Now, one morn, land appeared !—a speck
Dim trembling betwixt sea and sky :
“ Avoid it,” cried our pilot, “ check
 “ The shout, restrain the eager eye !”
But the heaving sea was black behind
For many a night and many a day,
And land, though but a rock, drew nigh ;
So, we broke the cedar pales away,
Let the purple awning flap in the wind,
 And a statue bright was on every deck !
We shouted, every man of us,
And steered right into the harbour thus,
With pomp and pæan glorious.

A hundred shapes of lucid stone !
 All day we built its shrine for each,
A shrine of rock for every one,
Nor paused we till in the westering sun
 We sat together on the beach
To sing because our task was done :
When lo ! what shouts and merry songs !
What laughter all the distance stirs !

A loaded raft with happy throngs
Of gentle islanders !

“ Our isles are just at hand,” they cried,
“ Like cloudlets faint in even sleeping ;

“ Our temple-gates are opened wide,
“ Our olive-groves thick shade are keeping”
“ For these majestic forms”—they cried.

Oh, then we awoke with sudden start
From our deep dream, and knew, too late,
How bare the rock, how desolate,
Which had received our precious freight :

Yet we called out—“ Depart !

“ Our gifts, once given, must here abide.

“ Our work is done ; we have no heart

“ To mar our work,”—we cried.

Fest. In truth ?

Par. Nay, wait : all this in tracings faint
May still be read on that deserted rock,
On rugged stones strewn here and there, but piled
In order once : then follows—mark what follows :

“ The sad rhyme of the men who proudly clung
“ To their first fault, and withered in their pride !”

Fest. Come back then, Aureole ; as you fear God,
come !

This is foul sin ; come back. Renounce the Past,
Forswear the Future ; look for joy no more
But wait death’s summons amid holy sights,
And trust me for the event—peace, if not joy.

Return with me to Einsiedeln, dear Aureole !

Par. No way, no way ! it would not turn to good.
 A spotless child sleeps on the flowering moss—
 'T is well for him ; but when a sinful man,
 Envying such slumber, may desire to put
 His guilt away, shall he return at once
 To rest by lying there ? Our sires knew well
 (Spite of the grave discoveries of their sons)
 The fitting course for such ; dark cells, dim lamps,
 A stone floor one may writhe on like a worm :
 No mossy pillow blue with violets !

Fest. I see no symptom of these absolute
 And tyrannous passions. You are calmer now.
 This verse-making can purge you well enough
 Without the terrible penance you describe.
 You love me still : the lusts you fear, will never
 Outrage your friend. To Einsiedeln, once more !
 Say but the word !

Par. No, no ; those lusts forbid :
 They crouch, I know, cowering with half-shut eye
 Beside you ; 't is their nature. Thrust yourself
 Between them and their prey ; let some fool style me
 Or king or quack, it matters not, and try
 Your wisdom, urge them to forego their treat !
 No, no ; learn better and look deeper, Festus !
 If you knew how a devil sneers within me
 While you are talking now of this, now that,
 As though we differed scarcely save in trifles !

Fest. Do we so differ ? True, change must proceed,

Whether for good or ill; keep from me, which!
 Do not confide all secrets: I was born
 To hope, and you . . .

Par. To trust: you know the fruits!

Fest. Listen: I do believe, what you call trust
 Was self-delusion at the best: for, see!
 So long as God would kindly pioneer
 A path for you, and screen you from the world,
 Procure you full exemption from man's lot,
 Man's common hopes and fears, on the mere pretext
 Of your engagement in His service—yield you
 A limitless licence, make you God, in fact,
 And turn your slave—you were content to say
 Most courtly praises! What is it, at last,
 But selfishness without example? None
 Could trace God's will so plain as you, while yours
 Remained implied in it; but now you fail,
 And we, who prate about that will, are fools!
 In short, God's service is established here
 As He determines fit, and not your way,
 And this you cannot brook. Such discontent
 Is weak. Renounce all creatureship at once!
 Affirm an absolute right to have and use
 Your energies; as though the rivers should say—
 "We rush to the ocean; what have we to do
 With feeding streamlets, lingering in the vales,
 Sleeping in lazy pools?" Set up that plea,
 That will be bold at least!

Par. 'T is like enough

The serviceable spirits are those, no doubt,
 The East produces : lo, the master nods,
 And they raise terraces and garden-grounds
 In one night's space ; and, this done, straight begin
 Another century's sleep, to the great praise
 Of him that framed them wise and beautiful,
 Till a lamp's rubbing, or some chance akin,
 Wake them again. I am of different mould.
 I would have soothed my lord, and slaved for him,
 And done him service past my narrow bound,
 And thus I get rewarded for my pains !
 Beside, 't is vain to talk of forwarding
 God's glory otherwise ; this is alone
 The sphere of its increase, as far as men
 Increase it ; why, then, look beyond this sphere ?
 We are His glory ; and if we be glorious,
 Is not the thing achieved ?

Fest.

Shall one like me

• Judge hearts like yours ? Though years have changed
 you much,
 And you have left your first love, and retain
 Its empty shade to veil your crooked ways,
 Yet I still hold that you have honoured God.
 And who shall call your course without reward ?
 For, wherefore this repining at defeat,
 Had triumph ne'er inured you to high hopes ?
 I urge you to forsake the life you curse,
 And what success attends me ?—simply talk
 Of passion, weakness and remorse ; in short,

Anything but the naked truth—you choose
 This so-despised career, and cheaply hold
 My happiness, or rather other men's.
 Once more, return !

Par. . . . And quickly. Oporinüs
 Has pilfered half my secrets by this time :
 And we depart by daybreak. I am weary,
 I know not how ; not even the wine-cup soothes
 My brain to-night . . .
 Do you not thoroughly despise me, Festus ?
 No flattery ! One like you needs not be told
 We live and breathe deceiving and deceived.
 Do you not scorn me from your heart of hearts,
 Me and my cant, each petty subterfuge,
 My rhymes and all this frothy shower of words,
 My glozing self-deceit, my outward crust
 Of lies which wrap, as tetter, morphew, furfair
 Wrap the sound flesh ?—so, see you flatter not !
 Even God flatters ! but my friend, at least,
 Is true. I would depart, secure henceforth
 Against all further insult, hate and wrong
 From puny foes ; my one friend's scorn shall brand me :
 No fear of sinking deeper !

Fest. . . . No, dear Aureole !
 No, no ; I came to counsel faithfully.
 There are old rules, made long ere we were born,
 By which I judge you. I, so fallible,
 So infinitely low beside your mighty,
 Majestic spirit !—even I can see

You own some higher law than ours which calls
 Sin, what is no sin—weakness, what is strength.
 But I have only these, such as they are,
 To guide me; and I blame you where they bid,
 Only so long as blaming promises
 To win peace for your soul: the more, that sorrow
 Has fallen on me of late, and they have helped me
 So that I faint not under my distress.
 But wherefore should I scruple to avow
 In spite of all, as brother judging brother,
 Your fate to me is most inexplicable?
 And should you perish without recompense
 And satisfaction yet—too hastily
 I have relied on love: you may have sinned,
 But you have loved. As a mere human matter—
 As I would have God deal with fragile men
 In the end—I say that you will triumph yet!

Par. Have you felt sorrow, Festus?—'t is because
 You love me. Sorrow, and sweet Michal yours!
 Well thought on: never let her know this last
 Dull winding-up of all: these miscreants dared
 Insult me—me she loved:—so, grieve her not.

Fest. Your success can little grieve her now.

Par. Michal is dead! pray Christ we do not craze!

Fest. Aureole, dear Aureole, look not on me thus!
 Fool, fool! this is the heart grown sorrow-proof—
 I cannot bear those eyes.

Par. Nay, really dead?

Fest. 'T is scarce a month.

Par. Stone dead!—then you have laid her
 Among the flowers ere this. Now, do you know,
 I can reveal a secret which shall comfort
 Even you. I have no julep, as men think,
 To cheat the grave; but a far better secret.
 Know, then, you did not ill to trust your love
 To the cold earth: I have thought much of it:
 For I believe we do not wholly die.

Fest. Aureole!

Par. Nay, do not laugh; there is a reason
 For what I say: I think the soul can never
 Taste death. I am, just now, as you may see,
 Very unfit to put so strange a thought
 In an intelligible dress of words;
 But take it as my trust, she is not dead.

Fest. But not on this account alone? you surely,
 —Aureole, you have believed this all along?

Par. And Michal sleeps among the roots and dews,
 While I am moved at Basil, and full of schemes
 For Nuremberg, and hoping and despairing,
 As though it mattered how the farce plays out,
 So it be quickly played. Away, away!
 Have your will, rabble! while we fight the prize,
 Troop you in safety to the snug back-seats,
 And leave a clear arena for the brave
 About to perish for your sport!—Behold!

V. PARACELSUS ATTAINS.

SCENE, Salzburg; a cell in the Hospital of St. Sebastian, 1541.

FESTUS, PARACELSUS.

Fest. No change! The weary night is well-nigh spent,

The lamp burns low, and through the casement-bars
 Grey morning glimmers feebly: yet no change!
 Another night, and still no sigh has stirred
 That fallen discoloured mouth, no pang relit
 Those fixed eyes, quenched by the decaying body,
 Like torch-flame choked in dust. While all beside
 Was breaking, to the last they held out bright,
 As a stronghold where life intrenched itself;
 But they are dead now—very blind and dead:
 He will drowse into death without a groan!

My Aureole—my forgotten, ruined Aureole!
 The days are gone, are gone! How grand thou wast!
 And now not one of those who struck thee down—
 Poor, glorious spirit—concerns him even to stay
 And satisfy himself his little hand
 Could turn God's image to a livid thing.
 Another night, and yet no change! 'Tis much
 That I should sit by him, and bathe his brow,
 And chafe his hands; 'tis much: but he will sure
 Know me, and look on me, and speak to me
 Once more—but only once! His hollow cheek

Looked all night long as though a creeping laugh
 At his own state were just about to break
 From the dying man: my brainswam, my throat swelled,
 And yet I could not turn away. In truth,
 They told me how, when first brought here, he seemed
 Resolved to live, to lose no faculty ;
 Thus striving to keep up his shattered strength,
 Until they bore him to this stifling cell :
 When straight his features fell, an hour made white
 The flushed face and relaxed the quivering limb
 Only the eye remained intense awhile
 As though it recognized the tomb-like place,
 And then he lay as here he lies.

Ay, here!

Here is earth's noblest, nobly garlanded—
 Her bravest champion with his well-won meed—
 Her best achievement, her sublime amends
 For countless generations fleeting fast
 And followed by no trace ;—the creature-god
 She instances when angels would dispute
 The title of her brood to rank with them.
 Angels, this is our angel! Those bright forms
 We clothe with purple, crown and call to thrones,
 Are human ; but not his : those are but men
 Whom other men press round and kneel before ;
 Those palaces are dwelt in by mankind ;
 Higher provision is for him you seek
 Amid our pomps and glories : see it here !
 Behold earth's paragon ! Now, raise thee, clay !

God! Thou art Love! I build my faith on that!
Even as I watch beside Thy tortured child
Unconscious whose hot tears fall fast by him,
So doth Thy right hand guide us through the world
Wherein we stumble. God! what shall we say?
How has he sinned? How else should he have done?
Surely he sought Thy praise—Thy praise, for all
He might be busied by the task so much
As to forget awhile its proper end.
Dost Thou well, Lord? Thou canst not but prefer
That I should range myself upon his side—
How could he stop at every step to set
Thy glory forth? Hadst Thou but granted him
Success, Thy honour would have crowned success,
A halo round a star. Or, say he erred,—
Save him, dear God; it will be like Thee: bathe him
In light and life! Thou art not made like us;
We should be wroth in such a case; but Thou
Forgivest—so, forgive these passionate thoughts
Which come unsought and will not pass away!
I know Thee, who hast kept my path, and made
Light for me in the darkness, tempering sorrow
So that it reached me like a solemn joy;
It were too strange that I should doubt Thy love.
But what am I? Thou madest him and knowest
How he was fashioned. I could never err
That way: the quiet place beside Thy feet,
Reserved for me, was ever in my thoughts:
But he—Thou shouldst have favoured him as well

Ah! he wakes! Aureole, I am here! 'tis Festus!
 I cast away all wishes save one wish—
 Let him but know me, only speak to me!
 He mutters; louder and louder; any other
 Than I, with brain less laden, could collect
 What he pours forth. Dear Aureole, do but look!
 Is it talking or singing this he utters, fast?
 Misery, that he should fix me with his eye,
 Quick talking to some other all the while!
 If he would husband this wild vehemence
 Which frustrates its intent!—I heard, I know
 I heard my name amid those rapid words.
 Oh, he will know me yet! Could I divert
 This current, lead it somehow gently back
 Into the channels of the Past!—His eye,
 Brighter than ever! It must recognize me!

Let me speak to him in another's name.
 I am Erasmus: I am here to pray
 That Paracelsus use his skill for me.
 The schools of Paris and of Padua send
 These questions for your learning to resolve.
 We are your students, noble master: leave
 This wretched cell, what business have you here?
 Our class awaits you; come to us once more!
 (O agony! the utmost I can do
 Touches him not; how else arrest his ear?)
 I am commissioned . . . I shall craze like him!
 Better be mute and see what God shall send.

Par. Stay; stay with me!

Fest. I will; I am come here
To stay with you—Festus, you loved of old;
Festus, you know, you must know!

Par. Festus! Where's
Aprile, then? Has he not chanted softly
The melodies I heard all night? I could not
Get to him for a cold hand on my breast,
But I made out his music well enough,
O, well enough! If they have filled him full
With magical music, as they freight a star
With light, and have remitted all his sin,
They will forgive me too; I too shall know!

Fest. Festus, your Festus!

Par. Ask him if Aprile
Knows as he Loves—if I shall Love and Know?
I try; but that cold hand, like lead—so cold!

Fest. My hand, see!

Par. Ah, the curse, Aprile, Aprile!
We get so near—so very, very near!
'T is an old tale: Jove strikes the Titans down
Not when they set about their mountain-piling,
But when another rock would crown their work!
And Phaeton—doubtless his first radiant plunge
Astonished mortals; though the gods were calm,
And Jove prepared his thunder: all old tales!

Fest. And what are these to you?

Par. Ay, fiends must laugh
So cruelly, so well; most like I never

Could tread a single pleasure underfoot,
 But they were grinning by my side, were chuckling
 To see me toil and drop away by flakes!
 Hell-spawn! I am glad, most glad, that thus I fail!
 Your cunning has o'ershot its aim. One year,
 One month, perhaps, and I had served your turn!
 You should have curbed your spite awhile. But now,
 Who will believe 't was you that held me back?
 Listen: there's shame, and hissing, and contempt,
 And none but laughs who names me, none but spits
 Measureless scorn upon me, me alone,
 The quack, the cheat, the liar,—all on me!
 And thus your famous plan to sink mankind
 In silence and despair, by teaching them
 One of their race had probed the inmost truth,
 Had done all man could do, yet failed no less—
 Your wise plan proves abortive. Men despair?
 Ha, ha! why, they are hooting the empiric,
 The ignorant and incapable fool who rushed
 Madly upon a work beyond his wits;
 Nor doubt they but the simplest of themselves
 Could bring the matter to triumphant issue.
 So pick and choose, among them all, accursed!
 Try now, persuade some other to slave for you,
 To ruin body and soul to work your ends!
 No, no; I am the first and last, I think.

Hest. Dear friend, who are accursed? who has
 done . . .

Par. What have I done? Fiends dare ask that? or
 you,

Brave men? Oh, you can chime in boldly, backed
 By the others! What had you to do, sage peers?
 Here stand my rivals; Latin, Arab, Jew,
 Greek, join dead hands against me: all I ask
 Is, that the world enrol my name with theirs,
 And even this poor privilege, it seems,
 They range themselves, prepared to disallow.
 Only observe: why, fiends may learn from them!
 How they talk calmly of my throes, my fierce
 Aspirings, terrible watchings, each one claiming
 Its price of blood and brain; how they dissect
 And sneeringly disparage the few truths
 Got at a life's cost; they too hanging the while
 About my neck, their lies misleading me
 And their dead names browbeating me! Grey crew,
 Yet steeped in fresh malevolence from hell,
 Is there a reason for your hate? My truths
 Have shaken a little the palm about each prince?
 Just think, Aprile, all these leering dotards
 Were bent on nothing less than to be crowned
 As we! That yellow blear-eyed wretch in chief
 To whom the rest cringe low with feigned respect,
 Galen of Pergamos and hell—nay speak
 The tale, old man! We met there face to face:
 I said the crown should fall from thee. Once more
 We meet as in that ghastly vestibule:
 Look to my brow! Have I redeemed my pledge?

Fest. Peace, peace; ah, see!

Par.

Oh, emptiness of fame

Oh Persic Zoroaster, lord of stars !
 — Who said these old renowns, dead long ago,
 Could make me overlook the living world
 To gaze through gloom at where they stood, indeed,
 But stand no longer ? What a warm light life
 After the shade ! In truth, my delicate witch,
 My serpent-queen, you did but well to hide
 The juggles I had else detected. Fire
 May well run harmless o'er a breast like yours !
 The cave was not so darkened by the smoke
 But that your white limbs dazzled me : oh, white,
 And panting as they twinkled, wildly dancing !
 I cared not for your passionate gestures then,
 But now I have forgotten the charm of charms,
 The foolish knowledge which I came to seek,
 While I remember that quaint dance ; and thus
 I am come back, not for those mummeries,
 But to love you, and to kiss your little feet
 Soft as an ermine's winter coat !

Fest.

A light

Will struggle through these thronging words at last,
 As in the angry and tumultuous West
 A soft star trembles through the drifting clouds.
 These are the strivings of a spirit which hates
 So sad a vault should coop it, and calls up
 The Past to stand between it and its fate.
 Were he at Einsiedeln—or Michal here !

Par. Cruel ! I seek her now—I kneel—I shriek—
 I clasp her vesture—but she fades, still fades ;

And she is gone ; sweet human love is gone !
 'T is only when they spring to heaven that angels
 Reveal themselves to you ; they sit all day
 Beside you, and lie down at night by you
 Who care not for their presence, muse or sleep,
 And all at once they leave you and you know them !
 We are so fooled, so cheated ! Why, even now
 I am not too secure against foul play :
 The shadows deepen and the walls contract—
 No doubt some treachery is going on !
 'T is very dusk. Where are we put, Aprile ?
 Have they left us in the lurch ? This murky, loathsome
 Death-trap, this slaughter-house, is not the hall
 In the golden city ! Keep by me, Aprile !
 There is a hand groping amid the blackness
 To catch us. Have the spider-fingers got you,
 Poet ? Hold on me for your life ! if once
 They pull you !—Hold !

'T is but a dream—no more !

I have you still ; the sun comes out again ;
 Let us be happy : all will yet go well !
 Let us confer : is it not like, Aprile,
 That spite of trouble, this ordeal passed,
 The value of my labours ascertained,
 Just as some stream foams long among the rocks
 But after glideth glassy to the sea,
 So, full content shall henceforth be my lot ?
 What think you, poet ? Louder ! Your clear voice
 Vibrates too like a harp-string. Do you ask

How could I still remain on earth, should God
 Grant me the great approval which I seek ?
 I, you, and God can comprehend each other,
 But men would murmur, and with cause enough ;
 For when they saw me, stainless of all sin,
 Preserved and sanctified by inward light,
 They would complain that comfort, shut from them,
 I drank thus unespied ; that they live on,
 Nor taste the quiet of a constant joy,
 For ache and care and doubt and weariness,
 While I am calm ; help being vouchsafed to me,
 And hid from them !—'T were best consider that !
 You reason well, Aprile ; but at least
 Let me know this, and die ! Is this too much ?
 I will learn this, if God so please, and die !

If Thou shalt please, dear God, if Thou shalt please !
 We are so weak, we know our motives least
 In their confused beginning. If at first
 I sought . . . but wherefore bare my heart to Thee ?
 I know Thy mercy ; and already thoughts
 Flock fast about my soul and comfort it,
 And intimate I cannot wholly fail,
 For love and praise would clasp me willingly
 Could I resolve to seek them. Thou art good,
 And I should be content. Yet—yet first show
 I have done wrong in daring ! Rather give
 The supernatural consciousness of strength
 Which fed my youth ! Only one hour of that

With Thee to help—O what should bar me then !

Lost, lost! Thus things are ordered here! God's creatures,
 And yet He takes no pride in us!—none, none!
 Truly there needs another life to come!
 If this be all—(I must tell Festus that)
 And other life await us not—for one,
 I say 't is a poor cheat, a stupid bungle,
 A wretched failure. I, for one, protest
 Against it, and I hurl it back with scorn !

Well, onward though alone: small time remains,
 And much to do: I must have fruit, must reap
 Some profit from my toils. I doubt my body
 Will hardly serve me through; while I have laboured
 It has decayed; and now that I demand
 Its best assistance, it will crumble fast:
 A sad thought, a sad fate! How very full
 Of wormwood 't is, that just at altar-service,
 The rapt hymn rising with the rolling smoke,
 When glory dawns and all is at the best—
 The sacred fire may flicker and grow faint
 And die for want of a wood-piler's help!
 Thus fades the flagging body, and the soul
 Is pulled down in the overthrow. Well, well—
 Let men catch every word, let them lose nought
 Of what I say; something may yet be done.

They are ruins! Trust me who am one of you!

All ruins, glorious once, but lonely now.
 It makes my heart sick to behold you crouch
 Beside your desolate fane: the arches dim,
 The crumbling columns grand against the moon—
 Could I but rear them up once more—but that
 May never be, so leave them! Trust me, friends,
 Why should you linger here when I have built
 A far resplendent temple, all your own?
 Trust me, they are but ruins! See, Aprile,
 Men will not heed! Yet were I not prepared
 With better refuge for them, tongue of mine
 Should ne'er reveal how blank their dwelling is:
 I would sit down in silence with the rest.

Ha, what? you spit at me, you grin and shriek
 Contempt into my ear—my ear which drank
 God's accents once? you curse me? Why men, men,
 I am not formed for it! Those hideous eyes
 Will be before me sleeping, waking, praying,
 They will not let me even die. Spare, spare me,
 Sinning or no, forget that, only spare me
 The horrible scorn! You thought I could support it,
 But now you see what silly fragile creature
 Cowers thus. I am not good nor bad enough,
 Not Christ nor Cain, yet even Cain was saved
 From hate like this. Let me but totter back!
 Perhaps I shall elude those jeers which creep
 Into my very brain, and shut these scorched
 Eyelids, and keep those mocking faces out.

Listen, Aprile! I am very calm :
 Be not deceived, there is no passion here
 Where the blood leaps like an imprisoned thing :
 I am calm : I will exterminate the race !
 Enough of that : 't is said and it shall be.
 And now be merry : safe and sound am I
 Who broke through their best ranks to get at you.
 And such a havoc, such a rout, Aprile!

Fest. Have you no thought, no memory for me,
 Aureole? I am so wretched—my pure Michal
 Is gone, and you alone are left to me,
 And even you forget me. Take my hand—
 Lean on me, thus. Do you not know me, Aureole?

Par. Festus, my own friend, you are come at last?
 As you say, 't is an awful enterprise ;
 But you believe I shall go through with it :
 'T is like you, and I thank you. Thank him for me,
 Dear Michal! See how bright St. Saviour's spire
 Flames in the sunset ; all its figures quaint
 Gay in the glancing light : you might conceive them
 A troop of yellow-vested white-haired Jews
 Bound for their own land where redemption dawns !

Fest. Not that blest time—not our youth's time,
 dear God !

Par. Ha—stay! true, I forget—all is done since !
 And he is come to judge me. How he speaks,
 How calm, how well! yes, it is true, all true ;
 All quackery ; all deceit ! myself can laugh
 The first at it, if you desire : but still

You know the obstacles which taught me tricks
 So foreign to my nature—envy and hate,
 Blind opposition, brutal prejudice,
 Bald ignorance—what wonder if I sunk
 To humour men the way they most approved?
 My cheats were never palmed on such as you,
 Dear Festus! I will kneel if you require me,
 Impart the meagre knowledge I possess,
 Explain its bounded nature, and avow
 My insufficiency—whate'er you will:
 I give the fight up! let there be an end,
 A privacy, an obscure nook for me.
 I want to be forgotten even by God!
 But if that cannot be, dear Festus, lay me,
 When I shall die, within some narrow grave,
 Not by itself—for that would be too proud—
 But where such graves are thickest; let it look
 Nowise distinguished from the hillocks round,
 So that the peasant at his brother's bed
 May tread upon my own and know it not;
 And we shall all be equal at the last,
 Or classed according to life's natural ranks,
 Fathers, sons, brothers, friends—not rich, nor wise,
 Nor gifted: lay me thus, then say, "He lived
 "Too much advanced before his brother men;
 "They kept him still in front: 't was for their good
 "But yet a dangerous station. It were strange
 "That he should tell God he had never ranked
 "With men: so, here at least he is a man!"

Fest. That God shall take thee to His breast, dear spirit,

Unto His breast, be sure ! and here on earth
 Shall splendour sit upon thy name for ever !
 Sun ! all the heaven is glad for thee : what care
 If lower mountains light their snowy phares
 At thine effulgence, yet acknowledge not
 The source of day ? Their theft shall be their bale :
 For after-ages shall retrack thy beams,
 And put aside the crowd of busy ones
 And worship thee alone—the master-mind,
 The thinker, the explorer, the creator !
 Then, who should sneer at the convulsive throes
 With which thy deeds were born, would scorn as well
 The winding sheet of subterraneous fire
 Which, pent and writhing, sends no less at last
 Huge islands up amid the simmering sea !
 Behold thy might in me ! thou hast infused
 Thy soul in mine ; and I am grand as thou,
 Seeing I comprehend thee—I so simple,
 Thou so august ! I recognize thee first ;
 I saw thee rise, I watched thee early and late,
 And though no glance reveal thou dost accept
 My homage—thus no less I proffer it,
 And bid thee enter gloriously thy rest !

Par. Festus !

Fest. I am for noble Aureole, God !
 I am upon his side, come weal or woe !
 His portion shall be mine ! He has done well !

I would have sinned, had I been strong enough;
 As he has sinned! Reward him or I waive
 Reward! If Thou canst find no place for him,
 He shall be king elsewhere, and I will be
 His slave for ever! There are two of us!

Par. Dear Festus!

Fest. Here, dear Aureole! ever by you!

Par. Nay, speak on, or I dream again. Speak on!
 Some story, anything—only your voice.
 I shall dream else. Speak on! ay, leaning so!

Fest. Thus the Mayne glideth

Where my Love abideth.

Sleep's no softer: it proceeds

On through lawns, on through meads,

On and on; whate'er befall,

Meandering and musical,

Though the niggard pasturage

Bears not on its shaven ledge

Aught but weeds and waving grasses

To view the river as it passes,

Save here and there a scanty patch

Of primroses, too faint to catch

A weary bee.

Par. More, more; say on!

Fest. And scarce it pushes

Its gentle way through strangling rushes,

Where the glossy kingfisher

Flutters when noon-heats are near,

Glad the shelving banks to shun,

Red and steaming in the sun,
 Where the shrew-mouse with pale throat
 Burrows, and the speckled stoat ;
 Where the quick sandpipers flit
 In and out the marl and grit
 That seems to breed them, brown as they :
 Nought disturbs its quiet way,
 Save some lazy stork that springs,
 Trailing it with legs and wings,
 Whom the shy fox from the hill
 Rouses, creep he ne'er so still.

Par. My heart! they loose my heart, those simple
 words ;

Its darkness passes, which nought else could touch :
 Like some dark snake that force may not expel,
 Which glideth out to music sweet and low.
 What were you doing when your voice broke through
 A chaos of ugly images? You, indeed!
 Are you alone here?

Fest. All alone: you know me?

This cell?

Par. An unexceptionable vault :
 Good brick and stone: the bats kept out, the rats
 Kept in: a snug nook: how should I mistake it?

Fest. But wherefore am I here?

Par. Ah, well remembered !

Why, for a purpose—for a purpose, Festus !
 'Tis like me: here I trifle while time fleets,
 And this occasion, lost, will ne'er return.

You are here to be instructed. I will tell
 God's message ; but I have so much to say,
 I fear to leave half out. All is confused
 No doubt ; but doubtless you will learn in time.
 He would not else have brought you here : no doubt
 I shall see clearer soon.

Fest. Tell me but this—

You are not in despair ?

Par. I ? and for what ?

Fest. Alas, alas ! he knows not, as I feared !

Par. What is it you would ask me with that earnest,
 Dear, searching face ?

Fest. How feel you, Aureole ?

Par. Well !

Well : 't is a strange thing. I am dying, Festus,
 And now that fast the storm of life subsides,
 I first perceive how great the whirl has been.
 I was calm then, who am so dizzy now—
 Calm in the thick of the tempest, but no less
 A partner of its motion and mixed up
 With its career. The hurricane is spent,
 And the good boat speeds through the brightening
 weather ;
 But is it earth or sea that heaves below ?
 The gulf rolls like a meadow-swell, o'erstrewn
 With ravaged boughs and remnants of the shore ;
 And now some islet, loosened from the land,
 Swims past with all its trees, sailing to ocean ;
 And now the air is full of uptorn canes,

Light strippings from the fan-trees, tamarisks
Unrooted, with their birds still clinging to them,
All high in the wind. Even so my varied life
Drifts by me ; I am young, old, happy, sad,
Hoping, desponding, acting, taking rest,
And all at once : that is ; those past conditions
Float back at once on me. If I select
Some special epoch from the crowd, 't is but
To will, and straight the rest dissolve away ;
And only that particular state is present,
With all its long-forgotten circumstance
Distinct and vivid as at first—myself
A careless looker-on and nothing more !
Indifferent and amused but nothing more !
And this is death : I understand it all.
New being waits me ; new perceptions must
Be born in me before I plunge therein ;
Which last is Death's affair ; and while I speak,
Minute by minute he is filling me
With power ; and while my foot is on the threshold
Of boundless life—the doors unopened yet,
All preparations not complete within—
I turn new knowledge upon old events,
And the effect is . . . but I must not tell ;
It is not lawful. Your own turn will come
One day. Wait, Festus ! You will die like me !
Fest. 'T is of that past life that I burn to hear !
Par. You wonder it engages me just now ?
In truth, I wonder too. What's life to me ?

Where'er I look is fire, where'er I listen
 Music, and where I tend bliss evermore.
 Yet how can I refrain? 'T is a refined
 Delight to view those chances,—one last view.
 I am so near the perils I escape,
 That I must play with them and turn them over,
 To feel how fully they are past and gone.
 Still it is like some further cause exists
 For this peculiar mood—some hidden purpose;
 Did I not tell you something of it, Festus?
 I had it fast, but it has somehow slipt
 Away from me; it will return anon.

Fest. (Indeed his cheek seems young again, his voice
 Complete with its old tones: that little laugh
 Concluding every phrase, with upturned eye,
 As though one stooped above his head to whom
 He looked for confirmation and approval,
 Where was it gone so long, so well preserved?
 Then, the fore-finger pointing as he speaks,
 Like one who traces in an open book
 The matter he declares; 't is many a year
 Since I remarked it last: and this in him,
 But now a ghastly wreck!)

And can it be,
 Dear Aureole, you have then found out at last
 That worldly things are utter vanity?
 That man is made for weakness, and should wait
 In patient ignorance till God appoint . . .

Par. Ha, the purpose, the true purpose: that is it!

How could I fail to apprehend ! You here,
 I thus ! But no more trifling ; I see all,
 I know all : my last mission shall be done
 If strength suffice. No trifling ! Stay ; this posture
 Hardly befits one thus about to speak :
 I will arise.

Fest. Nay, Aureole, are you wild ?
 You cannot leave your couch.

Par. No help ; no help ;
 Not even your hand. So ! there, I stand once more !
 Speak from a couch ? I never lectured thus.
 My gown—the scarlet lined with fur ; now put
 The chain about my neck ; my signet-ring
 Is still upon my hand, I think—even so ;
 Last, my good sword ; ah, trusty Azoth, leapest
 Beneath thy master's grasp for the last time ?
 This couch shall be my throne : I bid these walls
 Be consecrate, this wretched cell become
 A shrine, for here God speaks to men through me !
 Now, Festus, I am ready to begin.

Fest. I am dumb with wonder.

Par. Listen, therefore, Festus !
 There will be time enough, but none to spare.
 I must content myself with telling only
 The most important points. You doubtless feel
 That I am happy, Festus ; very happy.

Fest. 'Tis no delusion which uplifts him thus !
 Then you are pardoned, Aureole, all your sin ?

Par. Ay, pardoned ! yet why pardoned ?

Fest. 'T is God's praise
That man is bound to seek, and you . . .

Par. Have lived !
We have to live alone to set forth well
God's praise. 'T is true, I sinned much, as I thought,
And in effect need mercy, for I strove
To do that very thing ; but, do your best
Or worst, praise rises, and will rise for ever.
Pardon from Him, because of praise denied—
Who calls me to Himself to exalt Himself ?
He might laugh as I laugh !

Fest. But all comes
To the same thing. 'T is fruitless for mankind
To fret themselves with what concerns them not ;
They are no use that way : they should lie down
Content as God has made them, nor go mad
In thriveless cares to better what is ill.

Par. No, no ; mistake me not ; let me not work
More harm than I have done ! This is my case :
If I go joyous back to God, yet bring
No offering, if I render up my soul
Without the fruits it was ordained to bear,
If I appear the better to love God
For sin, as one who has no claim on Him,—
Be not deceived ! It may be surely thus
With me, while higher prizes still await
The mortal persevering to the end.
Beside I am not all so valueless :
I have been something, though too soon I left

Following the instincts of that happy time !

Fest. What happy time ? For God's sake, for man's
sake,

What time was happy ? All I hope to know
That answer will decide. What happy time ?

Par. When but the time I vowed myself to man ?

Fest. Great God, Thy judgments are inscrutable !

Par. Yes, it was in me ; I was born for it—

I, Paracelsus : it was mine by right.

Doubtless a searching and impetuous soul
Might learn from its own motions that some task

Like this awaited it about the world ;

Might seek somewhere in this blank life of ours

For fit delights to stay its longings vast ;

And, grappling Nature, so prevail on her

To fill the creature full she dared to frame

Hungry for joy ; and, bravely tyrannous,

Grow in demand, still craving more and more,

And make each joy conceded prove a pledge

Of other joy to follow—bating nought

Of its desires, still seizing fresh pretence

To turn the knowledge and the rapture wrung

As an extreme, last boon, from destiny,

Into occasion for new covetings,

New strifes, new triumphs :—doubtless a strong soul,

Alone, unaided might attain to this,

So glorious is our nature, so august

Man's inborn uninstructed impulses,

His naked spirit so majestic !

But this was born in me ; I was made so ;
Thus much time saved : the feverish appetites,
The tumult of unproved desire, the unaimed
Uncertain yearnings, aspirations blind,
Distrust, mistake, and all that ends in tears
Were saved me ; thus I entered on my course !
You may be sure I was not all exempt
From human trouble ; just so much of doubt
As bade me plant a surer foot upon
The sun-road, kept my eye unruined 'mid
The fierce and flashing splendour, set my heart
Trembling so much as warned me I stood there
On sufferance—not to idly gaze, but cast
Light on a darkling race ; save for that doubt,
I stood at first where all aspire at last
To stand : the secret of the world was mine.
I knew, I felt, (perception unexpressed,
Uncomprehended by our narrow thought,
But somehow felt and known in every shift
And change in the spirit,—nay, in every pore
Of the body, even,)—what God is, what we are,
What life is—how God tastes an infinite joy
In infinite ways—one everlasting bliss,
From whom all being emanates, all power
Proceeds ; in whom is life for evermore,
Yet whom existence in its lowest form
Includes ; where dwells enjoyment there is He !
With still a flying point of bliss remote,
A happiness in store afar, a sphere

Of distant glory in full view ; thus climbs
 Pleasure its heights for ever and for ever !
 The centre-fire heaves underneath the earth,
 And the earth changes like a human face ;
 The molten ore bursts up among the rocks,
 Winds into the stone's heart, outbranches bright
 In hidden mines, spots barren river-beds,
 Crumbles into fine sand where sunbeams bask—
 God joys therein ! The wroth sea's waves are edged
 With foam, white as the bitten lip of hate,
 When, in the solitary waste, strange groups
 Of young volcanos come up, cyclops-like,
 Staring together with their eyes on flame—
 God tastes a pleasure in their uncouth pride !
 Then all is still ; earth is a wintry ölöð :
 But spring-wind, like a dancing psaltröss, passes
 Over its breast to waken it, rare verdure
 Buds tenderly upon rough banks, between
 The withered tree-roots and the cracks of frost,
 Like a smile striving with a wrinkled face ;
 The grass grows bright, the boughs are swoln with
 blossoms
 Like chrysalids impatient for the air,
 The shining dorrs are busy, beetles run
 Along the furrows, ants make their ado ;
 Above, birds fly in merry flocks, the lark
 Soars up and up, shivering for very joy ;
 Afar the ocean sleeps ; white fishing-gulls
 Flit where the strand is purple with its tribe !

Of nested limpets; savage creatures seek
 Their loves in wood and plain—and God renews
 His ancient rapture! Thus He dwells in all,
 From life's minute beginnings, up at last
 To man—the consummation of this scheme
 Of being, the completion of this sphere
 Of life: whose attributes had here and there
 Been scattered o'er the visible world before,
 Asking to be combined, dim fragments meant
 To be united in some wondrous whole,
 Imperfect qualities throughout creation,
 Suggesting some one creature yet to make,
 Some point where all those scattered rays should meet
 Convergent in the faculties of man.
 Power—neither put forth blindly, nor controlled
 Calmly by perfect knowledge; to be used
 At risk, inspired or checked by hope and fear;
 Knowledge—not intuition, but the slow
 Uncertain fruit of an enhancing toil,
 Strengthened by love: love—not serenely pure,
 But strong from weakness, like a chance-sown plant
 Which, cast on stubborn soil, puts forth changed
 buds
 And softer stains, unknown in happier climes;
 Love which endures and doubts and is oppressed,
 And cherished, suffering much and much sustained;
 A blind, oft-failing, yet believing love,
 A half-enlightened, often-chequered trust;
 Hints and provisions of which faculties,

Are strewn confusedly everywhere about
 The inferior natures, and all lead up higher,
 All shape out dimly the superior race,
 The heir of hopes too fair to turn out false,
 And man appears at last: So far the seal
 Is put on life; one stage of being complete,
 One scheme wound up: and from the grand result
 A supplementary reflux of light,
 Illustrates all the inferior grades, explains
 Each back step in the circle. Not alone
 For their possessor dawn those qualities,
 But the new glory mixes with the heaven
 And earth; man, once descried, imprints for ever
 His presence on all lifeless things: the winds,
 Are henceforth voices, in a wail or shout,
 A querulous mutter, or a quick gay laugh,
 Never a senseless gust now man is born!
 The herded pines commune and have deep thoughts,
 A secret they assemble to discuss
 When the sun drops behind their trunks which glare
 Like grates of hell: the peerless cup afloat
 Of the lake-lily is an urn, some nymph
 Swims bearing high above her head: no bird
 Whistles unseen, but through the gaps above
 That let light in upon the gloomy woods,
 A shape peeps from the breezy forest-top,
 Arch with small puckered mouth and mocking eye:
 The morn has enterprise, deep quiet droops
 With evening, triumph takes the sunset hour,

Voluptuous transport ripens with the corn
 Beneath a warm moon like a happy face :
 —And this to fill us with regard for man,
 With apprehension of his passing worth,
 Desire to work his proper nature out,
 And ascertain his rank and final place,
 For these things tend still upward, progress is
 The law of life, man's self is not yet Man !
 Nor shall I deem his object served, his end
 Attained, his genuine strength put fairly forth,
 While only here and there a star dispels
 The darkness, here and there a towering mind
 O'erlooks its prostrate fellows : when the host
 Is out at once to the despair of night,
 When all mankind alike is perfected,
 Equal in full-blown powers—then, not till then,
 I say, begins man's general infancy !
 For wherefore make account of feverish starts
 Of restless members of a dormant whole,
 Impatient nerves which quiver while the body
 Slumbers as in a grave ? Oh long ago
 The brow was twitched, the tremulous lids astir,
 The peaceful mouth disturbed ; half-uttered speech
 Ruffled the lip, and then the teeth were set,
 The breath drawn sharp, the strong right-hand clenched
 stronger,
 As it would pluck a lion by the jaw ;
 The glorious creature laughed out even in sleep !
 But when full roused, each giant-limb awake,

Each sinew strung, the great heart pulsing fast,
He shall start up and stand on his own earth,
Thence shall his long triumphant march begin,
Thence shall his being date,—thus wholly roused,
What he achieves shall be set down to him !
When all the race is perfected alike
As man, that is ; all tended to mankind,
And, man produced, all has its end thus far :
But in completed man begins anew .
A tendency to God. Prognostics told
Man's near approach ; so in man's self arise
August anticipations, symbols, types
Of a dim splendour ever on before
In that eternal circle run by life.
For men begin to pass their nature's bound,
And find new hopes and cares which fast supplant
Their proper joys and griefs ; they outgrow all
The narrow creeds of right and wrong, which fade
Before the unmeasured thirst for good : while peace
Rises within them ever more and more.
Such men are even now upon the earth,
Serenè amid the half-formed creatures round
Who should be saved by them and joined with them.
Such was my task, and I was born to it—
Free, as I said but now, from much that chains
Spirits, high-dowered but limited and vexed
By a divided and delusive aim,
A shadow mocking a reality
Whose truth avails not wholly to disperse●

The flitting mimic called up by itself,
And so remains perplexed and nigh put out
By its fantastic fellow's wavering gleam.
I, from the first, was never cheated thus ;
I never fashioned out a fancied good
Distinct from man's ; a service to be done,
A glory to be ministered unto,
With powers put forth at man's expense, withdrawn
From labouring in his behalf ; a strength
Denied that might avail him. I cared not
Lest his success ran counter to success
Elsewhere : for God is glorified in man,
And to man's glory, vowed I soul and limb.
Yet, constituted thus, and thus endowed,
I failed : I gazed on power till I grew blind.
On power ; I could not take my eyes from that :
That only, I thought, should be preserved, increased
At any risk, displayed, struck out at once—
The sign and note and character of man.
I saw no use in the Past : only a scene
Of degradation, imbecility,
The record of disgraces best forgotten,
A sullen page in human chronicles
Fit to erase. I saw no cause why man
Should not be all-sufficient even now ;
Or why his annals should be forced to tell
That once the tide of light, about to break
Upon the world, was sealed within its spring :
I would have had one day, one moment's space,

Change man's condition, push each slumbering claim,
Of mastery o'er the elemental world
At once to full maturity, then roll
Oblivion o'er the tools, and hide from man
What night had ushered morn. Not so, dear child
Of after-days, wilt thou reject the Past,
Big with deep warnings of the proper tenure
By which thou hast the earth: the Present for thee
Shall have distinct and trembling beauty, seen
Beside that Past's own shade when, in relief,
Its brightness shall stand out: nor on thee yet
Shall burst the Future, as successive zones
Of several wonder open on some spirit
Flying secure and glad from heaven to heaven:
But thou shalt painfully attain to joy,
While hope and fear and love shall keep thee man
All this was hid from me: as one by one
My dreams grew dim, my wide aims circumscribed,
As actual good within my reach decreased,
While obstacles sprung up this way and that
To keep me from effecting half the sum,
Small as it proved; as objects, mean within
The primal aggregate, seemed, even the least,
Itself a match for my concentrated strength—
What wonder if I saw no way to shun
Despair? The power I sought for man, seemed God's.
In this conjuncture, as I prayed to die,
A strange adventure made me know, one sin
Had spotted my career from its uprise;

I saw Aprile—my Aprile there !
And as the poor melodious wretch disburthened
His heart, and moaned his weakness in my ear,
I learned my own deep error ; love's undoing
Taught me the worth of love in man's estate,
And what proportion love should hold with power
In his right constitution ; love preceding
Power, and with much power, always much more love ;
Love still too straitened in his present means,
And earnest for new power to set it free.
I learned this, and supposed the whole was learned :
And thus, when men received with stupid wonder
My first revealings, would have worshipped me,
And I despised and loathed their proffered praise—
When, with awakened eyes, they took revenge
For past credulity in casting shame
On my real knowledge, and I hated them—
It was not strange I saw no good in man,
To overbalance all the wear and waste
Of faculties, displayed in vain, but born
To prosper in some better sphere : and why ?
In my own heart love had not been made wise
To trace love's faint beginnings in mankind,
To know even hate is but a mask of love's,
To see a good in evil, and a hope
In ill-success ; to sympathize, be proud
Of their half-reasons, faint aspirings, dim
Struggles for truth, their poorest fallacies,
Their prejudice and fears and cares and doubts ;
Which all touch upon nobleness, despite

Their error, all tend upwardly though weak,
 Like plants in mines which never saw the sun,
 But dream of him, and guess where he may be,
 And do their best to climb and get to him.
 All this I knew not, and I failed. Let men
 Regard me, and the poet dead long ago
 Who loved too rashly ; and shape forth a third
 And better-tempered spirit, warned by both :
 As from the over-radiant star too mad
 To drink the light-springs, beamless thence itself—
 And the dark orb which borders the abyss,
 Ingulfed in icy night,—might have its course
 A temperate and equidistant world.
 Meanwhile, I have done well, though not all well.
 As yet men cannot do without contempt ;
 'Tis for their good, and therefore fit awhile
 That they reject the weak, and scorn the false,
 Rather than praise the strong and true, in me :
 But after, they will know me. If I stoop
 Into a dark tremendous sea of cloud,
 It is but for a time ; I press God's lamp
 Close to my breast ; its splendour, soon or late,
 Will pierce the gloom : I shall emerge one day.
 You understand me ? I have said enough ?

Fest. Now die, dear Aureole !

Par. Fustus, let my hand—
 This hand, lie in your own, my own true friend !
 Aprile ! Hand in hand with you, Aprile !

Fest. And this was Paracelsus !

NOTE.

THE liberties I have taken with my subject are very trifling; and the reader may slip the foregoing scenes between the leaves of any memoir of Paracelsus he pleases, by way of commentary. To prove this, I subjoin a popular account, translated from the 'Biographie Universelle, Paris, 1822,' which I select, not as the best, certainly, but as being at hand, and sufficiently concise for my purpose. I also append a few notes, in order to correct those parts which do not bear out my own view of the character of Paracelsus; and have incorporated with them a notice or two, illustrative of the poem itself.

"PARACELUS (Philippus Aureolus Theophrastus Bombastus ab Hohenheim) was born in 1493 at Einsiedeln,⁽¹⁾ a little town in the canton of Schwitz, some leagues distant from Zurich. His father, who exercised the profession of medicine at Villach in Carinthia, was nearly related to George Bombast de Hohenheim, who became afterward Grand Prior of the Order of Malta: consequently Paracelsus could not spring from the dregs of the people, as Thomas Erastus, his sworn enemy, pretends.* It appears that his elementary education was much neglected, and that he spent part of his youth in pursuing the life common to the travelling *literati* of the age; that is to say, in wandering

* I shall disguise M. Renauldin's next sentence a little. "Hic (Erastus sc.) Paracelsum trimum a milite quodam, alii a sue executum ferunt: constat imberbem illum, mulierumque osorem fuisse." A standing High-Dutch joke in those days at the expense of a number of learned men, as may be seen by referring to such rubbish as Melander's 'Jocoseria,' etc. In the prints from his portrait by Tintoretto, painted a year before his death, Paracelsus is *barbutulus*, at all events. But Erastus was never without a good reason for his faith—*e. g.* "Helvetium fuisse (Paracelsum) vix credo, vix enim ea regio tale monstrum ediderit." (De Medicina Nova.)

from country to country, predicting the future by astrology and cheiromancy, evoking apparitions, and practising the different operations of magic and alchemy, in which he had been initiated whether by his father or by various ecclesiastics, among the number of whom he particularizes the Abbot Tritheim,⁽²⁾ and many German bishops.

“As Paracelsus displays everywhere an ignorance of the rudiments of the most ordinary knowledge, it is not probable that he ever studied seriously in the schools: he contented himself with visiting the Universities of Germany, France and Italy; and in spite of his boasting himself to have been the ornament of those institutions, there is no proof of his having legally acquired the title of Doctor, which he assumes. It is only known that he applied himself long, under the direction of the wealthy Sigismond Fugger, of Schwatz, to the discovery of the *Magnum Opus*.

“Paracelsus travelled among the mountains of Bohemia, in the East, and in Sweden, in order to inspect the labours of the miners, to be initiated in the mysteries of the oriental adepts, and to observe the secrets of nature and the famous mountain of loadstone.⁽³⁾ He professes also to have visited Spain, Portugal, Prussia, Poland, and Transylvania; everywhere communicating freely, not merely with the physicians, but the old women, charlatans, and conjurers, of these several lands. It is even believed that he extended his journeyings as far as Egypt and Tartary, and that he accompanied the son of the Khan of the Tartars to Constantinople, for the purpose of obtaining the secret of the tincture of Trismegistus, from a Greek who inhabited that capital.

“The period of his return to Germany is unknown: it is only certain that, at about the age of thirty-three, many astonishing cures which he wrought on eminent personages procured him such a celebrity, that he was called in 1526, on the recommendation of *Cœcolampadius*,⁽⁴⁾ to fill a chair of physic and surgery at the University of Basil. There Paracelsus began by burning publicly in the amphitheatre the works of Avicenna and Galen, assuring his auditors that the latchets of his shoes were more

instructed than those two physicians; that all Universities, all writers put together, were less gifted than the hairs of his beard and of the crown of his head; and that, in a word, he was to be regarded as the legitimate monarch of medicine. 'You shall follow me,' cried he, 'you, Avicenna, Galen, Rhasis, Montagnana, Mesuca, you, gentlemen of Paris, Montpellier, Germany, Cologne, Vienna,* and whomsoever the Rhine and Danube nourish; you who inhabit the isles of the sea; you, likewise, Dalmatians, Athenians; thou, Arab; thou, Greek; thou, Jew; all shall follow me, and the monarchy shall be mine.†

"But at Basil it was speedily perceived that the new Professor was no better than an egregious quack. Scarcely a year elapsed before his lectures had fairly driven away an audience incapable of comprehending their emphatic jargon. That which above all contributed to sully his reputation was the debauched life he led. According to the testimony of Oporinus, who lived two years in his intimacy, Paracelsus scarcely ever ascended the lecture-desk unless half drunk, and only dictated to his secretaries when in a state of intoxication: if summoned to attend the sick, he rarely proceeded thither without previously drenching himself with wine. He was accustomed to retire to bed without changing his clothes; sometimes he spent the night in pot-houses with peasants, and in the morning knew no longer what he was about; and, nevertheless, up to the age of twenty-five his only drink had been water.⁽⁵⁾

* Erastus, who relates this, here oddly remarks, "mirum quod non et Garamantos, Indos et Anglos adjunxit." Not so wonderful neither, if we believe what another adversary "had heard somewhere,"—that all Paracelsus' system came of his pillaging "Anglum quendam, Rogerium Baccionem."

† See his works *passim*. I must give one specimen:—Somebody had been styling him "Luther alter;" "and why not?" (he asks, as he well might,) "Luther is abundantly learned, therefore you hate him and me; but we are at least a match for you.—Nam et contra vos et vestros universos principes Avicennam, Galenum, Aristotelem, etc. me satis superquo munitum esse novi. Et vertex iste meus calvus ac depilis multo plura et sublimiora novit quam vester vel Avicenna vel universam academiam. Proдите, et signum date, qui viri sitis, quid roboris habeatis? quid autem sitis? Doctores et magistri, pediculos pectentes et fricantes podicem." (Frag. Med.)

"At length, fearful of being punished for a serious outrage on a magistrate,⁽⁶⁾ he fled from Basil towards the end of the year 1527, and took refuge in Alsatia, whither he caused Oporinus to follow with his chemical apparatus.

"He then entered once more upon the career of ambulatory theosophist.* Accordingly we find him at Colmar in 1528 : at Nuremberg in 1529 ; at St. Gall in 1531 ; at Pfeffers in 1535 ; and at Augsburg in 1536 : he next made some stay in Moravia, where he still further compromised his reputation by the loss of many distinguished patients, which compelled him to betake himself to Vienna ; from thence he passed into Hungary ; and in 1538 was at Villach, where he dedicated his 'Chronicle' to the States of Carinthia, in gratitude for the many kindnesses with which they had honoured his father. Finally, from Mindelheim, which he visited in 1540, Paracelsus proceeded to Salzburg, where he died in the Hospital of St. Stephen (*Sebastian*, is meant), Sept. 24, 1541."—(Here follows a criticism on his writings, which I omit.)

(1) *Paracelsus* would seem to be a fantastic version of *Von Hohenheim* : Einsiedeln is the Latin Eremus, whence Paracelsus is sometimes called, as in the correspondence of Erasmus, Eremita : Bombast, his proper name, probably acquired, from the characteristic phraseology of his lectures, that unlucky signification which it has ever since retained.

(2) Then Bishop of Spanheim, and residing at Würzburg in Franconia ; a town situated in a grassy fertile country, whence its name, Herbipolis. He was much visited there by learned men, as may be seen by his 'Epistolæ Familiares,' Hag. 1536 : among others, by his staunch friend Cornelius Agrippa, to whom

* "So migratory a life could afford Paracelsus but little leisure for application to books, and accordingly he informs us that for the space of ten years he never opened a single volume, and that his whole medical library was not composed of six sheets : in effect, the inventory drawn up after his death states that the only books which he left were the Bible, the New Testament, the Commentaries of St. Jerome on the Gospels, a printed volume on Medicine, and seven manuscripts."

he dates thence, in 1510, a letter in answer to the dedicatory epistle prefixed to the treatise *De Occult. Philosoph.*, which last contains the following ominous allusion to Agrippa's sojourn : "Quum nuper tecum, R. P. in cœnobio tuo apud Herbigopolim aliquamdiu conversatus, multa de chymicis, multa de magicis, multa de cabalisticis, cæterisque quæ adhuc in occulto delitescunt, arcanis scientiis atque artibus una contulissemus," etc.

(3) "Inexplebilis illa aviditas naturæ perscrutandi secreta et reconditarum suppellectile scientiarum animum locupletandi, uno eodemque loco diu persistere non patiebatur, sed mercurii instar, omnes terras, nationes et urbes perlustrandi igniculos supponebat ut cum viris naturæ scrutatoribus, chymicis præsertim, ore tenus conferret, et quæ diuturnis laboribus nocturnisque vigiliis inveni-erant una vel altera communicatione obtineret." (Bitiskius in Præfat.) "Patris auxilio primum, deinde propria industria doctissimos viros in Germania, Italia, Gallia, Hispania, aliisque Europæ regionibus, nactus est præceptores ; quorum liberali doctrina, et potissimum propria inquisitione ut qui esset ingenio acutissimo ac fero divino, tantum profecit, ut multi testati sint, in universa philosophia, tam ardua, tam arcana et abdita cruisset mortalium neminem." (Melch. Adam. in Vit. Germ. Medic.) "Paracelsus qui in intima naturæ viscera sic penitus introierit, metallorum stirpiumque vires et facultates tam incredibili ingenii acumino exploraverit ac perviderit, ad morbos omnes vel desperatos et opinione hominum insanabiles percurandum ; ut cum Theophrasto nata primum medicina perfecta que videtur." (Petri Rami Orat. de Basilea.) His passion for wandering is best described in his own words : "Ecce amatorem adolescentem difficillimi itineris haud piget, ut venustam saltem puellam vel fœminam aspiciat : quanto minus nobilissimarum artium amore laboris ac cujuslibet tædii pigebit ?" etc. ('Defensiones Septem adversus Æmulos suos.' 1573. Def. 4ta. 'De peregrinationibus et exilio.')

(4) The reader may remember that it was in conjunction with Ecolampadius, then Divinity Professor at Basil, that Zuinglius

published, in 1528, an answer to Luther's Confession of Faith; and that both proceeded in company to the subsequent conference with Lutker and Melancthon at Marpurg. Their letters fill a large volume.—'D. D. Johannis Œcolampadii et Huldrici Zuinglii Epistolarum' lib. quatuor. Bas. 1536. It must be also observed that Zuinglius began to preach in 1516, and at Zurich in 1519, and that in 1525 the Mass was abolished in the cantons. The tenets of Œcolampadius were supposed to be more evangelical than those up to that period maintained by the glorious German, and our brave Bishop Fisher attacked them as the fouler heresy;—"About this time arose out of Luther's school one Œcolampadius, like a mighty and fierce giant; who, as his master had gone beyond the Church, went beyond his master (or else it had been impossible he could have been reputed the better scholar), who denied the real presence: him, this worthy champion (the Bishop) sets upon, and with five books (like so many smooth stones taken out of the river that doth always run with living water) slays the Philistine; which five books were written in the year of our Lord 1526, at which time he had governed the See of Rochester 20 years." (Life of Bishop Fisher. 1655.) Now, there is no doubt of the Protestantism of Paracelsus, Erasmus, Agrippa, etc., but the nonconformity of Paracelsus was always scandalous. L. Crasso ('Elogj d'Huomini Letterati.' Ven. 1666) informs us that his books were excommunicated by the Church. Quensledt (de Patr. Doct.) affirms "nec tantum novæ medicinæ, verum etiam novæ theologiæ autor est." Delrio, in his *Disquisit. Magicar.*, classes him among those "partim atheos, partim hæreticos" (lib. 1. cap. 3). "Omnino tamen multa theologica in ejusdem scriptis plane atheismum olent, ac duriuscule sonant in auribus vere Christiani." (D. Gabrielis Clauderi *Schediasma de Tinct. Univ. Norimb.* 1736.) I shall only add one more authority:—"Oporinus dicit se (Paracelsum) aliquando Lutherum et Papam, non minus quam nunc Galenum et Hippocratem redacturum in ordinem minabatur, neque enim eorum qui hactenus in scripturam sacram scripsissent, sive veteres, sive recentiores, quenquam scripturæ nucleum recte eruisse, sed circa corticem et quasi membranam tantum hæere." (Th. Erastus, *Disputat. de*

Med. Nova.) These and similar notions had their due effect on Oporinus, who, says Zuingerus, in his 'Theatrum,' "longum vale dixit ei (Paracelso) ne ob præceptoris, alioqui amicissimi, horrendas blasphemias ipse quoque aliquando pœnas Deo Opt. Max. lueret."

(5) His defenders allow the drunkenness. Take a sample of their excuses: "Gentis hoc, non viri vitium est, a Taciti sæculo ad nostrum usque non interrupto filo devolutum, sinceritati forte Germanæ cœvum, et nescio an aliquo consanguinitatis vinculo junctum." (Bitiskius.) The other charges were chiefly trumped up by Oporinus: "Domi, quod Oporinus amanuensis ejus sæpe narravit, nunquam nisi potus ad explicanda sua accessit, atque in medio conclavi ad columnam *τερυφωμένος* adsistens, apprehenso manibus capulo ensis, cujus *κοίλωμα* hospitium præbuit ut aiunt spiritui familiari, imaginationes aut concepta sua protulit:—alii illud quod in capulo habuit, ab ipso Azoth appellatum medicinam fuisse præstantissimam aut lapidem Philosophicum putant." (Melch. Adam.) This famous sword was no laughing-matter in those days, and is now a material feature in the popular idea of Paracelsus. I recollect a couple of allusions to it in our own literature, at the moment.

Ne had been known the Danish Gonswart,
Or Paracelsus with his long sword.

'Volpone,' Act ii. Scene 2.

Bumbastus kept a Devil's bird
Shut in the pummel of his sword,
That taught him all the cunning pranks
Of past and future mountebanks.

'Hudibras,' Part ii. Cant. 3.

This Azoth was simply "*laudanum suum*." But in his time he was commonly believed to possess the double tincture—the power of curing diseases, and transmuting metals. Oporinus often witnessed, as he declares, both these effects, as did also Franciscus, the servant of Paracelsus, who describes, in a letter to Neander, a successful projection at which he was present, and the results of which, good golden ingots, were confided to his keeping. For

the other quality, let the following notice vouch among many others :—"Degebat Theophrastus Norimbergæ procius a mendacibus illius urbis, et vaniloquus deceptorque proclamatus, qui, ut laboranti famæ subveniat, viros quosdam auctoritatis summæ in Republica illa adit, et infamiæ amoliendæ, artique suæ asserendæ, specimen ejus pollicetur editurum, nullo stipendio vel accepto pretio, horum faciles præbentium aures jussu elephantiacos aliquot, a communionem hominum cæterorum segregatos, et in valedudinarium detrusos, alieno arbitrio eliguntur, quos virtutè singulari remediorum suorum Theophrastus a fœda Græcorum lopera mundat, pristinaque sanitati restituit; conservat illustre harum curationum urbs in archivis suis testimonium."-(Bitiskius).* It is to be remarked that Oporinus afterward repented of his treachery: "Sed resipuit tandem, et quem vivum convitiis insecutus fuerat defunctum veneratione prosequutus, infames famæ præceptoris morsus in remorsus conscientiæ conversi pœnitentia, heu nimis tarda, vulnera clausere exanimique spiranti inflixerant." For these "bites" of Oporinus, see Disputat. Erasti, and Andree Jocisci 'Oratio de vit. ob. Opori;' for the "remorse," Mic. Toxita in pref. Testamenti, and Conringius (otherwise an enemy of Paracelsus), who says it was contained in a letter from Oporinus to Doctor Vegerus.†

Whatever the moderns may think of these marvellous attributes, the title of Paracelsus to be considered the father of modern chemistry, is indisputable. Gerardus Vossius, 'De Philos. et Philos. sectis,' thus prefaces the ninth section of cap. 9, 'De

* The premature death of Paracelsus casts no manner of doubt on the fact of his having possessed the Elixir Vitæ; the alchemists have abundant reasons to adduce, from which I select the following, as explanatory of a property of the Tincture not calculated on by its votaries:—"Objectionem illam, quod Paracelsus non fuerit longævus, nonnulli quoque solvunt per rationes physicas: vitæ nimirum abbreviationem fortasse talibus accidere posse, ob Tincturam frequentiore ac largiore dosi sumtam, dum a summe efficaci et penetrabili hujus virtute calor innatus quasi suffocatur." (Gabrielis Claudi Schediasma.)

† For a good defence of Paracelsus I refer the reader to Olaus Borrichius' treatise—'Hermetis etc. Sapiëntia vindicata,' 1674. Or, if he is no more learned than myself in such matters, I mention simply that Paracelsus introduced the use of Mercury and Laudanum.

Chymia'—“Nobilem hanc medicinæ partem, diu sepultam avorum ætate quasi ab orco revocavit Th. Paracelsus.” I suppose many hints lie scattered in his neglected books, which clever appropriators have since developed with applause. Thus, it appears from his treatise ‘De Phlebotomia,’ and elsewhere, that he had discovered the circulation of the blood and the sanguification of the heart; as did after him Realdo Colombo, and still more perfectly Andrea Cesalpino of Arezzo, as Bayle and Bartoli observe. Even Lavater quotes a passage from his work ‘De Natura Rerum,’ on practical Physiognomy, in which the definitions and axioms are precise enough: he adds, “though an astrological enthusiast, a man of prodigious genius.” See Holcroft’s Translation, vol. iii. p. 179—“The Eyes.” While on the subject of the writings of Paracelsus, I may explain a passage in the third part of the Poem. He was, as I have said, unwilling to publish his works, but in effect did publish a vast number. Valentius (in Præfat. in Paramyr.) declares “quod ad librorum Paracelsi copiam attinet, audio, a Germanis prope trecentos recenseri.” “O fecunditas ingenii!” adds he, appositely. Many of these were, however, spurious; and Fred. Bitiskius gives his good edition (3 vols. fol. Gen. 1658) “rejectis suppositis solo ipsius nomine superbientibus quorum ingens circumfertur numerus.” The rest were “charissimum et pretiosissimum authoris pignus, extorsum potius ab illo quam obtentum.” “Jam minime eo volente atque jubente hæc ipsius scripta in lucem prodisse videntur; quippe quæ muro inclusa ipso absente servi cujusdam indicio, furto surrepta atque sublata sunt,” says Valentius. These have been the study of a host of commentators, among whose labours are most notable, Petri Severini, ‘Idea Medicinæ Philosophiæ. Bas. 1571;’ Mic. Toxetis, ‘Onomastica. Arg. 1574;’ Dornei, ‘Dict. Parac. Franc. 1584;’ and ‘Pⁱ Philos^o Compendium cum scholiis auctore Leone Suavio. Paris.’ (This last, a good book.)

(6) A disgraceful affair. One Liechtenfels, a canon, having been rescued *in extremis* by the “*laudanum*” of Paracelsus, refused the stipulated fee, and was supported in his meanness by the authorities, whose interference Paracelsus would not brook. His own liberality was allowed by his bitterest foes, who found a

ready solution of his indifference to profit, in the aforesaid sword-handle and its guest. His freedom from the besetting sin of a profession he abhorred—(as he curiously says somewhere, “*Quis quæso deinceps honorem deferat professione tali, quæ a tam facinorosis nebulonibus obitur et administratur?*”)—is recorded in his epitaph, which affirms—“*Bona sua in pauperes distribuenda collocandaque erogavit, honoravit, or ordinavit.*—for accounts differ.

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY.

FLORENCE, 1850.

Christmas-Eve.

I.

Out of the little chapel I flung,
Into the fresh night-air again.
Five minutes I waited, held my tongue
In the doorway, to escape the rain
That drove in gusts down the common's centre,
At the edge of which the chapel stands,
Before I plucked up heart to enter.
Heaven knows how many sorts of hands
Reached past me, groping for the latch
Of the inner door that hung on catch
More obstinate the more they fumbled,
Till, giving way at last with a scold
Of the crazy hinge, in squeezed or tumbled
One sheep more to the rest in fold,
And left me irresolute, standing sentry
In the sheepfold's lath-and-plaster entry,
Four feet long by two feet wide,
Partitioned off from the vast inside—

I blocked up half of it at least.
No remedy ; the rain kept driving.
They eyed me much as some wild beast,
That congregation, still arriving,
Some of them by the main road, white
A long way past me into the night,
Skirting the common, then diverging ;
Not a few suddenly emerging
From the common's self thro' the paling-gaps,
—They house in the gravel-pits perhaps,
Where the road stops short with its safeguard border
Of lamps, as tired of such disorder ;—
But the most turned in yet more abruptly
From a certain squalid knot of alleys,
Where the town's bad blood once slept corruptly,
Which now the little chapel rallies
And leads into day again,—its priestliness
Lending itself to hide their beastliness
So cleverly (thanks in part to the mason),
And putting so cheery a whitewashed face on
Those neophytes too much in lack of it,
That, where you cross the common as I did,
And meet the party thus presided,
“ Mount Zion ” with Love-lane at the back of it,
They front you as little disconcerted
As, bound for the hills, her fate averted,
And her wicked people made to mind him,
Lot might have marched with Gomorrah behind him.

II.

Well, from the road, the lanes or the common,
In came the flock : the fat weary woman,
Panting and bewildered, down-clapping
Her umbrella with a mighty report,
Grounded it by me, wry and flapping,
A wreck of whalebones ; then, with a snort,
Like a startled horse, at the interloper
(Who humbly knew himself improper,
But could not shrink up small enough)
—Round to the door, and in,—the gruff
Hinge's invariable scold
Making my very blood run cold.
Prompt in the wake of her, up-pattered
On broken clogs, the many-tattered
Little old-faced, peaking, sister-turned-mother
Of the sickly babe she tried to smother
Somehow up, with its spotted face,
From the cold, on her breast, the one warm place ;
She too must stop, wring the poor ends dry
Of a draggled shawl, and add thereby
Her tribute to the door-mat, sopping
Already from my own clothes' dropping,
Which yet she seemed to grudge I should stand on ;
Then, stooping down to take off her pattens,
She bore them defiantly, in each hand one,
Planted together before her breast
And its babe, as good as a lance in rest.

Close on her heels, the dingy satins
Of a female something, past me flitted,
With lips as much too white, as a streak
Lay far too red on each hollow cheek ;
And it seemed the very door-hinge pitied
All that was left of a woman once,
Holding at least its tongue for the nonce.
Then a tall yellow man, like the Penitent Thief,
With his jaw bound up in a handkerchief,
And eyelids screwed together tight,
Led himself in by some inner light.
And, except from him, from each that entered,
I got the same interrogation—
“ What, you, the alien, you have ventured
“ To take with us, the elect, your station ?
“ A carer for none of it, a Gallio ! ”—
Thus, plain as print, I read the glance
At a common prey, in each countenance
As of huntsman giving his hounds the tallyho.
And, when the door's cry drowned their wonder,
The draught, it always sent in shutting,
Made the flame of the single tallow candle
In the cracked square lantern I stood under,
Shoot its blue lip at me, rebutting
As it were, the luckless cause of scandal :
I verily fancied the zealous light
(In the chapel's secret; too !) for spite
Would shudder itself clean off the wick,
With the airs of a Saint John's Candlestick.

There was no standing it much longer.
“ Good folks,” thought I, as resolve grew stronger,
“ This way you perform the Grand-Inquisitor,
“ When the weather sends you a chance visitor ?
“ You are the men, and wisdom shall die with you,
“ And none of the old Seven Churches vie with you !
“ But still, despite the pretty perfection
“ To which you carry your trick of exclusiveness,
“ And, taking God’s word under wise protection,
“ Correct its tendency to diffusiveness,
“ And bid one reach it over hot ploughshares,—
“ Still, as I say, though you ’ve found salvation,
“ If I should choose to cry, as now, ‘ Shares ! ’—
“ See if the best of you bars me my ration !
“ I prefer, if you please, for my expounder
“ Of the laws of the feast, the feast’s own Founder ;
“ Mine’s the same right with your poorest and sickliest,
“ Supposing I don the marriage-vestment :
“ So, shut your mouth and open your Testament,
“ And carve me my portion at your quickliest ! ”
Accordingly, as a shoemaker’s lad
With wizened face in want of soap,
And wet apron wound round his waist like a rope,
(After stopping outside, for his cough was bad,
To get the fit over, poor gentle creature,
And so avoid disturbing the preacher)
—Passed in, I sent my elbow spikewise
At the shutting door, and entered likewise,
Received the hinge’s accustomed greeting,

And crossed the threshold's magic pentacle,
And found myself in full conventicle,
—To wit, in Zion Chapel Meeting,
On the Christmas-Eve of 'Forty-nine,
Which, calling its flock to their special clover,
Found all assembled and one sheep over,
Whose lot, as the weather pleased, was mine.

III.

I very soon had enough of it.
The hot smell and the human noises,
And my neighbour's coat, the greasy cuff of it,
Were a pebble-stone that a child's hand poises,
Compared with the pig-of-lead-like pressure
Of the preaching-man's immense stupidity,
As he poured his doctrine forth, full measure,
To meet his audience's avidity.
You needed not the wit of the Sibyl
To guess the cause of it all, in a twinkling:
No sooner got our friend an inkling
Of treasure hid in the Holy Bible,
(Whene'er 't was that the thought first struck him,
How death, at unawares, might duck him
Deeper than the grave, and quench
The gin-shop's light in Hell's grim drench)
Than he handled it so, in fine irreverence,
As to hug the book of books to pieces:
And, a patchwork of chapters and texts in severance,
Not improved by the private dog's-ears and creases,

Having clothed his own soul with, he 'd fain see equipt
yours,—

So, tossed you again your Holy Scriptures.
And you picked them up, in a sense, no doubt :
Nay, had but a single face of my neighbours
Appeared to suspect that the preacher's labours
Were help which the world could be saved without,
'Tis odds but I might have borne in quiet
A qualm or two at my spiritual diet,
Or (who can tell?) perchance even mustered
Somewhat to urge in behalf of the sermon :
But the flock sat on, divinely flustered,
Sniffing, methought, its dew of Hermon
With such content in every snuffle,
As the devil inside us loves to ruffle.
My old fat woman purred with pleasure,
And thumb round thumb went twirling faster,
While she, to his periods keeping measure,
Maternally devoured the pastor.
The man with the handkerchief, untied it,
Showed us a horrible wen inside it,
Gave his eyelids yet another screwing,
And rocked himself as the woman was doing.
The shoemaker's lad, discreetly choking,
Kept down his cough. 'T was too provoking !
My gorge rose at the nonsense and stuff of it ;
So, saying like Eve when she plucked the apple,
" I wanted a taste, and now there 's enough of it,"
I flung out of the little chapel.

IV.

There was a lull in the rain, a lull
In the wind too ; the moon was risen,
And would have shown out pure and full,
But for the ramparted cloud-prison,
Block on block built up in the West,
For what purpose the wind knows best,
Who changes his mind continually.
And the empty other half of the sky
Seemed in its silence as if it knew
What, any moment, might look through
A chance gap in that fortress massy :—
Through its fissures you got hints
Of the flying moon, by the shifting tints,
Now, a dull lion-colour, now, brassy
Burning to yellow, and whitest yellow,
Like furnace-smoke just ere the flames bellow,
All a-simmer with intense strain
To let her through,—then blank again,
At the hope of her appearance failing:
Just by the chapel, a break in the railing
Shows a narrow path directly across ;
'T is ever dry walking there, on the moss—
Besides, you go gently all the way uphill.
I stooped under and soon felt better ;
My head grew lighter, my limbs more supple,
As I walked on, glad to have slipt the fetter.
My mind was full of the scene I had left,

That placid flock, that pastor vociferant,
—How this outside was pure and different!
The sermon, now—what a mingled weft
Of good and ill! were either less,
Its fellow had coloured the whole distinctly;
But alas for the excellent earnestness,
And the truths, quite true if stated succinctly,
But as surely false, in their quaint presentment,
However to pastor and flock's contentment!
Say rather, such truths looked false to your eyes,
With his provings and parallels twisted and twined,
Till how could you know them, grown double their
size

In the natural fog of the good man's mind,
Like yonder spots of our roadside lamps
Haloed about with the common's damps?
Truth remains true, the fault's in the prover;
The zeal was good, and the aspiration;
And yet, and yet, yet, fifty times over,
Pharaoh received no demonstration
By his Baker's dream of Baskets Three,
Of the doctrine of the Trinity,—
Although, as our preacher thus embellished it,
Apparently his hearers relished it
With so unfeigned a gust—who knows if
They did not prefer our friend to Joseph?
But so it is everywhere, one way with all of them!
These people have really felt, no doubt,
A something, the motion they style the Call of them;

And this is their method of bringing about,
 By a mechanism of words and tones,
 (So many texts in so many groans)
 A sort of reviving and reproducing,
 More or less perfectly, (who can tell?—)
 Of the mood itself, that strengthens by using;
 And how it happens, I understand well.
 A tune was born in my head last week,
 Out of the thump-thump and shriek-shriek
 Of the train, as I came by it, up from Manchester;
 And when, next week, I take it back again,
 My head will sing to the engine's clack again,
 While it only makes my neighbour's haunches stir,
 —Finding no dormant musical sprout
 In him, as in me, to be jolted out.
 'Tis the taught already that profits by teaching;
 He gets no more from the railway's preaching
 Than, from this preacher who does the rail's office, I:
 Whom therefore the flock cast a jealous eye on.
 Still, why paint over their door "Mount Zion,"
 To which all flesh shall come, saith the prophecy?

v.

But wherefore be harsh on a single case?
 After how many modes, this Christmas-Eve,
 Does the selfsame weary thing take place?
 The same endeavour to make you believe,
 And with much the same effect, no more:
 Each method abundantly convincing,
 As I say, to those convinced before,

But scarce to be swallowed without wincing,
By the not-as-yet-convinced. For me,
I have my own church equally :
And in *this* church my faith sprang first !
(I said, as I reached the rising ground,
And the wind began again, with a burst
Of rain in my face, and a glad rebound
From the heart beneath, as if, God speeding me,
I entered His church-door, Nature leading me)
—In youth I looked to these very skies,
And probing their immensities,
I found God there, His visible power ;
Yet felt in my heart, amid all its sense
Of the power, an equal evidence
That His love, there too, was the nobler dower.
For the loving worm within its clod,
Were diviner than a loveless god
Amid his worlds, I will dare to say.
You know what I mean : God's all, man's nought :
But also, God, whose pleasure brought
Man into being, stands away
As it were, a handbreadth off, to give
Room for the newly-made to live,
And look at Him from a place apart,
And use His gifts of brain and heart,
Given, indeed, but to keep for ever.
Who speaks of man, then, must not sever
Man's very elements from man,
Saying, " But all is God's "—whose plan

Was to create man and then leave him
Able, His own word saith, to grieve Him,
But able to glorify Him too,
As a mere machine could never do,
That prayed or praised, all unaware
Of its fitness for aught but praise and prayer,
Made perfect as a thing of course.
Man, therefore, stands on his own stock
Of love and power as a pin-point rock,
And, looking to God who ordained divorce
Of the rock from His boundless continent,
Sees, in His power made evident,
Only excess by a million-fold
O'er the power God gave man in the mould.
For, note: man's hand, first formed to carry
A few pounds' weight, when taught to marry
Its strength with an engine's, lifts a mountain,
—Advancing in power by one degree;
And why count steps through eternity?
But love is the ever-springing fountain:
Man may enlarge or narrow his bed
For the water's play, but the water-head—
How can he multiply or reduce it?
As easy create it, as cause it to cease;
He may profit by it, or abuse it,
But 't is not a thing to bear increase
As power does: be love less or more
In the heart of man, he keeps it shut
Or opes it wide, as he pleases, but

Love's sum remains what it was before.
So, gazing up, in my youth, at love
As seen through power, ever above
All modes which make it manifest,
My soul brought all to a single test—
That He, the Eternal First and Last,
Who, in His power, had so surpassed
All man conceives of what is might,—
Whose wisdom, too, showed infinite,
—Would prove as infinitely good ;
Would never, (my soul understood,)
With power to work all love desires,
Bestow e'en less than man requires :
That He who endlessly was teaching,
Above my spirit's utmost reaching,
What love can do in the leaf or stone,
(So that to master this alone,
This done in the stone or leaf for me,
I must go on learning endlessly)
Would never need that I, in turn,
Should point him out defect unheeded,
And show that God had yet to learn
What the meanest human creature needed,—
—Not life, to wit, for a few short years,
Tracking His way through doubts and fears,
While the stupid earth on which I stay
Suffers no change, but passive adds
Its myriad years to myriads,
Though I, He gave it to, decay,

Seeing death come and choose about me,
And my dearest ones depart without me.
No! love which, on earth, amid all the shows of it,
Has ever been seen the sole good of life in it,
The love, ever growing there, spite of the strife in it,
Shall arise, made perfect, from death's repose of it!
And I shall behold Thee, face to face,
O God, and in Thy light retrace
How in all I loved here, still wast Thou!
Whom pressing to, then, as I fain would now,
I shall find as able to satiate
The love, Thy gift, as my spirit's wonder
Thou art able to quicken and sublimate,
With this sky of Thine, that I now walk under,
And glory in Thee for, as I gaze
Thus, thus! oh, let men keep their ways
Of seeking Thee in a narrow shrine—
Be this my way! And this is mine!

VI.

For lo, what think you? suddenly
The rain and the wind ceased, and the sky
Received at once the full fruition
Of the moon's consummate apparition.
The black cloud-barricade was riven,
Ruined beneath her feet, and driven
Deep in the West; while, bare and breathless,
North and South and East lay ready
For a glorious Thing, that, dauntless, deathless,
Sprang across them, and stood steady.

'T was a moon-rainbow, vast and perfect,
 From heaven to heaven extending, perfect
 As the mother-moon's self, full in face.
 It rose, distinctly at the base
 With its seven proper colours chorded,
 Which still, in the rising, were compressed,
 Until at last they coalesced,
 And supreme the spectral creature lorded
 In a triumph of whitest white,—
 Above which intervened the night.
 But above night too, like only the next,
 The second of a wondrous sequence,
 Reaching in rare and rarer frequency,
 Till the heaven of heavens were circumflect,
 Another rainbow rose, a mightier,
 Fainter, flushier, and flightier,—
 Rapture dying along its verge!
 Oh, whose foot shall I see emerge,
 WHOSE, from the straining topmost dark,
 On to the keystone of that arc?

VII.

This sight was shown me, there and then,—
 Me, one out of a world of men,
 Singled forth, as the chance might hap
 To another, if in a thunderclap
 Where I heard noise, and you saw flame,
 Some one man knew God called his name.
 For me, I think I said, "Appear!
 " Good were it to be ever here.

" If Thou wilt, let me build to Thee
 " Service-tabernacles Three,
 " Where, forever in Thy presence,
 " In ecstatic acquiescence,
 " Far alike from thriftless learning
 " And ignorance's undiscerning,
 " I may worship and remain !"

Thus at the show above me, gazing
 With upturned eyes, I felt my brain
 Glutted with the glory, blazing
 Throughout its whole mass, over and under,
 Until at length it burst asunder,
 And out of it bodily therę streamed
 The too-much glory, as it seemed,
 Passing from out me to the ground,
 Then palely serpentining round
 Into the dark with mazy error.

VIII.

All at once I looked up with terror.
 He was there.
 He Himself with His human air,
 On the narrow pathway, just before.
 I saw the back of Him, no more—
 He had left the chapel, then, as I.
 I forgot all about the sky.
 No face: only the sight
 Of a sweepy garment, vast and white,
 With a hem that I could recognise.

I felt terror, no surprise ;
My mind filled with the cataract,
At one bound of the mighty fact.
I remembered, He did say
Doubtless, that, to this world's end,
Where two or three should meet and pray,
He would be in the midst, their friend :
Certainly He was there with them,
And my pulses leaped for joy
Of the golden thought without alloy,
That I saw His very vesture's hem.
Then rushed the blood back, cold and clear
With a fresh enhancing shiver of fear,
And I hastened, cried out while I pressed
To the salvation of the vest,
" But not so, Lord ! It cannot be
" That Thou, indeed, art leaving me—
" Me, that have despised Thy friends.
" Did my heart make no amends ?
" Thou art the love of God—above
" His power, didst hear me place His love,
" And that was leaving the world for Thee.
" Therefore Thou must not turn from me
" As if I had chosen the other part.
" Folly and pride o'ercame my heart.
" Our best is bad, nor bears Thy test ;
" Still, it should be our very best.
" I thought it best that Thou, the Spirit,
" Be worshipped in spirit and in truth,

" And in beauty, as even we require it—
 " Not in the forms burlesque, uncouth,
 " I left but now, as scarcely fitted
 " For Thee: I knew not what-I pitied.
 " But, all I felt there, right or wrong,
 " What is it to Thee, who curest sinning?
 " Am I not weak as Thou art strong?
 " I have looked to Thee from the beginning,
 " Straight up to Thee through all the world
 " Which, like an idle scroll, lay furled
 " To nothingness on either side:
 " And since the time Thou wast descried,
 " Spite of the weak heart, so have I
 " Lived ever, and so fain would die,
 " Living and dying, Thee before!
 " But if Thou leavest me—"

IX.

Less or more,

I suppose that I spoke thus.
 When,—have mercy, Lord, on us!
 The whole Face turned upon me full.
 And I spread myself beneath it,
 As when the bleacher spreads, to seethe it
 In the cleansing sun, his wool;—
 Steps in the flood of noontide whiteness
 Some defiled, discoloured web—
 So lay I, saturate with brightness.
 And when the flood appeared to ebb,

Lo, I was walking, light and swift,
With my senses settling fast and steadying,
But my body caught up in the whirl and drift
Of the vesture's amplitude, still eddying
On, just before me, still to be followed,
As it carried me after with its motion :
What shall I say ?—as a path were hollowed
And a man went weltering through the ocean,
Sucked along in the flying wake
Of the luminous water-snake.
Darkness and cold were cloven, as through
I passed, upborne yet walking too.
And I turned to myself at intervals,—
“ So He said, so it befals.
“ God who registers the cup
“ Of mere cold water, for His sake
“ To a disciple rendered up,
“ Disdains not His own thirst to slake
“ At the poorest love was ever offered :
“ And because it was my heart I proffered,
“ With true love trembling at the brim,
“ He suffers me to follow Him
“ For ever, my own way,—dispensed
“ From seeking to be influenced
“ By all the less immediate ways
“ That earth, in worships manifold,
“ Adopts to reach, by prayer and praise,
“ The garment's hem, which, lo, I hold !”

x.

And so we crossed the world and stopped.
For where am I, in city or plain,
Since I am 'ware of the world again?
And what is this that rises propped
With pillars of prodigious girth?
Is it really on the earth,
This miraculous Dome of God?
Has the angel's measuring-rod
Which numbered cubits, gem from gem,
'Twixt the gates of the New Jerusalem,
Meted it out,—and what he meted,
Have the sons of men completed?
—Binding, ever as he bade,
Columns in this colonnade
With arms wide open to embrace
The entry of the human race
To the breast of . . . what is it, yon building,
Ablaze in front, all paint and gilding,
With marble for brick, and stones of price
For garniture of the edifice?
Now I see ; it is no dream ;
It stands there and it does not seem :
For ever, in pictures, thus it looks,
And thus I have read of it in books
Often in England, leagues away,
And wondered how these fountains play,
Growing up eternally

Each to a musical water-tree,
Whose blossoms drop, a glittering boon,
Before my eyes, in the light of the moon,
To the granite lavers underneath.
Liar and dreamer in your teeth!
I, the sinner that speak to you,
Was in Rome this night, and stood, and knew
Both this and more. For see, for see,
The dark is rent, mine eye is free
To pierce the crust of the outer wall,
And I view inside, and all there, all,
As the swarming hollow of a hive,
The whole Basilica alive!
Men in the chancel, body and nave,
Men on the pillars' architrave,
Men on the statues, men on the tombs
With popes and kings in their porphyry wombs,
All famishing in expectation
Of the main-altar's consummation.
For see, for see, the rapturous moment
Approaches, and earth's best endowment
Blends with Heaven's; the taper-fires
Pant up, the winding brazen spires
Heave loftier yet the baldachin;
The incense-gaspings, long kept in,
Supsire in clouds; the organ blatant
Holds his breath and grovels latent,
As if God's hushing finger grazed him,
(Like Behemoth when He praised him)

At the silver bell's shrill tinkling,
Quick cold drops of terror sprinkling
On the sudden pavement strewed
With faces of the multitude.
Earth breaks up, time drops away,
In flows Heaven, with its new day
Of endless life, when He who trod,
Very Man and very God,
This earth in weakness, shame and pain,
Dying the death whose signs remain
Up yonder on the accursed tree,—
Shall come again, no more to be
Of captivity the thrall,
But the one God, All in all,
King of kings, Lord of lords,
As His servant John received the words,
“I died, and live for evermore!”

XI.

Yet I was left outside the door.
Why sat I there on the threshold-stone,
Left till He return, alone
Save for the garment's extreme fold
Abandoned still to bless my hold?—
My reason, to my doubt, replied,
As if a book were opened wide,
And at a certain page I traced
Every record undefaced,
Added by successive years,—

The harvestings of truth's stray ears
Singly gleaned, and in one sheaf
Bound together for belief.
Yes, I said—that He will go
And sit with these in turn, I know.
Their faith's heart beats, though her head swims
Too giddily to guide her limbs,
Disabled by their palsy-stroke
From propping me. Though Rome's gross yoke
Drops off, no more to be endured,
Her teaching is not so obscured
By errors and perversities,
That no truth shines athwart the lies :
And He, whose eye detects a spark
Even where, to man's, the whole seems dark,
May well see flame where each beholder
Acknowledges the embers smoulder.
But I, a mere man, fear to quit
The clue God gave me as most fit
To guide my footsteps through life's maze,
Because Himself discerns all ways
Open to reach Him : I, a man
Able to mark where faith began
To swerve aside, till from its summit
Judgment drops her damning plummet,
Pronouncing such a fatal space
Departed from the Founder's base :
He will not bid me enter too,
But rather sit, as now I do,

Awaiting his return outside.

—'T was thus my reason straight replied

And joyously I turned, and pressed

The garment's skirt upon my breast,

Until, afresh its light suffusing me,

My heart cried,—what has been abusing me

That I should wait here lonely and coldly,

Instead of rising, entering boldly,

Baring truth's face, and letting drift

Her veils of lies as they choose to shift?

Do these men praise Him? I will raise

My voice up to their point of praise!

I see the error; but above

The scope of error, see the love.—

Oh, love of those first Christian days!

—Fanned so soon into a blaze,

From the spark preserved by the trampled sect,

That the antique sovereign Intellect

Which then sat ruling in the world,

Like a change in dreams, was hurled

From the throne he reigned upon:

—You looked up, and he was gone!

Gone, his glory of the pen!

—Love, with Greece and Rome in ken,

Bade her scribes abhor the trick

Of poetry and rhetoric,

And exult, with hearts set free,

In blessed imbecility

Scrawled, perchance, on some torn sheet

Leaving Sallust incomplete.
Gone, his pride of sculptor, painter!
—Love, while able to acquaint her
With the thousand statues yet
Fresh from chisel, pictures wet
From brush, she saw on every side,
Chose rather with an infant's pride
To frame those portents which impart
Such unction to true Christian Art.
Gone, music too! The air was stirred
By happy wings: Terpander's bird
(That, when the cold came, fled away)
Would tarry not the wintry day,—
As more-enduring sculpture must,
Till a filthy saint rebuked the gust
With which he chanced to get a sight
Of some dear naked Aphrodite
He glanced a thought above the toes of,
By breaking zealously her nose off.
Love, surely, from that music's lingering,
Might have filched her organ-fingering,
Nor chosen rather to set prayings
To hog-grunts, praises to horse-neighings.
Love was the startling thing, the new;
Love was the all-sufficient too;
And seeing that, you see the rest:
As a babe can find its mother's breast
As well in darkness as in light,
Love shut our eyes, and all seemed right.

True, the world's eyes are open now :
—Less need for me to disallow
Some few that keep Love's zone unbuckled,
Peevish as ever to be suckled,
Lulled by the same old baby-prattle
With intermixture of the rattle,
When she would have them creep, stand steady
Upon their feet, or walk already,
Not to speak of trying to climb.
I will be wise another time,
And not desire a wall between us,
When next I see a church-roof cover
So many species of one genus,
All with foreheads bearing *Lover*
Written above the earnest eyes of them ; .
All with breasts that beat for beauty,
Whether sublimed, to the surprise of them,
In noble daring, steadfast duty,
The heroic in passion, or in action,—
Or, lowered for senses' satisfaction,
To the mere outside of human creatures,
Mere perfect form and faultless features.
What? with all Rome here, whence to levy
Such contributions to their appetite,
With women and men in a gorgeous bevy,
They take, as it were, a padlock, clap it tight
On their southern eyes, restrained from feeding
On the glories of their ancient reading,
On the beauties of their modern singing,

On the wonders of the builder's bringing,
On the majesties of Art around them,—
And, all these loves, late struggling incessant,
When faith has at last united and bound them,
They offer up to God for a present?
Why, I will, on the whole, be rather proud of it,—
And, only taking the act in reference
To the other recipients who might have allowed of it,
I will rejoice that God had the preference.

XII.

So I summed up my new resolves :
Too much love there can never be.
And where the intellect devolves
Its function on love exclusively,
I, a man who possesses both,
Will accept the provision, nothing loth,
—Will feast my love, then depart elsewhere,
That my intellect may find its share.
And ponder, O soul, the while thou departest,
And see thou applaud the great heart of the artist,
Who, examining the capabilities
Of the block of marble he has to fashion
Into a type of thought or passion,—
Not always, using obvious facilities,
Shapes it, as any artist cau,
Into a perfect symmetrical man,
Complete from head to foot of the life-size,
Such as old Adam stood in his wife's eyes,—

But, now and then, bravely aspires to consummate
 A Colossus by no means so easy to come at,
 And uses the whole of his block for the bust,
 Leaving the mind of the public to finish it,
 Since cut it ruefully short he must :
 On the face alone he expends his devotion,
 He rather would mar than resolve to diminish it,
 —Saying, “ Applaud me for this grand notion
 “ Of what a face may be ! As for completing it
 “ In breast and body and limbs, do *that*, you ! ”
 All hail ! I fancy how, happily meeting it,
 A trunk and legs would perfect the statue,
 Could man carve so as to answer volition.
 And how much nobler than petty cavils,
 Were a hope to find, in my spirit-travels,
 Some artist of another ambition,
 Who having a block to carve, no bigger,
 Has spent his power on the opposite quest,
 And believed to begin at the feet was best—
 For so may I see, ere I die, the whole figure !

XIII.

No sooner said than out in the night !
 My heart beat lighter and more light :
 And still, as before, I was walking swift,
 With my sensés settling fast and steadying,
 But my body caught up in the whirl and drift
 Of the vesture’s amplitude, still eddying
 On just before me, still to be followed,

As it carried me after with its motion,
 —What shall I say?—as a path were hollowed,
 And a man went weltering through the ocean,
 Sucked along in the flying wake
 Of the luminous water-snake.

XIV.

Alone! I am left alone once more—
 (Save for the garment's extreme fold
 Abandoned still to bless my hold)
 Alone, beside the entrance-door
 Of a sort of temple,—perhaps a college,
 —Like nothing I ever saw before
 At home in England, to my knowledge.
 The tall, old, quaint, irregular town!
 It may be . . . though *which*, I can't affirm . . . any
 Of the famous middle-age towns of Germany;
 And this flight of stairs where I sit down,
 Is it Halle, Weimar, Cassel, or Frankfort,
 Or Göttingen, that I have to thank for 't?
 It may be Göttingen,—most likely.
 Through the open door I catch obliquely
 Glimpses of a lecture-hall;
 And not a bad assembly neither—
 Ranged decent and symmetrical
 On benches, waiting what 's to see there;
 Which, holding still by the vesture's hem,
 I also resolve to see with them,
 Cautious this time how I suffer to slip

The chance of joining in fellowship
With any that call themselves His friends,
As these folks do I have a notion.
But hist—a buzzing and emotion !
All settle themselves, the while ascends
By the creaking rail to the lecture-desk,
Step by step, deliberate
Because of his cranium's over-freight,
Three parts sublime to one grotesque,
If I have proved an accurate guesser,
The hawk-nosed, high-cheek-boned Professor.
I felt at once as if there ran
A shoot of love from my heart to the man—
That sallow, virgin-minded, studious
Martyr to mild enthusiasm,
As he uttered a kind of cough-preludious'
That woke my sympathetic spasm,
(Beside some spitting that made me sorry)
And stood, surveying his auditory
With a wan pure look, well nigh celestial,—
Those blue eyes had survived so much !
While, under the foot they could not smutch,
Lay all the fleshly and the bestial.
Over he bowed, and arranged his notes,
Till the auditory's clearing of throats
Was done with, died into a silence ;
And, when each glance was upward sent,
Each bearded mouth composed intent,
And a pin might be heard drop half a mile hence,

He pushed back higher his spectacles,
Let the eyes stream out like lamps from cells,
And giving his head of hair—a hake
Of undressed tow, for colour and quantity—
One rapid and impatient shake,
(As our own young England adjusts a jaunty tie
When about to impart, on mature digestion,
Some thrilling view of the surplice-question)
—The Professor's grave voice, sweet though hoarse,
Broke into his Christmas-Eve's discourse.

XV.

And he began it by observing
How reason dictated that men
Should rectify the natural swerving,
By a reversion, now and then,
To the well-heads of knowledge, few
And far away, whence rolling grew
The life-stream wide whereat we drink,
Commingled, as we needs must think,
With waters alien to the source ;
To do which, aimed this eve's discourse ;
Since, where could be a fitter time
For tracing backward to its prime,
This Christianity, this lake,
This reservoir, whereat we slake,
From one or other bank, our thirst ?
So, he proposed inquiring first

Into the various sources whence
This Myth of Christ is derivable ;
Demanding from the evidence,
(Since plainly no such life was liveable)
How these phenomena should class?
Whether 't were best opine Christ was,
Or never was at all, or whether
He was and was not, both together—
It matters little for the name,
So the Idea be left the same.
Only, for practical purpose' sake,
'T was obviously as well to take
The popular story,—understanding
How the ineptitude of the time,
And the penman's prejudice, expanding
Fact into fable fit for the clime,
Had, by slow and sure degrees, translated it
Into this myth, this Individuum,—
Which, when reason had strained and abated it
Of foreign matter, gave, for residuum,
A Man!—aright true man, however,
Whose work was worthy a man's endeavour :
Work, that gave warrant almost sufficient,
To his disciples, for rather believing
He was just omnipotent and omniscient,
As it gives to us, for as frankly receiving
His word, their tradition,—which, though it meant
Something entirely different
From all that those who only heard it,

In their simplicity thought and averred it,
 Had yet a meaning quite as respectable :
 For, among other doctrines delectable,
 Was he not surely the first to insist on
 The natural sovereignty of our race?—
 Here the lecturer came to a pausing-place.
 And while his cough, like a drouthy piston,
 Tried to dislodge the husk that grew to him,
 I seized the occasion of bidding adieu to him,
 The vesture still within my hand.

XVI.

I could interpret its command.
 This time He would not bid me enter
 The exhausted air-bell of the Critic.
 Truth's atmosphere may grow mephitic
 When Papist struggles with Dissenter,
 Impregnating its pristine clarity,
 —One, by his daily fare's vulgarity,
 Its gust of broken meat and garlic;
 —One, by his soul's too-much presuming,
 To turn the frankincense's fuming
 And vapours of the candle starlike
 Into the cloud her wings she buoys on.
 Each, that thus sets the pure air seething,
 May poison it for healthy breathing—
 But the Critic leaves no air to poison ;
 Pumps out by a ruthless ingenuity

Atom by atom, and leaves you—vacuity.
Thus much of Christ, does he reject?
And what retain? His intellect?
What is it I must reverence duly?
Poor intellect for worship, truly,
Which tells me simply what was told
(If mere morality, bereft
Of the God in Christ, be all that's left)
Elsewhere by voices manifold;
With this advantage, that the stater
Made nowise the important stumble
Of adding, he, the sage and humble,
Was also one with the Creator.
You urge Christ's followers' simplicity:
But how does shifting blame, evade it?
Have wisdom's words no more felicity?
The stumbling-block, his speech—who laid it?
How comes it that for one found able
To sift the truth of it from fable,
Millions believe it to the letter?
Christ's goodness, then—does that fare better?
Strange goodness, which upon the score
Of being goodness, the mere due
Of man to fellow-man, much more
To God,—should take another view
Of its possessor's privilege,
And bid him rule his race! You pledge
Your fealty to such rule? What, all—
From heavenly John and Attic Paul,

And that brave weather-battered Peter
Whose stout faith only stood completer
For buffets, sinning to be pardoned,
As the more his hands hauled nets, they hardened,—
All, down to you, the man of men,
Professing here at Göttingen,
Compose Christ's flock! They, you and I
Are sheep of a good man! and why?
The goodness,—how did he acquire it?
Was it self-gained, did God inspire it?
Choose which; then tell me, on what ground
Should its possessor dare propound
His claim to rise o'er us an inch?
Were goodness all some man's invention,
Who arbitrarily made mention
What we should follow, and where flinch,—
What qualities might take the style
Of right and wrong,—and had such guessing
Met with as general acquiescing
As graced the Alphabet erewhile,
When A got leave an Ox to be,
No Camel (quoth the Jews) like G,—
For thus inventing thing and title
Worship were that man's fit requital.
But if the common conscience must
Be ultimately judge, adjust
Its apt name to each quality
Already known,—I would decree
Worship for such mere demonstration

And simple work of nomenclature,
Only the day I praised, not Nature,
But Harvey, for the circulation.
I would praise such a Christ, with pride
And joy, that he, as none beside,
Had taught us how to keep the mind
God gave him, as God gave his kind,
Freer than they from fleshly taint :
I would call such a Christ our Saint,
As I declare our Poet, him
Whose insight makes all others dim :
A thousand Poets pried at life,
And only one amid the strife
Rose to be Shakespeare : each shall take
His crown, I 'd say, for the world's sake—
Though some objected—" Had we seen
" The heart and head of each, what screen
" Was broken there to give them light,
" While in ourselves it shuts the sight,
" We should no more admire, perchance,
" That these found truth out at a glance,
" Than marvel how the bat discerns
" Some pitch-dark cavern's fifty turns,
" Led by a finer tact, a gift
" He boasts, which other birds must shift
" Without, and grope as best they can."
No, freely I would praise the man,—
Nor one whit more, if he contended
That gift of his, from God, descended.

Ah friend, what gift of man's does not ?
No nearer Something, by a jot,
Rise an infinity of Nothings
Than one : take Euclid for your teacher :
Distinguish kinds : do crownings, clothings,
Make that Creator which was creature ?
Multiply gifts upon his head,
And what, when all 's done, shall be said
But—the more gifted he, I ween !
That one 's made Christ, this other, Pilate,
And This might be all That has been,—
So what is there to frown or smile at ?
What is left for us, save, in growth
Of soul, to rise up, far past both,
From the gift looking to the Giver,
And from the cistern to the River,
And from the finite to Infinity,
And from man's dust to God's divinity ?

XVII.

Take all in a word : the truth in God's breast
Lies trace for trace upon ours impressed :
Though He is so bright and we so dim,
We are made in His image to witness Him ;
And were no eye in us to tell,
Instructed by no inner sense,
The light of Heaven from the dark of Hell,
That light would want its evidence,—

Though Justice, Good and Truth were still
 Divine, if, by some demon's will,
 Hatred and wrong had been proclaimed
 Law through the worlds, and Right misnamed.
 No mere exposition of morality
 Made or in part or in totality,
 Should win you to give it worship, therefore :
 And, if no better proof you will care for,
 —Whom do you count the worst man upon earth ?
 Be sure, he knows, in his conscience, more
 Of what Right is, than arrives at birth
 In the best man's acts that we bow before :
 This last *knows* better—true, but my fact is,
 †It is one thing to know, and another to practise.
 And thence I conclude that the real God-function
 Is to furnish a motive and injunction
 For practising what we know already.
 And such an injunction and such a motive
 As the God in Christ, do you waive, and “heady,
 High-minded,” hang your tablet-votive
 Outside the fane on a finger-post ?
 Morality to the uttermost,
 Supreme in Christ as we all confess,
 Why need *we* prove would avail no jot
 To make Him God, if God He were not ?
 What is the point where Himself lays stress ?
 Does the precept run “Believe in good,
 “In justice, truth, now understood
 “For the first time ?”—or, “Believe in ME,

“ Who lived and died, yet essentially
“ Am Lord of Life ? ” Whoever can take
The same to his heart and for mere love’s sake
Conceive of the love,—that man obtains
A new truth ; no conviction gains
Of an old one only, made intense
By a fresh appeal to his faded sense.

XVIII.

Can it be that He stays inside?
Is the vesture left me to commune with?
Could my soul find aught to sing in tune with
Even at this lecture, if she tried?
Oh, let me at lowest sympathize
With the lurking drop of blood that lies
In the desiccated brain’s white roots
Without a throb for Christ’s attributes,
As the Lecturer makes his special boast!
If love’s dead there, it has left a ghost.
Admire we, how from heart to brain
(Though to say so strike the doctors dumb)
One instinct rises and falls again,
Restoring the equilibrium.
And how when the Critic had done his best,
And the Pearl of Price, at reason’s test,
Lay dust and ashes levigable
On the Professor’s lecture-table ;
When we looked for the inference and monition
That our faith, reduced to such a condition,

Be swept forthwith to its natural dust-hole,—
He bids us, when we least expect it,
Take back our faith,—if it be not just whole,
Yet a pearl indeed, as his tests affect it,
Which fact pays the damage done rewardingly,
So, prize we our dust and ashes accordingly !
“ Go home and venerate the Myth
“ I thus have experimented with—
“ This Man, continue to adore him
“ Rather than all who went before him,
“ And all who ever followed after ! ”—
Surely for this I may praise you, my brother !
Will you take the praise in tears or laughter ?
That’s one point gained : can I compass another ?
Unlearned love was safe from spurning—
Can’t we respect your loveless learning ?
Let us at least give Learning honour !
What laurels had we showered upon her,
Girding her loins up to perturb
Our theory of the Middle Verb ;
Or Turk-like brandishing a scimitar
O’er anapæsts in comic-trimeter ;
Or curing the halt and maimed Iketides,
While we lounged on at our indebted ease :
Instead of which, a tricky demon
Sets her at Titus or Philemon !
When Ignorance wags his ears of leather
And hates God’s word, ’t is altogether ;
Nor leaves he his congenial thistles

To go and browse on Paul's Epistles.
—And you, the audience, who might ravage
The world wide, enviably savage,
Nor heed the cry of the retriever,
More than Herr Heine (before his fever),—
I do not tell a lie so arrant
As say my passion's wings are furled up,
And, without the plainest heavenly warrant,
I were ready and glad to give this world up—
But still, when you rub the brow meticulous,
And ponder the profit of turning holy
If not for God's, for your own sake solely,
—God forbid I should find you ridiculous!
Deduce from this lecture all that eases you,
Nay, call yourselves, if the calling pleases you,
“Christians,”—abhor the Deist's pravity,—
Go on, you shall no more move my gravity,
Than, when I see boys ride a-cockhorse
I find it in my heart to embarrass them
By hinting that their stick's a mock horse,
And they really carry what they say carries them.

xix.

So sat I talking with my mind.
I did not long to leave the door
And find a new church, as before,
But rather was quiet and inclined
To prolong and enjoy the gentle resting

From further tracking and trying and testing.
 This tolerance is a genial mood!
 (Said I, and a little pause ensued).
 One trims the bark 'twixt shoal and shelf,
 And sees, each side, the good effects of it,
 A value for religion's self,
 A carelessness about the sects of it.
 Let me enjoy my own conviction,
 Not watch my neighbour's faith with fretfulness,
 Still spying there some dereliction
 Of truth, perversity, forgetfulness!
 Better a mild indifferentism,
 Teaching that all our faiths (though duller
 His shine through a dull spirit's prism)
 Originally had one colour—
 Sending me on a pilgrimage
 Through ancient and through modern times
 To many peoples, various climes,
 Where I may see Saint, Savage, Sage
 Fuse their respective creeds in one
 Before the general Father's throne!

XX.

—'T was the horrible storm began afresh!
 The black night caught me in his mesh
 Whirled me up, and flung me prone.
 I was left on the college-step alone.
 I looked, and far there, ever fleeting

Far, far away, the receding gesture,
And looming of the lessening vesture!—
Swept forward from my stupid hand,
While I watched my foolish heart expand
In the lazy glow of benevolence,
O'er the various modes of man's belief.
I sprang up with fear's vehemence.
—Needs must there be one way, our chief
Best way of worship: let me strive
To find it, and when found, contrive
My fellows also take their share!
This constitutes my earthly care:
God's is above it and distinct.
For I, a man, with men am linked,
And not a brute with brutes; no gain
That I experience, must remain
Unshared: but should my best endeavour
To share it, fail—subsisteth ever
God's care above, and I exult
That God, by God's own ways occult,
May—doth, I will believe—bring back
All wanderers to a single track.
Meantime, I can but testify
God's care for me—no more, can I—
It is but for myself I *know*;
The world rolls witnessing around me
Only to leave me as it found me;
Men cry there, but my ear is slow:
Their races flourish or decay

—What boots it, while yon lucid way
Loaded with stars, divides the vault?
But soon my soul repairs its fault
When, sharpening 'sense's hebetude,
She turns on 'my own life! So viewed,
No mere mote's-breadth but teems immense
With witnessings of Providence:
And woe to me if when I look
Upon that record, the sole book
Unsealed' to me, I take no heed
Of any warning that I read!
Have I been sure, this Christmas-Eve,
God's own hand did the rainbow weave,
Whereby the truth from heaven slid
Into my soul?—I cannot bid
The world admit He stooped to heal
My soul, as if in a thunder-peal
Where one heard noise, and one saw flame,
I only knew He named my name:
But what is the world to me, for sorrow
Or joy in its censure, when to-morrow
It drops the remark, with just-turned head
Then, on again—that man is dead?
Yes, but for me—my name called,—drawn
As a conscript's lot from the lap's black yawn,
He has dipt into on a battle-dawn:
Bid out of life by a nod, a glance,—
Stumbling, mute-mazed, at nature's chance,—
With a rapid finger circled round,

Fixed to the first poor inch of ground
 To fight from, where his foot was found ;
 Whose ear but a minute since lay free
 To the wide camp's buzz and gossipry—
 Summoned, a solitary man,
 To end his life where his life began,
 From the safe glad rear, to the dreadful van !
 Soul of mine, hadst thou caught and held
 By the hem of the vesture !—

XXI.

And I caught

At the flying robe, and unrepelled
 Was lapped again in its folds full-fraught
 With warmth and wonder and delight,
 God's mercy being infinite.
 For scarce had the words escaped my tongue,
 When, at a passionate bound, I sprung
 Out of the wandering world of rain,
 Into the little chapel again.

XXII.

How else was I found there, bolt upright
 On my bench, as if I had never left it ?
 —Never flung out on the common at night
 Nor met the storm and wedge-like cleft it,
 Seen the raree-show of Peter's successor,
 Or the laboratory of the Professor !
 For the Vision, *that* was true, I wist,

True as that heaven and earth exist.
There sat my friend, the yellow and tall,
With his neck and its wen in the selfsame place ;
Yet my nearest neighbour's cheek showed gall,
She had slid away a contemptuous space :
And the old fat woman, late so placable,
Eyed me with symptoms, hardly mistakable,
Of her milk of kindness turning rancid.
In short a spectator might have fancied
That I had nodded betrayed by slumber,
Yet kept my seat, a warning ghastly,
Through the heads of the sermon, nine in number,
And woke up now at the tenth and lastly.
But again, could such a disgrace have happened ?
Each friend at my elbow had surely nudged it ;
And, as for the sermon, where did my nap end ?
Unless I heard it, could I have judged it ?
Could I report as I do at the close,
First, the preacher speaks through his nose :
Second, his gesture is too emphatic :
Thirdly, to waive what's pedagogic,
The subject-matter itself lacks logic :
Fourthly, the English is ungrammatic.
Great news ! the preacher is found no Pascal,
Whom, if I pleased, I might to the task call
Of making square to a finite eye
The circle of infinity,
And find so all-but-just-succeeding !
Great news ! the sermon proves no reading

Where bee-like in the flowers I may bury me,
 Like Taylor's, the immortal Jeremy!
 And now that I know the very worst of him,
 What was it I thought to obtain at first of him?
 Ha! Is God mocked, as He asks?
 Shall I take on me to change His tasks,
 And dare, dispatched to a river-head
 For a simple draught of the element,
 Neglect the thing for which He sent,
 And return with another thing instead?—
 Saying, "Because the water found
 "Welling up from underground,
 "Is mingled with the taints of earth,
 "While Thou, I know, dost laugh at dearth,
 "And couldst, at a word, convulse
 "The world with the leap of a river-pulse,—
 "Therefore I turned from the oozeings muddy,
 "And bring Thee a chalice I found, instead:
 "See the brave veins in the breccia ruddy!
 "One would suppose that the marble bled.
 "What matters the water? A hope I have nursed,
 "The waterless cup will quench my thirst."
 —Better have knelt at the poorest stream
 That trickles in pain from the straightest rift!
 For the less or the more is all God's gift,
 Who blocks up or breaks wide the granite-seam.
 And here, is there water or not, to drink?
 I then, in ignorance and weakness,
 Taking God's help, have attained to think

My heart does best to receive in meekness
That mode of worship, as most to His mind,
Where earthly aids being cast behind,
- His All in All appears serene
With the thinnest human veil between,
Letting the mystic Lamps, the Seven,
The many motions of His spirit,
Pass, as they list, to earth from heaven.
For the preacher's merit or demerit,
It were to be wished the flaws were fewer
In the earthen vessel, holding treasure,
Which lies as safe in a golden ewer;
But the main thing is, does it hold good measure?
Heaven soon sets right all other matters!—
Ask, else, these ruins of humanity,
This flesh worn out to rags and tatters,
This soul at struggle with insanity,
Who thence take comfort, can I doubt,
Which an empire gained, were a loss without.
May it be mine! And let us hope
That no worse blessing befall the Pope,
Turn'd sick at last of to-day's buffoonery,
Of posturings and petticoatings,
Beside his Bourbon bully's gloatings
In the bloody orgies of drunk poltroonery!
Nor may the Professor forego its peace
At Göttingen presently, when, in the dusk
Of his life, if his cough, as I fear, should increase,
Prophesied of by that horrible husk—

When thicker and thicker the darkness fills
 The world through his misty spectacles,
 And he gropes for something more substantial
 Than a fable, myth, or personification,—
 May Christ do for him what no mere man shall,
 And stand confessed as the God of Salvation !
 Meantime, in the still recurring fear
 Lest myself, at unawares, be found,
 While attacking the choice of my neighbours round,
 With none of my own made—I choose here !
 The giving out of the hymn reclaims me ;
 I have done : and if any blames me,
 Thinking that merely to touch in brevity
 The topics I dwell on, were unlawful,—
 Or worse, that I trench, with undue levity,
 On the bounds of the holy and the awful,—
 I praise the heart, and pity the head of him,
 And refer myself to THEE, instead of him,
 Who head and heart alike discernest,
 Looking below light speech we utter
 When the frothy spume and frequent sputter
 Prove that the soul's depths boil in earnest !
 May truth shine out, stand ever before us !
 I put up pencil and join chorus
 To Hepzibah Tune, without further apology,
 The last five verses of the third section
 Of the seventeenth hymn of Whitfield's Collection,
 To conclude with the doxology.

Easter-Day.

I.

How very hard it is to be
 A Christian! Hard for you and me,
 —Not the mere task of making real
 That duty up to its ideal,
 Effecting thus, complete and whole,
 A purpose of the human soul—
 For that is always hard to do;
 But hard, I mean, for me and you
 To realize it, more or less,
 With even the moderate success
 Which commonly repays our strife
 To carry out the aims of life.
 “This aim is greater,” you will say,
 “And so more arduous every way.”
 —But the importance of their fruits
 Still proves to man, in all pursuits,
 Proportional encouragement.
 “Then, what if it be God’s intent
 “That labour to this one result
 “Should seem unduly difficult?”
 Ah, that ’s a question in the dark—
 And the sole thing that I remark
 Upon the difficulty, this;

We do not see it where it is,
At the beginning of the race:
As we proceed, it shifts its place,
And where we looked for crowns to fall,
We find the tug's to come,—that 's all.

II

At first you say, "The whole, or chief
" Of difficulties, is Belief.
" Could I believe once thoroughly,
" The rest were simple. What? Am I
" An idiot, do you think,—a beast?
" Prove to me, only that the least
" Command of God is God's indeed,
" And what injunction shall I need
" To pay obedience? Death so nigh,
" When time must end, eternity
" Begin,—and cannot I compute,
" Weigh loss and gain together, suit
" My actions to the balance drawn,
" And give my body to be sawn
" Asunder, hacked in pieces, tied
" To horses, stoned, burned, crucified,
" Like any martyr of the list?
" How gladly!—if I made acquist,
" Through the brief minute's fierce annoy,
" Of God's eternity of joy."

III.

—And certainly you name the point
 Whereon all turns : for could you joint
 This flexile finite life once tight
 Into the fixed and infinite,
 You, safe inside, would spurn what 's out,
 With carelessness enough, no doubt—
 Would spurn mere life : but when time brings
 To their next stage your reasonings,
 Your eyes, late wide, begin to wink
 Nor see the path so well, I think.

IV.

You say, " Faith may be, one agrees,
 " A touchstone for God's purposes,
 " Even as ourselves conceive of them.
 " Could He acquit us or condemn
 " For holding what no hand can loose,
 " Rejecting when we can't but choose?
 " As well award the victor's wreath
 " To whosoever should take breath
 " Duly each minute while he lived—
 " Grant heaven, because a man contrived
 " To see its sunlight every day
 " He walked forth on the public way.
 " You must mix some uncertainty
 " With faith, if you would have faith *be*.
 " Why, what but faith, do we abhor.

" And idolize each other for—
 " Faith in our evil, or our good,
 " Which is or is not understood
 " Aright by those we love or those
 " We hate, thence called our friends or foes?
 " Your mistress saw your spirit's grace,
 " When, turning from the ugly face,
 " I found belief in it too hard;
 " And she and I have our reward.
 " —Yet here a doubt peeps: well for us
 " Weak beings, to go using thus
 " A touchstone for our little ends,
 " Trying with faith the foes and friends;
 " —But God, bethink you! I would fain
 " Conceive of the Creator's reign
 " As based upon exacter laws
 " Than creatures build by with applause.
 " In all God's acts—(as Plato cries
 " He doth)—He *should* geometrize.
 " Whence, I desiderate . . ."

v.

I see!

You would grow as a natural tree,
 Stand as a rock, soar up like fire.
 The world's so perfect and entire,
 Quite above faith, so right and fit!
 Go there, walk up and down in it!
 No. The creation travails, groans—

Contrive your music from its moans,
 Without or let or hindrance, friend !
 That 's an old story, and its end
 As old—you come back (be sincere)
 With every question you put here
 (Here where there once was, and is still,
 We think, a living oracle,
 Whose answers you stand carping at)
 This time flung back unanswered flat,—
 Beside, perhaps, as many more
 As those that drove you out before,
 Now added, where was little need !
 Questions impossible, indeed,
 To us who sat still, all and each
 Persuaded that our earth had speech
 Of God's, writ down, no matter if
 In cursive type or hieroglyph,—
 Which one fact freed us from the yoke
 Of guessing why He never spoke.
 You come back in no better plight
 Than when you left us,—am I right ?

VI.

So, the old process, I conclude,
 Goes on, the reasoning 's pursued
 Further. You own, " 'Tis well averred,
 " A scientific faith 's absurd,
 " —Frustrates the very end't was meant

“ To serve. So, I would rest content
“ With a mere probability,
“ But, probable; the chance must lie
“ Clear on one side,—lie all in rough,
“ So long as there be just enough
“ To pin my faith to, though it hap
“ Only at points: from gap to gap
“ One hangs up a huge curtain so,
“ Grandly, nor seeks to have it go
“ Foldless and flat along the wall.
“ —What care I if some interval
“ Of life less plainly may depend
“ On God? I’d hang there to the end;
“ And thus I should not find it hard
“ To be a Christian and debarred
“ From trailing on the earth, till furled
“ Away by death.—Renounce the world!
“ Were that a mighty hardship? Plan
“ A pleasant life, and straight some man
“ Beside you, with, if he thought fit,
“ Abundant means to compass it,
“ Shall turn deliberate aside
“ To try and live as, if you tried
“ You clearly might, yet most despise.
“ One friend of mine wears out his eyes,
“ Slighting the stupid joys of sense,
“ In patient hope that, ten years hence,
“ ‘Somewhat completer,’ he may say,
“ ‘My list of *coleoptera!*’

" While just the other who most laughs
 " At him, above all epitaphs
 " Aspires to have his tomb describe
 " Himself as Sole among the tribe
 " Of snuffbox-fanciers, who possessed
 " A Grignon with the Regent's crest.
 " So that, subduing, as you want,
 " Whatever stands predominant
 " Among my earthly appetites.
 " For tastes, and smells, and sounds, and sights,
 " I shall be doing that alone,
 " To gain a palm-branch and a throne,
 " Which fifty people undertake
 " To do, and gladly, for the sake
 " Of giving a Semitic guess,
 " Or playing pawns at blindfold chess."

VII.

Good! and the next thing is,—look round
 For evidence enough. 'T is found,
 No doubt: as is your sort of mind,
 So is your sort of search—you'll find
 What you desire, and that's to be
 A Christian. What says history?
 How comforting a point it were
 To find some mummy-scrap declare
 There lived a Moses! Better still,
 Prove Jonah's whale translatable
 Into some quicksand of the seas,

Isle, cavern, rock, or what you please,
That faith might clap her wings and crow
From such an eminence! Or, no—
The human heart's best; you prefer
Making that prove the minister
To truth; you probe its wants and needs,
And hopes and fears, then try what creeds
Meet these most aptly,—resolute
That faith plucks such substantial fruit
Wherever these two correspond,
She little needs to look beyond,
And puzzle out who Orpheus was,
Or Dionysius Zagrias.
You'll find sufficient, as I say,
To satisfy you either way;
You wanted to believe; your pains
Are crowned—you do: and what remains?
“Renounce the world!”—Ah, were it done
By merely cutting one by one
Your limbs off, with your wise head last,
How easy were it!—how soon past,
If once in the believing mood!
“Such is man's usual gratitude,
“Such thanks to God do we return,
“For not exacting that we spurn
“A single gift of life, forego
“One real gain,—only taste them so
“With gravity and temperance,
“That those mild virtues may enhance

" Such pleasures, rather than abstract—
 " Last spice of which, will be the fact
 " Of love discerned in every gift;
 " While, when the scene of life shall shift,
 " And the gay heart be taught to ache,
 " As sorrows and privations take
 " The place of joy,—the thing that seems
 " Mere misery, under human schemes,
 " Becomes, regarded by the light
 " Of love, as very near, or quite
 " As good a gift as joy before.
 " So plain is it that, all the more
 " God's dispensation's merciful,
 " More pettishly we try and cull
 " Briars, thistles, from our private plot,
 " To mar God's ground where thorns are not!"

VIII.

Do you say this, or I?—Oh, you!
 Then, what, my friend,—(thus I pursue
 Our parley)—you indeed opine
 That the Eternal and Divine
 Did, eighteen centuries ago,
 In very truth . . . Enough! you know
 The all-stupendous tale,—that Birth,
 That Life, that Death! And all, the earth
 Shuddered at,—all, the heavens grew black
 Rather than see; all, Nature's rack

And throe at dissolution's brink
Attested,—all took place, you think,
Only to give our joys a zest,
And prove our sorrows for the best?
We differ, then! Were I, still pale
And heartstruck at the dreadful tale,
Waiting to hear God's voice declare
What horror followed for my share,
As implicated in the deed,
Apart from other sins,—concede
That if He blacked out in a blot
My brief life's pleasantness, 't were not
So very disproportionate!
Or there might be another fate—
I certainly could understand
(If fancies were the thing in hand)
How God might save, at that Day's price,
The impure in their impurities,
Give formal licence and complete
To choose the fair and pick the sweet.
But there be certain words, broad, plain,
Uttered again and yet again,
Hard to mistake or overgloss—
Announcing this world's gain for loss,
And bidding us reject the same:
The whole world lieth (they proclaim)
In wickedness,—come out of it!
Turn a deaf ear, if you think fit,
But I who thrill through every nerve

At thought of what deaf ears deserve,—
How do you counsel in the case ?

IX.

“ I ’d take, by all means, in your place,
 “ The safe side, since it so appears :
 “ Deny myself, a few brief years,
 “ The natural pleasure, leave the fruit
 “ Or cut the plant up by the root.
 “ Remember what a martyr said’
 “ On the rude tablet overhead !
 “ ‘ I was born sickly, poor and mean,
 “ ‘ A slave : no misery could screen
 “ ‘ The holders of the pearl of price
 “ ‘ From Cæsar’s envy ; therefore twice
 “ ‘ I fought with beasts, and three times saw
 “ ‘ My children suffer by his law ;
 “ ‘ At last my own release was earned :
 “ ‘ I was some time in being burned,
 “ ‘ But at the close a Hand came through
 “ ‘ The fire above my head, and drew
 “ ‘ My soul to Christ, whom now I see.
 “ ‘ Sergius, a brother, writes for me
 “ ‘ This testimony on the wall—
 “ ‘ For me, I have forgot it all.’
 “ You say right ; this were not so hard !
 “ And since one nowise is debarred
 “ From this, why not escape some sins
 “ By such a method ? ”

x.

Then begins

To the old point, revulsion new—
(For 't is just this, I bring you to)
If after all we should mistake,
And so renounce life for the sake
Of death and nothing else? You hear
Our friends we jeered at, send the jeer
Back to ourselves with good effect—
'There *were* my beetles to collect!'
'My box—a trifle, I confess,
'But here I hold it, ne'ertheless!'
Poor idiots, (let us pluck up heart ɪ
And answer) we, the better part
Have chosen, though 't were only hope,—
Nor envy moles like you that grope
Amid your veritable muck,
More than the grasshoppers would truck,
For yours, their passionate life away,
That spends itself in leaps all day
To reach the sun, you want the eyes
To see, as they the wings to rise
And match the noble hearts of them!
Thus the contemner we contemn,—
And, when doubt strikes us, thus we ward
Its stroke off, caught upon our guard,
—Not struck enough to overturn
Our faith, but shake it—make us learn

What I began with, and, I wis,
 End, having proved,—how hard it is
 To be a Christian !

XI.

“ Proved, or not,
 “ Howe’er you wis, small thanks, I wot,
 “ You get of mine, for taking pains
 “ To make it hard to me. Who gains
 “ By that, I wonder? Here I live
 “ In trusting ease ; and here you drive
 “ At causing me to lose what most
 “ Yourself would mourn for had you lost ! ”

XII.

But, do you see, my friend, that thus
 You leave St. Paul for Æschylus ?
 —Who made his Titan’s arch-device
 The giving men *blind hopes* to spice
 The meal of life with, else devoured
 In bitter haste, while lo! death loured
 Before them at the platter’s edge !
 If faith should be, as I allege,
 Quite other than a condiment
 To heighten flavours with, or meant
 (Like that brave curry of his Grace)
 To take at need the victuals’ place ?
 If, having dined, you would digest

Besides, and turning to your rest
Should find instead . . .

XIII.

Now, you shall see
And judge if a mere foppery
Pricks on my speaking! I resolve
To utter . . . yes, it shall devolve
On you to hear as solemn, strange
And dread a thing as in the range
Of facts,—or fancies, if God will—
E'er happened to our kind! I still
Stand in the cloud and, while it wraps
My face, ought not to speak perhaps;
Seeing that if I carry through
My purpose, if my words in you
Find a live actual listener,
My story, reason must aver
False after all—the happy chance!
While, if each human countenance
I meet in London day by day,
Be what I fear,—my warnings fray
No one, and no one they convert,
- And no one helps me to assert
How hard it is to really be
A Christian, and in vacancy
I pour this story!

XIV.

I commence
By trying to inform you, whence

It comes that every Easter-night
As now, I sit up, watch, till light,
Upon those chimney-stacks and roofs,
Give, through my window-pane, grey proofs
That Easter-day is breaking slow.
On such a night, three years ago,
It chanced that I had cause to cross
The common, where the chapel was,
Our friend spoke of, the other day—
You 've not forgotten, I dare say.
I fell to musing of the time
So close, the blessed matin-prime
All hearts leap up at, in some guise—
One could not well do otherwise.
Insensibly my thoughts were bent
Toward the main point; I overwent
Much the same ground of reasoning
As you and I just now. One thing
Remained, however—one that tasked
My soul to answer; and I asked,
Fairly and frankly, what might be
That History, that Faith, to me
—Me there—not me in some domain
Built up and peopled by my brain,
Weighing its merits as one weighs
Mere theories for blame or praise,
—The kingcraft of the Lucumons,
Or Fourier's scheme, its pros and cons,—
But *my* faith *there*, or none at all.

‘How were my case, now, did I fall
‘Dead here, this minute—should I lie
‘Faithful or faithless?’—Note that I
Inclined thus ever!—little prone
For instance, when I lay alone
In childhood, to go calm to sleep
And leave a closet where might keep
His watch perdue some murderer
Waiting till twelve o’clock to stir,
As good, authentic legends tell:
‘He might: but how improbable!
‘How little likely to deserve
‘The pains and trial to the nerve
‘Of thrusting head into the dark!’—
Urged my old nurse, and bade me mark
Beside, that, should the dreadful scout
Really lie hid there, and leap out
At first turn of the rusty key,
Mine were small gain that she could see,
Killed not in bed but on the floor,
And losing one night’s sleep the more.
I tell you, I would always burst
The door ope, know my fate at first.
This time, indeed, the closet penned
No such assassin: but a friend
Rather, peeped out to guard me, fit
For counsel, Common Sense, to wit,
Who said a good deal that might pass,—
Heartening, impartial too, it was,

Judge else: 'For, soberly now,—who
'Should be a Christian if not you?'
(Hear how he smoothed me down.) 'One takes
'A whole life, sees what course it makes
'Mainly, and not by fits and starts—
'In spite of stoppage which imparts
'Fresh value to the general speed.
'A life, with none, would fly indeed:
'Your progressing is slower—right!
'We deal with progress and not flight.
'Through baffling senses passionate,
'Fancies as restless,—with a freight
'Of knowledge cumbersome enough
'To sink your ship when waves grow rough,
'Though meant for ballast in the hold,—
'I find, 'mid dangers manifold,
'The good bark answers to the helm
'Where faith sits, easier to o'erwhelm
'Than some stout peasant's heavenly guide,
'Whose hard head could not, if it tried,
'Conceive a doubt, nor understand
'How senses hornier than his hand
'Should 'tice the Christian off his guard.
'More happy! But shall we award
'Less honour to the hull which, dogged
'By storms, a mere wreck, waterlogged,
'Masts by the board, her bulwarks gone,
'And stanchions going, yet bears on,—
'Than to mere life-boats, built to save,

' And triumph o'er the breaking wave ?
' Make perfect your good ship as these,
' And what were her performances !'
I added—' Would the ship reach home !
' I wish indeed " God's kingdom come—"
' The day when I shall see appear
' His bidding, as my duty, clear
' From doubt ! And it shall dawn, that day,
' Some future season ; Easter may
' Prove, not impossibly, the time—
' Yes, that were striking—fates would chime
' So aptly ! Easter-morn, to bring
' The Judgment !—deeper in the spring
' Than now, however, when there's snow
' Capping the hills ; for earth must show
' All signs of meaning to pursue
' Her tasks as she was wont to do
' —The skylark, taken by surprise
' As we ourselves, shall recognize
' Sudden the end. For suddenly
' It comes ; the dreadfulness must be
' In that ; all warrants the belief—
' " At night it cometh like a thief."
' I fancy why the trumpet blows ;
' —Plainly, to wake one. From repose
' We shall start up, at last awake
' From life, that insane dream we take
' For waking now, because it seems.
' And as, when now we wake from dreams,

' We laugh, while we recall them, " Fool,
 ' " To let the chance slip, linger cool
 ' " When such adventure offered! Just
 ' " A bridge to cross; a dwarf to thrust
 ' " Aside, a wicked mage to stab—
 ' " And, lo ye, I had kissed Queen Mab!"—
 ' So shall we marvel why we grudged
 ' Our labour here, and idly judged
 ' Of Heaven, we might have gained; but lose!
 ' Lose? Talk of loss, and I refuse
 ' To plead at all! You speak no worse
 ' Nor better than my ancient nurse
 ' When she would tell me in my youth
 ' I well deserved that shapes uncouth
 ' Frighted and teased me in my sleep—
 ' Why could I not in memory keep
 ' Her precept for the evil's cure?
 ' " Pinch your own arm, boy, and be sure
 ' " You'll wake forthwith!"'

xv.

And as I said
 This nonsense, throwing back my head
 With light complacent laugh, I found
 Suddenly all the midnight round
 One fire. The dome of heaven had stood
 As made up of a multitude
 Of handbreadth cloudlets, one vast rack

Of ripples infinite and black,
From sky to sky. Sudden there went,
Like horror and astonishment,
A fierce vindictive scribble of red
Quick flame across, as if one said
(The angry scribe of Judgment) 'There—
'Burn it!' And straight I was aware
That the whole ribwork round, minute
Cloud touching cloud beyond compute,
Was tinted, each with its own spot
Of burning at the core, till clot
Jammed against clot, and spilt its fire
Over all heaven, which 'gan suspire
As fanned to measure equable,—
Just so great conflagrations kill
Night overhead, and rise and sink,
Reflected. Now the fire would shrink
And wither off the blasted face
Of heaven, and I distinct might trace
The sharp black ridgy outlines left
Unburned like network—then, each cleft
The fire had been sucked back into,
Regorged, and out it surging flew,
Furiously, and night writhed inflamed,
Till, tolerating to be tamed
No longer, certain rays world-wide
Shot downwardly. On every side
Caught past escape, the earth was lit;
As if a dragon's nostril split

And all his famished ire o'erflowed ;
 Then, as he winced at his lord's goad,
 Back he inhaled : whereat I found
 The clouds into vast pillars bound,
 Based on the corners of the earth,
 Propping the skies at top : a dearth
 Of fire i' the violet intervals,
 Leaving exposed the utmost walls
 Of time, about to tumble in
 And end the world.

XVI.

I felt begin

The Judgment-Day : to retrocede
 Was too late now. 'In very deed,'
 (I uttered to myself) 'that Day !'
 The intuition burned away
 All darkness from my spirit too :
 There, stood I, found and fixed, I knew,
Choosing the world. The choice was made ;
 And naked and disguiseless stayed,
 And unevadable, the fact.
 My brain held ne'ertheless compact
 Its senses, nor my heart declined
 Its office ; rather, both combined
 To help me in this juncture. I
 Lost not a second,—agony
 Gave boldness ; since my life had end
 And my choice with it—best defend.

Applaud both! I resolved to say,
 'So was I framed by Thee, such way
 'I put to use Thy senses here!
 'It was so beautiful, so near,
 'Thy world,—what could I then but choose
 'My part there? Nor did I refuse
 'To look above the transient boon
 'Of time; but it was hard so soon
 'As in a short life, to give up
 'Such beauty: I could put the cup
 'Undrained of half its fulness, by;
 'But, to renounce it, utterly,
 '—That was too hard! Nor did the cry
 'Which bade renounce it, touch my brain
 'Authentically deep and plain
 'Enough to make my lips let go,
 'But Thou, who knowest all, dost know
 'Whether I was not, life's brief while,
 'Endeavouring to reconcile
 'Those lips (too tardily, alas!)
 'To letting the dear remnant pass,
 'One day,—some drops of earthly good
 'Untasted! Is it for this mood,
 'That Thou, whose earth delights so well,
 'Hast made its complement a hell?'

XVII.

A final belch of fire like blood,
 Overbroke all heaven in one flood

Of doom. Then fire was sky, and sky
 Fire, and both, one brief ecstasy,
 Then ashes. But I heard no noise
 (Whatever was) because a Voice
 'Beside me spoke thus, "Life is done,
 "Time ends, Eternity's begun,
 "And thou art judged for evermore."

XVIII.

I looked up; all seemed as before;
 Of that cloud-Tophet overhead,
 No trace was left: I saw instead
 The common round me, and the sky
 Above, stretched drear and emptily
 Of life. 'T was the last watch of night,
 Except what brings the morning quite;
 When the armed angel, conscience-clear,
 His task nigh done, leans o'er his spear
 And gazes on the earth he guards,
 Safe one night more through all its wards,
 Till God relieve him at his post.
 'A dream—a waking dream at most!
 (I spoke out quick, that I might shake
 The horrid nightmare off, and wake.)
 'The world gone, yet the world is here?
 'Are not all things as they appear?
 'Is Judgment past for me alone?
 '—And where had place the great white throne?

'The rising of the quick and dead?
 'Where stood they, small and great? Who read
 'The sentence from the opened book?'
 So, by degrees, the blood forsook
 My heart, and let it beat afresh;
 I knew I should break through the mesh
 Of horror, and breathe presently:
 When, lo, again, the Voice by me!

XIX.

I saw . . . Oh brother, 'mid far sands
 The palm-tree-cinctured city stands,
 Bright-white beneath, as heaven, bright-blue,
 Leans o'er it, while the years pursue
 Their course, unable to abate
 Its paradisaical laugh at fate!
 One morn,—the Arab staggers blind
 O'er a new tract of death, calcined
 To ashes, silence, nothingness,—
 And strives, with dizzy wits, to guess
 Whence fell the blow. What if, 'twixt skies
 And prostrate earth, he should surprise
 The imaged vapour, head to foot,
 Surveying, motionless and mute,
 Its work, ere, in a whirlwind rapt
 It vanish up again?—So hapt
 My chance. HE stood there. Like the smoke
 Pillared o'er Sodom, when day broke,—
 I saw Him. One magnificent pall

Mantled in massivè fold and fall
 His dread, and coiled in snaky swathes
 About His feet: night's black, that bathes
 All else, broke, grizzled with despair,
 Against the soul of blackness there.
 A gesture told the mood within—
 That wrappèd right hand which basèd the chin,
 That intense meditation fixèd
 On His procedure,—pity mixèd
 With the fulfilment of decree.
 Motionless, thus, He spokè to me,
 Who fell before His feet, a mass,
 No man now.

xx.

"All is come to pass.
 "Such shows are over for each soul
 "They had respect to. In the roll
 "Of Judgment which convincèd mankind
 "Of sin, stood many, bold and blind,
 "Terror must burn the truth into :
 "Their fate for them!—thou hadst to do
 "With absolute omnipotence,
 "Able its judgments to dispense
 "To the whole race, as every one
 "Were its sole object. Judgment done,
 "God is, thou art,—the rest is hurled
 "To nothingness for thee. This world,
 "This finite life, thou hast preferred,

“ In disbelief of God’s own word,
“ To Heaven and to Infinity.
“ Here the probation was for thee,
“ To show thy soul the earthly mixed
“ With heavenly, it must choose betwixt.
“ The earthly joys lay palpable,—
“ A taint, in each, distinct as well ;
“ The heavenly flitted, faint and rare,
“ Above them, but as truly were
“ Taintless, so, in their nature, best.
“ Thy choice was earth: thou didst attest
“ ‘T was fitter spirit should subserve
“ The flesh, than flesh refine to nerve
“ Beneath the spirit’s play. Advance
“ No claim to their inheritance
“ Who chose the spirit’s fugitive
“ Brief gleams, and yearned, ‘ This were to live
“ ‘ Indeed, if rays, completely pure
“ ‘ From flesh that dulls them, could endure,—
“ ‘ Not shoot in meteor-light athwart
“ ‘ Our earth, to show how cold and swart
“ ‘ It lies beneath their fire, but stand
“ ‘ As stars do, destined to expand,
“ ‘ Prove veritable worlds, our home !’
“ Thou saidst,—‘ Let spirit star the dome
“ ‘ Of sky, that flesh may miss no peak,
“ ‘ No nook of earth,—I shall not seek
“ ‘ Its service further !’ Thou art shut
“ Out of the heaven of spirit ; glut

“Thy sense upon the world: ’t is thine
 “For ever—take it!”

XXI.

‘How? Is mine,
 ‘The world?’ (I cried, while my soul broke
 Out in a transport,) ‘Hast Thou spoke
 ‘Plainly in that? Earth’s exquisite
 ‘Treasures of wonder and delight,
 ‘For me?’

XXII.

The austere Voice returned,—
 “So soon made happy? Hadst thou learned
 “What God accounteth happiness,
 “Thou wouldst not find it hard to guess
 “What hell may be His punishment
 “For those who doubt if God invent
 “Better than they. Let such men rest
 “Content with what they judged the best.
 “Let the unjust usurp at will:
 “The filthy shall be filthy still:
 “Miser, there waits the gold for thee!
 “Hater, indulge thine enmity!
 “And thou, whose heaven self-ordained
 “Was, to enjoy earth unrestrained,
 “Do it! Take all the ancient show!
 “The woods shall wave, the rivers flow,
 “And men apparently pursue

“ Their works, as they were wont to do,
“ While living in probation yet.
“ I promise not thou shalt forget
“ The Past, now gone to its account ;
“ But leave thee with the old amount
“ Of faculties, nor less nor more,
“ Unvisited, as heretofore,
“ By God’s free spirit, that makes an end.
“ So, once more, take thy world ! expend
“ Eternity upon its shows,
“ Flung thee as freely as one rose
“ Out of a summer’s opulence,
“ Over the Eden-barrier whence
“ Thou art excluded. Knock in vain !”

XXIII.

I sat up. All was still again.
I breathed free : to my heart, back fled
The warmth. ‘ But, all the world !’ (I said)
I stooped and picked a leaf of fern,
And recollected I might learn
From books, how many myriad sorts
Of fern exist, to trust reports,
Each as distinct and beautiful
As this, the very first I cull.
Think, from the first leaf to the last !
Conceive, then, earth’s resources ! Vast
Exhaustless beauty, endless change

Of wonder! and this foot shall range
 Alps, Andes,—and this eye devour
 The bee-bird and the aloe-flower?

XXIV.

Then the Voice, "Welcome so to rate
 "The arras-folds that variegate
 "The earth, God's antechamber, well!
 "The wise, who waited there, could tell
 "By these, what royalties in store
 "Lay one step past the entrance-door.
 "For whom, was reckoned, not too much,
 "This life's munificence? For such
 "As thou,—a race, whereof scarce one
 "Was able; in a million,
 "To feel that any marvel lay
 "In objects round his feet all day;
 "Scarce one, in many millions more,
 "Willing, if able, to explore
 "The secreter, minuter charm!
 "—Brave souls, a fern-leaf could disarm
 "Of power to cope with God's intent,—
 "Or scared if the south firmament
 "With north-fire did its wings reflodge!
 "All partial beauty was a pledge
 "Of beauty in its plenitude:
 "But since the pledge sufficed thy mood,
 "Retain it! plenitude be theirs
 "Who looked above!"

XXV.

Though sharp despairs
 Shot through me, I held up, bore on.
 'What matter though my trust were gone
 'From natural things? Henceforth my part
 'Be less with Nature than with Art!
 'For Art supplants, gives mainly worth
 'To Nature; 't is Man stamps the earth—
 'And I will seek his impress, seek
 'The statuary of the Greek,
 'Italy's painting—there my choice
 'Shall fix!

XXVI.

“Obtain it!” said the Voice,
 “—The one form with its single act,
 “Which sculptors laboured to abstract,
 “The one face, painters tried to draw,
 “With its one look, from throngs they saw.
 “And that perfection in their soul,
 “These only hinted at? The whole,
 “They were but parts of? What each laid
 “His claim to glory on?—afraid
 “His fellow-men should give him rank
 “By the poor tentatives he shrank
 “Smitten at heart from, all the more,
 “That gazers pressed in to adore!
 ““Shall I be judged by only these?”

“ If such his soul’s capacities,
“ Even while he trod the earth,—think, now
“ What pomp in Buonarroti’s brow,
“ With its new palace-brain where dwells
“ Superb the soul, unvexed by cells
“ That crumbled with the transient clay !
“ What visions will his right hand’s sway
“ Still turn to form, as still they burst
“ Upon him ? How will he quench thirst,
“ Titanically infantine,
“ Laid at the breast of the Divine ?
“ Does it confound thee,—this first page
“ Emblazoning man’s heritage ?—
“ Can this alone absorb thy sight,
“ As pages were not infinite,—
“ Like the omnipotence which tasks
“ Itself, to furnish all that asks
“ The soul it means to satiate ?
“ What was the world, the starry state
“ Of the broad skies,—what, all displays
“ Of power and beauty intermixed,
“ Which now thy soul is chained betwixt,—
“ What else than needful furniture
“ For life’s first stage ? God’s work, be sure,
“ No more spreads wasted, than falls scant :
“ He filled, did not exceed, man’s want
“ Of beauty in this life. But through
“ Life pierce,—and what has earth to do,
“ Its utmost beauty’s appanage,

- “ With the requirement of next stage ?
“ Did God pronounce earth ‘ very good ’ ?
“ Needs must it be, while understood
“ For man’s preparatory state ;
“ Nothing to heighten nor abate :
“ Transfer the same completeness here,
“ To serve a new state’s use,—and drear
“ Deficiency gapes every side !
“ The good, tried once, were bad, retried.
“ See the enwrapping rocky niche,
“ Sufficient for the sleep, in which
“ The lizard breathes for ages safe :
“ Split the mould—and as this would chafe
“ The creature’s new world-widened sense,
“ One minute after day dispense
“ The thousand sounds and sights that broke
“ In on him at the chisel’s stroke,—
“ So, in God’s eye, the earth’s first stuff
“ Was, neither more nor less, enough
“ To house man’s soul, man’s need fulfil.
“ Man reckoned it immeasurable ?
“ So thinks the lizard of his vault !
“ Could God be taken in default,
“ Short of contrivances, by you,—
“ Or reached, ere ready to pursue
“ His progress through eternity ?
“ That chambered rock, the lizard’s world,
“ Your easy mallet’s blow has hurled
“ To nothingness for ever ; so,

"Has God abolished at a blow
 "This world, wherein his saints were pent,—
 "Who, though found grateful and content,
 "With the provision there, as thou,
 "Yet knew He would not disallow
 "Their spirit's hunger, felt as well,—
 "Unsated,—not unsatable,
 "As paradise gives proof. Deride
 "Their choice now, thou who sit'st outside!"

XXVII.

I cried in anguish, 'Mind, the mind,
 'So miserably cast behind,
 'To gain what had been wisely lost!
 'Oh, let me strive to make the most
 'Of the poor stunted soul, I nipped
 'Of budding wings, else now equipt
 'For voyage from summer isle to isle!
 'And though she needs must reconcile
 'Ambition to the life on ground,
 'Still, I can profit by late found
 'But precious knowledge. Mine is best—
 'I will seize mind, forego the rest,
 'And try how far my tethered strength
 'May crawl in this poor breadth and length.
 'Let me, since I can fly no more,
 'At least spin dervish-like about
 '(Till giddy rapture almost doubt

' I fly) through circling sciences,
 ' Philosophies and histories!
 ' Should the whirl slacken there, then verse,
 ' Fining to music, shall asperse
 ' Fresh and fresh fire-dew, till I strain
 ' Intoxicate, half-break my chain!
 ' Not joyless, though more favoured feet
 ' Stand calm, where I want wings to beat
 ' The floor. At least earth's bond is broke!'

XXVIII.

Then, (sickening even while I spoke)
 ' Let me alone! No answer, pray,
 ' To this! I know what Thou wilt say!
 ' All still is earth's,—to Know, as much
 ' As Feel its truths, which if we touch
 ' With sense, or apprehend in soul,
 ' What matter? I have reached the goal—
 ' " Whereto does Knowledge serve!" will burn
 ' My eyes, too sure, at every turn!
 ' I cannot look back now, nor stake
 ' Bliss on the race, for running's sake.
 ' The goal's a ruin like the rest!—
 ' And so much worse thy latter quest,
 (Added the Voice) " that even on earth—
 ' Whenever, in man's soul, had birth
 ' Those intuitions, grasps of guess,
 ' That pull the more into the less,

- " Making the finite comprehend
 " Infinity,—the bard would spend
 " Such praise alone, upon his craft,
 " As, when wind-lyres obey the waft,
 " Goes to the craftsman who arranged.
 " The seven strings, changed them and rechanged—
 " Knowing it was the South that harped.
 " He felt his song, in singing, warped ;
 " Distinguished his and God's part : whence
 " A world of spirit as of sense
 " Was plain to him, yet not too plain,
 " Which he could traverse, not remain
 " A guest in :—else were permanent
 " Heaven on earth, which its gleams were meant
 " To sting with hunger for full light,—
 " Made visible in verse, despite
 " The veiling weakness,—truth by means
 " Of fable, showing while it screens,—
 " Since highest truth, man e'er supplied,
 " Was ever fable on outside.
 " Such gleams made bright the earth an age ;
 " Now, the whole sun 's his heritage !
 " Take up thy world, it is allowed, !
 " Thou who hast entered in the cloud ! "

XXIX.

Then I—' Behold, my spirit bleeds,
 ' Catches no more at broken reeds,—

' But lilies flower those reeds above :
' I let the world go, and take love !
' Love survives in me, albeit those
' I love be henceforth masks and shows,
' Not loving men and women : still
' I mind how love repaired all ill,
' Cured wrong, soothed grief, made earth amends
' With parents, brothers, children, friends !
' Some semblance of a woman yet
' With eyes to help me to forget,
' Shall live with me ; and I will match
' Departed love with love, attach
' Its fragments to my whole, nor scorn
' The poorest of the grains of corn
' I save from shipwreck on this isle,
' Trusting its barrenness may smile
' With happy foodful green one day,
' More precious for the pains. I pray,
' For love, then, only !'

xxx.

At the word,
The Form, I looked to have been stirred
With pity and approval, rose
O'er me, as when the headsman throws
Axe over shoulder to make end—
I fell prone, letting Him expend
His wrath, while thus the inflicting Voice

Smote me. "Is this thy final choice?
"Love is the best? 'T is somewhat late!
"And all thou dost enumerate
"Of power and beauty in the world,
"The mightiness of love was curled
"Inextricably round about.
"Love lay within it and without,
"To clasp thee,—but in vain! Thy soul
"Still shrunk from Him who made the whole,
"Still set deliberate aside
"His love!—Now take love! Well betide
"Thy tardy conscience! Haste to take
"The show of love for the name's sake,
"Remembering every moment Who
"Beside creating thee unto
"These ends, and these for thee, was said
"To undergo death in thy stead
"In flesh like thine: so ran the tale.
"What doubt in thee could countervail
"Belief in it? Upon the ground
"That in the story had been found
"Too much love! How could God love *so*?
"He who in all His works below
"Adapted to the needs of man,
"Made love the basis of the plan,—
"Did love, as was demonstrated:
"While man, who was so fit instead
"To hate, as every day gave proof,—
"Man thought man, for his kind's behoof,

" Both could and did invent that scheme
 " Of perfect love—'t would well beseem
 " Cain's nature thou wast wont to praise,
 " Not tally with God's usual ways!"

XXXI.

And I cowered deprecatingly—
 'Thou Love of God! Or let me die,
 ' Or grant what shall seem Heaven almost!
 ' Let me not know that all is lost,
 ' Though lost it be—leave me not tied
 ' To this despair, this corpse-like bride!
 ' Let that old life seem mine—no more—
 ' With limitation as before,
 ' With darkness, hunger, toil, distress:
 ' Be all the earth a wilderness!
 ' Only let me go on, go on,
 ' Still hoping ever and anon
 ' To reach one eve the Better Land!'

XXXII.

Then did the Form expand, expand—
 I knew Him through the dread disguise,
 As the whole God within His eyes
 Embraced me.

XXXIII.

When I lived again,

The day was breaking,—the grey plain
I rose from, silvered thick with dew.
Was this a vision? False or true?
Since then, three varied years are spent,
And commonly my mind is bent
To think it was a dream—be sure
A mere dream and distemperature—
The last day's watching: then the night,—
The shock of that strange Northern Light
Set my head swimming, bred in me
A dream. And so I live, you see,
Go through the world, try, prove, reject,
Prefer, still struggling to effect
My warfare; happy that I can
Be crossed and thwarted as a man,
Not left in God's contempt apart,
With ghastly smooth life, dead at heart,
Tame in earth's paddock as her prize.
Thank God, she still each method tries
To catch me, who may yet escape,
She knows, the fiend in angel's shape!
Thank God, no paradise stands barred
To entry, and I find it hard
To be a Christian, as I said!
Still every now and then my head
Raised glad, sinks mournful—all grows drear
Spite of the sunshine, while I fear
And think, 'How dreadful to be grudged
' No ease henceforth, as one that's judged,

‘ Condemned to earth for ever, shut
 ‘ From Heaven ! ’

But Easter-Day breaks ! But
 Christ rises ! Mercy every way
 Is infinite,—and who can say ?

TO J. MILSAND, OF DIJON.

Dear Friend,—Let the next poem be introduced by your name, and so repay all trouble it ever cost me. I wrote it twenty-five years ago for only a few, counting even in these on somewhat more care about its subject than they really had. My own faults of expression were many; but with care for a man or book such would be surmounted, and without it what avails the faultlessness of either ? I blame nobody, least of all myself, who did my best then and since ; for I lately gave time and pains to turn my work into what the many might,—instead of what the few must,—like : but after all, I imagined another thing at first, and therefore leave as I find it. The historical decoration was purposely of no more importance than a background requires ; and my stress lay on the incidents in the development of a soul : little else is worth study. I, at least, always thought so—you, with many known and unknown to me, think so—others may one day think so : and whether my attempt remain for them or not, I trust, though away and past it, to continue ever yours, R. B.

London, June 9, 1863.

SORDELLO.

1840.

BOOK THE FIRST.

A QUIXOTIC ATTEMPT.

Who will, may hear Sordello's story told :
His story ? Who believes me shall behold
The man, pursue his fortunes to the end,
Like me : for as the friendless-people's friend
Spied from his hill-top once, despite the din
And dust of multitudes, Pentapolin
Named o' the Naked Arm, I single out
Sordello, compassed murkily about
With ravage of six long sad hundred years.
Only believe me. Ye believe ?

Appears

Verona . . . Never, I should warn you first,
Of my own choice had this, if not the worst
Yet not the best expedient, served to tell
A story I could body forth so well
By making speak, myself kept out of view,
The very man as he was wont to do,

And leaving you to say the rest for him.
Since, though I might be proud to see the dim
Abysmal Past divide its hateful surge,
Letting of all men this one man emerge
Because it pleased me, yet, that moment past,
I should delight in watching first to last
His progress as you watch it, not a whit
More in the secret than yourselves who sit
Fresh-chapleted to listen. But it seems
Your setters-forth of unexampled themes,
Makers of quite new men, producing them,
Would best chalk broadly on each vesture's hem,
The wearer's quality; or take their stand,
Motley on back and pointing-pole in hand,
Beside him. So, for once I face y^e, friends,
Summoned together from the world's four ends,
Dropped down from heaven or cast up from hell,
To hear the story I propose to tell.
Confess now, poets know the dragnet's trick,
Catching the dead, if fate denies the quick,
And shaming her; 't is not for fate to choose
Silence or song because she can refuse
Real eyes to glisten more, real hearts to ache
Less oft, real brows turn smoother for our sake:
I have experienced something of her spite;
But there 's a realm wherein she has no right
And I have many lovers. Say, but few
Friends fate accords me? Here they are: now view
The host I muster! Many a lighted face

Foul with no vestige of the grave's disgrace ;
 What else should tempt them back to taste our air
 Except to see how their successors fare ?
 My audience ! and they sit, each ghostly man
 Striving to look as living as he can,
 Brother by breathing brother ; thou art set,
 Clear-witted critic, by . . . but I'll not fret
 A wondrous soul of them, nor move death's spleen
 Who loves not to unlock them : Friends ! I mean
 The living in good earnest—ye elect
 Chiefly for love—suppose not I reject
 Judicious praise, who contrary shall peep,
 Some fit occasion, forth, for fear ye sleep,
 To glean your bland approvals. Then, appear,
 Verona ! stay—thou, spirit, come not near
 Now—not this time desert thy cloudy place
 To scare me, thus employed, with that pure face !
 I need not fear this audience, I make free
 With them, but then this is no place for thee !
 The thunder-phrase of the Athenian, grown
 Up out of memories of Marathon,
 Would echo like his own sword's griding screech
 Braying a Persian shield,—the silver speech
 Of Sidney's self, the starry paladin,
 Turn intense as a trumpet sounding in
 The knights to tilt,—wert thou to hear ! What heart
 Have I to play my puppets, bear my part
 Before these worthies ?

Lo, the Past is hurled

In twain : up-thrust, out-staggering on the world,
 Subsiding into shape, a darkness rears
 Its outline, kindles at the core, appears
 Verona. 'Tis six hundred years and more
 Since an event. The Second Friedrich wore
 The purple, and the Third Honorius filled
 The holy chair. That autumn eve was stilled :
 A last remains of sunset dimly burned
 O'er the far forests, like a torch-flame turned
 By the wind back upon its bearer's hand
 In one long flare of crimson ; as a brand,
 The woods beneath lay black. A single eye
 From all Verona cared for the soft sky.
 But, gathering in its ancient market-place,
 Talked group with restless group ; and not a face
 But wrath made livid, for among them were
 Death's staunch purveyors, such as have in care
 To feast him. Fear had long since taken root
 In every breast, and now these crushed its fruit,
 The ripe hate, like a wine : to note the way
 It worked while each grew drunk ! men grave and grey
 Stood, with shut eyelids, rocking to and fro,
 Letting the silent luxury trickle slow
 About the hollows where a heart should be ;
 But the young gulped with a delirious glee
 Some foretaste of their first debauch in blood
 At the fierce news : for, be it understood,
 Envoys apprised Verona that her prince
 Count Richard of Saint Boniface, joined since

A year with Azzo, Este's Lord, to thrust
 Taurello Salinguerra, prime in trust
 With Ecelin Romano, from his seat
 Ferrara,—over zealous in the feat
 And stumbling on a peril unaware,
 Was captive, trammelled in his proper snare,
 They phrase it, taken by his own intrigue.
 Immediate succour from the Lombard League
 Of fifteen cities that affect the Pope,
 For Azzo, therefore, and his fellow-hope
 Of the Guelf cause, a glory overcast !
 Men's faces, late agape, now are aghast.
 " Prone is the purple pavis ; Este makes
 Mirth for the devil when he undertakes
 To play the Ecelin ; as if it cost
 Merely your pushing-by to gain a post
 Like his ! The patron tells ye, once for all,
 There be sound reasons that preferment fall
 On our beloved " . . .

" Duke o' the Rood, why not ? "

Shouted an Estian, " grudge ye such a lot ?
 The hill-cat boasts some cunning of her own,
 Some stealthy trick to better beasts unknown,
 That quick with prey enough her hunger blunts,
 And feeds her fat while gaunt the lion hunts."

" Taurello," quoth an envoy, " as in wane
 Dwelt at Ferrara. Like an osprey fain
 To fly but forced the earth his couch to make
 Far inland, till his friend the tempest wake,

Waits he the Kaiser's coming ; and as yet
 That fast friend sleeps, and he too sleeps : but let
 Only the billow freshen, and he snuffs
 The aroused hurricane ere it enroughs
 The sea it means to cross because of him.
 Sinketh the breeze ? His hope-sick eye grows dim ;
 Creep closer on the creature ! Every day
 Strengthens the Pontiff ; Ecelin, they say,
 Dozes now at Oliero, with dry lips
 Telling upon his perished finger-tips
 How many ancestors are to depose
 Ere he be Satan's Viceroy when the doze
 Deposits him in hell. So, Guelfs rebuilt
 Their houses ; not a drop of blood was spilt
 When Cino Bocchimpane chanced to meet
 Buccio Virtù—God's wafer, and the street
 Is narrow ! Tutti Santi, think, a-swarm
 With Ghibellins, and yet he took no harm !
 This could not last. Off Salinguerra went
 To Padua, Podestà, ' with pure intent,'
 Said he, ' my presence, judged the single bar
 To permanent tranquillity, may jar
 No longer '—so ! his back is fairly turned ?
 The pair of goodly palaces are burned,
 The gardens ravaged, and our Guelfs laugh, drunk
 A week with joy. The next, their laughter sunk
 In sobs of blood, for they found, some strange way,
 Old Salinguerra back again—I say,
 Old Salinguerra in the town once more

Uprooting, overturning, flame before,
 Blood fetlock-high beneath him. Azzo fled;
 'Who scaped the carnage followed; then the dead
 Were pushed aside from Salinguerra's throne,
 He ruled once more Ferrara, all alone.
 Till Azzo, stunned awhile, revived, would pounce
 Coupled with Boniface, like lynx and ounce,
 On the gorged bird. The burghers ground their teeth
 To see troop after troop encamp beneath
 I' the standing corn thick o'er the scanty patch
 It took so many patient months to snatch
 Out of the marsh; while just within their walls
 Men fed on men. At length Taurello calls
 A parley: 'let the Count wind up the war!
 Richard, light-hearted as a plunging star,
 Agrees to enter for the kindest ends
 Ferrara, flanked with fifty chosen friends,
 No horse-boy more, for fear your timid sort
 Should fly Ferrara at the bare report.
 Quietly through the town they rode, jog-jog;
 'Ten, twenty, thirty,—curse the catalogue
 Of burnt Guelf houses! Strange; Taurello shows
 Not the least sign of life'—whereat arose
 A general growl: 'How? With his victors by?
 I and my Veronese? My troops and I?
 Receive us, was your word?' So jogged they on,
 Nor laughed their host too openly: once gone
 Into the trap!—

Six hundred years ago!

Such the time's aspect and peculiar woe
 (Yourselves may spell it yet in chronicles,
 Albeit the worm, our busy brother, drills
 His sprawling path through letters anciently
 Made fine and large to suit some abbot's eye) . . .
 When the new Hohenstauffen dropped the mask,
 Flung John of Brienné's favour from his casque,
 Forsook crusading, had no mind to leave
 Saint Peter's proxy leisure to retrieve
 Losses to Otho and to Barbaross,
 Or make the Alps less easy to recross;
 And, thus confirming Pope Honorius' fear,
 Was excommunicate that very year.
 "The triple-bearded Teuton come to life!"
 Groaned the Great League; and, arming for the strife,
 Wide Lombardy, on tiptoe to begin,
 Took up, as it was Guelf or Ghibellin,
 Its cry; what cry?

"The Emperor to come!"

His crowd of feudatories, all and some,
 That leapt down with a crash of swords, spears, shields,
 One fighter on his fellow, to our fields,
 Scattered anon, took station here and there,
 And carried it, till now, with little care—
 Cannot but cry for him; how else rebut
 Us longer? Cliffs, an earthquake suffered jut
 In the mid-sea, each domineering crest,
 Nothing save such another throe can wrest
 From out (conceive) a certain chokeweed grown

Since o'er the waters, twine and tangle thrown
 Too thick, too fast accumulating round,
 Too sure to over-riot and confound
 Ere long each brilliant islet with itself
 Unless a second shock save shoal and shelf,
 Whirling the sea-drift wide: alas, the bruised
 And sullen wreck! Sunlight to be diffused
 For that! Sunlight, 'neath which, a scum at first,
 The million fibres of our chokeweed nurst
 Dispread themselves, mantling the troubled main,
 And, shattered by those rocks, took hold again,
 So kindly blazed it—that same blaze to brood
 O'er every cluster of the multitude
 Still hazarding new clasps, ties, filaments,
 An emulous exchange of pulses, vents
 Of nature into nature; till some growth
 Unfancied yet, exuberantly clothe
 A surface solid now, continuous, one :
 "The Pope, for us the People, who begun
 The People, carries on the People thus,
 To keep that Kaiser off and dwell with us!
 See you ?

Or say, Two Principles that live
 Each fitly by its Representative.
 "Hill-cat"—who called him so?—the gracefulest
 Adventurer, the ambiguous stranger-guest
 Of Lombardy (sleek but that ruffling fur,
 Those talons to their sheath!) whose velvet purr
 Soothes jealous neighbours when a Saxon scout

—Arpo or Yoland, is it?—one without
 A country or a name, presumes to couch
 Beside their noblest; until men avouch
 That, of all Houses in the Trevisan,
 Conrad descries no fitter, rear or van,
 Than Ecelo! They laughed as they enrolled
 That name at Milan on the page of gold,
 Godego's lord,—Ramon, Marostica,
 Cartiglion, Bassano, Loria,
 And every sheep-cote on the Suabian's fief!
 No laughter when his son, "the Lombard Chief"
 Forsooth, as Barbarossa's path was bent
 To Italy along the Vale of Trent,
 Welcomed him at Roncaglia! Sadness now—
 The hamlets nested on the Tyrol's brow,
 The Asolan and Euganean hills,
 The Rhetian and the Julian, sadness fills
 Them all, for Ecelin vouchsafes to stay
 Among and care about them; day by day
 Choosing this pinnacle, the other spot,
 A castle building to defend a cot,
 A cot built for a castle to defend,
 Nothing but castles, castles, nor an end
 To boasts how mountain ridge may join with ridge
 By sunken gallery and soaring bridge.
 He takes, in brief, a figure that beseems
 The griesliest nightmare of the Church's dreams,
 —A Signory firm-rooted, unestranged
 From its old interests, and nowise changed

By its new neighbourhood ; perchance the vaunt
 Of Otho, " my own Este shall supplant
 Your Este," come to pass. The sire led in
 A son as cruel ; and this Ecelin
 Had sons, in turn, and daughters sly and tall,
 And curling and compliant ; but for all
 Romano (so they styled him) throve, that neck
 Of his so pinched and white, that hungry cheek
 Proved 't was some fiend, not him, the man's-flesh wen
 To feed : whereas Romano's instrument,
 Famous Taurello Salinguerra, sole
 I' the world, a tree whose boughs were slipt the bole
 Successively, why should not he shed blood
 To further a design ? Men understood
 Living was pleasant to him as he wore
 His careless surcoat, glanced some missive o'er,
 Propped on his truncheon in the public way,
 While his lord lifted writen hands to pray,
 Lost at Oliero's convent.

Hill-cats, face

With Azzo, our Guelf Lion !—nor disgrace
 A worthiness conspicuous near and far
 (Atii at Rome while free and consular,
 Este at Padua who repulsed the Hun)
 By trumpeting the Church's princely son
 Styled Patron of Rovigo's Polesine,
 Ancona's March, Ferrara's . . . ask, in fine,
 Our chronicles, commenced when some old monk
 Found it intolerable to be sunk

(Vexed to the quick by his revolting cell)
 Quite out of summer while alive and well:
 Ended when by his mat the Prior stood,
 'Mid busy promptings of the brotherhood,
 Striving to coax from his decrepit brains
 The season Father Porphyry took pains
 To blot those ten lines out which used to stand
 First on their charter drawn by Hildebrand.

The same night wears. Verona's rule of yore
 Was vested in a certain Twenty-four;
 And while within his palace these debate
 Concerning Richard and Ferrara's fate,
 Glide we by clapping doors, with sudden glare
 Of cressets vented on the dark, nor care
 For aught that's seen or heard until we shut
 The smother in, the lights, all noises but
 The carroch's blooming: safe at last! Why strange
 Such a recess should lurk behind a range
 Of banquet-rooms? Your finger—thus—you push
 A spring, and the wall opens, would you rush
 Upon the banqueters, select your prey,
 Waiting, the slaughter-weapons in the way
 Strewing this very bench, with sharpened ear
 A preconcerted signal to appear;
 Or if you simply crouch with beating heart,
 Bearing in some voluptuous pageant part
 To startle them. Nor mutes nor masquers now;
 Nor any . . . does that one man sleep whose brow
 The dying lamp-flame sinks and rises o'er?

What woman stood beside him? not the more
Is he unfastened from the earnest eyes
Because that arras fell between! Her wise
And lulling words are yet about the room,
Her presence wholly poured upon the gloom
Down even to her vesture's creeping stir.
And so reclines he, saturate with her,
Until an outcry from the square beneath
Pierces the charm: he springs up, glad to breathe
Above the cunning element, and shakes
The stupor off as (look you) morning breaks
On the gay dress, and, near concealed by it,
The lean frame like a half-burnt taper, lit
Erst at some marriage-feast, then laid away
Till the Armenian bridegroom's dying day,
In his wool wedding-robe. For he—for he,
Gate-vein of this hearts' blood of Lombardy,
(If I should falter now)—for he is Thine!
Sordello, thy forerunner, Florentine!
A herald-star I know thou didst absorb
Relentless into the consummate orb
That scared it from its right to roll along
A sempiternal path with dance and song
Fulfilling its allotted period,
Serenest of the progeny of God
Who yet resigns it not! His darling stoops
With no quenched lights, desponds with no blank
Of disenfranchised brilliances, for, blent [troops
Utterly with thee, its shy element

Like thine upburneth prosperous and clear.
 Still, what if I approach the august sphere
 Named now, with only one name, disentwine
 That under-current soft and argentine
 From its fierce mate in the majestic mass
 Leavened as the sea whose fire was mixt with glass
 In John's transcendent vision,—launch once more
 That lustre? Dante, pacer of the shore
 Where glutton hell disgorgeth filthiest gloom,
 Unbitten by its whirring sulphur-spume—
 Or whence the grieved and obscure waters slope
 Into a darkness quieted by hope;
 Plucker of amaranths grown beneath God's eye
 In gracious twilights where His chosen lie,
 I would do this! if I should falter now!

In Mantua-territory half is slough
 Half pine-tree forest; maples, scarlet-oaks
 Breed o'er the river-beds; even Mincio chokes
 With sand the summer through: but 't is morass
 In winter up to Mantua walls. There was,
 Some thirty years before this evening's coil,
 One spot reclaimed from the surrounding spoil,
 Goito; just a castle built amid
 A few low mountains; firs and larches hid
 Their main defiles, and rings of vineyard bound
 The rest. Some captured creature in a pound,
 Whose artless wonder quite precludes distress,
 Secure beside in its own loveliness,
 So peered with airy head, below, above,

The castle at its toils, the lapwings love
 To glean among at grape-time. Pass within.
 A maze of corridors contrived for sin,
 Dusk winding-stairs, dim galleries got past,
 You gain the inmost chambers, gain at last
 A maple-panelled room : that haze which seems
 Floating about the panel, if there gleams
 A sunbeam over it, will turn to gold
 And in light-graven characters unfold
 The Arab's wisdom everywhere ; what shade
 Marred them a moment, those slim pillars made,
 Cut like a company of palms to prop
 The roof, each kissing top entwined with top,
 Leaning together ; in the carver's mind
 Some knot of bacchanals, flushed cheek combined
 With straining forehead, shoulders purpled, hair
 Diffused between, who in a goat-skin bear
 A vintage ; graceful sister-palms ! But quick
 To the main wonder, now. A vault, see ; thick
 Black shade about the ceiling, though fine slits
 Across the buttress suffer light by fits
 Upon a marvel in the midst. Nay, stoop—
 A dullish grey-streaked cumbrous font, a group
 Round it,—each side of it, where'er one sees,—
 Upholds it ; shrinking Caryatides
 Of just-tinged marble like Eve's liliated flesh
 Beneath her Maker's finger when the fresh
 First pulse of life shot brightening the snow.
 The font's edge burthens every shoulder, so

They muse upon the ground, eyelids half closed ;
 Some, with meek arms behind their backs disposed,
 Some, crossed above their bosoms, some, to veil
 Their eyes, some, propping chin and cheek so pale,
 Some, hanging slack an utter helpless length
 Dead as a buried vestal whose whole strength
 Goes when the grate above shuts heavily.
 So dwell these noiseless girls, patient to see,
 Like priestesses because of sin impure
 Penanced for ever, who resigned endure,
 Having that once drunk sweetness to the dregs.
 And every eve, Sordello's visit begs
 Pardon for them : constant as eve he came
 To sit beside each in her turn, the same
 As one of them, a certain space : and awe
 Made a great indistinctness till he saw
 Sunset slant cheerful through the buttress-chinks,
 Gold seven times globed ; surely our maiden shrinks
 And a smile stirs her as if one faint grain
 Her load were lightened, one shade less the stain
 Obscured her forehead, yet one more bead slipt
 From off the rosary whereby the crypt
 Keeps count of the contritions of its charge ?
 Then with a step more light, a heart more large,
 He may depart, leave her and every one
 To linger out the penance in mute stone.
 Ah, but Sordello ? 'Tis the tale I mean
 To tell you. In this castle may be seen,
 On the hill tops, or underneath the vines,

Or eastward by the mound of firs and pines
 That shuts out Mantua, still in loneliness,
 A slender boy in a loose page's dress,
 Sordello: do but look on him awhile
 Watching ('t is autumn) with an earnest smile
 The noisy flock of thievish birds at work
 Among the yellowing vineyards; see him lurk
 ('T is winter with its sullenest of storms)
 Beside that arras-length of broidered forms,
 On tiptoe, lifting in both hands a light
 Which makes yon warrior's visage flutter bright
 —Ecelo, dismal father of the brood,
 And Ecelin, close to the girl he wooed,
 Auria, and their Child, with all his wives
 From Agnes to the Tuscan that survives,
 Lady of the castle, Adelaide. His face
 —Look, now he turns away! Yourselves shall trace
 (The delicate nostril swerving wide and fine,
 A sharp and restless lip, so well combine
 With that calm brow) a soul fit to receive
 Delight at every sense; you can believe
 Sordello foremost in the regal class
 Nature has broadly severed from her mass
 Of men, and framed for pleasure, as she frames
 Some happy lands, that have luxurious names,
 For loose fertility; a footfall there
 Suffices to upturn to the warm air
 Half-germinating spices; mere decay
 Produces richer life; and day by day

New pollen on the lily-petal grows,
 And still more labyrinthine buds the rose.
 You recognize at once the finer dress
 Of flesh that amply lets in loveliness
 At eye and ear, while round the rest is furled
 (As though she would not trust them with her world)
 A veil that shows a sky not near so blue,
 And lets but half the sun look fervid through.
 How can such love?—like souls on each full-fraught
 Discovery brooding, blind at first to aught
 Beyond its beauty, till exceeding love
 Becomes an aching weight; and, to remove
 A curse that haunts such natures—to preclude
 Their finding out themselves can work no good
 To what they love nor make it very blest
 By their endeavour,—they are fain invest
 The lifeless thing with life from their own soul,
 Availing it to purpose, to control,
 To dwell distinct and have peculiar joy
 And separate interests that may employ
 That beauty fitly, for its proper sake.
 Nor rest they here; fresh births of beauty wake
 Fresh homage, every grade of love is past,
 With every mode of loveliness: then cast
 Inferior idols off their borrowed crown
 Before a coming glory. Up and down
 Runs arrowy fire, while earthly forms combine
 To throb the secret forth; a touch divine—
 And the scaled eyeball owns the mystic rod:

Visibly through His garden walketh God.
 So fare they. Now revert. One character
 Denotes them through the progress and the stir,—
 A need to blend with each external charm,
 Bury themselves, the whole heart wide and warm,
 In something not themselves; they would belong
 To what they worship—stronger and more strong
 Thus prodigally fed—which gathers shape
 And feature, soon imprisons past escape
 The votary framed to love and to submit
 Nor ask, as passionately he kneels to it,
 Whence grew the idol's empery. So runs
 A legend; light had birth ere moons and suns,
 Flowing through space a river and alone,
 Till chaos burst and blank the spheres were strown
 Hither and thither, foundering and blind,
 When into each of them rushed light—to find
 Itself no place, foiled of its radiant chance.
 Let such forego their just inheritance!
 For there's a class that eagerly looks, too,
 On beauty, but, unlike the gentler crew,
 Proclaims each new revelation born a twin
 With a distinctest consciousness within
 Referring still the quality, now first
 Revealed, to their own soul—its instinct nursed
 In silence, now remembered better, shown
 More thoroughly, but not the less their own;
 A dream come true; the special exercise
 Of any special function that implies

The being fair, or good, or wise, or strong,
 Dormant within their nature all along—
 Whose fault? So, homage, other souls direct
 Without, turns inward; "How should this deject
 Thee, soul?" they murmur; "wherefore strength be
 quelled

Because, its trivial accidents withheld,
 Organs are missed that clog the world, inert,
 Wanting a will, to quicken and exert,
 Like thine—existence cannot satiate,
 Cannot surprise? laugh thou at envious fate,
 Who, from earth's simplest combination stamp
 With individuality—uncrampt
 By living its faint elemental life,
 Dost soar to heaven's completest essence, rife
 With grandeurs, unaffronted to the last,
 Equal to being all!"

In truth? Thou hast
 Life, then—wilt challenge life for us: our race
 Is vindicated so, obtains its place
 In thy ascent, the first of us; whom we
 May follow, to the meanest, finally,
 With our more bounded wills?

Ah, but to find
 A certain mood enervate such a mind,
 Counsel it slumber in the solitude
 Thus reached nor, stooping, task for mankind's good
 Its nature just as life and time accord
 "—Too narrow an arena to reward

Emprize—the world's occasion worthless since
 Not absolutely fitted to evince
 Its mastery! ” Or if yet worse befall,
 And a desire possess it to put all
 That nature forth, forcing our straitened sphere
 Contain it,—to display completely here
 The mastery another life should learn,
 Thrusting in time eternity's concern,—
 So that Sordello . . . Fool, who spied the mark
 Of leprosy upon him, violet-dark
 Already as he loiters? Born just now,
 With the new century, beside the glow
 And efflorescence out of barbarism;
 Witness a Greek or two from the abyss
 That stray through Florence-town with studious air,
 Calming the chisel of that Pisan pair:
 If Nicolo should carve a Christus yet!
 While at Siena is Guidone set,
 Forehead on hand; a painful birth must be
 Matured ere Saint Eufemia's sacristy
 Or transept gather fruits of one great gaze
 At the moon: look you! The same orange haze,—
 The same blue stripe round that—and, i' the midst,
 Thy spectral whiteness, Mother-maid, who didst
 Pursue the dizzy painter!

Woe, then, worth

Any officious babble letting forth
 The leprosy confirmed and ruinous
 To spirit lodged in a contracted house!

Go back to the beginning, rather; blend
 It gently with Sordello's life; the end
 Is piteous, you may see, but much between
 Pleasant enough. Meantime, some pyx to screen
 The full-grown pest, some lid to shut upon
 The goblin! So they found at Babylon,
 (Colleagues, mad Lucius and sage Antonine)
 Sacking the city, by Apollo's shrine,
 In rummaging among the rarities,
 A certain coffer; he who made the prize
 Opened it greedily; and out there curled
 Just such another plague, for half the world
 Was stung; Crawl in then, hag, and couch asquat,
 Keeping that blotchy bosom thick in spot
 Until your time is ripe! The coffer-lid
 Is fastened, and the coffer safely hid
 Under the Loxian's choicest gifts of gold.

Who will may hear Sordello's story told,
 And how he never could remember when
 He dwelt not at Goito. Calmly, then,
 About this secret lodge of Adelaide's
 Glided his youth away; beyond the glades
 On the fir-forest's border, and the rim
 Of the low range of mountain, was for him
 No other world: but this appeared his own
 To wander through at pleasure and alone.
 The castle too seemed empty; far and wide
 Might he disport; only the northern side
 Lay under a mysterious interdict—

Slight, just enough remembered to restrict
 His roaming to the corridors, the vault
 Where those font-bearers expiate their fault,
 The maple-chamber, and the little nooks
 And nests, and breezy parapet that looks
 Over the woods to Mantua: there he strolled.
 Some foreign women-servants, very old,
 Tended and crept about him—all his clue
 To the world's business and embroiled ado
 Distant a dozen hill-tops at the most.

And first a simple sense of life engrossed
 Sordello in his drowsy Paradise;
 The day's adventures for the day suffice—
 Its constant tribute of perceptions strange,
 With sleep and stir in healthy interchange,
 Suffice, and leave him for the next at ease
 Like the great palmer-worm that strips the trees,
 Eats the life out of every luscious plant,
 And, when September finds them sere or scant,
 Puts forth two wondrous winglets, alters quite,
 And hies him after unforeseen delight.
 So fed Sordello, not a shard disheathed;
 As ever, round each new discovery, wreathed
 Luxuriantly the fancies infantine
 His admiration, bent on making fine
 Its novel friend at any risk, would fling
 In gay profusion forth: a ficklest king,
 Confessed those minions! Eager to dispense
 So much from his own stock of thought and sense.

As might enable each to stand alone
 And serve him for a fellow; with his own,
 Joining the qualities that just before
 Had graced some older favourite. Thus they wore
 A fluctuating halo, yesterday
 Set flicker and to-morrow filched away,—
 Those upland objects each of separate name,
 Each with an aspect never twice the same,
 Waxing and waning as the new-born host
 Of fancies, like a single night's hoar-frost,
 Gave to familiar things a face grotesque;
 Only, preserving through the mad burlesque
 A grave regard. Conceive! the orpine-patch
 Blossoming earliest on the log-house-thatch
 The day those archers wound along the vines—
 Related to the Chief that left their lines
 To climb with clinking step the northern stair
 Up to the solitary chambers where
 Sordello never came. Thus thrall reached thrall;
 He o'er-festooning every interval,
 As the adventurous spider, making light
 Of distance, shoots her threads from depth to height,
 From barbican to battlement; so flung
 Fantasies forth and in their centre swung
 Our architect,—the breezy morning fresh
 Above, and merry,—all his waving mesh
 Laughing with lucid dew-drops rainbow-edged.
 This world of ours by tacit pact is pledged
 To laying such a spangled fabric low

Whether by gradual brush or gallant blow.
 But its abundant will was baulked here: doubt
 Rose tardily in one so fenced about
 From most that nurtures judgment, care and pain:
 Judgment, that dull expedient we are fain,
 Less favoured, to adopt betimes and force
 Stead us, diverted from our natural course
 Of joys,—contrive some yet amid the dearth,
 Vary and render them, it may be, worth
 Most we forego. Suppose Sordello hence
 Selfish enough, without a moral sense
 However feeble; what informed the boy
 Others desired a portion in his joy?
 Or say a ruthless chance broke woof and warp—
 A heron's nest beat down by March winds sharp
 A fawn breathless beneath the precipice,
 A bird with unsoiled breast and filmless eyes
 Warm in the brake—could these undo the trance
 Lapping Sordello? Not a circumstance
 That makes for you, friend Naddo! Eat fern-seed
 And peer beside us and report indeed
 If (your word) "genius" dawned with throes and
 stings
 And the whole fiery catalogue, while springs
 Summers and winters quietly came and went.
 Time put at length that period to content,
 By right the world should have imposed: bereft
 Of its good offices, Sordello, left
 To study his companions, managed rip

Their fringe off, learn the true relationship,
 Core with its crust, their natures with his own :
 Amid his wild-wood sights he lived alone.
 As if the poppy felt with him ! Though he
 Partook the poppy's red effrontery
 Till Autumn spoiled their flooring quite with rain,
 And, turbanless, a coarse brown rattling crane
 Lay bare. That's gone ! yet why renounce, for
 that,

His disenchanting tributaries—flat
 Perhaps, but scarce so utterly forlorn,
 Their simple presence might not well be borne
 Whose parley was a transport once : recall
 The poppy's gifts, it flaunts you, after all,
 A poppy : why distrust the evidence
 Of each soon satisfied and healthy sense ?
 The new-born judgment answered : " little boots
 Beholding other creatures' attributes
 And having none ! " or, say that it sufficed,
 " Yet, could one but possess, oneself," (enticed
 Judgment) " some special office ! " Nought beside
 Serves you ? " Well then, be somehow justified
 For this ignoble wish to circumscribe
 And concentrate, rather than swell, the tribe
 Of actual pleasures : what, now, from without
 Effects it ?—proves, despite a lurking doubt,
 Mere sympathy sufficient, trouble spared ?
 That, tasting joys by proxy thus, you fared
 The better for them ? " Thus much craved his soul.

Alas, from the beginning love is whole
 And true ; if sure of nought beside, most sure
 Of its own truth at least ; nor may endure
 A crowd to see its face, that cannot know
 How hot the pulses throb its heart below.
 While its own helplessness and utter want
 Of means to worthily be ministrant
 To what it worships, do but fan the more
 Its flame, exalt the idol far before
 Itself as it would have it ever be.
 Souls like Sordello, on the contrary,
 Coerced and put to shame, retaining will,
 Care little, take mysterious comfort still,
 But look forth tremblingly to ascertain
 If others judge their claims not urged in vain,
 And say for them their stifled thoughts aloud.
 So, they must ever live before a crowd :
 —“Vanity,” Naddo tells you.

Whence contrive

A crowd, now ? From these women just alive,
 That archer-troop ? Forth glided—not alone
 Each painted warrior, every girl of stone,
 Nor Adelaide (bent double o'er a scroll,
 One maiden at her knees, that eve, his soul
 Shook as he stumbled through the arras'd glooms
 On them, for, 'mid quaint robes and weird perfumes,
 Started the meagre Tuscan up,—her eyes,
 The maiden's, also, bluer with surprise)
 —But the entire out-world : whatever, scraps

And snatches, song and story, dreams perhaps,
 Conceited the world's offices, and he
 Had hitherto transferred to flower or tree,
 Nor counted, a befitting heritage
 Each, of its own right, singly to engage
 Some man, no other,—such now, dared to stand
 Alone. Strength, wisdom, grace on every hand
 Soon disengaged themselves, and he discerned
 A sort of human life: at least, was turned
 A stream of lifelike figures through his brain.
 Lord, liegeman, valvassor and suzerain,
 Ere he could choose, surrounded him; a staff
 To work his pleasure on; there, sure enough:
 But as for gazing, what shall fix that gaze?
 Are they to simply testify the ways
 He who convoked them sends his soul along
 With the cloud's thunder or a dove's brood-song?
 —While they live each his life, boast each his own
 Peculiar dower of bliss, stand each alone
 In some one point where something dearest loved
 Is easiest gained—far worthier to be proved
 Than aught he envies in the forest-wights!
 No simple and self-evident delights,
 But mixed desires of unimagined range,
 Contrasts or combinations, new and strange,
 Irsome perhaps, yet plainly recognized
 By this, the sudden company—loves prized
 By those who are to prize his own amount
 Of loves. Once care because such make account,

Allow a foreign recognition stamp
 The current value, and his crowd shall vamp
 Him counterfeits enough; and so their print
 Be on the piece, 't is gold, attests the mint,
 And "good," pronounce they whom his new appeal
 Is made to: if their casual print conceal—
 This arbitrary good of theirs o'ergloss
 What he have lived without, nor felt the loss—
 Qualities strange, ungainly, wearisome,
 —What matter? so must speech expand the dumb
 Part-sigh, part-smile with which Sordello, late
 No foolish woodland-sights could satiate,
 Betakes himself to study hungrily
 Just what the puppets his crude fantasy
 Supposes notablest, popes, kings, priests, knights,
 May please to promulgate for appetites;
 Accepting all their artificial joys
 Not as he views them, but as he employs
 Each shape to estimate the other's stock
 Of attributes, that on a marshalled flock
 Of authorized enjoyments he may spend
 Himself, be men, now, as he used to blend
 With tree and flower—nay more entirely, 'else
 'T were mockery: for instance, "how excels
 My life that chieftain's?" (who apprised the youth
 Ecelin, here, becomes this month, in truth,
 Imperial Vicar?) "Turns he in his tent
 Remissly? Be it so—my head is bent
 Deliciously amid my girls to sleep.

What if he stalks the Trentine-pass? Yon steep
 I climbed an hour ago with little toil—
 We are alike there. But can I, too, foil
 The Guelf's paid stabber, carelessly afford
 Saint Mark's a spectacle, the sleight o' the sword
 Baffling their project in a moment?" Here
 No rescue! Poppy he is none, but peer
 To Ecelin, assuredly: his hand,
 Fashioned no otherwise, should wield a brand
 With Ecelin's success—try, now! He soon
 Was satisfied, returned as to the moon
 From earth; left each abortive boy's-attempt
 For feats, from failure happily exempt,
 In fancy at his beck. "One day I will
 Accomplish it! Are they not older still
 —Not grown up men and women? 'Tis beside
 Only a dream; and though I must abide
 With dreams now, I may find a thorough vent
 For all myself, acquire an instrument
 For acting what these people act; my soul
 Hunting a body out may gain its whole
 Desire some day!" How else express chagrin
 And resignation, show the hope steal in
 With which he let sink from an aching wrist
 The rough-hewn ash-bow? straight, a gold shaft hissed
 Into the Syrian air, struck Malek down
 Superbly! "Crosses to the breach! God's Town
 Is gained him back!" Why bend rough ash-bows
 more?

Thus lives he: if not careless as before,
 Comforted: for one may anticipate,
 Rehearse the Future, be prepared when fate
 Shall have prepared in turn real men whose names
 Startle, real places of enormous fames,
 Este abroad and Ecelin at home
 To worship him,—Mantua, Vérona, Rome
 To witness it. Who grudges time so spent?
 Rather test qualities to heart's content—
 Summon them, thrice selected, near and far—
 Compress the starriest into one star,
 And grasp the whole at once!

The pageant thinned

Accordingly; from rank to rank, like wind
 His spirit passed to winnow and divide;
 Back fell the simpler phantasms; every side
 The strong clave to the wise; with either classed
 The beauteous; so, till two or three amassed
 Mankind's beseemingnesses, and reduced
 Themselves eventually, graces loosed,
 And lavished strengths, to heighten up One Shape
 Whose potency no creature should escape.
 Can it be Friedrich of the bowmen's talk?
 Surely that grape-juice, bubbling at the stalk,
 Is some grey scorching Saracenic wine
 The Kaiser quaffs with the Miramoline—
 Those swarthy hazel-clusters, seamed and chapped,
 Or filberts russet-sheathed and velvet-capped,
 Are dates plucked from the bough John Brienne sent,

To keep in mind his sluggish armament
 Of Canaan.—Friedrich's, all the pomp and fierce
 Demeanour! But harsh sounds and sights transpierce
 So rarely the serene cloud where he dwells,
 Whose looks enjoin, whose lightest words are spells
 On the obdurate! That right arm indeed
 Has thunder for its slave; but where's the need
 Of thunder if the stricken multitude
 Harkens, arrested in its angriest mood,
 While songs go up exulting, then dispread,
 Dispart, disperse, lingering overhead
 Like an escape of angels? 'Tis the tune,
 Nor much unlike the words the women croon
 Smilingly, colourless and faint-designed
 Each, as a worn-out queen's face some remind
 Of her extreme youth's love-tales. "Eglamor
 Made that!" Half minstrel and half emperor,
 What but ill objects vexed him? Such he slew.
 The kinder sort were easy to subdue
 By those ambrosial glances, dulcet tones;
 And these a gracious hand advanced to thrones
 Beneath him. Wherefore twist and torture this,
 Striving to name afresh the antique bliss,
 Instead of saying, neither less nor more,
 He had discovered, as our world before,
 Apollo? That shall be the name; nor bid
 Me rag by rag expose how patchwork hid
 The youth—what thefts of every clime and day
 Contributed to purple the array

He climbed with (June at deep) some close ravine
 'Mid clatter of its million pebbles sheen,
 Over which, singing soft, the runnel slipt
 Elate with rains: into whose streamlet dipt
 He foot, yet trod, you thought, with unwet sock—
 Though really on the stubs of living rock
 Ages ago it crenneled; vines for roof,
 Lindens for wall; before him, aye aloof,
 Flittered in the cool some azure damsel-fly,
 Born of the simmering quiet, there to die.
 Emerging whence, Apollo still, he spied
 Mighty descents of forest; multiplied
 Tuft on tuft, here, the frolic myrtle-trees,
 There gendered the grave maple-stocks at ease.
 And, proud of its observer, strait the wood
 Tried old surprises on him; black it stood
 A sudden barrier ('t was a cloud passed o'er)
 So dead and dense, the tiniest brute no more
 Must pass; yet presently (the cloud dispatched)
 Each clump, behold, was glistening detached
 A shrub, oak-boles shrunk into ilex-stems!
 Yet could not he denounce the stratagems
 He saw thro', till, hours thence, aloft would hang
 White summer-lightnings; as it sank and sprang
 To measure, that whole palpitating breast
 Of heaven, 't was Apollo, nature prest
 At eve to worship.

Time stole: by degrees
 The Pythons perish off; his votaries

Sink to respectful distance ; songs redeem
 Their pains, but briefer ; their dismissals seem
 Emphatic ; only girls are very slow
 To disappear—his Delians ! Some that glow
 O' the instant, more with earlier loves to wrench
 Away, reserves to quell, disdains to quench ;
 Alike in one material circumstance—
 All soon or late adore Apollo ! Glance
 The bevy through, divine Apollo's choice,
 His Daphne ! “ We secure Count Richard's voice
 In Este's counsels, good for Este's ends
 As our Taurello,” say his faded friends,
 “ By granting him our Palma !” the sole child,
 They mean of Agnes Este who beguiled
 Ecelin, years before this Adelaide
 Wedded and turned him wicked : “ but the maid
 Rejects his suit,” those sleepy women boast.
 She, scorning all beside, deserves the most
 Sordello : so, conspicuous in his world
 Of dreams sat Palma. How the tresses curled
 Into a sumptuous swell of gold and wound
 About her like a glory ! even the ground
 Was bright as with spilt sunbeams ; breathe not, breathe
 Not !—poised, see, one leg doubled underneath,
 Its small foot buried in the dimpling snow,
 Rests, but the other, listlessly below,
 O'er the couch-side swings feeling for cool air,
 The vein-streaks swoln a richer violet where
 The languid blood lies heavily ; yet calm

On her slight prop, each flat and outspread palm,
 As but suspended in the act to rise
 By consciousness of beauty, whence her eyes
 Turn with so frank a triumph, for she meets
 Apollo's gaze in the pine glooms.

Time fleets :

That's worst ! Because the pre-appointed age
 Approaches. Fate is tardy with the stage
 And crowd she promised. Lean he grows and pale,
 Though restlessly at rest. Hardly avail
 Fancies to soothe him. Time steals, yet alone
 He tarries here ! The earnest smile is gone.
 How long this might continue matters not ;
 —For ever, possibly ; since to the spot
 None come : our lingering Taurello quits
 Mantua at last, and light our lady flits
 Back to her place disburthened of a care.
 Strange—to be constant here if he is there !
 Is it distrust ? Oh, never ! for they both
 Goad Ecelin alike—Romano's growth
 So daily manifest, that Azzo's dumb
 And Richard wavers : let but Friedrich come !
 —Find matter for the minstrelsy's report,
 Lured from the Isle and its young Kaiser's court
 To sing us a Messina morning up,
 And, double rillet of a drinking cup,
 Sparkle along to ease the land of drouth
 Northward to Provence that, and thus far south
 The other. What a method to apprise

Neighbours of births, espousals, obsequies !
Which in their very tongue the Troubadour
Records ; and his performance makes a tour,
For Trouveres bear the miracle about,
Explain its cunning to to the vulgar rout,
Until the Formidable House is famed
Over the country—as Taurello aimed,
Who introduced, although the rest adopt,
The novelty. Such games her absence stopped,
Begin afresh now Adelaide, recluse
No longer, in the light of day pursues
Her plans at Mantua : whence an accident
Which, breaking on Sordello's mixed content,
Opened, like any flash that cures the blind,
The veritable business of mankind.

BOOK THE SECOND.

THIS BUBBLE OF FANCY,

THE woods were long austere with snow : at last
 Pink leaflets budded on the beech, and fast
 Larches, scattered through pine-tree solitudes,
 Brightened, "as in the slumbrous heart o' the woods
 Ouf buried year, a witch, grew young again
 To placid incantations, and that stain
 About were from her cauldron, green smoke blent
 With those black pines"—so Eglamor gave vent
 To a chance fancy. Whence a just rebuke
 From his companion ; brother Naddo shook
 The solemnest of brows ; "Beware," he said,
 "Of setting up conceits in nature's stead !"
 Forth wandered our Sordello. Nought so sure
 As that to-day's adventure will secure
 Palma, the visioned lady—only pass
 O'er yon damp mound and its exhausted grass,
 Under that brake where sundawn feeds the stalks
 Of withered fern with gold, into those walks
 Of pine and take her ! Buoyantly he went.
 Again his stooping forehead was besprent
 With dew-drops from the skirting ferns. Then wide
 Opened the great morass, shot every side
 With flashing water through and through ; a-shine,

Thick-steaming, all alive. Whose shape divine,
 Quivered i' the farthest rainbow-vapour, glanced.
 Athwart the flying herons? He advanced,
 But warily; though Mincio leaped no more,
 Each foot-ball burst up in the marish-floor
 A diamond jet: and if he stopped to pick
 Rose-lichen, or molest the leeches quick,
 And circling blood-worms, minnow, newt or loach,
 A sudden pond would silently encroach
 This way and that. On Palma passed. The verge^d
 Of a new wood was gained. She will emergeⁿ
 Flushed, now, and panting,—crowds to see,—will own
 She loves him—Boniface to hear, to groan,
 To leave his suit! One screen of pine-trees still
 Opposes: but—the startling spectacle—
 Mantua, this time! Under the walls—a crowd
 Indeed, real men and women, gay and loud
 Round a pavilion. How he stood!

In truth

No prophecy had come to pass: his youth
 In its prime now—and where was homage poured
 Upon Sordello?—born to be adored,
 And suddenly discovered weak, scarce made
 To cope with any, cast into the shade
 By this and this. Yet something seemed to prick
 And tingle in his blood; a sleight—a trick—
 And much would be explained. It went for nought—
 The best of their endowments were ill bought
 With his identity: nay, the conceit,

'That this day's roving led to Palma's feet
 Was not so vain—list! The word, "Palma!" Steal
 Aside, and die, Sordello; this is real,
 And this—abjure!

What next? . The curtains, see,
 Dividing! She is there; and presently
 He will be there—the proper You, at length—
 In your own cherished dress of grace and strength:
 Most like, the very Boniface!

Not so.

It was a showy man advanced; but though
 A glad cry welcomed him, then every sound
 Sank and the crowd disposed themselves around,
 —"This is not he," Sordello felt; while, "Place
 For the best Troubadour of Boniface!"
 Hollaed the Jongleurs,—"Eglamor, whose lay
 Concludes his patron's Court of Love to-day!"
 Obsequious Naddo strung the master's lute
 With the new lute-string, "Elys," named to suit
 The song: he stealthily at watch, the while,
 Biting his lip to keep down a great smile
 Of pride: then up he struck. Sordello's brain
 Swam; for he knew a sometime deed again;
 So, could supply each foolish gap and chasm
 The minstrel left in his enthusiasm,
 Mistaking its true version—was the tale
 Not of Apollo? Only, what avail
 Luring her down, that Elys an he pleased,
 If the man dared no further? Has he ceased?

And, lo, the people's frank applause half done,
 Sordello was beside him, had begun
 (Spite of indignant twitchings from his friend
 The Trouvere) the true lay with the true end,
 Taking the other's names and time and place
 For his. On flew the song, a giddy race,
 After the flying story; word made leap
 Out word, rhyme—rhyme; the lay could barely keep
 Pace with the action visibly rushing past:
 Both ended. Back fell Naddo more aghast
 Than some Egyptian from the harassed bull
 That wheeled abrupt and, bellowing, fronted full
 His plague, who spied a scarab 'neath his tongue,
 And found 't was Apis' flank his hasty prong
 Insulted. But the people—but the cries,
 The crowding round, and proffering the prize!
 (For he had gained some prize)—He seemed to shrink
 Into a sleepy cloud, just at whose brink
 One sight withheld him. There sat Adelaide,
 Silent; but at her knees the very maid
 Of the North Chamber, her red lips as rich,
 The same pure fleecy hair; one weft of which,
 Golden and great, quite touched his cheek as o'er
 She leant, speaking some six words and no more.
 He answered something, anything; and she
 Unbound a scarf and laid it heavily
 Upon him, her neck's warmth and all. Again
 Moved the arrested magic; in his brain
 Noises grew, and a light that turned to glare,

And greater glare, until the intense flare
 Engulfed him, shut the whole scene from his sense.
 And when he woke 't was many a furlong thence,
 At home ; the sun shining his ruddy wont ;
 The customary birds'-chirp ; but his front
 Was crowned—was crowned ! Her scented scarf around
 His neck ! Whose gorgeous vesture heaps the ground ?
 A prize ? He turned, and peeringly on him
 Brooded the women-faces, kind and dim,
 Ready to talk.—“ The Jongleurs in a troop
 Had brought him back, Naddo and Squarcialupe
 And Tagliafer ; how strange ! a childhood spent
 In taking, well for him, so brave a bent !
 Since Eglamor,” they heard, “ was dead with spite,
 And Palma chose him for her minstrel.”

Light

Sordello rose—to think, now ; hitherto
 He had perceived. Sure, a discovery grew
 Out of it all ! Best live from first to last
 The transport o'er again. A week he passed,
 Sucking the sweet out of each circumstance,
 From the bard's outbreak to the luscious trance
 Bounding his own achievement. Strange ! A man
 Recounted an adventure, but began
 Imperfectly ; his own task was to fill
 The frame-work up, sing well what he sung ill,
 Supply the necessary points, set loose
 As many incidents of little use
 —More imbecile the other, not to see

Their relative importance clear as he!
 But, for a special pleasure in the act
 Of singing—had he ever turned, in fact,
 From Elys, to sing Elys?—from each fit
 Of rapture, to contrive a song of it?
 True, this snatch or the other seemed to wind
 Into a treasure, helped himself to find
 A beauty in himself; for, see, he soared
 By means of that mere snatch to many a hoard
 Of fancies; as some falling cone bears soft
 The eye, along the fir-tree-spire, aloft
 To a dove's nest. Then, how divine the cause
 Such a performance might exact applause
 From men, if they had fancies too? Could fate
 Decree they found a beauty separate
 In the poor snatch itself?—"Take Elys, there,
 —' Her head that's sharp and perfect like a pear,
 So close and smooth are laid the few fine locks
 Coloured like honey oozed from topmost rocks
 Sun-blanced the livelong summer'—if they heard
 Just those two rhymes, assented at my word,
 And loved them as I love them who have run
 These fingers through those pale locks, let the sun
 Into the white cool skin—who first could clutch,
 Then praise—I needs must be a god to such.
 Or if some few, above themselves, and yet
 Beneath me, like their Eglamor, have set
 An impress on our gift? So, men believe
 And worship what they know not, nor receive

Delight from. Have they fancies—slow, perchance,
 Not at their beck, which indistinctly glance
 Until, by song, each floating part be linked
 To each, and all grow palpable, distinct ?”
 He pondered this.

Meanwhile, sounds low and drear
 Stole on him, and a noise of footsteps, near
 And nearer, and the underwood was pushed
 Aside, the larches grazed, the dead leaves crushed,
 At the approach of men. The wind seemed laid ;
 Only, the trees shrunk slightly and a shade
 Came o’er the sky although ’t was midday yet :
 You saw each half-shut downcast floweret
 Flutter—“ a Roman bride, when they ’d dispart
 Her unbound tresses with the Sabine dart,
 Holding that famous rape in memory still,
 Felt creep into her curls the iron chill,
 And looked thus,” Eglamor would say—indeed
 ’T is Eglamor, no other, these precede
 Home hither in the woods. “ ’T were surely sweet
 Far from the scene of one’s forlorn defeat
 To sleep !” judged Naddo, who in person led
 Jongleurs and Trouveres, chanting at their head,
 A scanty company ; for, sooth to say,
 Our beaten Troubadour had seen his day.
 Old worshippers were something shamed, old friends
 Nigh weary ; still the death proposed amends.
 “ Let us but get them safely through my song
 And home again !” quoth Naddo.

All along,

This man (they rest the bier upon the sand)
 —This calm corpse with the loose flowers in his hand,
 Eglamor, lived Sordello's opposite.
 For him indeed was Naddo's notion right,
 And verse a temple-worship vague and vast,
 A ceremony that withdrew the last
 Opposing bolt, looped back the lingering veil
 Which hid the holy place—should one so frail
 Stand there without such effort? or repine
 That much was blank, uncertain at the shrine
 He knelt before, till, soothed by many a rite,
 The Power responded, and some sound or sight
 Grew up, his own forever, to be fixed
 In rhyme, the beautiful, forever! mixed
 With his own life, unloosed when he should please,
 Having it safe at hand, ready to ease
 All pain, remove all trouble; every timè
 He loosed that fancy from its bonds of rhyme,
 Like Perseus when he loosed his naked love,
 Faltering; so distinct and far above
 Himself, these fancies! He, no genius rare,
 Transfiguring in fire or wave or air
 At will, but a poor gnome that, cloistered up
 In some rock-chamber with his agate cup,
 His topaz rod, his seed-pearl, in these few
 And their arrangement finds enough to do
 For his best art. Then, how he loved that art!
 The calling marking him a man apart

From men—one not to care, take counsel for
 Cold hearts, comfortless faces—(Eglamor
 Was neediest of his tribe)—since verse, the gift,
 Was his, and men, the whole of them, must shift
 Without it, e'en content themselves with wealth
 And pomp and power, snatching a life by stealth.
 So, Eglamor was not without his pride!
 The sorriest bat which cowers through noontide
 While other birds are jocund, has one time
 When moon and stars are blinded, and the prime
 Of earth is his to claim, nor find a peer;
 And Eglamor was noblest poet here—
 He knew that, 'mid the April woods, he cast
 Conceits upon in plenty as he past,
 That Naddo might suppose him not to think
 Entirely on the coming triumph: wink
 At the one weakness! 'T was a fervid child,
 That song of his; no brother of the guild
 Had e'er conceived its like. The rest you know,
 The exaltation and the overthrow:
 Our poet lost his purpose, lost his rank,
 His life—to that it came. Yet envy sank
 Within him, as he heard Sordello out,
 And, for the first time, shouted—tried to shout
 Like others, not from any zeal to show
 Pleasure that way: the common sort did so,
 And what was Eglamor? who, bending down
 The same, placed his beneath Sordello's crown,
 Printed a kiss on his successor's hand,

Left one great tear on it, then joined his band
 —In time; for some were watching at the door:
 Who knows what envy may effect? “Give o’er,
 Nor charm his lips, nor craze him!” (here one spied
 And disengaged the withered crown)—“Beside
 His crown? How prompt and clear those verses rung
 To answer yours! nay, sing’ them!” And he sung
 Them calmly? Home he went; friends used to wait
 His coming, zealous to congratulate,
 But, to a man, so quickly runs report,
 Could do no less than leave him, and escort
 His rival. That eve, then, bred many a thought:
 What must his future life be? was he brought
 So low, who was so lofty this Spring morn?
 At length he said, “Best sleep now with my scorn,
 And by to-morrow I devise some plain
 Expedient!” So, he slept, nor woke again.
 They found as much, those friends, when they returned
 O’erflowing with the marvels they had learned
 About Sordello’s paradise, his roves
 Among the hills and valleys, plains and groves,
 Wherein, no doubt, this lay was roughly cast,
 Polished by slow degrees, completed last
 To Eglamor’s discomfiture and death.

Such form the chauters now, and, out of breath,
 They lay the beaten man in his abode,
 Naddo reciting that same luckless ode,
 Doleful to hear. Sordello could explore
 By means of it, however, one step more

In joy ; and, mastering the round at length,
 Learnt how to live in weakness as in strength,
 When from his covert forth he stood, addressed
 Eglamor, bade the tender ferns invest,
 Primæval pines o'er canopy his couch,
 And, most of all, his fame—(shall I avouch
 Eglamor heard it, dead though he might look,
 And laughed as from his brow Sordello took
 The crown, and laid it on his breast, and said
 It was a crown, now, fit for poet's head ?)
 —Continue. Nor the prayer quite fruitless fell.
 A plant they have yielding a three-leaved bell
 Which whitens at the heart ere noon, and ails
 Till evening ; evening gives it to her gales
 To clear away with such forgotten things
 As are an eyesore to the morn : this brings
 Him to their mind, and bears his very name.

So much for Eglamor. My own month came ;
 'T was a sunrise of blossoming and May.
 Beneath a flowering laurel thicket lay
 Sordello ; each new sprinkle of white stars
 That smell fainter of wine than Massic jars
 Dug up at Baiæ, when the south wind shed
 The ripest, made him happier ; filleted
 And robed the same, only a lute beside
 Lay on the turf. Before him far and wide
 The country stretched : Goito slept behind
 —The castle and its covert, which confined
 Him with his hopes and fears ; so fain of old

To leave the story of his birth untold.
 At intervals, 'spite the fantastic glow
 Of his Apollo-life, a certain low
 And wretched whisper, winding through the bliss;
 Admonished, no such fortune could be his,
 All was quite false and sure to fade one day :
 The closelier drew he round him his array
 Of brilliance to expel the truth. But when
 A reason for his difference from men
 Surprised him at the grave, he took no rest
 While aught of that old life, superbly drest
 Down to its meanest incident, remained
 A mystery : alas, they soon explained
 Away Apollo ! and the tale amounts
 To this : when at Vicenza both her Counts
 Banished the Vivaresi kith and kin,
 Those Maltraversi hung on Ecelin,
 Reviled him as he followed ; he for spite
 Must fire their quarter, though that self-same night
 Among the flames young Ecelin was born
 Of Adelaide, there too, and barely torn
 From the roused populace hard on the rear,
 By a poor archer when his chieftain's fear
 Grew high ; into the thick Elcorte leapt,
 Saved her, and died ; no creature left except
 His child to thank. And when the full escape
 Was known—how men impaled from chine to nape
 Unlucky Prata, all to pieces spurned
 Bishop Pistore's concubines, and burned

300 HE, SO LITTLE, WOULD FAIN BE SO MUCH:

Taurello's entire household, flesh and fell,
Missing the sweeter prey—such courage well
Might claim reward. The orphan, ever sjuce,
Sordello, had been nurtured by his prince
Within a blind retreat where Adelaide—
(For, once this notable discovery made,
The Past at every point was understood)
—Might harbour easily when times were rude,
When Azzo schemed for Palma, to retrieve
That pledge of Agnes Este—loath to leave
Mantua unguarded with a vigilant eye,
Taurello biding there ambiguously—
He who could have no motive now to moil
For his own fortunes since their utter spoil—
As it were worth while yet (went the report)
To disengage himself from her. In short,
Apollo vanished; a mean youth, just named
His lady's minstrel, was to be proclaimed
—How shall I phrase it?—Monarch of the World!
For, on the morning that array was furled
For ever, and in place of one a slave
To longings, wild indeed, but longings save
In dreams as wild, suppressed—one daring not
Assume the mastery such dreams allot,
Until a magical equipment, strength
Grace, wisdom, decked him too,—he chose at length,
Content with unproved wits and failing frame,
In virtue of his simple will, to claim
That mastery, no less—to do his best

With means so limited, and let the rest
 Go by,—the seal was set: never again
 Sordello could in his own sight remain
 One of the many, one with hopes and cares
 And interests nowise distinct from theirs,
 Only peculiar in a thriveless store
 Of fancies, which were fancies and no more;
 Never again for him and for the crowd
 A common law was challenged and allowed
 If calmly reasoned of, howe'er denied
 By a mad impulse nothing justified
 Short of Apollo's presence. The divorce
 Is clear: why needs Sordello square his course
 By any known example? Men no more
 Compete with him than tree and flower before;
 Himself, inactive, yet is greater far
 Than such as act, each stooping to his star,
 Acquiring thence his function; he has gained
 The same result with meaner mortals trained
 To strength or beauty, moulded to express
 Each the idea that rules him; since no less
 He comprehends that function, but can still
 Embrace the others, take of might his fill
 With Richard as of grace with Palma, mix
 Their qualities, or for a moment fix
 On one; abiding free meantime, uncramped
 By any partial organ, never stamped
 Strong, and to strength turning all energies—
 Wise, and restricted to becoming wise—

That is, he loves not, nor possesses One
 Idea that, star-like over, lures him on
 To its exclusive purpose. "Fortunate!
 This flesh of mine ne'er strove to emulate
 A soul so various—took no casual mould
 Of the first fancy and, contracted, cold,
 Lay clogged forever thence, averse to change
 As that: whereas it left her free to range,
 Remains itself a blank, cast into shade,
 Encumbers little, if it cannot aid.
 So, rangé, my soul!—who, by self-consciousness,
 The last drop of all beauty dost express—
 The grace of seeing grace, a quintessence
 For thee: but for the world, that can dispense
 Wonder on men who, themselves, wonder—make
 A shift to love at second-hand, and take
 Those for its idols who but idolize,
 Themselves,—world that loves souls as strong or wise,
 Who, themselves, love strength, wisdom,—it shall bow
 Surely in unexampled worship now,
 Discerning me!"—

(Dear monarch, I beseech,
 Notice how lamentably wide a breach
 Is here! discovering this, discover too
 What our poor world has possibly to do
 With it! As pigmy natures as you please—
 So much the better for you; take your ease;
 Look on, and laugh; style yourself God alone;
 Strangle some day with a cross olive-stone:

All that is right enough: but why want us
 To know that you yourself know thus and thus?)
 "The world shall bow to me conceiving all
 Man's life, who sees its blisses, great and small,
 Afar—not tasting any; no machine
 To exercise my utmost will is mine:
 Be mine mere consciousness! Let them perceive
 What I could do, a mastery believe,
 Asserted and established to the throng
 By their selected evidence of song
 Which now shall prove, whate'er they are, or seek
 To be, I am—who take no pains to speak,
 Change no old standards of perfection, vex
 With no strange forms created to perplex,
 But will perform their bidding and no more,
 At their own satiating-point give o'er,
 While each shall love in me the love that leads
 His soul to its perfection." Song, not deeds,
 (For we get tired) was chosen. Fate would brook
 Mankind no other organ; he would look
 For not another channel to dispense
 His own volition, and receive their sense
 Of its existing; but would be content,
 Obstructed else, with merely verse for vent.
 Nor should, for instance, strength an outlet seek
 And, striving, be admired, nor grace bespeak
 Wonder, displayed in gracious attitudes;
 Nor wisdom, poured forth, change unseemly moods:
 But he would give and take on song's one point.

Like some huge throbbing-stone that, poised a-joint,
 Sounds, to affect on its basaltic bed,
 Must sue in just one accent ; tempests shed
 Thunder, and raves the landstorm : only let
 That key by any little noise be set—
 The far benighted hunter's halloo pitch
 On that, the hungry curlew chance to scritch
 Or serpent hiss it, rustling through the rift,
 However loud, however low—all lift
 The groaning monster, stricken to the heart.

Lo ye, the world's concernment, for its part,
 And this, for his, will hardly interfere !
 Its businesses in blood and blaze this year
 But wile the hour away—a pastime slight
 Till he shall step upon the platform : right !
 And, now thus much is settled, cast in rough,
 Proved feasible, be counselled ! thought enough,—
 Slumber, Sordello ! any day will serve :
 Were it a less digested plan ! how swerve
 To-morrow ? Meanwhile eat these sun-dried grapes,
 And watch the soaring hawk there ! Life escapes
 Merrily thus.

He thoroughly read o'er
 His truchman Naddo's missive six times more,
 Praying him visit Mantua and supply
 A famished world.

The evening star was high
 When he reached Mantua, but his fame arrived
 Before him : friends applauded, foes connived,

And Naddo looked an angel, and the rest
 Angels; and all these angels would be blest
 Supremely by a song—the thrice-renowned
 Goito manufacture. Then he found
 (Casting about to satisfy the crowd)
 That happy vehicle, so late allowed,
 A sore annoyance; 't was the song's effect
 He cared for, scarce the song itself: reflect!
 In the past life, what might be singing's use?
 Just to delight his Delians, whose profuse
 Praise, not the toilsome process which procured
 That praise, enticed Apollo: dreams abjured,
 No over-leaping means for ends—take both
 For granted or take neither! I am loth
 To say the rhymes at last were Eglamor's;
 But Naddó, chuckling, bade competitors
 Go pine; “the master certes meant to waste
 No effort, cautiously had probed the taste
 He'd please anon: true bard, in short, disturb
 His title if they could; nor spur nor curb,
 Fancy nor reason, wanting in him; whence
 The staple of his verses, common sense:
 He built on man's broad nature—gift of gifts,
 That power to build! The world contented shifts
 With counterfeits enough, a dreary sort
 Of warriors, statesmen, ere it can extort
 Its poet-soul—that's, after all, a freak
 (The having eyes to see and tongue to speak)
 With our herd's stupid sterling happiness

So plainly incompatible that—yes—
 Yes—should a son of his improve the breed
 And turn out poet, he were cursed indeed !”
 “ Well, there’s Goito and its woods anon,
 If the worst happen ; best go stoutly on
 Now !” thought Sordello.

Ay, and goes on yet !

You pother with your glossaries to get
 A notion of the Troubadour’s intent
 In rondel, tenzon, virlai or sirvent—
 Much as you study arras how to twirl
 His angelot, plaything of page and girl,
 Once ; but you surely reach, at last,—or, no !
 Never quite reach what struck the people so,
 As from the welter of their time he drew
 Its elements successively to view,
 Followed all actions backward on their course,
 And catching up, unmingled at the source,
 Such a strength, such a weakness, added then
 A touch or two, and turned them into men.
 Virtue took form, nor vice refused a shape ;
 Here heaven opened, there was hell agape,
 As Saint this simpered past in sanctity,
 Sinner the other flared portentous by
 A greedy people. Then why stop, surprised
 At his success ? The scheme was realized
 Too suddenly in one respect : a crowd
 Praising, eyes quick to see, and lips as loud
 To speak, delicious homage to receive,

The woman's breath to feel upon his sleeve,
 Who said, "But Anafest—why asks he less
 Than Lucio, in your verses? how confess,
 It seemed too much but yestereve!"—the youth;
 Who bade him earnestly, "Avow the truth!
 You love Bianca, surely, from your song;
 I knew I was unworthy!"—soft or strong,
 In poured such tributes ere he had arranged
 Ethereal ways to take them, sorted, changed,
 Digested. Courted thus at unawares,
 In spite of his pretensions and his cares,
 He caught himself shamefully hankering.
 After the obvious petty joys that spring
 From real life, fain relinquish pedestal
 And condescend with pleasures—one and all
 To be renounced, no doubt; for, thus to chain
 Himself to single joys and so refrain
 From tasting their quintessence, frustrated, sure,
 His prime design; each joy must he abjure
 Even for love of it.

He laughed: what sage
 But perishes if from his magic page
 He look because, at the first line, a proof
 'T was heard salutes him from the cavern-roof?
 "On! Give yourself, excluding aught beside,
 To the day's task; compel your slave provide
 Its utmost at the soonest; turn the leaf
 Thoroughly conned. These lays of yours, in brief—
 Cannot men bear, now, something better?—fly

A pitch beyond this unreal pageantry
Of essences? the period sure has ceased
For such: present us with ourselves, at least,
Not portions of ourselves, mere loves and hates
Made flesh: wait not!"

Awhile the poet waits
However. The first trial was enough:
He left imagining, to try the stuff
That held the imaged thing, and, let it writhe
Never so fiercely, scarce allowed a tithe
To reach the light—his Language. How he sought
The cause, conceived a cure, and slow re-wrought
That Language,—welding words into the crude
Mass from the new speech round him, till a rude
Armour was hammered out, in time to be
Approved beyond the Roman panoply
Melted to make it,—boots not. This obtained
With some ado, no obstacle remained
To using it; accordingly he took
An action with its actors, quite forsook
Himself to live in each, returned anon
With the result—a creature, and, by one
And one, proceeded leisurely to equip
Its limbs in harness of his workmanship.
“Accomplished! Listen, Mantuans!” Fond essay!
Piece after piece that armour broke away,
Because perceptions whole, like that he sought
To clothe, reject so pure a work of thought
As language: thought may take perception’s place

But hardly co-exist in any case,
 Being its mere presentment—of the whole
 By parts, the simultaneous and the sole
 By the successive and the many. Lacks
 The crowd perception? painfully it tacks
 Thought to thought, which Sordello, needing such,
 Has rent perception into: it's to clutch
 And reconstruct—his office to diffuse,
 Destroy: as hard, then, to obtain a Muse
 As to become Apollo. "For the rest,
 E'en if some wondrous vehicle express
 The whole dream, what impertinence in me
 So to express it, who myself can be
 The dream! nor, on the other hand, are those
 I sing to, over-likely to suppose
 A higher than the highest I present
 Now, which they praise already: be content
 Both parties, rather—they with the old verse,
 And I with the old praise—far go, fare worse!"
 A few adhering rivets loosed, upsprings
 The angel, sparkles off his mail, and rings,
 Whirled from each delicatest limb it warps,
 As might Apollo from the sudden corpse
 Of Hyacinth have cast his luckless quoits.
 He set to celebrating the exploits
 Of Montfort o'er the Mountaineers.

Then came

The world's revenge: their pleasure, now his aim
 Merely,—what was it? "Not to play the fool

So much as learn our lesson in your school!"
 Replied the world. He found that, every time
 He gained applause by any ballad-rhyme,
 His auditory recognized no jot
 As he intended, and, mistaking not
 Him for his meanest hero, ne'er was dunce
 Sufficient to believe him—all, at once.
 His will . . . conceive it caring for his will!
 —Mantuan, the main of them, admiring still
 How a mere singer, ugly, stunted, weak,
 Had Montfort at completely (so to speak)
 His fingers' ends; while past the praise-tide swept
 To Montfort, either's share distinctly kept:
 The true meed for true merit!—his abates
 Into a sort he most repudiates,
 And on them angrily he turns. Who were
 The Mantuan, after all, that he should care
 About their recognition, ay or no?
 In spite of the convention months ago,
 (Why, blink the truth?) was not he forced to help
 This same ungrateful audience, every whelp
 Of Naddo's litter, make them pass for peers
 With the bright band of old Goito years,
 As erst he toiled for flower or tree? Why, there
 Sat Palma! Adelaide's funereal hair
 Ennobled the next corner. Ay, he strewed
 A fairy dust upon that multitude,
 Although he feigned to take them by themselves;
 His giants dignified those puny elves,

Sublimed their faint applause. In short, he found
 Himself still footing a delusive round,
 Remote as ever from the self-display
 He meant to compass, hampered every way
 By what he hoped assistance. Wherefore then
 Continue, make believe to find in men
 A use he found not ?

Weeks, months, years went by ;

And lo, Sordello vanished utterly,
 Sundered in twain ; each spectral part at strife
 With each ; one jarred against another life ;
 The Poet thwarting hopelessly the Man
 Who, fooled no longer, free in fancy ran
 Here, there ; let slip no opportunities
 As pitiful, forsooth, beside the prize
 To drop on him some no-time and acquit
 His constant faith (the Poet-half's to wit—
 That waiving any compromise between
 No joy and all joy kept the hunger keen
 Beyond most methods)—of incurring scoff
 From the Man-portion not to be put off
 With self-reflectings by the Poet's scheme,
 Though ne'er so bright ; that sauntered forth in dream,
 Drest any how, nor waited mystic frames,
 Immeasurable gifts, astounding claims,
 But just his sorry self—who yet might be
 Sorrier for aught he in reality
 Achieved, so pinioned That the Poet-part,
 Fondling, in turn of fancy, verse ; the Art

Developing his soul a thousand ways—
 Potent, by its assistance, to amaze
 The multitude with majesties, convince
 Each sort of nature, that same nature's prince
 Accosted it. Language, the makeshift, grew
 Into a bravest of expedients, too;
 Apollo, seemed it now, perverse had thrown
 Quiver and bow away, the lyre alone
 Sufficed. While, out of dream, his day's work went
 To tune a crazy tenzon or sirvent—
 So hampered him the Man-part, thrust to judge
 Between the bard and the bard's audience, grudge
 A minute's toil that missed its due reward!
 But the complete Sordello, Man and Bard,
 John's cloud-girt angel, this foot on the land,
 That on the sea, with open in his hand
 A bitter-sweetling of a book—was gone.

And if internal struggles to be one
 That frittered him incessantly piecemeal,
 Referred, ne'er so obliquely, to the real
 Mantuans! intruding ever with some call
 To action while he pondered, once for all,
 Which looked the easier effort—to pursue
 This course, still leap o'er paltry joys, yearn through
 The present ill-appreciated stage
 Of self-revelment, and compel the age
 Know him; or else, forswearing bard-craft, wake
 From out his lethargy and nobly shake
 Off timid habits of denial, mix

With men, enjoy like men. Ere he could fix
 On aught, in rushed the Mantuans; much they cared
 For his perplexity! Thus unprepared,
 The obvious if not only shelter lay
 In deeds, the dull conventions of his day
 Prescribed the like of him: why not be glad
 'Tis settled Palma's minstrel, good or bad,
 Submits to this and that established rule?
 Let Vidal change, or any other fool,
 His murrey-coloured robe for philamot,
 And crop his hair; too skin-deep, is it not,
 Such vigour? Then, a sorrow to the heart,
 His talk! Whatever topics they might start,
 Had to be groped for in his consciousness
 Straight, and as straight delivered them by guess.
 Only obliged to ask himself, "What was,"
 A speedy answer followed; but, alas,
 One of God's large ones, tardy to condense
 Itself into a period; answers whence
 A tangle of conclusions must be stripped
 At any risk ere, trim to pattern clipped,
 They matched rare specimens the Mantuan flock
 Regaled him with, each talker from his stock
 Of sorted-o'er opinions, every stage,
 Juicy in youth or desiccate with age,
 Fruits like the fig-tree's, rathe-ripe, rotten-rich,
 Sweet-sour, all tastes to take: a practice which
 He too had not impossibly attained,
 Once either of those fancy-flights restrained;

For, at conjecture how might words appear
 To others, playing there what happened here,
 And occupied abroad by what he spurned
 At home, 't was slipt, the occasion he returned
 To seize: he 'd strike that lyre adroitly—speech,
 Would but a twenty-cubit plectre reach;
 A clever hand, consummate instrument,
 Were both brought close; each excellency went
 For nothing else. The question Naddo asked,
 Had just a lifetime moderately tasked
 To answer, Naddo's fashion. More disgust
 And more! why move his soul, since move it must
 At a minute's notice or as good it failed
 To move at all? The end was, he retailed
 Some ready-made opinion, put to use
 This quip, that maxim, ventured reproduce
 Gestures and tones—at any folly caught
 Serving to finish with, nor too much sought
 If false or true 't was spoken; praise and blame
 Of what he said grew pretty well the same
 —Meantime awards to meantime acts: his soul,
 Unequal to the compassing a whole,
 Saw, in a tenth part, less and less to strive
 About. And as for men in turn . . . contrive
 Who could to take eternal interest
 In them, so hate the worst, so love the best!
 Though, in pursuance of his passive plan,
 He hailed, decried the proper way.

As Man

So figured he; and how as Poet? Verse
 Came only not to a stand-still. The worse,
 That his poor piece of daily work to do
 Was, not sink under any rivals; who
 Loudly and long enough, without these qualms,
 Tuned, from Bocafoli's stark-naked psalms,
 To Plara's sonnets spoilt by toying with,
 "As knops that stud some almug to the pith
 Prickèd for gum, wry thence, and crinklèd worse
 Than pursèd eyelids of a river-horse
 Sunning himself o' the slime when whirrs the
 breeze"—

Gad-fly, that is. He might compete with these!
 But—but—

“Observe a pompion-twine afloat;
 Pluck me one cup from off the castle-moat!
 Along with cup you raise leaf, stalk and root,
 The entire surface of the pool to boot.
 So could I pluck a cup, put in one song
 A single sight, did not my hand, too strong,
 Twitch in the least the root-strings of the whole.
 How should externals satisfy my soul?”
 “Why that's precise the error Squarcialupe”
 (Hazarded Naddo) “finds; ‘the man can't stoop
 To sing us out,’ quoth he, ‘a mere romance;
 He'd fain do better than the best, enhance
 The subjects' rarity, work problems out
 Therewith:’ now, you're a bard, a bard past doubt,
 And no philosopher; why introduce

Crotchets like these? fine, surely, but no use
 In poetry—which still must be, to strike,
 Based upon common sense; there's nothing like
 Appealing to our nature! what beside
 Was your first poetry? No tricks were tried
 In that, no hollow thrills, affected throes!
 'The man,' said we, 'tells his own joys and woes—
 We'll trust him.' Would you have your songs endure?
 Build on the human heart!—Why, to be sure
 Yours is one sort of heart—but I mean theirs,
 Ours, every one's, the healthy heart one cares
 To build on! Central peace, mother of strength,
 That's father of . . . nay, go yourself that length,
 Ask those calm-hearted doers what they do
 When they have got their calm! And is it true,
 Fire rankles at the heart of every globe?
 Perhaps! But these are matters one may probe
 Too deeply for poetic purposes:
 Rather select a theory that . . . yes,
 Laugh! what does that prove?—stations you midway
 And saves some little o'er-refining. Nay,
 That's rank injustice done me! I restrict
 The poet? Don't I hold the poet picked
 Out of a host of warriors, statesmen . . . did
 I tell you? Very like! As well you hid
 That sense of power, you have! True bards believe
 All able to achieve what they achieve—
 That is, just nothing—in one point abide
 Profounder simpletons than all beside.

Oh, ay! The knowledge that you are a bard
 Must constitute your prime, nay sole, reward!"
 So prattled Naddo, busiest of the tribe
 Of genius-haunters—how shall I describe
 What grubs or nips, or rubs, or rips—your louse
 For love, your flea for hate, magnanimous,
 Malignant, Pappacoda, Tagliafer,
 Picking a sustenance from wear and tear
 By implements it sedulous employs
 To undertake, lay down, mete out, o'er-toise
 Sordello? Fifty creepers to elude
 At once! They settled stanchly; shame ensued:
 Behold the monarch of mankind succumb
 To the last fool who turned him round his thumb,
 As Naddo styled it! 'T was not worth oppose
 The matter of a moment, gainsay those
 He aimed at getting rid of; better think
 Their thoughts and speak their speech, secure to slink
 Back expeditiously to his safe place,
 And chew the cud—what he and what his race
 Were really, each of them. Yet even this
 Conformity was partial. He would miss
 Some point, brought into contact with them ere
 Assured in what small segment of the sphere
 Of his existence they attended him;
 Whence blunders—falsehoods rectify—a grim
 List—slur it over! How? If dreams were tried,
 His will swayed sicklily from side to side,
 Nor merely neutralized his waking act

But tended e'en in fancy to distract
 The intermediate will, the choice of means.
 He lost the art of dreaming : Mantuan scenes
 Supplied a baron, say, he sung before,
 Handsomely reckless, full to running o'er
 Of gallantries ; " abjure the soul, content
 With body, therefore ! " Scarcely had he bent
 Himself in dream thus low, when matter fast
 Cried out, he found, for spirit to contrast
 And task it duly ; by advances slight,
 The simple stuff becoming composite,
 Count Lori grew Apollo—best recall
 His fancy ! Then would some rough peasant-Paul,
 Like those old Ecelin confers with, glance
 His gay apparel o'er ; that countenance
 Gathered his shattered fancy into one,
 And, body clean abolished, soul alone
 Sufficed the grey Paulician : by and by,
 To balance the ethereality,
 Passions were needed ; foiled he sunk again.

Meanwhile the world rejoiced ('t is time explain)
 Because a sudden sickness set it free
 From Adelaide. Missing the mother-bee,
 Her mountain-hive Romano swarmed ; at once
 A rustle-forth of daughters and of sons
 Blackened the valley. " I am sick too, old,
 Half crazed I think ; what good 's the Kaiser's gold
 To such an one ? God help me ! for I catch
 My children's greedy sparkling eyes at watch—

He bears that double breastplate on, they say,
 So many minutes less than yesterday!
 Beside, Monk Hilary is on his knees
 Now, sworn to kneel and pray till God shall please
 Exact a punishment for many things
 You know, and some you never knew; which brings
 To memory, Azzo's sister Beatrix
 And Richard's Giglia are my Alberic's
 And Ecelin's betrothed; the Count himself
 Must get my Palma: Ghibellin and Guelf
 Mean to embrace each other." So began
 Romano's missive to his fighting-man
 Taurello—on the Tuscan's death, away
 With Friedrich sworn to sail from Naples' bay
 Next month for Syria. Never thunder-clap
 Out of Vesuvius' throat, like this mishap
 Startled him. "That accursed Vicenza! I
 Absent, and she selects this time to die!
 Ho, fellows, for Vicenza!" Half a score
 Of horses ridden dead, he stood before
 Romano in his reeking spurs: too late—
 "Boniface urged me, Este could not wait,"
 The chieftain stammered; "let me die in peace—
 Forget me! Was it I e'er craved increase
 Of rule? Do you and Friedrich plot your worst
 Against the Father: as you found me first
 So leave me now. Forgive me! Palma, sure,
 Is at Goito still. Retain that lure—
 Only be pacified!"

The country rung

With such a piece of news : on every tongue,
 How Ecelin's great servant, congeed off,
 Had done a long day's service, so, might doff
 The green and yellow, and recover breath
 At Mantua, whither,—since Retrude's death,
 (The girlish slip of a Sicilian bride
 From Otho's House, he carried to reside
 At Mantua till the Ferrarese should pile
 A structure worthy her imperial style,
 The gardens raise, the statues there enshrine,
 She never lived to see)—although his line
 Was ancient in her archives and she took
 A pride in him, that city, nor forsook
 Her child when he forsook himself and spent
 A prowess on Romano surely meant
 For his own growth—whither he ne'er resorts
 If wholly satisfied (to trust reports)
 With Ecelin. So, forward in a trice
 Were shows to greet him. “Take a friend's advice,”
 Quoth Naddo to Sordello, “nor be rash
 Because your rivals (nothing can abash
 Some folks) demur that we pronounced you best
 To sound the great man's welcome ; 't is a test,
 Remember ! Strojavacca looks asquint,
 The rough fat sloven ; and there's plenty hint
 Your pinions have received of late a shock—
 Out-soar them, cobswan of the silver flock !
 Sing well !” A signal wonder, song's no whit
 Facilitated.

Fast the minutes flit ;
 Another day, Sordello finds, will bring
 The soldier, and he cannot choose but sing ;
 So, a last shift, quits Mantua—slow, alone :
 Out of that aching brain, a very stone,
 Song must be struck. What occupies that front ?
 Just how he was more awkward than his wont
 The night before, when Naddo, who had seen
 Taurello on his progress, praised the mien
 For dignity no crosses could affect—
 Such was a joy, and might not he detect
 A satisfaction if established joys
 Were proved imposture ? Poetry annoys
 Its utmost : wherefore fret ? Verses may come
 Or keep away ! And thus he wandered, dumb
 Till evening, when he paused, thoroughly spent,
 On a blind hill-top : down the gorge he went,
 Yielding himself up as to an embrace.
 The moon came out ; like features of a face
 A querulous fraternity of pines,
 Sad blackthorn clumps, leafless and grovelling vines
 Also came out, made gradually up
 The picture ; 't was Goito's mountain-cup
 And castle. He had dropped through one defile
 He never dared explore, the Chief erewhile
 Had vanished by. Back rushed the dream, enwrapped
 Him wholly. 'T was Apollo now they lapped,
 Those mountains, not a pettish minstrel meant
 To wear his soul away in discontent,

Brooding on fortune's malice. Heart and brain
 Swelled ; he expanded to himself again,
 As some thin seedling spice-tree starved and frail,
 Pushing between cat's head and ibis' tail
 Crusted into the porphyry pavement smooth,
 —Suffered remain just as it sprung, to soothe
 The Soldan's pining daughter, never yet
 Well in her chilly green-glazed minaret,—
 When rooted up, the sunny day she died,
 And flung into the common court beside
 Its parent tree. Come home, Sordello ! Soon
 Was he low muttering, beneath the moon,
 Of sorrow saved, of quiet evermore,—
 Since from the purpose, he maintained before,
 Only resulted wailing and hot tears.
 Ah, the slim castle ! dwindled of late years,
 But more mysterious ; gone to ruin—trails
 Of vine through every loop-hole. Nought avails
 The night as, torch in hand, he must explore
 The maple chamber—did I say, its floor
 Was made of intersecting cedar beams ?
 Worn now with gaps so large, there blew cold streams
 Of air quite from the dungeon ; lay your ear
 Close and 't is like, one after one, you hear
 In the blind darkness water drop. The nests
 And nooks retain their long ranged vesture-chests
 Empty and smelling of the iris root
 The Tuscan grated o'er them to recruit
 Her wasted wits. Palma was gone that day,

Said the remaining women. Last, he lay
Beside the Carian group reserved and still.

The Body, the Machine for Acting Will,
Had been at the commencement proved unfit ;
That for Reflecting, Demonstrating it,
Mankind—no fitter : was the Will Itself
In fault ?

His forehead pressed the moonlit shelf
Beside the youngest marble maid awhile ;
Then, raising it, he thought, with a long smile,
“ I shall be king again ! ” as he withdrew
The envied scarf ; into the font he threw
His crown.

Next day, no poet ! “ Wherefore ? ” asked
Taurello, when the dance of Jongleurs, masked
As devils, ended ; “ don't a song come next ? ”
The master of the pageant looked perplext
Till Naddo's whisper came to his relief.
“ His Highness knew what poets were : in brief,
Had not the tetchy race prescriptive right
To peevishness, caprice ? or, call it spite,
One must receive their nature in its length
And breadth, expect the weakness with the strength ! ”
—So phrasing, till, his stock of phrases spent,
The easy-natured soldier smiled assent,
Settled his portly person, smoothed his chin,
And nodded that the bull-bait might begin.

.BOOK THE THIRD.

NATURE MAY TRIUMPH THEREFORE ;

AND the font took them : let our laurels lie !
 Braid moonfern now with mystic trifoly
 Because once more Goito gets, once more,
 Sordello to itself ! A dream is o'er,
 And the suspended life begins anew ;
 Quiet those throbbing temples, then, subdue
 That cheek's distortion ! Nature's strict embrace,
 Putting aside the Past, shall soon efface
 Its print as well—factitious humours grown
 Over the true—loves, hatreds not his own—
 And turn him pure as some forgotten vest
 Woven of painted byssus, silkiest
 Tufting the Tyrrhene whelk's pearl-sheeted lip,
 Left welter where a trireme let it slip
 I' the sea, and vexed a satrap ; so the stain
 O' the world forsakes Sordello, with its pain,
 Its pleasure : how the tinct loosening escapes,
 Cloud after cloud ! Mantua's familiar shapes
 Die, fair and foul die, fading as they flit,
 Men, women, and the pathos and the wit,
 Wise speech and foolish, deeds to smile or sigh
 For, good, bad, seemly or ignoble, die.
 The last face glances through the eglantines,

The last voice murmurs 'twixt the blossomed vines
 Of Men, of that machine supplied by thought
 To compass self-perception with, he sought
 By forcing half himself—an insane pulse
 Of a god's blood, on clay it could convulse,
 Never transmute—on human sights and sounds,
 To watch the other half with; irksome bounds
 It ebbs from to its source, a fountain sealed
 Forever. Better sure be unrevealed
 Than part-revealed: Sordello well or ill
 Is finished: then what further use of Will,
 A point in the prime idea not realized,
 An oversight? inordinately prized,
 No less, and pampered with enough of each
 Delight to prove the whole above its reach.
 "To need become all natures, yet retain
 The law of my own nature—to remain
 Myself, yet yearn . . . as if that chestnut, think,
 Should yearn for this first larch-bloom crisp and pink,
 Or those pale fragrant tears where zephyrs stanch
 March wounds along the fretted pine-tree branch!
 Will and the means to show will, great and small,
 Material, spiritual,—abjure them all
 Save any so distinct, they may be left
 To amuse, not tempt become! and, thus bereft,
 Just as I first was fashioned would I be!
 Nor, moon, is it Apollo now, but me
 Thou visitest to comfort and befriend!
 Swim thou into my heart, and there an end,

Since I possess thee!—nay, thus shut mine eyes
 And know, quite know, by this heart's fall and rise,
 When thou dost bury thee in clouds, and when
 Out-standest : wherefore practise upon men
 To make that plainer to myself?"

Slide here

Over a sweet and solitary year
 Wasted : or simply notice change in him—
 How eyes, bright with exploring once, grew dim
 And satiate with receiving. Some distress
 Was caused, too, by a sort of consciousness
 Under the imbecility,—nought kept
 That down ; he slept, but was aware he slept,
 So, frustrated : as who brainsick made pact
 Erst with the overhanging cataract
 To deafen him, yet still distinguished slow
 His own blood's measured clicking at his brow.

To finish. One declining Autumn day—
 Few birds about the heaven chill and grey,
 No wind that cared trouble the tacit woods—
 He sauntered home complacently, their moods
 According, his and Nature's. Every spark
 Of Mantua life was trodden out ; so dark
 The embers, that the Troubadour, who sung
 Hundreds of songs, forgot, its trick his tongue,
 Its craft his brain, how either brought to pass
 Singing at all ; that faculty might class
 With any of Apollo's now. The year
 Began to find its early promise sere

As well. Thus beauty vanishes ; thus stone
 Outlingers flesh : Nature's and his youth gone,
 They left the world to you, and wished you joy.
 When, stopping his benevolent employ,
 A presage shuddered through the welkin ; harsh
 The earth's remonstrance followed. 'T was the marsh
 Gone of a sudden. Mincio, in its place,
 Laughed, a broad water, in next morning's face,
 And, where the mists broke up immense and white
 I' the steady wind, burned like a spilth of light
 Out of the crashing of a myriad stars.
 And here was Nature, bound by the same bars
 Of fate with him !

“No ! youth once gone is gone :
 Deeds let escape are never to be done.
 Leaf-fall and grass-spring for the year ; for us—
 Oh forfeit I unalterably thus
 My chance ? nor two lives wait me, this to spend
 Learning save that ? Nature has time to mend
 Mistake, she knows occasion will recur—
 Landslip or seabreach, how affects it her
 With her magnificent resources ?—I
 Must perish once and perish utterly !
 Not any strollings now at even-close
 Down the field-path, Sordello ! by thorn-rows
 Alive with lamp-flies, swimming spots of fire
 And dew, outlining the black cypress' spire
 She waits you at, Elys, who heard you first
 Woo her, the snow-month through, but ere she durst

Answer 't was April! Linden-flower-time-long
 Her eyes were on the ground; 't is July, strong
 Now; and because white dust-clouds overwhelm,
 The woodside, here or by the village elm
 That holds the moon, she meets you, somewhat pale,
 But letting you lift up her coarse flax veil,
 And whisper (the damp little hand in yours)
 Of love, heart's love, your heart's love that endures
 Till death. Tush! No mad mixing with the rout
 Of haggard ribalds wandering about
 The hot torchlit wine-scented island-house
 Where Friedrich holds his wickedest carouse,
 Parading,—to the gay Palermitans,
 Soft Messinese, dusk Saracenic clans
 Nuocera holds,—those tall grave dazzling Norse,
 High-cheeked, lank-haired, toothed whiter than the
 Queen of the caves of jet stalactites, [morse,
 He sent his barks to fetch through icy seas,
 The blind night seas without a saving star,
 And here in snowy birdskin robes they are,
 Sordello!—here, mollitious alcoves gilt
 Superb as Byzant domes that devils built!
 —Ah, Byzant, there again! no chance to go
 Ever like august pleasant Dandolo,
 Worshipping hearts about him for a wall,
 Conducted, blind eyes, hundred years and all,
 Through vanquished Byzant where friends note for him
 What pillar, marble massive, sardius slim,
 'T were fittest he transport to Venice' Square—

Flattered and promised life to touch them there
 Soon, by his fervid sons of senators !
 No more lifes, deaths, loves, hatreds, peaces, wars—
 Ah, fragments of a whole ordained to be !
 Points in the life I waited ! what are ye
 But roundels of a ladder which appeared
 Awhile the very platform it was reared
 To lift me on ?—that happiness I find
 Proofs of my faith in, even in the blind
 Instinct which bade forego you all unless
 Ye led me past yourselves. Ay, happiness
 Awaited me ; the way life should be used
 Was to acquire, and deeds like you conducted
 To teach it by a self-revelment, deemed
 The very use, so long ! Whatever seemed
 Progress to that, was pleasure ; aught that stayed
 My reaching it—no pleasure. I have laid
 The ladder down ; I climb not ; still, aloft
 The platform stretches ! Blissess strong and soft,
 I dared not entertain, elude me ; yet
 Never of what they promised could I get
 A glimpse till now ! The common sort, the crowd,
 Exist, perceive ; with Being are endowed,
 However slight, distinct from what they See,
 However bounded : Happiness must be,
 To feed the first by gleanings from the last,
 Attain its qualities, and slow or fast
 Become what they behold ; such peace-in-strife
 By transmutation, is the Use of Life,
 The Alien turning Native to the soul

Or body—which instructs me ; I am whole
 There and demand a Palma ; had the world
 Been from my soul to a like distance hurled,
 'T were Happiness to make it one with me—
 Whereas I must, ere I begin*to Be,
 Include a world, in flesh, I comprehend
 In spirit now ; and this done, what's to blend
 With ? Nought is Alien in the world—my Will
 Owns all already ; yet can turn it still
 Less Native, since my Means to correspond
 With Will are so unworthy, 't was my bond
 To tread the very joys that tantalize
 Most now, into a grave, never to rise.
 I die then ! Will the rest agree to die ?
 Next Age or no ? Shall its Sordello try
 Clue after clue, and catch at last the clue
 I miss ?—that's underneath my finger too,
 Twice, thrice a day, perhaps,—some yearning traced
 Deeper, some petty consequence embraced
 Closer ! Why fled I Mantua, then ?—complained
 So much my Will was fettered, yet remained
 Content within a tether half the range
 I could assign it ?—able to exchange
 My ignorance (I felt) for knowledge, and
 Idle because I could thus understand—
 Could e'en have penetrated to its core
 Our mortal mystery, and yet forbore,
 Preferred elaborating in the dark
 My casual stuff, by any wretched spark

Born of my predecessors, though one stroke
 Of mine had brought the flame forth ! Mantua's yoke,
 My minstrel's-trade, was to behold mankind,—
 My own concernment—just to bring my mind
 Behold, just extricate, for my acquist,
 Each object suffered stife in the mist
 • Which hazard, use and blindness could impose
 In their relation to myself.”

He rose.

The level wind carried above the firs
 Clouds, the irrevocable travellers,
 Onward.

“ Pushed thus into a drowsy copse,
 Arms twine about my neck, each eyelid drops
 Under a humid finger ; while there fleets,
 Outside the screen, a pageant time repeats
 Never again ! To be deposed—immured
 Clandestinely—still petted, still assured
 To govern were fatiguing work—the Sight
 Fleeting meanwhile ! 'T is noontide : wreak ere night
 Somehow my will upon it, rather ! Slake
 This thirst somehow, the poorest impress take
 That serves ! A blasted bud displays you, torn,
 Faint rudiments of the full flower unborn ;
 But who divines what glory coats o'erclasp
 Of the bulb dormant in the mummy's grasp
 Taurello sent ” . . .

“ Taurello ? Palma sent
 Your Trouvere,” (Naddo interposing leaut

Over the lost bard's shoulder)—“and, believe,
 You cannot more reluctantly receive.
 Than I pronounce her message : we depart
 Together. What avail a poet's heart
 Verona's pomps and gauds? five blades of grass
 Suffice him. News? Why, where your marsh was,
 On its mud-banks smoke fast rises after smoke
 I' the valley, like a spout of hell new-broke.
 Oh, the world's tidings! small your thanks, I guess,
 For them. The father of our Patroness,
 Has played Taurello an astounding trick,
 Parts between Ecelin and Alberic
 His wealth and goes into a convent: both
 Wed Guelfs: the Count and Palma plighted troth
 A week since at Verona: and they want
 You doubtless to contrive the marriage-chant
 Ere Richard storms Ferrara.” Here was told
 The tale from the beginning—how, made bold
 By Salinguerra's absence, Guelfs had burned
 And pillaged till he unawares returned
 To take revenge: how Azzo and his friend
 Were doing their endeavour, how the end
 Of the siege was nigh, and how the Count, released
 From further care, would with his marriage-feast
 Inaugurate a new and better rule,
 Absorbing thus Romano.

“Shall I school
 My master,” added Naddo, “and suggest
 How you may clothe in a poetic vest

These doings, at Verona? Your response
 To Palma! Wherefore jest? 'Depart at once?'
 A good resolve! In truth, I hardly hoped
 So prompt an acquiescence. Have you groped
 Out wisdom in the wilds here?—Thoughts may be
 Over-poetical for poetry.

Pearl-white, you poets liken Palma's neck;
 And yet what spoils an orient like some speck
 Of genuine white, turning its own white grey?
 You take me? Curse the cicale!"

One more day.

One eve—appears Verona! Many a group,
 (You mind) instructed of the osprey's swoop
 On lynx and ounce, was gathering—Christendom
 Sure to receive, whate'er the end was, from
 The evening's purpose cheer or detriment,
 Since Friedrich only waited some event
 Like this, of Ghibellins establishing
 Themselves within Ferrara, ere, as King
 Of Lombardy, he'd glad descend there, wage
 Old warfare with the Pontiff, disengage
 His barons from the burghers, and restore
 The rule of Charlemagne, broken of yore
 By Hildebrand.

In the palace, each by each,
 Sordello sat and Palma: little speech
 At first in that dim closet, face with face
 (Despite the tumult in the market-place)
 Exchanging quick low laughers: now would rush

Word upon word to meet a sudden flush,
 A look left off, a shifting lips' surmise—
 But for the most part their two histories
 Ran best thro' the locked fingers and linked arms.
 And so the night flew on with its alarms
 Till in burst one of Palma's retinue ;
 "Now, Lady!" gasped he. Then arose the two
 And leaned into Verona's air, dead-still.
 A balcony lay black beneath until
 Out, 'mid a gush of torchfire, grey-haired men
 Came on it and harangued the people: then
 Sea-like that people surging to and fro
 Shouted, "Hale forth the Carroch—trumpets, ho,
 A flourish! run it in the ancient grooves—
 Back from the bell! Hammer! that whom behoves
 May hear the League is up! Peal! learn who list,
 Verona means not be the first break tryst
 To-morrow with the League!"

Enough. Now turn—

Over the eastern cypresses: discern—
 Is any beacon set a-glimmer?

Rang

The air with shouts that overpowered the clang
 Of the incessant carroch, even: "Haste—
 The Candle's at the gateway! ere it waste,
 Each soldier stand beside it, armed to march
 With Tiso Sampier through the eastern arch!"
 Ferrara's succoured, Palma!

Once again

They sat together; some strange thing in train
 To say, so difficult was Palma's place
 In taking, with a coy fastidious grace
 Like the bird's flutter ere it fix and feed.
 But when she felt she held her friend indeed
 Safe, she threw back her curls, began implant
 Her lessons, telling of another want
 Goito's quiet nourished than his own;
 Palma—to serve, as him—be served, alone
 Importing; Agnes' milk so neutralized
 The blood of Ecelin. Nor be surprised
 If, while Sordello fain had captive led
 Nature, in dream was Palma wholly subjected
 To some out-soul, which dawned not though she pined
 Delaying till its advent, heart and mind,
 Their life. "How dared I let expand the force
 Within me, till some out-soul, whose resource
 It grew for, should direct it? Every law
 Of life, its every fitness, every flaw,
 Must One determine whose corporeal shape
 Would be no other than the prime escape
 And revelation to me of a Will
 Orb-like o'ershrouded and inscrutable
 Above, save at the point which, I should know,
 Shone that myself, my powers, might overflow
 So far, so much; as now it signified
 Which earthly shape it henceforth chose my guide,
 Whose mortal lip selected to declare
 Its oracles, what fleshly garb would wear

—The first of intimations, whom to love ;
 The next, how love him. Seemed that orb, above
 The castle-covert and the mountain-close,
 Slow in appearing,—if beneath it rose
 Cravings, aversions,—did our green precinct
 Take pride in me, at unawares distinct
 With this or that endowment,—how, repress
 At once, such jetting power shrunk to the rest !
 Was I to have a chance touch spoil me, leave
 My spirit thence unfitted to receive
 The consummating spell ?—that spell so near
 Moreover ! ‘ Waits he not the waking year ?
 His almond-blossoms must be honey-ripe
 By this ; to welcome him, fresh runnels stripe
 The thawed ravines ; because of him, the wind
 Walks like a herald. I shall surely find
 Him now !’

And chief, that earnest April morn
 Of Richard’s Love-court, was it time, so worn
 And white my cheek, so idly my blood beat,
 Sitting that morn beside the Lady’s feet
 And saying as she prompted ; till outburst
 One face from all the faces—not then first
 I knew it ; where in maple chamber glooms,
 Crowned with what sanguine-heart pomegranate blooms
 Advanced it ever ? Men’s acknowledgment
 Sanctioned my own : ’t was taken, Palma’s bent,—
 Sordello, accepted.

And the Tuscan dumb

Sat scheming, scheming. Ecelin would come
 Gaunt, scared, 'Cesano baffles me,' he'd say:
 'Better I fought it out, my father's way!
 Strangle Ferrara in its drowning flats,
 And you and your Taurello yonder—what's
 Romano's business there?' An hour's concern
 To cure the forward Chief!—induced return
 Much heartened from those overmeaning eyes,
 Wound up to persevere,—his enterprise
 Marked out anew, its exigent of wit
 Apportioned,—she at liberty to sit
 And scheme against the next emergence, I—
 To covet her Taurello-sprite, made fly
 Or fold the wing—to con your horoscope
 For leave command those steely shafts shoot ope,
 Or straight assuage their blinding eagerness
 To blank smooth snow. What semblance of success
 To any of my plans for making you
 Mine and Romano's? Break the first wall through,
 Tread o'er the ruins of the Chief, supplant
 His sons beside, still, vainest were the vaunt:
 There, Salinguerra would obstruct me sheer,
 And the insuperable Tuscan, here,
 Stayed me! But one wild eve that Lady died
 In her lone chamber : only I beside :
 Taurello far at Naples, and my sire
 At Padua, Ecelin away in ire
 With Alberic. She held me thus—a clutch
 To make our spirits as our bodies touch—

And so began flinging the Past up, heaps
 Of uncouth treasure from their sunless sleeps
 Within her soul; deeds rose along with dreams,
 Fragments of many miserable schemes,
 Secrets, more secrets, then—no, not the last—
 'Mongst others, like a casual trick o' the Past,
 How . . . ay, she told me, gathering up her face
 —All left of it, into one arch-grimace
 To die with . . .

Friend, 't is gone! but not the fear
 Of that fell laughing, heard as now I hear.
 Nor faltered voice, nor seemed her heart grow weak,
 When i' the midst abrupt she ceased to speak
 —Dead, as to serve a purpose, mark!—for in
 Rushed o' the very instant Ecelin
 (How summoned, who divine?)—looking as if
 He understood why Adelaide lay stiff
 Already in my arms; for, ' Girl, how must
 I manage Este in the matter thrust
 Upon me, how unravel your bad coil?—
 Since ' (he declared) ' 't is on your brow—a soil
 Like hers, there!' then in the same breath, ' he lacked
 No counsel after all, had signed no pact
 With devils, nor was treason here or there,
 Goito or Vicenza, his affair:
 He buried it in Adelaide's deep grave,
 Would begin life afresh, now,—would not slave
 For any Friedrich's nor Taurello's sake!
 What bootéd him to meddle or to make

In Lombardy?' And afterward I knew
 The meaning of his promise to undo
 All she had done—why marriages were made,
 New friendships entered on, old followers paid
 With nurses for their pains,—new friends' amaze
 At height, when, passing out by Gate St. Blaise,
 He stopped short in Vicenza, bent his head
 Over a friar's neck,—'had vowed,' he said,
 'Long since, nigh thirty years, because his wife
 And child were saved there, to bestow his life
 On God, his gettings on the Church.'

Exiled

Within Goito, still one dream beguiled
 My days and nights; 't was found, the orb I sought
 To serve, those glimpses came of Fomalhaut,
 No other: but how serve it?—authorize
 You and Romano mingle destinies?
 And straight Romano's angel stood beside
 Me who had else been Boniface's bride,
 For Salinguerra 't was, with neck low bent,
 And voice lightened to music, (as he meant
 To learn not teach me,) who withdrew the pall
 From the dead Past and straight revived it all,
 Making me see how first Romano waxed,
 Wherefore he waned now, why, if I relaxed
 My grasp (even I!) would drop a thing effete,
 Frayed by itself, unequal to complete
 Its course, and counting every step astray
 A gain so much. Romano, every way

Stable, a Lombard House now—why start back
 Into the very outset of its track ?
 This patching-principle which late allied
 Our House with other Houses—what beside
 Concerned the apparition, the first Knight
 Who followed Conrad hither in such plight
 His utmost wealth was summed in his one steed ?
 For Ecelo, that prowler, was decreed
 A task, in the beginning hazardous
 To him as ever task can be to us ;
 But did the weather-beaten thief despair
 When first our crystal cincture of warm air,—
 That binds the Trevisan,—as its spice-belt
 (Crusaders say) the tract where Jesus dwelt,—
 Furtive he pierced, and Este was to face—
 Despaired Saponian strength of Lombard grace ?
 Tried he at making surer aught made sure,
 Maturing what already was mature ?
 No ; his heart prompted Ecelo, ' Confront'
 Este, inspect yourself. What's nature ? Wont.
 Discard three-parts your nature, and adopt
 The rest as an advantage ?' Old strength propped
 The man who first grew Podestà among
 The Vincentines, no less than, while there sprung
 His palace up in Padua like a threat,
 Their noblest spied a grace, unnoticed yet
 In Conrad's crew. Thus far the object gained,
 Romano was established—has remained—
 For are you not Italian, truly peers

With Este? 'Azzo' better soothes our ears
 Than 'Alberic?' or is this lion's-crine
 From over-mounts' (this yellow hair of mine)
 'So weak a graft on Agnes Este's stock?'
 (Thus went he on with something of a mock)
 'Wherefore recoil, then, from the very fate,
 Conceded you, refuse to imitate
 Your model farther? Este long since left
 Being mere Este: as a blade its heft,
 Este required the Pope to further him:
 And you, the Kaiser—whom your father's whim
 Foregoes or, better, never shall forego.
 If Palma dare pursue what Ecelo
 Commenced, but Ecelin desists from: just
 As Adelaide of Susa could intrust
 Her donative,—her Piedmont given the Pope,
 Her Alpine-pass for him to shut or ope
 'Twixt France and Italy,—to the superb
 Matilda's perfecting,—so, lest aught curb
 Our Adelaide's great counter-project for
 Giving her Trentinè to the Emperor
 With passage here from Germany,—shall you
 Take it,—my slender plodding talent, too!'
 —Urged me Taurellò with his half-smile.

He

As Patron of the scattered family
 Conveyed me to his Mantua, kept in bruit
 Azzo's alliances and Richard's suit
 Until, the Kaiser excommunicate,

'Nothing remains,' Taurello said, 'but wait
 Some rash procedure : Palma was the link,
 As Agnes' child, between us, and they shrink
 From losing Palma : judge if we advance,
 Your father's method, your inheritance !'
 That day I was betrothed to Boniface
 At Padua by Taurello's self, took place
 The outrage of the Ferrarese : again,
 That day I sought Verona with the train
 Agreed for,—by Taurello's policy
 Convicting Richard of the fault, since we
 Were present to annul or to confirm,—
 Richard, whose patience had outstayed its term,
 Quitted Verona for the siege.

And now

What glory may engird Sordello's brow
 Through this ? A month since at Oliero slunk
 All that was Ecelin into a monk ;
 But how could Salinguerra so forget
 His liege of thirty years as grudge even yet
 One effort to recover him ? He sent
 Forthwith the tidings of this last event
 To Ecelin—declared that he, despite
 The recent folly, recognized his right
 To order Salinguerra : 'Should he wring
 Its uttermost advantage out, or fling
 This chance away ? Or were his sons now Head
 Of the House ?' Through me Taurello's missive sped ;
 My father's answer will by me return.

Behold! 'For him,' he writes, 'no more concern
 With strife than, for his children, with fresh plots
 Of Friedrich. Old engagements out he blots
 For aye: Taurello shall no more subserve,
 Nor Berlin impose.' Lest this unnerve
 Taurello at this juncture, slack his grip
 Of Richard, suffer the occasion slip,—
 I, in his sons' default (who, mating with
 Este, forsake Romano as the frith
 Its mainsea for the firmland, sea makes head
 Against) I stand, Romano,—in their stead
 Assume the station they desert, and give
 Still, as the Kaiser's representative,
 Taurello licence he demands. Midnight—
 Morning—by noon to-morrow, making light
 Of the League's issue, we, in some gay weed
 Like yours, disguised together, may precede
 The arbitrators to Ferrara: reach
 Him, let Taurello's noble accents teach
 The rest! then say if I have misconceived
 Your destiny, too readily believed
 The Kaiser's cause your own!"

And Palma's fled,

Though no affirmative disturbs the head,
 A dying lamp-flame sinks and rises o'er,
 Like the alighted planet Pollux wore,
 Until, morn breaking, he resolves to be
 Gate-vein of this heart's blood of Lombardy,
 Soul of this body—to wield this aggregate

344 THUS THEN, HAVING COMPLETED A CIRCLE,

Of souls and bodies, and so conquer fate
Though he should live—a centre of disgust
Even—apart, core of the outward crust
He vivified, assimilated. Thus
I bring Sordello to the rapturous
Exclaim at the crowd's cry, because one round
Of life was quite accomplished ; and he found
Not only that a soul, whate'er its might,
Is insufficient to its own delight,
Both in corporeal organs and in skill
By means of such to body forth its Will—
And, after, insufficient to apprise
Men of that Will, oblige them recognise
The Hid by the Revealed—but that, the last •
Nor lightest of the struggles overpast,
His Will, bade abdicate, which would not void
The throne, might sit there, suffer be enjoyed
Mankind, a varied and divine array
Incapable of homage, the first way,
Nor fit to render incidentally
Tribute connived at, taken by the by,
In joys. If thus with warrant to rescind
The ignominious exile of mankind—
Whose proper service, ascertained intact
As yet, (to be by him themselves made act,
Not watch Sordello acting each of them)
Was to secure—if the true diadem
Seemed imminent while our Sordello drank
The wisdom of that golden Palma,—thank

Verona's Lady in her citadel
Founded by Gaulish Brennus, legends tell :
And truly when she left him, the sun reared
A head like the first clamberer's that peered
A-top the Capitol, his face on flame
With triumph, triumphing till Manlius came.
Nor slight too much my rhymes—that spring, dispread,
Dispart, disperse, lingering over head
Like an escape of angels! Rather say,
My transcendental platan! mounting gay
(An archimage so courts a novice-queen)
With tremulous silvered trunk, whence branches sheen
Laugh out, thick-foliaged next a-shiver soon
With coloured buds, then glowing like the moon
One mild flame,—last a pause, a burst, and all
Her ivory limbs are smothered by a fall,
Bloom-flinders and fruit-sparkles and leaf-dust,
Ending the weird work prosecuted just
For her amusement; he decrepit, stark,
Dozes; her uncontrolled delight may mark
Apart—

Yet not so, surely never so!
Only, as good my soul were suffered go
O'er the lagune: forth fare thee, put aside
Entrance thy synod, as a god may glide
Out of the world he fills, and leave it mute
For myriad ages as we men compute,
Returning into it without a break
O' the consciousness! They sleep, and I awake
O'er the lagune.

Sordello said once, " Note,
 In just such songs as Eglamor (say) wrote
 With heart and soul and strength, for he believed
 Himself achieving all to be achieved
 By singer—in such songs you find alone
 Completeness, judge the song and singer on,
 And either's purpose answered, his in it
 Or its in him : while from true works. (to wit
 Sordello's dream-performances that will
 Be never more than dreamed) escapes there still
 Some proof, the singer's proper life was 'neath
 The life his song exhibits, this a sheath
 To that ; a passion and a knowledge far
 Transcending these, majestic as they are,
 Smouldered ; his lay was but an episode
 In the bard's life : which evidence you owed
 To some slight weariness, some looking-off
 Or start-away. The childish skit or scoff
 In " Charlemagne," (his poem, dreamed divine
 In every point except one silly line
 About the restiff daughters !)—what may lurk
 In that ? ' My life commenced before that work,'
 (Thus I interpret the significance
 Of the bard's start aside and look askance)
 ' My life continues after : on I fare
 With no more stopping, possibly, no care
 To note the undercurrent, the why and how,
 Where, when, of the deeper life, as thus just now.
 But, silent, shall I cease to live ? Alas

For you! who sigh, 'When shall it come to pass
 We read that story? How will he compress
 The future gains, his life's true business,
 Into the better lay which—that one flout,
 How'er inopportune it be, lets out—
 Engrosses him already, though professed
 To meditate with us eternal rest,
 And partnership in all his life has found?
 'Tis but a sailor's promise, weather-bound:
 'Strike sail, slip cable, here the bark be moored
 For once, the awning stretched, the poles assured!
 Noontide above; except the wave's crisp dash,
 Or buzz of colibri, or tortoise' splash.
 The margin's silent: out with every spoil
 Made in our tracking, coil by mighty coil,
 This serpent of a river to his head
 I' the midst! Admire each treasure, as we spread
 The bank, to help us tell our history
 Aright: give ear, endeavour to descry
 The groves of giant rushes, how they grew
 Like demons' endlong tresses we sailed through,
 What mountains yawned, forests to give us vent
 Opened, each doleful side, yet on we went
 Till . . . may that beetle (shake your cap) attest
 The springing of a land-wind from the West!
 —'Wherefore? Ah yes, you frolic it to-day!
 To-morrow, and the pageant's moved away
 Down to the poorest tent-pole: we and you
 Part company: no other may pursue

Eastward your voyage, be informed what fate
Intends, if triumph or decline await
The tempter of the everlasting steppe.'

I muse this on a ruined palace-step
At Venice: why should I break off, nor sit
Longer upon my step, exhaust the fit
England gave birth to? Who's adorable
Enough reclaim a —— no Sordello's Will
Alack!—be queen to me? That Bassanese
Busied among her smoking fruit-boats? These
Perhaps from our delicious Asolo
Who twinkle, pigeons o'er the portico
Not prettier, bind June lilies into sheaves
To deck the bridge-side chapel, dropping leaves
Soiled by their own loose gold-meal? Ah, beneath
The cool arch stoops she, brownest-cheek! Her wreath
Endures a month—a half month—if I make
A queen of her, continue for her sake
Sordello's story? Nay, that Paduan girl
Splashes with barer legs where a live whirl
In the dead black Giudecca proves sea-weed
Drifting has sucked down three, four, all indeed
Save one pale-red striped, pale-blue turbaned post
For gondolas.

You sad disheveled ghost

That pluck at me and point, are you advised
I breathe? Let stay those girls (e'en her disguised
—Jewels in the locks that loved no crown like
Their native field-buds and the green wheat spike,

So fair!—who left this end of June's turmoil,
 Shook off, as might a lily its gold soil,
 Pomp, save a foolish gem or two, and free
~~In~~ dream, came join the peasants o'er the sea.)
 Look they too happy, too tricked out? Confess
 There is such niggard stock of happiness
 To share, that, do one's uttermost, dear wretch,
 One labours ineffectually to stretch
 It o'er you so that mother and children, both
 May equitably flaunt the sumpter-cloth!
 Divide the robe yet farther: be content
 With seeing just a score pre-eminent
 Through shreds of it, acknowledged happy wights,
 Engrossing what should furnish all, by rights—
 For, these in evidence, you clearer claim
 A like garb for the rest,—grace all, the same
 As these my peasants. I ask youth and strength
 And health for each of you, not more—at length
 Grown wise, who asked at home that the whole race
 Might add the spirit's to the body's grace,
 And all be dizened out as chiefs and bards.
 But in this magic weather one discards
 Much old requirement—Venice seems a type
 Of Life,—'twixt blue and blue extends, a stripe,
 As Life, the somewhat, hangs 'twixt nought and nought:
 'T is Venice, and 't is Life—as good you sought
 To spare me the Piazza's slippery stone
 Or keep me to the unchoked canals alone,
 As hinder Life the evil with the good

Which make up Living, rightly understood.
 Only, do finish something! Peasants or queens,
 Take them, made happy by whatever means,
 Parade them for the common credit, vouch
 That a luckless residue, we send to crouch
 In corners out of sight, was just as framed
 For happiness, its portion might have claimed
 As well, and so, obtaining it, had stalked
 Fastuous as any!—such my project, baulked
 Already; I hardly venture to adjust
 The first rags, when you find me. To mistrust
 Me!—nor unreasonably. You, no doubt,
 Have the true knack of tiring suitors out
 With those thin lips on tremble, lashless eyes
 Inveterately tear-shot—there, be wise
 Mistress of mine, there, there, as if I meant
 You insult!—shall your friend (not slave) be shent
 For speaking home? Beside, care-bit, erased,
 Broken-up beauties ever took my taste
 Supremely, and I love you more, far more
 Than her I looked should foot Life's temple-floor.
 Years ago, leagues at distance, when and where
 A whisper came, "Let others seek!—thy care
 Is found, thy life's provision; if thy race
 Should be thy mistress, and into one face
 The many faces crowd?" Ah, had I, judge,
 Or no, your secret? Rough apparel—grudge
 All ornaments save tag or tassel worn
 To hint we are not thoroughly forlorn—

Slouch bonnet, unloop mantle, careless go
 Alone (that's saddest, but it must be so)
 Through Venice, sing now and now glance aside,
 Aught desultory or undignified,—
 Then, ravishingest lady, will you pass
 Or not each formidable group, the mass
 Before the Basilic (that feast gone by,
 God's great day of the Corpus Domini)
 And, wistfully foregoing proper men,
 Come timid up to me for alms? And then
 The luxury to hesitate, feign do
 Some unexampled grace!—when, whom but you
 Dare I bestow your own upon? And hear
 Further before you say, it is to sneer
 I call you ravishing; for I regret
 Little that she, whose early foot was set
 Forth as she'd plant it on a pedestal,
 Now, i' the silent city, seems to fall
 Toward me—no wreath, only a lip's unrest
 To quiet, surcharged eyelids to be pressed
 Dry of their tears upon my bosom. Strange
 Such sad chance should produce in thee such change,
 My Love! warped souls and bodies! yet God spoke
 Of right-hand, foot and eye—selects our yoke,
 Sordello, as your poetship may find!
 So, sleep upon my shoulder, child, nor mind
 Their foolish talk; we'll manage reinstate
 Your old worth; ask moreover, when they prate
 Of evil men past hope, “ don't each contrive,

Despite the evil you abuse, to live?—
 Keeping, each losel, through a maze of lies,
 His own conceit of truth? to which he hies
 By obscure windings, tortuous, if you will,
 But to himself not inaccessible;
 He sees truth; and his lies are for the crowd
 Who cannot see; some fancied right allowed
 His vilest wrong, empowered the fellow clutch
 One pleasure from a multitude of such
 Denied him." Then assert, "all men appear
 To think all better than themselves, by here
 Trusting a crowd they wrong; but really," say,
 "All men think all men stupider than they,
 Since, save themselves, no other comprehends
 The complicated scheme to make amends
 —Evil, the scheme by which, thro' Ignorance,
 Good labours to exist." A slight advance,—
 Merely to find the sickness you die through,
 And nought beside! but if one can't eschew
 One's portion in the common lot, at least
 One can avoid an ignorance increased
 Tenfold by dealing out hint after hint
 How nought were like dispensing without stint
 The water of life—so easy to dispense
 Beside, when one has probed the centre whence
 Commotion's born—could tell you of it all!
 "—Meantime, just meditate my madrigal
 O' the mugwort that conceals a dewdrop safe!"
 What, dullard? we and you in smothery chafe,

Babes, baldheads, stumbled thus far into Zin
 The Horrid, getting neither out nor in,
 A hungry sun above us, sands that bung
 Our throats,—each dromedary lolls a tongue,
 Each camel churns a sick and frothy chap,
 And you, 'twixt tales of Potiphar's mishap,
 And sonnets on the earliest ass that spoke,
 —Remark, you wonder any one needs choke
 With founts about! Potsherd him, Gibeonites!
 While awkwardly enough your Moses smites
 The rock, though he forego his Promised Land;
 Thereby, have Satan claim his carcass, and
 Figure as Metaphysic Poet . . . ah
 Mark ye the dim first oozings? Meribah!
 Then, quaffing at the fount my courage gained,
 Recall—not that I prompt ye—who explained?
 "Presumptuous!" interrupts one: You, not I.
 'T is, brother, marvel at and magnify
 Such office: "office," quotha? can we get
 To the beginning of the office yet?
 What do we here? simply experiment
 Each on the other's power and its intent
 When elsewhere tasked,—if this of mine were trucked
 For yours to either's good,—we watch construct,
 In short, an engine: with a finished one,
 What it can do, is all,—nought, how 't is done.
 But this of ours yet in probation, dusk
 A kernel of strange wheelwork through its husk
 Grows into shape by quarters and by halves;

Remark this tooth's spring, wonder what that valve's
 Fall bodes, presume each faculty's device,
 Make out each other more or less precise—
 The scope of the whole engine's to be proved ;
 We die : which means to say, the whole's removed,
 Dismounted wheel by wheel, this complex gin;—
 To be set up anew elsewhere, begin
 A task indeed, but with a clearer clime
 Than the murk lodgment of our building-time.
 And then, I grant you, it behoves forget
 How 't is done—all that must amuse us yet
 So long : and, while you turn upon your heel,
 Pray that I be not busy slitting steel
 Or shredding brass, camped on some virgin shore
 Under a cluster of fresh stars, before
 I name a tithe o' the wheels I trust to do !
 So occupied, then, are we : hitherto,
 At present, and a weary while to come,
 The office of ourselves,—nor blind nor dumb,
 And seeing somewhat of man's state,—has been,
 For the worst of us, to say they so have seen ;
 For the better, what it was they saw ; the best
 Impart the gift of seeing to the rest :
 " So that I glance," says such an one, " around,
 And there's no face but I can read profound
 Disclosures in ; this stands for hope, that—fear,
 And for a speech, a deed in proof, look here !
 ' Stoop, else the strings of blossom, where the nuts
 O'erarch, will blind thee ! said I not ? she shuts

Both eyes this time, so close the hazels meet !
 Thus, prisoned in the Piombi, I repeat
 Events one rove occasioned, o'er and o'er,
 Putting 'twixt me and madness evermore
 Thy sweet shape, Zanzé ! therefore stoop !'
 'That's truth !'

(Adjudge you) ' the incarcerated youth
 Would say that !'

'Youth ? Plara the bard ? Set down
 That Plara spent his youth in a grim town
 Whose cramped ill-featured streets huddled about
 The minster for protection, never out
 Of its black belfry's shade and its bells' roar.
 The brighter shone the suburb,—all the more
 Ugly and absolute that shade's reproof
 Of any chance escape of joy,—some roof,
 Taller than they, allowed the rest detect
 Before the sole permitted laugh (suspect [cheek's
 Who could, 't was meant for laughter, that ploughed
 Repulsive gleam !) when the sun stopped both peaks
 Of the cleft belfry like a fiery wedge,
 Then sunk, a huge flame on its socket's edge,
 With leavings on the grey glass oriel-pane
 Ghastly some minutes more. No fear of rain—
 The minster minded that ! in heaps the dust
 Lay everywhere. This town, the minster's trust,
 Held Plara ; who, its denizen, bade hail
 In twice twelve sonnets, Tempe's dewy vale.'
 'Exact the town, the minster and the street !'

‘As all mirth triumphs, sadness means defeat :
 Lust triumphs and is gay; Love’s triumphed o’er
 And sad : but Lucio’s sad. I said before,
 Love’s sad, not Lucio ; one who loves may be
 As gay his love has leave to hope, as he
 Downcast that lusts’ desire escapes the springe :
 ’T is of the mood itself I speak, what tinge
 Determines it, else colourless,—or mirth,
 Or melancholy, as from heaven or earth.’

‘Ay, that’s the variation’s gist!’ Indeed?
 Thus far advanced in safety then, proceed!
 And having seen too what I saw, be bold
 And next encounter what I do behold
 (That’s sure) but bid you take on trust! Attack
 The use and purpose of such sights? Alack,
 Not so unwisely does the crowd dispense
 On Salinguerras praise in preference
 To the Sordellos : men of action, these!
 Who, seeing just as little as you please,
 Yet turn that little to account,—engage
 With, do not gaze at,—carry on, a stage,
 The work o’ the world, not merely make report
 The work existed ere their day! In short,
 When at some future no-time a brave band
 Sees, using what it sees, then shake my hand
 In heaven, my brother! Meanwhile where’s the hurt
 Of keeping the Makers-see on the alert,
 At whose defection mortals stare aghast [fast
 As though heaven’s bounteous windows were slammed

Incontinent? whereas all you, beneath,
 Should scowl at, curse them, bruise lips, break their
 Who ply the pullies, for neglecting you: [teeth
 And therefore have I moulded, made anew
 A Man, and give him to be turned and tried,
 Be angry with or pleased at. On your side,
 Have ye times, places, actors of your own?
 Try them upon Sordello when full-grown,
 And then—ah then! If Hercules first parched
 His foot in Egypt only to be marched
 A sacrifice for Jove with pomp to suit,
 What chance have I? The demigod was mute
 Till, at the altar, where time out of mind
 Such guests became oblations, chaplets twined
 His forehead long enough, and he began
 Slaying the slayers, nor escaped a man.
 Take not affront, my gentle audience! whom
 No Hercules shall make his hecatomb,
 Believe, nor from his brows your chaplet rend—
 That's your kind suffrage, yours, my patron-friend,
 Whose great verse blares unintermittent on
 Like your own trumpeter at Marathon,—
 You who, Platæas and Salamis being scant,
 Put up with Ætna for a stimulant—
 And did well, I acknowledged, as he loomed
 Over the midland sea last month, presumed
 Long, lay demolished in the blazing West
 At eve, while towards him tilting cloudlets prest
 Like Persian ships at Salamis. Friend, wear

A crest proud as desert while I declare
 Had I a flawless ruby fit to wring
 Tears of its colour from that painted king
 Who lost it, I would, for that smile which went,
 To my heart, fling it in the sea, content,
 Wearing your verse in place, an amulet
 Sovereign against all passion, wear and fret!
 My English Eyebright, if you are not glad
 That, as I stopped my task awhile, the sad
 Disheveled form, wherein I put mankind
 To come at times and keep my pact in mind,
 Renewed me,—hear no crickets in the hedge,
 Nor let a glowworm spot the river's edge
 At home, and may the summer showers gush
 Without a warning from the missel thrush!
 So, to our business, now—the fate of such
 As find our common nature—overmuch
 Despised because restricted and unfit
 To bear the burthen they impose on it—
 Cling when they would discard it; craving strength
 To leap from the allotted world, at length
 They do leap,—flounder on without a term,
 Each a god's germ, doomed to remain a germ
 In unexpanded infancy, unless . . .
 But that's the story—dull enough, confess!
 There might be fitter subjects to allure;
 Still, neither misconceive my portraiture
 Nor undervalue its adornments quaint:
 What seems a fiend perchance may prove a saint.

Ponder a story ancient pens transmit,
 Then say if you condemn me or acquit.
 John the Beloved, banished Antioch
 For Patmos, bade collectively his flock
 Farewell, but set apart the closing eve
 To comfort those his exile most would grieve,
 He knew : a touching spectacle, that house
 In motion to receive him ! Xanthus' spouse
 You missed, made panther's meat a month since ; but
 Xanthus himself (his nephew 't was, they shut
 'Twixt boards and sawed asunder) Polycarp,
 Soft Charicle, next year no wheel could warp
 To swear by Cæsar's fortune, with the rest
 Were ranged ; thro' whom the grey disciple prest,
 Busily blessing right and left, just stopt
 To pat one infant's curls, the hangman cropt
 Soon after, reached the portal—on its hinge
 The door turns and he enters—what quick twinge
 Ruins the smiling mouth, those wide eyes fix
 Whereon, why like some spectral candlestick's
 Branch the disciple's arms ? Dead swooned he, woke
 Anon, heaved sigh, made shift to gasp, heart-broke,
 " Get thee behind me, Satan ! have I toiled
 To no more purpose ? is the gospel foiled
 Here too, and o'er my son's, my Xanthus' hearth,
 Portrayed with sooty garb and features swarth—
 Ah Xanthus, am I to thy roof beguiled
 To see the—the—the Devil domiciled ?"
 Whereto sobbed Xanthus, " Father, 't is yourself

Installed, a limning which our utmost pelf
Went to procure against to-morrow's loss ;
And that's no twy-prong, but a pastoral cross,
You 're painted with !" His puckered brows unfold—
And you shall hear Sordello's story told.

BOOK THE FOURTH.

MEN SUFFERED MUCH,

MEANTIME Ferrara lay in rueful case ;
 The lady-city, for whose sole embrace
 Her pair of suitors struggled, felt their arms
 A brawny mischief to the fragile charms
 They tugged for—one discovering that to twist
 Her tresses twice or thrice about his wrist
 Secured a point of vantage—one, how best
 He'd parry that by planting in her breast
 His elbow-spike—each party too intent
 For noticing, howe'er the battle went,
 The conqueror would but have a corpse to kiss.
 " May Boniface be duly damned for this !"
 —Howled some old Ghibellin, as up he turned,
 From the wet heap of rubbish where they burned
 His house, a little skull with dazzling teeth :
 " A boon, sweet Christ—let Salinguerra seethe
 In hell for ever, Christ, and let myself
 Be there to laugh at him !" —moaned some young Guelf
 Stumbling upon a shrivelled hand nailed fast
 To the charred lintel of the doorway, last
 His father stood within to bid him speed.
 The thoroughfares were overrun with weed
 —Docks, quitchgrass, loathly mallows no man plants.

The stranger, none of its inhabitants
 Crept out of doors to taste fresh air again,
 And ask the purpose of a sumptuous train
 Admitted on a morning; every town
 Of the East League was come by envoy down
 To treat for Richard's ransom: here you saw
 The Vicentine, here snowy oxen draw
 The Paduan carroch, its vermilion cross
 On its white field. A-tiptoe o'er the fosse
 Looked Legate Montelungo wistfully
 After the flock of steeples he might spy
 In Este's time, gone (doubts he) long ago
 To mend the ramparts—sure the laggards know
 The Pope's as good as here! They paced the streets
 More soberly. At last, "Taurello greets
 The League," announced a pursuivant,—“will match
 Its courtesy, and labours to dispatch
 At earliest Tito, Friedrich's Pretor, sent
 On pressing matters from his post at Trent,
 With Mainard Count of Tyrol,—simply waits
 Their going to receive the delegates.”
 “Tito!” Our delegates exchanged a glance,
 And, keeping the main way, admired askance
 The lazy engines of outlandish birth,
 Couched like a king each on its bank of earth—
 Arbalist, manganel, and catapult;
 While stationed by, as waiting a result,
 Lean silent gangs of mercenaries ceased
 Working to watch the strangers. “This, at least,

Were better spared ; he scarce presumes gainsay
 The League's decision ! Get our friend away
 And profit for the future : how else teach
 Fools 't is not safe to stray within claw's reach
 Ere Salinguerra's final gasp be blown ?
 Those mere convulsive scratches find the bone.
 Who bade hirȝ bloody the spent osprey's nare ?”

The carrochs halted in the public square.
 Pennons of every blazon once a-flaunt,
 Men prattled, freelier that the crested gaunt
 White ostrich with a horse-shoe in her beak
 Was missing, and whoever chose might speak
Ecelin boldly out: so,—“ *Ecelin*
 Needed his wife to swallow half the sin
 And sickens by himself: the devil's whelp,
 He styles his son, dwindles away, no help
 From conserves, your fine triple-curved froth
 Of virgin's blood, your Venice viper-broth—
 Eh ? Jubilate ! Peace ! no little word
 You utter here that 's not distinctly heard
 Up at Oliero : he was absent sick
 When we besieged Bassano—who, i' the thick
 O' the work, perceived the progress Azzo made,
 Like *Ecelin*, through his witch *Adelaide* ?
 She managed it so well that, night by night,
 At their bed-foot stood up a soldier-sprite
 First fresh, pale by-and-by without a wound,
 And, when it came with eyes filmed as in swound,
 They knew the place was taken. Ominous

That Ghibellins should get what cautious
 Old Redbeard sought from Azzo's sire to wrench
 Vainly; Saint George contrived his town a trench
 O' the marshes, an impermeable bar.
 Young Ecelin is meant the tutelar
 Of Padua, rather; veins embrace upon
 His hand like Brenta and Bacchiglione.
 What now? The founts! God's bread, touch not a
 A crawling hell of carrion—every tank [plank!
 Choke full!—found out just now to Cino's cost—
 The same who gave Taurello up for lost,
 And, making no account of fortune's freaks,
 Refused to budge from Padua then, but sneaks
 Back now with Concorezzi—'faith! they drag
 Their carroch to San Vitale, plant the flag
 On his own palace so adroitly razed
 He knew it not; a sort of Guelf folk gazed
 And laughed apart; Cino disliked their air—
 Must pluck up spirit, show he does not care—
 Seats himself on the tank's edge—will begin
 To hum, *za, za, Cavalier Ecelin*—
 A silence; he gets warmer, clinks to chime,
 Now both feet plough the ground, deeper each time,
 At last, *za, za* and up with a fierce kick
 Comes his own mother's face caught by the thick
 Grey hair about his spur!"

Which means, they lift

The covering, Salinguerra made a shift
 To stretch upon the truth; as well avoid

Further disclosures; leave them thus employed.
 Our dropping Autumn morning clears apace,
 And poor Ferrara puts a softened face
 On her misfortunes. Let us scale this tall
 Huge foursquare line of red brick garden-wall ..
 Bastioned within by trees of every sort
 On three sides, slender, spreading, long and short,
 Each grew as it contrived, the poplar ramped,
 The fig-tree reared itself,—but stark and cramped,
 Made fools of, like tamed lions; whence, on the edge,
 Running 'twixt trunk and trunk to smooth one ledge
 Of shade, were shrubs inserted, warp and woof,
 Which smothered up that variance. Scale the roof
 Of solid tops, and o'er the slope you slide
 Down to a grassy space level and wide,
 Here and there dotted with a tree, but trees
 Of rarer leaf, each foreigner at ease,
 Set by itself: and in the centre spreads,
 Born upon thræ uneasy leopards' heads,
 A laver, broad and shallow, one bright spirt
 Of water bubbles in. The walls begirt
 With trees leave off on either hand; pursue
 Your path along a wondrous avenue
 Those walls abut on, heaped of gleamy stone,
 With aloes leering everywhere, grey-grown
 From many a Moorish summer: how they wind
 Out of the fissures! likelier to bind
 The building than those rusted cramps which drop.
 Already in the eating sunshine. Stop,

You fleeting shapes above there! Ah, the pride
 Or else despair of the whole country-side—
 A range of statues, swarming o'er with wasps,
 God, goddess, woman, man, the Greek rough-rasps
 In crumbling Naples marble! meant to look
 Like those Messina marbles Constance took
 Delight in, or Taurello's self conveyed
 To Mantua for his mistress, Adelaide,
 A certain font with caryatides
 Since cloistered at Goito; only, these
 Are up and doing, not abashed, a troop
 Able to right themselves—who see you, stoop
 O' the instant after you their arms! Unplucked
 By this or that, you pass, for they conduct
 To terrace raised on terrace, and, between,
 Creatures of brighter mould and braver mien
 Than any yet, the choicest of the Isle
 No doubt. Here, left a sullen breathing-while,
 Up-gathered on himself the Fighter stood
 For his last fight, and, wiping treacherous blood
 Out of the eyelids just held ope beneath
 Those shading fingers in their iron sheath,
 Steadied his strengths amid the buz and stir
 Of the dusk hideous amphitheatre
 At the announcement of his over-match
 To wind the day's diversion up, dispatch
 The pertinacious Gaul: while, limbs one heap,
 The Slave, no breath in her round mouth, watched leap
 Dart after dart forth, as her hero's car

Clove dizzily the solid of the war
 —Let coil about his knees for pride in him.
 We reach the farthest terrace, and the grim
 San Pietro Palace stops us.

Such the state

Of Salinguerra's plan to emulate
 Sicilian marvels, that his girlish wife
 Retrude still might lead her ancient life
 In her new home—whereat enlarged so much
 Neighbours upon the novel princely touch
 He took,—who here imprisons Boniface.
 Here must the Envoys come to sue for grace ;
 And here, emerging from the labyrinth
 Below, Sordello paused beside the plinth
 Of the door-pillar.

He had really left.

Verona for the cornfields (a poor theft
 From the morass) where Este's camp was made ;
 The Envoys' march, the Legate's cavalcade—
 All had been seen by him, but scarce as when,
 Eager for cause to stand aloof from men
 At every point save the fantastic tie
 Acknowledged in his boyish sophistry,
 He made account of such. A crowd,—he meant
 To task the whole of it ; each part's intent
 Concerned him therefore : and, the more he pried,
 The less became Sordello satisfied
 With his own figure at the moment. Sought
 He respite from his task ? descried he aught

Novel in the anticipated sight
 Of all these livers upon all delight?
 This phalanx, as of myriad points combined,
 Whereby he still had imaged that mankind
 His youth was passed in dreams of rivalling,
 His age—in plans to prove at least such thing
 Had been so dreamed,—which now he must impress
 With his own will, effect a happiness
 By theirs,—supply a body to his soul
 Thence, and become eventually whole
 With them as he had hoped to be without—
 Made these the mankind he once raved about?
 Because a few of them were notable,
 Should all be figured worthy note? As well
 Expect to find Taurello's triple line
 Of trees a single and prodigious pine.
 Real pines rose here and there; but, close among,
 Thrust into and mixed up with pines, a throng
 Of shrubs, he saw,—a nameless common sort
 O'erpast in dreams, left out of the report
 And hurried into corners, or at best
 Admitted to be fancied like the rest.
 Reckon that morning's proper chiefs—how few!
 And yet the people grew, the people grew,
 Grew ever, as if the many there indeed,
 More left behind and most who should succeed,—
 Simply in virtue of their mouths and eyes,
 Petty enjoyments and huge miseries,—
 Mingled with, and made veritably great

Those chiefs : he overlooked not Mainard's state
 Nor Concorezzi's station, but instead
 Of stopping there, each dwindled to be head
 Of infinite and absent Tyrolese
 Or Paduans ; startling all the more, that these
 Seemed passive and disposed of, uncared for,
 " Yet doubtless on the whole " (quoth Eglamor)
 " Smiling—for if a wealthy man decays
 And out of store of robes must wear, all days,
 One tattered suit, alike in sun and shade,
 'Tis commonly some tarnished gay brocade
 Fit for a feast-night's flourish and no more :
 Nor otherwise poor Misery from her store
 Of looks is fain to upgather, keep unfurled
 For common wear as she goes through the world,
 The faint remainder of some worn-out smile
 Meant for a feast-night's service merely." While
 Crowd upon crowd rose on Sordello thus,—
 (Crowds no way interfering to discuss,
 Much less dispute, life's joys with one employed
 In envying them,—or, if they aught enjoyed,
 Where lingered something indefinable
 In every look and tone, the mirth as well
 As woe, that fixed at once his estimate
 Of the result, their good or bad estate)—
 Old memories returned with new effect :
 And the new body, ere he could suspect,
 Cohered, mankind and he were really fused,
 The new self seemed impatient to be used

By him, but utterly another way
 Than that anticipated : strange to say,
 They were too much below him, more in thrall
 Than he, the adjunct than the principal.
 What bootéd scattered units ?—here a mind
 And there, which might repay his own to find,
 And stamp, and use ?—a few, how'er august,
 If all the rest were groveling in the dust ?
 No : first a mighty equilibrium, sure,
 Should he establish, privilege procure
 For all, the few had long possessed ! he felt
 An error, an exceeding error melt—
 While he was occupied with Mantuan chants,
 Behoved him think of men, and take their wants,
 Such as he now distinguished every side,
 As his own want which might be satisfied,—
 And, after that, think of rare qualities
 Of his own soul demanding exercise.
 It followed naturally, through no claim
 On their part, which made virtue of the aim
 At serving them, on his,—that, past retrieve,
 He felt now in their toils, theirs—nor could leave
 Wonder how, in the eagerness to rule,
 Impress his will on mankind, he (the fool !)
 Had never even entertained the thought
 That this his last arrangement might be fraught
 With incidental good to them as well,
 And that mankind's delight would help to swell
 His own. So, if he sighed, as formerly

Because the merry time of life must fleet,
'T was deeper now,—for could the crowds repeat
Their poor experiences? His hand that shook
Was twice to be deplored. “The Legate, look!
With eyes, like fresh-blown thrush-eggs on a thread,
Faint-blue and loosely floating in his head,
Large tongue, moist open mouth; and this long while
That owner of the idiotic smile
Serves them!” He fortunately saw in time
His fault however, and since the office prime
Includes the secondary—best accept
Both offices; Taurello, its adept,
Could teach him the preparatory one,
And how to do what he had fancied done
Long previously, ere take the greater task.
How render first these people happy? ask
The people's friends: for there must be one good,
One way to it—the Cause!—he understood
The meaning now of Palma; why the jar
Else, the ado, the trouble wide and far
Of Guelfs and Ghibellins, the Lombard's hope
And Rome's despair?—'twixt Emperor and Pope
The confused shifting sort of Eden tale—
Still hardihood recurring, still to fail—
That foreign interloping fiend, this free
And native overbrooding deity—
Yet a dire fascination o'er the palms
The Kaiser ruined, troubling even the calms
Of paradise—or, on the other hand,

The Pontiff, as the Kaisers understand,
 One snake-like cursed of God to love the ground,
 Whose heavy length breaks in the noon profound
 Some saving tree—which needs the Kaiser, drest
 As the dislodging angel of that pest,
 Then—yet that pest bedropt, flat head, full fold,
 With coruscating dower of dyes. “Behold
 The secret, so to speak, and master-spring
 Of the contest! which of the two Powers shall bring
 Men good—perchance the most good—ay, it may
 Be that! the question, which best knows the way.”

And hereupon Count Mainard strutted past
 Out of San Pietro; never seemed the last
 Of archers, slingers: and our friend began
 To recollect strange modes of serving man—
 Arbalist, catapult, brake, manganel,
 And more. “This way of theirs may,—who can tell?—
 Need perfecting,” said he: “let all be solved
 At once! Taurello ’t is, the task devolved
 On late—confront Taurello!”

And at last

He did confront him. Scarcely an hour past
 When forth Sordello came, older by years
 Than at his entry. Unexampled fears
 Oppressed him, and he staggered off, blind, mute
 And deaf, like some fresh-mutilated brute,
 Into Ferrara—not the empty town
 That morning witnessed: he went up and down
 Streets whence the veil had been stripped shred by
 shred,

So that, in place of huddling with their dead,
 Indoors, to answer Salinguerra's ends,
 Its folk made shift to crawl forth, sit like friends
 With any one. A woman gave him choice
 Of her two daughters, the infantile voice
 Or the dimpled knee, for half a chain, his throat
 Was clasped with; but an archer knew the coat—
 Its blue cross and eight lilies,—bade beware
 One dogging him in concert with the pair
 Though thrumming on the sleeve that hid his knife.
 Night set in early, autumn dews were rife,
 They kindled great fires while the Leaguer's mass
 Began at every carroch—he must pass
 Between the kneeling people. Presently
 The carroch of Verona caught his eye
 With purple trappings; silently he bent
 Over its fire, when voices violent
 Began, "Affirm not whom the youth was like
 That, striking from the porch, I did not strike
 Again; I too have chestnut hair; my kin
 Hate Azzo and stand up for Ecelin.
 Here, minstrel, drive bad thoughts away! sing! take
 My glove for guerdon!" and for that man's sake
 He turned: "A song of Eglamor's!"—scarce named,
 When, "Our Sordello's, rather!" all exclaimed;
 "Is not Sordello famousest for rhyme?"
 He had been happy to deny, this time,—
 Profess as heretofore the aching head
 And failing heart,—suspect that in his stead

Some true Apollo had the charge of them,
 Was champion to reward or to condemn,
 So his intolerable risk might shift
 Or share itself; but Naddo's precious gift
 Of gifts, he owned, be certain! At the close—
 "I made that," said he to a youth who rose
 As if to hear: 't was Palma through th' band
 Conducted him in silence by her hand.
 . Back now for Salinguerra. Tito of Trent
 Gave place to Palma and her friend; who went
 In turn at Montelungo's visit—one
 After the other were they come and gone,—
 These spokesmen for the Kaiser and the Pope,
 This incarnation of the People's hope,
 Sordello,—all the say of each was said
 And Salinguerra sat, himself instead
 Of these to talk with, lingered musing yet.
 'T was a drear vast presence-chamber roughly set
 In order for the morning's use; full face,
 The Kaiser's ominous-sign mark had first place,
 The crowned grim twy-necked eagle, coarsely-blacked
 With ochre on the naked wall; nor lacked
 Romano's green and yellow either side;
 But the new token Tito brought had tried
 The Legate's patience—nay, if Palma knew
 What Salinguerra almost meant to do
 Until the sight of her restored his lip
 A certain half-smile, three months' chieftainship
 Had banished! Afterward, the Legate found

No change in him, nor asked what badge he wound
 And unwound carelessly. Now sat the Chief
 Silent as when our couple left, whose brief
 Encounter wrought so opportune effect
 In thoughts he summoned not, nor would reject.
 Though time 't was now if ever, to pause—fix
 On any sort of ending: wiles and tricks
 Exhausted, judge! his charge, the crazy town,
 Just managed to be hindered crashing down—
 His last sound troops ranged—care observed to post
 His best of the maimed soldiers innermost—
 So much was plain enough, but somehow struck
 Him not before. And now with this strange luck
 Of Tito's news, rewarding his address
 So well, what thought he of?—how the success
 With Friedrich's rescript there, would either hush
 Old Ecelin's scruples, bring the manly flush
 To his young son's white cheek, or, last, exempt
 Himself from telling what there was to tempt?
 No: that this minstrel was Romano's last
 Servant—himself the first! Could he contrast
 The whole! that minstrel's thirty years just spent
 In doing nought, their notablest event
 This morning's journey hither, as I told—
 Who yet was lean, outworn and really old,
 A stammering awkward man that scarce dared raise
 His eye before the magisterial gaze—
 And Salinguerra with his fears and hopes
 Of sixty years, his Emperors and Popes,

Cares and contrivances, yet, you would say,
 'T was a youth nonchalantly looked away
 Through the embrasure northward o'er the sick
 Expostulating trees—so agile, quick
 And graceful turned the head on the broad chest
 Encased in pliant steel, his constant vest,
 Whence split the sun off in a spray of fire
 Across the room ; and, loosened of its tire
 Of steel, that head let breathe the comely brown
 Large massive locks discoloured as if a crown
 Encircled them, so frayed the basnet where
 A sharp white line divided clean the hair ;
 Glossy above, glossy below, it swept
 Curling and fine about a brow thus kept
 Calm, laid coat upon coat, marble and sound :
 This was the mystic mark the Tuscan found,
 Mused of, turned over books about. . Square-faced,
 No lion more ; two vivid eyes, enchased
 In hollows filled with many a shade and streak
 Settling from the bold nose and bearded cheek ;
 Nor might the half-smile reach them that deformed
 A lip supremely perfect else—unwarmed,
 Unwidened, less or more ; indifferent
 Whether on trees or men his thoughts were bent,
 Thoughts rarely, after all, in trim and train
 As now a period was fulfilled again ;
 Of such, a series made his life, compressed
 In each, one story serving for the rest—
 How his life-streams rolling arrived at last

At the barrier, whence, were it once overpast,
 They would emerge, a river to the end,—
 Gathered themselves up, paused, bade fate befriend,
 Took the leap, hung a minute at the height,
 Then fell back to oblivion infinite :
 Therefore he smiled. Beyond stretched garden-grounds
 Where late the adversary, breaking bounds,
 Had gained him an occasion, That above,
 That eagle, testified he could improve
 Effectually. The Kaiser's symbol lay
 Beside his rescript, a new badge by way
 Of baldric ; while,—another thing that marred
 Alike emprise, achievement and reward,—
 Ecelin's missive was conspicuous too.

What past life did those flying thoughts pursue ?
 As his, few names in Mantua half so old ;
 But at Ferrara, where his sires enrolled
 It latterly, the Adelardi spared
 No pains to rival them : both factions shared
 Ferrara, so that, counted out, 't would yield
 A product very like the city's shield,
 Half black and white, or Ghibellin and Guelf,
 As after Salinguerra styled himself
 And Este who, till Marchesalla died,
 (Last of the Adelardi)—never tried
 His fortune there : with Marchesalla's child
 Would pass,—could Blacks and Whites be reconciled
 And young Taurello wed Linguetta,—wealth
 And sway to a sole grasp. Each treats by stealth

Already : when the Guelfs, the Ravennese
 Arrive, assault the Pietro quarter, seize
 Linguetta, and are gone ! Men's first dismay
 Abated somewhat, hurries down, to lay
 The after indignation, Boniface,
 This Richard's father. " Learn the full disgrace
 Averted, ere you blame us Guelfs, who rate
 Your Salinguerra, your sole potentate
 That might have been, 'mongst Este's valvassors—
 Ay, Azzo's—who, not privy to, abhors
 Our step—but we were zealous." Azzo's then
 To do with ! Straight a meeting of old men :
 " Old Salinguerra dead, his heir a boy,
 What if we change our ruler and decoy
 The Lombard Eagle of the azure sphere,
 With Italy to build in, fix him here,
 Settle the city's troubles in a trice ?
 For private wrong, let public good suffice !"
 In fine, young Salinguerra's staunchest friends
 Talked of the townsmen making him amends,
 Gave him a goshawk, and affirmed there was
 Rare sport, one morning, over the green grass
 A mile or so. He sauntered through the plain,
 Was restless, fell to thinking, turned again
 In time for Azzo's entry with the bride ;
 Count Boniface rode smirking at their side :
 " She brings him half Ferrara," whispers flew,
 " And all Ancona ! If the stripling knew !"
 Anon the stripling was in Sicily

Where Heinrich ruled in right of Constance ; he
 Was gracious nor his guest incapable ;
 Each understood the other. So it fell,
 One Spring, when Azzo, thoroughly, at ease
 Had near forgotten by what precise degrees
 He crept at first to such a downy seat,
 The Count trydged over in a special heat
 To bid him of God's love dislodge from each
 Of Salinguerra's palaces,—a breach
 Might yawn else, not so readily to shut,
 For who was just arrived at Mantua but
 The youngster, sword on thigh, and tuft on chin,
 With tokens for Celano, Ecelin,
 Pistore and the like ! Next news,—no whit
 Do any of Ferrara's domes befit
 His wife of Heinrich's very blood : a band
 Of foreigners assemble, understand
 Garden-constructing, level and surround,
 Build up and bury in. A last news crowned
 The consternation : since his infant's birth,
 He only waits they end his wondrous girth
 Of trees that link San Pietro with Tomà,
 To visit Mantua. When the Podestà
 Ecelin, at Vicenza, called his friend
 Taurello thither, what could be their end
 But to restore the Ghibellins' late Head,
 The Kaiser helping ? He with most to dread
 From vengeance and reprisal, Azzo, there
 With Boniface beforehand, as aware

Of plots in progress, gave alarm, expelled
 Both plotters: but the Guelfs in triumph yelled
 Too hastily. The burning and the flight,
 And how Taurello, occupied that night
 With Ecelin, lost wife and son, I told:
 —Not how he bore the blow, retained his hold,
 Got friends safe through, left enemies the worst
 O' the fray, and hardly seemed to care at first—
 But afterward men heard not constantly
 Of Salinguerra's House so sure to be!
 Though Azzo simply gained by the event
 A shifting of his plagues—the first, content
 To fall behind the second and estrange
 So far his nature, suffer such a change
 That in Romano sought he wife and child
 And for Romano's sake seemed reconciled
 To losing individual life, which shrunk
 As the other prospered—mortised in his trunk;
 Like a dwarf palm which wanton Arabs foil'
 Of bearing its own proper wine and oil,
 By grafting into it the stranger-vine,
 Which sucks its heart out, sly and serpentine,
 Till forth one vine-palm feathers to the root,
 And red drops moisten the insipid fruit.
 Once Adelaide set on,—the subtle mate
 Of the weak soldier, urged to emulate
 The Church's valiant women deed for deed,
 And paragon her namesake, win the meed
 Of the great Matilda,—soon they overbore

The rest of Lombardy,—not as before
 By an instinctive truculence, but patched
 The Kaiser's strategy until it matched
 The Pontiff's, sought old ends by novel means.
 "Only, why is it Salinguerra screens
 Himself behind Romano?—him we bade
 Enjoy our shine i' the front, not seek the shade!"
 —Asked Heinrich, somewhat of the tardiest
 To comprehend. Nor Philip acquiesced
 At once in the arrangement; reasoned, plied
 His friend with offers of another bride,
 A statelier function—fruitlessly: 't was plain
 Taurello through some weakness must remain
 Obscure. And Otho, free to judge of both,
 —Ecelin the unready, harsh and loth,
 And this more plausible and facile wight
 With every point a-sparkle—chose the right,
 Admiring how his predecessors harped
 On the wrong man: "thus," quoth he, "wits are
 warped
 By outsides!" Carelessly, meanwhile, his life
 Suffered its many turns of peace and strife
 In many lands—you hardly could surprise
 The man; who shamed Sordello (recognise!)
 In this as much beside, that, unconcerned
 What qualities were natural or earned,
 With no ideal of graces, as they came
 He took them, singularly well the same—
 Speaking the Greek's own language, just because

Your Greek eludes you, leave the least to flaws
 'In contracts with him ; while, since Arab lore
 Holds the stars' secret—take one trouble more
 And master it ! 'T is done, and now deter
 Who may the Tuscan, once Jove trined for her,
 From Friedrich's path !—Friedrich, whose pilgrimage
 The same man puts aside, whom he'll engage
 To leave next year John Brienne in the lurch,
 Come to Bassano, see Saint Francis' church
 And judge of Guido the Bolognian's piece
 Which, lend Taurello credit, rivals Greece—
 Angels, with aureoles like golden quoits
 Pitched home, applauding Ecelin's exploits.
 For elegance, he strung the angelot,
 Made rhymes thereto ; for prowess, clove he not
 Tiso, last siege, from crest to crupper ? Why
 Detail you thus a varied mastery
 But to show how Taurello, on the watch
 For men, to read their hearts and thereby catch
 Their capabilities and purposes,
 Displayed himself so far as displayed these :
 While our Sordello only cared to know
 About men as a means whereby he'd show
 Himself, and men had much or little worth
 According as they kept in or drew forth
 That self ; Taurello's choicest instruments
 Surmised him shallow.

Meantime, malcontents
 Dropped off, town after town grew wiser. " How

Change the world's face?" asked people; "as 't is now
 It has been, will be ever: very fine
 Subjecting things profane to things divine,
 In talk! this contumacy will fatigue
 The vigilance of Este and the League!
 The Ghibellins gain on us!"—as it happed
 Old Azzo and old Boniface, entrapped
 By Ponte Alto; both in one month's space
 Slept at Verona: either left a brace
 Of sons—but, three years after, either's pair
 Lost Guglielm and Aldobrand its heir:
 Azzo remained and Richard—all the stay
 Of Este and Saint Boniface, at bay
 As 't were. Then, either Ecelin grew old
 Or his brain altered—not of the proper mould
 For new appliances—his old palm-stock
 Endured no influx of strange strengths. He'd rock
 As in a drunkenness, or chuckle low
 As proud of the completeness of his woe,
 Then weep real tears;—now make some mad onslaught
 On Este, heedless of the lesson taught
 So painfully,—now cringe for peace, sue peace
 At price of past gain,—much more, fresh increase
 To the fortunes of Romano. Up at last
 Rose Este, down Romano sank as fast.
 And men remarked these freaks of peace and war
 Happened while Salinguerra was afar:
 Whence every friend besought him, all in vain,
 To use his old adherent's wits again.

Not he!—"who had advisers in his sons,
 Could plot himself, nor needed any one's
 Advice." 'T was Adelaide's remaining stanch
 Prevented his destruction root and branch
 Forthwith; but when she died, doom fell, for gay
 He made alliances, gave lands away
 To whom it pleased accept them, and withdrew
 For ever from the world. Taurello, who
 Was summoned to the convent, then refused
 A word at the wicket, patience thus abused,
 Promptly threw off alike his imbecile
 Ally's yoke, and his own frank, foolish smile.
 Soon a few movements of the happier sort
 Changed matters, put himself in men's report
 As heretofore; he had to fight, beside,
 And that became him ever. So, in pride
 And flushing of this kind of second youth,
 He dealt a good-will blow. Este in truth
 Lay prone—and men remembered, somewhat late,
 A laughing old outrageous stifled hate
 He bore to Este—how it would outbreak
 At times spite of disguise, like an earthquake
 In sunny weather—as that noted day
 When with his hundred friends he tried to slay
 Azzo before the Kaiser's face: and how,
 On Azzo's calm refusal to allow
 A liegeman's challenge, straight he too was calmed:
 As if his hate could bear to lie embalmed,
 Bricked up, the moody Pharaoh, and survive

All intermediate crumbings, and arrive
At earth's catastrophe—'t was Este's crash
Not Azzo's he demanded, so, no rash
Procedure! Este's true antagonist
Rose out of Ecelin: all voices whist,
All eyes were sharpened, wits predicted. He
'T was, leaned in the embrasure absently,
Amused with his own efforts, now, to trace
With his steel-sheathed forefinger Friedrich's face
I' the dust: but as the trees waved sere, his smile
Deepened, and words expressed its thought erewhile.

“Ay, fairly housed at last, my old compeer?
That we should stick together, all the year,
I kept Verona!—How old Boniface,
Old Azzo caught us in its market-place,
He by that pillar, I at this,—caught each
In mid swing, more than fury of his speech,
Egging the rabble on to disavow
Allegiance to their Marquis—Bacchus, how
They boasted! Ecelin must turn their drudge,
Nor, if released, will Salinguerra grudge
Paying arrears of tribute due long since—
Bacchus! My man could promise then, nor wince,
The bones-and-muscles! sound of wind and limb,
Spoke he the set excuse I framed for him:
And now he sits me, slaving and mute,
Intent on chafing each starved purple foot
Benumbed past aching with the altar slab—
Will no vein throb there when some monk shall blab

Spitefully to the circle of bald scalps,
 'Friedrich's affirmed to be our side the Alps'
 —Eh, brother Lactance, brother Anaclet?
 Sworn to abjure the world, its fume and fret,
 God's own now? Drop the dormitory bar,
 Enfold the scanty grey serge scapular
 Twice o'er the cowl to muffle memories out—
 So! but the midnight whisper turns a shout,
 Eyes wink, mouths open, pulses circulate
 In the stone walls: the Past, the world you hate
 Is with you, ambush, open field—or see
 The surging flame—we fire Vicenza—glee!
 Follow, let Pilio and Bernardo chafe—
 Bring up the Mantuans—through San Biagio—safe!
 Ah, the mad people waken? Ah, they writhe
 And reach us? if they block the gate—no tithe
 Can pass—keep back, you Bassanese! the edge,
 Use the edge—shear, thrust, hew, melt down the
 wedge,

Let out the black of those black upturned eyes!
 Hell—are they sprinkling fire too? the blood fries
 And hisses on your brass gloves as they tear
 Those upturned faces choking with despair.
 Brave! Slidder through the reeking gate—'how now?
 You six had charge of her?' And then the vow
 Comes, and the foam spirts, hair's plucked, till one
 shriek

(I hear it) and you fling—you cannot speak—
 Your gold-flowered basnet to a man who haled

The Adelaide he dared scarce view unveiled
 This morn, naked across the fire : how crown
 The archer that exhausted lays you down
 Your infant, smiling at the flame, and dies ?
 While one, while mine . . .

Bacchus ! I think there lies
 More than one corpse there " (and he paced the room)
 " —Another cinder somewhere—'t was my doom
 Beside, my doom ! If Adelaide is dead
 I am the same, this Azzo lives instead
 Of that to me, and we pull, any how,
 Este into a heap—the matter 's now
 At the true juncture slipping us so oft.
 Ay, Heinrich died and Otho, please you, doffed
 His crown at such a juncture ! still, if hold
 Our Friedrich's purpose, if this chain enfold
 The neck of . . . who but this same Ecelin
 That must recoil when the best days begin !
 Recoil ? that 's nought ; if the recoiler leaves
 His name for me to fight with, no one grieves !
 But he must interfere, forsooth, unlock
 His cloister to become my stumbling-block
 Just as of old ! Ay, ay, there 't is again—
 The land's inevitable Head—explain
 The reverences that subject us ! Count
 These Ecelins now ! not to say as fount,
 Originating power of thought,—from twelve
 That drop i' the trenches they joined hands to delve,
 Six shall surpass him, but . . . why, men must twine

Somehow with something! *Ecelin*'s a fine
 Clear name! 'T were simpler, doubtless, twine with me
 At once: our cloistered friend's capacity
 Was of a sort! I had to share myself
 In fifty portions, like an o'ertasked elf
 That's forced illume in fifty points the vast
 Rare vapour he's environed by. At last
 My strengths, though sorely frittered, e'en converge
 And crown . . . no, Bacchus, they have yet to urge
 The man be crowned!

That aloe, an he durst,
 Would climb! just such a bloated sprawler first
 I noted in Messina's castle-court
 The day I came, when Heinrich asked in sport
 If I would pledge my faith to win him back
 His right in Lombardy: 'for, once bid pack
 Marauders,' he continued, 'in my stead
 You rule, Taurello!' and upon this head
 Laid the silk glove of Constance—I see her
 Too, mantled head to foot in miniver,
 Retrude following!

I am absolved
 From further toil: the empery devolved
 On me, 't was Tito's word: I have to lay
 For once my plan, pursue my plan my way,
 Prompt nobody, and render an account
 Taurello to Taurello! nay, I mount
 To Friedrich—he conceives the post I kept,
 Who did true service, able or inept,

Who's worthy guerdon, Ecelin or I.
 Me guerdoned, counsel follows; would he vie
 With the Pope really? Azzo, Boniface
 Compose a right-arm Hohenstauffen's race
 Must break ere govern Lombardy. I point
 How easy 't were to twist, once out of joint,
 The socket from the bone:—my Azzo's stare
 Meanwhile! for I, this idle strap to wear,
 Shall—fret myself abundantly, what end
 To serve? There's left me twenty years to spend
 —How better than my old way? Had I one
 Who laboured overthrow my work—a son
 Hatching with Azzo superb treachery,
 To root my pines up and then poison me,
 Suppose—'t were worth while frustrate that! Beside,
 Another life's ordained me: the world's tide
 Rolls, and what hope of parting from the press
 Of waves, a single wave through weariness
 Gently lifted aside, laid upon shore?
 My life must be lived out in foam and roar,
 No question. Fifty years the province held
 Taurello; troubles raised, and troubles quelled,
 He in the midst—who leaves this quaint stone place,
 These trees a year or two, then, not a trace
 Of him! How obtain hold, fetter men's tongues
 Like this poor minstrel with the foolish songs—
 To which, despite our bustle, he is linked?
 —Flowers one may teaze, that never grow extinct.
 Ay, that patch, surely, green as ever, where

I set Her Moorish lentisk, by the stair,
 To overawe the aloes; and we trod
 Those flowers, how call you such?—into the sod;
 A stately foreigner—a world of pain
 To make it thrive, arrest rough winds—all vain!
 It would decline; these would not be destroyed:
 And now, where is it? where can you avoid
 The flowers? I frighten children twenty years
 Longer!—which way, too, Ecelin appears
 To thwart me, for his son's besotted youth
 Gives promise of the proper tiger-tooth:
 They feel it at Vicenza! Fate, fate, fate,
 My fine Taurello! go you, promulgate
 Friedrich's decree, and here's shall aggrandise
 Young Ecelin—your Prefect's badge! a prize
 Too precious, certainly.

How now? Compete
 With my old comrade? shuffle from their seat
 His children? Paltry dealing! Do'n't I know
 Ecelin? now, I think, and years ago!
 What's changed—the weakness? did not I compound
 For that, and undertake to keep him sound
 Despite it? Here's Taurello hankering
 After a boy's preferment—this plaything
 To carry, Bacchus!" And he laughed.

Remark

Why schemes wherein cold-blooded men embark
 Prosper, when your enthusiastic sort
 Fail: while these last are ever stopping short—

(So much they should.—so little they can do!)
 The careless tribe see nothing to pursue
 If they desist; meantime their scheme succeeds.
 Thoughts were caprices in the course of deeds
 Methodic with Taurello; so, he turned,
 Enough amused by fancies fairly earned
 Of Este's horror-struck submitted neck,
 And Richard, the cowed braggart, at his beck,—
 To his own petty but immediate doubt
 If he could pacify the League without
 Conceding Richard; just to this was brought
 That interval of vain discursive thought!
 As, shall I say, some Ethiop, past pursuit
 Of all enslavers, dips a shackled foot
 Burnt to the blood, into the drowsy black
 Enormous watercourse which guides him back
 To his own tribe again, where he is king;
 And laughs because he guesses, numbering
 The yellower poison-wattles on the pouch
 Of the first lizard wrested from its couch
 Under the slime (whose skin, the while, he strips
 To cure his nostril with, and festered lips,
 And eyeballs bloodshot through the desert blast)
 That he has reached its boundary, at last
 May breathe;—thinks o'er enchantments of the South
 Sovereign to plague his enemies, their mouth,
 Eyes, nails, and hair; but, these enchantments tried
 In fancy, puts them soberly aside
 For truth, projects a cool return with friends,

The likelihood of winning mere amends
 Ere long; thinks that, takes comfort silently,
 Then, from the river's brink, his wrongs and he,
 Hugging revenge close to their hearts, are soon
 Off-striding for the Mountains of the Moon.

Midnight: the watcher nodded on his spear,
 Since clouds dispersing left a passage clear,
 For any meagre and discoloured moon
 To venture forth; and such was peering soon
 Above the harassed city—her close lanes
 Closer, not half so tapering her fanes,
 As though she shrunk into herself to keep
 What little life was saved, more safely. Heap
 By heap the watch-fires mouldered, and beside
 The blackest spoke Sordello and replied
 Palma with none to listen. " 'Tis your Cause:
 What makes a Ghibellin? There should be laws—
 (Remember how my youth escaped! I trust
 To you for manhood, Palma; tell me just
 As any child)—there must be laws at work
 Explaining this. Assure me, good may lurk
 Under the bad,—my multitude has part
 In your designs, their welfare is at heart,
 With Salinguerra, to their interest
 Refer the deeds he dwelt on,—so divest
 Our conference of much that scared me. Why
 Affect that heartless tone to Tito? I
 Esteemed myself, yes, in my inmost mind
 This morn, a recreant to my race—mankind

O'erlooked till now : why boast my spirit's force,
 —Such force denied its object ? why divorce
 These, then admire my spirit's flight the same
 As though it bore up, helped some half-orbed flame
 Else quenched in the dead void, to living space ?
 —That orb cast off to chaos and disgrace,
 Why vaunt so much my unincumbered dance,
 Making a feat's facilities enhance
 Its marvel ? But I front Taurello, one
 Of happier fate, and all I should have done,
 He does ; the people's good being paramount
 With him, their progress may perhaps account
 For his abiding still : whereas you heard
 The talk with Tito—the excuse preferred
 For burning those five hostages,—and broached
 By way of blind, as you and I approached,
 I do believe."

She spoke : then he, " My thought
 Plainlier expressed ! All to your profit—nought
 Meantime of these, of conquests to achieve
 For them, of wretchedness he might relieve
 While profiting your party. Azzo, too,
 Supports a cause : what cause ? Do Guelfs pursue
 Their ends by means like yours, or better ?"

When
 The Guelfs were proved alike, men weighed with men,
 And deed with deed, blaze, blood, with blood and blaze,
 Morn broke : " Once more, Sordello, meet its gaze
 Proudly—the people's charge against thee fails

In every point, while either party quails !
 These are the busy ones—be silent thou !
 Two parties take the world up, and allow
 No third, yet have one principle, subsist
 By the same injustice ; whoso shall enlist
 With either, ranks with man's inveterate foes.
 So there is one less quarrel to compose ;
 The Guelf, the Ghibellin may be to curse—
 I have done nothing, but both sides do worse
 Than nothing. Nay, to me, forgotten, reft
 Of insight, lapped by trees and flowers, was left
 The notion of a service—ha ? What lured
 Me here, what mighty aim was I assured
 Must move Taurello ? What if there remained
 A Cause, intact, distinct from these, ordained,
 For me, its true discoverer ?”

Some one pressed
 Before them here, a watcher, to suggest
 The subject for a ballad : “ They must know
 The tale of the dead worthy, long ago
 Consul of Rome—that's long ago for us,
 Minstrels and bowmen, idly squabbling thus
 In the world's corner—but too late, no doubt,
 For the brave time he sought to bring about.
 —Not know Crescentius Nomentanus ?” Then
 He cast about for terms to tell him, when
 Sordello disavowed it, how they used
 Whenever their Superior introduced
 A novice to the Brotherhood—(“ for I

Was just a brown-sleeve brother, merrily
 Appointed too," quoth he, "till Innocent
 Bade me relinquish, to my small content,
 My wife or my brown sleeves")—some brother spoke
 Ere nocturns of Crescentius, to revoke
 The edict issued, after his demise,
 Which blotted fame alike and effigies,
 All out except a floating power, a name
 Including, tending to produce the same
 Great act. Rome, dead, forgotten, lived at least
 Within that brain, though to a vulgar priest
 And a vile stranger,—two not worth a slave
 Of Rome's, Pope John, King Otho,—fortune gave
 The rule there: so, Crescentius, haply drest
 In white, called Roman Consul for a jest,
 Taking the people at their word, forth stept
 As upon Brutus' heel, nor ever kept
 Rome waiting,—stood erect, and from his brain
 Gave Rome out on its ancient place again,
 Ay, bade proceed with Brutus' Rome, kings styled
 Themselves mere citizens of, and, beguiled
 Into great thoughts thereby, would choose the gem
 Out of a lapfull, spoil their diadem
 —The Senate's cypher was so hard to scratch!
 He flashes like a phanal, all men catch
 The flame, Rome's just accomplished! when returned
 Otho, with John, the Consul's step had spurned,
 And Hugo Lord of Este, to redress
 The wrongs of each. Crescentius in the stress

Of adverse fortune bent. "They crucified
 Their Consul in the Forum, and abide
 E'er since such slaves at Rome, that I—(for I
 Was once a brown-sleeve brother, merrily
 Appointed)—I had option to keep wife
 Or keep brown sleeves, and managed in the strife
 Lose both. A song of Rome!"

And Rome, indeed,
 Robed at Goito in fantastic weed,
 The Mother-City of his Mantuan days,
 Looked an established point of light whence rays
 Traversed the world; for, all the clustered homes
 Beside of men, seemed bent on being Romes
 In their degree; the question was, how each
 Should most resemble Rome, clean out of reach.
 Nor, of the great Two, either principle,
 Struggled to change—but to possess—Rome, still,
 Guelf Rome or Ghibellin Rome.

Let Rome advance!

Rome, as she struck Sordello's ignorance—
 How could he doubt one moment? Rome's the Cause!
 Rome of the Pandects, all the world's new laws—
 Of the Capitol, of Castle Angelo;
 New structures, that inordinately glow,
 Subdued, brought back to harmony, made ripe
 By many a relic of the archetype
 Extant for wonder; every upstart church
 That hoped to leave old temples in the lurch,
 Corrected by the Theatre forlorn

That,—as a mundane shell, its world late born,—
Lay and o'ershadowed it. These hints combined,
Rome typifies the scheme to put mankind
Once more in full possession of their rights.
“Let us have Rome again! On me it lights
To build up Rome—on me, the first and last :
For such a Future was endured the Past!”
And thus, in the grey twilight, forth he sprung
To give his thought consistency among
The very People—let their facts avail
Finish the dream grown from the archer's tale.

BOOK THE FIFTH.

MANKIND TRIUMPH OF A SUDDEN?

Is it the same Sordello in the dusk
 As at the dawn?—merely a perished hark
 Now, that arose a power fit to build
 Up Rome again? The proud conception chilled
 So soon? Ay, watch that latest dream of thine
 —A Rome indebted to no Palatine,
 Drop arch by arch, Sordello! Art possess
 Of thy wish now—rewarded for thy quest
 To-day among Ferrara's squalid sons—
 Are this and this and this the shining ones
 Meet for the Shining City? Sooth to say,
 Your favoured tenantry pursue their way
 After a fashion! This companion slips
 On the smooth causey, t' other blinkard trips
 At his mooned sandal. "Leave to lead the brawls
 Here i' the atria?" No, friend! He that sprawls
 On aught but a stibadium . . . what his dues
 Who puts the lustral vase to such an use?
 Oh, huddle up the day's disasters! March,
 Ye runagates, and drop thou, arch by arch,
 Rome!

Yet before they quite disband—a whim—
 Study mere shelter, now, for him, and him,

Nay, even the worst,—just house them! Any cave
 Suffices: throw out earth! "A loophole? Brave!
 They ask to feel the sun shine, see the grass
 Grow, hear the larks sing? Dead art thou, *alás*,
 And I am dead! But here's our son excels.
 At hurdle-weaving any Scythian, fells
 Oak and devises rafters, dreams and shapes
 His dream into a door-post, just escapes
 The mystery of hinges. Lie we both
 Perdue another age. The goodly growth
 Of brick and stone! Our building-pelt was rough,
 But that descendant's garb suits well enough
 A portico-contriver. Speed the years—
 What's time to us? at last, a city rears
 Itself! nay, enter—what's the grave to us?
 Lo, our forlorn acquaintance carry thus
 The head! Successively sewer, forum, cirque—
 Last age, an aqueduct was counted work,
 But now they tire the artificer upon
 Blank alabaster, black obsidion,
 —Careful, Jove's face be duly fulgorant,
 And mother Venus' kiss-creased nipples pant
 Back into pristine pulpiness, ere fixed
 Above the baths. What difference betwixt
 This Rome and ours—resemblance what, between
 That scurvy dumb-show and this pageant sheen—
 These Romans and our rabble? Use thy wit!
 The work marched: step by step,—a workman fit
 Took each, nor too fit,—to one task, one time,—

No leaping o'er the petty to the prime,
 When just the substituting osier lithe
 For brittle bulrush, sound wood for soft withe,
 To further loam-and-roughcast-work a stage,—
 Exacts an architect, exacts an age:
 No tables of the Mauritanian tree
 For men whose maple-log's their luxury!
 That way was Rome built. "Better" (say you)
 "merge"

At once all workmen in the demiurge,
 All epochs in a lifetime, every task
 In one!" So should the sudden city bask [knack
 I' the day—while those we'd feast there, want the
 Of keeping fresh-chalked gowns from speck and brack,
 Distinguish not rare peacock from vile swan,
 Nor Mareotic juice from Cæcuban.
 "Enough of Rome! 'T was happy to conceive
 Rome on a sudden, nor shall fate bereave
 Me of that credit: for the rest, her spite
 Is an old story—serves my folly right
 By adding yet another to the dull
 List of abortions—things proved beautiful
 Could they be done, Sordello cannot do."

He sat upon the terrace, plucked and threw
 The powdery aloe-cusps away, saw shift
 Rome's walls, and drop arch after arch, and drift
 Mist-like afar those pillars of all stripe,
 Mounds of all majesty. "Thou archetype,
 Last of my dreams and loveliest, depart!"

And then a low voice wound into his heart :
 "Sordello!" (low as some old Pythoness
 Conceding to a Lydian King's distress
 The cause of his long error—one mistake
 Of her past oracle). "Sordello, wake!
 God has conceded two sights to a man—
 One, of men's whole work, time's completed plan,
 The other, of the minute's work, man's first
 Step to the plan's completeness; what's dispersed
 Save hope of that supreme step which, descried
 Earliest, was meant still to remain untried
 Only to give you heart to take your own
 Step, and there stay—leaving the rest alone?
 Where is the vanity? Why count as one
 The first step, with the last step? What is gone
 Except Rome's æry magnificence,
 That last step you'd take first?—an evidence
 You were God: be man now! Let those glances fall!
 The basis, the beginning step of all,
 Which proves you just a man—is that gone too?
 Pity to disconcert one versed as you
 In fate's ill-nature! but its full extent
 Eludes Sordello, even: the veil rent,
 Read the black writing—that collective man
 Outstrips the individual! Who began
 The acknowledged greatnesses? Ay, your own art
 Shall serve us: put the poet's mimes apart—
 Close with the poet's self, and lo, a dim
 Yet too plain form divides itself from him!

Alcamo's song enmeshes the lulled Isle,
 Woven into the echoes left erewhile
 By Nina, one soft web of song : no more
 Turning his name, then, flower-like o'er and o'er !
 An elder poet in the younger's place—
 Nina's the strength—but Alcamo's the grace :
 Each neutralizes each then ! Search your fill ;
 You get no whole and perfect Poet—still
 New Ninas, Alcamos, till time's mid-night
 Shrouds all—or better say, the shutting light
 Of a forgotten yesterday. Dissect
 Every ideal workman—(to reject
 In favour of your fearful ignorance
 The thousand phantasms eager to advance,
 And point you but to those within your reach)—
 Were you the first who brought—(in modern speech)
 The Multitude to be materialized ?
 That loose eternal unrest—who devised
 An apparition i' the midst ? The rout
 Was checked, a breathless ring was formed about
 That sudden flower : get round at any risk
 The gold-rough pointel, silver-blazing disk
 O' the lily ! Swords across it ! Reign thy reign
 And serve thy frolic service, Charlemagne ?
 —The very child of over-joyousness,
 Unfeeling thence, strong therefore : Strength by stress
 Of Strength comes of that forehead confident,
 Those widened eyes expecting heart's content,
 A calm as out of just-quelled noise ; nor swerves

For doubt, the ample cheek in gracious curves
 Abutting on the upthrust nether lip :
 He wills, how should he doubt then ? Ages slip :
 Was it Sordello pried into the work
 So far accomplished, and discovered lurk
 A company amid the other clans,
 Only distinct in priests for castellans
 And popes for suzerains (their rule confessed
 Its rule, their interest its interest,
 Living for sake of living—there an end,—
 Wrapt in itself, no energy to spend
 In making adversaries or allies),—
 Dived you into its capabilities
 And dared create, out of that sect, a soul
 Should turn the multitude, already whole,
 Into its body ? Speak plainer ! Is 't so sure
 God's church lives by a King's investiture ?
 Look to last step ! a staggering—a shock—
 What's mere sand is demolished, while the rock
 Endures : a column of black fiery dust
 Blots heaven—that help was prematurely thrust
 Aside, perchance !—but the air clears, nought's erased
 Of the true outline ! Thus much being firm based,
 The other was a scaffold. See him stand
 Buttressed upon his mattock, Hildebrand
 Of the huge brain-mask welded ply o'er ply
 As in a forge ; it buries either eye
 White and extinct, that stupid brow ; teeth clenched,
 The neck tight-corded, too, the chin deep-trenched,

As if a cloud enveloped him while fought
 Under its shade, grim prizers, thought with thought
 At dead-lock, agonizing he, until
 The victor thought leapt radiant up, and Will,
 The slave with folded arms and drooping lids
 They fought for, lean forth flame-like as it bids.
 Call him no flower—a mandrake of the earth,
 Thwarted and dwarfed and blasted in its birth,
 Rather, a fruit of suffering's excess,
 Thence feeling, therefore stronger : still by stress
 Of Strength, work Knowledge! Full three hundred years
 Have men to wear away in smiles and tears
 Between the two that nearly seemed to touch,
 Observe you ! quit one workman and you clutch
 Another, letting both their trains go by—
 The actors-out of either's policy,
 Heinrich, on this hand, Otho, Barbaross,
 Carry the three Imperial crowns across,
 Aix' Iron, Milan's Silver, and Rome's Gold—
 While Alexander, Innocent uphold
 On that, each Papal key—but, link on link,
 Why is it neither chain betrays a chink ?
 How coalesce the small and great ? Alack,
 For one thrust forward, fifty such fall back !
 Do the popes coupled there help Gregory
 Alone ? Hark—from the hermit Peter's cry
 At Claremont, down to the first serf that says
 Friedrich's no liege of his while he delays
 Getting the Pope's curse off him ! The Crusade—

Or trick of breeding strength by other aid
 Than strength, is safe. Hark—from the wild harangue
 Of Vimmercato, to the carroch's clang
 Yonder! The League—or trick of turning strength
 Against pernicious strength, is safe at length.
 Yet hark—from Mantuan Albert making cease
 The fierce ones, to St. Francis preaching peace
 Yonder! God's Truce—or trick to supersede
 The very use of strength, is safe. Indeed
 We trench upon the Future! Who is found
 To take next step, next age—trail o'er the ground—
 Shall I say, gourd-like?—not the flower's display
 Nor the root's prowess, but the plenteous way
 O' the plant—produced by joy and sorrow, whence
 Unfeeling and yet feeling, strongest thence?
 Knowledge by stress of merely Knowledge? No—
 E'en were Sordello ready to forego
 His life for this, 't were overleaping work
 Some one has first to do, howe'er it irk,
 Nor stay a foot's breadth from the beaten road.
 Who means to help must still support the load
 Hildebrand lifted—' why hast Thou,' he groaned,
 ' Imposed on me a burthen, Paul had moaned,
 And Moses dropped beneath?' Much done—and yet
 Doubtless that grandest task God ever set
 On man, left much to do: at his arm's wrench,
 Charlemagne's scaffold fell; but pillars blench
 Merely, start back again—perchance have been
 Taken for buttresses: crash every screen,

Hammer the tenons better, and engage
 A gang about your work, for the next age
 Or two, of Knowledge, part by Strength and part
 By Knowledge! Then, indeed, perchance may start
 Sordello on his race—would time divulge
 Such secrets! If one step's awry, one bulge
 Calls for correction by a step we thought
 Got over long since, why, till that is wrought,
 No progress! and the scaffold in its turn
 Becomes, its service o'er, a thing to spurn.
 Meanwhile, if your half-dozen years of life
 In store, dispose you to forego the strife,
 Who takes exception? Only bear in mind,
 Ferrara's reached, Goito's left behind:
 As you then were, as half yourself, desist!
 —The warrior-part of you may, an it list,
 Finding real faulchions difficult to poise,
 Fling them afar and taste the cream of joys
 By wielding such in fancy,—what is bard
 Of you may spurn the vehicle that marred
 Elys so much, and in free fancy glut
 His sense, yet write no verses—you have but
 To please yourself for law, and once could please
 What once appeared yourself, by dreaming these
 Rather than doing these, in days gone by.
 But all is changed the moment you descry
 Mankind as half yourself,—then, fancy's trade
 Ends once and always: how may half evade
 The other half? men are found half of you.

Out of a thousand helps, just one or two
Can be accomplished presently : but finch
From these (as from the faulchion, raised an inch,
Elys, described a couplet) and make proof
Of fancy,—then, while one half lolls aloof
I' the vines, completing Rome to the tip-top—
See if, for that, your other half will stop
A tear, begin^d a smile ! The rabble's woes,
Ludicrous in their patience as they chose
To sit about their town and quietly
Be slaughtered,—the poor reckless soldiery,
With their ignoble rhymes on Richard, how
' Polt-foot,' sang they, ' was in a pitfall now,'
Cheering each other from the engine-mounts,—
That crippled spawling idiot who recounts
How, lopt of limbs, he lay, stupid as stone,
Till the pains crept from out him one by one,
• And wriggles round the archers on his head
To earn a morsel of their chestnut bread,—
And Cino, always in the self-same place
Weeping ; beside that other wretch's case,
Eyepits to ear, one gangrene since he plied
The engine in his coat of raw sheep's hide
A double watch in the noon sun ; and see
Lucchino, beauty, with the favours free,
• Trim hacqueton, spruce beard and scented hair,
Campaigning it for the first time—cut there
In two already, boy enough to crawl
For latter orpine round the southern wall, •

Tomà, where Richard's kept, because that whore
 Marfisa, the fool never saw before,
 Sickened for flowers this wearisomest siege:
 And Tiso's wife—men liked their pretty liege,
 Cared for her least of whims once,—Berta, wed
 A twelvemonth gone, and, now poor Tiso's dead,
 Delivering herself of his first child
 On that chance heap of wet filth, reconciled
 To fifty gazers!"—(Here a wind below
 Made moody music augural of woe
 From the pine barrier)—“What if, now the scene
 Draws to a close, yourself have really been
 —You, plucking purples in Goito's moss
 Like edges of a trabea (not to cross
 Your consul-humour) or dry aloë-shafts
 For fasces, at Ferrara—he, fate wafts,
 This very age, her whole inheritance
 Of opportunities? Yet you advance
 Upon the last! Since talking is your trade,
 There's Salinguerra left you to persuade:
 Fail! then”—

“No—no—which latest chance secure?”
 Leapt up and cried Sordello: “this made sure,
 The Past were yet redeemable; its work
 Was—help the Guelfs, whom I, how'er it irk,
 Thus help!” He shook the foolish aloë-haulm
 Out of his doublet, paused, proceeded calm
 To the appointed presence. The large head
 Turned on its socket; “And your spokesman,” said

The large voice, "is Elcorte's happy sprout?
 Few such"—(so finishing a speech no doubt
 Addressed to Palma, silent at his side)
 —"My sober councils have diversified.
 Elcorte's son! good: forward as you may,
 Our lady's minstrel with so much to say!"
 The hesitating sunset floated back,
 Rosily traversed in the wonted track
 The chamber, from the lattice o'er the girth
 Of pines, to the huge eagle blacked in earth
 Opposite,—outlined sudden, spur to crest,
 That solid Salinguerra, and caressed
 Palma's contour; 't was day looped back night's pall;
 Sordello had a chance left spite of all.

And much he made of the convincing speech
 He meant should compensate the Past and reach
 Through his youth's daybreak of unprofit, quite
 To his noon's labour, so proceed till night
 Leisurely! The great argument to bind
 Taurello with the Guelf Cause, body and mind,
 —Came the consummate rhetoric to that?
 Yet most Sordello's argument dropped flat
 Through his accustomed fault of breaking yoke,
 Disjoining him who felt from him who spoke.
 Was 't not a touching incident—so prompt
 A rendering the world its just accopt,
 Once proved its debtor? Who'd suppose, before
 This proof, that he, Goito's god of yore,
 At duty's instance could demean himself

So memorably, dwindle to a Guelf?
 Be sure, in such delicious flattery steeped
 His inmost self at the out-portion peeped,
 Thus occupied; then stole a glance at those
 Appealed to, curious if her colour rose
 Or his lip moved, while he discreetly urged
 The need of Lombardy's becoming purged
 At soonest of her barons; the poor part
 Abandoned thus, missing the blood at heart
 And spirit in brain, unseasonably off
 Elsewhere! But, though his speech was worthy scoff,
 Good-humoured Salinguerra, famed for tact
 And tongue, who, careless of his phrase, ne'er lacked
 The right phrase, and harangued Honorius dumb
 At his accession,—looked as all fell plumb
 To purpose and himself found interest
 In every point his new instructor pressed
 —Left playing with the rescript's white wax seal
 To scrutinize Sordello head and heel.
 Then means to yield assent sure? No, alas!
 All he replied was, "What, it comes to pass
 That poesy, sooner than politics,
 Makes fade young hair?" To think such speech could fix
 Taurello!

Then a flash of bitter truth :

So fantasies could break and fritter youth
 That he had long ago lost earnestness,
 Lost will to work, lost power to even express
 The need of working! Earth was turned a grave :

No more occasions now, though he should crave
 Just one, in right of superhuman toil,
 To do what was undone, repair such spoil,
 Alter the Past—nothing would give the chance!
 Not that he was to die; he saw askance
 Protract the ignominious years beyond
 To dream in—time to hope and time despond,
 Remember and forget, be sad, rejoice
 As saved a trouble; he might, at his choice,
 One way or other, idle life out, drop
 No few smooth verses by the way—for prop,
 A thyrsus, these sad people, all the same,
 Should pick up, and set store by,—far from blame,
 Plant o'er his hearse, convinced his better part
 Survived him. “Rather tear men out the heart
 Of the truth!”—Sordello muttered, and renewed
 His propositions for the Multitude.

But Salinguerra, who at this attack
 Had thrown great breast and ruffling corslet back
 To hear the better, smilingly resumed
 His task; beneath, the carroch's warning boomed;
 He must decide with Tito; courteously
 He turned then, even seeming to agree
 With his admonisher—“Assist the Pope,
 Extend Guelf domination, fill the scope
 Of the Church, thus based on All, by All, for All—
 Change Secular to Evangelical”—
 Echoing his very sentence: all seemed lost,
 When suddenly he looked up, laughingly almost,

To Palma: "This opinion of your friend's—
 For instance, would it answer Palma's ends?
 Best, were it not, turn Guelf, submit our Strength"—
 (Here he drew out his baldric to its length)
 —"To the Pope's Knowledge—let our captive slip,
 Wide to the walls throw ope our gates, equip
 Azzo with . . . what I hold here? Who'll subscribe
 To a trite censure of the minstrel tribe
 Henceforward? or pronounce, as Heinrich used,
 'Spear-heads for battle, burr-heads for the joust!'—
 —When Constance, for his couplets, would promote
 Alcamo, from a parti-coloured coat,
 To holding her lord's stirrup in the wars.
 Not that I see where couplet-making jars
 With common sense: at Mantua I had borne
 This chanted, better than their most forlorn
 Of bull-baits,—that's indisputable!"

Brave!

Whom vanity nigh slew, contempt shall save!
 All's at an end: a Troubadour suppose
 Mankind will class him with their friends or foes?
 A puny uncouth ailing vassal think
 The world and him bound in some special link?
 Abrupt the visionary tether burst—
 What were rewarded here, or what amerced
 If a poor drudge, solicitous to dream
 Deservingly, got tangled by his theme
 So far as to conceit the knack or gift
 Or whatsoever it be, of verse, might lift

The globe, a lever like the hand and head
 Of—"Men of Action," as the Jongleurs said,
 —"The Great Men," in the people's dialect?
 And not a moment did this scorn affect
 Sordello: scorn the poet? They, for once,
 Asking "what was," obtained a full response.
 Bid Naddo think at Mantua, he had but
 To look into his promptuary, put
 Finger on a set thought in a set speech:
 But was Sordello fitted thus for each
 Conjecture? Nowise; since within his soul,
 Perception brooded unexpressed and whole.
 A healthy spirit like a healthy frame
 Craves aliment in plenty—all the same,
 Changes, assimilates its aliment.
 Perceived Sordello, on a truth intent?
 Next day no formularies more you saw
 Than figs or olives in a sated maw.
 'T is Knowledge, whither such perceptions tend;
 They lose themselves in that, means to an end,
 The many old producing some one new,
 A last unlike the first. If lies are true,
 The Caliph's wheel-work man of brass receives
 A meal, munched millet grains and lettuce leaves
 Together in his stomach rattle loose—
 You find them perfect next day to produce;
 But ne'er expect the man, on strength of that,
 Can roll an iron camel-collar flat
 Like Haroun's self! I tell you, what was stored

Bit by bit through Sordello's life, outpoured
 That eve, was, for that age, a novel thing :
 And round those three the people formed a ring,
 Of visionary judges whose award
 He recognized in full—faces that barred
 Henceforth return to the old careless life,
 In whose great presence, therefore, his first strife
 For their sake must not be ignobly fought,
 All these, for once, approved of him, he thought,
 Suspended their own vengeance, chose await
 The issue of this strife to reinstate
 Them in the right of taking it—in fact
 He must be proved king ere they could exact
 Vengeance for such king's defalcation. Last,
 A reason why the phrases flowed so fast
 Was in his quite forgetting for a time
 Himself in his amazement that the rhyme
 Disguised the royalty so much : he there—
 And Salinguerra—and yet unaware
 Who was the lord, who liegeman !

“ Thus I lay .

On thine my spirit and compel obey
 His lord,—my liegeman,—impotent to build
 Another Rome, but hardly so unskilled
 In what such builder should have been, as brook
 One shame beyond the charge that I forsook
 His function ! Free me from that shame, I bend
 A brow before, suppose new years to spend,
 Allow each chance, nor fruitlessly, recur—

Measure thee with the Minstrel, then, demur
 At any crown he claims! That I must cede
 Shamed now, my right to my especial meed—
 Confess thee fitter help the world than I
 Ordained its champion from eternity,
 Is much: but to behold thee scorn the post
 I quit in thy behalf—to hear thee boast
 What makes my own despair!" And while he rung
 The changes on this theme, the roof up-sprung,
 The sad walls of the presence-chamber died
 Into the distance, or embowering vied
 With far-away Goito's vine-frontier;
 And crowds of faces—(only keeping clear
 The rose-light in the midst, his vantage-ground
 To fight their battle from)—deep clustered round
 Sordello, with good wishes no mere breath,
 Kind prayers for him no vapour, since, come death,
 Come life, he was fresh-sinewed every joint,
 Each bone new-marrowed as whom gods anoint
 Though mortal to their rescue: now let sprawl
 The snaky volumes hither! Is Typhon all
 For Hercules to trample—good report
 From Salinguerra only to extort?
 "So was I" (closed he his inculcating,
 A poet must be earth's essential king)
 So was I, royal so, and if I fail,
 'Tis not the royalty, ye witness quail,
 But one deposed who, caring not exert
 Its proper essence, trifled malapert

With accidents instead—good things assigned
 As heralds of a better thing behind—
 And, worthy through display of these, put forth
 Never the inmost all-surpassing worth
 That constitutes him king precisely since
 As yet no other spirit may evince
 Its like : the power he took most pride to test,
 Whereby all forms of life had been professed
 At pleasure, forms already on the earth,
 Was but a means to power beyond, whose birth
 Should, in its novelty, be kingship's proof.
 Now, whether he came near or kept aloof
 The several forms he longed to imitate,
 Not there the kingship lay, he sees too late.
 Those forms, unalterable first as last,
 Proved him her copier, not the protoplast
 Of nature : what could come of being free,
 By action to exhibit tree for tree,
 Bird, beast, for beast and bird, or prove earth bore
 One veritable man or woman more ?
 Means to an end, such proofs are : what the end ?
 Let essence, whatso'er it be, extend—
 Never contract. Already you include
 The multitude ; then let the multitude
 Include yourself ; and the result were new :
 Themselves before, the multitude turn you.
 This were to live and move and have, in them,
 Your being, and secure a diadem
 You should transmit (because no cycle yearns

Beyond itself, but on itself returns)
 When, the full sphere in wane, the world o'erlaid
 Long since with you, shall have in turn obeyed
 Some orb still prouder, some displayer, still
 More potent than the last, of human will,
 And some new king depose the old. Of such
 Am I—whom pride of this elates too much?
 Safe, rather say, 'mid troops of peers again;
 I, with my words, hailed brother of the train
 Deeds once sufficed: for, let the world roll back,
 Who fails, through deeds howe'er diverse, re-track
 My purpose still, my task? A teeming crust—
 Air, flame, earth, wave at conflict! Then, needs must
 Emerge some Calm embodied, these refer
 The brawl to;—yellow-bearded Jupiter?
 No! Saturn; some existence like a pact
 And protest against Chaos, some first fact
 'P the faint of time. My deep of life, I know,
 Is unavailing e'en to poorly show" . . .
 (For here the Chief immeasurably yawned)
 . . . "Deeds in their due gradation till Song dawned—
 The fullest effluence of the finest mind,
 All in degree, no way diversè in kind
 From minds about it, minds which, more or less
 Lofty or low, movè seeking to impress
 Themselves on somewhat; but one mind has climbed
 Step after step, by just ascent, sublimed.
 Thought is the soul of act, and, stage by stage,
 Soul is from body still to disengage

As tending to a freedom which rejects
 Such help and incorporeally affects
 The world, producing deeds but not by deeds,
 Swaying, in others, frames itself exceeds,
 Assigning them the simpler tasks it used
 To patiently perform till Song produced
 Acts, by thoughts only, for the mind: divest
 Mind of e'en Thought, and, lo, God's unexpressed
 Will dawns above us! All then is to win
 Save that! How much for me, then? where begin
 My work? About me, faces! and they flock,
 The earnest faces. What shall I unlock
 By song? behold me prompt, whate'er it be,
 To minister: how much can mortals see
 Of Life? No more than so? I take the task
 And marshal you Life's elemental masque,
 Show Men, on evil or on good lay stress,
 This light, this shade make prominent, suppress
 All ordinary hues that softening blend
 Such natures with the level. Apprehend
 Which sinner is, which saint, if I allot
 Hell, Purgatory, Heaven, a blaze or blot,
 To those you doubt concerning! I enwomb
 Some wretched Friedrich with his red-hot tomb;
 Some dubious spirit, Lombard Agilulph
 With the black chastening river. I engulph;
 Some unapproached Matilda I enshrine
 With languors of the planet of decline—
 These, fail to recognise, to arbitrate

Between henceforth, to rightly estimate
 Thus marshalled in the masque! Myself, the while,
 As one of you, am witness, shrink or smile
 At my own showing! Next age—what's to do?
 The men and women stationed hitherto
 Will I unstation, good and bad, conduct
 Each nature to its farthest, or obstruct
 At soonest, in the world: light, thwarted, breaks
 A limpid purity to rainbow flakes,
 Or shadow, massed, freezes to gloom: behold
 How such, with fit assistance to unfold,
 Or obstacles to crush them, disengage
 Their forms, love, hate, hope, fear, peace make, war
 In presence of you all! Myself, implied [wage,
 Superior now, as, by the platform's side,
 I bade them do and suffer,—would last content
 The world . . . no—that's too far! I circumvent
 A few, my masque contented, and to these
 Offer unveil the last of mysteries—
 Man's inmost life shall have yet freer play:
 Once more I cast external things away,
 And natures composite, so decompose
 That" . . . Why, he writes *Sordello!*

“How I rose,

And how have you advanced! since evermore
 Yourself effect what I was fain before
 Effect, what I supplied yourselves suggest,
 What I leave bare yourselves can now invest.
 How we attain to talk as brothers talk,

In half-words, call things by half-names, no balk
 From discontinuing old aids. To-day
 Takes in account the work of Yesterday :
 Has not the world a Past now, its adept
 Consults ere he dispense with or accept
 New aids ? a single touch more may enhance,
 A touch less turn to insignificance
 Those structures' symmetry the Past has strewed
 The world with, once so bare. Leave the mere rude
 Explicit details ! 't is but brother's speech
 We need, speech where an accent's change gives each
 The other's soul—no speech to understand
 By former audience : need was then to expand,
 Expatiate—hardly were we brothers ! true—
 Nor I lament my small remove from you,
 Nor reconstruct what stands already. Ends
 Accomplished turn to means : my art intends
 New structure from the ancient : as they changed
 The spoils of every clime at Venice, ranged
 The horned and snouted Libyan god, upright
 As in his desert, by some simple bright
 Clay cinerary pitcher—Thebes as Rome,
 Athens as Byzant rifled, till their Dome
 From earth's reputed consummations razed
 A seal, the all-transmuting Triad blazed
 Above. Ah, whose that fortune ? ne'ertheless
 E'en he must stoop contented to express
 No tithe of what's to say—the vehicle
 Never sufficient : but his work is still

For faces like the faces that select
 The single service I am bound effect,
 And bid me cast aside such fancies, bow
 Taurello to the Guelf cause, disallow
 The Kaiser's coming—which with heart, soul, strength,
 I labour for, this eve, who feel at length
 My past career's outrageous vanity,
 And would, as Qts amends, die, even die
 Now I first estimate the boon of life,
 If death might win compliance—sure, this strife
 Is right for once—the People my support.”

My poor Sordello! what may we extort
 By this, I wonder? Palma's lighted eyes
 Turned to Taurello who, long past surprise,
 Began, “ You love him—what you'd say at large
 Let me say briefly. First, your father's charge
 To me, his friend, peruse: I guessed indeed
 You were no stranger to the course decreed.
 He bids me leave his children to the saints:
 As for a certain project, he acquaints
 The Pope with that, and offers him the best
 Of your possessions to permit the rest
 Go peaceably—to Ecelin, a stripe
 Of soil the cursed Vicentines will gripe,
 —To Alberic, a patch the Trevisan
 Clutches already; extricate, who can,
 Tréville, Villarazzi, Puissolo,
 Cartiglione, Loria!—all go,
 And with them go my hopes. 'T is lost, then! Lost

This eve, our crisis, and some pains it cost
 Procuring ; thirty years—as good I 'd spent
 Like our admonisher ! But each his bent
 Pursues : no question, one might live absurd
 Oneself this while, by deed as he by word,
 Persisting to obtrude an influence where
 'Tis made account of, much as . . . nay, you fare
 With twice the fortune, youngster !—I submit,
 Happy to parallel my waste of wit
 With the renowned Sordello's : you decide
 A course for me. Romano may abide
 Romano,—Bacchus ! After all, what dearth
 Of Ecelins and Alberics on earth ?
 Say there 's a prize in prospect, must disgrace
 Betidé competitors, unless they style
 Themselves Romano ? were it worth my while
 To try my own luck ! But an obscure place
 Suits me—there wants a youth to bustle, stalk
 And attitudinize—some fight, more talk,
 Most flaunting badges—how, I might make clear,
 Since Friedrich's very purposes lie here
 —Here, pity they are like to lie ! For me,
 With station fixed unceremoniously
 Long since, small use contesting ; I am but
 The liegeman, you are born the liegés—shut
 That gentle mouth now ! or resume your kin
 In your sweet self ; were Palma Ecelin
 For me to work with ! Could that neck endure
 This bauble for a cumbrous garniture,

She should . . . or might one bear it for her? Stay—
 I have not been so flattered many a day
 As by your pale friend—Bacchus! The least help
 Would lick the hind's fawn to a lion's whelp—
 His neck is broad enough—a ready tongue
 Beside—too writhled—but, the main thing, young—
 I could . . . why, look ye!”

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And the badge was thrown
 Across Sordello's neck: “This badge alone
 Makes you Romano's Head—becomes superb
 On your bare neck, which would, on mine, disturb
 The pauldron,” said Taurello. A mad act,
 Not even dreamed about before—in fact,
 Not when his sportive arm rose for the nonce—
 But he had dallied overmuch, this once,
 With power: the thing was done, and he, aware
 The thing was done, proceeded to declare—
 (So like a nature made to serve, excel
 In serving, only feel by service well!)
 —That he would make Sordello that and more.
 “As good a scheme as any! What's to pore
 At in my face?” he asked—ponder instead
 This piece of news; you are Romano's Head!
 One cannot slacken pace so near the goal,
 Suffer my Azzo to escape heart-whole
 This time! For you there's Palma to espouse—
 For me, one crowning trouble ere I house
 Like my compeer.”

On which ensued a strange

And solemn visitation ; there came change
 O'er every one of them ; each looked on each :
 Up in the midst a truth grew, without speech.
 And when the giddiness sank and the haze
 Subsided, they were sitting, no amaze,
 Sordello with the baldric on, his sire
 Silent, though his proportions seemed aspire
 Momently ; and, interpreting the thrill
 Night at its ebb, Palma was found there still
 Relating somewhat Adelaide confessed
 A year ago, while dying on her breast,—
 Of a contrivance that Vicenza night,
 When Ecelin had birth. “ Their convoy's flight,
 Cut off a moment, coiled inside the flame
 That wallowed like a dragon at his game
 The toppling city through—San Biagio rocks !
 And wounded lies in her delicious locks
 Retrude, the frail mother, on her face,
 None of her wasted, just in one embrace
 Covering her child : when, as they lifted her,
 Cleaving the tumult, mighty, mightier
 And mightiest Taurello's cry outbroke,
 Leapt like a tongue of fire that cleaves the smoke,
 Midmost to cheer his Mantuans onward—drown
 His colleague Ecelin's clamour, up and down
 The disarray : failed Adelaide see then
 Who was the natural chief, the man of men ?
 Outstripping time, her infant there burst swathe,
 Stood up with eyes haggard beyond the scathe

From wandering after his heritage
 Lost once and lost for aye—and why that rage,
 That deprecating glance? A new shape leant
 On a familiar shape—gloatingly bent
 O'er his discomfiture; 'mid wreaths it wore,
 Still one outflamed the rest—her child's before
 'T was Salinguerra's for his child: scorn, hate,
 Rage, startled her from Ecelin—too late!
 Then was the moment! a rival's foot had spurned
 Never that brow to earth! Ere sense returned—
 The act conceived, adventured, and complete,
 They bore away to an obscure retreat
 Mother and child—Retrude's self not slain '—
 (Nor even here Taurello moved) “ though pain
 Was fled; and what assured them most 't was fled,
 All pain, was, if they raised the pale hushed head
 'T would turn this way and that, waver awhile,
 And only settle into its old smile—
 (Graceful as the disquieted water-flag
 Steadying itself, remarked they, in the quag
 On either side their path)—when suffered look
 Down on her child. They marched: no sign once shook
 The company's close litter of crossed spears
 Till, as they reached Goito, a few tears
 Slipt in the sunset from her long black lash,
 And she was gone. So far the action rash—
 No crime. They laid Retrude in the font,
 Taurello's very gift, her child was wont
 To sit beneath—constant as eve he came

To sit by its attendant girls the same
 As one of them. For Palma, she would blend
 With this magnific spirit to the end,
 That ruled her first—but scarcely had she dared
 To disobey the Adelaide who scared
 Her into vowing never to disclose
 A secret to her husband, which so froze
 His blood at half-recital, she contrived
 To hide from him Taurello's infant lived,
 Lest, by revealing that, himself should mar
 Romano's fortunes. And, a crime so far,
 Palma received that action : she was told
 Of Salinguerra's nature, of his cold
 Calm acquiescence in his lot! But free
 To impart the secret to Romano, she
 Engaged to repossess Sordello of
 His heritage, and hers, and that way doff
 The mask, but after years, long years!—while now,
 Was not Romano's sign-mark on that brow?"

Across Taurello's heart his arms were locked:
 And when he did speak 't was as if he mocked
 The minstrel, "who had not to move," he said,
 "Not stir—should fate defraud him of a shred
 Of his son's infancy? much less of his youth!"
 (Laughingly all this)—"which to aid, in truth,
 Himself, reserved on purpose, had not grown
 Old, not too old—'t was best they kept alone
 Till now, and never idly met till now;"
 —Then, in the same breath, told Sordello how

All intimations of this eve's event
 Were lies, for Friedrich must advance to Trent,
 Thence to Verona, then to Rome, there stop,
 Tumble the Church down, institute a-top
 The Alps a Prefecture of Lombardy :
 —“That's now!—no prophesying what may be
 Anon, with a new monarch of the clime,
 Native of Genoa, passing his youth's prime
 At Naples. Tito bids my choice decide
 On whom . . .”

“Embrace him, madman!” Palma cried,
 Who through the laugh saw sweatdrops burst apace,
 And his lips blanching: he did not embrace
 Sordello, but he laid Sordello's hand
 On his own eyes, mouth, forehead.

Understand,
 This while Sordello was becoming flushed
 Out of his whiteness; thoughts rushed, fancies rushed;
 He pressed his hand upon his head and signed
 Both should forbear him. “Nay, the best's behind!”
 Taurello laughed—not quite with the same laugh:
 “The truth is, thus we scatter, ay, like chaff
 These Guelfs, a despicable monk recoils
 From: nor expect a fickle Kaiser spoils
 Our triumph!—Friedrich? Think you, I intend
 Friedrich shall reap the fruits of blood I spend
 And brain I waste? Think you, the people clap
 Their hands at my out-hewing this wild gap
 For any Friedrich to fill up? 'Tis mine—

That's yours: I tell you, towards some such design
 Have I worked blindly, yes, and idly, yes,
 And for another, yes—but worked no less
 With instinct at my heart; I else had swerved,
 While now—look round! My cunning has preserved
 Samminiato—that's a central place
 Secures us Florence, boy,—in Pisa's case,
 By land as she by sea; with Pisa ours,
 And Florence, and Pistoia, one devours
 The land at leisure! Gloriously dispersed—
 Brescia, observe, Milan, Piacenza first
 That flanked us (ah, you know not!) in the March;
 On these we pile, as keystone of our arch,
 Romagna and Bologna, whose first span
 Covered the Trentine and the Valsugan;
 Sofia's Egna by Bolgiano's sure!" . . .
 So he proceeded: half of all this, pure
 Delusion, doubtless, nor the rest too true,
 But what was undone he felt sure to do,
 As ring by ring he wrung off, flung away
 The pauldron-rings to give his sword-arm play—
 Need of the sword now! That would soon adjust
 Aught wrong at present; to the sword intrust
 Sordello's whiteness, undersize: 't was plain
 He hardly rendered right to his own brain—
 Like a brave hound, men educate to pride
 Himself on speed or scent nor aught beside,
 As though he could not, gift by gift, match men!
 Palma had listened patiently: but when

'T was time expostulate, attempt withdraw
 Taurello from his child, she, without awe
 Took off his iron arms from, one by one,
 Sordello's shrinking shoulders, and, that done,
 Made him avert his visage and relieve
 Sordello (you might see his corselet heave
 The while) who, loose, rose—tried to speak, then sank :
 They left him in the chamber. All was blank.

And even reeling down the narrow stair
 Taurello kept up, as though unaware
 Palma was by to guide him, the old device
 —Something of Milan—"how we muster thrice
 The Torriani's strength there—all along
 Our own Visconti cowed them"—thus the song
 Continued even while she bade him stoop,
 Thrid somehow, by some glimpse of arrow-loop,
 The turnings to the gallery below,
 Where he stopped short as Palma let him go.
 When he had sat in silence long enough
 Splintering the stone bench, braving a rebuff
 She stopt the truncheon; only to commence
 One of Sordello's poems, a pretence
 For speaking, some poor rhyme of "Elys' hair
 And head that's sharp and perfect like a pear,
 So smooth and close are laid the few fine locks
 Stained like pale honey oozed from topmost rocks
 Sun-blanced the livelong Summer"—from his worst
 Performance, the Goito, as his first :
 And that at end, conceiving from the brow

And open mouth no silence would serve now,
 Went on to say the whole world loved that man
 And, for that matter, thought his face, tho' wan,
 Eclipsed the Count's—he sucking in each phrase
 As if an angel spoke. The foolish praise
 Ended, he drew her on his mailed knees, made
 Her face a framework with his hands, a shade,
 A crown, an aureole: there must she remain
 (Her little mouth compressed with smiling pain
 As in his gloves she felt her tresses twitch)
 To get the best look at, in fittest niche
 Dispose his saint. That done, he kissed her brow,
 —“Lauded her father for his treason now,”
 He told her, “only, how could one suspect
 The wit in him?—whose clansman, recollect,
 Was ever Salinguerra—she, the same,
 Romano and his lady—so, might claim
 To know all, as she should”—and thus begun
 Schemes with a vengeance, schemes on schemes, “not
 Fit to be told that foolish boy,” he said, [one
 “But only let Sordello Palma wed,
 —Then!”

'T was a dim long narrow place at best:
 Midway a sole grate showed the fiery West,
 As shows its corpse the world's end some split tomb—
 A gloom, a rift of fire, another gloom,
 Faced Palma—but at length Taurello set
 Her free; the grating held one ragged jet
 Of fierce gold fire: he lifted her within

The hollow underneath—how else begin
 Fate's second marvellous cycle, else renew
 The ages than with Palma plain in view ?
 Then paced the passage, hands clenched, head erect,
 Pursuing his discourse ; a grand unchecked
 Monotony made out from his quick talk
 And the recurring noises of his walk ;
 —Somewhat too much like the o'ercharged assent
 Of two resolved friends in one danger blent,
 Who hearten each the other against heart—
 Boasting there 's nought to care for, when, apart
 The boaster, all 's to care for. He, beside
 Some shape not visible, in power and pride
 Approached, out of the dark, ginglyly near,
 Nearer, passed close in the broad light, his ear
 Crimson, eyeballs suffused, temples full-fraught,
 Just a snatch of the rapid speech you caught,
 And on he strode into the opposite dark
 Till presently the harsh heel's turn, a spark
 I' the stone, and whirl of some loose embossed throug
 That crashed against the angle eye so long
 After the last, punctual to an amount
 Of mailed great paces you could not but count,—
 Prepared you for the paciñg back again.
 And by the snatches you might ascertain
 That, Friedrich's Prefecture surmounted, left
 By this alone in Italy, they cleft
 Asunder, crushed together, at command
 Of none, were free to break up Hildebrand,

Rebuild, he and Sordello, Charlemagne—
 But garnished, Strength with Knowledge, “if we deign
 Accept that compromise and stoop to give
 Rome law, the Cæsars’ Representative.”
 —Enough, that the illimitable flood
 Of triumphs after triumphs, understood
 In its faint reflux (you shall hear) sufficed
 Young Ecelin for appanage, enticed
 Him on till, these long quiet in their graves,
 He found ’t was looked for that a whole life’s braves
 Should somehow be made good—so, weak and worn,
 Must stagger up at Milan, one grey morn.
 Of the To-Come, and fight his latest fight.
 But, Salinguerra’s prophecy at height—
 He voluble with a raised arm and stiff,
 A blaring voice, a blazing eye, as if
 He had our very Italy to keep
 Or cast away, or gather in a heap
 To garrison the better—ay, his word
 Was, “run the cucumber into a gourd,
 Drive Trent upon Apulia.”—at their pitch
 Who spied the continents and islands which
 Grew mulberry leaves and sickles, in the map—
 (Strange that three such confessions so should hap
 To Palma, Dante spoke with in the clear
 Amorous silence of the Swooning-sphere,—
Cunizza, as he called her! Never ask
 Of Palma more! She sat, knowing her task
 Was done, the labour of it,—for, success,

Concerned not Palma, passion's votaress)
 Triumph at height, and thus Sordello crowned—
 Above the passage suddenly a sound
 Stops speech, stops walk : back shrinks Taurello, bids
 With large involuntary asking lids,
 Palma interpret. " 'T is his own foot-stamp—
 Your hand ! His summons ! Nay, this idle damp
 Befits not ! " ^o Out they two reeled dizzily.
 " Visconti's strong at Milan," resumed he,
 In the old, somewhat insignificant way—
 (Was Palma wont, years afterward, to say)
 As though the spirit's flight, sustained thus far,
 Dropped at that very instant, Gone they are—
 Palma, Taurello ; Eglamor anon,
 Ecelin,—only Naddo's never gone !
 —Labours, this moonrise, what the Master meant
 " Is Squarcialupo speckled ?—purulent,
 I'd say, but when was Providence put out ?
 He carries somehow handily about
 His spite nor fouls himself ! " Goito's vines
 Stand like a cheat detected—stark rough lines,
 The moon breaks through, a grey mean scale against
 The vault where, this eve's Maiden, thou remain'st
 Like some fresh martyr, eyes fixed—who can tell ?
 As Heaven, now all's at end, did not so well,
 Spite of the faith and victory, to leave
 Its virgin quite to death in the lone eve.
 While the persisting hermit-bee . . . ha ! wait
 No longer—these in compass, forward fate !

BOOK THE SIXTH.

AT THE CLOSE OF A DAY OR A LIFE,

THE thought of Eglamor's least like a thought,
 And yet a false one, was, "Man shrinks to nought
 If matched with symbols of immensity—
 Must quail, forsooth, before a quiet sky
 Or sea, too little for their quietude:"
 And, truly, somewhat in Sordello's mood
 Confirmed its speciousness, while eve slow sank
 Down the near terrace to the farther bank,
 And only one spot left out of the night
 Glimmered upon the river opposite—
 A breadth of watery heaven like a bay,
 A sky-like space of water, ray for ray,
 And star for star, one richness where they mixed
 As this and that wing of an angel, fixed,
 Tumultuary splendours folded in
 To die. . . Nor turned he till Ferrara's din
 (Say, the monotonous speech from a man's lip
 Who lets some first and eager purpose slip
 In a new fancy's birth; the speech keeps on
 Though elsewhere its informing soul be gone)
 —Aroused him,—surely offered succour. Fate
 Paused with this eve; ere she precipitate
 Herself,—put off strange after-thoughts awhile,
 That voice, those large hands, that portentous smile,—

What help to pierce the Future as the Past,
Lay in the plaining city ?

And at last

The main discovery and prime concern,
All that just now imported him to learn,
His truth, like yonder slow moon to complete
Heaven, rose again, and, naked at his feet,
Lighted his old life's every shift and change,
Effort with counter-effort ; nor the range
Of each looked wrong except wherein it checked,
Some other—which of these could he suspect,
Prying into them by the sudden blaze ?
The real way seemed made up of all the ways—
Mood after mood of the one mind in him ;
Tokens of the existence, bright or dim,
Of a transcendent all-embracing sense
Demanding only outward influence,
A soul, in Palma's phrase, above his soul,
Power to uplift his power,—this moon's control,
Over the sea-depths,—and their mass had swept
Onward from the beginning and still kept
Its course : but years and years the sky above
Held none, and so, untasked of any love,
His sensitiveness idled, now amort,
Alive now, and to sullenness or sport
Given wholly up, disposed itself anew
At every passing instigation, grew
And dwindled at caprice, in foam-showers spilt,
Wedge-like insisting, quivered now a gilt

Shield in the sunshine, now a blinding race
 Of whitest ripples o'er the reef—found place
 For much display; not gathered up and, hurled
 Right from its heart, encompassing the world.
 So had Sordello been, by consequence,
 Without a function: others made pretence
 To strength not half his own, yet had some core
 Within, submitted to some moon, before.
 Them still, superior still whate'er their force,—
 Were able therefore to fulfil a course,
 Nor missed life's crown, authentic attribute.
 To each who lives must be a certain fruit
 Of having lived in his degree,—a stage,
 Earlier or later in men's pilgrimage,
 To stop at; and to this the spirits tend
 Who, still discovering beauty without end,
 Amass the scintillations, make one star
 —Something unlike them, self-sustained, afar,—
 And meanwhile nurse the dream of being blest
 By winning it to notice and invest
 Their souls with alien glory, some one day
 Whene'er the nucleus, gathering shape away,
 Round to the perfect circle—soon or late,
 According as themselves are formed to wait;
 Whether mere human beauty, will suffice
 —The yellow hair and the luxurious eyes,
 Or human intellect seem best, or each
 Combine in some ideal form past reach
 On earth, or else some shade of these, some aim,

Some love, hate even, take their place, the same,
 And may be served—all this they do not lose,
 Waiting for death to live, nor idly choose
 What must be Hell—a progress thus pursued
 Through all existence, still above the food
 That's offered them, still towering beyond
 The widened range, in virtue of their bond
 Of sovereignty. Not that a Palma's Love,
 A Salinguerra's Hate, would equal prove
 To swaying all Sordello: wherefore doubt,
 That love meet for such strength, some moon without
 Would match his sea?—or fear, Good manifest,
 Only the Best breaks faith?—Ah but the Best
 Somehow eludes us ever, still might be
 And is not! crave we gems? no penury
 Of their material round us! pliant earth,
 The plastic flame—what balks the mage his birth
 —Jacinth in balls, or lodestone by the block?
 Flinders enrich the strand, and veins the rock—
 Nought more! Ask creatures? Life's i' the tempest,

Thought

Clothes the keen hill-top, mid-day woods are fraught
 With fervours: ah, these forms are well enough!
 But we had hoped, encouraged by the stuff
 Profuse at Nature's pleasure, men beyond
 These men! and thus, perchance, are over-fond
 In arguing, from Good the Best, from force
 Divided—force combined, an ocean's course
 From this our sea whose mere intestine pants

Might seem at times sufficient to our wants.
 —External Power? If none be adequate
 And he stand forth ordained (a prouder fate)
 A law to his own sphere?—need to remove
 All incompleteness, for that law, that love?
 Nay, if all other laws be such, though veiled
 In mercy to each vision that had failed
 If unassisted by its want,—for lure,
 Embodied? Stronger vision could endure
 The unbodied want: no bauble for a truth!
 The People were himself; and, by the ruth
 At their condition, was he less impelled
 To alter the discrepancy beheld,
 Than if, from the sound Whole, a sickly Part
 Subtracted were transformed, decked out with art,
 Then palmed on him as alien woe—the Guelf
 To succour, proud that he forsook himself?
 No! All 's himself; all service, therefore, rates
 Alike, nor serving one part, immolates
 The rest: but all in time! “That lance of yours
 Makes havoc soon with Malek and his Moors,
 That buckler's lined with many a giant's beard
 Ere long, O champion, be the lance upreared,
 The buckler wielded handsomely as now!
 But view your escort, bear in mind your vow,
 Count the pale tracts of sand to pass ere that,
 And, if you hope we struggle through the flat,
 Put lance and buckler by! Next half-month lacks
 Mere sturdy exercise of mace and axe

To cleave this dismal brake of prickly-pear
 Which bristling holds Cydippe by the hair,
 Lames barefoot Agathon: this felled, we'll try
 The picturesque achievements by and by—
 Next life!"

Ay, rally, mock, oh People, urge
 Your claims!—for thus he ventured, to the verge,
 Push a vain nummery which perchance distrust
 Of his fast-slipping resolution thrust
 Likewise: accordingly the Crowd—as yet
 He had unconsciously contrived forget
 I' the whole, to dwell o' the points . . . one might
 assuage

The signal horrors easier than engage
 With a dim vulgar vast unobvious grief
 Not to be fancied off, nor gained relief
 In brilliant fits, cured by a happy quirk,
 But by dim vulgar vast unobvious work
 To correspond . . . this Crowd then, forth they stood.
 "And now content thy stronger vision, brood
 On thy bare want; uncovered, turf by turf,
 Study the corpse-face thro' the taint-worms' scurf!"

Down sank the People's Then; uprose their Now.
 These sad ones render service to! And how
 Piteously little must that service prove
 —Had surely proved in any case! for, move
 Each other obstacle away, let youth
 Have been aware it had surprised a truth
 'T were service to impart—can truth be seized,

Settled forthwith, and, of the captive eased,
 Its captor find fresh prey, since this alit
 So happily, no gesture luring it,
 The earnest of a flock to follow? Vain,
 Most vain! a life's to spend ere this be chain,
 To the poor crowd's complacence; ere the crowd
 Pronounce it captured, he describes a cloud
 Its kin of twice the plume—which he, in turn,
 If he shall live as many lives, may learn
 How to secure—not else. Then Mantua called
 Back to his mind how certain bards were thrall'd
 —Buds blasted, but of breath more like perfume
 Than Naddo's staring nosegay's carrion bloom:
 Some insane rose that burnt heart out in sweets,
 A spendthrift in the spring, no summer greets—
 Some Dularete, drunk with truths and wine,
 Grown bestial, dreaming how become divine.
 "Yet to surmount this obstacle, commence
 With the commencement, merits crowning! Hence
 Must truth be casual truth, elicited
 In sparks so mean, at intervals dispread
 So rarely, that 't is like at no one time
 Of the world's story has not truth, the prime
 Of truth, the very truth which, loosed; had hurled
 The world's course right, been really in the world
 —Content the while with some mean spark by dint
 Of some chance-blow, the solitary hint
 Of buried fire, which, rip its breast, would stream
 Sky-ward!"

Sordello's miserable gleam
 Was looked for at the moment: he would dash
 This badge, and all it brought, to earth,—abash
 Taurello thus, perhaps persuade him wrest
 The Kaiser from his purpose,—would attest
 His own belief, in any case. Before
 He dashes it however, think once more!
 For, were that little, truly service? “Ay—
 I' the end, no doubt; but meantime? Plain you spy
 Its ultimate effect, but many flaws
 Of vision blur each intervening cause.
 Were the day's fraction clear as the life's sum
 Of service, Now as filled as the To-come
 With evidence of good—nor too minute
 A share to vie with evil! No dispute,
 'T were fittest maintain the Guelfs in rule:
 That makes your life's work: but you have to school
 Your day's work on these natures circumstanced
 Thus variously, which yet, as each advanced
 Or might impede the Guelf rule, must be moved
 Now, for the Then's sake,—hating what you loved,
 Loving old hatreds! nor if one man bore
 Brand upon temples while his fellow wore
 The aureole, would it task you to decide—
 But, portioned duly out, the Future vied
 Never with the unparcelled Present! Smite
 Or spare so much on warrant all so slight?
 The Present's complete sympathies to break,
 Aversions bear with, for a Future's sake

So feeble? Tito ruined through one speck,
 The Legate saved by his sole lightish fleck?
 This were work, true—but work performed at cost
 Of other work—aught gained here, elsewhere lost.
 For a new segment spoil an orb half-done?
 Rise with the People one step, and sink—one?
 Were it but one step—less than the whole face
 Of things, your novel duty bids erase!
 Harms to abolish! what? the prophet saith,
 The minstrel singeth vainly then? Old faith,
 Old courage, only born because of harms,
 Were not, from highest to the lowest, charms?
 Flame may persist but is not glare as staunch?
 Where the salt marshes stagnate, crystals branch—
 Blood dries to crimson—Evil's beautified
 In every shape. Thrust Beauty then aside
 And banish Evil! wherefore? After all,
 Is Evil a result less natural
 Than Good? For overlook the seasons' strife
 With tree and flower,—the hideous animal life,
 (Of which who seeks shall find a grinning taunt
 For his solution, and endure the vaunt
 Of nature's angel, as a child that knows
 Himself befooled, unable to propose
 Aught better than the fooling)—and but care
 For men, for the mere People then and there,—
 In these, could you but see that Good and Ill
 Claimed you alike! Whence rose their claim but still
 From Ill, as fruit of Ill—what else could knit

You theirs but Sorrow ? Any free from it
 Were also free from you ! Whosè happiness
 Could be distinguished in this morning's press
 Of miseries ?—the fool's who passed a gibe
 'On thee,' jeered he, 'so wedded to thy tribe,
 Thou carriest green and yellow tokens in
 Thy very face that thou art Ghibellin !'
 Much hold out you that fool obtained ! Nay mount
 Yet higher—and upon men's own account
 Must Evil stay : for, what is joy ?—to heave
 Up one obstruction more, and common leave
 What was peculiar—by such act destroy
 Itself ; a partial death is every joy ;
 The sensible escape, enfranchisement
 Of a sphere's essence : once the vexed—content,
 The cramped—at large, the growing circle—round,
 All's to begin again—some novel bound
 To break, some new enlargement to entreat ;
 The sphere though larger is not more complete.
 Now for Mankind's experience : who alone
 Might style the unobstructed world his own ?
 Whom palled Goito with its perfect things ?
 Sordello's self ! whereas for mankind springs
 Salvation by each hindrance interposed ;
 They climb, life's view is not at once disclosed
 To creatures caught up, on its summit left,
 Heaven plain above them, yet of wings bereft—
 But lower laid, as at the mountain's foot,
 While, range on range, the girdling forests shoot

'Twixt your plain prospect and the throngs who scale
 Height after height, and pierce mists, veil by veil,
 Heartened with each discovery ; in their soul,
 The Whole they seek by Parts—but, found that Whole,
 Could they revert, enjoy past gains ? The space
 Of time you judge so meagre to embrace
 The Parts were more than plenty, once attained
 The Whole, to quite exhaust it : nought were gained
 But leave to look—not leave to do : Beneath
 Soon sates the looker—look Above, and Death
 Tempts ere a tithe of Life be tasted. Live
 First, and die soon enough, Sordello ! Give
 Body and spirit the first right they claim,
 And pasture thee on a voluptuous shame
 That thou, a pageant-city's denizen,
 Art neither vilely lodged midst Lombard men—
 Canst force joy out of sorrow, seem to truck
 Thine attributes away for sordid muck,
 Yet manage from that very muck educe
 Gold ; then subject nor scruple, to thy cruce
 The world's discardings ! Though real ingots pay
 Thy pains, the clods that yielded them are clay
 To all save thee,—would clay remain, though quenched
 Thy purging-fire ; who's robbed then ? Had you
 wrenched

An ampler treasure forth !—As 't is, they crave
 A share that ruins you and will not save
 Them. Why should sympathy command you quit
 The course that makes your joy, nor will remit

Their woe? Would all arrive at joy? Reverse
 The order (time instructs you) nor coerce
 Each unit till, some predetermined mode,
 The total be emancipate; men's road
 Is one, men's times of travel many; thwart
 No enterprising soul's precocious start
 Before the general march! if slow or fast
 All straggle up to the same point at last,
 Why grudge your having gained, a month ago,
 The brakes at balm-shed, asphodels in blow,
 While they were landlocked? Speed their Then, but how
 This badge would suffer you improve your Now! " "

His time of action for, against, or with
 Our world (I labour to extract the pith
 Of this his problem) grew, that even-tide,
 Gigantic with its power of joy, beside
 The world's eternity of impotence
 To profit though at his whole joy's expense.
 "Make nothing of my day because so brief?
 Rather make more—instead of joy, use grief
 Before its novelty have time subside!
 Wait not for the late savour—leave untried
 Virtue, the creaming honey-wine, quick squeeze
 Vice like a biting spirit from the lees
 Of life!—together let wrath, hatred, lust,
 All tyrannies in every shape, be thrust
 Upon this Now, which time may reason out
 As mischiefs, far from benefits, no doubt—
 But long ere then Sordello will have slept

Away—you teach him at Goito's crypt,
 There's a blank issue to that fiery thrill!
 Stirring, the few cope with the many, still:
 So much of sand as, quiet, makes a mass
 Unable to produce three tufts of grass,
 Shall, troubled by the whirlwind, render void
 The whole calm glebe's endeavour: be employed!
 And e'en though somewhat smart the Crowd for this,
 Contribute each his pang to make your bliss,
 'Tis but one pang—one blood-drop to the bowl
 Which brimful tempts the sluggish asp uncowl
 At last, stains ruddily the dull red cape,
 And, kindling orbs grey as the unripe grape
 Before, avails forthwith to disentrance
 The portent—soon to lead a mystic dance
 Among you! For, who sits alone in Rome?
 Have those great hands indeed hewn out a home,
 And set me there to live? Oh life, life-breath,
 Life-blood,—ere sleep, come travail, life ere death!
 This life stream on my soul, direct, oblique,
 But always streaming! Hindrances? They pique—
 Helps? such . . . but why repeat, my soul o'ertops
 Each height, then every depth profoundlier drops?
 Enough that I can live, and would live! Wait
 For some transcendent life reserved by Fate
 To follow this? Oh, never! Fate, I trust
 The same, my soul to; for, as who flings dust,
 Perchance—so facile was the deed, she chequed
 The void with these materials to affect

My soul diversely—these consigned anew
 To nought by death, what marvel if she threw
 A second and superber spectacle
 Before it? What may serve for sun—what still
 Wander a moon above me—what else wind
 About me like the pleasures left behind,
 And how shall some new flesh that is not flesh
 Cling to me? what's new laughter—soothes the fresh
 Sleep like sleep? Fate's exhaustless for my sake
 In brave resource, but whether bids she slake
 My thirst at this first rivulet, or count
 No draught worth lip save from the rocky fount
 Above i' the clouds, while here she's provident
 Of pure loquacious pearl, the soft tree-tent
 Guards, with its face of reate and sedge, nor fail
 The silver globules and gold-sparkling grail.
 At bottom. Oh, 't were too absurd to slight
 For the hereafter the to-day's delight!
 Quench thirst at this, then seek next well-spring—wear
 Home-lilies ere strange lotus in my hair!
 Here is the Crowd, whom I with freest heart
 Offer to serve, contented for my part
 To give life up in service,—only grant
 That I do serve; if otherwise, why want
 Aught further of me? If men cannot choose
 But set aside life, why should I refuse
 The gift? I take it—I, for one, engage
 Never to falter through my pilgrimage—
 Nor end it howling that the stock or stone

Were enviable, truly : I, for one,
 Will praise the world, you style mere anteroom
 To the palace—be it so ! shall I assume
 —My foot the courtly gait, my tongue the trope,
 My mouth the smirk, before the doors fly ope
 One moment ? What—with guarders row on row,
 Gay swarms of varletry that come and go,
 Pages to dice with, waiting-girls unlaced
 The plackets of, pert claimants help displace,
 Heart-heavy suitors get a rank for,—laugh
 At yon sleek parasite, break his own staff
 'Cross Beetle-brows the Usher's shoulder,—why,
 Admitted to the presence by and by,
 Should thought of having lost these make me grieve
 Among new joys I reach, for joys I leave ?
 —Cool citrine-crystals, fierce pyropus-stone,
 Are floor-work here !—But did I let alone
 That black-eyed peasant in the vestibule
 Once and for ever ?—Floor-work ? No such fool !
 Rather, were heaven to forestal earth, I 'd say
 I, is it, must be blessed ? Then, my own way . . .
 Bless me ! give firmer arm and fleeter foot,
 I 'll thank you : but to no mad wings transmute
 These limbs of mine—our greensward was so soft !
 Nor camp I on the thunder-cloud aloft :
 We feel the bliss distinctlier, having thus
 Engines subservient, not mixed up with us.
 Better move palpably through heaven—nor, freed
 Of flesh, forsooth, from space to space proceed

'Mid flying synods of worlds ! No : in heaven's marge
 Show Titan still, recumbent o'er his targe
 Solid with stars—the Centaur at his game,
 Made tremulously out in hoary flame !

Life ! Yet the very cup whose extreme dull
 Dregs, even, I would quaff, was dashed, at full,
 Aside so oft ; the death I fly, revealed
 So oft a better life this life concealed,
 And which sage, champion, martyr, through each path
 Have hunted fearlessly—the horrid bath,
 The crippling-irons and the fiery chair.

—'T was well for them ; let me become aware
 As they, and I relinquish life, too ! Let
 What masters life disclose itself ! Forget
 Vain ordinances, I have one appeal—
 I feel, am what I feel, know what I feel
 —So much is truth to me. What Is, then ? Since
 One object, viewed diversely, may evince
 Beauty and ugliness—this way attract,
 That way repel, why gloze upon the fact ?
 Why must a single of the sides be right ?
 What bids choose this and leave the opposite ?
 Where's abstract Right for me ?—in youth endued
 With Right still present, still to be pursued,
 Thro' all the interchange of circles, rife
 Each with its proper law and mode of life,
 Each to be dwelt at ease in : where, to sway
 Absolute with the Kaiser, or obey
 Implicit with his serf of fluttering heart,

450 BECAUSE THERE IS A LIFE BEYOND LIFE,

Or, like a sudden thought of God's, to start
Up, Brutus in the presence, then go shout
That some should pick the unstrung jewels out—
Each, well!”

And, as in moments when the Past
Gave partially enfranchisement, he cast
Himself quite through mere secondary states
Of his soul's essence, little loves and hates,
Into the mid deep yearnings overlaid
By these; as who should pierce hill, plain, grove,
glade,
And on into the very nucleus probe
That first determined there exist a globe.
As that were easiest, half the globe dissolved,
So seemed Sordello's closing-truth evolved
By his flesh-half's break up—the sudden swell
Of his expanding soul showed Ill and Well,
Sorrow and Joy, Beauty and Ugliness,
Virtue and Vice, the Larger and the Less,
All qualities, in fine, recorded here,
Might be but modes of Time and this one sphere,
Urgent on these, but not of force to bind
Eternity; as Time—as Matter—Mind,
If Mind, Eternity, should choose assert
Their attributes within a Life: thus girt
With circumstance, next change beholds them cinct
Quite otherwise—with Good and Ill distinct,
Joys, sorrows, tending to a like result—
Contrived to render easy, difficult,

This or the other course of . . . what new bond
 In place of flesh may stop their flight beyond
 Its new sphere, as that course does harm or good
 To its arrangements. Once this understood,
 As suddenly he felt himself alone,
 Quite out of Time and this world: all was known.
 What made the secret of his past despair?
 —Most imminent when he seemed most aware
 Of his own self-sufficiency; made mad
 By craving to expand the power he had,
 And not new power to be expanded?—just
 This made it; Soul on Matter being thrust,
 Joy comes when so much Soul is wrecked in Time
 On Matter,—let the Soul's attempt sublime
 Matter beyond the scheme and so prevent
 By more or less that deed's accomplishment,
 And Sorrow follows: Sorrow how avoid?
 Let the employer match the thing employed,
 Fit to the finite his infinity,
 And thus proceed for ever, in degree
 Changed but in kind the same, still limited
 To the appointed circumstance and dead
 To all beyond. A sphere is but a sphere—
 Small, Great, are merely terms we bandy here—
 Since to the spirit's absoluteness all
 Are like: now, of the present sphere we call
 Life, are conditions—take but this among:
 Many; the body was to be so long
 Youthful, no longer—but, since no control

Tied to that body's purposes his soul,
 She chose to understand the body's trade
 More than the body's self—had fain conveyed
 Her boundless, to the body's bounded lot :
 Hence, the soul permanent, the body not,—
 Scarce the one minute for enjoying here,
 The soul must needs instruct her weak compeer,
 Run o'er its capabilities and wring
 A joy thence, she held worth experiencing—
 Which, far from half discovered even,—lo,
 The minute gone, the body's power let go
 That's portioned to that joy's acquirement ! Broke
 Morning o'er earth, he yearned for all it woke—
 From the volcano's vapour-flag, winds hoist
 Black o'er the spread of sea,—down to the moist
 Dale's silken barley-spikes sullied with rain,
 Swayed earthwards, heavily to rise again—
 (The Small, a sphere as perfect as the Great
 To the soul's absoluteness)—meditate
 'Too long on such a morning's cluster-chord
 And the whole music it was framed afford,—
 The chord's might half discovered, what should pluck
 One string, his finger, was found palsy-struck.
 And then no marvel if the spirit, shown
 A saddest sight—the body lost alone
 Through her officious proffered help, deprived
 Of this and that enjoyment Fate contrived,
 Virtue, Good, Beauty, each allowed slip hence,—
 Vain-gloriously were fain, for recompense,

To stem the ruin even yet, protract
 The body's term, supply the power it lacked
 From her infinity, compel it learn
 These qualities were only Time's concern,
 And body may, with spirit helping, barred—
 Advance the same, vanquished—obtain reward,
 Reap joy where sorrow was intended grow,
 Of Wrong make Right, and turn Ill Good below.
 And the result is, the poor body soon
 Sinks under what was meant a wondrous boon,
 Leaving its bright accomplice all aghast.

So much was plain then, proper in the Past ;
 To be complete for, satisfy the whole
 Series of spheres—Eternity, his soul
 Exceeded, so was incomplete for, each
 Single sphere—Time. But does our knowledge reach
 No farther? Is the cloud of hindrance broke
 But by the failing of the fleshly yoke,
 Its loves and hates, as now when death lets soar
 Sordello, self-sufficient as before,
 Though during the mere space that shall elapse
 'Twixt his enthrallment in new bonds, perhaps?
 Must life be ever just escaped, which should
 Have been enjoyed?—nay, might have been and would,
 Each purpose ordered right—the soul's no whit
 Beyond the body's purpose under it—
 Like yonder breadth of watery heaven, a bay,
 And that sky-space of water, ray for ray
 And star for star, one richness where they mixed

As this and that wing of an angel, fixed,
 Tumultuary splendours folded in
 To die—would soul, proportioned thus, begin
 Exciting discontent, or surelier quell
 The body if, aspiring, it rebel?
 But how so order life? Still brutalize
 The soul, the sad world's way, with muffled eyes
 To all that was before, all that shall be,
 After this sphere—and every quality
 Save some sole and immutable Great and Good
 And Beauteous whither fate has loosed its hood
 To follow? Never may some soul see All
 —The Great Before and After, and the Small
 Now, yet be saved by this the simplest lore,
 And take the single course prescribed before,
 As the king-bird with ages on his plumes
 Travels to die in his ancestral glooms?
 But where descry the Love that shall select
 That course? Here is a soul whom, to affect,
 Nature has plied with all her means—from trees
 And flowers—e'en to the Multitude!—and these,
 Decides he save or no? One word to end!"

Ah my Sordello, I this once befriend
 And speak for you. Of a Power above you still
 Which, utterly incomprehensible,
 Is out of rivalry, which thus you can
 Love, tho' unloving all conceived by man—
 What need! And of—none the minutest duct
 To that out-nature, nought that would instruct

And so let rivalry begin to live—
 But of a Power its representative
 Who, being for authority the same,
 Communication different, should claim
 A course, the first chose and this last revealed—
 This Human clear, as that Divine concealed—
 What utter need!

What has Sordello found?

Or can his spirit go the mighty round,
 End where poor Eglamor begun? as, says
 Old fable, the two eagles went two ways
 About the world: where, in the midst, they met,
 Though on a shifting waste of sand, men set
 Jove's temple. Quick, what has Sordello found?
 For they approach—approach—that foot's rebound . .
 Palma? No, Salinguerra though in mail;
 They mount, have reached the threshold, dash the veil
 Aside—and you divine who sat there dead,
 Under his foot the badge: still, Palma said,
 A triumph lingering in the wide eyes,
 Wider than some spent swimmer's if he spies
 Help from above in his extreme despair,
 And, head far back on shoulder thrust, turns there
 With short, quick, passionate cry: as Palma prest
 In one great kiss her lips upon his breast
 It beat. By this, the hermit-bee has stopped
 His day's toil at Goito: the new-cropped
 Dead vine-leaf answers, now 't is eve, he bit,
 Twirled so, and filed all day: the mansion's fit,

God counselled for. As easy guess the word
 That passed betwixt them and become the third
 To the soft small unfrighted bee, as tax
 Him with one fault—so, no remembrance racks
 Of the stone maidens and the font of stone
 He, creeping through the crevice, leaves alone.
 Alas, my friend—alas Sordello, whom
 Anon they laid within that old font-tomb—
 And, yet again, alas !

And now is 't worth

Our while bring back to mind, much less set forth
 How Salinguerra extricates himself
 Without Sordello? Ghibellin and Guelf
 May fight their fiercest out? If Richard sulked
 In durance or the Marquis paid his mulct,
 Who cares, Sordello gone? The upshot, sure,
 Was peace; our chief made some frank overture
 That prospered; compliment fell thick and fast
 On its disposer, and Taurello passed
 With foe and friend for an outstripping soul,
 Nine days at least. Then,—fairly reached the goal,—
 He, by one effort, blotted the great hope
 Out of his mind, nor further tried to cope
 With Este, that mad evening's style, but sent
 Away the Legate and the League, content
 No blame at least the brothers had incurred,
 —Despatched a message to the Monk, he heard
 Patiently first to last, scarce shivered at,
 Then curled his limbs up on his wolfskin mat

And ne'er spoke more,—informed the Ferrarese
 He but retained their rule so long as these
 Lingered in pupilage,—and last, no mode
 Apparent else of keeping safe the road
 From Germany direct to Lombardy
 For Friedrich,—none, that is, to guarantee
 The faith and promptitude of who should next
 Obtain Sofia's dowry,—sore perplexed—
 (Sofia being youngest of the tribe
 Of daughters, Ecelin was wont to bribe
 The envious magnates with—nor, since he sent
 Henry of Egna this fair child, had Trent
 Once failed the Kaiser's purposes—"we lost
 Egna last year, and who takes Egna's post—
 Opens the Lombard gate if Friedrich knock?")
 Himself espoused the Lady of the Rock
 In pure necessity, and so destroyed
 His slender last of chances, quite made void
 Old prophecy, and spite of all the schemes
 Overt and covert, youth's deeds, age's dreams,
 Was sucked into Romano. And so hushed
 He up this evening's work that, when 't was brushed
 Somehow against by a blind chronicle
 Which, chronicling whatever woe befell
 Ferrara, noted this the obscure woe
 Of "Salinguerra's sole son Giacomo
 Deceased, fatuous and doting, ere his sire,"
 The townsfolk rubbed their eyes, could but admire
 Which of Sofia's five was meant.

The chaps

Of earth's dead hope were tardy to collapse,
 Obliterated not the beautiful
 Distinctive features at a crash—but dull
 And duller, next year, as Guelf chiefs withdrew
 Each to his stronghold. Then (securely too
 Ecelin at Campese slept—close by,
 Who likes may see him in Solagna lie
 With cushioned head and gloved hand to denote
 The cavalier he was)—then his heart smote
 Young Ecelin at last!—long since adult,
 And, save Vicenza's business, what result
 In blood and blaze? ('t was hard to intercept
 Sordello till his plain withdrawal.) Stept,
 Then, its new lord on Lombardy. I' the nick
 Of time when Ecelin and Alberic
 Closed with Taurello, come precisely news
 That in Verona half the souls refuse
 Allegiance to the Marquis and the Count—
 Have cast them from a throne they bid him mount,
 Their Podestà, thro' his ancestral worth.
 Ecelin flew there, and the town henceforth
 Was wholly his—Taurello sinking back
 From temporary station to a track
 That suited. News received of this acquist,
 Friedrich did come to Lombardy: who missed
 Taurello then? Another year: they took
 Vicenza, left the Marquis scarce a nook
 For refuge, and, when hundreds two or three

Of Guelfs conspired to call themselves "the Free,"
 Opposing Alberic,—vile Bassanese,—
 (Without Sordello!)—Ecelin at ease
 Slaughtered them so observably, that oft
 A little Salinguerra looked with soft
 Blue eyes up, asked his sire the proper age
 To get appointed his proud uncle's page.
 More years passed, and that sire had dwindled down
 To a mere showy turbulent soldier, grown
 Better through age, his parts still in repute,
 Subtle—how else?—but hardly so astute
 As his contemporaneous friends professed;
 Undoubtedly a brawler: for the rest,
 Known by each neighbour, and allowed for, let
 Keep his incorrigible ways, nor fret
 Men who had missed their boyhood's bugbear—"trap
 The ostrich, suffer our bald osprey flap
 A battered pinion"—was the word. In fine,
 One flap too much and Venice's marine
 Was meddled with; no overlooking that!
 She captured him in his Ferrara, fat
 And florid at a banquet, more by fraud
 Than force, to speak the truth; there's slender laud
 Ascribed you for assisting eighty years
 To pull his death on such a man—fate shears
 The life-cord prompt enough whose last fine threads
 You fritter: so, presiding his board-head,
 The old smile, your assurance all went well
 With Friedrich (as if he were like to tell!)

In rushed (a plan contrived before) our friends,
 Made some pretence at fighting, some amends
 For the shame done his eighty years—(apart
 The principle, none found it in his heart
 To be much angry with Taurello)—gained
 Their galleys with the prize, and what remained
 But carry him to Venice for a show?
 —Set him, as 't were, down gently—free to go
 His gait, inspect our square, pretend observe
 The swallows soaring their eternal curve
 'Twixt Theodore and Mark, if citizens
 Gathered importunately, fives and tens,
 To point their children the Magnifico,
 All but a monarch once in firm-land, go
 His gait among them now—"it took, indeed,
 Fully this Ecelin to supersede
 That man," remarked the seniors. Singular!
 Sordello's inability to bar
 Rivals the stage, that evening, mainly brought
 About by his strange disbelief that aught
 Was ever to be done,—this thrust the Twain
 Under Taurello's tutelage,—whom, brain
 And heart and hand, he forthwith in one rod
 Indissolubly bound to baffle God
 Who loves the world—and thus allowed the thin
 Grey wizened dwarfish devil Ecelin,
 And massy-muscled big-boned Alberic
 (Mere man, alas!) to put his problem quick
 To demonstration—prove wherever's will

To do, there's plenty to be done, or ill
 Or good. Anointed, then, to rend and rip—
 Kings of the gag and flesh-hook, screw and whip,
 They plagued the world: a touch of Hildebrand
 (So far from obsolete!) made Lombards band
 Together, cross their coats as for Christ's cause,
 And saving Milan win the world's applause.
 Ecelin perished: and I think grass grew
 Never so pleasant as in Valley Rù
 By San Zenon where Alberic in turn
 Saw his exasperated captors burn
 Seven children and their mother; then, regaled
 So far, tied on to a wild horse, was trailed
 To death through rounce and bramble-bush. I take
 God's part and testify that mid the brake
 Wild o'er his castle on the pleasant knoll,
 You hear its one tower left, a belfry, toll—
 The earthquake spared it last year, laying flat
 The modern church beneath,—no harm in that!
 Cherups the contumacious grasshopper,
 Rustles the lizard and the cushats chirre
 Above the ravage: there, at deep of day
 A week since, heard I the old Canon say
 He saw with his own eyes a barrow burst
 And Alberic's huge skeleton unheard
 Only five years ago. He added, "June's
 The month for carding off our first cocoons
 The silkworms fabricate"—a double news,
 Nor he nor I could tell the worthier. Choose!

And Naddo gone, all's gone; not Eglamor!
 Believe, I knew the face I waited for,
 A guest my spirit of the golden courts!
 Oh strange to see how, despite ill-reports,
 Disuse, some wear of years, that face retained
 Its joyous look of love! Suns waxed and waned,
 And still my spirit held an upward flight,
 Spiral on spiral, gyres of life and light
 More and more gorgeous—ever that face there
 The last admitted! crossed, too, with some care
 As perfect triumph were not sure for all,
 But, on a few, enduring damp must fall,
 —A transient struggle, haply a painful sense
 Of the inferior nature's clinging—whence
 Slight starting tears easily wiped away,
 Fine jealousies soon stifled in the play
 Of irrepressible admiration—not
 Aspiring, all considered, to their lot
 Who ever, just as they prepare ascend
 Spiral on spiral, wish thee well, impend
 Thy frank delight at their exclusive track,
 That upturned fervid face and hair put back!

Is there no more to say? He of the rhymes—
 Many a tale, of this retreat betimes,
 Was born: Sordello die at once for men?
 The Chroniclers of Mantua tired their pen
 Telling how *Sordello Prince Visconti* saved
 Mantua, and elsewhere notably behaved—
 Who thus, by fortune's ordering events,

Passed with posterity, to all intents,
 For just the god he never could become.
 As Knight, Bard, Gallant, men were never dumb
 In praise of him: while what he should have been,
 Could be, and was not—the one step too mean
 For him to take,—we suffer at this day
 Because of: Ecelin had pushed away
 Its chance ere Dante could arrive and take
 That step Sordello spurned, for the world's sake:
 He did much—but Sordello's chance was gone.
 Thus, had Sordello dared that step alone,
 Apollo had been compassed—'t was a fit
 He wished should go to him, not he to it
 —As one content to merely be supposed
 Singing or fighting elsewhere, while he dozed
 Really at home—one who was chiefly glad
 To have achieved the few real deeds he had,
 Because that way assured they were not worth
 Doing, so spared from doing them henceforth—
 A tree that covets fruitage and yet tastes
 Never itself, itself: had he embraced
 Their cause then, men had plucked Hesperian fruit
 And, praising that, just thrown him in to boot
 All he was anxious to appear, but scarce
 Solicitous to be. A sorry farce
 Such life is, after all I cannot I say
 He lived for some one better thing? this way.—
 Lo, on a heathy brown and nameless hill
 By sparkling Asolo, in mist and chill,

Morning just up, higher and higher runs
 A child barefoot and rosy. See! the sun's
 On the square castle's inner-court's low wall
 Like the chine of some extinct animal
 Half turned to earth and flowers; and through the
 haze

(Save where some slender patches of grey maize
 Are to be overleaped) that boy has cross'd
 The whole hill-side of dew and powder-frost
 Matting the balm and mountain camomile.
 Up and up goes he, singing all the while
 Some unintelligible words to beat
 The lark, God's poet; swooning at his feet,
 So worsted is he at "the few fine locks
 Stained like pale honey oozed from topmost rocks
 Sunblanched the livelong summer,"—all that's left
 Of the Goito lay! And thus bereft,
 Sleep and forget, Sordello! In effect
 He sleeps, the feverish poet—I suspect
 Not utterly companionless; but, friend,
 Wake up; the ghost's gone, and the story ends
 I'd fain hope, sweetly—seeing, peri or ghoul,
 That spirits are conjectured fair or foul,
 Evil or good, judicious authors think,
 According as they vanish in a stink
 Or in a perfume. Friends, be frank! ye snuff
 Civet, I warrant. Really? Like enough!
 Merely the savour's rareness; any nose
 May ravage with impunity a rose:

Rifle a musk-pod and 't will ache like yours!
I'd tell you that same pungency ensures
An after-gust—but that were overbold.
Who would has heard Sordello's story told.

THE END.



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