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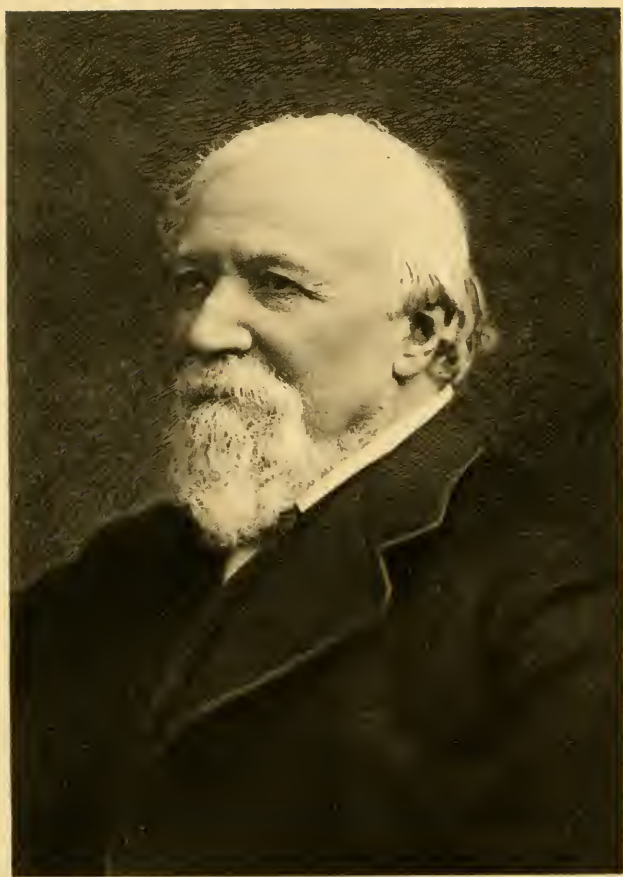
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THE RING AND THE BOOK

BY

ROBERT BROWNING
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From the Author's Revised Text

EDITED WITH BIOGRAPHICAL AND CRITICAL NOTES
AND INTRODUCTION

BY

CHARLOTTE PORTER AND HELEN A. CLARKE
EDITORS OF "POET-LORE"



49943-271

NEW YORK: 46 EAST 14TH STREET

THOMAS Y. CROWELL & COMPANY

BOSTON: 100 PURCHASE STREET

PK 4-19
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1897

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Norwood Press
J. S. Cushing & Co. Berwick & Smith
Norwood Mass. U.S.A.

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BIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION.



"A peep through my window, if folk prefer;
But, please you, no foot over threshold of mine." — 'HOUSE.'

WHEN some depreciator of the familiar declared that "Only in Italy is there any romance left," Browning replied, "Ah! well, I should like to include poor old Camberwell," and "poor old Camberwell," where Robert Browning was born, May 7, 1812, offered no meagre nurture for the fancy of a child gifted with the ardor that greatens and glorifies the real.

Nature still garlanded this suburban part of London with bowery spaces breathing peace. The view of the region from Herne Hill over softly wreathing distances of domestic wood "was, before railroads came, entirely lovely," Ruskin says. He writes of "the tops of twenty square miles of politely inhabited groves," of bloom of lilac and laburnum and of almond-blossoms, intermingling suggestions of the wealth of fruit-trees in enclosed gardens, and companioning all this with the furze, birch, oak, and bramble of the Norwood hills, and the open fields of Dulwich "animate with cow and buttercup."

Nature was ready to beckon the young poet to dreams and solitude, and, too close to need to vie with her, the great city was at hand to make her power intimately felt. From a height crowned by three large elms, Browning, as a lad, used to enjoy the picturesqueness of his "poor old Camberwell." Its heart of romance was centred for him in the sight of the vast city lying to the westward. His memory singled out one such visit as peculiarly significant, the first one on which he beheld teeming London by night, and heard the vague confusion of her collective voice beneath the silence of the stars.

Within the home into which he was born, equally well-poised conditions befriended him, fostering the development of his emotional and intellectual nature. His mother was once described by Carlyle as "the true type of a Scottish gentlewoman." Browning himself used to say of

her "with tremulous emotion," according to his friend, Mrs. Orr, "she was a divine woman." Her gentle, deeply religious nature evidently derived its evangelical tendency from her mother, also Scotch; while from her father, William Wiedemann, ship-owner, a Hamburg German, settled in Dundee, who was an accomplished draughtsman and musician, she seems to have derived the liking and facility for music which was one of the characteristic bents of the poet. To this Scotch-German descent on his mother's side the metaphysical quality of his mind is accountable, concerning which Harriet Martineau is recorded as having said to him, "You have no need to study German thought, your mind is German enough already." The peculiarly tender affection his mother called out in him seems to have been at once proof and enhancement of the mystical, emotional, and impressible side of his disposition; and these traits were founded on an organic inheritance from her of "what he called a nervousness of nature," which his father could not have bequeathed to him.

Exuberant vitality, insatiable intellectual curiosity and capacity, the characteristics of Robert Browning the elder, were the heritage of his son, but raised in him to a more effective power, through their transmutation, perhaps, as Mrs. Orr suggests, in the more sensitive physique and temperament inherited from his mother. Of his father, Browning wrote that his "Powers, natural and acquired, would easily have made him a notable man, had he known what vanity or ambition or the love of money or social influence meant." He had refused to stay on his mother's sugar plantation at St. Kitt's in the West Indies, losing the fortune to be achieved there, because of his detestation of slavery, and the office he filled in the Bank of England was never close enough to his liking to induce him to rise in it so far as his father had risen; but it enabled him to indulge his tastes for many books and a few pictures and to secure for his son, as that son said shortly before his death, "all the ease and comfort that a literary man needs to do good work."

One of the poet's own early recollections gives a picture that epitomizes the joint influence of his happy parentage. It depicts the child "sitting on his father's knees in the library, listening with enthralled attention to the tale of Troy, with marvellous illustrations among the glowing coals in the fireplace; with, below all, the vaguely heard accompaniment — from the neighboring room where Mrs. Browning sat 'in her chief happiness, her hour of darkness and solitude and music' — of a wild Gaelic lament."

His father's brain was itself a library, stored with literary antiquities, which, his son used to say, made him seem to have known Paracelsus, Faustus, and even Talmudic personages personally, and his heart was

so young and buoyant that his lore, instead of isolating him from his boy and girl, made him their most entertaining companion.

It is not surprising that under such circumstances the ordinary schooling was too puerile for young Robert's wide-awake wits. He was so energetic in mind and body that he was sent to a day-school near by for peace' sake at an early age, and sent back again, for peace' sake, too, because his proficiency made the mammas complain that Mrs. — was neglecting her other pupils for the sake of bringing on Master Browning Home teaching followed. Also home amusement, which included the keeping of a variety of pets, — owls, monkeys, magpies, hedgehogs, an eagle, a toad, and two snakes. If any further proof is needed of the hospitable warmth of his youthful heart, an entry in his diary at the age of seven or eight may serve — "married two wives this morning." This referred, of course, to an imaginary appropriation of two girls he had just seen in church.

Later he entered the school of the Misses Ready and passed thence to their brother's school, staying there till he was fourteen, but his contempt for the petty and formal learning which is the best accorded many children, was marked, and perfectly natural to a boy who delighted to plunge in the deeper knowledge his father's book-crammed house opened generously to him.

In the list, given by Mrs. Orr, of books early attractive to him, were a seventeenth edition of Quarles's 'Emblems'; first editions of 'Robinson Crusoe,' and Milton; the original pamphlet, 'Killing no Murder' (1559) which Carlyle borrowed for his 'Cromwell'; an early edition of the 'Bees' by the Bernard Mandeville, with whom he was destined later to hold a 'Parleying' of his own; rare old Bibles; Voltaire; a wide range of English poetry; the Greek and Elizabethan dramatists.

His father's profound love of poetry was essentially classic, and his marked aptitude in rhyming followed the models of Pope, but Browning's early poet was Byron, and all his sympathies were warmly romantic. His verse-making, which began before he could write, resulted at twelve in a volume of short poems, presumably Byronic, which he gracefully entitled 'Incondita.'

He wanted, in vain, to find a publisher for this, and soon afterwards destroyed it, but not before his mother had shown it to Miss Flower, and she, to her sister, Sarah Flower, and to Mr. Fox, and the budding poet had thus gained the attention of three genuine friends.

Shortly after this, the Byronic star which had shed its somewhat lurid influence over the first ebullitions of his genius, was forever banished by the appearance of a new star within his field of vision. Incredible as it may seem to the present generation, he had never heard

of Shelley, and if it had not been for a happy chance, an important influence in the early shaping of his poetic faculties might have been postponed until too late to furnish its quickening impulse.

One day in passing a book-stall, he happened to see advertised in a box of second-hand wares a little book, 'Mr. Shelley's Atheistical Poems:' very scarce. Though the little second-hand volume was only a miserable pirated edition, by its means such entrancing glimpses of an unsuspected world were revealed to the boy that he longed to possess more of Shelley. His mother, accordingly, sallied forth in search of Shelley's poems, which, after many tribulations, she at length found at C. and J. Ollier's of Vere Street. She brought away not only nearly all of Shelley in first editions (the 'Cenci' excepted), but three volumes of Keats, whom she was assured would interest anybody who liked Shelley. Browning, himself, used to recall how, at the end of this eventful day, two nightingales, one in the laburnum at the end of his father's garden, and one in a copper beech in the next garden, sang in emulation of the poets whose music had laid its subtle spell upon him. While Keats was duly appreciated, it was Shelley who appealed most to Browning, and although it was some years before any poetic manifestation of Shelley's influence was to work itself out, he, with youthful ardor, at once adopted the crude attitude taken by Shelley in his immature work 'Queen Mab,' became a professing atheist, and even went so far as to practise vegetarianism, of which, however, he was soon cured because of its unpleasant effect on his eyesight. Of his atheism Mrs. Orr says, "His mind was not so constituted that such doubt fastened itself upon it; nor did he ever in after life speak of this period of negation except as an access of boyish folly, with which his mature self could have no concern. The return to religious belief did not shake his faith in his new prophet. It only made him willing to admit that he had misread him. This period of Browning's life remained, nevertheless, one of rebellion and unrest, to which many circumstances may have contributed besides the influence of one mind."

With the exception of the poetic awakening just recorded, Browning's youthful life is uneventful.

By his father's decision his education was continued at home with instruction in dancing, riding, boxing, fencing; in French with a tutor for two years; and in music with John Relfe for theory, and a Mr. Abel, pupil of Moscheles, for execution, doubtless supplemented with continuous browsing among the rare books in his father's library. At eighteen he attended a Greek class at the London University for a term or two and with this his formal education ceased. It was while at the university that his final choice of poetry as his future profession was made.

That he had a bent in other artistic directions as well as that of poetry is witnessed by his own confession written on the fly-leaf of a first edition of 'Pauline' now treasured in the South Kensington Museum. "'Pauline' written in pursuance of a foolish plan I forget, or have no wish to remember; involving the assumption of several distinct characters: the world was never to guess that such an opera, such a comedy, such a speech proceeded from the same notable person."

Some idea had been entertained of the possibility of Robert's qualifying himself for the bar, but Mr. Browning was entirely too much in sympathy with his son's interests to put any obstacles in the way of his choice, and did everything in his power to help him in establishing himself in his poetical career. When the decision was made, Browning's first step was to read and digest the whole of Johnson's Dictionary.

During these years of preparation his consciousness of his own latent powers, together with youthful immaturity, made him, from all accounts, a somewhat obstreperous personage. Mrs. Orr says that his mother was much distressed at his impatience and aggressiveness. "He set the judgments of those about him at defiance, and gratuitously proclaimed himself everything that he was and some things that he was not." It is probable, as his sister suggests, that the life of Camberwell, in spite of the dear home to which he was much attached, and a small coterie of congenial friends, including his cousins, the Silverthornes, and Alfred Domett, did not afford sufficient scope for the expansion of his eager intelligence.

In 1833 appeared the first flowering of his genius in 'Pauline,' for the publication of which his aunt, Mrs. Silverthorne, furnished the money. It was printed with no name affixed, by Saunders and Otley.

The influence of Shelley breathes through this poem: not only is it immanent in the music of the verse, but in its general atmosphere, while one of its finest climaxes is the apostrophe to Shelley beginning, "Sun-treader, life and light be thine forever!" These influences, however, are commingled with elements of striking originality indicating, in spite of some crudities of construction, that here was a new force in the poetic world. Not many recognized it at the time. Among those who did was his former friend, Mr. Fox, then editor of the *Monthly Repository*, who gave 'Pauline' a sympathetic review in his magazine. Later, another article praising it was printed in the same magazine. This and one or two other inadequate notices ended its early literary history, and thus was unassumingly planted the first seed of one of the most splendid poetical growths the world has seen. How completely 'Pauline' was forgotten is shown by the anecdote told of Rossetti's coming across it in the British Museum twenty years later, and guess-

ing from internal evidence that it was by the author of 'Paracelsus.' Delighted with it, he transcribed it. If he had not, it might have remained buried there to this day, for Browning was very loath to acknowledge this early child of his genius.

A journey to Russia at the invitation of the Russian consul-general, Mr. Benckhausen, with whom he went as nominal secretary, and the contribution to the *Monthly Repository* of five short poems fills up the time until the appearance of 'Paracelsus.' Most remarkable among these short poems were 'Porphyria's Lover' and 'Johannes Agricola in Meditation,' of which Mr. Gosse says, "It is a curious matter for reflection that two poems so unique in their construction and conception, so modern, so interesting, so new could be printed without attracting attention so far as it would appear from any living creature."

Paracelsus was suggested as a subject to Browning by Count de Ripert Monclar, a young French Royalist, who, while spending his summers in England, formed a friendship with the poet. The absence of love in the story seemed to him afterwards a drawback, but Browning, having read up the literature of Paracelsus at the British Museum, decided to follow his friend's suggestion and according to promise dedicated the poem to Count Monclar.

In the days when he was writing 'Paracelsus' Browning was fond of drawing inspiration from midnight rambles in the Dulwich woods, and he used often to compose in the open air. Here we may perhaps find an explanation of the fact that in these earlier poems there is a constant interfusion of nature imagery which, later, when the poet "fared up and down amid men," gave place to the human emotions upon which his thoughts became concentrated, or appeared only at rare intervals.

Mr. Fox, always ready to praise the young poet whom he had been the first to recognize, was upon the publication of 'Paracelsus' seconded by John Forster, who wrote an appreciative article about it in the *Examiner*.

If 'Paracelsus' did not win popularity, it gained the poet many friends among the literary men of the day. From this period dates the acquaintanceship of notabilities like Serjeant Talfourd, Horne, Leigh Hunt, Barry Cornwall, Harriet Martineau, Miss Mitford, Monckton Milnes, Dickens, Wordsworth, Landor, and others. The most important in its consequences of his new friendships was that begun with the celebrated actor William Macready, to whom he was introduced by Mr. Fox. Macready, delighted with Browning, shortly after asked him to a New Year's party at his house at Elstree.

Every one who met the poet seemed attracted by his personality. Macready said he looked more like a youthful poet than any man he

had ever seen. Mr. Sharpe's description of him from hearsay is more definite. As a young man he appears to have had a certain ivory delicacy of coloring. He appeared taller than he was, partly because of his rare grace of movement and partly from a characteristic high poise of the head when listening intently to music or conversation. Even then he had the expressive wave of the hand which in later years was as full of various meanings as the *Ecco* of an Italian.

A swift alertness pervaded him noticeably as much in the rapid change of expression, in the deepening and illuming colors of his singularly expressive eyes, and in his sensitive mouth as in his greyhound-like apprehension, which so often grasped the subject in its entirety before its propounder himself realized its significance. His hair—then of a brown so dark as to appear black—was so beautiful in its heavy, sculpturesque waves as frequently to attract attention. His voice then had a rare flute-like tone, clear, sweet, and resonant.

The influence of Macready turned the poet's thoughts toward writing for the stage. A drama, 'Narses,' was discussed, but for some reason abandoned, and the subject of *Strafford* was decided upon in its place.

The occasion upon which the decision was made gives an attractive glimpse of the young Browning receiving his first social honor. It was at a dinner at Talfourd's after the performance of 'Ion,' in which Macready acted. Mr. Sharpe says:—

"To his surprise and gratification, Browning found himself placed next but one to his host and immediately opposite Macready, who sat between two gentlemen, one calm as a summer evening, the other with a tempestuous youth dominating his sixty years, whom the young poet at once recognized as Wordsworth and Walter Savage Landor. When Talfourd rose to propose the toast of 'The Poets of England,' every one probably expected that Wordsworth would be named to respond; but with a kindly grace, the host, after flattering remarks upon the two great men then honoring him by sitting at his table, coupled his toast with the name of the youngest of the poets of England, Mr. Robert Browning, the author of 'Paracelsus.' According to Miss Mitford, he responded with grace and modesty, looking even younger than he was."

The conversation turning upon the drama, Macready said, "Write a play, Browning, and keep me from going to America." The reply came, "Shall it be historical and English? What do you say to a drama on *Strafford*?"

'Sordello' had already been begun, but 'Strafford' and a journey to Italy were to intervene before it was finished. 'Strafford' was performed at Covent Garden, May 1, 1837, with Macready as *Strafford* and Helen Faucit as *Lady Carlisle*, was well received, and would probably

have had a long run had it not been for difficulties which arose in the theatre management.

If Shelley was the paramount influence of his youthful years, from the time of his Italian journey in 1838, Italy became an influence which was henceforth to exert its magic over his work. He liked to call Italy his university. In 'Sordello' he had already chosen an Italian subject, and his journey was undertaken partly with the idea of gaining personal experience of the scenes wherein the tragedy of Sordello's soul was enacted.

It was published in 1840, and except for a notice in the *Eclectic Review*, and the appreciation of a few friends, was ignored. A world not over sensitive to the beauties of his previous work, could hardly be expected to welcome enthusiastically a poem so complex in its historical setting and so full of philosophy. Even the keenest intellects approach this poem with the feeling that they are about to attack a problem; for in spite of undoubted power and many beauties, it must be confessed that the luxuriance of the poet's mental force often unduly overbalances his sense of artistic proportion. Evidently the world was frightened. The little breeze, with which Browning's career began, instead of developing as it normally should into a strong wind of universal recognition, died out, and for twenty years nothing he could do seemed to win for him his just deserts, though his very next poem, 'Pippa Passes,' showed him already a consummate master of his forces both on the artistic side and in the special realm which he chose, the development of the soul.

'Pippa Passes,' 'King Victor and King Charles,' and 'The Return of the Druses' lay in his desk for some time without a publisher. He finally arranged with Edward Moxon to bring them out in pamphlet form, using cheap type, each issue to consist of a sixteen-page form, printed in double columns. This was the beginning of the now celebrated series, 'Bells and Pomegranates.' They were issued from 1841 to 1846, and included all the dramas and a number of short poems.

The only one of these poems with a story other than literary, is 'The Blot in the 'Scutcheon,' written for Macready, and performed at Drury Lane, on February 11, 1843. A favorite weapon in the hands of the Philistines has been the often reiterated statement that the performance was a failure. A letter from Browning to Mr. Hill, editor of the *Daily News*, at the time of the revival of 'The Blot' by Lawrence Barrett in 1884, drawn out by the same old falsehood, gives the truth in regard to the matter, and should silence once for all the ubiquitous Philistines.

“Macready received and accepted the play, while he was engaged at the Haymarket, and retained it for Drury Lane, of which I was ignorant that he was about to become the manager: he accepted it at the instigation of nobody. . . . When the Drury Lane season began, Macready informed me that he would act the play when he had brought out two others, — ‘The Patrician’s Daughter’ and ‘Plighted Troth.’ Having done so, he wrote to me that the former had been unsuccessful in money-drawing, and the latter had ‘smashed his arrangements altogether’: but he would still produce my play. In my ignorance of certain symptoms better understood by Macready’s professional acquaintances — I had no notion that it was a proper thing, in such a case, to release him from his promise; on the contrary, I should have fancied that such a proposal was offensive. Soon after, Macready begged that I would call on him: he said the play had been read to the actors the day before, ‘and laughed at from beginning to end’; on my speaking my mind about this, he explained that the reading had been done by the prompter, a grotesque person with a red nose and wooden leg, ill at ease in the love scenes, and that he would himself make amends by reading the play next morning, — which he did, and very adequately, — but apprised me that in consequence of the state of his mind, harassed by business and various troubles, the principal character must be taken by Mr. Phelps; and again I failed to understand, . . . that to allow at Macready’s theatre any other than Macready to play the principal part in a new piece was suicidal, and really believed I was meeting his exigencies by accepting the substitute. At the rehearsal, Macready announced that Mr. Phelps was ill, and that he himself would read the part: on the third rehearsal, Mr. Phelps appeared for the first time . . . while Macready more than read, rehearsed the part. The next morning Mr. Phelps waylaid me to say . . . that Macready would play Tresham on the ground that himself, Phelps, was unable to do so. . . . He added that he could not expect me to waive such an advantage, — but that if I were prepared to waive it, ‘he would take ether, sit up all night, and have the words in his memory by next day.’ I bade him follow me to the green-room, and hear what I decided upon — which was that as Macready had given him the part, he should keep it: this was on a Thursday; he rehearsed on Friday and Saturday, — the play being acted the same evening, — *of the fifth day after the ‘reading’ by Macready.* Macready at once wished to reduce the importance of the play . . . tried to leave out so much of the text, that I baffled him by getting it printed in four and twenty hours, by Moxon’s assistance. He wanted me to call it ‘The Sister!’ — and I have before me . . . the stage-acting copy, with two lines of his own insertion to avoid the tragical ending — Tresham was to announce his intention of going into a monastery! all this, to keep up the belief that Macready, and Macready alone, could produce a veritable ‘tragedy’ unproduced before. Not a shilling was spent on scenery or dresses. If your critic considers this treatment of the play an instance of ‘the failure of powerful and experienced actors’ to insure its success, — I can only say that my own opinion was shown by at once

breaking off a friendship . . . which had a right to be plainly and simply told that the play I had contributed as a proof of it would, through a change of circumstances, no longer be to my friend's advantage. . . . Only recently. . . . when the extent of his pecuniary embarrassments at that time was made known, could I in a measure understand his motives — less than ever understand why he so strangely disguised them. If 'applause,' means success, the play thus maimed and maltreated was successful enough; it 'made way' for Macready's own Benefit and the theatre closed a fortnight after."

Browning's second visit to Italy took place in the autumn of 1844, from which he returned to meet with the supreme spiritual influence of his life. 'Lady Geraldine's Courtship' had just been published, and Browning expressing his enthusiasm for it to Mr. Kenyon, a dear friend of his and a cousin of Miss Barrett's, the latter immediately suggested that Browning should write and tell her of his delight in it. The correspondence soon developed into a meeting which was at first refused by Miss Barrett in a few self-depreciative words, "There is nothing to see in me, nothing to hear in me, I am a weed fit for the ground and darkness."

Mr. Browning's fate was sealed at the first meeting, we are told, but Miss Barrett, conscious of the obstacle offered by her ill-health, was not easily won, and only consented, at last, with the proviso that their marriage should depend upon improvement in her health.

Though the new joy in her life seemed to give her fresh strength, her doctor told her, in the summer of 1846, that her only hope of recovery depended upon her spending the coming winter in Italy. Her father having absolutely refused to hear of such a course, she was persuaded to consent to a private marriage with Mr. Browning, which took place on September 12, 1846, at St. Pancras Church. A week later they started for Italy. Mrs. Orr writes: —

"In the late afternoon or evening of September 19, Mrs. Browning, attended by her maid and her dog, stole away from her father's house. The family were at dinner, at which meal she was not in the habit of joining them; her sisters, Henrietta and Arabel, had been throughout in the secret of her attachment and in full sympathy with it; in the case of the servants she was also sure of friendly connivance. There was no difficulty in her escape, but that created by the dog, which might be expected to bark its consciousness of the unusual situation. She took him into her confidence. She said, 'O Flush, if you make a sound, I am lost.' And Flush understood, as what good dog would not, and crept after his mistress in silence."

Mr. Barrett never forgave her and never saw her again. The surprise and consternation of Mr. Browning's family was soon transformed

into love for Mrs. Browning, while Mr. Kenyon, who had not been told because, as Mrs. Browning said, she did not wish to implicate any one in the deception she was obliged to practise against her father, was overjoyed at the result of his kindly offices in bringing the two poets together.

After a journey full of suffering for Mrs. Browning and the tenderest devotion on the part of Mr. Browning, they halted at Pisa, memorable as the spot where Mrs. Browning presented her husband with the matchless 'Sonnets from the Portuguese.' Mrs. Browning's health improved greatly in the genial climate. The whole of their married life, with the exception of occasional summers in England and two winters in Paris, was spent in Italy, and what that married life was in its harmonious blending of two unusually congenial souls we have abundant evidence in the glimpses obtained from Mrs. Browning's letters, and the recollections of it in the minds of their many friends.

In the summer of 1847 they established themselves in Florence in the Casa Guidi. It became practically their Italian home, varied by sojourns in Ancona, at the baths of Lucca, Venice, and winters in Rome in 1854 and 1859.

In Florence, March 9, 1849, their son was born, and to Mrs. Browning's life, especially, was added one more element of intense happiness. Mrs. Orr thinks that in Pompilia in 'The Ring and the Book,' is reflected the maternal joy as Browning saw it revealed in Mrs. Browning's relation to her son. A shadow was at the same time cast over Browning's life by the death of his mother, who died just as the news was received of the birth of her grandchild. Mrs. Browning, writing to a friend, said, "My husband has been in the greatest anguish. . . . He has loved his mother as such passionate natures only can love, and I never saw a man so bowed down in an extremity of sorrow, — never."

The first effect of Browning's marriage seems to have been to put his muse to sleep. Up to 1850 the only events in his literary career were the performance of 'The Blot' at Sadler's Wells in 1848, and the issue of a collected edition of his works in 1849. In 1850, in Florence, he wrote 'Christmas Eve' and 'Easter Day,' and in Paris, 1857, the 'Essay on Shelley' to be prefixed to twenty-five letters of Shelley's, that afterwards turned out to be spurious.

The fifty poems in 'Men and Women' complete the record of Browning's work during his wife's life. They appeared in 1855, and reflect very directly new sources of inspiration which had come into his life with his marriage.

Though Mr. and Mrs. Browning led a comparatively quiet life, they gathered around them, wherever they were, a distinguished circle of

friends. In the early days at Florence, they much enjoyed the society of Margaret Fuller Ossoli. Joseph Milsand and George Sand — the first a cherished friend, the last simply 'an acquaintance — connect themselves with their life in Paris, while in London and Rome all the bright particular stars of the time circled about them, some of whom were the Storys, the Hawthornes, the Carlyles, the Kemble sisters, Cardinal Manning, Sir Frederick Leighton, Rossetti, Val Princesp, and Landor.

Mrs. Browning's death at dawn, on the 29th of June, 1861, cut short the golden period of these Italian days. Even in his bereavement he had cause to be poignantly happy. For he had watched beside his wife on that last night, and she, weak, though suffering little and without presentiment of the end which even to him seemed not so imminent, had given him, as he wrote, — "what my heart will keep till I see her again and longer, — the most perfect expression of her love to me within my whole knowledge of her." He added, "I shall grow still. I hope, but my root is taken and remains." He left Florence never to return. His settling in London that winter was a result of his wife's death, destined to bring him into closer touch with an English public which was to like him yet. The change was dictated by his care for his son's education, whose well-being he considered a trust from his wife.

In 1862, he wrote from Biarritz of 'Pen's' enjoyment of his holidays, adding, "for me I have got on by having a great read at Euripides besides attending to my own matters, my new poem that is about to be and of which the whole is pretty well in my head — the Roman murder story." But the Roman murder story was long in taking shape as 'The Ring and the Book.' It had been conceived in one of his last June evenings at Casa Guidi, but the rude break in his life made by Mrs. Browning's death remains marked in the record of this work's incubation. During the next years spent in London, with holidays in Brittany, work went steadily on, first for the three-volume collected edition of 1863 of his works, and then for 'Dramatis Personæ,' published in the year following, before 'The Ring and the Book' came out at last, in 1868. With the appearance of this, and the six-volume edition of his works, the poet began to reap the abundant fruits of a slow but solidly-founded fame.

It was not until 1871, however, that the "great read at Euripides" showed its significance in 'Balaustion's Adventure' and four years later again, in 'Aristophanes' Apology,' rounding out thus his original criticism of Greek life and literature and especially affecting 'Euripides the human,' whom his wife had been earliest to deliver from blundering censure.

While in the midst of this prosperous scheme of work he wrote : "I feel such comfort and delight in doing the best I can with my own object of life, poetry, — which, I think, I never could have seen the good of before, — that it shows me I have taken the root I did take well. I hope to do much more — and that the flower of it will be put into Her hand somehow."

His father had died in Paris in 1866, at the age of eighty-five. Brother and sister, now each left alone, lived together thenceforth a life of tranquil uneventfulness, alternating between London and the Continent — a life rich in pleasant acquaintances and warm friendships and increasingly full of invitations and honors of all sorts for the poet. Supreme among the friendships was that with Miss Anne Egerton Smith. Music was the special bond of sympathy between her and Browning, and while they were both in London no important concert lacked their appreciation. Miss Browning, her brother, and Miss Smith spent also four successive summers together, the fourth at Salève, near Geneva, where Miss Smith's sudden death was the occasion of Browning's poem on immortality, 'La Saisiaz.' Among the honors the poet received were the organization of the London Browning Society in 1881, degrees from Oxford and from Cambridge, and nominations for the Rectorship of Glasgow University and for that of St. Andrews. The latter was a unanimous nomination from the students, and as an evidence of the younger generation's esteem of his poetic influence was more than commonly gratifying to Browning, although he declined this and all other such overtures.

His activities during the remainder of his days, his social and friendly life in London and later in Venice, were habitually cheerful and genial. He sedulously cultivated happiness. This was indeed the consistent result of the fact to which those who knew him best bear witness, that he held the great lyric love of his life as sacred, and cherished it as a religion. Those who know the whole body of his work most intimately will be readiest to corroborate this on subtler evidence; for only on the hypothesis of a unique revelation of the significance of a supreme human love from whose large sureness smaller dramatic exemplifications of love in life derive their vitality can the varied overplay of his art and the deep sufficiency of his religious reconciliation of Power and Love be adequately understood. As he himself once said, the romance of his life was in his own soul. To this perhaps the bibliography of his works will ever provide the most accurate outline map.

After the issue of his Greek pieces, the most noticeable new features of his remaining work may be summed up as idyllic and lyric. A new

picturesqueness interpenetrated his dramatic pieces, as if he were dowered with a fresh pleasure in eyesight. This was shown in the 'Dramatic Idyls.' A new purity intensified his lyrical faculty. This is shown in the lyrics in 'Ferishtah's Fancies' and in 'Asolando.'

To his whole achieved work add the brief final record of his contentment in his son's marriage in 1887, his removal to the house he bought in De Vere Gardens, the gradual weakening of his robust health in his last years, his painless death in Venice in his son's Palazzo Rezzonico on the very day, December 12, 1889, of the issue of 'Asolando' in London, his burial in Westminster Abbey in Poets' Corner, December 31, and the story of Robert Browning's earthly life is told.

CHARLOTTE PORTER.

HELEN A. CLARKE.

May 20, 1896.

INTRODUCTORY ESSAY.

"THE Ring and the Book," in the estimation of one of its most appreciative critics, James Thomson, may be classed among those rare works of literature, philosophy, or art which give the impression of being too gigantic to have been wrought out by a single man. With the unerring instinct of the poet for subtle and illuminating analogies, he compared it in its grandeur and complexity to a great Gothic cathedral. "For here truly," he says, "we find the soaring towers and pinnacles, the multitudinous niches with their statues, the innumerable intricate traceries, the gargoyles wildly grotesque; and, within, the many colored light through the stained windows, with the red and purple of blood predominant, the long, pillared, echoing aisles, the altar with its piteous crucifix and altar-piece of the Last Judgment, the organ and choir pealing their *Miserere* and *De Profundis* and *In Excelsis Deo*, the side chapels and confessionals, the fantastic wood-carvings, the tombs with effigies sculptured supine: and, beneath, yet another chapel, as of death, and the solemn sepulchral crypts. The counterparts of all these, I dare affirm, may veritably be found in this immense and complicate structure, whose foundations are so deep and whose crests are so lofty. Only as a Gothic cathedral has been termed a petrified forest, we must image this work as a vivified cathedral, thrilling hot, swift life through all its marble nerves."

This analogy of the living cathedral illustrates the richness of the poem as an artistic product. It involves, moreover, a characteristic difference or development from the methods of Gothic art. It is by virtue of the life instinct within it that Gothic art and the art of "The Ring and the Book" are akin; but it is the distinctive trait of the art of the poem that it parts utterly with the rigidity and stability of inorganic form. The shifting, flowing trend of all the independent parts of the poem toward an organic unity of design is the only sort of fixity to which Browning's art is bound.

The social organism, made up of living, growing personalities, each intrinsically valuable, but dependent on one another for the working

out of their ultimate significance, is the closest exemplar of the artistic plan of the poem. Not content with social material, the poet devises an artistic method that is also social.

His own share as artist in the creation and purport of the poem falls into place, at the outset, as itself also an element to be taken account of in the interplay of human personalities behind the action presented in the bare facts of the story. What the poet's own touch upon the facts was, what intent he held toward them, and what his art's impress upon them might be worth, are, broadly speaking, the questions upon which he arouses interest in his first book.

This first book is in the nature of a prologue to the poem, and so original in its conception as to have caused much querulous grumbling among that class of critics which feels aggrieved when brought face to face with something not before met in its experience. Instead of presenting a more or less ornamental generalization of the poet's purpose, or a symbolic picture of the underlying motive of the poem, or the even less vital rhetorical flourishes characteristic of many poetical prologues, it lays before the reader a complete sketch of the plot, — thus shattering at one blow an element of dramatic art upon which authors have largely relied as a means of piquing attention by alluring it onwards in doubting suspense to some much-wished for, half-suspected *denouement*. Has not the poet substituted for the sacrificed plot-development something quite as alluring? Examining it more closely, this prologue will be found to possess not only the power of arousing to the utmost an interested curiosity as to what is to follow, but to contain intrinsic elements of rare fascination. It is like some finely constructed overture, which, having a distinct subject of its own, yet combines with it in a harmonious whole all the varying musical themes later to be unfolded and enriched in the body of the opera.

7 The grand central theme of the prologue is the worth of art as a revealer of a higher truth than lies in the fact alone. This is stated in the opening lines by means of the beautiful symbolism of the ring. The poet then proceeds to unfold about this main thought the processes of the artist-mind, from its first seizure upon the bare fact and recognition of its truth as pure gold, through the ever-deepening phases of inspiration, until the work of poetic art, by the alloy of fancy, is rounded into as perfect a shape as the exquisite ring wrought by "Castellani's imitative craft." As a means for illustrating this development of his inspiration, the poet chooses naturally enough the story found in the old yellow book which is to be the subject-matter of the poem. In showing the growth of his own fancy about this nugget of truth, he at the same time reveals the incidents of the story, not

primarily for the sake of telling it, but, by the way, as he pictures the various relations set up between the fact and fancy in this inceptive process. Thus, at the same time that we are shown into the innermost sanctum of the poet's genius, and are permitted to see the creative forces actually at work, the story is made known.

Following the development of the poet's inspiration, it is found to pass from the external to the internal. The first step in the process is the discovery of the book, and the unalloyed facts of the story are told just as they appear in it. Then, as the poet's fancy works, the characters seem to become real and living personalities to him, and he describes them as he sees them; but, although there is here revivification, the poet himself is still the visible medium between the characters in the story and the reader or listener. He must dive deeper yet; he must not only see them living before his own inner vision, he must so enter into their natures that he will be able to make them speak directly to others, himself entirely out of sight,—the artist lost in his creations.

In this manner, we are gradually led from an interest in the externalities of the plot to an interest in the personality of the characters themselves; an interest which the poet proceeds to whet by giving a sketch of those who are to reveal themselves in the future, with sufficiently tantalizing glimpses of their various points of view. The reader, by this time, is in some such state of expectation as one might be who had seen photographs of a great actor and read eulogiums upon him, and was about to experience the reality of that which had so frequently come to him by indirections.

The multiform design sketched in the opening book unfolds its nicely adjusted parts in the remaining books in harmonious accord with this richly modulated overture.

Leaving the personal presence of the modern poet of highly developed consciousness towards the art by which his story shall take on the hue of life, the sensibilities are first made familiar with the atmosphere of the deed that was done in Seventeenth-Century Rome,—the better to reach the quivering heart of its experience, a little later,—by becoming acquainted, in the three following books, with the three Romans who part between them all typical public opinion. The environment of the story shown in this first group of three books is essentially human and psychical. It is not at all an environment of the insensate physical sort usually studied by the scientist who investigates the causes of social phenomena. It consists in the presentation of the influence of the deed upon the contemporary Roman citizen and of the reflection of the color of his character upon the story. Through

this living and breathing environment of the old Roman murder case, as if through the outer rim of some planet's atmosphere which is that planet's specific influence upon the vagues of ether about it, the poem passes on to penetrate still closer toward the true focus of the action.

In the second group of three books, therefore, the three main actors in the story successively emerge: Count Guido Franceschini, first, since he is its prime mover, yet most external and material factor; Giuseppe Caponsacchi, next, the counterforce awakened to repel his malevolent activity; and, then, Pompilia. Passivity personified, she seems, yet is the inmost effluence in the poem of subtle spiritual insight and good will, radiating her light, — as if she were indeed some central orb of whiteness, — upon Caponsacchi first, because he stands closest to her in intuitive moral rectitude, and thence diffusing even through the outer cycle of darkness where Guido writhes the resistless rays of her illumination.

The order of the poem turns outward again with the third group of three books. Is this, also, in keeping with the design? Are these learned technicalities of the two lawyers and the elaborate balancing and ethical probing of the Pope the natural sequence? Yes; for the racial impulse spoke in Pompilia's fidelity to her motherhood which dictated her escape under Caponsacchi's championship, and the institution of the family asserted its prerogative in the marital supremacy on which Guido relied to sanction his slaughter. The issue raised was a matter of social concern and affecting the moral order. The poem setting forth in quest of life and truth traces the pathway of these outgoing beams and encompasses them with their nucleus in its harmonious system. Professional equity, robed in all her ceremonial trappings, appears accordingly in the three following books. On the one side writes the husband's advocate, with pomp of legal precedent, yet in laying his personal impress on his plea speaks most vitally. On the other side, the wife's advocate upholds the moral dominion of the Law, yet fastens the interest closest where it most lay for him, upon his own oratorical ambition and dexterity. Finally, the Church herself officially assays the value of each act and claim, but, her judgment finding embodiment and instrument in the wise and aged Antonio Pignatelli, the test of his personal experience is applied in giving sentence.

The artistic warrant for the second appearance of Guido in the succeeding book appears as an inevitable part of this interknit, socially conceived work of art. There is no word but must be made flesh and subject to diverse human scrutiny. The sentence of death, therefore, must have sentence pronounced upon it by the soul most intimate with the crime. The crowning voice of "The Ring and the Book," accord-

ingly, is the voice of him whom society has condemned. In the eleventh book, at his eleventh hour, Guido combats the sentence and caustically arraigns civilization and religion, speaking now, fittingly, not as Count or Franceschini but without privilege of name and race, simply as the human being, — Guido. So, at the close of the book, when his doom smites his soul with sudden terror, his own lips utter the vital admission needed and supply the only fitting climax for such a poem.

The concluding book, as Epilogue, companions the opening book as Prologue. Its main office is to round out the tale. In supplementing its last occurrences, the original order is symmetrically followed in little. The Venetian traveller gives the town-talk, much as the three Roman citizens did, and provides the external report of the execution. The two lawyers appear again to furnish the social or institutional outcome and the professional glimpse of the suit for Pompilia's estate; and the Augustinian friar stands in place of the Pope to pronounce the moral summing up in the extract from his sermon. The final words from the poet's own mouth turn again, as at the outset, upon the plan and purport of his art, and the consecration of his work to the poet who was his wife. "Ring" is linked to "ring," the "book" lying between in the transposed words of the titles of the first and last books. "The Ring and the Book" becoming "The Book and the Ring," and the significance of the name of the poem shaping it to the end.

One other general trait of the work, which is characteristic of its evolutionary and social method, is especially ministered unto in the twelfth book. That trait is its historic quality. With Guido's cry in the ears, with the climax of the poem reached, this last book opens. Is the result that of anticlimax or redundancy? "Here were the end," says the poet, "had anything an end." As nothing has an end, there is room here for one suggestion more to that effect, and relevantly, too. An image of the fiery event resuscitated in the poem symbolizes this perpetual existency. The vivid outburst of Guido's deed is seen at its height, and then it is shown paling and dying gradually away in the vastness of the ages. The addition of the twelfth book is justified by this culminating stroke of art, revealing the central event of the poem as but an incident in the larger life of historic civilization.

This historic quality is, of course, not such as usually marks the work of the professional historian. It depends little upon exact results or patient verification of evidence. In the poem dispassionateness as well as partisanship is distrusted, and stress is put on genuineness of character as the criterion of merely relative truth. And yet a poem which is made to bear witness that human testimony is false and "fame and estimation words and wind," since it shows to the life how essential

to each man is his own character and peculiar point of view, reveals more convincingly than any but the most modern histories the interdependence and necessary coherence of all points of view; the continuous unity of the social life thence each human act emerges and whence it sinks, forever perpetuating its influence through oblivion; and the endless beauty of personal aspiration toward all that can be called "truth."

As a whole it appears, then, that, unlike most poetic plots, with definitely isolated beginnings, middles, and ends, this plot seems to be composed of continuous intersecting unfoldings, as if in concentric orbits round a centre related to all these spheres of psychical action and influence, and having outside the whole an imaginative envelope of unexplored, indefinite space.

Turning now — after this general survey of the structural design of the poem, first as projected by the poet in his prologue and then as wrought out by him in the sequence — to an examination of the characters created, it may be found that in these, too, the secret of the art with which they are portrayed consists not merely in their separate vitality but in their lifelike interrelations.

The truth to life of the first three characters is apparently meant to be more typical than personal. Yet it is easy to see the individual within the class in either Half-Rome, The Other Half-Rome, or Tertium Quid; and their double quality of generalized and individualized life is peculiarly well adapted to give the impression of a larger social atmosphere encompassing the central event, and to lead on to the more fully individualized characters of the central actors in whose persons the intensity of interest is condensed.

The typical quality of the three Roman citizens is not abstract. It does not mar their humanity. Half-Rome buttonholes the cousin of the jackanapes who is too civil to his wife, and the reader feels the touch, too, and grows absorbed in the turn the gossip gives the story. He gathers from the whole account, however, not merely the estimate of the characters which the speaker conceives, but, also, from that, a cumulative estimate of the speaker's own character, and, thence, a still further estimate of the doubtful value of this man's evidence.

Listen next to The Other Half-Rome's version of the story; and with whatever eagerness, acquired by the habit of following the plot of incident, one may pounce upon the slight divergences in the facts between this and the preceding version, the interest in the plot of incident soon gives place to interest in the plot of character. The estimate of the characters peculiar to The Other Half-Rome's point of view first absorbs attention; then it is perceived to throw light on his own character, and finally suspicion falls upon the value of his evidence.

Where shall the real truth be found then? is the question that now dominates the reader's mood. At this stage he is ready to rush greedily upon Tertium Quid's account. His hopes are cunningly fostered by the pretence of this third speaker that now the "authoritative word" of "persons qualified to pronounce" will at last prevail above "this rabble's-brabble" of "reasonless unreasoning Rome." But no; he is only tantalized more acutely by the spiritless equipoise of Tertium Quid. Thrown back now upon a trust in his own wits as the only guide, the reader passes the poet's probation toward wisdom, and is ripe to learn what the second group of characters — the three actors in the tragedy — shall successively impart, and with more and more intimacy of each other, themselves, and the truth.

Once having felt this threefold progressive illumination of the story, there is no end to the fascination of detailed comparison. Guido's, Caponsacchi's, and Pompilia's characters, as they appear in each man's eyes and in their own, are to be traced, contrasted, the investigation narrowed to a test by the character of each speaker as to what his special evidence on each point is worth, and crowned with a divination of how the whole coheres.

All this complexity of interest results primarily from a perception of the characters of Half-Rome, The Other Half-Rome, and Tertium Quid. Half-Rome is seen to be so warped by one idea that any subject he considered would wear the hated color. He cannot see true any more than Othello could, and all his mental aspirations are subject to the clumsy obtuseness and despotic cruelty of a man suspicious of the woman nature, because it is foreign to his own. It is not so important, however, that certain external circumstances be gathered about him, — namely, that he is a jealous husband who is making the telling of this story to the cousin of the "jackanapes" an excuse to cause the fellow to fear him, — as it is that the character of the man enslaved to his prejudices be seen.

The Other Half-Rome is swifter witted and more humane. He is too subtle and strategic himself not to revel in the finer powers of intuition and emotion. His nature has no distrust of the woman nature, but rather an instinctive attraction toward it. He is Violante's best defender. He excuses her first falsity, but seeing that she clears her conscience at Pompilia's expense, blames her for confessing the lie. Some acute inkling of the relativity of truth seems to move him to put loyalty to an essential truth beyond adherence to the external truth of fact. Criticism is his foible, however, and everybody gets a taste of his dissecting blade. Even Pompilia, his adoration, the saint with the allurements of a beautiful girl, does not escape disparagement for her

passivity. The "helpless, simple-sweet, or silly-sooth," he says, "how can she render service to the truth?" (805) The poor opinion he expresses of Pompilia's intellect and will is misleading, but natural to the shrewd man who underrates the high capacity of brain and nerve necessarily accompanying experienced goodness. Otherwise, he has so sympathetically assimilated Pompilia's version of the story that his account of her penetrates closer to the heart of the matter than that of any other of the outer circles of characters. His vivisection of Guido is particularly keen and profitable to observe; and the measure of understanding he shows for Caponsacchi is not a little remarkable in view of his latent rivalry with one whom he regards as an ordinary lover.

Again, with this speaker, the mere circumstance that he is a bachelor who is romantically partial to pretty women and "the side the others are down on," is not in itself so important to observe as that with all his cleverness he is not a master of his bias.

Tertium Quid is obviously the man of pretence to social prominence and distinguished intellect. He is witty, graphic, and sophisticated; a specialist in worldliness, which qualifies him to judge as an expert in the case; but his deft reconstruction of its twists and turns feels its way, subserviently, after all, toward that neutral somewhat which will be accepted as the "safe" view of the conservative class. The upshot of his specialistic investigation, in spite of the dexterity of its incidental episodes, is disappointing in making no point but the minor one against torture. Its main conclusion is equivocal because it has to steer its course between a disdain of "plebs, the commonalty" and a supine regard for "quality" not compatible with the unity of humanity. The actual conclusion to be drawn is that horror of the "mob" is the main dependence to prove superiority over it. At the impotent close of the deft harangue, when "Excellency" and "Highness" show themselves human enough to be bored by much talk to no purpose, they fare no better than "plebs" in Tertium Quid's eyes, and he styles them, between his teeth, "the two idiots here." The reader is led to cap his conclusion with another, remembering the gage offered at the start—

"if I fail—
Favored with such an audience, understand!—
To set things right, why, class me with the mob
As understander of the mind of man!"

Here again, then, with Tertium Quid, as with the two other typical Roman citizens, it is important not merely to perceive the character but judge the pretensions, and, balancing the two, see how much the evidence is worth.

Flattering clouds of suffering and manly self-confidence half obscure Guido's genuine self upon his first appearance. A flood of daylight pours upon him on his second. To know the secret of his character, and lay the true stress upon its relation to the story, appeal must be made here, from the Count presumed innocent to Guido found guilty. Holding in abeyance, then, the first plea of Count Guido Franceschini, it may be compared better with his final utterances later, when nothing intervenes between the man and death.

A peculiar interest attaches to Caponsacchi, because he alone of all the personages that revolve about the central tragedy suffers the tortures of a severe moral struggle. His soul is first awakened by Pompilia, whose sudden influence works a revolution in his character, and sows the seeds of a development only curtailed by his inevitable priestly bias. All the onlookers agree in describing him as a mixture of priest and courtly gallant. — vowed to the Church, yet a favorite in the social world.

Under these circumstances it is hardly to be wondered at that no one, not even sympathetic Other Half-Rome, can believe in his entire innocence and self-disinterestedness in rendering aid to Pompilia. Sympathy for the outraged honor of Guido blinds Half-Rome to every other consideration; but the rest of the world is more ready to condone the sin of the priest than to believe him guiltless. This widespread feeling is reflected in the paltering decision of the court, — not to exonerate him, but to deal him a light punishment. What could world or law-court know of the powerful forces latent within the character of the worldly priest, or of the influence for good of a personality so intuitively strong as that of the youthful Pompilia! Only when Caponsacchi comes to tell his own story is the real truth of the matter discoverable. The vision of Pompilia with her "beautiful sad strange smile" was his first true revelation; her face became for him "God's own smile," and he realized there were greater possibilities in life and in religion than he had ever dreamed of. Henceforth the frivolous side of his life became utterly distasteful to him, and the perception of his duties as a priest deepened. Conscious that his awakening was due to his sudden recognition in Pompilia of a purity of soul he had never before experienced, his trust in her was so complete that he at once saw through the diabolical plan of Guido to entrap Pompilia and himself. So strong a nature as his, once aroused to an understanding of the seriousness of duty, would be apt to verge toward fanaticism. He would confuse the duty to his earth-made vows with a larger divine duty, especially in an age when religious sentiment placed more emphasis upon the performance of the letter of the vow than upon keeping the spirit of it intact.

Only so can his hesitancy, when Pompilia appealed to him for aid, be explained. His struggle was threefold, and wavered between a human desire to help Pompilia, a desire to live up to the new ideal of duty born within him by Pompilia herself, and a desire truly to sacrifice himself. This last, he concludes, can best be accomplished by withstanding the great wish of his heart to help Pompilia, — a conclusion which, combined with his desire to be true to his vows, causes him to decide to leave her in God's hands. Another visit to Pompilia makes him understand that he himself must be God's instrument. He accepts the charge somewhat in the spirit of Prometheus, who "freely sinned." His only sin, however, was against the external laws of the Church. He cherished faithfully the spirit of his vows, not only because he must be true to his new-born ideals, but because such action constituted the highest homage he could offer Pompilia. He dares hardly acknowledge even to himself his love for her, largely because he cannot throw off entirely the priestly attitude which takes for granted an antagonism between an earthly love and the love of the Church. Though he pictures the possibilities of a life outside the Church, and made sacred by her presence, he does not let himself recognize that in such love as existed between them there is a divine element transcending all earthly vows, and destined to have its fulfilment in eternity. Earth might have had such bliss in store for him: it is lost forever, and duty demands that he shall not even regret the loss.

"So I from such communion pass content."

But his heart asserts itself, and human anguish forces from him the cry, —

"O great, just, good God! Miserable me!"

He is indeed a Prometheus, but a Prometheus still in chains.

His speech is a masterpiece of dramatic writing, reflecting to the life his complex feelings. Scorn for the lawyers, whom he scores mercilessly for their miserable failure in the guardianship of Pompilia, when he who might have been of use to her was facetiously adjudged a "merry" punishment for what they persisted in regarding a youthful escapade; loathing of Guido; anguish at the news of Pompilia's death intensifying his love for her; but against any expression of which he strives fiercely, lest it might detract from the perfect sum of her purity, — and underneath all these rending human passions, the struggle of the priest to maintain his priesthood unsullied.

There was a law in force in the ancient Hindu drama, that no actor could come upon the stage before some reference had been made to him by actors already on the stage. The effectiveness of such a method

Browning has certainly proved in "The Ring and the Book." The reader is in a fever-heat of expectation when Pompilia is finally introduced in her own person; and that the poet has succeeded in making her not only fulfil expectation, but surprise us with her transcendent loveliness, is alone proof of his masterly genius. She has appeared, through the medium of the speakers, in the preceding monologues in the likeness, at one extreme, of a light, frivolous, even depraved girl; at the other, in that of a martyred saint, according as individual bias misunderstands and hates her, or comprehends and reverentially loves her. Guido's brutal attitude toward her as his wife is too evident for his account of her to gain any credence whatever; yet, in spite of himself, there are references to her in his speech which give glimpses of her true character, just as if her nature were so powerful a centre of truth that it must perforce shine through the foulest aspersions of her. Even Half-Rome's opinion of her does not appear to be based upon an overwhelming conviction of her guilt, but rather upon the determination to uphold the rights of the husband at any cost. Did Half-Rome forget himself for the moment, when he presents so finely the picture of Pompilia trapped at Castelnuovo?

"Her defence? This. She woke, saw, sprang upright
I' the midst, and stood as terrible as truth."

Such passages have been considered a lapse from Half-Rome into Browning. But if Half-Rome be conceived to base his arguments on prejudice, rather than conviction, it will be easy to imagine him carried away, for the moment, by the splendid pluck of Pompilia, and falling into this sudden show of sympathy. This is made all the more plausible by the way he brings himself up with a round turn, —

"But facts are facts, and flinch not; stubborn things,
And the question, how comes my purse
I' the poke of you? admits of no reply."

If glimpses are caught, from time to time, of Pompilia as she really is, even from her enemies, it is equally true that her friends do not give an entire view of her character. We saw how The Other Half-Rome regarded her, so "silly-sooth" that she could hardly be expected to shed any light on the bare justice of the situation. It may be questioned whether Caponsacchi recognized to the full the greatness of her character, although he had felt the influence of her personality, — one that convinced, not by argument, but by her presence, as Walt Whitman would say. He certainly did not understand, in their essence, the principles that guided her, or he would not have suffered

her to languish a day longer than she need for help, while he settled upon the action best for his own soul.

There is no moral struggle in Pompilia's short life, such as that in Caponsacchi's. Both were alike in the fact that up to a certain point in their lives their full consciousness was unawakened: hers slept, through innocence and ignorance; his, in spite of knowledge, through lack of aspiration. She was rudely awakened by suffering; he by the sudden revelation of a possible ideal. Therefore, while for him, conscious of his past failures, a struggle begins; for her, conscious of no failure in her duty, which she had always followed according to her light, there simply continues duty according to the new light. Neither archbishop nor friendly "smiles and shakes of head" could weaken her conviction that, being estranged in soul from her husband, her attitude toward him was inevitable. No qualms of conscience trouble her as to her inalienable right to fly from him. That she submitted as long as she did, was only because no one could be found to aid her. And how quick and certain her defence of Caponsacchi, threatened by Guido, when he overtakes them at the Inn! As she thinks over it calmly afterwards, she makes no apology, but justifies her action as the voice of God.

"If I sinned so, — never obey voice more
O' the Just and Terrible, who bids us 'Bear!'
Not — 'Stand by; bear to see my angels bear!'"

The gossip over her flight with Caponsacchi does not trouble her as it does him. He saved her in her great need; the supposition that their motives for flight had any taint of impurity in them is too puerile to be given a thought, yet with the same sublime certainty of the right, characteristic of her, she acknowledges, at the end, her love for Caponsacchi, and looks for its fulfilment in the future when marriage shall be an interpenetration of souls that know themselves into one. Having attained so great a good, she can wish none of the evil she has suffered undone. † She goes a step farther. Not only does she accept her own suffering for the sake of the final supreme good to herself, but she feels assured that good will fall at last to those who worked the evil.

Of all the characters portrayed by Browning in this poem, Pompilia is the only one, not even excepting the good old Pope, who has absolutely clear vision. She stands as the embodiment of that higher law which works behind all narrow-minded conceptions of duty; she grasps the relations of evil to good in the world, and her large charity makes room for even her arch-enemy in the healing shadow of God. Withal she is so human and lovable. Though her philosophy is profound, it

breaks so spontaneously and simply from her lips that it does not give the impression of being the result of intellectual pondering, but is like the natural outflow of a mind that had reached a higher plane of consciousness than those about her.

The sole point in which her feeling appears slightly to darken her perception is with regard to Caponsacchi, of whose moral struggle she does not seem to be aware, for she attributes to him the same intuitive vision possessed by herself. His own account and hers of his reply to her when she "called him to her and he came" is a striking example of this. He says, "It shall be when it can be." She makes him say simply, "I am yours." It is quite possible, however, that she knew his inmost soul better than he did himself, and caught its meaning rather than his words. Pompilia's conception of him is perhaps the true Caponsacchi, while in his account of himself we get Caponsacchi entangled in a mesh woven of inherited convention. May we not venture to imagine that Pompilia's dying message to him at last set him free, and that, henceforth, he would acknowledge and accept a present and future for their two souls of love infinitely exalted, nor any longer look back upon an unrealized earthly love?

After the intense concentration of emotion in these two monologues, the speeches of the two lawyers furnish a relief that may be compared to the effect of a Shakespearian scene in which the "base mechanicals" figure. De Archangelis and Bottinius are not much more profound in their reasoning than Bottom the weaver, but their poverty in wisdom is bolstered up by an immense deal more of learning and an intellectual cunning in the use of it which produces at least a "swashing outside." To them a murder case is just so much grist for the legal mill. The desire to find the truth and have justice rendered is no part of their programme. The ambition of each is to gain his case and outwit his opponent by building up a defence on some legal quibble. There is not a more brilliant example of searching sarcasm in literature than in the portrayal of this brace of lawyers, hitting not only at these easily recognizable types, but at the institution of law itself, as at present constituted.

The pettifogging soul of De Archangelis warms to the task of proving a guilty man justified in his guilt. He is quite invincible when marshalling his forces of precedent, provided it first be admitted that citations of precedent constitute argument; but, if driven to rely on his own reasoning powers for a point, he flounders pitifully. Yet we cannot altogether despise this representative of the law, because of his absorbing interest in his little son, whom he must have loved devotedly if there is any truth in the quaint little German saying, "Much-loved children have many names." One suspects that some of his inanities

in argument may have been due to his abstraction over the coming birthday feast.

The egotism of De Archangelis pales before that of Bottinius picturing himself, — the centre of admiring judges and audience, — while he paints with artist-hand a true picture of the sainted Pompilia. His method of presenting the truth is to imagine Pompilia and Caponsacchi guilty of lower depths of moral depravity than even Guido could have accused them of; and then to try to justify his interpretation of their actions by defending Pompilia on the ground that she committed small sins to save Guido from a greater sin; and Caponsacchi on the ground that he followed out natural tendencies. Bottinius has the instincts of a criminal lawyer, and when given a case where the evidence proves too easily the innocence of his client, his ingenuity must find vent in arguing white, black, and then whitewashing the blackness he has himself created. At the end he has evidently convinced himself, if no one else, that all the calumnies he was only going to imagine true are indeed true, and that he has succeeded in glossing them over so as to make them appear virtues. Then, with an effrontery that reveals the depths of his moral obliquity, he declares that he has, through painting Pompilia's virtue, proved Guido's crime. Pompilia's confession almost upsets his devious methods of proving her purity; but he is equal to the occasion and declares it a lie which adds one more grace to her character, — the grace of perjuring herself to save Guido's soul.

The character of the "good old Pope" is somewhat difficult to analyze, since he seems to be a composite of two historical popes, Innocent XI. and Innocent XII., combined with a special individuality, created for him by Browning, made up of mental traits quite consistent with the time, and others which belong to the nineteenth century, if not peculiarly to Browning himself.

Taking him as we find him, sprung fully endowed from the brain of the poet, he is pre-eminently a man actuated by the most sincere desire to find the truth and deal out justice, and in his earnest dignity furnishes a refreshing contrast to the shallow lawyers.

He is, however, human, and feels the necessity of assuring himself that the safety of his own soul will not be jeopardized by his decision to condemn to death Guido and his associates. He states a profound truth when he decides that God will look upon the sincerity of his intention, even should he in his human ignorance make a mistake.

There are no finer passages in the poem than those in which he renders his judgments upon the various actors in the tragedy. With terrible keenness of vision he dissects Guido's motives, — his avarice, his deceit out of which all his crimes grew. Yet even here the fallibility

of the human mind asserts itself. Though he shows the most exquisite appreciation of Pompilia, and recognizes her intuitive perception of the higher law, he does not quite realize whither this intuitive faculty carried her. He commends her for her submission to her husband until the higher duty of motherhood bade her rebel, evidently unconscious that she never acknowledged any obedience to Guido, but simply submitted because circumstances forced her to do so. Pompilia, herself, is careful to make this plain when she says, —

“Now understand here, by no means mistake!
Long ago had I tried to leave that house.”

He passes over also her confession of love for Caponsacchi, which it seems hardly probable he would approve if he had noticed it, since he considered one of Caponsacchi's chief glories the withstanding of the temptation to love Pompilia. He also admires Caponsacchi for his “Championship of God, at first blush,” when he sprang to rescue Pompilia. He is quite oblivious of the fact that Caponsacchi took some time to decide whether he would not be obeying the voice of God to more purpose if he did not rescue the “martyr-maiden.” The enthusiasm of the Pope for these two really blinds him a little to the realities of the case, and results in his admiring them both, especially for something they did not do. The inconsistencies which may arise from a recognition of truth in conflict with obedience to convention is shown when the Pope, in spite of his admiration for Caponsacchi, would have him punished because he broke the laws of the Church. These are the touches which place the Pope along with the other characters of the book as a really dramatic portraiture, while his grief at the lust for gold he everywhere discovers suits well enough with the historical accounts of Innocent XII., whose energies were spent in trying to reform abuses growing out of the selfish scramble for wealth rife at that time. But when the Pope philosophizes upon the basis of his faith, upon evil and doubt, he takes a long leap forward. Going beyond that eighteenth century, which the poet makes him look forward to as an age of revivifying doubt destined to give birth to a new faith, he reveals in his own convictions what that new faith will become in the nineteenth century, namely, a belief in a personal revelation of divine love to every individual.

There is a curious difference between Guido's first monologue and his second one. His character must necessarily appear in both. Why is it truer in the last? In both he assumes various plausible shapes, and lays claim to heroism, but reveals the skulking soul. When the two messengers enter, as earlier when he addressed his judges, his first

impulse is to ingratiate himself by a flattery of rank that will serve to insinuate his own claim to social privilege. After he has heard why they come to him and what message they bring him from the Pope, then it is as if some outer bodily integument which he had himself supposed, until now, to be a veritable part of him, slipped away, and left his inner nature intact and able to betray itself more clearly. Guido's truth to himself flares out, now that life must leave him, with a sudden fierce perception of the life still within him, that has made him what he was and now makes him strong to answer the Pope's sentence — "'Be thou not!' by 'Thus I am!'" The best possible explanation of the criminal is — In my crime spoke my nature. His best possible justification for reading his own nature into all other men's natures is the warrant they themselves give him to do so. Half-Rome has substantially the same theory of society and marriage as that on which Guido based his life and justified his slaughter. So has Bottinius and Tertium Quid. Guido, in his first smooth, deferential monologue, rested his confidence in his safety on this plea: I am a loyal servant of Church and Law, a pillar of society! "Absolve thou me, law's mere executant!" Through me bring in force again the wholesome household rule —

"Husbands once more God's representative,
Wives like the typical Spouse once more, and Priests
No longer men of Belial."

In his last speech, this pretence of serving "public weal, which hangs to the law, which holds by the Church," having been knocked from under him by the stroke of his death-sentence, he falls back merely on his own nature. The stealthy cunning lashes out into unbridled ferocity. The tiger-cat that "whined before, and pried and tried and trod so gingerly" has done with useless wariness and openly attacks first the Church he served, and then the Civilization and Society for which he finds he risked his head. Capable for an instant, at least, of conceiving "a careless courage as to consequences," and of exercising sincerely a curiosity that bids him turn over and over again the theories he acted on to see the true reason for his failure, the real Guido arouses a new interest. The character, supposed to be merely mean and tricky, shows an inherent self inside the mask. An element of grandeur appears in the hard consistency and implacable heart with which this self-styled victim of Society arraigns the judgment he falls beneath. If his helplessness stir a thrill of pathos finally, the art of the poet will have finished its vital reconstruction and redeemed the villain in Guido to human brotherliness.

Nobles and men of power make common cause, against the unconsidered mass of men, to gain unharmed their pleasure. This is one of Guido's first principles. "Manly men" who own a wife hold their right "with tooth and nail." This is another of Guido's first principles. They suffice to show him his innocence. Right as an abstract conception or a moral test has not occurred to him. A right as a privilege exercised by whosoever has title, wealth, or strength, he understands and illustrates in the story of Felice. There were Popes then, too, he maintains; not such as this one. "Why do things change? Wherefore is Rome un-Romed?" Guido accuses Society of moral progress, without knowing what moral progress means, and condemns it, like any other grumbler who suffers from a change, for the newness of its virtue. He considers it a pretence, of course, — a fall from grace in Gospel and in Law, — and blames himself merely for the blunder of calculating that their action would be consistent.

To this nature, arrogating his time-honored right to rule by force or guile those he counts his creatures, Pompilia speaks for the new individual right the one effective word. The leaven of her "self-possession to the uttermost" is shown at its work in Guido's account of her as the stumbling-block in his path. Not Caponsacchi himself has gained so adequate a conception as Guido has of Pompilia's forceless strength.

Guido's ugly picture of his relations toward his son supplies the right contrast to make the beauty of Pompilia's motherliness more convincing. His notion of fatherhood falls before her influence as fell his notions of citizenship and husbandhood. The contrast is not merely pointed between recreant fatherhood and noble motherliness: it symbolizes the good and evil social influences this wife and husband represent. Of this Guido is unaware, but he lays his defeat to Pompilia; and through her, by means of the push of her influence upon him, on Caponsacchi, on the Pope, and on the Pope's sentence, his whole conception of life begins at last to quake.

At the climax of the poem, through the revelation of Guido's nature, the two forces stand in open opposition. If something come now to check Guido's voluble rhetoric, shrivel through the human testimony and disclose the human fact, if the Pope's sentence — Pompilia's instrument — complete the moral battle-shock between the two, and hurl Guido on from the perception of blunder to a feeling of need, one cry of trust in the strength of human goodness will be enough to proclaim its triumph over human evil. It comes, —

"God, . . .

Pompilia, will you let them murder me?"

In characterizing Guido thus, the poet has brought the entire plot of tragic incident, interwoven character, and dramatically expressed moral motive to a focus.

The style of "The Ring and the Book" is singularly clear, in spite of the colloquialisms, archaisms, historical and classical allusions, and Latin phrases that abound. If they were judged as belonging to the whole poem, and that were considered as if it were a single subjective utterance, they might make it seem uncouth. But if they be referred to their appropriate places in the course of the talk of the various characters, whose monologues constitute the story, they will readily reveal their fitness in a work that blends the traits of poem, drama, and novel. Colloquialisms, for instance, in the speech of such worldly townsmen as are here presented, obviously belong to any vital transcription of everyday talk. It may be a question how far a modern poet is justified in counting upon the use of obsolete and archaic English words to breathe an Italian seventeenth-century aroma. However that may be, it is evidently an intention that accounts for them. Such historical allusions as appear in the frequent mention of Molinism seem intended, also, to add their minute touch to the effect of a historical environment about this particular event in the life of Rome, which Browning sought to give, as already indicated, by placing an outer circle of characters about his central group. The classical allusions mainly appear in the monologues of speakers with some pretence to the pagan scholarship Italy had loved from the days of the Renaissance. It is amusing to see Half-Rome ape this gentlemanly habit and leave a blank in his speech, through an attempt to decorate it with still another pagan god whose name fails him. Bottinius and Guido are more apt. The recurrence of favorite allusions perhaps marks a literary custom of the time, which Browning's reading had noted. The pomp of Latin to which their profession obliges the lawyers is so whimsical, as well as fitting, that finding fault with it is graceless criticism, the more so, since the poet has made his base professionals give a humorous free-hand English version which, while it doubly delights the Latinist, does not leave the English reader in the dark.

Lyric outbursts of exquisite beauty occur only where the mood befits them, when the speaker is noble in character and stirred to a high devotion. The dedicatory lines to "Lyric Love," passages put in Caponsacchi's mouth, and much of Pompilia's utterance, move to this smoother music. Again, in Guido's second monologue, there is a savage directness almost lurid with dramatic force, or there is an impulsive throbbing delicacy in Caponsacchi's outflow, or on the Pope's lips a brooding serenity. Everywhere the fluent diversity is subject to the beck of the dramatic wand.

The work as a whole has been accused of inordinate length. Closer study of it may show that every word is needed for the proper elaboration of the characters. It has been claimed, too, that some one or other of the characters might be spared, but even after those to spare had been agreed upon, a fuller consideration might reveal that all, without exception, fall into the places intended for them, and that on their interlacing support grows the design which distinguishes the poem.

CHARLOTTE PORTER.
HELEN A. CLARKE.

May 11, 1897.

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Posizione
Di tutta La Causa Criminale
Contro
Guido Franceschini Nobile
Aretino, e suoi Sicarij Stati
fatti morire in Roma il di 22.
Febb: 1690.
Il primo con la decollazione gl'altri
quattro di Forza
Romana Homicidiorum

Disputatur an et quando Maritus
possit occidere Vxorem
Adulteranz
absque incursu pang Crd: 23

THE RING AND THE BOOK.

1868-9.

[Book I. places the plan of the poem before the reader, and shows how the purpose of the poet is to transmute by the intermingling of fancy with crude fact, a dry record of events into a work of art, and thereby gain a more universal truth than lies in the fact alone. The finished product of art is symbolized as the Ring; the crude fact is found in the old yellow Book from which first a bare sketch of the story is given. Next, the poet sketches the story as he imagines it after his fancy has clothed the characters with living objective personality. This is symbolized as the ring with the alloy of fancy added that it may be fashioned into shape. Still it needs the final spirit of acid to carry off the alloy, leaving only the refashioned truth. This will be accomplished by bringing all the characters on the scene to tell their own stories. The poet himself will disappear, but the effects of his fancy will be revealed in the fashioning of the characters. Thus to the truth of fact is added the vitalizing truth of art.]

I.

THE RING AND THE BOOK.

Do you see this Ring?¹

'T is Rome-work, made to match

(By Castellani's imitative craft²)

Etrurian circlets found, some happy morn,

After a dropping April; found alive

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

5

That roof old tombs at Chiusi:³ soft, you see,

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

¹ Mrs. Browning owned such a ring. After her death the poet always wore it on his watch-chain. It is now in the possession of their son.

² *Imitative craft*: the elder Castellani Fortunato Piso (d. 1865), founder of the house of Roman jewellers and antiquarians of that name, opened a studio in 1826, about the same time that so many antique jewels were unearthed in Etruria. He turned his attention especially to the rediscovery of the chemical and mechanical processes known

and used by ancient workers in very pure gold, and was successful in reproducing many antique effects.

³ *Chiusi*: the ancient Clusium of Lars Porsenna, capital of Etruria, 88 miles from Florence. To the east of the modern city is a slope called the Jewellers' Field (*Campo degli Orefici*) from the relics brought to light there, rarely as the produce of the tombs or of systematic search, but of accidental discovery, especially after heavy rains.

(Craftsmen instruct me) one approved device
 And but one, fits such slivers of pure gold
 As this was, — such mere oozeings from the mine, 10
 Virgin as oval tawny pendent tear
 At beehive-edge when ripened combs o'erflow. —
 To bear the file's tooth and the hammer's tap:
 Since hammer needs must widen out the round,
 And file emboss it fine with lily-flowers, 15
 Ere the stuff grow a ring-thing right to wear.
 That trick is, the artificer melts up wax
 With honey, so to speak; he mingles gold
 With gold's alloy, and, duly tempering both,
 Effects a manageable mass, then works: 20
 But his work ended, once the thing a ring,
 Oh, there 's repriming!¹ Just a spirt
 O' the proper fiery acid o'er its face,
 And forth the alloy unfastened flies in fume;
 While, self-sufficient now, the shape remains, 25
 The rondure brave, the lilyed loveliness,
 Gold as it was, is, shall be evermore:
 Prime nature with an added artistry —
 No carat lost, and you have gained a ring.
 What of it? 'T is a figure, a symbol, say: 30
 A thing's sign: now for the thing signified.

Do you see this square old yellow Book,² I toss
 I' the air, and catch again, and twirl about
 By the crumpled vellum covers, — pure crude fact
 Secreted from man's life when hearts beat hard. 35
 And brains, high-blooded, ticked two centuries since?
 Examine it yourselves! I found this book,
 Gave a *lira* for it, eightpence English just,
 (Mark the predestination!) when a Hand,
 Always above my shoulder, pushed me once, 40
 One day still fierce 'mid many a day struck calm,
 Across a Square in Florence, crammed with booths,
 Buzzing and blaze, noontide and market-time,
 Toward Baccio's marble,³ — ay, the basement-ledge
 O' the pedestal where sits and menaces 45
 John of the Black Bands with the upright spear,
 'Twixt palace and church, — Riccardi where they lived,
 His race, and San Lorenzo where they lie.

¹ *Repriming*: restoration to its earlier nature.

² *Book*: the original is now in the Library of Balliol College, Oxford.

³ *Baccio's marble*: the statue of Giovanni

delle Bande Nere (John of the Black Bands, father of Cosimo de' Medici), by Baccio Bandinelli, in the Piazza San Lorenzo, between the Palazzo Riccardi (the palace of the Medici) and the church of San Lorenzo.



PALAZZO RICCARDI, FLORENCE.

This book, — precisely on that palace-step
 Which, meant for lounging knaves o' the Medici, 50
 Now serves re-venders to display their ware, —
 'Mongst odds and ends of ravage, picture-frames
 White through the worn gilt, mirror-sconces chipped,
 Bronze angel-heads once knobs attached to chests,
 (Handled when ancient dames chose forth brocade) 55
 Modern chalk drawings, studies from the nude,
 Samples of stone, jet, breccia,¹ porphyry
 Polished and rough, sundry amazing busts
 In baked earth, (broken, Providence be praised!)
 A wreck of tapestry, proudly-proposed web 60
 When reds and blues were indeed red and blue,
 Now offered as a mat to save bare feet
 (Since carpets constitute a cruel cost)
 Treading the chill scagliola² bedward: then
 A pile of brown-etched prints, two *crazie*³ each, 65
 Stopped by a conch a-top from fluttering forth
 — Sowing the Square with works of one and the same
 Master, the imaginative Sienese⁴
 Great in the scenic backgrounds — (name and fame
 None of you know, nor does he fare the worse :) 70
 From these . . . Oh, with a Lionard going cheap
 If it should prove, as promised, that Joconde⁵
 Whereof a copy contents the Louvre! — these
 I picked this book from. Five compeers in flank
 Stood left and right of it as tempting more — 75
 A dogseared Spicilegium,⁶ the fond tale
 O' the Frail One of the Flower, by young Dumas,⁷
 Vulgarized Horace for the use of schools,
 The Life, Death, Miracles of Saint Somebody,
 Saint Somebody Else, his Miracles, Death and Life, — 80
 With this, one glance at the lettered back of which,
 And "Stall!" cried I: a *lira* made it mine.

Here it is, this I toss and take again;
 Small-quarto size, part print part manuscript: 85
 A book in shape but, really, pure crude fact
 Secreted from man's life when hearts beat hard,
 And brains, high-blooded, ticked two centuries since.
 Give it me back! The thing 's restorative
 I' the touch and sight.

¹ *Breccia*: bits of stone from broken walls. Gioconda, by Leonardo da Vinci, in the Louvre.

² *Scagliola*: marble or stone flooring.

³ *Two crazie*: about 1½ d.

⁴ *The imaginative Sienese*: Ademollo (see l. 364).

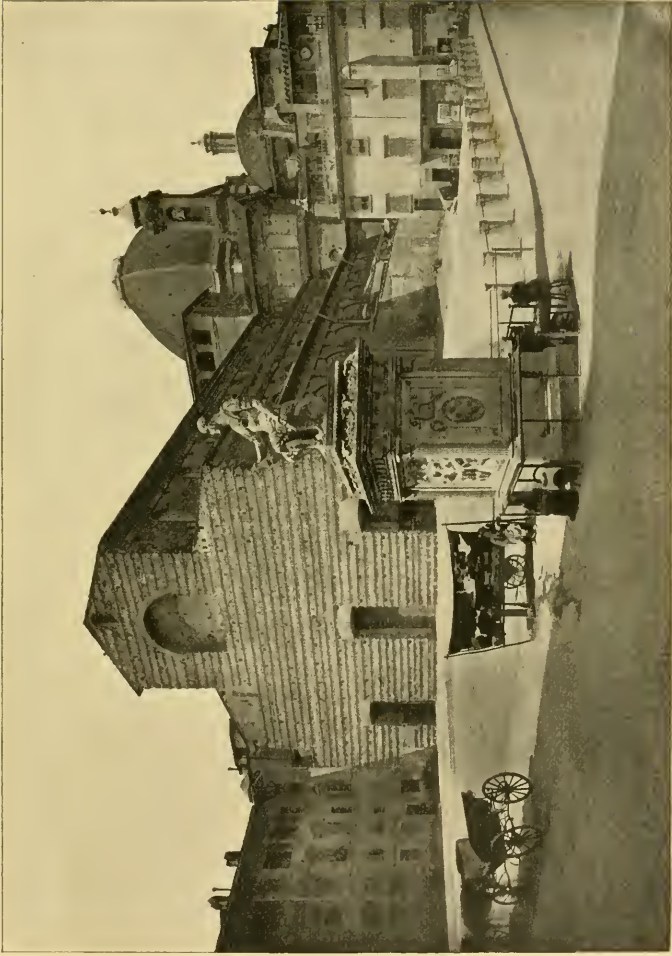
⁶ *Spicilegium*: a book of selections made from the best writers.

⁷ *The Frail One of the Flower*: La

⁵ *Joconde*: the portrait of Mona Lisa Dame aux Caméllias.

That memorable day, (June was the month, Lorenzo named the Square)	90
I leaned a little and overlooked my prize By the low railing round the fountain-source Close to the statue, where a step descends :	
While clinked the cans of copper, as stooped and rose Thick-ankled girls who brimmed them, and made place	95
For marketmen glad to pitch basket down, Dip a broad melon-leaf that holds the wet, And whisk their faded fresh. And on I read Presently, though my path grew perilous	
Between the outspread straw-work, piles of plait	100
Soon to be flapping, each o'er two black eyes And swathe of Tuscan hair, on festas ¹ fine :	
Through fire-irons, tribes of tongs, shovels in sheaves, Skeleton bedsteads, wardrobe-drawers agape, Rows of tall slim brass lamps with dangling gear, —	105
And worse, cast clothes a-sweetening in the sun :	
None of them took my eye from off my prize. Still read I on, from written title-page To written index, on, through street and street.	
At the Strozzi, at the Pillar, at the Bridge ;	110
Till, by the time I stood at home again In Casa Guidi by Felice Church, Under the doorway where the black begins With the first stone-slab of the staircase cold,	
I had mastered the contents, knew the whole truth	115
Gathered together, bound up in this book, Print three-fifths, written supplement the rest. " <i>Romana Homicidiorum</i> " — nay, Better translate — " A Roman murder-case :	
Position of the entire criminal cause	120
Of Guido Franceschini, nobleman. With certain Four the cutthroats in his pay, Tried, all five, and found guilty and put to death By heading or hanging as befitted ranks, At Rome on February Twenty Two,	
Since our salvation Sixteen Ninety Eight :	125
Wherein it is disputed if, and when, Husbands may kill adulterous wives, yet 'scape The customary forfeit."	
Word for word, So ran the title-page : murder, or else	130
Legitimate punishment of the other crime, Accounted murder by mistake, — just that	

¹ *Festas* : feast days.



CHURCH AND SQUARE OF SAN LORENZO, FLORENCE.

And no more, in a Latin cramp enough
 When the law had her eloquence to launch,
 But interfilleted with Italian streaks 135
 When testimony stooped to mother-tongue, —
 That, was this old square yellow book about.

Now, as the ingot, ere the ring was forged,
 Lay gold, (beseech you, hold that figure fast!)
 So, in this book lay absolutely truth, 140
 Fanciless fact, the documents indeed,
 Primary lawyer-pleadings for, against,
 The aforesaid Five; real summed-up circumstance
 Adduced in proof of these on either side,
 Put forth and printed, as the practice was. 145
 At Rome, in the Apostolic Chamber's type,
 And so submitted to the eye o' the Court
 Presided over by His Reverence
 Rome's Governor and Criminal Judge, — the trial
 Itself, to all intents, being then as now 150
 Here in the book and nowise out of it;
 Seeing, there properly was no judgment-bar,
 No bringing of accuser and accused,
 And whoso judged both parties, face to face,
 Before some court, as we conceive of courts. 155
 There was a Hall of Justice; that came last:
 For Justice had a chamber by the hall —
 Where she took evidence first, summed up the same,
 Then sent accuser and accused alike,
 In person of the advocate of each, 160
 To weigh its worth, thereby arrange, array
 The battle. 'T was the so-styled Fisc¹ began,
 Pleaded (and since he only spoke in print
 The printed voice of him lives now as then)
 The public Prosecutor — "Murder's proved; 165
 With five . . . what we call qualities of bad,
 Worse, worst, and yet worse still, and still worse yet;
 Crest over crest crowning the cockatrice,
 That beggar hell's regalia to enrich
 Count Guido Franceschini: punish him!" 170
 Thus was the paper put before the court
 In the next stage, (no noisy work at all,
 To study at ease. In due time like reply
 Came from the so-styled Patron of the Poor,
 Official mouthpiece of the five accused 175
 Too poor to fee a better, — Guido's luck
 Or else his fellows', — which, I hardly know, —

¹ *Fisc*: i.e. Counsel for the Treasury, or Public Prosecutor.

An outbreak as of wonder at the world,
 A fury-fit of outraged innocence,
 A passion of betrayed simplicity : 180
 "Punish Count Guido? For what crime, what hint
 O' the color of a crime, inform us first!
 Reward him rather! Recognize, we say,
 In the deed done, a righteous judgment dealt!
 All conscience and all courage, — there 's our Count 185
 Charactered in a word ; and, what 's more strange,
 He had companionship in privilege,
 Found four courageous conscientious friends :
 Absolve, applaud all five, as props of law,
 Sustainers of society! — perchance 190
 A trifle over-hasty with the hand
 To hold her tottering ark, had tumbled else ;
 But that 's a splendid fault whereat we wink,
 Wishing your cold correctness sparkled so!"
 Thus paper second followed paper first, 195
 Thus did the two join issue — nay, the four,
 Each pleader having an adjunct. " True, he killed
 — So to speak — in a certain sort — his wife,
 But laudably, since thus it happed!" quoth one :
 Whereat, more witness and the case postponed. 200
 " Thus it happed not, since thus he did the deed,
 And proved himself thereby portentousest
 Of cutthroats and a prodigy of crime,
 As the woman that he slaughtered was a saint,
 Martyr and miracle!" quoth the other to match : 205
 Again, more witness, and the case postponed.
 " A miracle, ay — of lust and impudence ;
 Hear my new reasons!" interposed the first :
 " — Coupled with more of mine!" pursued his peer.
 " Beside, the precedents, the authorities!" 210
 From both at once a cry with an echo, that!
 That was a firebrand at each fox's tail
 Unleashed in a cornfield : soon spread flare enough,
 As hurtled thither and there heaped themselves
 From earth's four corners, all authority 215
 And precedent for putting wives to death.
 Or letting wives live, sinful as they seem.
 How legislated, now, in this respect,
 Solon and his Athenians ?¹ Quote the code
 Of Romulus and Rome !² Justinian³ speak! 220

¹ *Solon*, etc. : Solon's laws about women "were of the strangest," says Plutarch, for death, heavy fines, and small fines were all permissible penalties in cases of adultery.

² *Code of Romulus* : the code of the

founder of Rome, as given by Plutarch, forbade a wife to leave her husband, but granted a husband power to turn off a wife for counterfeiting his keys, or for adultery.

³ *Justinian* : the Roman emperor (530-

Nor modern Baldo¹ Bartolo² be dumb!
 The Roman voice was potent, plentiful;
*Cornelia de Sicariis*³ hurried to help
Pompeia de Parricidiis; *Julia de*
 Something-or-other jostled *Lex* this-and-that; 225
 King Solomon confirmed Apostle Paul:⁴
 That nice decision of Dolabella,⁵ eh?
 That pregnant instance of Theodoric,⁶ oh!
 Down to that choice example *Ælian*⁷ gives
 (An instance I find much insisted on) 230
 Of the elephant who, brute-beast though he were,
 Yet understood and punished on the spot
 His master's naughty spouse and faithless friend;
 A true tale which has edified each child,
 Much more shall flourish favored by our court! 235
 Pages of proof this way, and that way proof,
 And always — once again the case postponed.
 Thus wrangled, brangled, jangled they a month,
 — Only on paper, pleadings all in print,
 Nor ever was, except i' the brains of men, 240
 More noise by word of mouth than you hear now —
 'Till the court cut all short with "Judged, your cause.
 Receive our sentence! Praise God! We pronounce
 Count Guido devilish and damnable:
 His wife *Pompiliā* in thought, word and deed, 245
 Was perfect pure, he murdered her for that:
 As for the Four who helped the One, all Five —
 Why, let employer and hirelings share alike
 In guilt and guilt's reward, the death their due!"

So was the trial at end, do you suppose? 250
 "Guilty you find him, death you doom him to?
 Ay, were not Guido, more than needs, a priest,
 Priest and to spare!" — this was a shot reserved;
 I learn this from epistles which begin
 Here where the print ends. — see the pen and ink 255

564) upon whose Pandects, 529-533, later European law was based.

¹ *Baldo*: an eminent professor of civil law, also of canon law, born in 1327.

² *Bartolo*: an erudite Italian jurist (1313-1356) associated with the Emperor Charles V. in codifying laws. To him is attributed the "Bulle d' Or," the charter of the German constitution.

³ *Cornelia de Sicariis*, *Pompeia de Parricidiis*: the titles of Roman laws dealing with homicide and adultery.

⁴ *Solomon confirmed Paul*: Ecc. vii. 25; 1 Cor. vii. 39, xi. 3, 9; Rom. vii. 2.

⁵ *Decision of Dolabella*: see viii. 913.

⁶ *Instance of Theodoric*: the Ostrogoth, in letters (*Variæ Epistolæ*) written for him by Cassiodorus: "For even brute beasts vindicate their conjugal rights by force; how much more man who is so deeply dishonored," etc.

⁷ *Ælian*: "De Animalium Natura," xi. 15.

Of the advocate, the ready at a pinch! —
 “My client boasts the clerkly privilege,
 Has taken minor orders many enough,
 Shows still sufficient chrism upon his pate
 To neutralize a blood-stain: *presbyter*,¹ 260
Primæ tonsuræ, subdiaconus,
Sacerdos, so he slips from underneath
 Your power, the temporal, slides inside the robe
 Of mother Church: to her we make appeal
 By the Pope, the Church’s head!”

A parlous plea, 265

Put in with noticeable effect, it seems;
 “Since straight,” — resumes the zealous orator,
 Making a friend acquainted with the facts, —
 “Once the word ‘clericality’ let fall,
 Procedure stopped and freer breath was drawn 270
 By all considerate and responsible Rome.”
 Quality took the decent part, of course;
 Held by the husband, who was noble too:
 Or, for the matter of that, a churl would side
 With too-refined susceptibility, 275
 And honor which, tender in the extreme.
 Stung to the quick, must roughly right itself
 At all risks, not sit still and whine for law
 As a Jew would, if you squeezed him to the wall,
 Brisk-trotting through the Ghetto.² Nay, it seems, 280
 Even the Emperor’s Envoy had his say
 To say on the subject; might not see, unmoved,
 Civility menaced throughout Christendom
 By too harsh measure dealt her champion here.
 Lastly, what made all safe, the Pope was kind, 285
 From his youth up, reluctant to take life,
 If mercy might be just and yet show grace;
 Much more unlikely then, in extreme age,
 To take a life the general sense bade spare.
 ’T was plain that Guido would go scatheless yet. 290

But human promise, oh, how short of shine!
 How topple down the piles of hope we rear!
 How history proves . . . nay, read Herodotus!³

¹ *Presbyter*, etc.: the names of successive orders in the Roman Church, of which the minor ones can be assumed without causing the holder to cease to be a layman; thus (a point of importance in Count Guido’s case) they do not prevent him from marrying, yet

they are sufficient to entitle him to appeal to the Pope, as head of the Church.

² *Ghetto*: the Jews’ quarter of the city.

³ *Herodotus*: e.g. the stories of Cræsus or of Xerxes.

Suddenly starting from a nap, as it were,
 A dog-sleep with one shut, one open orb. 295
 Cried the Pope's¹ great self, — Innocent by name
 And nature too, and eighty-six years old,
 Antonio Pignatelli of Naples, Pope'
 Who had trod many lands, known many deeds,
 Probed many hearts, beginning with his own, 300
 And now was far in readiness for God. —
 'T was he who first bade leave those souls in peace,
 Those Jansenists, re-nicknamed Molinists,²
 ('Gainst whom the cry went, like a frowzy tune,
 Tickling men's ears — the sect for a quarter of an hour 305
 I the teeth of the world which, clown-like, loves to chew
 Be it but a straw 'twixt work and whistling-while,
 Taste some vituperation, bite away,
 Whether at marjoram-sprig or garlic-clove,
 Aught it may sport with, spoil, and then spit forth) 310
 "Leave them alone," bade he. "those Molinists!
 Who may have other light than we perceive,
 Or why is it the whole world hates them thus?"
 Also he peeled off that last scandal-rag
 Of Nepotism³; and so observed the poor 315
 That men would merrily say. "Halt, deaf and blind,
 Who feed on fat things, leave the master's self
 To gather up the fragments of his feast,
 These be the nephews of Pope Innocent! —
 His own meal costs but five carlines⁴ a day, 320
 Poor-priest's allowance, for he claims no more."
 — He cried of a sudden, this great good old Pope,
 When they appealed in last resort to him,
 "I have mastered the whole matter: I nothing doubt.
 Though Guido stood forth priest from head to heel, 325
 Instead of as alleged, a piece of one, —
 And further, were he, from the tonsured scalp
 To the sandaled sole of him, my son and Christ's,
 Instead of touching us by finger-tip
 As you assert, and pressing up so close 330
 Only to set a blood-smutch on our robe, —
 I and Christ would renounce all right in him.
 Am I not Pope, and presently to die,
 And busied how to render my account,

¹ *The Pope*: Innocent XII., pope from 1691-1700.

² *Molinists*: followers of Miguel Molinos, a Spaniard, who published at Rome in 1675 a work of mystical or "quietistic" theology, entitled the *Guida Spirituale* or *Spiritual Guide*, which attracted much attention, but

was declared heretical by the heads of the Church. Allusions to the orthodox dislike or dread of Molinism at this time recur frequently in this poem.

³ *Nepotism*: favoritism to relations.

⁴ *Carlines*: a small silver coin, worth about twopence.

And shall I wait a day ere I decide 335
 On doing or not doing justice here?
 Cut off his head to-morrow by this time,
 Hang up his four mates, two on either hand,
 And end one business more!"

So said, so done —

Rather so writ, for the old Pope bade this, 340
 I find, with his particular chirograph,
 His own no such infirm hand, Friday night;
 And next day, February Twenty Two,
 Since our salvation Sixteen Ninety Eight,
 — Not at the proper head-and-hanging-place 345
 On bridge-foot close by Castle Angelo,
 Where custom somewhat staled the spectacle.
 ('T was not so well i' the way of Rome, beside,
 The noble Rome, the Rome of Guido's rank)
 But at the city's newer gayer end, — 350
 The cavalcading promenading place
 Beside the gate and opposite the church
 Under the Pincian gardens green with Spring,
 'Neath the obelisk¹ 'twixt the fountains in the Square,
 Did Guido and his fellows find their fate. 355
 All Rome for witness, and — my writer adds —
 Remonstrant in its universal grief,
 Since Guido had the suffrage of all Rome.

This is the bookful: thus far take the truth,
 The untempered gold, the fact untampered with, 360
 The mere ring-metāl ere the ring be made!
 And what has hitherto come of it? Who preserves
 The memory of this Guido, and his wife
 Pompilia, more than Ademollo's name,
 The etcher of those prints, two *crazie* each, 365
 Saved by a stone from snowing broad the Square
 With scenic backgrounds? Was this truth of force?
 Able to take its own part as truth should.
 Sufficient, self-sustaining? Why, if so —
 Yonder 's a fire, into it goes my book, 370
 As who shall say me nay, and what the loss?
 You know the tale already: I may ask,
 Rather than think to tell you, more thereof, —
 Ask you not merely who were he and she.
 Husband and wife, what manner of mankind, 375

¹ *Obelisk*: brought from Egypt by Augustus, and placed in the Circus Maximus, whence, having fallen down, it was removed by Pope Sixtus V. in 1589, and set up in the Piazza del Popolo, below the Monte Pincio.

But how you hold concerning this and that
 Other yet-unnamed actor in the piece.
 The young frank handsome courtly Canon, now,
 The priest, declared the lover of the wife,
 He who, no question, did elope with her, 380
 For certain bring the tragedy about,
 Giuseppe Caponsacchi; — his strange course
 I' the matter, was it right or wrong or both?
 Then the old couple, slaughtered with the wife
 By the husband as accomplices in crime, 385
 Those Comparini, Pietro and his spouse, —
 What say you to the right or wrong of that,
 When, at a known name whispered through the door
 Of a lone villa on a Christmas night,
 It opened that the joyful hearts inside 390
 Might welcome as it were an angel-guest
 Come in Christ's name to knock and enter, sup
 And satisfy the loving ones he saved;
 And so did welcome devils and their death?
 I have been silent on that circumstance 395
 Although the couple passed for close of kin
 To wife and husband, were by some accounts
 Pompilia's very parents: you know best.
 Also that infant the great joy was for,
 That Gaetano, the wife's two-weeks' babe, 400
 The husband's first-born child, his son and heir,
 Whose birth and being turned his night to day —
 Why must the father kill the mother thus
 Because she bore his son and saved himself?

Well, British Public, ye who like me not, 405
 (God love you!) and will have your proper laugh
 At the dark question, laugh it! I laugh first.
 Truth must prevail, the proverb vows; and truth
 — Here is it all i' the book at last, as first
 There it was all i' the heads and hearts of Rome 410
 Gentle and simple, never to fall nor fade
 Nor be forgotten. Yet, a little while,
 The passage of a century or so,
 Decads thrice five, and here 's time paid his tax,
 Oblivion gone home with her harvesting, 415
 And all left smooth again as scythe could shave,
 Far from beginning with you London folk,
 I took my book to Rome first, tried truth's power
 On likely people. "Have you met such names?
 Is a tradition extant of such facts? 420
 Your law-courts stand, your records frown a-row:
 What if I rove and rummage?" "— Why you 'll waste

Your pains and end as wise as you began!"
 Every one snickered: "names and facts thus old
 Are newer much than Europe news we find 425
 Down in to-day's *Diario*.¹ Records, quotha?
 Why, the French burned them, what else do the French?
 The rap-and-rending nation! And it tells
 Against the Church, no doubt. — another gird
 At the Temporality, your Trial, of course?" 430
 "— Quite otherwise this time," submitted I:
 "Clean for the Church and dead against the world,
 The flesh and the devil, does it tell for once."
 "— The rarer and the happier! All the same,
 Content you with your treasure of a book, 435
 And waive what 's wanting! Take a friend's advice!
 It 's not the custom of the country. Mend
 Your ways indeed and we may stretch a point:
 Go get you manned by Manning and new-manned
 By Newman and, mayhap, wise-manned to boot 440
 By Wiseman,² and we 'll see or else we won't!
 Thanks meantime for the story, long and strong,
 A pretty piece of narrative enough,
 Which scarce ought so to drop out, one would think,
 From the more curious annals of our kind, 445
 Do you tell the story, now, in off-hand style,
 Straight from the book? Or simply here and there,
 (The while you vault it through the loose and large)
 Hang to a hint? Or is there book at all,
 And don't you deal in poetry, make-believe, 450
 And the white lies it sounds like?"

Yes and no!

From the book, yes; thence bit by bit I dug
 The lingot³ truth, that memorable day,
 Assayed and knew my piecemeal gain was gold. —
 Yes: but from something else surpassing that, 455
 Something of mine which, mixed up with the mass,
 Made it bear hammer and be firm to file.
 Fancy with fact is just one fact the more:
 To-wit, that fancy has informed, transpierced,
 Thridded and so thrown fast the facts else free, 460
 As right through ring and ring runs the djereed⁴
 And binds the loose, one bar without a break.
 I fused my live soul and that inert stuff.

¹ *Diario*: daily paper.

² *Manning*, etc.: distinguished modern prelates and champions of the Roman Catholic Church.

³ *Lingot*: the same word as ingot; here = the solid mass of truth.

⁴ *Djereed*: an Arab spear. The allusion is to a game analogous to tilting at a ring.

Before attempting smithcraft, on the night
 After the day when. — truth thus grasped and gained, 465
 The book was shut and done with and laid by
 On the cream-colored massive agate, broad
 'Neath the twin cherubs in the tarnished frame
 O' the mirror, tall thence to the ceiling-top.
 And from the reading, and that slab I leant 470
 My elbow on, the while I read and read,
 I turned, to free myself and find the world.
 And stepped out on the narrow terrace, built
 Over the street and opposite the church,
 And paced its lozenge-brickwork sprinkled cool; 475
 Because Felice-church-side stretched, a-glow
 Through each square window fringed for festival.
 Whence came the clear voice of the cloistered ones
 Chanting a chant made for midsummer nights —
 I know not what particular praise of God, 480
 It always came and went with June. Beneath
 I' the street, quick shown by openings of the sky
 When flame fell silently from cloud to cloud,
 Richer than that gold snow¹ Jove rained on Rhodes,
 The townsmen walked by twos and threes, and talked, 485
 Drinking the blackness in default of air —
 A busy human sense beneath my feet:
 While in and out the terrace-plants, and round
 One branch of tall datura,² waxed and waned
 The lamp-fly lured there, wanting the white flower. 490
 Over the roof o' the lighted church I looked
 A bowshot to the street's end, north away
 Out of the Roman gate to the Roman road
 By the river, till I felt the Apennine.
 And there would lie Arezzo, the man's town, 495
 The woman's trap and cage and torture-place,
 Also the stage where the priest played his part,
 A spectacle for angels, — ay, indeed,
 There lay Arezzo!³ Farther then I fared,
 Feeling my way on through the hot and dense, 500
 Romeward, until I found the wayside inn
 By Castelnuovo's few mean hut-like homes
 Huddled together on the hill-foot bleak.
 Bare, broken only by that tree or two
 Against the sudden bloody splendor poured 505
 Cursewise in day's departure by the sun

¹ *Gold snow*, etc.: as the Rhodians were the first who offered sacrifices to Minerva, Jove rewarded them by covering the island with a golden cloud from which he sent showers of presents upon the people.

² *Datura*: thorn-apple = stramonium.

³ *Arezzo*: in Tuscany, about 40 miles southeast of Florence.

O'er the low house-roof of that squalid inn
 Where they three, for the first time and the last,
 Husband and wife and priest, met face to face.
 Whence I went on again, the end was near, 510
 Step by step, missing none and marking ail.
 Till Rome itself, the ghastly goal, I reached.
 Why, all the while. — how could it otherwise? —
 The life in me abolished the death of things,
 Deep calling unto deep: as then and there 515
 Acted itself over again once more
 The tragic piece. I saw with my own eyes
 In Florence as I trod the terrace, breathed
 The beauty and the fearfulness of night.
 How it had run, this round from Rome to Rome — 520
 Because, you are to know, they lived at Rome,
 Pompilia's parents, as they thought themselves,
 Two poor ignoble hearts who did their best
 Part God's way, part the other way than God's,
 To somehow make a shift and scramble through 525
 The world's mud, careless if it splashed and spoiled,
 Provided they might so hold high, keep clean
 Their child's soul, one soul white enough for three.
 And lift it to whatever star should stoop,
 What possible sphere of purer life than theirs 530
 Should come in aid of whiteness hard to save.
 I saw the star stoop, that they strained to touch,
 And did touch and depose their treasure on,
 As Guido Franceschini took away
 Pompilia to be his for evermore. 535
 While they sang " Now let us depart in peace,
 Having beheld thy glory, Guido's wife!"
 I saw the star supposed, but fog o' the fen,
 Gilded star-fashion by a glint from hell;
 Having been heaved up, haled on its gross way, 540
 By hands unguessed before, invisible help
 From a dark brotherhood, and specially
 Two obscure goblin creatures, fox-faced this,
 Cat-clawed the other, called his next of kin
 By Guido the main monster, — cloaked and caped, 545
 Making as they were priests, to mock God more. —
 Abate Paul, Canon Girolamo.
 These who had rolled the starlike pest to Rome
 And stationed it to suck up and absorb
 The sweetness of Pompilia, rolled again 550
 That bloated bubble, with her soul inside.
 Back to Arezzo and a palace there —
 Or say, a fissure in the honest earth
 Whence long ago had curled the vapor first.

Blown big by nether fires to appal day : 555
 It touched home, broke, and blasted far and wide.
 I saw the cheated couple find the cheat
 And guess what foul rite they were captured for, —
 Too fain to follow over hill and dale
 That child of theirs caught up thus in the cloud 560
 And carried by the Prince o' the Power of the Air
 Whither he would, to wilderness or sea.
 I saw them, in the potency of fear,
 Break somehow through the satyr-family
 (For a gray mother with a monkey-mien, 565
 Mopping and mowing, was apparent too.
 As confident of capture, all took hands
 And danced about the captives in a ring)
 — Saw them break through, breathe safe, at Rome again,
 Saved by the selfish instinct, losing so 570
 Their loved one left with haters. These I saw,
 In recrudescency of baffled hate,
 Prepare to wring the uttermost revenge
 From body and soul thus left them : all was sure.
 Fire laid and cauldron set, the obscene ring traced, 575
 The victim stripped and prostrate : what of God?
 The cleaving of a cloud, a cry, a crash,
 Quenched lay their cauldron, covered i' the dust the crew,
 As, in a glory of armor like Saint George,
 Out again sprang the young good beauteous priest 580
 Bearing away the lady in his arms.
 Saved for a splendid minute and no more.
 For, whom i' the path did that priest come upon,
 He and the poor lost lady borne so brave,
 — Checking the song of praise in me, had else 585
 Swelled to the full for God's will done on earth —
 Whom but a dusk misfeatured messenger,
 No other than the angel of this life,
 Whose care is lest men see too much at once.
 He made the sign, such God-glimpse must suffice, 590
 Nor prejudice the Prince o' the Power of the Air,
 Whose ministration piles us overhead
 What we call, first, earth's roof and, last, heaven's floor,
 Now grate o' the trap, then outlet of the cage :
 So took the lady, left the priest alone, 595
 And once more canopied the world with black.
 But through the blackness I saw Rome again,
 And where a solitary villa stood
 In a lone garden-quarter : it was eve,
 The second of the year, and oh so cold ! 600
 Ever and anon there flittered through the air
 A snow-flake, and a scanty couch of snow

Crusted the grass-walk and the garden-mould.
 All was grave, silent, sinister, — when, ha?
 Glimmeringly did a pack of were-wolves pad 605
 The snow, those flames were Guido's eyes in front,
 And all five found and footed it, the track,
 To where a threshold-streak of warmth and light
 Betrayed the villa-door with life inside,
 While an inch outside were those blood-bright eyes, 610
 And black lips wrinkling o'er the flash of teeth,
 And tongues that lolled — Oh God that madest man!
 They parleyed in their language. Then one whined —
 That was the policy and master-stroke —
 Deep in his throat whispered what seemed a name — 615
 "Open to Caponsacchi!" Guido cried:
 "Gabriel!" cried Lucifer at Eden-gate.
 Wide as a heart, opened the door at once,
 Showing the joyous couple, and their child
 The two-weeks' mother, to the wolves, the wolves 620
 To them. Close eyes! And when the corpses lay
 Stark-stretched, and those the wolves, their wolf-work done,
 Were safe-embosomed by the night again,
 I knew a necessary change in things:
 As when the worst watch of the night gives way, 625
 And there comes duly, to take cognizance,
 The scrutinizing eye-point of some star —
 And who despairs of a new daybreak now?
 Lo, the first ray protruded on those five!
 It reached them, and each felon writhed transfixed. 630
 Awhile they palpitated on the spear
 Motionless over Tophet: stand or fall?
 "I say, the spear should fall — should stand, I say!"
 Cried the world come to judgment, granting grace
 Or dealing doom according to world's wont. 635
 Those world's-bystanders grouped on Rome's cross-road
 At prick and summons of the primal curse
 Which bids man love as well as make a lie.
 There prattle they, discoursed the right and wrong,
 Turned wrong to right, proved wolves sheep and sheep wolves, 640
 So that you scarce distinguished fell from fleece:
 Till out spoke a great guardian of the fold,
 Stood up, put forth his hand that held the crook,
 And motioned that the arrested point decline:
 Horribly off, the wriggling dead-weight reeled. 645
 Rushed to the bottom and lay ruined there.
 Though still at the pit's mouth, despite the smoke
 O' the burning, barriers turned again to talk
 And trim the balance, and detect at least
 A touch of wolf in what showed whitest sheep, 650

A cross of sheep redeeming the whole wolf, —
 Vex truth a little longer : — less and less,
 Because years came and went, and more and more
 Brought new lies with them to be loved in turn.
 Till all at once the memory of the thing, — 655
 The fact that, wolves or sheep, such creatures were, —
 Which hitherto, however men supposed,
 Had somehow plain and pillar-like prevailed
 I' the midst of them, indisputably fact,
 Granite, time's tooth should grate against, not graze, — 660
 Why, this proved sandstone, friable, fast to fly
 And give its grain away at wish o' the wind.
 Ever and ever more diminutive,
 Base gone, shaft lost, only entablature,
 Dwindled into no bigger than a book, 665
 Lay of the column ; and that little, left
 By the roadside 'mid the ordure, shards and weeds.
 Until I haply, wandering that lone way,
 Kicked it up, turned it over, and recognized.
 For all the crumblement, this abacus,¹ 670
 This square old yellow book, could calculate
 By this the lost proportions of the style.

This was it from, my fancy with those facts,
 I used to tell the tale, turned gay to grave,
 But lacked a listener seldom ; such alloy, 675
 Such substance of me interfused the gold
 Which, wrought into a shapely ring therewith,
 Hammered and filed, fingered and favored, last
 Lay ready for the renovating wash
 O' the water. "How much of the tale was true?" 680
 I disappeared ; the book grew all in all ;
 The lawyers' pleadings swelled back to their size, —
 Doubled in two, the crease upon them yet,
 For more commodity of carriage, see! —
 And these are letters, veritable sheets 685
 That brought posthaste the news to Florence, writ
 At Rome the day Count Guido died, we find,
 To stay the craving of a client there,
 Who bound the same and so produced my book.
 Lovers of dead truth, did ye fare the worse? 690
 Lovers of live truth, found ye false my tale?

Well, now ; there 's nothing in nor out o' the world
 Good except truth : yet this, the something else,

¹ *Abacus* : the upper part of the capital of a pillar on which the architrave rests. In its earliest forms it is generally square in shape.

What 's this then, which proves good yet seems untrue? This that I mixed with truth, motions of mine That quickened, made the inertness malleolable ¹ O' the gold was not mine, — what 's your name for this? Are means to the end, themselves in part the end? Is fiction which makes fact alive, fact too? The somehow may be thishow.	695
I find first	700
Writ down for very A B C of fact, "In the beginning God made heaven and earth ;" From which, no matter with what lisp, I spell And speak you out a consequence — that man, Man. — as befits the made, the inferior thing. — Purposed, since made, to grow, not make in turn, Yet forced to try and make, else fail to grow, — Formed to rise, reach at, if not grasp and gain The good beyond him, — which attempt is growth. — Repeats God's process in man's due degree, Attaining man's proportionate result, — Creates, no, but resuscitates, perhaps. Inalienable, the arch-prerogative Which turns thought, act — conceives, expresses too! No less, man, bounded, yearning to be free, May so project his surplusage of soul In search of body, so add self to self By owning what lay ownerless before, — So find, so fill full, so appropriate forms — That, although nothing which had never life Shall get life from him, be, not having been, Yet, something dead may get to live again, Something with too much life or not enough, Which, either way imperfect, ended once : An end whereat man's impulse intervenes, Makes new beginning, starts the dead alive, Completes the incomplete and saves the thing. Man's breath were vain to light a virgin wick. — Half-burned-out, all but quite-quenched wicks o' the lamp Stationed for temple-service on this earth, These indeed let him breathe on and relume! For such man's feat is, in the due degree, — Mimic creation, galvanism for life, But still a glory portioned in the scale. Why did the mage say, — feeling as we are wont For truth, and stopping midway short of truth, And resting on a lie. — "I raise a ghost" ?	705 710 715 720 725 730 735

¹ *Malleolable* : formed from the Latin, *malleolus*, a little hammer.

"Because," he taught adepts, "man makes not man.
 Yet by a special gift, an art of arts,
 More insight and more oversight and much more 740
 Will to use both of these than boast my mates,
 I can detach from me, commission forth
 Half of my soul; which in its pilgrimage
 O'er old unwandered waste ways of the world,
 May chance upon some fragment of a whole. 745
 Rag of flesh, scrap of bone in dim disuse,
 Smoking flax that fed fire once: prompt therein
 I enter, spark-like, put old powers to play,
 Push lines out to the limit, lead forth last
 (By a moonrise through a ruin of a crypt) 750
 What shall be mistily seen, murmuringly heard,
 Mistakenly felt: then write my name with Faust's!"
 Oh, Faust, why Faust? Was not Elisha once? —
 Who bade them lay his staff on a corpse-face.
 There was no voice, no hearing: he went in 755
 Therefore, and shut the door upon them twain,
 And prayed unto the Lord: and he went up
 And lay upon the corpse, dead on the couch.
 And put his mouth upon its mouth, his eyes
 Upon its eyes, his hands upon its hands, 760
 And stretched him on the flesh; the flesh waxed warm:
 And he returned, walked to and fro the house.
 And went up, stretched him on the flesh again,
 And the eyes opened. 'T is a credible feat
 With the right man and way.

Enough of me ! 765

The Book ! I turn its medicinable leaves
 In London now till, as in Florence erst,
 A spirit laughs and leaps through every limb,
 And lights my eye, and lifts me by the hair,
 Letting me have my will again with these 770
 — How title I the dead alive once more?

Count Guido Franceschini the Aretine,
 Descended of an ancient house, though poor,
 A beak-nosed bushy-bearded black-haired lord,
 Lean, pallid, low of stature yet robust, 775
 Fifty years old, — having four years ago
 Married Pompilia Comparini, young,
 Good, beautiful, at Rome, where she was born,
 And brought her to Arezzo, where they lived
 Unhappy lives, whatever curse the cause. — 780
 This husband, taking four accomplices,
 Followed this wife to Rome, where she was fled

From their Arezzo to find peace again,
 In convoy, eight months earlier, of a priest,
 Aretine also, of still nobler birth, 785
 Giuseppe Caponsacchi, — caught her there
 Quiet in a villa on a Christmas night,
 With only Pietro and Violante by,
 Both her putative parents; killed the three,
 Aged, they, seventy each, and she, seventeen, 790
 And, two weeks since, the mother of his babe
 First-born and heir to what the style was worth
 O' the Guido who determined, dared and did
 This deed just as he purposed point by point.
 Then, bent upon escape, but hotly pressed, 795
 And captured with his co-mates that same night,
 He, brought to trial, stood on this defence —
 Injury to his honor caused the act;
 And since his wife was false, (as manifest
 By flight from home in such companionship,) 800
 Death, punishment deserved of the false wife
 And faithless parents who abetted her
 I' the flight aforesaid, wronged nor God nor man.
 "Nor false she, nor yet faithless they," replied
 The accuser; "cloaked and masked this murder glooms; 805
 True was Pompilia, loyal too the pair;
 Out of the man's own heart a monster curled
 Which — crime coiled with connivancy at crime —
 His victim's breast, he tells you, hatched and reared;
 Uncoil we and stretch stark the worm of hell!" 810
 A month the trial swayed this way and that
 Ere judgment settled down on Guido's guilt;
 Then was the Pope, that good Twelfth Innocent,
 Appealed to: who well weighed what went before,
 Affirmed the guilt and gave the guilty doom. 815

Let this old woe step on the stage again!
 Act itself o'er anew for men to judge,
 Not by the very sense and sight indeed —
 (Which take at best imperfect cognizance,
 Since, how heart moves brain, and how both move hand, 820
 What mortal ever in entirety saw?)
 — No dose of purer truth than man digests,
 But truth with falsehood, milk that feeds him now,
 Not strong meat he may get to bear some day —
 To-wit, by voices we call evidence, 825
 Uproar in the echo, live fact deadened down,
 Talked over, bruited abroad, whispered away,
 Yet helping us to all we seem to hear:
 For how else know we save by worth of word?

Here are the voices presently shall sound 830
 In due succession. First, the world's outcry
 Around the rush and ripple of any fact
 Fallen stonewise, plumb on the smooth face of things ;
 The world's guess, as it crowds the bank o' the pool,
 At what were figure and substance, by their splash : 835
 Then, by vibrations in the general mind,
 At depth of deed already out of reach.
 This threefold murder of the day before, —
 Say, Half-Rome's feel after the vanished truth ;
 Honest enough, as the way is : all the same, 840
 Harboring in the centre of its sense
 A hidden germ of failure, shy but sure,
 To neutralize that honesty and leave
 That feel for truth at fault, as the way is too.
 Some prepossession such as starts amiss. 845
 By but a hair's breadth at the shoulder-blade,
 The arm o' the feeler, dip he ne'er so bold ;
 So leads arm waveringly, lets fall wide
 O' the mark its finger, sent to find and fix
 Truth at the bottom, that deceptive speck. 850
 With this Half-Rome, — the source of swerving, call
 Over-belief in Guido's right and wrong
 Rather than in Pompilia's wrong and right :
 Who shall say how, who shall say why? 'Tis there —
 The instinctive theorizing whence a fact 855
 Looks to the eye as the eye likes the look.
 Gossip in a public place, a sample-speech.
 Some worthy, with his previous hint to find
 A husband's side the safer, and no whit
 Aware he is not Æacus¹ the while. — 860
 How such an one supposes and states fact
 To whosoever of a multitude
 Will listen, and perhaps prolong thereby
 The not-unpleasant flutter at the breast,
 Born of a certain spectacle shut in 865
 By the church Lorenzo opposite. So, they lounge
 Midway the mouth o' the street, on Corso side,
 'Twixt palace Fiano and palace Ruspoli,
 Linger and listen ; keeping clear o' the crowd,
 Yet wishful one could lend that crowd one's eyes, 870
 (So universal is its plague of squint)
 And make hearts beat our time that flutter false :
 — All for truth's sake, mere truth, nothing else !
 How Half-Rome found for Guido much excuse.

¹ Æacus : the colleague of Minos and Rhadamanthus as judge of the nether world ; hence a type of impartiality.

Next, from Rome's other half, the opposite feel 875
 For truth with a like swerve, like unsuccess, —
 Or if success, by no skill but more luck
 This time, through siding rather with the wife.
 Because a fancy-fit inclined that way,
 Than with the husband. One wears drab, one pink ; 880
 Who wears pink, ask him " Which shall win the race,
 Of coupled runners like as egg and egg? "
 " — Why, if I must choose, he with the pink scarf."
 Doubtless for some such reason choice fell here.
 A piece of public talk to correspond 885
 At the next stage of the story ; just a day
 Let pass and new day brings the proper change.
 Another sample-speech i' the market-place
 O' the Barberini by the Capucins :
 Where the old Triton,¹ at his fountain-sport, 890
 Bernini's creature plated to the paps,
 Puffs up steel sleet which breaks to diamond dust,
 A spray of sparkles snorted from his conch.
 High over the caritellas, out o' the way
 O' the motley merchandizing multitude. 895
 Our murder has been done three days ago,
 The frost is over and gone, the south wind laughs,
 And, to the very tiles of each red roof
 A-smoke i' the sunshine, Rome lies gold and glad :
 So, listen how, to the other half of Rome, 900
 Pompilia seemed a saint and martyr both!

Then, yet another day let come and go,
 With pause prelusive still of novelty,
 Hear a fresh speaker! — neither this nor that
 Half-Rome aforesaid ; something bred of both : 905
 One and one breed the inevitable three.
 Such is the personage harangues you next ;
 The elaborated product, *tertium quid* :²
 Rome's first commotion in subsidence gives
 The curd o' the cream, flower o' the wheat, as it were, 910
 And finer sense o' the city. Is this plain?
 You get a reasoned statement of the case,
 Eventual verdict of the curious few
 Who care to sift a business to the bran
 Nor coarsely bolt it like the simpler sort. 915
 Here, after ignorance, instruction speaks ;

¹ *Old Triton* : fountain in the great square of the Barberini palace, palace and fountain both by Bernini, celebrated sculptor and architect, 1598-1680.

² *Tertium quid* : a third something

- Here, clarity of candor, history's soul,
 The critical mind, in short : no gossip-guess.
 What the superior social section thinks,
 In person of some man of quality 920
 Who, — breathing musk from lace-work and brocade,
 His solitaire amid the flow of frill,
 Powdered peruke on nose, and bag at back,
 And cane dependent from the ruffled wrist, —
 Harangues in silvery and selectest phrase 925
 'Neath waxlight in a glorified saloon
 Where mirrors multiply the girandole : ¹
 Courting the approbation of no mob,
 But Eminence This and All-Illustrious That
 Who take snuff softly, range in well-bred ring, *hand* 930
 Card-table-quitters for observance' sake,
 Around the argument, the rational word —
 Still, spite its weight and worth, a sample-speech.
 How Quality dissertated on the case.
- So much for Rome and rumor ; smoke comes first : 935
 Once let smoke rise untroubled, we descry
 Clearlier what tongues of flame may spire and spit
 To eye and ear, each with appropriate tinge
 According to its food, or pure or foul.
 The actors, no mere rumors of the act, 940
 Intervene. First you hear Count Guido's voice,
 In a small chamber that adjoins the court,
 Where Governor and Judges, summoned thence,
 Tommati, Venturini and the rest.
 Find the accused ripe for declaring truth. 945
 Soft-cushioned sits he ; yet shifts seat, shirks touch,
 As, with a twitchy brow and wincing lip
 And cheek that changes to all kinds of white,
 He proffers his defence. in tones subdued
 Near to mock-mildness now, so mournful seems 950
 The obtuser sense truth fails to satisfy ;
 Now, moved, from pathos at the wrong endured,
 To passion ; for the natural man is roused
 At fools who ~~first do wrong~~ then pour the blame
 Of their wrong-doing, Satan-like, on Job. 955
 Also his tongue at times is hard to curb ;
 Incisive, nigh satiric bites the phrase.
 Rough-raw, yet somehow claiming privilege
 — It is so hard for shrewdness to admit
 Folly means no harm when she calls black white! 960
 — Eruption momentary at the most.

¹ *Girandole* : a dance.

Modified forthwith by a fall o' the fire,
 Sage acquiescence ; for the world 's the world,
 And, what it errs in. Judges rectify :
 He feels he has a fist, then folds his arms 965
 Crosswise and makes his mind up to be meek.
 And never once does he detach his eye
 From those ranged there to slay him or to save,
 But does his best man's-service for himself,
 Despite, — what twitches brow and makes lip wince, — 970
 His limbs' late taste of what was called the Cord,
 Or Vigil-torture¹ more facetiously.
 Even so ; they were wont to tease the truth
 Out of loth witness (toying, trifling time)
 By torture : 't was a trick, a vice of the age. 975
 Here, there and everywhere, what would you have ?
 Religion used to tell Humanity
 She gave him warrant or denied him course.
 And since the course was much to his own mind,
 Of pinching flesh and pulling bone from bone 980
 To unhusk truth a-hiding in its hulls,
 Nor whisper of a warning stopped the way,
 He, in their joint behalf, the burly slave,
 Bestirred him, mauled and maimed all recusants,
 While, prim in place, Religion overlooked ; 985
 And so had done till doomsday, never a sign
 Nor sound of interference from her mouth,
 But that at last the burly slave wiped brow,
 Let eye give notice as if soul were there,
 Muttered " 'T is a vile trick, foolish more than vile, 990
 Should have been counted sin ; I make it so :
 At any rate no more of it for me —
 Nay, for I break the torture-engine thus !"
 Then did Religion start up, stare amain,
 Look round for help and see none, smile and say 995
 " What, broken is the rack ? Well done of thee !
 Did I forget to abrogate its use ?
 Be the mistake in common with us both !
 — One more fault our blind age shall answer for,
 Down in my book denounced though it must be 1000
 Somewhere. Henceforth find truth by milder means !"
 Ah but, Religion, did we wait for thee
 To ope the book, that serves to sit upon,
 And pick such place out, we should wait indeed !
 That is all history : and what is not now, 1005
 Was then, defendants found it to their cost.
 How Guido, after being tortured, spoke.

¹ *Vigil-torture* : which kept the accused a jurist of Bologna, and called by him *cordis* from sleep, said to be invented by Marsilius, *dolorem*.

Also hear Caponsacchi who comes next,
 Man and priest — could you comprehend the coil! —
 In days when that was rife which now is rare. 1010
 How, mingling each its multifarious wires,
 Now heaven, now earth, now heaven and earth at once,
 Had plucked at and perplexed their puppet here,
 Played off the young frank personable priest;
 Sworn fast and tonsured plain heaven's celibate, 1015
 And yet earth's clear-accepted servitor,
 A courtly spiritual Cupid, squire of dames
 By law of love and mandate of the mode.
 The Church's own, or why parade her seal,
 Wherefore that chrism and consecrative work? 1020
 Yet verily the world's, or why go badged
 A prince of sonneteers and lutanists,¹
 Show color of each vanity in vogue
 Borne with decorum due on blameless breast?
 All that is changed now, as he tells the court 1025
 How he had played the part excepted at;
 Tell it, moreover, now the second time:
 Since, for his cause of scandal, his own share
 I' the flight from home and husband of the wife,
 He has been censured, punished in a sort 1030
 By relegation, — exile, we should say,
 To a short distance for a little time, —
 Whence he is summoned on a sudden now,
 Informed that she, he thought to save, is lost,
 And, in a breath, bidden re-tell his tale. 1035
 Since the first telling somehow missed effect,
 And then advise in the matter. There stands he,
 While the same grim black-panelled chamber blinks
 As though rubbed shiny with the sins of Rome
 Told the same oak for ages — wave-washed wall 1040
 Against which sets a sea of wickedness.
 There, where you yesterday heard Guido speak,
 Speaks Caponsacchi; and there face him too
 Tommatj. Venturini and the rest
 Who, eight months earlier, scarce repressed the smile, 1045
 Forewent the wink; waived recognition so
 Of peccadillos incident to youth.
 Especially youth high-born; for youth means love,
 Vows can't change nature, priests are only men,
 And love likes stratagem and subterfuge 1050
 Which age, that once was youth, should recognize,
 May blame, but needs not press too hard upon.
 Here sit the old Judges then, but with no grace

¹ *Lutanist*: player on the lute.

Of reverend carriage, magisterial port :
 For why? The accused of eight months since, — the same 1055
 Who cut the conscious figure of a fool,
 Changed countenance, dropped bashful gaze to ground,
 While hesitating for an answer then, —
 Now is grown judge himself, terrifies now
 This, now the other culprit called a judge. 1060
 Whose turn it is to stammer and look strange,
 As he speaks rapidly, angrily, speech that smites :
 And they keep silence, bear blow after blow,
 Because the seeming-solitary man,
 Speaking for God, may have an audience too, 1065
 Invisible, no discreet judge provokes.
 How the priest Caponsacchi said his say.

Then a soul sighs its lowest and its last
 After the loud ones, — so much breath remains
 Unused by the four-days'-dying ; for she lived 1070
 Thus long, miraculously long, 't was thought,
 Just that Pompilia might defend herself.
 How, while the hireling and the alien stoop,
 Comfort, yet question, — since the time is brief,
 And folk, allowably inquisitive, 1075
 Encircle the low pallet where she lies
 In the good house that helps the poor to die, —
 Pompilia tells the story of her life.
 For friend and lover, — leech and man of law
 Do service ; busy helpful ministrants 1080
 As varied in their calling as their mind,
 Temper and age : and yet from all of these,
 About the white bed under the arched roof,
 Is somehow, as it were, evolved a one, —
 Small separate sympathies combined and large, 1085
 Nothings that were, grown something very much :
 As if the bystanders gave each his straw,
 All he had, though a trifle in itself,
 Which, plaited all together, made a Cross
 Fit to die looking on and praying with, 1090
 Just as well as if ivory or gold.
 So, to the common kindness she speaks,
 There being scarce more privacy at the last
 For mind than body : but she is used to bear,
 And only unused to the brotherly look. 1095
 How she endeavored to explain her life.

Then, since a Trial ensued, a touch o' the same
 To sober us, flustered with frothy talk,
 And teach our common sense its helplessness.

For why deal simply with divining-rod, 1100
 Scrape where we fancy secret sources flow,
 And ignore law, the recognized machine,
 Elaborate display of pipe and wheel
 Framed to unchoke, pump up and pour apace
 Truth till a flowery foam shall wash the world? 1105
 The patent truth-extracting process. — ha?
 Let us make that grave mystery turn one wheel,
 Give you a single grind of law at least!
 One Orator, of two on either side.
 Shall teach us the puissance of the tongue 1110
 — That is, o' the pen which simulated tongue
 On paper and saved all except the sound
 Which never was. Law's speech beside law's thought?
 That were too stunning, too immense an odds:
 That point of vantage law lets nobly pass. 1115
 One lawyer shall admit us to behold
 The manner of the making out a case,
 First fashion of a speech; the chick in egg,
 The masterpiece law's bosom incubates.
 How Don Giacinto of the Arcangeli, 1120
 Called Procurator of the Poor at Rome,
 Now advocate for Guido and his mates, —
 The jolly learned man of middle age,
 Cheek and jowl all in laps with fat and law,
 Mirthful as mighty, yet, as great hearts use, 1125
 Despite the name and fame that tempt our flesh,
 Constant to that devotion of the hearth,
 Still captive in those dear domestic ties! —
 How he, — having a cause to triumph with,
 All kind of interests to keep intact, 1130
 More than one efficacious personage
 To tranquillize, conciliate and secure,
 And above all, public anxiety
 To quiet, show its Guido in good hands, —
 Also, as if such burdens were too light, 1135
 A certain family-feast to claim his care,
 The birthday-banquet for the only son —
 Paternity at smiling strife with law —
 How he brings both to buckle in one bond;
 And, thick at throat, with waterish under-eye, 1140
 Turns to his task and settles in his seat
 And puts his utmost means in practice now:
 Wheezes out law-phrase, whiffles Latin forth,
 And, just as though roast lamb would never be,
 Makes logic levigate ¹ the big crime small: 1145

¹ *Levigate*: make light of.

Rubs palm on palm, rakes foot with itchy foot,
 Conceives and inchoates the argument,
 Sprinkling each flower appropriate to the time,
 — Ovidian quip or Ciceronian crank,
 A-bubble in the larynx while he laughs, 1150
 As he had fritters deep down frying there.
 How he turns, twists, and tries the oily thing
 Shall be — first speech for Guido 'gainst the Fisc.
 Then with a skip as it were from heel to head,
 Leaving yourselves fill up the middle bulk 1155
 O' the Trial, reconstruct its shape august,
 From such exordium clap we to the close :
 Give you, if we dare wing to such a height,
 The absolute glory in some full-grown speech
 On the other side, some finished butterfly, 1160
 Some breathing diamond-flake with leaf-gold fans,
 That takes the air, no trace of worm it was,
 Or cabbage-bed it had production from.
 Giovambattista o' the Bottini, Fisc,
 Pompilia's patron by the chance of the hour, 1165
 To-morrow her persecutor, — composite, he,
 As becomes who must meet such various calls —
 Odds of age joined in him with ends of youth.
 A man of ready smile and facile tear.
 Improvised hopes, despairs at nod and beck, 1170
 And language — ah, the gift of eloquence!
 Language that goes, goes, easy as a glove.
 O'er good and evil, smoothens both to one.
 Rashness helps caution with him, fires the straw,
 In free enthusiastic careless fit, 1175
 On the first proper pinnacle of rock
 Which offers, as reward for all that zeal,
 To lure some bark to founder and bring gain :
 While calm sits Caution, rapt with heavenward eye,
 A true confessor's gaze, amid the glare 1180
 Beaconing to the breaker, death and hell.
 "Well done, thou good and faithful" she approves :
 "Hadst thou let slip a fagot to the beach,
 The crew might surely spy thy precipice
 And save their boat ; the simple and the slow 1185
 Might so, forsooth, forestall the wrecker's fee!
 Let the next crew be wise and hail in time !"
 Just so compounded is the outside man,
 Blue juvenile pure eye and pippin cheek,
 And brow all prematurely soiled and seamed 1190
 With sudden age, bright devastated hair.
 Ah, but you miss the very tones o' the voice,
 The scrannel pipe that screams in heights of head,

As, in his modest studio, all alone,
 The tall wight stands a-tiptoe. strives and strains, 1195
 Both eyes shut, like the cockerel that would crow,
 Tries to his own self amorously o'er
 What never will be uttered else than so —
 Since to the four walls, Forum and Mars' Hill,
 Speaks out the poesy which, penned, turns prose. 1200
 Clavecinist¹ debarred his instrument,
 He yet thrums — shirking neither turn nor trill,
 With desperate finger on dumb table-edge —
 The sovereign rondo,² shall conclude his *Suite*,
 Charm an imaginary audience there, 1205
 From old Corelli³ to young Haendel,⁴ both
 I' the flesh at Rome, ere he perforce go print
 The cold black score, mere music for the mind —
 The last speech against Guido and his gang,
 With special end to prove Pompilia pure. 1210
 How the Fisc vindicates Pompilia's fame.

Then comes the all but end, the ultimate
 Judgment save yours. Pope Innocent the Twelfth,
 Simple, sagacious, mild yet resolute,
 With prudence, probity and — what beside 1215
 From the other world he feels impress at times,
 Having attained to fourscore years and six, —
 How, when the court found Guido and the rest
 Guilty, but law supplied a subterfuge
 And passed the final sentence to the Pope. 1220
 He, bringing his intelligence to bear
 This last time on what ball behoves him drop
 In the urn, or white or black, does drop a black,
 Send five souls more to just precede his own,
 Stand him in stead and witness, if need were. 1225
 How he is wont to do God's work on earth.
 The manner of his sitting out the dim
 Droop of a sombre February day
 In the plain closet where he does such work.
 With, from all Peter's treasury, one stool, 1230
 One table, and one lathen⁵ crucifix.
 There sits the Pope, his thoughts for company:
 Grave but not sad, — nay, something like a cheer

¹ *Clavecinist*: a player on the harpsichord.

⁴ *Haendel*: celebrated composer, 1685-1759.

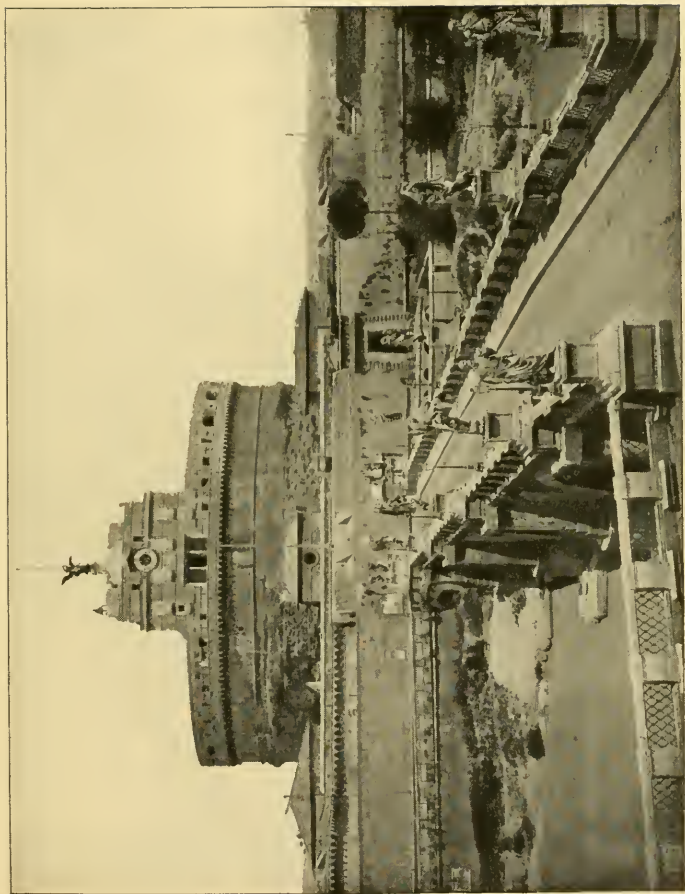
² *Rondo*: a form of composition in which the theme is repeated and developed according to certain rules. Often used as the final movement of a sonata or suite.

⁵ *Lathen*: probably meant for *latten*, a fine kind of brass or bronze used in the Middle Ages for crosses and candlesticks.

³ *Corelli*: Arcangelo, violin virtuoso and composer, 1652-1713.

- Leaves the lips free to be benevolent,
 Which, all day long, did duty firm and fast. 1235
 A cherishing there is of foot and knee,
 A chafing loose-skinned large-veined hand with hand, —
 What steward but knows when stewardship earns its wage,
 May levy praise, anticipate the lord?
 He reads, notes, lays the papers down at last, 1240
 Muses, then takes a turn about the room ;
 Unclasps a huge tome in an antique guise,
 Primitive print and tongue half obsolete,
 That stands him in diurnal stead ; opes page,
 Finds place where falls the passage to be conned 1245
 According to an order long in use :
 And, as he comes upon the evening's chance,
 Starts somewhat, solemnizes straight his smile,
 Then reads aloud that portion first to last,
 And at the end lets flow his own thoughts forth 1250
 Likewise aloud, for respite and relief,
 Till by the dreary relics of the west
 Wan through the half-moon window, all his light,
 He bows the head while the lips move in prayer,
 Writes some three brief lines, signs and seals the same, 1255
 Tinkles a hand-bell, bids the obsequious Sir
 Who puts foot presently o' the closet-sill
 He watched outside of, bear as superscribed
 That mandate to the Governor forthwith :
 Then heaves abroad his cares in one good sigh, 1260
 Traverses corridor with no arm's help,
 And so to sup as a clear conscience should.
 The manner of the judgment of the Pope.
- Then must speak Guido yet a second time,
 Satan's old saw being apt here — skin for skin. 1265
 All a man hath that will he give for life.
 While life was graspable and gainable,
 And bird-like buzzed her wings round Guido's brow,
 Not much truth stiffened out the web of words
 He wove to catch her : when away she flew 1270
 And death came, death's breath rivelled¹ up the lies,
 Left bare the metal thread, the fibre fine
 Of truth, i' the spinning : the true words shone last.
 How Guido, to another purpose quite,
 Speaks and despairs, the last night of his life, 1275
 In that New Prison by Castle Angelo
 At the bridge foot : the same man, another voice.
 On a stone bench in a close fetid cell,

¹ *Rivelled* : shrank up.



CASTLE OF SANT' ANGELO, ROME.

Where the hot vapor of an agony,
 Struck into drops on the cold wall, runs down — 1280
 Horrible worms made out of sweat and tears —
 There crouch, well nigh to the knees in dungeon-straw,
 Lit by the sole lamp suffered for their sake,
 Two awe-struck figures, this a Cardinal,
 That an Abate, both of old styled friends 1285
 O' the thing part man part monster in the midst,
 So changed is Franceschini's gentle blood.
 The tiger-cat screams now, that whined before,
 That pried and tried and trod so gingerly,
 Till in its silkiness the trap-teeth joined ; 1290
 Then you know how the bristling fury foams.
 They listen, this wrapped in his folds of red,
 While his feet fumble for the filth below ;
 The other, as beseems a stouter heart,
 Working his best with beads and cross to ban 1295
 The enemy that comes in like a flood
 Spite of the standard set up, verily
 And in no trope at all, against him there ;
 For at the prison-gate, just a few steps
 Outside, already, in the doubtful dawn, 1300
 Thither, from this side and from that, slow sweep
 And settle down in silence solidly,
 Crow-wise, the frightful Brotherhood of Death¹
 Black-hatted and black-hooded huddle they,
 Black rosaries a-dangling from each waist ; 1305
 So take they their grim station at the door,
 Torches lit, skull-and-cross-bones-banner spread,
 And that gigantic Christ with open arms,
 Grounded. Nor lacks there aught but that the group
 Break forth, intone the lamentable psalm, 1310
 " Out of the deeps, Lord, have I cried to thee! " —
 When inside, from the true profound, a sign
 Shall bear intelligence that the foe is foiled,
 Count Guido Franceschini has confessed,
 And is absolved and reconciled with God. 1315
 Then they, intoning, may begin their march,
 Make by the longest way for the People's Square,
 Carry the criminal to his crime's award :
 A mob to cleave, a scaffolding to reach,
 Two gallows and Mannaia² crowning all. 1320
 How Guido made defence a second time.

¹ *Brotherhood of Death*: the confraternity of the Misericordia, or brothers of mercy, who prepare criminals for death, and attend funerals as an act of charity.

² *Mannaia*: a kind of guillotine.

Finally, even as thus by step and step
 I led you from the level of to-day
 Up to the summit of so long ago,
 Here, whence I point you the wide prospect round — 1325
 Let me, by like steps, slope you back to smooth,
 Land you on mother-earth, no whit the worse.
 To feed o' the fat o' the furrow: free to dwell,
 Taste our time's better things profusely spread
 For all who love the level, corn and wine, 1330
 Much cattle and the many-folded fleece.
 Shall not my friends go feast again on sward,
 Though cognizant of country in the clouds
 Higher than wistful eagle's horny eye
 Ever unclosed for, 'mid ancestral crags, 1335
 When morning broke and Spring was back once more,
 And he died, heaven, save by his heart, unreached?
 Yet heaven my fancy lifts to, ladder-like, —
 As Jack reached, holpen¹ of his beanstalk-rungs!

A novel country: I might make it mine 1340
 By choosing which one aspect of the year
 Suited mood best, and putting solely that
 On panel somewhere in the House of Fame,
 Landscaping what I saved, not what I saw:
 — Might fix you, whether frost in goblin-time 1345
 Startled the moon with his abrupt bright laugh,
 Or, August's hair afloat in filmy fire,
 She fell, arms wide, face foremost on the world,
 Swooned there and so singed out the strength of things.
 Thus were abolished Spring and Autumn both, 1350
 The land dwarfed to one likeness of the land,
 Life cramped corpse-fashion. Rather learn and love
 Each facet-flash of the revolving year! —
 Red, green and blue that whirl into a white,
 The variance now, the eventual unity, 1355
 Which make the miracle. See it for yourselves.
 This man's act, changeable because alive!
 Action now shrouds, nor shows the informing thought;
 Man, like a glass ball with a spark a-top,
 Out of the magic fire that lurks inside, 1360
 Shows one tint at a time to take the eye:
 Which, let a finger touch the silent sleep,
 Shifted a hair's-breadth shoots you dark for bright,
 Suffuses bright with dark, and baffles so
 Your sentence absolute for shine or shade. 1365
 Once set such orbs, — white styled, black stigmatized, —

¹ *Holpen*: old form, past participle of help.

A-rolling, see them once on the other side
 Your good men and your bad men every one
 From Guido Franceschini to Guy Faux,
 Oft would you rub your eyes and change your names. 1370

Such, British Public, ye who like me not,
 (God love you!) — whom I yet have labored for,
 Perchance more careful whoso runs may read
 Than erst when all, it seemed, could read who ran, —
 Perchance more careless whoso reads may praise 1375
 Than late when he who praised and read and wrote
 Was apt to find himself the self-same me, —
 Such labor had such issue, so I wrought
 This arc, by furtherance of such alloy,
 And so, by one spirt, take away its trace 1380
 Till, justifiably golden, rounds my ring.

A ring without a posy,¹ and that ring mine?

O lyric Love, half angel and half bird
 And all a wonder and a wild desire. —
 Boldest of hearts that ever braved the sun, 1385
 Took sanctuary within the holier blue,
 And sang a kindred soul out to his face, —
 Yet human at the red-ripe of the heart —
 When the first summons from the darkling earth
 Reached thee amid thy chambers, blanched their blue, 1390
 And bared them of the glory — to drop down,
 To toil for man, to suffer or to die, —
 This is the same voice : can thy soul know change?
 Hail then, and hearken from the realms of help!
 Never may I commence my song, my due 1395
 To God who best taught song by gift of thee,
 Except with bent head and beseeching hand —
 That still, despite the distance and the dark,
 What was, again may be ; some interchange
 Of grace, some splendor once thy very thought, 1400
 Some benediction anciently thy smile :
 — Never conclude, but raising hand and head
 Thither where eyes, that cannot reach, yet yearn
 For all hope, all sustainment, all reward,
 Their utmost up and on, — so blessing back 1405
 In those thy realms of help, that heaven thy home,
 Some whiteness which, I judge, thy face makes proud,
 Some wanness where, I think, thy foot may fall!

¹ *Posy* : a motto or rhyme engraved inside a ring.

II.

HALF-ROME.

[Book II. gives the facts of the story ending in the murder as known to the general public and colored by the partisanship of the speaker for wronged husbands. His sympathies are, therefore, with Guido, and he is the mouthpiece of one half Rome. The scene is by the church of San Lorenzo, in and out of which has surged all day a crowd, curious to view Guido's victims, Pietro and Violante.]

WHAT, you, Sir, come too? (Just the man I'd meet.)
 Be ruled by me and have a care o' the crowd :
 This way, while fresh folk go and get their gaze :
 I'll tell you like a book and save your shins.
 Fie, what a roaring day we've had! Whose fault? 5
 Lorenzo in Lucina,¹ — here 's a church
 To hold a crowd at need, accommodate
 All comers from the Corso!² If this crush
 Make not its priests ashamed of what they show
 For temple-room, don't prick them to draw purse 10
 And down with bricks and mortar, eke us out
 The beggarly transept with its bit of apse
 Into a decent space for Christian ease,
 Why, to-day's lucky pearl is cast to swine.
 Listen and estimate the luck they've had! 15
 (The right man, and I hold him.)

Sir, do you see,

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

¹ *Lorenzo in Lucina*: a church in the small square of San Lorenzo, opening out of the Corso. Founded in the fifth century, rebuilt by Paul V. 1606. ² *Corso*: the principal thoroughfare of Rome.

A delicacy there is, our gallants hold,
 When you avenge your honor and only then,
 That you disfigure the subject, fray the face,
 Not just take life and end, in clownish guise.
 It was Violante gave the first offence,
 Got therefore the conspicuous punishment :
 While Pietro, who helped merely, his mere death
 Answered the purpose, so his face went free. 30
 We fancied even, free as you please, that face
 Showed itself still intolerably wronged ;
 Was wrinkled over with resentment yet,
 Nor calm at all, as murdered faces use, 40
 Once the worst ended : an indignant air
 O' the head there was — 't is said the body turned
 Round and away, rolled from Violante's side
 Where they had laid it loving-husband-like.
 If so, if corpses can be sensitive, 45
 Why did not he roll right down altar-step,
 Roll on through nave, roll fairly out of church,
 Deprive Lorenzo of the spectacle,
 Pay back thus the succession of affronts
 Whereto this church had served as theatre? 50
 For see : at that same altar where he lies,
 To that same inch of step, was brought the babe
 For blessing after baptism, and there styled
 Pompilia, and a string of names beside.
 By his bad wife, some seventeen years ago, 55
 Who purchased her simply to palm on him,
 Flatter his dotage and defraud the heirs.
 Wait awhile! Also to this very step
 Did this Violante, twelve years afterward,
 Bring, the mock-mother, that child-cheat full-grown, 60
 Pompilia, in pursuance of her plot,
 And there brave God and man a second time
 By linking a new victim to the lie.
 There, having made a match unknown to him,
 She, still unknown to Pietro, tied the knot 65
 Which nothing cuts except this kind of knife ;
 Yes, made her daughter, as the girl was held,
 Marry a man, and honest man beside,
 And man of birth to boot, — clandestinely
 Because of this, because of that, because 70
 O' the devil's will to work his worst for once, —
 Confident she could top her part at need
 And, when her husband must be told in turn,
 Ply the wife's trade, play off the sex's trick
 And, alternating worry with quiet qualms, 75
 Bravado with submissiveness, prettily fool

Her Pietro into patience : so it proved.
 Ay, 't is four years since man and wife they grew,
 This Guido Franceschini and this same
 Pompilia, foolishly thought, falsely declared 80
 A Comparini and the couple's child :
 Just at this altar where, beneath the piece
 Of Master Guido Reni,¹ Christ on cross,²
 Second to naught observable in Rome,
 That couple lie now, murdered yestereve. 85
 Even the blind can see a providence here.

From dawn till now that it is growing dusk,
 A multitude has flocked and filled the church,
 Coming and going, coming back again,
 Till to count crazed one. Rome was at the show. 90
 People climbed up the columns, fought for spikes
 O' the chapel-rail to perch themselves upon,
 Jumped over and so broke the wooden work
 Painted like porphyry to deceive the eye ;
 Serve the priests right! The organ-loft was crammed, 95
 Women were fainting, no few fights ensued,
 In short, it was a show repaid your pains :
 For, though their room was scant undoubtedly,
 Yet they did manage matters, to be just,
 A little at this Lorenzo. Body o' me! 100
 I saw a body exposed once . . . never mind!
 Enough that here the bodies had their due.
 No stinginess in wax, a row all round,
 And one big taper at each head and foot.

So, people pushed their way, and took their turn, 105
 Saw, threw their eyes up, crossed themselves, gave place
 To pressure from behind, since all the world
 Knew the old pair, could talk the tragedy
 Over from first to last : Pompilia too,
 Those who had known her — what 't was worth to them! 110
 Guido's acquaintance was in less request ;
 The Count had lounged somewhat too long in Rome,
 Made himself cheap ; with him were hand and glove
 Barbers and blear-eyed, as the ancient³ sings.
 Also he is alive and like to be : 115
 Had he considerably died, — aha!
 I jostled Luca Cini on his staff,

¹ *Guido Reni* : a painter of the Bolognese school (1574-1642).

² *Christ on Cross* : represents the Crucifixion seen against a wild, stormy sky.

³ *The ancient* : Horace ("Satires" i. 7, 3, "Omnibus et lippis notum et tonsoribus").

Mute in the midst, the whole man one amaze,
 Staring amain and crossing brow and breast.
 "How now?" asked I. "'T is seventy years," quoth he, 120
 "Since I first saw, holding my father's hand,
 Bodies set forth: a many have I seen,
 Yet all was poor to this I live and see.
 Here the world's wickedness seals up the sum:
 What with Molinos'¹ doctrine and this deed, 125
 Antichrist surely comes and doomsday's near.
 May I depart in peace, I have seen my see."
 "Depart then," I advised, "nor block the road
 For youngsters still behindhand with such sights!"
 "Why no," rejoins the venerable sire, 130
 "I know it 's horrid, hideous past belief,
 Burdensome far beyond what eye can bear;
 But they do promise, when Pompilia dies
 I' the course o' the day, — and she can't outlive night, —
 They 'll bring her body also to expose 135
 Beside the parents, one, two, three abreast;
 That were indeed a sight, which might I see.
 I trust I should not last to see the like!"
 Whereat I bade the senior spare his shanks,
 Since doctors give her till to-night to live, 140
 And tell us how the butchery happened. "Ah,
 But you can't know!" sighs he, "I 'll not despair:
 Beside I 'm useful at explaining things —
 As, how the dagger laid there at the feet,
 Caused the peculiar cuts; I mind its make, 145
 Triangular i' the blade, a Genoese,
 Armed with those little hook-teeth on the edge
 To open in the flesh nor shut again:
 I like to teach a novice: I shall stay!"
 And stay he did, and stay be sure he will. 150

A personage came by the private door
 At noon to have his look: I name no names:
 Well then, His Eminence the Cardinal,
 Whose servitor in honorable sort
 Guido was once, the same who made the match, 155
 (Will you have the truth?) whereof we see effect.
 No sooner whisper ran he was arrived
 Than up pops Curate Carlo, a brisk lad,
 Who never lets a good occasion slip,
 And volunteers improving the event. 160
 We looked he 'd give the history's self some help,
 Treat us to how the wife's confession went

¹ *Molinos' doctrine*: see note, I. 303.

(This morning she confessed her crime, we know)
 And, maybe, throw in something of the Priest —
 If he 's not ordered back, punished anew, 165
 The gallant, Caponsacchi, Lucifer
 I' the garden where Pompilia, Eve-like, lured
 Her Adam Guido to his fault and fall.
 Think you we got a sprig of speech akin
 To this from Carlo, with the Cardinal there? 170
 Too wary he was, too widely awake, I trow.
 He did the murder in a dozen words ;
 Then said that all such outrages crop forth
 I' the course of nature when Molinos' tares
 Are sown for wheat, flourish and choke the Church : 175
 So slid on to the abominable sect
 And the philosophic sin — we 've heard all that,
 And the Cardinal too, (who book-made on the same)¹
 But, for the murder, left it where he found.
 Oh but he 's quick, the Curate, minds his game! 180
 And, after all, we have the main o' the fact :
 Case could not well be simpler, — mapped, as it were,
 We follow the murder's maze from source to sea,
 By the red line, past mistake : one sees indeed
 Not only how all was and must have been, 185
 But cannot other than be to the end of time.
 Turn out here by the Ruspoli!² Do you hold
 Guido was so prodigiously to blame?
 A certain cousin of yours has told you so?
 Exactly! Here 's a friend shall set you right, 190
 Let him but have the handsel³ of your ear.

These wretched Comparini were once gay
 And galliard,⁴ of the modest middle class :
 Born in this quarter seventy years ago
 And married young, they lived the accustomed life, 195
 Citizens as they were of good repute :
 And, childless, naturally took their ease
 With only their two selves to care about
 And use the wealth for : wealthy is the word,
 Since Pietro was possessed of house and land — 200
 And specially one house, when good days smiled,
 In Via Vittoria, the aspectable street
 Where he lived mainly ; but another house
 Of less pretension did he buy betimes,
 The villa, meant for jaunts and jollity, 205

¹ *Cardinal, who book-made on the same* :
 two or three books on the teachings of Molinos
 were written by Cardinal d'Estrées.

² *Ruspoli* : palace on the Corso.

³ *Handsel* : first gift.

⁴ *Galliard* : brisk, active.

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

Hence, seventeen years ago, conceive his glee
 When first Violante, 'twixt a smile and blush,
 With touch of agitation proper too, 220
 Announced that, spite of her unpromising age,
 The miracle would in time be manifest,
 An heir's birth was to happen: and it did.
 Somehow or other, — how, all in good time!
 By a trick, a sleight of hand you are to hear. — 225
 A child was born, Pompilia, for his joy,
 Plaything at once and prop, a fairy-gift,
 A saints' grace or, say, grant of the good God, —
 A fiddle-pin's end! What imbeciles are we!
 Look now: if some one could have prophesied, 230
 "For love of you, for liking to your wife,
 I undertake to crush a snake I spy
 Settling itself i' the soft of both your breasts.
 Give me yon babe to strangle painlessly!
 She 'll soar to the safe: you 'll have your crying out, 235
 Then sleep, then wake, then sleep, then end your days
 In peace and plenty, mixed with mild regret,
 Thirty years hence when Christmas takes old folk" —
 How had old Pietro sprung up, crossed himself,
 And kicked the conjurer! Whereas you and I, 240
 Being wise with after-wit, had clapped our hands;
 Nay, added, in the old fool's interest,
 "Strangle the black-eyed babe, so far so good,
 But on condition you relieve the man
 O' the wife and throttle him Violante too — 245
 She is the mischief!"

We had hit the mark.
 She, whose trick had brought the babe into the world,
 She it was, when the babe was grown a girl,
 Judged a new trick should reinforce the old,
 Send vigor to the lie now somewhat spent 250

By twelve years' service; lest Eve's rule decline
 Over this Adam of hers, whose cabbage-plot
 Throve dubiously since turned fools'-paradise,
 Spite of a nightingale on every stump.
 Pietro's estate was dwindling day by day. 255
 While he, rapt far above such mundane care,
 Crawled all-fours with his baby pick-a-back,
 Sat at serene cats'-cradle with his child,
 Or took the measured tallness, top to toe,
 Of what was grown a great girl twelve years old: 260
 Till sudden at the door a tap discreet,
 A visitor's premonitory cough,
 And poverty had reached him in her rounds.

This came when he was past the working-time,
 Had learned to dandle and forgot to dig, 265
 And who must but Violante cast about,
 Contrive and task that head of hers again?
 She who had caught one fish, could make that catch
 A bigger still, in angler's policy:
 So, with an angler's mercy for the bait, 270
 Her minnow was set wriggling on its barb
 And tossed to mid-stream; which means, this grown girl
 With the great eyes and bounty of black hair
 And first crisp youth that tempts a jaded taste,
 Was whisked i' the way of a certain man, who snapped. 275

Count Guido Franceschini the Aretine¹
 Was head of an old noble house enough,
 Not over-rich, you can't have everything,
 But such a man as riches rub against,
 Readily stick to, — one with a right to them 280
 Born in the blood: 't was in his very brow
 Always to knit itself against the world,
 Beforehand so, when that world stinted due
 Service and suit: the world ducks and defers.
 As such folks do, he had come up to Rome 285
 To better his fortune, and, since many years,
 Was friend and follower of a cardinal;
 Waiting the rather thus on providence
 That a shrewd younger poorer brother yet,
 The Abate Paolo, a regular priest, 290
 Had long since tried his powers and found he swam
 With the deftest on the Galilean pool:
 But then he was a web-foot, free o' the wave,
 And no ambiguous dab-chick² hatched to strut,

¹ *Aretine*: native of Arezzo.² *Dab-chick*: a small-sized grebe, a genus

Humbled by any fond attempt to swim
 When fiercer fowl usurped his dunghill top — 295
 A whole priest, Paolo, no mere piece of one
 Like Guido tacked thus to the Church's tail!¹
 Guido moreover, as the head o' the house,
 Claiming the main prize, not the lesser luck, 300
 The centre lily, no mere chickweed fringe.

He waited and learned waiting, thirty years ;
 Got promise, missed performance — what would you have?
 No petty post rewards a nobleman
 For spending youth in splendid lackey-work, 305
 And there 's concurrence for each rarer prize ;
 When that falls, rougher hand and readier foot
 Push aside Guido spite of his black looks.
 The end was, Guido, when the warning showed,
 The first white hair i' the glass, gave up the game, 310
 Determined on returning to his town,
 Making the best of bad incurable,
 Patching the old palace up and lingering there
 The customary life out with his kin,
 Where honor helps to spice the scanty bread. 315

Just as he trimmed his lamp and girt his loins
 To go his journey and be wise at home,
 In the right mood of disappointed worth,
 Who but Violante sudden spied her prey
 (Where was I with that angler-simile ?) 320
 And threw her bait, Pompilia, where he sulked —
 A gleam i' the gloom!

What if he gained thus much,
 Wrung out this sweet drop from the bitter Past,
 Bore off this rose-bud from the prickly brake
 To justify such torn clothes and scratched hands, 325
 And, after all, brought something back from Rome?
 Would not a wife serve at Arezzo well
 To light the dark house, lend a look of youth
 To the mother's face grown meagre, left alone
 And famished with the emptiness of hope, 330
 Old Donna Beatrice? Wife you want
 Would you play family-representative,
 Carry you elder-brotherly, high and right
 O'er what may prove the natural petulance

of diving birds, frequenting rivers and fresh-water lakes. Its movements on land are ungainly, but it swims gracefully. Brown-
 ing's use of the allusion appears to be at fault here.

¹ *Church's tail*: see note, I. 260.

Of the third brother, younger, greedier still, 335
 Girolamo, also a fledgeling priest,
 Beginning life in turn with callow beak
 Agape for luck, no luck had stopped and stilled.
 Such were the pinks and grays about the bait
 Persuaded Guido gulp down hook and all. 340

What constituted him so choice a catch,
 You question? Past his prime and poor beside!
 Ask that of any she who knows the trade.
 Why first, here was a nobleman with friends,
 A palace one might run to and be safe 345
 When presently the threatened fate should fall,
 A big-browed master to block doorway up,
 Parley with people bent on pushing by
 And praying the mild Pietro quick clear scores :
 Is birth a privilege and power or no? 350
 Also, — but judge of the result desired,
 By the price paid and manner of the sale.
 The Count was made woo, win and wed at once :
 Asked, and was haled for answer, lest the heat
 Should cool, to San Lorenzo, one blind eye, 355
 And had Pompilia put into his arms
 O' the sly there, by a hasty candle-blink,
 With sanction of some priest-confederate
 Properly paid to make short work and sure.

So did old Pietro's daughter change her style 360
 For Guido Franceschini's lady-wife
 Ere Guido knew it well; and why this haste
 And scramble and indecent secrecy?
 " Lest Pietro, all the while in ignorance,
 Should get to learn, gainsay and break the match : 365
 His peevishness had promptly put aside
 Such honor and refused the proffered boon.
 Pleased to become authoritative once.
 She remedied the wilful man's mistake — "
 Did our discreet Violante. Rather say, 370
 Thus did she, lest the object of her game,
 Guido the gulled one, give him but a chance,
 A moment's respite, time for thinking twice,
 Might count the cost before he sold himself,
 And try the clink of coin they paid him with. 375

But coin paid, bargain struck and business done,
 Once the clandestine marriage over thus,
 All parties made perforce the best o' the fact ;
 Pietro could play vast indignation off,

Be ignorant and astounded, dupe, poor soul, 380
 Please you, of daughter, wife and son-in-law,
 While Guido found himself in flagrant fault,
 Must e'en do suit and service, soothe, subdue
 A father not unreasonably chafed,
 Bring him to terms by paying son's devoir. 385
 Pleasant initiation!

The end, this :

Guido's broad back was saddled to bear all —
 Pietro, Violante, and Pompilia too. —
 Three lots cast confidently in one lap,
 Three dead-weights with one arm to lift the three 390
 Out of their limbo up to life again.
 The Roman household was to strike fresh root
 In a new soil, graced with a novel name,
 Gilt with an alien glory, Aretine
 Henceforth and never Roman any more, 395
 By treaty and engagement ; thus it ran :
 Pompilia's dowry for Pompilia's self
 As a thing of course, — she paid her own expense ;
 No loss nor gain there : but the couple, you see,
 They, for their part, turned over first of all 400
 Their fortune in its rags and rottenness
 To Guido, fusion and confusion, he
 And his with them and theirs, — whatever rag
 With coin residuary fell on floor
 When Brother Paolo's energetic shake 405
 Should do the relics justice : since 't was thought,
 Once vulnerable Bietro out of reach,
 That, left at Rome as representative,
 The Abate, backed by a potent patron here,
 And otherwise with purple flushing him, 410
 Might play a good game with the creditor,
 Make up a moiety which, great or small,
 Should go to the common stock — if anything,
 Guido's, so far repayment of the cost
 About to be, — and if, as looked more like, 415
 Nothing, — why, all the nobler cost were his
 Who guaranteed, for better or for worse,
 To Pietro and Violante, house and home,
 Kith and kin, with the pick of company
 And life o' the fat o' the land while life should last. 420
 How say you to the bargain at first blush ?
 Why did a middle-aged not-silly man
 Show himself thus besotted all at once ?
 Quoth Solomon,¹ one black eye does it all.

¹ Quoth Solomon : Solomon's Song iv. 9.

They went to Arezzo, — Pietro and his spouse, 425
 With just the dusk o' the day of life to spend,
 Eager to use the twilight, taste a treat,
 Enjoy for once with neither stay nor stint
 The luxury of lord-and-lady-ship,
 And realize the stuff and nonsense long 430
 A-simmer in their noddles; vent the fume
 Born there and bred, the citizen's conceit
 How fares nobility while crossing earth,
 What rampart or invisible body-guard
 Keeps off the taint of common life from such. 435
 They had not fed for nothing on the tales
 Of grandees who give banquets worthy Jove,
 Spending gold as if Plutus¹ paid a whim,
 Served with obeisances as when . . . what God?
 I'm at the end of my tether; 't is enough 440
 You understand what they came primed to see:
 While Guido who should minister the sight,
 Stay all this qualmish greediness of soul
 With apples and with flagons — for his part,
 Was set on life diverse as pole from pole : 445
 Lust of the flesh, lust of the eye, — what else
 Was he just now awake from, sick and sage,
 After the very debauch they would begin? —
 Suppose such stuff and nonsense really were.
 That bubble, they were bent on blowing big, 450
 He had blown already till he burst his cheeks,
 And hence found soapsuds bitter to the tongue.
 He hoped now to walk softly all his days
 In soberness of spirit, if haply so, •
 Pinching and paring he might furnish forth 455
 A frugal board, bare sustenance, no more,
 Till times, that could not well grow worse, should mend.

Thus minded then, two parties mean to meet
 And make each other happy. The first week,
 And fancy strikes fact and explodes in full. 460
 "This," shrieked the Comparini, "this the Count,
 The palace, the signorial privilege,
 The pomp and pageantry were promised us?
 For this have we exchanged our liberty,
 Our competence, our darling of a child? 465
 To house as spectres in a sepulchre
 Under this black stone-heap, the street's disgrace,
 Grimmiest as that is of the gruesome town,
 And here pick garbage on a pewter plate

¹ *Plutus* : God of Wealth, son of Jasion and Ceres.

Or cough at verjuice¹ dripped from earthenware? 470
 Oh Via Vittoria, oh the other place
 I' the Pauline, did we give you up for this?
 Where 's the foregone housekeeping good and gay,
 The neighborliness, the companionship,
 The treat and feast when holidays came round. 475
 The daily feast that seemed no treat at all,
 Called common by the uncommon fools we were!
 Even the sun that used to shine at Rome,
 Where is it? Robbed and starved and frozen too,
 We will have justice, justice if there be!" 480
 Did not they shout, did not the town resound!
 Guido's old lady-mother Beatrice,
 Who since her husband, Count Tommaso's death,
 Had held sole sway i' the house, — the doited² crone
 Slow to acknowledge, curtesy and abdicate, — 485
 Was recognized of true novercal³ type,
 Dragon and devil. His brother Girolamo
 Came next in order: priest was he? The worse!
 No way of winning him to leave his mumps
 And help the laugh against old ancestry 490
 And formal habits long since out of date,
 Letting his youth be patterned on the mode
 Approved of where Violante laid down law.
 Or did he brighten up by way of change,
 Dispose himself for affability? 495
 The malapert, too complaisant by half
 To the alarmed young novice of a bride!
 Let him go buzz, betake himself elsewhere
 Nor singe his fly-wings in the candle-flame!

Four months' probation of this purgatory, 500
 Dog-snap and cat-claw, curse and counterblast,
 The devil's self were sick of his own din;
 And Pietro, after trumpeting huge wrongs
 At church and market-place, pillar and post,
 Square's corner, street's end, now the palace-step 505
 And now the wine-house bench — while, on her side,
 Violante up and down was voluble
 In whatsoever pair of ears would perk
 From goody, gossip, cater-cousin⁴ and sib,⁵
 Curious to peep at the inside of things 510

¹ *Verjuice*: juice of sour apples or unripe grapes.

² *Doited*: adjective formed from *doit*, a Scotch coin of small value = worthless.

³ *Novercal*: in the manner of a step-mother.

⁴ *Cater-cousin*: a cousin within the first four degrees of kindred.

⁵ *Sib*: a blood relation.

And catch in the act pretentious poverty
 At its wits' end to keep appearance up,
 Make both ends meet, — nothing the vulgar loves
 Like what this couple pitched them right and left.
 Then, their worst done that way, both struck tent, marched : 515
 — Renounced their share o' the bargain, flung what dues
 Guido was bound to pay, in Guido's face,
 Left their hearts'-darling, treasure of the twain
 And so forth, the poor inexperienced bride,
 To her own devices, bade Arezzo rot, 520
 Cursed life signorial, and sought Rome once more.

I see the comment ready on your lip,
 "The better fortune, Guido's — free at least
 By this defection of the foolish pair.
 He could begin make profit in some sort 525
 Of the young bride and the new quietness,
 Lead his own life now, henceforth breathe unplagued."
 Could he? You know the sex like Guido's self.
 Learn the *Violante-nature!*

Once in Rome, 530
 By way of helping Guido lead such life,
 Her first act to inaugurate return
 Was, she got pricked in conscience : Jubilee ¹
 Gave her the hint. Our Pope, as kind as just,
 Attained his eighty years, announced a boon
 Should make us bless the fact, held Jubilee — 535
 Short shrift, prompt pardon for the light offence
 And no rough dealing with the regular crime
 So this occasion were not suffered slip —
 Otherwise, sins commuted as before,
 Without the least abatement in the price. 540
 Now, who had thought it? All this while, it seems,
 Our sage *Violante* had a sin of a sort
 She must compound for now or not at all.
 Now be the ready riddance! She confessed
Pompilia was a fable not a fact : 545
 She never bore a child in her whole life.
 Had this child been a changeling, that were grace
 In some degree, exchange is hardly theft,
 You take your stand on truth ere leap your lie :
 Here was all lie, no touch of truth at all, 550
 All the lie hers — not even *Pietro* guessed
 He was as childless still as twelve years since.
 The babe had been a find i' the filth-heap, Sir,

¹ *Jubilee* : held every twenty-fifth year.

Catch from the kennel! There was found at Rome,
 Down in the deepest of our social dregs, 555
 A woman who professed the wanton's trade
 Under the requisite thin coverture,
Communis meretrix and washer-wife:
 The creature thus conditioned found by chance
 Motherhood like a jewel in the muck, 560
 And straightway either trafficked with her prize
 Or listened to the tempter and let be. —
 Made pact abolishing her place and part
 In womankind, beast-fellowship indeed.

She sold this babe eight months before its birth 565
 To our Violante, Pietro's honest spouse,
 Well-famed and widely-instanced as that crown
 To the husband, virtue in a woman's shape.
 She it was, bought, paid for, passed off the thing
 As very flesh and blood and child of her 570
 Despite the flagrant fifty years, — and why?
 Partly to please old Pietro, fill his cup
 With wine at the late hour when lees are left,
 And send him from life's feast rejoicingly, —
 Partly to cheat the rightful heirs, agape, 575
 Each uncle's cousin's brother's son of him,
 For that same principal of the usufruct¹
 It vexed him he must die and leave behind.

Such was the sin had come to be confessed.
 Which of the tales, the first or last, was true? 580
 Did she so sin once, or, confessing now,
 Sin for the first time? Either way you will.
 One sees a reason for the cheat: one sees
 A reason for a cheat in owning cheat
 Where no cheat had been. What of the revenge? 585
 What prompted the contrition all at once,
 Made the avowal easy, the shame slight?
 Why, prove they but Pompilia not their child,
 No child, no dowry! this, supposed their child,
 Had claimed what this, shown alien to their blood, 590
 Claimed nowise: Guido's claim was through his wife,
 Null then and void with hers. The biter bit,
 Do you see! For such repayment of the past,
 One might conceive the penitential pair
 Ready to bring their case before the courts, 595

¹ *Principal of the usufruct*: i.e. the principal sum, in which Pietro had only a life-interest or usufruct.

Publish their infamy to all the world
And, arm in arm, go chuckling thence content.

Is this your view? 'T was Guido's anyhow
And colorable: he came forward then,
Protested in his very bride's behalf 600
Against this lie and all it led to, least
Of all the loss o' the dowry; no! From her
And him alike he would expunge the blot,
Erase the brand of such a bestial birth,
Participate in no hideous heritage 605
Gathered from the gutter to be garnered up
And glorified in a palace. Peter and Paul!
But that who likes may look upon the pair
Exposed in yonder church, and show his skill
By saying which is eye and which is mouth 610
Thro' those stabs thick and threefold, — but for that —
A strong word on the liars and their lie
Might crave expression and obtain it, Sir!
— Though prematurely, since there's more to come,
More that will shake your confidence in things 615
Your cousin tells you, — may I be so bold?

This makes the first act of the farce, — anon
The sombre element comes stealing in
Till all is black or blood-red in the piece.
Guido, thus made a laughing-stock abroad, 620
A proverb for the market-place at home.
Left alone with Pompilia now, this graft
So reputable on his ancient stock.
This plague-seed set to fester his sound flesh,
What does the Count? Revenge him on his wife? 625
Unfasten at all risks to rid himself
The noisome lazar-badge, fall foul of fate,
And, careless whether the poor rag was 'ware
O the part it played, or helped unwittingly,
Bid it go burn and leave his frayed flesh free? 630
Plainly, did Guido open both doors wide,
Spurn thence the cur-cast creature and clear scores
As man might, tempted in extreme like this?
No, birth and breeding, and compassion too
Saved her such scandal. She was young, he thought, 635
Not privy to the treason, punished most
I' the proclamation of it; why make her
A party to the crime she suffered by?
Then the black eyes were now her very own,
Not any more Violante's: let her live, 640

Lose in a new air, under a new sun,
 The taint of the imputed parentage
 Truly or falsely, take no more the touch
 Of Pietro and his partner anyhow!
 All might go well yet.

So she thought, herself, 645
 It seems, since what was her first act and deed
 When news came how these kindly ones at Rome
 Had stripped her naked to amuse the world
 With spots here, spots there and spots everywhere?
 — For I should tell you that they noised abroad 650
 Not merely the main scandal of her birth,
 But slanders written, printed, published wide,
 Pamphlets which set forth all the pleasantry
 Of how the promised glory was a dream,
 The power a bubble, and the wealth — why, dust. 655
 There was a picture, painted to the life,
 Of those rare doings, that superlative
 Initiation in magnificence
 Conferred on a poor Roman family
 By favor of Arezzo and her first 660
 And famousest, the Franceschini there.
 You had the Countship holding head aloft
 Bravely although bespattered, shifts and straits
 In keeping out o' the way o' the wheels o' the world,
 The comic of those home-contrivances 665
 When the old lady-mother's wit was taxed
 To find six clamorous mouths in food more real
 Than fruit plucked off the cobwebbed family-tree,
 Or acorns shed from its gilt mouldered frame —
 Cold glories served up with stale fame for sauce. 670
 What, I ask, — when the drunkenness of hate
 Hiccaped return for hospitality,
 Befouled the table they had feasted on,
 Or say, — God knows I'll not prejudge the case, —
 Grievances thus distorted, magnified, 675
 Colored by quarrel into calumny, —
 What side did our Pompilia first espouse?
 Her first deliberate measure was — she wrote,
 Pricked by some loyal impulse, straight to Rome
 And her husband's brother the Abate there, 680
 Who, having managed to effect the match,
 Might take men's censure for its ill success.
 She made a clean breast also in her turn,
 And qualified the couple properly,
 Since whose departure, hell, she said, was heaven, 685
 And the house, late distracted by their peals,

Quiet as Carmel¹ where the lilies live.
 Herself had oftentimes complained: but why?
 All her complaints had been their prompting, tales
 Trumped up, devices to this very end. 690
 Their game had been to thwart her husband's love
 And cross his will, malign his words and ways,
 To reach this issue, furnish this pretence
 For impudent withdrawal from their bond, —
 Theft, indeed murder, since they meant no less 695
 Whose last injunction to her simple self
 Had been — what parents'-precept do you think?
 That she should follow after with all speed,
 Fly from her husband's house clandestinely,
 Join them at Rome again, but first of all 700
 Pick up a fresh companion in her flight,
 So putting youth and beauty to fit use, —
 Some gay dare-devil cloak-and-rapier spark
 Capable of adventure, — helped by whom
 She, some fine eve when lutes were in the air, 705
 Having put poison in the posset²-cup,
 Laid hands on money, jewels and the like,
 And, to conceal the thing with more effect,
 By way of parting benediction too,
 Fired the house, — one would finish famously 710
 I' the tumult, slip out, scurry off and away
 And turn up merrily at home once more.
 Fact this, and not a dream o' the devil, Sir!
 And more than this, a fact none dare dispute,
 Word for word, such a letter did she write, 715
 And such the Abate read, nor simply read
 But gave all Rome to ruminate upon.
 In answer to such charges as, I say,
 The couple sought to be beforehand with.

The cause thus carried to the courts at Rome, 720
 Guido away, the Abate had no choice
 But stand forth, take his absent brother's part,
 Defend the honor of himself beside.
 He made what head he might against the pair,
 Maintained Pompilia's birth legitimate 725
 And all her rights intact — hers, Guido's now:
 And so far by his policy turned their flank,
 (The enemy being beforehand in the place)
 That, — though the courts allowed the cheat for fact,

¹ *Carmel*: Mount Carmel in Syria, where the Carmelite order of mendicant monks was said to be established. They wore white.

² *Posset*: a drink made of milk and wine.

Suffered Violante to parade her shame, 730
 Publish her infamy to heart's content,
 And let the tale o' the feigned birth pass for proved, —
 Yet they stopped there, refused to intervene
 And dispossess the innocents, befooled
 By gifts o' the guilty, at guilt's new caprice. 735
 They would not take away the dowry now
 Wrongfully given at first, nor bar at all
 Succession to the aforesaid usufruct,
 Established on a fraud, nor play the game
 Of Pietro's child and now not Pietro's child 740
 As it might suit the gamester's purpose. Thus
 Was justice ever ridiculed in Rome :
 Such be the double verdicts favored here
 Which send away both parties to a suit
 Nor puffed up nor cast down. — for each a crumb 745
 Of right, for neither of them the whole loaf.
 Whence, on the Comparini's part, appeal —
 Counter-appeal on Guido's, — that 's the game :
 And so the matter stands, even to this hour,
 Banded as balls are in a tennis-court, 750
 And so might stand, unless some heart broke first,
 Till doomsday.

Leave it thus, and now revert
 To the old Arezzo whence we moved to Rome.
 We've had enough o' the parents, false or true.
 Now for a touch o' the daughter's quality. 755
 The start 's fair henceforth, every obstacle
 Out of the young wife's footpath, she's alone,
 Left to walk warily now : how does she walk?
 Why, once a dwelling's threshold marked and crossed
 In rubric by the enemy on his rounds 760
 As eligible, as fit place of prey,
 Baffle him henceforth, keep him out who can!
 Stop up the door at the first hint of hoof,
 Presently at the window taps a horn,
 And Satan 's by your fireside, never fear! 765
 Pompilia, left alone now, found herself ;
 Found herself young too, sprightly, fair enough,
 Matched with a husband old beyond his age
 (Though that was something like four times her own)
 Because of cares past, present and to come : 770
 Found too the house dull and its inmates dead.
 So, looked outside for light and life.

And love
 Did in a trice turn up with life and light, —
 The man with the aureole, sympathy made flesh,

The all-consoling Caponsacchi, Sir!	775
A priest — what else should the consoler be?	
With goodly shoulderblade and proper leg,	
A portly make and a symmetric shape,	
And curls that clustered to the tonsure quite.	
This was a bishop in the bud, and now	780
A canon full-blown so far: priest, and priest	
Nowise exorbitantly overworked,	
The courtly Christian, not so much Saint Paul	
As a saint of Cæsar's household: there posed he	
Sending his god-glance after his shot shaft,	785
Apollo's turned Apollo, while the snake	
Pompilia writhed transfixed through all her spires.	
He, not a visitor at Guido's house,	
Scarce an acquaintance, but in prime request	
With the magnates of Arezzo, was seen here,	790
Heard there, felt everywhere in Guido's path	
If Guido's wife's path be her husband's too.	
Now he threw comfits at the theatre	
Into her lap. — what harm in Carnival?	
Now he pressed close till his foot touched her gown,	795
His hand brushed hers, — how help on promenade?	
And, ever on weighty business, found his steps	
Incline to a certain haunt of doubtful fame	
Which fronted Guido's palace by mere chance;	
While — how do accidents sometimes combine! —	800
Pompilia chose to cloister up her charms	
Just in a chamber that o'erlooked the street,	
Sat there to pray, or peep thence at mankind.	
This passage of arms and wits amused the town.	
At last the husband lifted eyebrow, — bent	805
On day-book and the study how to wring	
Half the due vintage from the worn-out vines	
At the villa, tease a quarter the old rent	
From the farmstead, tenants swore would tumble soon, —	
Pricked up his ear a-singing day and night	810
With "ruin, ruin;" — and so surprised at last —	
Why, what else but a titter? Up he jumps.	
Back to mind come those scratchings at the grange,	
Prints of the paw about the outhouse: rife	
In his head at once again are word and wink,	815
<i>Mum</i> here and <i>budget</i> ¹ there, the smell o' the fox.	
The musk o' the gallant. "Friends, there 's falseness here!"	

The proper help of friends in such a strait

¹ *Mum, Budget*: see Shakespeare, "Merry Wives of Windsor," V. ii. 7.

Is waggery, the world over. Laugh him free
 O' the regular jealous-fit that 's incident 820
 To all old husbands that wed brisk young wives,
 And he 'll go duly docile all his days.
 "Somebody courts your wife, Count? Where and when?
 How and why? Meré horn-madness: have a care!
 Your lady loves her own room, sticks to it, 825
 Locks herself in for hours, you say yourself.
 And — what, it 's Caponsacchi means you harm?
 The Canon? We caress him, he 's the world's,
 A man of such acceptance — never dream,
 Though he were fifty times the fox you fear, 830
 He 'd risk his brush for your particular chick,
 When the wide town 's his hen-roost! Fie o' the fool!"
 So they dispensed their comfort of a kind.
 Guido at last cried "Something is in the air,
 Under the earth, some plot against my peace 835
 The trouble of eclipse hangs overhead;
 How it should come of that officious orb
 Your Canon in my system, you must say:
 I say — that from the pressure of this spring
 Began the chime and interchange of bells, 840
 Ever one whisper, and one whisper more,
 And just one whisper for the silvery last,
 Till all at once a-row the bronze-throats burst
 Into a larum both significant
 And sinister: stop it I must and will. 845
 Let Caponsacchi take his hand away
 From the wire! — disport himself in other paths
 Than lead precisely to my palace-gate. —
 Look where he likes except one window's way
 Where, cheek on hand, and elbow set on sill, 850
 Happens to lean and say her litanies
 Every day and all day long, just my wife —
 Or wife and Caponsacchi may fare the worse!"

Admire the man's simplicity, "I 'll do this,
 I 'll not have that, I 'll punish and prevent!" — 855
 'T is easy saying. But to a fray, you see,
 Two parties go. The badger shows his teeth:
 The fox nor lies down sheep-like nor dares fight.
 Oh, the wife knew the appropriate warfare well,
 The way to put suspicion to the blush! 860
 At first hint of remonstrance, up and out
 I' the face of the world, you found her: she could speak,
 State her case, — Franceschini was a name,
 Guido had his full share of foes and friends —
 Why should not she call these to arbitrate? 865

- She bade the Governor do governance,
 Cried out on the Archbishop. — why, there now,
 Take him for sample! Three successive times,
 Had he to reconduct her by main-force
 From where she took her station opposite 870
 His shut door, — on the public steps thereto,
 Wringing her hands, when he came out to see,
 And shrieking all her wrongs forth at his foot, —
 Back to the husband and the house she fled :
 Judge if that husband warmed him in the face 875
 Of friends or frowned on foes as heretofore!
 Judge if he missed the natural grin of folk,
 Or lacked the customary compliment
 Of cap and bells, the luckless husband's fit!
- So it went on and on till — who was right? 880
 One merry April morning, Guido woke
 After the cuckoo, so late, near noonday,
 With an inordinate yawning of the jaws,
 Ears plugged, eyes gummed together, palate, tongue
 And teeth one mud-paste made of poppy-milk : 885
 And found his wife flown, his scritoire the worse
 For a rummage, — jewelry that was, was not,
 Some money there had made itself wings too, —
 The door lay wide and yet the servants slept
 Sound as the dead, or dosed which does as well. 890
 In short, Pompilia, she who, candid soul,
 Had not so much as spoken all her life
 To the Canon, nay, so much as peeped at him
 Between her fingers while she prayed in church, —
 This lamb-like innocent of fifteen years 895
 (Such she was grown to by this time of day)
 Had simply put an opiate in the drink
 Of the whole household overnight, and then
 Got up and gone about her work secure,
 Laid hand on this waif and the other stray, 900
 Spoiled the Philistine and marched out of doors
 In company of the Canon who, Lord's love,
 What with his daily duty at the church,
 Nightly devoir where ladies congregate,
 Had something else to mind, assure yourself, 905
 Beside Pompilia, paragon though she be,
 Or notice if her nose were sharp or blunt!
 Well, anyhow, albeit impossible,
 Both of them were together jollily
 Jaunting it Rome-ward, half-way there by this, 910
 While Guido was left go and get undrugged,

Gather his wits up, groaningly give thanks
When neighbors crowded round him to condole.

“ Ah,” quoth a gossip, “ well I mind me now,
The Count did always say he thought he felt 915
He feared as if this very chance might fall!
And when a man of fifty finds his corns
Ache and his joints throb, and foresees a storm,
Though neighbors laugh and say the sky is clear,
Let us henceforth believe him weatherwise!” 920
Then was the story told, I ’ll cut you short :
All neighbors knew : no mystery in the world.
The lovers left at nightfall — over night
Had Caponsacchi come to carry off
Pompilia, — not alone, a friend of his, 925
One Guillichini, the more conversant
With Guido’s housekeeping that he was just
A cousin of Guido’s and might play a prank —
(Have not you too a cousin that ’s a wag?)
— Lord and a Canon also, — what would you have? 930
Such are the red-clothed milk-swollen poppy-heads
That stand and stiffen ’mid the wheat o’ the Church !—
This worthy came to aid, abet his best.
And so the house was ransacked, booty bagged,
The lady led downstairs and out of doors 935
Guided and guarded till, the city passed,
A carriage lay convenient at the gate.
Good-bye to the friendly Canon : the loving one
Could peradventure do the rest himself.
In jumps Pompilia, after her the priest, 940
“ Whip, driver! Money makes the mare to go,
And we ’ve a bagful. Take the Roman road!”
So said the neighbors. This was eight hours since.

Guido heard all, swore the befitting oaths,
Shook off the relics of his poison-drench, 945
Got horse, was fairly started in pursuit
With never a friend to follow, found the track
Fast enough, ’t was the straight Perugia way,
Trod soon upon their very heels, too late
By a minute only at Camoscia, reached 950
Chiusi, Foligno, ever the fugitives
Just ahead, just out as he galloped in,
Getting the good news ever fresh and fresh,
Till, lo, at the last stage of all, last post
Before Rome, — as we say, in sight of Rome 955
And safety (there ’s impunity at Rome
For priests, you know) at — what ’s the little place? —

What some call Castelnuovo, some just call
 The Osteria,¹ because o' the post-house inn,
 There, at the journey's all but end, it seems, 960
 Triumph deceived them and undid them both,
 Secure they might foretaste felicity
 Nor fear surprisal: so, they were surprised.
 There did they halt at early evening, there
 Did Guido overtake them: 't was day-break; 965
 He came in time enough, not time too much.
 Since in the courtyard stood the Canon's self
 Urging the drowsy stable-grooms to haste
 Harness the horses, have the journey end,
 The trifling four-hours'-running, so reach Rome. 970
 And the other runaway, the wife? Upstairs.
 Still on the couch where she had spent the night,
 One couch in one room, and one room for both.
 So gained they six hours, so were lost thereby.

Sir, what 's the sequel? Lover and beloved 975
 Fall on their knees? No impudence serves here?
 They beat their breasts and beg for easy death,
 Confess this, that and the other?—anyhow
 Confess there wanted not some likelihood
 To the supposition so preposterous. 980
 That, O Pompilia, thy sequestered eyes
 Had noticed, straying o'er the prayerbook's edge,
 More of the Canon than that black his coat,
 Buckled his shoes were, broad his hat of brim:
 And that, O Canon, thy religious care 985
 Had breathed too soft a *benedicite*
 To banish trouble from a lady's breast
 So lonely and so lovely, nor so lean!
 This you expect? Indeed, then, much you err.
 Not to such ordinary end as this 990
 Had Caponsacchi flung the cassock far,
 Doffed the priest, donned the perfect cavalier.
 The die was cast: over shoes over boots:
 And just as she, I presently shall show,
 Pompilia, soon looked Helen to the life, 995
 Recumbent upstairs in her pink and white,
 So, in the inn-yard, bold as 't were Troy-town,
 There strutted Paris in correct costume,
 Cloak, cap and feather, no appointment missed,
 Even to a wicked-looking sword at side, 1000
 He seemed to find and feel familiar at.
 Nor wanted words as ready and as big

¹ Osteria: a tavern or inn.

As the part he played, the bold abashless one.
 "I interposed to save your wife from death,
 Yourself from shame, the true and only shame : 1005
 Ask your own conscience else! — or, failing that,
 What I have done I answer, anywhere.
 Here, if you will ; you see I have a sword :
 Or, since I have a tonsure as you taunt,
 At Rome, by all means, — priests to try a priest. 1010
 Only, speak where your wife's voice can reply!"
 And then he fingered at the sword again.
 So, Guido called, in aid and witness both,
 The Public Force. The Commissary came,
 Officers also ; they secured the priest ; 1015
 Then, for his more confusion, mounted up
 With him, a guard on either side, the stair
 To the bed-room where still slept or feigned a sleep
 His paramour and Guido's wife : in burst
 The company and bade her wake and rise. 1020

Her defence? This. She woke, saw, sprang upright
 I' the midst and stood as terrible as truth,
 Sprang to her husband's side, caught at the sword
 That hung there useless, — since they held each hand
 O' the lover, had disarmed him properly, — 1025
 And in a moment out flew the bright thing
 Full in the face of Guido : but for help
 O' the guards who held her back and pinioned her
 With pains enough, she had finished you my tale
 With a flourish of red all round it, pinked her man 1030
 Prettily ; but she fought them one to six.
 They stopped that, — but her tongue continued free :
 She spat forth such invective at her spouse.
 O'erfrothed him with such foam of murderer,
 Thief, pandar — that the popular tide soon turned, 1035
 The favor of the very *sbirri*,¹ straight
 Ebbed from the husband, set toward his wife,
 People cried " Hands off, pay a priest respect !"
 And " persecuting fiend " and " martyred saint "
 Began to lead a measure from lip to lip. 1040

But facts are facts and flinch not ; stubborn things,
 And the question " Prithee, friend, how comes my purse
 I' the poke of you ? " — admits of no reply.
 Here was a priest found out in masquerade,
 A wife caught playing truant if no more ; 1045

¹ *Sbirri* : papal police.

While the Count, mortified in mien enough,
 And, nose to face, an added palm in length,
 Was plain writ "husband" every piece of him :
 Capture once made, release could hardly be.
 Beside, the prisoners both made appeal, 1050
 "Take us to Rome!"

Taken to Rome they were ;

The husband trooping after, piteously,
 Tail between legs, no talk of triumph now—
 No honor set firm on its feet once more
 On two dead bodies of the guilty, — nay, 1055
 No dubious salve to honor's broken pate
 From chance that, after all, the hurt might seem
 A skin-deep matter, scratch that leaves no scar :
 For Guido's first search, — ferreting, poor soul.
 Here, there and everywhere in the vile place 1060
 Abandoned to him when their backs were turned,
 Found, — furnishing a last and best regale, —
 All the love-letters bandied 'twixt the pair
 Since the first timid trembling into life
 O' the love-star till its stand at fiery full. 1065
 Mad prose, mad verse, fears, hopes, triumph, despair,
 Avowal, disclaimer, plans, dates, names, — was nought
 Wanting to prove, if proof consoles at all,
 That this had been but the fifth act o' the piece
 Whereof the due proemium, months ago 1070
 These playwrights had put forth, and ever since
 Matured the middle, added 'neath his nose.
 He might go cross himself: the case was clear.

Therefore to Rome with the clear case: there plead
 Each party its best, and leave law do each right, 1075
 Let law shine forth and show, as God in heaven,
 Vice prostrate, virtue pedestalled at last,
 The triumph of truth! What else shall glad our gaze
 When once authority has knit the brow
 And set the brain behind it to decide 1080
 Between the wolf and sheep turned litigants?
 "This is indeed a business!" law shook head:
 "A husband charges hard things on a wife,
 The wife as hard o' the husband: whose fault here?
 A wife that flies her husband's house, does wrong: 1085
 The male friend's interference looks amiss,
 Lends a suspicion: but suppose the wife,
 On the other hand, be jeopardized at home —
 Nay, that she simply hold, ill-groundedly,
 An apprehension she is jeopardized, — 1090
 And further, if the friend partake the fear,

And, in a commendable charity
 Which trusteth all, trust her that she mistrusts, —
 What do they but obey law — natural law?
 Pretence may this be and a cloak for sin, 1095
 And circumstances that concur i' the close
 Hint as much, loudly — yet scarce loud enough
 To drown the answer 'strange may yet be true :'
 Innocence often looks like guiltiness.
 The accused declare that in thought, word and deed, 1100
 Innocent were they both from first to last
 As male-babe haply laid by female-babe
 At church on edge of the baptismal font
 Together for a minute. perfect-pure.
 Difficult to believe, yet possible, 1105
 As witness Joseph, the friend's patron-saint.
 The night at the inn — there charity nigh chokes
 Ere swallow what they both asseverate ;
 Though down the gullet faith may feel it go,
 When mindful of what flight fatigued the flesh 1110
 Out of its faculty and fleshliness,
 Subdued it to the soul, as saints assure :
 So long a flight necessitates a fall
 On the first bed, though in a lion's den,
 And the first pillow, though the lion's back : 1115
 Difficult to believe, yet possible.
 Last come the letters' bundled beastliness —
 Authority repugns¹ give glance to — nay,
 Turns head, and almost lets her whip-lash fall ;
 Yet here a voice cries 'Respite !' from the clouds — 1120
 The accused, both in a tale, protest, disclaim,
 Abominate the horror : 'Not my hand'
 Asserts the friend — 'Nor mine' chimes in the wife,
 'Seeing I have no hand, nor write at all.'
 Illiterate — for she goes on to ask, 1125
 What if the friend did pen now verse now prose,
 Commend it to her notice now and then ?
 'T was pearls to swine : she read no more than wrote,
 And kept no more than read, for as they fell
 She ever brushed the burr-like things away, 1130
 Or, better, burned them, quenched the fire in smoke.
 As for this fardel,² filth and foolishness,
 She sees it now the first time : burn it too !
 While for his part the friend vows ignorance
 Alike of what bears his name and bears hers : 1135
 'T is forgery, a felon's masterpiece,
 And, as 't is said the fox still finds the stench,

¹ *Repugns* : opposes.² *Fardel* : bundle.

Home-manufacture and the husband's work.
 Though he confesses, the ingenuous friend.
 That certain missives, letters of a sort, 1140
 Flighty and feeble, which assigned themselves
 To the wife, no less have fallen, far too oft,
 In his path : wherefrom he understood just this —
 That were they verily the lady's own,
 Why, she who penned them, since he never saw 1145
 Save for one minute the mere face of her,
 Since never had there been the interchange
 Of word with word between them all their life,
 Why, she must be the fondest of the frail,
 And fit, she for the '*apage*'¹ he flung, 1150
 Her letters for the flame they went to feed!
 But, now he sees her face and hears her speech,
 Much he repents him if, in fancy-freak
 For a moment the minutest measurable,
 He coupled her with the first flimsy word 1155
 O' the self-spun fabric some mean spider-soul
 Furnished forth : stop his films and stamp on him!
 Never was such a tangled knottiness,
 But thus authority cuts the Gordian through,
 And mark how her decision suits the need! 1160
 Here 's troublesomeness, scandal on both sides,
 Plenty of fault to find, no absolute crime :
 Let each side own its fault and make amends!
 What does a priest in cavalier's attire
 Consorting publicly with vagrant wives 1165
 In quarters close as the confessional,
 Though innocent of harm? 'T is harm enough :
 Let him pay it, — say, be relegate a good
 Three years, to spend in some place not too far
 Nor yet too near, midway 'twixt near and far, 1170
 Rome and Arezzo. — Civita we choose,
 Where he may lounge away time, live at large,
 Find out the proper function of a priest,
 Nowise an exile, — that were punishment, —
 But one our love thus keeps out of harm's way 1175
 Not more from the husband's anger than, mayhap
 His own . . . say, indiscretion, waywardness,
 And wanderings when Easter eves grow warm.
 For the wife, — well, our best step to take with her,
 On her own showing, were to shift her root 1180
 From the old cold shade and unhappy soil
 Into a generous ground that fronts the south
 Where, since her callow soul, a-shiver late,

¹ *Apage* : away with thee.

Craved simply warmth and called mere passers-by
 To the rescue, she should have her fill of shine. 1185
 Do house and husband hinder and not help?
 Why then, forget both and stay here at peace,
 Come into our community, enroll
 Herself along with those good Convertites,¹
 Those sinners saved, those Magdalens re-made, 1190
 Accept their ministration, well bestow
 Her body and patiently possess her soul,
 Until we see what better can be done.
 Last for the husband: if his tale prove true,
 Well is he rid of two domestic plagues — 1195
 Both wife that ailed, do whatsoever he would,
 And friend of hers that undertook the cure.
 See, what a double load we lift from breast!
 Off he may go, return, resume old life,
 Laugh at the priest here and Pompilia there 1200
 In limbo each and punished for their pains,
 And grateful tell the inquiring neighborhood —
 In Rome, no wrong but has its remedy.”
 The case was closed. Now, am I fair or no
 In what I utter? Do I state the facts, 1205
 Having forechosen a side? I promised you!

The Canon Caponsacchi, then, was sent
 To change his garb, re-trim his tonsure, tie
 The clerkly silk round, every plait correct,
 Make the impressive entry on his place 1210
 Of relegation, thrill his Civita.
 As Ovid,² a like sufferer in the cause,
 Planted a primrose-patch by Pontus: where, —
 What with much culture of the sonnet-stave
 And converse with the aborigines, 1215
 Soft savagery of eyes unused to roll
 And hearts that all awry went pit-a-pat
 And wanted setting right in charity, —
 What were a couple of years to while away?
 Pompilia, as enjoined, betook herself 1220
 To the aforesaid Convertites, soft sisterhood
 In Via Lungara, where the light ones live,
 Spin, pray, then sing like linnets o'er the flax.
 “Anywhere, anyhow, out of my husband's house
 Is heaven,” cried she, — was therefore suited so. 1225
 But for Count Guido Franceschini, he —

¹ *Convertites*: an order of nuns devoted to the rescue of others who, like themselves, have fallen.

² *Ovid, a like sufferer*: he was banished by Augustus to Tomis, on the Euxine Sea, for some amour or imprudence.

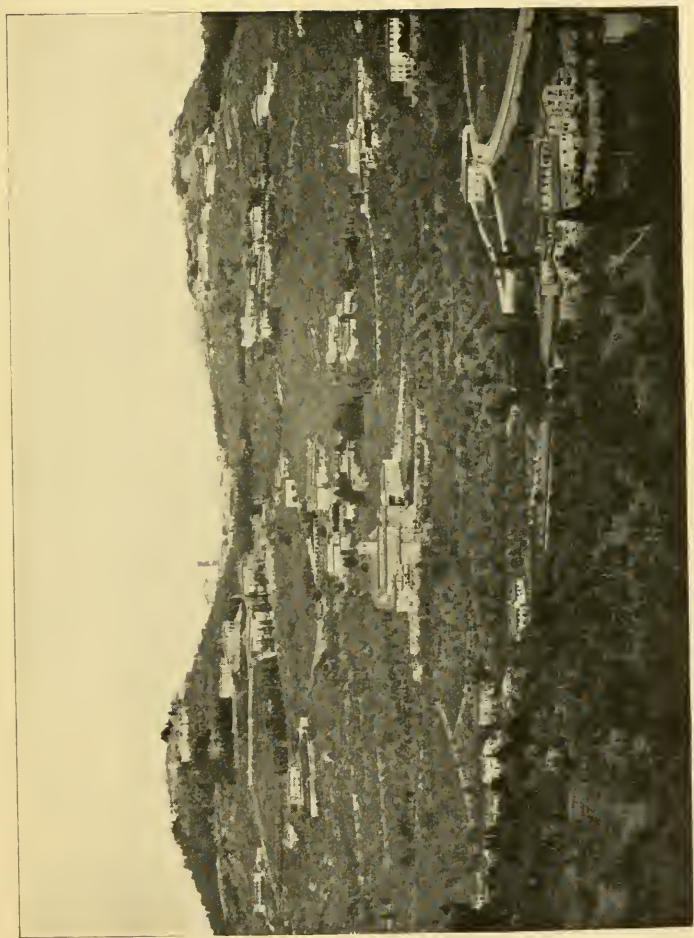
The injured man thus righted — found no heaven
 I' the house when he returned there, I engage.
 Was welcomed by the city turned upside down
 In a chorus of inquiry. "What, back — you? 1230
 And no wife? Left her with the Penitents?
 Ah, being young and pretty, 't were a shame
 To have her whipped in public: leave the job
 To the priests who understand! Such priests as yours —
 (Pontifex Maximus whipped Vestals once)¹ 1235
 Our madcap Caponsacchi: think of him!
 So, he fired up, showed fight and skill of fence?
 Ay, you drew also, but you did not fight!
 The wiser, 't is a word and a blow with him,
 True Caponsacchi, of old Head-i'-the-Sack² 1240
 That fought at Fiesole ere Florence was:
 He had done enough, to firk³ you were too much.
 And did the little lady menace you,
 Make at your breast with your own harmless sword?
 The spitfire! Well, thank God you're safe and sound, 1245
 Have kept the sixth commandment whether or no
 The lady broke the seventh: I only wish
 I were as saint-like, could contain me so.
 I, the poor sinner, fear I should have left
 Sir Priest no nose-tip to turn up at me!" 1250
 You, Sir, who listen but interpose no word,
 Ask yourself, had you borne a baiting thus?
 Was it enough to make a wise man mad?
 Oh, but I'll have your verdict at the end!
 Well, not enough, it seems: such mere hurt falls, 1255
 Frets awhile, aches long, then grows less and less,
 And so gets done with. Such was not the scheme
 O' the pleasant Comparini: on Guido's wound
 Ever in due succession, drop by drop,
 Came slow distilment from the alembic here 1260
 Set on to simmer by Canidian hate,⁴
 Corrosives keeping the man's misery raw.
 First fire-drop, — when he thought to make the best
 O' the bad, to wring from out the sentence passed,
 Poor, pitiful, absurd although it were, 1265
 Yet what might eke him out result enough

¹ *Pontifex Maximus*: in ancient Rome, any Vestal Virgin who let the sacred fire go out was scourged by the Pontifex Maximus.

² *Caponsacchi*: in English, *Head i' the Sack*. The family is mentioned in Dante's *Paradise*, XVI.

³ *Firk*: chastise

⁴ *Canidian hate*: Canidia was a Neapolitan beloved by Horace. When she deserted him, he held her up to contempt as an old witch.



FIESOLE.

And make it worth while to have had the right
 And not the wrong i' the matter judged at Rome.
 Inadequate her punishment, no less
 Punished in some slight sort his wife had been ; 1270
 Then, punished for adultery, what else?
 On such admitted crime he thought to seize,
 And institute procedure in the courts
 Which cut corruption of this kind from man,
 Cast loose a wife proved loose and castaway : 1275
 He claimed in due form a divorce at least.

This claim was met now by a counterclaim :
 Pompilia sought divorce from bed and board
 Of Guido, whose outrageous cruelty,
 Whose mother's malice and whose brother's hate 1280
 Were just the white o' the charge, such dreadful depths
 Blackened its centre, — hints of worse than hate,
 Love from that brother, by that Guido's guile,
 That mother's prompting. Such reply was made,
 So was the engine loaded, wound up, sprung 1285
 On Guido, who received bolt full in breast ;
 But no less bore up, giddily perhaps.
 He had the Abate Paolo still in Rome,
 Brother and friend and fighter on his side :
 They rallied in a measure, met the foe 1290
 Manlike, joined battle in the public courts,
 As if to shame supine law from her sloth :
 And waiting her award, let beat the while
 Arezzo's banter, Rome's buffoonery,
 On this ear and on that ear, deaf alike, 1295
 Safe from worse outrage. Let a scorpion nip,
 And never mind till he contorts his tail!
 But there was sting i' the creature ; thus it struck.
 Guido had thought in his simplicity —
 That lying declaration of remorse, 1300
 That story of the child which was no child
 And motherhood no motherhood at all,
 — That even this sin might have its sort of good
 Inasmuch as no question more could be, —
 Call it false, call the story true, — no claim 1305
 Of further parentage pretended now :
 The parents had abjured all right, at least,
 I' the woman owned his wife : to plead right still
 Were to declare the abjuration false :
 He was relieved from any fear henceforth 1310
 Their hands might touch, their breath defile again
 Pompilia with his name upon her yet.
 Well, no : the next news was, Pompilia's health

Demanded change after full three long weeks
 Spent in devotion with the Sisterhood, — 1315
 Which rendered sojourn, — so the court opined, —
 Too irksome, since the convent's walls were high
 And windows narrow, nor was air enough
 Nor light enough, but all looked prison-like.
 The last thing which had come into the court's head. 1320
 Propose a new expedient therefore, — this!
 She had demanded — had obtained indeed,
 By intervention of her pitying friends
 Or perhaps lovers — (beauty in distress,
 Beauty whose tale is the town-talk beside. 1325
 Never lacks friendship's arm about her neck) —
 Obtained remission of the penalty,
 Permitted transfer to some private place
 Where better air, more light, new food might soothe —
 Incarcerated (call it, all the same) 1330
 At some sure friend's house she must keep inside,
 Be found in at requirement fast enough, —
Domus pro carcere,¹ in Roman style.
 You keep the house i' the main, as most men do
 And all good women: but free otherwise. 1335
 Should friends arrive, to lodge them and what not?
 And such a *domum*, such a dwelling-place,
 Having all Rome to choose from, where chose she?
 What house obtained Pompilia's preference?
 Why, just the Comparini's — just, do you mark, 1340
 Theirs who renounced all part and lot in her
 So long as Guido could be robbed thereby,
 And only fell back on relationship
 And found their daughter safe and sound again
 When that might surelier stab him: yes, the pair 1345
 Who, as I told you, first had baited hook
 With this poor gilded fly Pompilia-thing,
 Then caught the fish, pulled Guido to the shore
 And gutted him, — now found a further use
 For the bait, would trail the gauze wings yet again 1350
 I' the way of what new swimmer passed their stand.
 They took Pompilia to their hiding-place —
 Not in the heart of Rome as formerly,
 Under observance, subject to control —
 But out o' the way, — or in the way, who knows? 1355
 That blind mute villa lurking by the gate
 At Via Paulina, not so hard to miss
 By the honest eye, easy enough to find
 In twilight by marauders: where perchance

¹ *Domus pro carcere*: a house for a prison.

Some muffled Caponsacchi might repair, 1360
 Employ odd moments when he too tried change,
 Found that a friend's abode was pleasanter
 Than relegation, penance and the rest.

Come, here 's the last drop does its worst to wound
 Here 's Guido poisoned to the bone, you say 1365
 Your boasted still 's full strain and strength: not so!
 One master-squeeze from screw shall bring to birth
 The hoard i' the heart o' the toad,¹ hell's quintessence.

He learned the true convenience of the change,
 And why a convent lacks the cheerful hearts 1370
 And helpful hands which female straits require,
 When, in the blind mute villa by the gate,
 Pompilia — what? sang, danced, saw company?
 — Gave birth, Sir, to a child, his son and heir,
 Or Guido's heir and Caponsacchi's son. 1375

I want your word now: what do you say to this?
 What would say little Arezzo and great Rome,
 And what did God say and the devil say
 One at each ear o' the man, the husband, now
 The father? Why, the overburdened mind 1380
 Broke down, what was a brain became a blaze.

In fury of the moment — (that first news
 Fell on the Count among his vines, it seems,
 Doing his farm-work,) — why, he summoned steward,
 Called in the first four hard hands and stout hearts 1385
 From field and furrow, poured forth his appeal,
 Not to Rome's law and gospel any more,
 But this clown with a mother or a wife,
 That clodpole with a sister or a son:

And, whereas law and gospel held their peace, 1390
 What wonder if the sticks and stones cried out?

All five soon somehow found themselves at Rome,
 At the villa door: there was the warmth and light —
 The sense of life so just an inch inside —
 Some angel must have whispered "one more chance!" 1395

He gave it: bade the others stand aside:
 Knocked at the door, — "Who is it knocks?" cried one.
 "I will make," surely Guido's angel urged.
 "One final essay, last experiment,
 Speak the word, name the name from out all names 1400

¹ *Hoard i' the heart o' the toad*: Fenton stelon, which, being used as rings, gives fore-
 says, "There is to be found in the heads of warning against venom. See "As You Like
 old and great toads a stone they call borax or It," II. i. 15.

Which, if, — as doubtless strong illusions are,
 And strange disguisings whereby truth seems false,
 And, since I am but man, I dare not do
 God's work until assured I see with God, —
 If I should bring my lips to breathe that name 1405
 And they be innocent, — nay, by one mere touch
 Of innocence redeemed from utter guilt, —
 That name will bar the door and bid fate pass.
 I will not say 'It is a messenger,
 A neighbor, even a belated man, 1410
 Much less your husband's friend, your husband's self: '
 At such appeal the door is bound to ope.
 But I will say " — here 's rhetoric and to spare!
 Why, Sir, the stumbling-block is cursed and kicked,
 Block though it be; the name that brought offence 1415
 Will bring offence: the burnt child dreads the fire
 Although that fire feed on some taper-wick
 Which never left the altar nor singed a fly:
 And had a harmless man tripped you by chance,
 How would you wait him, stand or step aside, 1420
 When next you heard he rolled your way? Enough.

"Giuseppe Caponsacchi!" Guido cried;
 And open flew the door: enough again.
 Vengeance, you know, burst, like a mountain-wave
 That holds a monster in it, over the house. 1425
 And wiped its filthy four walls free at last
 With a wash of hell-fire. — father, mother, wife,
 Killed them all, bathed his name clean in their blood,
 And, reeking so, was caught, his friends and he,
 Haled hither and imprisoned yesternight 1430
 O' the day all this was.

Now, Sir, tale is told,
 Of how the old couple come to lie in state
 Though hacked to pieces, — never, the expert say,
 So thorough a study of stabbing — while the wife
 (Viper-like, very difficult to slay) 1435
 Writhes still through every ring of her, poor wretch,
 At the Hospital hard by — survives, we 'll hope,
 To somewhat purify her putrid soul
 By full confession, make so much amends
 While time lasts; since at day's end die she must. 1440

For Caponsacchi, — why, they 'll have him here,
 As hero of the adventure, who so fit
 To figure in the coming Carnival?
 'T will make the fortune of whate'er saloon

Hears him recount, with helpful cheek, and eye 1445
 Hotly indignant now, now dewy-dimmed,
 The incidents of flight, pursuit, surprise,
 Capture, with hints of kisses all between —
 While Guido, wholly unromantic spouse,
 No longer fit to laugh at since the blood 1450
 Gave the broad farce an all too brutal air.
 Why, he and those four luckless friends of his
 May tumble in the straw this bitter day —
 Laid by the heels i' the New Prison, I hear,
 To bide their trial, since trial, and for the life, 1455
 Follows if but for form's sake : yes, indeed!

But with a certain issue : no dispute,
 " Try him," bids law : formalities oblige :
 But as to the issue, — look me in the face! —
 If the law thinks to find them guilty, Sir, 1460
 Master or men — touch one hair of the five,
 Then I say in the name of all that 's left
 Of honor in Rome, civility i' the world
 Whereof Rome boasts herself the central source, —
 There 's an end to all hope of justice more. 1465
 Astræa¹ 's gone indeed, let hope go too!
 Who is it dares impugn the natural law,
 Deny God's word " the faithless wife shall die " ?
 What, are we blind? How can we fail to learn
 This crowd of miseries make the man a mark, 1470
 Accumulate on one devoted head
 For our example? — yours and mine who read
 Its lesson thus — " Henceforward let none dare
 Stand, like a natural in the public way,
 Letting the very urchins twitch his beard 1475
 And tweak his nose, to earn a nickname so,
 Be styled male-Grissel² or else modern Job! "
 Had Guido, in the twinkling of an eye,
 Summed up the reckoning, promptly paid himself,
 That morning when he came up with the pair 1480
 At the wayside inn, — exacted his just debt
 By aid of what first mattock, pitchfork, axe
 Came to hand in the helpful stable-yard,
 And with that axe, if providence so pleased,
 Cloven each head, by some Rolando-stroke,³ 1485

¹ *Astræa* : virgin-goddess of justice, daughter of Zeus and Themis, who departed from earth at the close of the golden age and became the constellation Virgo.

² *Male-Grissel* : Griselda, the heroine of

Chaucer's Clerk of Oxenford's tale, a type of female patience.

³ *Rolando-stroke* : Roland, the mediæval hero of romance.

In one clean cut from crown to clavicle,¹
 — Slain the priest-gallant, the wife-paramour,
 Sticking, for all defence, in each skull's cleft
 The rhyme and reason of the stroke thus dealt,
 To-wit, those letters and last evidence 1490
 Of shame, each package in its proper place. —
 Bidding, who pitied, undistend the skulls. —
 I say, the world had praised the man. But no!
 That were too plain, too straight, too simply just!
 He hesitates, calls law forsooth to help. 1495
 And law, distasteful to who calls in law
 When honor is beforehand and would serve,
 What wonder if law hesitate in turn,
 Plead her disuse to calls o' the kind, reply
 (Smiling a little) " 'T is yourself assess 1500
 The worth of what 's lost, sum of damage done.
 What you touched with so^olight a finger-tip,
 You whose concern it was to grasp the thing,
 Why must law gird herself and grapple with?
 Law, alien to the actor whose warm blood 1505
 Asks heat from law whose veins run lukewarm milk, —
 What you dealt lightly with, shall law make out
 Heinous forsooth? "

Sir, what 's the good of law
 In a case o' the kind? None, as she all but says.
 Call in law when a neighbor breaks your fence, 1510
 Cribs from your field, tampers with rent or lease,
 Touches the purse or pocket, — but woos your wife?
 No: take the old way trod when men were men!
 Guido preferred the new path, — for his pains,
 Stuck in a quagmire, floundered worse and worse 1515
 Until he managed somehow scramble back
 Into the safe sure rutted road once more,
 Revenged his own wrong like a gentleman.
 Once back 'mid the familiar prints, no doubt
 He made too rash amends for his first fault, 1520
 Vaulted too loftily over what barred him late.
 And lit i' the mire again, — the common chance,
 The natural over-energy: the deed
 Maladroit yields three deaths instead of one,
 And one life left: for where 's the Canon's corpse? 1525
 All which is the worse for Guido, but, be frank —
 The better for you and me and all the world,
 Husbands of wives, especially in Rome.
 The thing is put right, in the old place, — ay,
 The rod hangs on its nail behind the door, 1530

¹ *Clavicle*: collar-bone.

Fresh from the brine : a matter I commend
To the notice, during Carnival that 's near,
Of a certain what 's-his-name and jackanapes
Somewhat too civil of eves with lute and song
About a house here, where I keep a wife.
(You, being his cousin, may go tell him so.)

1535

III.

THE OTHER HALF-ROME.

[That side of public opinion which is predisposed to take the weaker part and to look beneath the more obvious motives for the deeper-seated causes of any occurrence is given expression in Book III. The "Other Half-Rome," therefore, befriends the suffering wife and her untitled foster-parents, detects the inconsistencies of Guido's defence, and, in the interest of society at large, refuses to permit a husband to constitute himself judge and executioner in his own case.]

ANOTHER day that finds her living yet,
 Little Pompilia, with the patient brow
 And lamentable smile on those poor lips,
 And, under the white hospital-array,
 A flower-like body, to frighten at a bruise 5
 You 'd think, yet now, stabbed through and through again,
 Alive i' the ruins. 'T is a miracle.
 It seems that, when her husband struck her first,
 She prayed Madonna just that she might live
 So long as to confess and be absolved; 10
 And whether it was that, all her sad life long
 Never before successful in a prayer,
 This prayer rose with authority too dread, —
 Or whether, because earth was hell to her,
 By compensation, when the blackness broke 15
 She got one glimpse of quiet and the cool blue,
 To show her for a moment such things were, —
 Or else, — as the Augustinian Brother thinks,
 The friar who took confession from her lip, —
 When a probationary soul that moved 20
 From nobleness to nobleness, as she,
 Over the rough way of the world, succumbs,
 Bloodies its last thorn with unflinching foot.
 The angels love to do their work betimes,
 Staunch some wounds here nor leave so much for God. 25
 Who knows? However it be, confessed, absolved,
 She lies, with overplus of life beside
 To speak and right herself from first to last,
 Right the friend also, lamb-pure, lion-brave,
 Care for the boy's concerns, to save the son 30
 From the sire, her two-weeks' infant orphaned thus,
 And — with best smile of all reserved for him —

Pardon that sire and husband from the heart.
A miracle, so tell your Molinists!

There she lies in the long white lazar-house. 35
Rome has besieged, these two days, never doubt,
Saint Anna's¹ where she waits her death, to hear
Though but the chink o' the bell, turn o' the hinge
When the reluctant wicket opes at last.
Lets in, on now this and now that pretence, 40
Too many by half, — complain the men of art, —
For a patient in such plight. The lawyers first
Paid the due visit — justice must be done ;
They took her witness, why the murder was.
Then the priests followed properly, — a soul 45
To shrive ; 't was Brother Celestine's own right,
The same who noises thus her gifts abroad.
But many more, who found they were old friends,
Pushed in to have their stare and take their talk
And go forth boasting of it and to boast. 50
Old Monna Baldi chatters like a jay,
Swears — but that, prematurely trundled out
Just as she felt the benefit begin,
The miracle was snapped up by somebody, —
Her palsied limb 'gan prick and promise life 55
At touch o' the bedclothes merely, — how much more
Had she but brushed the body as she tried!
Cavalier Carlo² — well, there's some excuse
For him — Maratta who paints Virgins so —
He too must fee the porter and slip by 60
With pencil cut and paper squared, and straight
There was he figuring away at face :
"A lovelier face is not in Rome," cried he,
"Shaped like a peacock's egg, the pure as pearl,
That hatches you anon a snow-white chick." 65
Then, oh that pair of eyes, that pendent hair,
Black this and black the other! Mighty fine —
But nobody cared ask to paint the same,
Nor grew a poet over hair and eyes
Four little years ago when, ask and have, 70
The woman who wakes all this rapture leaned
Flower-like from out her window long enough,
As much uncomplimented as uncropped
By comers and goers in Via Vittoria: eh?
'T is just a flower's fate: past parterre we trip, 75

¹ *Saint Anna's*: the monastery in Rome painter (1625-1713) called "Carlo delle where Vittoria Colonna also awaited death. Madonne," on account of the great number

² *Carlo Maratta*: celebrated Roman of pictures of the Virgin he painted.

Till peradventure someone plucks our sleeve —
 “Yon blossom at the briar’s end, that’s the rose
 Two jealous people fought for yesterday
 And killed each other: see, there’s undisturbed
 A pretty pool at the root, of rival red!” 80
 Then cry we “Ah, the perfect paragon!”
 Then crave we “Just one keepsake-leaf for us!”

Truth lies between: there’s anyhow a child
 Of seventeen years, whether a flower or weed,
 Ruined: who did it shall account to Christ — 85
 Having no pity on the harmless life
 And gentle face and girlish form he found,
 And thus flings back. Go practise if you please
 With men and women: leave a child alone
 For Christ’s particular love’s sake! — so I say. 90

Somebody, at the bedside, said much more,
 Took on him to explain the secret cause
 O’ the crime: quoth he, “Such crimes are very rife,
 Explode nor make us wonder now-a-days,
 Seeing that Antichrist disseminates 95
 That doctrine of the Philosophic Sin:¹
 Molinos’ sect will soon make earth too hot!”
 “Nay,” groaned the Augustinian, “what’s there new?
 Crime will not fail to flare up from men’s hearts
 While hearts are men’s and so born criminal; 100
 Which one fact, always old yet ever new,
 Accounts for so much crime that, for my part,
 Molinos may go whistle to the wind
 That waits outside a certain church, you know!”

Though really it does seem as if she here, 105
 Pompilia, living so and dying thus,
 Has had undue experience how much crime
 A heart can hatch. Why was she made to learn
 — Not you, not I, not even Molinos’ self —
 What Guido Franceschini’s heart could hold? 110
 Thus saintship is effected probably;
 No sparing saints the process! — which the more
 Tends to the reconciling us, no saints,
 To sinnership, immunity and all.

For see now: Pietro and Violante’s life 115
 Till seventeen years ago, all Rome might note

¹ *Philosophic Sin*: Molinos taught that “desires nothing, not even his own salvation; a soul in a state of perfect contemplation and fears nothing, not even hell itself.”

And quote for happy — see the signs distinct
 Of happiness as we yon Triton's¹ trump.
 What could they be but happy? — balanced so,
 Nor low i' the social scale nor yet too high, 120
 Nor poor nor richer than comports with ease,
 Nor bright and envied, nor obscure and scorned,
 Nor so young that their pleasures fell too thick,
 Nor old past catching pleasure when it fell,
 Nothing above, below the just degree, 125
 All at the mean where joy's components mix.
 So again, in the couple's very souls
 You saw the adequate half with half to match,
 Each having and each lacking somewhat, both
 Making a whole that had all and lacked nought. 130
 The round and sound, in whose composure just
 The acquiescent and recipient side,
 Was Pietro's, and the stirring striving one
 Violante's: both in union gave the due
 Quietude, enterprise, craving and content, 135
 Which go to bodily health and peace of mind.
 But, as 't is said a body, rightly mixed,
 Each element in equipoise, would last
 Too long and live for ever, — accordingly
 Holds a germ — sand-grain weight too much i' the scale — 140
 Ordained to get predominance one day
 And so bring all to ruin and release, —
 Not otherwise a fatal germ lurked here:
 "With mortals much must go, but something stays;
 Nothing will stay of our so happy selves." 145
 Out of the very ripeness of life's core
 A worm was bred — "Our life shall leave no fruit."
 Enough of bliss, they thought, could bliss bear seed,
 Yield its like, propagate a bliss in turn
 And keep the kind up; not supplant themselves 150
 But put in evidence, record they were,
 Show them, when done with, i' the shape of a child.
 " 'T is in a child, man and wife grow complete,
 One flesh: God says so: let him do his work! "

Now, one reminder of this gnawing want, 155
 One special prick o' the maggot at the core,
 Always befell when, as the day came round,
 A certain yearly sum, — our Pietro being,
 As the long name runs, an usufructuary,² —

¹ *Yon Triton*: see note, I. 890. The speaker is represented as being in the Piazza Barberini, near Bernini's fountain, composed of a Triton supported by dolphins.

² *Usufructuary*: a person who has the use of the profits of a property.

- Dropped in the common bag as interest 160
 Of money, his till death. not afterward,
 Failing an heir: an heir would take and take,
 A child of theirs be wealthy in their place
 To nobody's hurt — the stranger else seized all.
 Prosperity rolled river-like and stopped, 165
 Making their mill go; but when wheel wore out,
 The wave would find a space and sweep on free
 And, half-a-mile off, grind some neighbor's corn.
- Adam-like, Pietro sighed and said no more:
 Eve saw the apple was fair and good to taste. 170
 So, plucked it, having asked the snake advice.
 She told her husband God was merciful,
 And his and her prayer granted at the last:
 Let the old mill-stone moulder. — wheel unworn,
 Quartz from the quarry, shot into the stream 175
 Adroitly, as before should go bring grist —
 Their house continued to them by an heir,
 Their vacant heart replenished with a child.
 We have her own confession at full length
 Made in the first remorse: 't was Jubilee 180
 Pealed in the ear o' the conscience and it woke.
 She found she had offended God no doubt,
 So much was plain from what had happened since,
 Misfortune on misfortune; but she harmed
 No one i' the world, so far as she could see. 185
 The act had gladdened Pietro to the height,
 Her spouse whom God himself must gladden so
 Or not at all: thus much seems probable
 From the implicit faith, or rather say
 Stupid credulity of the foolish man 190
 Who swallowed such a tale nor strained a whit
 Even at his wife's far-over-fifty years
 Matching his sixty-and-under. Him she blessed:
 And as for doing any detriment
 To the veritable heir. — why, tell her first 195
 Who was he? Which of all the hands held up
 I' the crowd, one day would gather round their gate,
 Did she so wrong by intercepting thus
 The ducat, spendthrift fortune thought to fling
 For a scramble just to make the mob break shins? 200
 She kept it, saved them kicks and cuffs thereby.
 While at the least one good work had she wrought,
 Good, clearly and incontestably! Her cheat —
 What was it to its subject, the child's self,
 But charity and religion? See the girl! 205
 A body most like — a soul too probably —

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

To which demand the dreadful answer comes — 220
 For that same deed, now at Lorenzo's church,
 Both agents, conscious and unconscious, lie ;
 While she, the deed was done to benefit,
 Lies also, the most lamentable of things,
 Yonder where curious people count her breaths, 225
 Calculate how long yet the little life
 Unspilt may serve their turn nor spoil the show,
 Give them their story, then the church its group.

Well, having gained Pompilia, the girl grew
 In the midst of Pietro here, Violante there, 230
 Each, like a semicircle with outstretched arms,
 Joining the other round her preciousness —
 Two walls that go about a garden-plot
 Where a chance sliver, branchlet split from bole
 Of some tongue-leaved eye-figured Eden tree,¹ 235
 Filched by two exiles and borne far away,
 Patiently glorifies their solitude, —
 Year by year mounting, grade by grade surmount
 The builded brick-work, yet is compassed still,
 Still hidden happily and shielded safe, — 240
 Else why should miracle have graced the ground?
 But on the twelfth sun that brought April there
 What meant that laugh? The coping-stone was reached ;
 Nay, above towered a light tuft of bloom
 To be toyed with by butterfly or bee, 245
 Done good to or else harm to from outside :
 Pompilia's root, stalk and a branch or two
 Home enclosed still, the rest would be the world's.
 All which was taught our couple though obtuse,

¹ *Tongue-leaved eye-figured Eden tree* : possibly a reference to some symbolic representation of the tree of Eden.

- Since walls have ears, when one day brought a priest, 250
 Smooth-mannered soft-speeched sleek-cheeked visitor,
 The notable Abate Paolo — known
 As younger brother of a Tuscan house
 Whereof the actual representative,
 Count Guido, had employed his youth and age 255
 In culture of Rome's most productive plant —
 A cardinal: but years pass and change comes,
 In token of which, here was our Paolo brought
 To broach a weighty business. Might he speak?
 Yes — to Violante somehow caught alone 260
 While Pietro took his after-dinner doze,
 And the young maiden, busily as befits,
 Minded her broider-frame three chambers off.
- So — giving now his great flap-hat a gloss
 With flat o' the hand between-whiles, soothing now 265
 The silk from out its creases o'er the calf,
 Setting the stocking clerical again,
 But never disengaging, once engaged.
 The thin clear grey hold of his eyes on her —
 He dissertated on that Tuscan house, 270
 Those Franceschini, — very old they were —
 Not rich however — oh, not rich, at least,
 As people look to be who, low i' the scale
 One way, have reason, rising all they can
 By favor of the money-bag! 't is fair — 275
 Do all gifts go together? But don't suppose
 That being not so rich means all so poor!
 Say rather, well enough — i' the way, indeed,
 Ha, ha, to fortune better than the best:
 Since if his brother's patron-friend kept faith, 280
 Put into promised play the Cardinalate,
 Their house might wear the red cloth that keeps warm,
 Would but the Count have patience — there 's the point!
 For he was slipping into years apace.
 And years make men restless — they needs must spy 285
 Some certainty, some sort of end assured,
 Some sparkle, tho' from topmost beacon-tip,
 That warrants life a harbor through the haze.
 In short, call him fantastic as you choose,
 Guido was home-sick, yearned for the old sights 290
 And usual faces, — fain would settle himself
 And have the patron's bounty when it fell
 Irrigate far rather than deluge near.
 Go fertilize Arezzo, not flood Rome.
 Sooth to say, 't was the wiser wish: the Count 295
 Proved wanting in ambition. — let us avouch,

Since truth is best,—in callousness of heart,
 And winced at pin-pricks whereby honors hang
 A ribbon o'er each puncture: his—no soul
 Ecclesiastic (here the hat was brushed) 300
 Humble but self-sustaining, calm and cold,
 Having, as one who puts his hand to the plough,
 Renounced the over-vivid family-feel—
 Poor brother Guido! All too plain, he pined
 Amid Rome's pomp and glare for dinginess 305
 And that dilapidated palace-shell
 Vast as a quarry and, very like, as bare—
 Since to this comes old grandeur now-a-days—
 Or that absurd wild villa in the waste
 O' the hill side, breezy though, for who likes air, 310
 Vittiano, nor unpleasant with its vines,
 Outside the city and the summer heats.
 And now his harping on this one tense chord
 The villa and the palace, palace this
 And villa the other, all day and all night 315
 Creaked like the implacable cicala's cry
 And made one's ear drum ache: nought else would serve
 But that, to light his mother's visage up
 With second youth, hope, gaiety again,
 He must find straightway, woo and haply win 320
 And bear away triumphant back, some wife.
 Well now, the man was rational in his way:
 He, the Abate,—ought he to interpose?
 Unless by straining still his tutelage
 (Priesthood leaps over elder-brothership) 325
 Across this difficulty: then let go,
 Leave the poor fellow in peace! Would that be wrong?
 There was no making Guido great, it seems.
 Spite of himself: then happy be his dole!
 Indeed, the Abate's little interest 330
 Was somewhat nearly touched i' the case, they saw:
 Since if his simple kinsman so were bent,
 Began his rounds in Rome to catch a wife.
 Full soon would such unworldliness surprise
 The rare bird, sprinkle salt on phoenix' tail, 335
 And so secure the nest a sparrow-hawk.
 No lack of mothers here in Rome,—no dread
 Of daughters lured as larks by looking-glass!¹
 The first name-pecking credit-scratching fowl
 Would drop her unfledged cuckoo in our nest 340

¹ *Lured as larks by looking-glass*: refers to a kind of trap mounted on a pivot and set with little pieces of looking-glass which, exposed to the sun, by their brightness attract larks and other birds.

To gather greyness there, give voice at length
 And shame the brood . . . but it was long ago
 When crusades were, and we sent eagles forth!
 No, that at least the Abate could forestall.
 He read the thought within his brother's word, 345
 Knew what he purposed better than himself.
 We want no name and fame — having our own :
 No worldly aggrandizement — such we fly :
 But if some wonder of a woman's-heart
 Were yet untainted on this grimy earth, 350
 Tender and true — tradition tells of such —
 Prepared to pant in time and tune with ours —
 If some good girl (a girl since she must take
 The new bent, live new life, adopt new modes)
 Not wealthy (Guido for his rank was poor) 355
 But with whatever dowry came to hand, —
 There were the lady-love predestinate!
 And somehow the Abate's guardian eye —
 Scintillant, rutilant,¹ fraternal fire. —
 Roving round every way had seized the prize 360
 — The instinct of us, we, the spirituality!
 Come, cards on table : was it true or false
 That here — here in this very tenement —
 Yea, Via Vittoria did a marvel hide.
 Lily of a maiden, white with intact leaf 365
 Guessed thro' the sheath that saved it from the sun?
 A daughter with the mother's hands still clasped
 Over her head for fillet virginal,
 A wife worth Guido's house and hand and heart?
 He came to see ; had spoken, he could no less — 370
 (A final cherish of the stockinged calf)
 If harm were, — well, the matter was off his mind.

 Then with the great air did he kiss, devout,
 Violante's hand, and rise up his whole height
 (A certain purple gleam about the black) 375
 And go forth grandly, — as if the Pope came next.
 And so Violante rubbed her eyes awhile,
 Got up too, walked to wake her Pietro soon
 And pour into his ear the mighty news
 How somebody had somehow somewhere seen 380
 Their tree-top-tuft of bloom upon the wall,
 And came now to apprise them the tree's self
 Was no such crab-sort as should go feed swine,
 But veritable gold, the Hesperian ball²

¹ *Rutilant* : shining.

which Hercules was required to fetch from

² *The Hesperian ball* : the golden apple the garden of the Hesperides.

Ordained for Hercules to haste and pluck, 385
 And bear and give the Gods to banquet with —
 Hercules standing ready at the door.
 Whereon did Pietro rub his eyes in turn,
 Look very wise, a little woeful too,
 Then, periwig on head, and cane in hand, 390
 Sally forth dignifiedly into the Square
 Of Spain¹ across Babbuino the six steps,
 Toward the Boat-fountain where our idlers lounge, —
 Ask, for form's sake, who Hercules might be,
 And have congratulation from the world. 395

Heartily laughed the world in his fool's-face
 And told him Hercules was just the heir
 To the stubble once a corn-field, and brick-heap
 Where used to be a dwelling-place now burned.
 Guido and Franceschini; a Count. — ay : 400
 But a cross² i' the poke³ to bless the Countship? No!
 All gone except sloth, pride, rapacity,
 Humors of the imposthume⁴ incident
 To rich blood that runs thin, — nursed to a head
 By the rankly-salted soil — a cardinal's court 405
 Where, parasite and picker-up of crumbs,
 He had hung on long, and now, let go, said some,
 Shaken off, said others, — but in any case
 Tired of the trade and something worse for wear,
 Was wanting to change town for country quick, 410
 Go home again : let Pietro help him home!
 The brother, Abate Paolo, shrewder mouse,
 Had pricked for comfortable quarters, inched
 Into the core of Rome, and fattened so ;
 But Guido, over-burly for rat's hole 415
 Suted to clerical slimness, starved outside,
 Must shift for himself : and so the shift was this!
 What, was the snug retreat of Pietro tracked,
 The little provision for his old age snuffed ?
 " Oh, make your girl a lady, an you list, 420
 But have more mercy on our wit than vaunt
 Your bargain as we burgesses who brag!
 Why, Goodman Dullard, if a friend must speak,
 Would the Count, think you, stoop to you and yours
 Were there the value of one penny-piece' 425

¹ *The Square of Spain* : the Piazza di Spagna, in the present "English quarter" of Rome. The Via del Babuino runs into it, and the "Boat-fountain" (Fontana della Barcaccia) stands in it.

found in Goldsmith, Dryden, Shakespeare, and others. It originated from money with a cross stamped on it.

³ *Poke* : a pocket.

⁴ *Imposthume* : abscess.

² *Cross* : i.e. a coin; an old expression,

To rattle 'twixt his palms — or likelier laugh,
Bid your Pompilia help you black his shoe ?”

Home again, shaking oft the puzzled pate,
Went Pietro to announce a change indeed,
Yet point Violante where some solace lay 430
Of a rueful sort, — the taper, quenched so soon,
Had ended merely in a snuff, not stink —
Congratulate there was one hope the less
Not misery the more : and so an end.

The marriage thus impossible, the rest 435
Followed : our spokesman, Paolo, heard his fate,
Resignedly Count Guido bore the blow :
Violante wiped away the transient tear,
Renounced the playing Danae¹ to gold dreams,
Praised much her Pietro's prompt sagaciousness, 440
Found neighbors' envy natural, lightly laughed
At gossips' malice, fairly wrapped herself
In her integrity three folds about,
And, letting pass a little day or two,
Threw, even over that integrity, 445
Another wrappage, namely one thick veil
That hid her, matron-wise, from head to foot,
And, by the hand holding a girl veiled too,
Stood, one dim end of a December day,
In Saint Lorenzo on the altar-step — 450
Just where she lies now and that girl will lie —
Only with fifty candles' company
Now, in the place of the poor winking one
Which saw, — doors shut and sacristan made sure, —
A priest — perhaps Abate Paolo — wed 455
Guido clandestinely, irrevocably
To his Pompilia aged thirteen years
And five months. — witness the church register, —
Pompilia, (thus become Count Guido's wife
Clandestinely, irrevocably his,) 460
Who all the while had borne, from first to last,
As brisk a part i' the bargain, as yon lamb,
Brought forth from basket and set out for sale,
Bears while they chaffer, wary market-man
And voluble housewife, o'er it. — each in turn 465
Patting the curly calm unconscious head,
With the shambles ready round the corner there,
When the talk 's talked out and a bargain struck.

¹ *Danae* : shut up in an underground chamber, she was visited by Jupiter disguised as a shower of gold.

Transfer complete, why, Pietro was apprised.
 Violante sobbed the sobs and prayed the prayers 470
 And said the serpent tempted so she fell,
 Till Pietro had to clear his brow apace
 And make the best of matters: wrath at first, —
 How else? pacification presently;
 Why not? — could flesh withstand the impurpled one, 475
 The very Cardinal, Paolo's patron-friend?
 Who, justifiably surnamed "a hinge,"¹
 Knew where the mollifying oil should drop
 To cure the creak o' the valve, — considerate
 For frailty, patient in a naughty world. 480
 He even volunteered to supervise
 The rough draught of those marriage-articles
 Signed in a hurry by Pietro, since revoked:
 Trust 's politic, suspicion does the harm,
 There is but one way to brow-beat this world, 485
 Dumb-founder doubt, and repay scorn in kind, —
 To go on trusting, namely, till faith move
 Mountains.

And faith here made the mountains move.
 Why, friends whose zeal cried "Caution ere too late!" —
 Bade "Pause ere jump, with both feet joined, on slough!" — 490
 Counsell'd "If rashness then, now temperance!" —
 Heard for their pains that Pietro had closed eyes,
 Jumped and was in the middle of the mire,
 Money and all, just what should sink a man.
 By the mere marriage, Guido gained forthwith 495
 Dowry, his wife's right; no rescinding there:
 But Pietro, why must he needs ratify
 One gift Violante gave, pay down one doit²
 Promised in first fool's-flurry? Grasp the bag
 Lest the son's service flag, — is reason and rhyme, 500
 Above all when the son 's a son-in-law.
 Words to the wind! The parents cast their lot
 Into the lap o' the daughter: and the son
 Now with a right to lie there, took what fell,
 Pietro's whole having and holding, house and field. 505
 Goods, chattels and effects, his worldly worth
 Present and in perspective, all renounced
 In favor of Guido. As for the usufruct —
 The interest now, the principal anon,
 Would Guido please to wait, at Pietro's death: 510
 Till when, he must support the couple's charge.

¹ A hinge: the title *Cardinal* is derived from *cardo*, "a hinge." ² *Doit*: see note, II. 484.

- Bear with them, housemates, pensionaries, pawned
 To an alien for fulfilment of their pact.
 Guido should at discretion deal them orts,¹
 Bread-bounty in Arezzo the strange place,— 515
 They who had lived deliciously and rolled
 Rome's choicest comfit 'neath the tongue before.
 Into this quag,² "jump" bade the Cardinal!
 And neck-deep in a minute there flounced they.
- But they touched bottom at Arezzo: there — 520
 Four months' experience of how craft and greed
 Quickened by penury and pretentious hate
 Of plain truth, brutify and bestialize, —
 Four months' taste of apportioned insolence,
 Cruelty graduated, dose by dose 525
 Of ruffianism dealt out at bed and board,
 And lo, the work was done, success clapped hands.
 The starved, stripped, beaten brace of stupid dupes
 Broke at last in their desperation loose,
 Fled away for their lives, and lucky so: 530
 Found their account in casting coat afar
 And bearing off a shred of skin at least:
 Left Guido lord o' the prey, as the lion is,
 And, careless what came after, carried their wrongs
 To Rome, — I nothing doubt, with such remorse 535
 As folly feels, since pain can make it wise,
 But crime, past wisdom, which is innocence,
 Needs not be plagued with till a later day.
- Pietro went back to beg from door to door,
 In hope that memory not quite extinct 540
 Of cheery days and festive nights would move
 Friends and acquaintance — after the natural laugh,
 And tributary "Just as we foretold —"
 To show some bowels, give the dregs o' the cup,
 Scraps of the trencher, to their host that was, 545
 Or let him share the mat with the mastiff, he
 Who lived large and kept open house so long.
 Not so Violante: ever a-head i' the march,
 Quick at the bye-road and the cut-across,
 She went first to the best adviser. God — 550
 Whose finger unmistakably was felt
 In all this retribution of the past.
 Here was the prize of sin, luck of a lie!
 But here too was what Holy Year would help,
 Bound to rid sinners of sin vulgar, sin 555

¹ *Orts*: scraps.² *Quag* = quagmire.

Abnormal, sin prodigious, up to sin
 Impossible and supposed for Jubilee' sake :
 To lift the leadenest of lies, let soar
 The soul unhampered by a feather-weight.
 "I will " said she "go burn out this bad hole 560
 That breeds the scorpion, baulk the plague at least
 Of hope to further plague by progeny :
 I will confess my fault, be punished, yes,
 But pardoned too : Saint Peter pays for all."

So, with the crowd she mixed, made for the dome, 565
 Through the great door¹ new-broken for the nonce
 Marched, muffled more than ever matron-wise,
 Up the left nave to the formidable throne,
 Fell into file with this the poisoner
 And that the parricide, and reached in turn 570
 The poor repugnant Penitentiary²
 Set at this gully-hole o' the world's discharge
 To help the frightfullest of filth have vent,
 And then knelt down and whispered in his ear
 How she had bought Pompilia, palmed the babe 575
 On Pietro, passed the girl off as their child
 To Guido, and defrauded of his due
 This one and that one, — more than she could name,
 Until her solid piece of wickedness
 Happened to split and spread woe far and wide : 580
 Contritely now she brought the case for cure.

Replied the throne — "Ere God forgive the guilt,
 Make man some restitution! Do your part!
 The owners of your husband's heritage,
 Barred thence by this pretended birth and heir, — 585
 Tell them, the bar came so, is broken so,
 Theirs be the due reversion as before!
 Your husband who, no partner in the guilt,
 Suffers the penalty, led blindfold thus
 By love of what he thought his flesh and blood 590
 To alienate his all in her behalf, —
 Tell him too such contract is null and void!
 Last, he who personates your son-in-law,
 Who with sealed eyes and stopped ears, tame and mute,

¹ *Great door*: according to the special ritual, the Pope, at the commencement of the Jubilee year, goes in solemn procession to a particular walled-up door (the Porta Aurea, or golden door of St. Peter's) and knocks three times, using the words of Psalm cxviii. 19. "Open to me the gates of righteous-

ness." The doors are then opened and sprinkled with holy water, and the Pope passes through. When the Jubilee closes, the doorway is again built up.

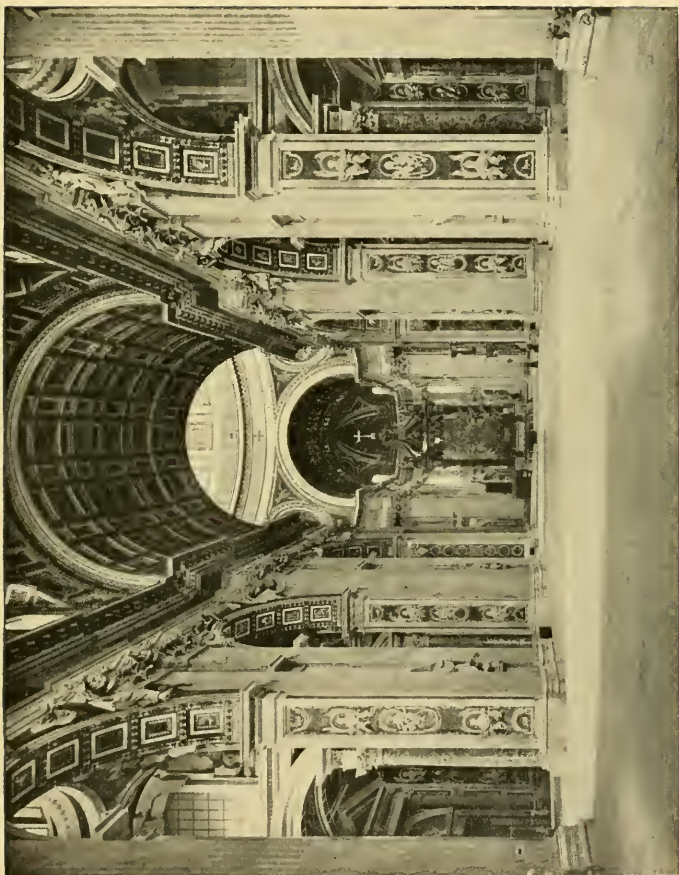
² *Penitentiary*: an officer in some cathedrals vested with power to absolve.

Took at your hand that bastard of a whore 595
 You called your daughter and he calls his wife,—
 Tell him, and bear the anger which is just!
 Then, penance so performed, may pardon be!"

Who could gainsay this just and right award?
 Nobody in the world: but, out o' the world, 600
 Who knows?— might timid intervention be
 From any makeshift of an angel-guide,
 Substitute for celestial guardianship,
 Pretending to take care of the girl's self:
 "Woman, confessing crime is healthy work, 605
 And telling truth relieves a liar like you,
 But how of my quite unconsidered charge?
 No thought if, while this good befalls yourself,
 Aught in the way of harm may find out her?"
 No least thought, I assure you: truth being truth, 610
 Tell it and shame the devil!

Said and done:

Home went Violante, disbosomed all:
 And Pietro who, six months before, had borne
 Word after word of such a piece of news
 Like so much cold steel inched through his breast-blade, 615
 Now at its entry gave a leap for joy,
 As who— what did I say of one in a quag?—
 Should catch a hand from heaven and spring thereby
 Out of the mud. on ten toes stand once more.
 "What? All that used to be, may be again? 620
 My money mine again, my house, my land,
 My chairs and tables, all mine evermore?
 What, the girl's dowry never was the girl's,
 And, unpaid yet, is never now to pay?
 Then the girl's self, my pale Pompilia child 625
 That used to be my own with her great eyes—
 He who drove us forth, why should he keep her
 When proved as very a pauper as himself?
 Will she come back, with nothing changed at all,
 And laugh 'But how you dreamed uneasily! 630
 I saw the great drops stand here on your brow—
 Did I do wrong to wake you with a kiss?'
 No, indeed, darling! No, for wide awake
 I see another outburst of surprise:
 The lout-lord, bully-beggar, braggart-sneak, 635
 Who not content with cutting purse, crops ear—
 Assuredly it shall be salve to mine
 When this great news red-letters him, the rogue!
 Ay, let him taste the teeth o' the trap, this fox,
 Give us our lamb back, golden fleece and all, 640



INTERIOR OF THE BASILICA OF ST. PETER'S, ROME.

Let her creep in and warm our breasts again!
 Why care for the past? We three are our old selves,
 And know now what the outside world is worth."
 And so, he carried case before the courts ;
 And there Violante, blushing to the bone, 645
 Made public declaration of her fault,
 Renounced her motherhood, and prayed the law
 To interpose, frustrate of its effect
 Her folly, and redress the injury done.

Whereof was the disastrous consequence, 650
 That though indisputably clear the case
 (For thirteen years are not so large a lapse,
 And still six witnesses survived in Rome
 To prove the truth o' the tale) — yet, patent wrong
 Seemed Guido's ; the first cheat had chanced on him : 655
 Here was the pity that, deciding right,
 Those who began the wrong would gain the prize.
 Guido pronounced the story one long lie
 Lied to do robbery and take revenge :
 Or say it were no lie at all but truth, 660
 Then, it both robbed the right heirs and shamed him
 Without revenge to humanize the deed :
 What had he done when first they shamed him thus?
 But that were too fantastic : losels they,
 And leasing this world's-wonder of a lie, 665
 They lied to blot him though it brand themselves.

So answered Guido through the Abate's mouth.
 Wherefore the court, its customary way,
 Inclined to the middle course the sage affect.
 They held the child to be a changeling, — good : 670
 But, lest the husband got no good thereby,
 They willed the dowry, though not hers at all,
 Should yet be his, if not by right then grace —
 Part-payment for the plain injustice done.
 As for that other contract, Pietro's work, 675
 Renunciation of his own estate,
 That must be cancelled — give him back his gifts,
 He was no party to the cheat at least!
 So ran the judgment : — whence a prompt appeal
 On both sides, seeing right is absolute. 680
 Cried Pietro " Is the child no child of mine ?
 Why give her a child's dowry ? " — " Have I right
 To the dowry, why not to the rest as well ? "
 Cried Guido, or cried Paolo in his name :
 Till law said " Reinvestigate the case ! " 685
 And so the matter pends, to this same day.

- Hence new disaster — here no outlet seemed ;
 Whatever the fortune of the battle-field,
 No path whereby the fatal man might march
 Victorious, wreath on head and spoils in hand, 690
 And back turned full upon the baffled foe, —
 Nor cranny whence, desperate and disgraced,
 Stripped to the skin, he might be fain to crawl
 Worm-like, and so away with his defeat
 To other fortune and a novel prey. 695
 No, he was pinned to the place there, left alone
 With his immense hate and, the solitary
 Subject to satisfy that hate, his wife.
 “ Cast her off? Turn her naked out of doors?
 Easily said! But still the action pends, 700
 Still dowry, principal and interest,
 Pietro’s possessions, all I bargained for, —
 Any good day, be but my friends alert,
 May give them me if she continue mine.
 Yet, keep her? Keep the puppet of my foes — 705
 Her voice that lissps me back their curse — her eye
 They lend their leer of triumph to — her lip
 I touch and taste their very filth upon? ”
- In short, he also took the middle course
 Rome taught him — did at last excogitate 710
 How he might keep the good and leave the bad
 Twined in revenge, yet extricable, — nay
 Make the very hate’s eruption, very rush
 Of the unpent sluice of cruelty relieve
 His heart first, then go fertilize his field. 715
 What if the girl-wife, tortured with due care,
 Should take, as though spontaneously, the road
 It were impolitic to thrust her on?
 If, goaded, she broke out in full revolt,
 Followed her parents i’ the face o’ the world, 720
 Branded as runaway not castaway,
 Self-sentenced and self-punished in the act?
 So should the loathed form and detested face
 Launch themselves into hell and there be lost
 While he looked o’er the brink with folded arms ; 725
 So should the heaped-up shames go shuddering back
 O’ the head o’ the heapers, Pietro and his wife,
 And bury in the breakage three at once :
 While Guido, left free, no one right renounced,
 Gain present, gain prospective, all the gain, 730
 None of the wife except her rights absorbed,
 Should ask law what it was law paused about —
 If law were dubious still whose word to take,

The husband's — dignified and derelict,
Or the wife's — the . . . what I tell you. It should be. 735

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

Revealed their malice — how they even laid
A last injunction on her, when they fled,
That she should forthwith find a paramour,
Complot with him to gather spoil enough,
Then burn the house down, — taking previous care 745

To poison all its inmates overnight, —
And so companioned, so provisioned too,
Follow to Rome and there join fortunes gay.
This letter, traced in pencil-characters,
Guido as easily got re-traced in ink 750

By his wife's pen, guided from end to end,
As if it had been just so much Chinese.
For why? That wife could broider, sing perhaps,
Pray certainly, but no more read than write
This letter "which yet write she must," he said, 755

"Being half courtesy and compliment,
Half sisterliness: take the thing on trust!"
She had as readily re-traced the words
Of her own death-warrant, — in some sort 't was so.
This letter the Abate in due course 760

Communicated to such curious souls
In Rome as needs must pry into the cause
Of quarrel, why the Comparini fled
The Franceschini, whence the grievance grew.
What the hubbub meant: "Nay, — see the wife's own word, 765

Authentic answer! Tell detractors too
There 's a plan formed, a programme figured here
— Pray God no after-practice put to proof,
This letter cast no light upon, one day!"

So much for what should work in Rome: back now 770

To Arezzo, follow up the project there,
Forward the next step with as bold a foot,
And plague Pompilia to the height, you see!
Accordingly did Guido set himself

To worry up and down, across, around, 775
The woman, hemmed in by her household-bars, —
Chase her about the coop of daily life,
Having first stopped each outlet thence save one
Which, like bird with a ferret in her haunt,

She needs must seize as sole way of escape 780
 Though there was tied and twittering a decoy
 To seem as if it tempted. — just the plume
 O' the popinjay, not a real respite there
 From tooth and claw of something in the dark, —
 Giuseppe Caponsacchi.

Now begins •

The tenebrific¹ passage of the tale : 785
 How hold a light, display the cavern's gorge?
 How, in this phase of the affair, show truth?
 Here is the dying wife who smiles and says
 " So it was, — so it was not, — how it was, 790
 I never knew nor ever care to know — "
 Till they all weep, physician, man of law,
 Even that poor old bit of battered brass
 Beaten out of all shape by the world's sins,
 Common utensil of the lazar-house — 795
 Confessor Celestino groans " 'T is truth,
 All truth and only truth : there 's something here,
 Some presence in the room beside us all,
 Something that every lie expires before :
 No question she was pure from first to last." 800
 So far is well and helps us to believe :
 But beyond, she the helpless, simple-sweet
 Or silly-sooth, unskilled to break one blow
 At her good fame by putting finger forth, —
 How can she render service to the truth? 805
 The bird says " So I fluttered where a springe
 Caught me : the springe did not contrive itself,
 That I know : who contrived it, God forgive! "
 But we, who hear no voice and have dry eyes,
 Must ask, — we cannot else, absolving her. — 810
 How of the part played by that same decoy
 I' the catching, caging? Was himself caught first?
 We deal here with no innocent at least,
 No witless victim, — he's a man of the age
 And priest beside, — persuade the mocking world 815
 Mere charity boiled over in this sort!
 He whose own safety too. — (the Pope 's apprised —
 Good-natured with the secular offence,
 The Pope looks grave on priesthood in a scrape)
 Our priest's own safety therefore, may-be life, 820
 Hangs on the issue! You will find it hard.
 Guido is here to meet you with fixed foot,
 Stiff like a statue — " Leave what went before!
 My wife fled i' the company of a priest,

¹ *Tenebrific* : gloomy.

- Spent two days and two nights alone with him : 825
 Leave what came after!" He stands hard to throw.
 Moreover priests are merely flesh and blood;
 When we get weakness, and no guilt beside,
 'T is no such great ill-fortune : finding grey,
 We gladly call that white which might be black, 830
 Too used to the double-dye. So, if the priest,
 Moved by Pompilia's youth and beauty, gave
 Way to the natural weakness. . . . Anyhow
 Here be facts, charactery; ¹ what they spell
 Determine, and thence pick what sense you may ! 835
 There was a certain young bold handsome priest
 Popular in the city, far and wide
 Famed, since Arezzo's but a little place,
 As the best of good companions, gay and grave
 At the decent minute ; settled in his stall, 840
 Or sidling, lute on lap, by lady's couch,
 Ever the courtly Canon ; see in him
 A proper star to climb and culminate,
 Have its due handbreadth of the heaven at Rome,
 Though meanwhile pausing on Arezzo's edge, 845
 As modest candle does 'mid mountain fog,
 To rub off redness and rusticity
 Ere it sweep chastened, gain the silver-sphere!
 Whether through Guido's absence or what else,
 This Caponsacchi, favorite of the town, 850
 Was yet no friend of his nor free o' the house,
 Though both moved in the regular magnates' march :
 Each must observe the other's tread and halt
 At church, saloon, theatre, house of play.
 Who could help noticing the husband's slouch, 855
 The black of his brow — or miss the news that buzzed
 Of how the little solitary wife
 Wept and looked out of window all day long?
 What need of minute search into such springs
 As start men, set o' the move? — machinery 860
 Old as earth, obvious as the noonday sun.
 Why, take men as they come, — an instance now, —
 Of all those who have simply gone to see
 Pompilia on her deathbed since four days,
 Half at the least are, call it how you please, 865
 In love with her — I don't except the priests
 Nor even the old confessor whose eyes run
 Over at what he styles his sister's voice
 Who died so early and weaned him from the world.
 Well, had they viewed her ere the paleness pushed 870

¹ *Charactery* : manner or means of expressing by characters.

The last o' the red o' the rose away, while yet
 Some hand, adventurous 'twixt the wind and her,
 Might let shy life run back and raise the flower
 Rich with reward up to the guardian's face, —
 Would they have kept that hand employed all day 875
 At fumbling on with prayer-book pages? No!
 Men are men: why then need I say one word
 More than that our mere man the Canon here
 Saw, pitied, loved Pompilia?

This is why ;

This startling why: that Caponsacchi's self— 880
 Whom foes and friends alike avouch, for good
 Or ill, a man of truth whate'er betide,
 Intrepid altogether, reckless too
 How his own fame and fortune, tossed to the winds,
 Suffer by any turn the adventure take, 885
 Nay, more — not thrusting, like a badge to hide,
 'Twixt shirt and skin a joy which shown is shame —
 But flirting flag-like i' the face o' the world
 This tell-tale kerchief, this conspicuous love
 For the lady, — oh, called innocent love, I know! 890
 Only, such scarlet fiery innocence
 As most folk would try muffle up in shade, —
 'T is strange then that this else abashless mouth
 Should yet maintain, for truth's sake which is God's,
 That it was not he made the first advance, 895
 That, even ere word had passed between the two,
 Pompilia penned him letters, passionate prayers,
 If not love, then so simulating love
 That he, no novice to the taste of thyme,
 Turned from such over-luscious honey-clot 900
 At end o' the flower, and would not lend his lip
 Till . . . but the tale here frankly outsoars faith:
 There must be falsehood somewhere. For her part,
 Pompilia quietly constantly avers
 She never penned a letter in her life 905
 Nor to the Canon nor any other man,
 Being incompetent to write and read:
 Nor had she ever uttered word to him, nor he
 To her till that same evening when they met,
 She on her window-terrace, he beneath 910
 I' the public street, as was their fateful chance,
 And she adjured him in the name of God
 To find out, bring to pass where, when and how
 Escape with him to Rome might be contrived.
 Means were found, plan laid, time fixed, she avers, 915
 And heart assured to heart in loyalty,

All at an impulse! All extemporized
 As in romance-books! Is that credible?
 Well, yes: as she avers this with calm mouth
 Dying, I do think "Credible!" you'd cry — 920
 Did not the priest's voice come to break the spell.
 They questioned him apart, as the custom is,
 When first the matter made a noise at Rome,
 And he, calm, constant then as she is now,
 For truth's sake did assert and re-assert 925
 Those letters called him to her and he came,
 — Which damns the man, the story credible otherwise.
 Why should this man, — mad to devote himself,
 Careless what comes of his own fame, the first, —
 Be studious thus to publish and declare 930
 Just what the lightest nature loves to hide,
 So screening lady from the byword's laugh
 "First spoke the lady, last the cavalier!"
 — I say, — why should the man tell truth just now
 When graceful lying meets such ready shrift? 935
 Or is there a first moment for a priest
 As for a woman, when invaded shame
 Must have its first and last excuse to show?
 Do both contrive love's entry in the mind
 Shall look, i' the manner of it, a surprise, — 940
 That after, once the flag o' the fort hauled down,
 Effrontery may sink drawbridge, open gate,
 Welcome and entertain the conqueror?
 Or what do you say to a touch of the devil's worst?
 Can it be that the husband, he who wrote 945
 The letter to his brother I told you of,
 I' the name of her it meant to criminate, —
 What if he wrote those letters to the priest?
 Further the priest says, when it first befell,
 This folly o' the letters, that he checked the flow, 950
 Put them back lightly each with its reply.
 Here again vexes new discrepancy:
 There never reached her eye a word from him:
 He did write but she could not read — could just
 Burn the offence to wifehood, womanhood, 955
 So did burn: never bade him come to her.
 Yet when it proved he must come, let him come,
 And when he did come though uncalled, — why, spoke
 Prompt by an inspiration: thus it chanced.
 Will you go somewhat back to understand? 960

When first, pursuant to his plan, there sprang,
 Like an uncaged beast, Guido's cruelty
 On soul and body of his wife, she cried

To those whom law appoints resource for such,
 The secular guardian, — that 's the Governor, 965
 And the Archbishop, — that 's the spiritual guide,
 And prayed them take the claws from out her flesh
 Now, this is ever the ill consequence
 Of being noble, poor and difficult,
 Ungainly, yet too great to disregard, — 970
 This — that born peers and friends hereditary, —
 Though disinclined to help from their own store
 The opprobrious wight, put penny in his poke
 From private purse or leave the door ajar
 When he goes wistful by at dinner-time. — 975
 Yet, if his needs conduct him where they sit
 Smugly in office, judge this, bishop that,
 Dispensers of the shine and shade o' the place —
 And if, friend's door shut and friend's purse undrawn,
 Still potentates may find the office-seat 980
 Do as good service at no cost — give help
 By-the-bye, pay up traditional dues at once
 Just through a feather-weight too much i' the scale,
 Or finger-tip forgot at the balance-tongue, —
 Why, only churls refuse, or Molinists. 985
 Thus when, in the first roughness of surprise
 At Guido's wolf-face whence the sheepskin fell,
 The frightened couple, all bewilderment,
 Rushed to the Governor, — who else rights wrong?
 Told him their tale of wrong and craved redress — 990
 Why, then the Governor woke up to the fact
 That Guido was a friend of old, poor Count! —
 So, promptly paid his tribute, promised the pair,
 Wholesome chastisement should soon cure their qualms
 Next time they came, wept, prated and told lies : 995
 So stopped all prating, sent them dumb to Rome.
 Well, now it was Pompilia's turn to try :
 The troubles pressing on her, as I said,
 Three times she rushed, maddened by misery,
 To the other mighty man, sobbed out her prayer 1000
 At footstool of the Archbishop — fast the friend
 Of her husband also! Oh, good friends of yore!
 So, the Archbishop, not to be outdone
 By the Governor, break custom more than he.
 Thrice bade the foolish woman stop her tongue, 1005
 Unloosed her hands from harassing his gout,
 Coached her and carried her to the Count again,
 — His old friend should be master in his house,
 Rule his wife and correct her faults at need!
 Well, driven from post to pillar in this wise, 1010
 She, as a last resource, betook herself

To one, should be no family-friend at least,
 A simple friar o' the city ; confessed to him,
 Then told how fierce temptation of release
 By self-dealt death was busy with her soul. 1015
 And urged that he put this in words, write plain
 For one who could not write, set down her prayer
 That Pietro and Violante, parent-like
 If somehow not her parents, should for love
 Come save her, pluck from out the flame the brand 1020
 Themselves had thoughtlessly thrust in so deep
 To send gay-colored sparkles up and cheer
 Their seat at the chimney-corner. The good friar
 Promised as much at the moment ; but, alack,
 Night brings discretion : he was no one's friend, 1025
 Yet presently found he could not turn about
 Nor take a step i' the case and fail to tread
 On someone's toe who either was a friend,
 Or a friend's friend, or friend's friend thrice-removed,
 And woe to friar by whom offences come ! 1030
 So, the course being plain. — with a general sigh
 At matrimony the profound mistake, —
 He threw reluctantly the business up,
 Having his other penitents to mind.

If then, all outlets thus secured save one, 1035
 At last she took to the open, stood and stared
 With her wan face to see where God might wait —
 And there found Caponsacchi wait as well
 For the precious something at perdition's edge,
 He only was predestinate to save, — 1040
 And if they recognized in a critical flash
 From the zenith, each the other, her need of him,
 His need of . . . say, a woman to perish for.
 The regular way o' the world, yet break no vow,
 Do no harm save to himself, — if this were thus ? 1045
 How do you say ? It were improbable ;
 So is the legend of my patron-saint.

Anyhow, whether, as Guido states the case,
 Pompilia, — like a starving wretch i' the street
 Who stops and rifles the first passenger 1050
 In the great right of an excessive wrong, —
 Did somehow call this stranger and he came, —
 Or whether the strange sudden interview
 Blazed as when star and star must needs go close
 Till each hurts each and there is loss in heaven — 1055
 Whatever way in this strange world it was, —
 Pompilia and Caponsacchi met, in fine,

She at her window, he i' the street beneath,
And understood each other at first look.

All was determined and performed at once. 1060
And on a certain April evening, late
I' the month, this girl of sixteen, bride and wife
Three years and over, — she who hitherto
Had never taken twenty steps in Rome
Beyond the church, pinned to her mother's gown, 1065
Nor, in Arezzo, knew her way through street
Except what led to the Archbishop's door. —
Such an one rose up in the dark, laid hand
On what came first, clothes and a trinket or two,
Belongings of her own in the old day, — 1070
Stole from the side o' the sleeping spouse — who knows?
Sleeping perhaps, silent for certain, — slid
Ghost-like from great dark room to great dark room
In through the tapestries and out again
And onward, unembarrassed as a fate, 1075
Descended staircase, gained last door of all,
Sent it wide open at first push of palm,
And there stood, first time, last and only time,
At liberty, alone in the open street. —
Unquestioned, unmolested found herself 1080
At the city gate, by Caponsacchi's side,
Hope there, joy there, life and all good again,
The carriage there, the convoy there, light there
Broadening ever into blaze at Rome
And breaking small what long miles lay between ; 1085
Up she sprang, in he followed, they were safe

The husband quotes this for incredible,
All of the story from first word to last :
Sees the priest's hand throughout upholding hers,
Traces his foot to the alcove, that night, 1090
Whither and whence blindfold he knew the way,
Proficient in all craft and stealthiness ;
And cites for proof a servant, eye that watched
And ear that opened to purse secrets up,
A woman-spy, — suborned to give and take 1095
Letters and tokens, do the work of shame
The more adroitly that herself, who helped
Communion thus between a tainted pair,
Had long since been a leper thick in spot,
A common trull o' the town : she witnessed all, 1100
Helped many meetings, partings, took her wage
And then told Guido the whole matter. Lies!
The woman's life confutes her word, — her word

Confutes itself: "Thus, thus and thus I lied."
 "And thus, no question, still you lie," we say. 1105

"Ay, but at last, e'en have it how you will,
 Whatever the means, whatever the way, explodes
 The consummation" — the accusers shriek:
 "Here is the wife avowedly found in flight,
 And the companion of her flight, a priest;
 She flies her husband, he the church his spouse:
 What is this?" 1110

Wife and priest alike reply
 "This is the simple thing it claims to be,
 A course we took for life and honor's sake,
 Very strange, very justifiable." 1115
 She says, "God put it in my head to fly,
 As when the martin migrates: autumn claps
 Her hands, cries 'Winter's coming, will be here,
 Off with you ere the white teeth overtake!
 Flee!' So I fled: this friend was the warm day,
 The south wind and whatever favors flight;
 I took the favor, had the help, how else? 1120
 And so we did fly rapidly all night,
 All day, all night — a longer night — again,
 And then another day, longest of days, 1125
 And all the while, whether we fled or stopped,
 I scarce know how or why, one thought filled both,
 'Fly and arrive!' So long as I found strength
 I talked with my companion, told him much,
 Knowing that he knew more, knew me, knew God 1130
 And God's disposal of me, — but the sense
 O' the blessed flight absorbed me in the main,
 And speech became mere talking through a sleep,
 Till at the end of that last longest night
 In a red daybreak, when we reached an inn 1135
 And my companion whispered 'Next stage — Rome!'
 Sudden the weak flesh fell like piled-up cards,
 All the frail fabric at a finger's touch,
 And prostrate the poor soul too, and I said
 'But though Count Guido were a furlong off,
 Just on me, I must stop and rest awhile!' 1140
 Then something like a huge white wave o' the sea
 Broke o'er my brain and buried me in sleep
 Blessedly, till it ebbed and left me loose,
 And where was I found but on a strange bed 1145
 In a strange room like hell, roaring with noise,
 Ruddy with flame, and filled with men, in front

Who but the man you call my husband? ay —
 Count Guido once more between heaven and me,
 For there my heaven stood, my salvation, yes — 1150
 That Caponsacchi all my heaven of help,
 Helpless himself, held prisoner in the hands
 Of men who looked up in my husband's face
 To take the fate thence he should signify,
 Just as the way was at Arezzo. Then, 1155
 Not for my sake but his who had helped me —
 I sprang up, reached him with one bound, and seized
 The sword o' the felon, trembling at his side.
 Fit creature of a coward, unsheathed the thing
 And would have pinned him through the poison-bag 1160
 To the wall and left him there to palpitate,
 As you serve scorpions, but men interposed —
 Disarmed me, gave his life to him again
 That he might take mine and the other lives,
 And he has done so. I submit myself!" 1165
 The priest says — oh, and in the main result
 The facts asseverate, he truly says,
 As to the very act and deed of him,
 However you mistrust the mind o' the man —
 The flight was just for flight's sake, no pretext 1170
 For aught except to set Pompilia free.
 He says "I cite the husband's self's worst charge
 In proof of my best word for both of us.
 Be it conceded that so many times
 We took our pleasure in his palace: then, 1175
 What need to fly at all? — or flying no less,
 What need to outrage the lips sick and white
 Of a woman, and bring ruin down beside,
 By halting when Rome lay one stage beyond?"
 So does he vindicate Pompilia's fame, 1180
 Confirm her story in all points but one —
 This; that, so fleeing and so breathing forth
 Her last strength in the prayer to halt awhile,
 She makes confusion of the reddening white, 1185
 Which was the sunset when her strength gave way,
 And the next sunrise and its whitening red
 Which she revived in when her husband came:
 She mixes both times, morn and eve, in one,
 Having lived through a blank of night 'twixt each
 Though dead-sleep, unaware as a corpse, 1190
 She on the bed above; her friend below
 Watched in the doorway of the inn the while,
 Stood i' the red o' the morn, that she mistakes,
 In act to rouse and quicken the tardy crew
 And hurry out the horses, have the stage 1195

Over, the last league, reach Rome and be safe :
When up came Guido.

Guido's tale begins —

How he and his whole household, drunk to death
By some enchanted potion, popped drugs
Plied by the wife, lay powerless in gross sleep 1200
And left the spoilers unimpeded way,
Could not shake off their poison and pursue,
Till noontide, then made shift to get on horse
And did pursue : which means he took his time.
Pressed on no more than lingered after, step 1205
By step, just making sure o' the fugitives,
Till at the nick of time, he saw his chance,
Seized it, came up with and surprised the pair.
How he must needs have gnawn lip and gnashed teeth,
Taking successively at tower and town, 1210
Village and roadside, still the same report
" Yes, such a pair arrived an hour ago,
Sat in the carriage just where now you stand,
While we got horses ready, — turned deaf ear
To all entreaty they would even alight ; 1215
Counted the minutes and resumed their course."
Would they indeed escape, arrive at Rome,
Leave no least loop-hole to let murder through,
But foil him of his captured infamy,
Prize of guilt proved and perfect ? So it seemed. 1220
Till, oh the happy chance, at last stage, Rome
But two short hours off, Castelnuovo reached,
The guardian angel gave reluctant place,
Satan stepped forward with alacrity,
Pompilia's flesh and blood succumbed, perforce 1225
A halt was, and her husband had his will.
Perdue he couched, counted out hour by hour
Till he should spy in the east a signal-streak —
Night had been, morrow was, triumph would be.
Do you see the plan deliciously complete ? 1230
The rush upon the unsuspecting sleep,
The easy execution, the outcry
Over the deed " Take notice all the world !
These two dead bodies, locked still in embrace. —
The man is Caponsacchi and a priest, 1235
The woman is my wife : they fled me late.
Thus have I found and you beheld them thus.
And may judge me : do you approve or no ? "

Success did seem not so improbable.
But that already Satan's laugh was heard. 1240
His black back turned on Guido — left i' the lurch

- Or rather, balked of suit and service now,
 Left to improve on both by one deed more,
 Burn up the better at no distant day,
 Body and soul one holocaust to hell. 1245
- Anyhow, of this natural consequence
 Did just the last link of the long chain snap :
 For an eruption was o' the priest, alive
 And alert, calm, resolute and formidable,
 Not the least look of fear in that broad brow — 1250
 One not to be disposed of by surprise,
 And armed moreover — who had guessed as much?
 Yes, there stood he in secular costume
 Complete from head to heel, with sword at side,
 He seemed to know the trick of perfectly. 1255
- There was no prompt suppression of the man
 As he said calmly "I have saved your wife
 From death ; there was no other way but this ;
 Of what do I defraud you except death?
 Charge any wrong beyond, I answer it." 1260
 Guido, the valorous, had met his match,
 Was forced to demand help instead of fight,
 Bid the authorities o' the place lend aid
 And make the best of a broken matter so.
 They soon obeyed the summons — I suppose. 1265
 Apprised and ready, or not far to seek —
 Laid hands on Caponsacchi, found in fault,
 A priest yet flagrantly accoutred thus, —
 Then, to make good Count Guido's further charge,
 Proceeded, prisoner made lead the way, 1270
 In a crowd, upstairs to the chamber-door
 Where wax-white, dead asleep, deep beyond dream,
 As the priest laid her, lay Pompilia yet.
- And as he mounted step and step with the crowd
 How I see Guido taking heart again! 1275
 He knew his wife so well and the way of her —
 How at the outbreak she would shroud her shame
 In hell's heart, would it mercifully yawn —
 How, failing that, her forehead to his foot.
 She would crouch silent till the great doom fell, 1280
 Leave him triumphant with the crowd to see
 Guilt motionless or writhing like a worm!
 No ! Second misadventure, this worm turned,
 I told you : would have slain him on the spot
 With his own weapon, but they seized her hands : 1285
 Leaving her tongue free, as it tolled the knell
 Of Guido's hope so lively late. The past
 Took quite another shape now. She who shrieked

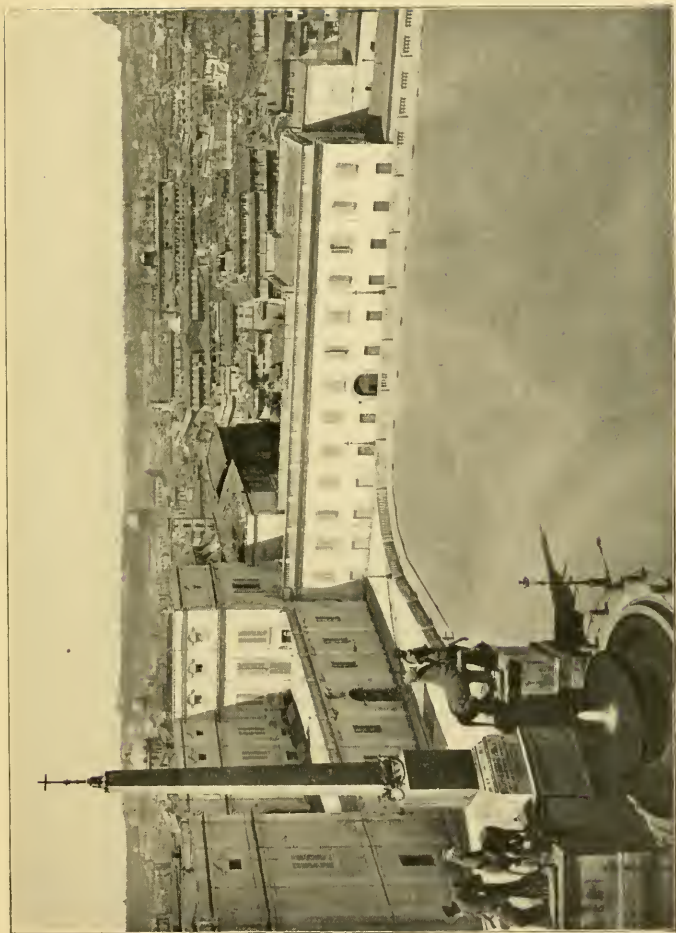
"At least and for ever I am mine and God's,
 Thanks to his liberating angel Death — 1290
 Never again degraded to be yours
 The ignoble noble, the unmanly man,
 The beast below the beast in brutishness!" —
 This was the froward child, "the restif lamb
 Used to be cherished in his breast," he groaned — 1295
 "Eat from his hand and drink from out his cup,
 The while his fingers pushed their loving way
 Through curl on curl of that soft coat — alas,
 And she all silverly baaed gratitude
 While meditating mischief!" — and so forth. 1300
 He must invent another story now!
 The ins and outs o' the rooms were searched: he found
 Or showed for found the abominable prize —
 Love-letters from his wife who cannot write,
 Love-letters in reply o' the priest — thank God! — 1305
 Who can write and confront his character
 With this, and prove the false thing forged throughout:
 Spitting whereat, he needs must spatter whom
 But Guido's self? — that forged and falsified
 One letter called Pompilia's, past dispute: 1310
 Then why not these to make sure still more sure?

So was the case concluded then and there:
 Guido preferred his charges in due form,
 Called on the law to adjudicate, consigned
 The accused ones to the Prefect of the place, 1315
 (Oh mouse-birth of that mountain-like revenge!)
 And so to his own place betook himself
 After the spring that failed, — the wildcat's way.
 The captured parties were conveyed to Rome;
 Investigation followed here i' the court — 1320
 Soon to review the fruit of its own work,
 From then to now being eight months and no more.
 Guido kept out of sight and safe at home:
 The Abate, brother Paolo, helped most
 At words when deeds were out of question, pushed 1325
 Nearest the purple,¹ best played deputy,
 So, pleaded, Guido's representative
 At the court shall soon try Guido's self, — what's more,
 The court that also took — I told you, Sir —
 That statement of the couple, how a cheat 1330
 Had been i' the birth of the babe, no child of theirs.
 That was the prelude; this, the play's first act:
 Whereof we wait what comes, crown, close of all.

¹ *The purple*: the color of the cardinals.

Well, the result was something of a shade
 On the parties thus accused, — how otherwise? 1335
 Shade, but with shine as unmistakable.
 Each had a prompt defence: Pompilia first —
 "Earth was made hell to me who did no harm:
 I only could emerge one way from hell
 By catching at the one hand held me, so 1340
 I caught at it and thereby stepped to heaven:
 If that be wrong, do with me what you will!"
 Then Caponsacchi with a grave grand sweep
 O' the arm as though his soul warned baseness off —
 "If as a man, then much more as a priest 1345
 I hold me bound to help weak innocence:
 If so my worldly reputation burst,
 Being the bubble¹ it is, why, burst it may:
 Blame I can bear though not blameworthiness.
 But use your sense first, see if the miscreant proved, 1350
 The man who tortured thus the woman, thus
 Have not both laid the trap and fixed the lure
 Over the pit should bury body and soul!
 His facts are lies: his letters are the fact —
 An infiltration flavored with himself! 1355
 As for the fancies — whether . . . what is it you say?
 The lady loves me, whether I love her
 In the forbidden sense of your surmise, —
 If, with the midday blaze of truth above,
 The unlidged eye of God awake, aware, 1360
 You needs must pry about and trace the birth
 Of each stray beam of light may traverse night,
 To the night's sun that 's Lucifer himself.
 Do so, at other time, in other place.
 Not now nor here! Enough that first to last 1365
 I never touched her lip nor she my hand
 Nor either of us thought a thought, much less
 Spoke a word which the Virgin might not hear.
 Be such your question, thus I answer it."
 Then the court had to make its mind up, spoke. 1370
 "It is a thorny question, yea, a tale
 Hard to believe, but not impossible:
 Who can be absolute for either side?
 A middle course is happily open yet.
 Here has a blot surprised the social blank, — 1375
 Whether through favor, feebleness or fault,
 No matter, leprosy has touched our robe
 And we unclean must needs be purified.

¹ *If so my worldly reputation burst, being the bubble it is:* recalls Shakespeare, "As You Like It," II. vii. 152.



GENERAL VIEW OF ROME FROM THE QUIRINALE.

Here is a wife makes holiday from home,
 A priest caught playing truant to his church, 1380
 In masquerade moreover: both allege
 Enough excuse to stop our lifted scourge
 Which else would heavily fall. On the other hand,
 Here is a husband, ay and man of mark,
 Who comes complaining here, demands redress 1385
 As if he were the pattern of desert —
 The while those plaguy allegations frown,
 Forbid we grant him the redress he seeks.
 To all men be our moderation known!
 Rewarding none while compensating each, 1390
 Hurting all round though harming nobody,
 Husband, wife, priest, scot-free not one shall 'scape,
 Yet priest, wife, husband, boast the unbroken head
 From application of our excellent oil:
 So that, whatever be the fact, in fine, 1395
 We make no miss of justice in a sort.
 First, let the husband stomach as he may,
 His wife shall neither be returned him, no —
 Nor branded, whipped and caged, but just consigned
 To a convent and the quietude she craves; 1400
 So is he rid of his domestic plague:
 What better thing can happen to a man?
 Next, let the priest retire — unshent, unshamed,
 Unpunished as for perpetrating crime,
 But relegated (not imprisoned, Sirs!) 1405
 Sent for three years to clarify his youth
 At Civita,¹ a rest by the way to Rome:
 There let his life skim off its last of lees
 Nor keep this dubious color. Judged the cause:
 All parties may retire, content, we hope." 1410
 That 's Rome's way, the traditional road of law;
 Whither it leads is what remains to tell.

The priest went to his relegation-place,
 The wife to her convent, brother Paolo
 To the arms of brother Guido with the news 1415
 And this beside — his charge was countercharged;
 The Comparini, his old brace of hates,
 Were breathed and vigilant and venomous now —
 Had shot a second bolt where the first stuck,
 And followed up the pending dowry-suit 1420
 By a procedure should release the wife
 From so much of the marriage-bond as barred
 Escape when Guido turned the screw too much

¹ *Civita*: Civita Vecchia, a seaport near Rome.

On his wife's flesh and blood, as husband may.
 No more defence, she turned and made attack. 1425
 Claimed now divorce from bed and board, in short :
 Pleaded such subtle strokes of cruelty,
 Such slow sure siege laid to her body and soul,
 As, proved, — and proofs seemed coming thick and fast, —
 Would gain both freedom and the dowry back 1430
 Even should the first suit leave them in his grasp :
 So urged the Comparini for the wife.
 Guido had gained not one of the good things
 He grasped at by his creditable plan
 O' the flight and following and the rest : the suit 1435
 That smouldered late was fanned to fury new,
 This adjunct came to help with fiercer fire.
 While he had got himself a quite new plague —
 Found the world's face an universal grin
 At this last best of the Hundred Merry Tales¹ 1440
 Of how a young and sprightly clerk devised
 To carry off a spouse that moped too much,
 And cured her of the vapors in a trice ;
 And how the husband, playing Vulcan's² part,
 Told by the Sun, started in hot pursuit 1445
 To catch the lovers, and came halting up,
 Cast his net and then called the Gods to see
 The convicts in their rosy impudence —
 Whereat said Mercury " Would that I were Mars !"
 Oh it was rare, and naughty all the same ! 1450
 Brief, the wife's courage and cunning, — the priest's show
 Of chivalry and adroitness, — last not least.
 The husband — how he ne'er showed teeth at all,
 Whose bark had promised biting ; but just sneaked
 Back to his kennel, tail 'twixt legs, as 't were, — 1455
 All this was hard to gulp down and digest.
 So pays the devil his liegeman, brass for gold.
 But this was at Arezzo : here in Rome
 Brave Paolo bore up against it all —
 Battled it out, nor wanting to himself 1460
 Nor Guido nor the House whose weight he bore
 Pillar-like, by no force of arm but brain.
 He knew his Rome, what wheels to set to work ;
 Plied influential folk, pressed to the ear

¹ *Hundred Merry Tales* : Browning seems to be thinking here of "A C Mery Talys" (*A Hundred Merry Tales*), a collection of short stories published in England in 1526 by John Rastell. The titles in the table of contents are exactly in the manner of the story cited here, all beginning with "Of." A

Roman citizen would, however, be more likely to have in mind Boccaccio's "Decameron," which contained a hundred stories.

² *Vulcan's part* : referring to Homer ("Odyssey," viii. 266 ff.), where Hephæstus (Vulcan) is deceived by Aphrodite (Venus), his wife, and Ares (Mars), her lover.

Of the efficacious purple, pushed his way 1465
 To the old Pope's self, — past decency indeed, —
 Praying him take the matter in his hands
 Out of the regular court's incompetence.
 But times are changed and nephews out of date
 And favoritism unfashionable: the Pope 1470
 Said "Render Cæsar what is Cæsar's due!"
 As for the Comparini's counter-plea,
 He met that by a counter-plea again,
 Made Guido claim divorce — with help so far
 By the trial's issue: for, why punishment 1475
 However slight unless for guiltiness
 However slender? — and a molehill serves
 Much as a mountain of offence this way.
 So was he gathering strength on every side
 And growing more and more to menace — when 1480
 All of a terrible moment came the blow
 That beat down Paolo's fence, ended the play
 O' the foil and brought mannaia¹ on the stage.

Five months had passed now since Pompilia's flight,
 Months spent in peace among the Convert nuns. 1485
 This, — being, as it seemed, for Guido's sake
 Solely, what pride might call imprisonment
 And quote as something gained, to friends at home, —
 This naturally was at Guido's charge:
 Grudge it he might, but penitential fare, 1490
 Prayers, preachings, who but he defrayed the cost?
 So, Paolo dropped, as proxy, doit by doit
 Like heart's blood, till — what 's here? What notice comes?
 The convent's self makes application bland
 That, since Pompilia's health is fast o' the wane, 1495
 She may have leave to go combine her cure
 Of soul with cure of body, mend her mind
 Together with her thin arms and sunk eyes
 That want fresh air outside the convent-wall,
 Say in a friendly house, — and which so fit 1500
 As a certain villa in the Pauline way,
 That happens to hold Pietro and his wife,
 The natural guardians? "Oh, and shift the care
 You shift the cost, too; Pietro pays in turn,
 And lightens Guido of a load! And then, 1505
 Villa or convent, two names for one thing,
 Always the sojourn means imprisonment,
*Domus pro carcere*² — nowise we relax,
 Nothing abate: how answers Paolo?"

¹ *Mannaia*: see note, I. 1320.

² *Domus pro carcere*: see note, II. 1333.

You,

What would you answer? All so smooth and fair, 1510
 Even Paul's astuteness sniffed no harm i' the world.
 He authorized the transfer, saw it made
 And, two months after, reaped the fruit of the same,
 Having to sit down, rack his brain and find
 What phrase should serve him best to notify 1515
 Our Guido that by happy providence
 A son and heir, a babe was born to him
 I' the villa, — go tell sympathizing friends!
 Yes, such had been Pompilia's privilege:
 She, when she fled was one month gone with child, 1520
 Known to herself or unknown, either way
 Availing to explain (say men of art)
 The strange and passionate precipitance
 Of maiden startled into motherhood
 Which changes body and soul by nature's law. 1525
 So when the she-dove breeds, strange yearnings come
 For the unknown shelter by undreamed-of shores,
 And there is born a blood-pulse in her heart
 To fight if needs be, though with flap of wing,
 For the wool-flock or the fur-tuft, though a hawk 1530
 Contest the prize, — wherefore, she knows not yet.
 Anyhow, thus to Guido came the news.
 "I shall have quitted Rome ere you arrive
 To take the one step left," — wrote Paolo.
 Then did the winch o' the winepress of all hate, 1535
 Vanity, disappointment, grudge and greed,
 Take the last turn that screws out pure revenge
 With a bright bubble at the brim beside —
 By an heir's birth he was assured at once
 O' the main prize, all the money in dispute: 1540
 Pompilia's dowry might revert to her
 Or stay with him as law's caprice should point, —
 But now — now — what was Pietro's shall be hers,
 What was hers shall remain her own, — if hers,
 Why then, — oh, not her husband's but — her heir's! 1545
 That heir being his too, all grew his at last
 By this road or by that road, since they join.
 Before, why, push he Pietro out o' the world, —
 The current of the money stopped, you see,
 Pompilia being proved no Pietro's child: 1550
 Or let it be Pompilia's life he quenched,
 Again the current of the money stopped, —
 Guido debarred his rights as husband soon,
 So the new process threatened; — now, the chance,
 Now, the resplendent minute! Clear the earth, 1555
 Cleanse the house, let the three but disappear

A child remains, depositary of all,
 That Guido may enjoy his own again,
 Repair all losses by a master-stroke,
 Wipe out the past, all done all left undone, 1560
 Swell the good present to best evermore,
 Die into new life, which let blood baptize!

So, i' the blue of a sudden sulphur-blaze,
 Both why there was one step to take at Rome,
 And why he should not meet with Paolo there, 1565
 He saw — the ins and outs to the heart of hell —
 And took the straight line thither swift and sure.
 He rushed to Vittiano, found four sons o' the soil,
 Brutes of his breeding, with one spark i' the clod
 That served for a soul, the looking up to him 1570
 Or aught called Franceschini as life, death,
 Heaven, hell, — lord paramount, assembled these,
 Harangued, equipped, instructed, pressed each clod
 With his will's imprint; then took horse, plied spur,
 And so arrived, all five of them, at Rome 1575
 On Christmas-Eve, and forthwith found themselves
 Installed i' the vacancy and solitude
 Left them by Paolo, the considerate man
 Who, good as his word, had disappeared at once
 As if to leave the stage free. A whole week 1580
 Did Guido spend in study of his part,
 Then played it fearless of a failure. One,
 Struck the year's clock whereof the hours are days,
 And off was rung o' the little wheels the chime
 "Good will on earth and peace to man:" but, two, 1585
 Proceeded the same bell and, evening come,
 The dreadful five felt finger-wise their way
 Across the town by blind cuts and black turns
 To the little lone suburban villa; knocked —
 "Who may be outside?" called a well-known voice. 1590
 "A friend of Caponsacchi's bringing friends
 A letter."

That 's a test, the excusers say:
 Ay, and a test conclusive, I return.
 What? Had that name brought touch of guilt or taste
 Of fear with it, aught to dash the present joy 1595
 With memory of the sorrow just at end, —
 She, happy in her parents' arms at length
 With the new blessing of the two weeks' babe, —
 How had that name's announcement moved the wife?
 Or, as the other slanders circulate, 1600
 Were Caponsacchi no rare visitant
 On nights and days whither safe harbor lured,

What bait had been i' the name to ope the door?
 The promise of a letter? Stealthy guests
 Have secret watchwords, private entrances : 1605
 The man's own self might have been found inside
 And all the scheme made frustrate by a word.
 No : but since Guido knew, none knew so well,
 The man had never since returned to Rome
 Nor seen the wife's face more than villa's front, 1610
 So, could not be at hand to warn or save. —
 For that, he took this sure way to the end.

"Come in," bade poor Violante cheerfully,
 Drawing the door-bolt : that death was the first,
 Stabbed through and through. Pietro, close on her heels, 1615
 Set up a cry — "Let me confess myself!
 Grant but confession!" Cold steel was the grant.
 Then came Pompilia's turn.

Then they escaped.
 The noise o' the slaughter roused the neighborhood.
 They had forgotten just the one thing more 1620
 Which saves i' the circumstance, the ticket to-wit
 Which puts post-horses at a traveller's use :
 So, all on foot, desperate through the dark
 Reeled they like drunkards along open road,
 Accomplished a prodigious twenty miles 1625
 Homeward, and gained Baccano very near,
 Stumbled at last, deaf, dumb, blind through the feat,
 Into a grange and, one dead heap, slept there
 Till the pursuers hard upon their trace
 Reached them and took them, red from head to heel, 1630
 And brought them to the prison where they lie.
 The couple were laid i' the church two days ago,
 And the wife lives yet by miracle.

All is told.

You hardly need ask what Count Guido says,
 Since something he must say. "I own the deed —" 1635
 (He cannot choose, — but —) "I declare the same
 Just and inevitable, — since no way else
 Was left me, but by this of taking life,
 To save my honor which is more than life.
 I exercised a husband's rights." To which 1640
 The answer is as prompt — "There was no fault
 In any one o' the three to punish thus :
 Neither i' the wife, who kept all faith to you,
 Nor in the parents, whom yourself first duped,
 Robbed and maltreated, then turned out of doors. 1645
 You wronged and they endured wrong ; yours the fault.

- Next, had endurance overpassed the mark
 And turned resentment needing remedy, —
 Nay, put the absurd impossible case, for once
 You were all blameless of the blame alleged 1650
 And they blameworthy where you fix all blame,
 Still, why this violation of the law?
 Yourself elected law should take its course,
 Avenge wrong, or show vengeance not your right;
 Why, only when the balance in law's hand 1655
 Trembles against you and inclines the way
 O' the other party, do you make protest,
 Renounce arbitrament, flying out of court,
 And crying 'Honor's hurt the sword must cure'?
 Aha, and so i' the middle of each suit 1660
 Trying i' the courts, — and you had three in play
 With an appeal to the Pope's self beside, —
 What, you may chop and change and right your wrongs
 Leaving the law to lag as she thinks fit?"
- That were too temptingly commodious, Count! 1665
 One would have still a remedy in reserve
 Should reach the safest oldest sinner, you see!
 One's honor forsooth? Does that take hurt alone
 From the extreme outrage? I who have no wife,
 Being yet sensitive in my degree 1670
 As Guido, — must discover hurt elsewhere
 Which, half compounded-for in days gone by,
 May profitably break out now afresh,
 Need cure from my own expeditious hands.
 The lie that was, as it were, imputed me 1675
 When you objected to my contract's clause, —
 The theft as good as, one may say, alleged,
 When you, co-heir in a will, excepted, Sir,
 To my administration of effects,
 — Aha, do you think law disposed of these? 1680
 My honor's touched and shall deal death around!
 Count, that were too commodious, I repeat!
 If any law be imperative on us all,
 Of all are you the enemy: out with you
 From the common light and air and life of man! 1685

IV.

TERTIUM QUID.

[Book IV. presents the condescending point of view of a critic who assumes to be the mouth-piece of the superior class, and to deliver the enlightened and authoritative opinion on the case. Indifference takes the place, here, of any special sympathy with either side, the speaker's only solicitude being to do himself credit in the eyes of his distinguished listeners, and to steer clear of any prejudices they may have. Accordingly, both sides are alternately elaborated, with a great show of cleverness, and the conclusion is lost in a mist of neutrality.]

TRUE, Excellency — as his Highness says,
 Though she 's not dead yet, she 's as good as stretched
 Symmetrical beside the other two ;
 Though he 's not judged yet, he 's the same as judged,
 So do the facts abound and superabound : 5
 And nothing hinders that we lift the case
 Out of the shade into the shine. allow
 Qualified persons to pronounce at last,
 Nay, edge in an authoritative word
 Between this rabble's-brabble of dolts and fools 10
 Who make up reasonless unreasoning Rome.
 " Now for the Trial ! " they roar : " the Trial to test
 The truth, weigh husband and weigh wife alike
 I ' the scales of law, make one scale kick the beam ! " 15
 Law 's a machine from which, to please the mob,
 Truth the divinity must needs descend
 And clear things at the play's fifth act — aha !
 Hammer into their noddles who was who
 And what was what. I tell the simpletons
 " Could law be competent to such a feat 20
 'T were done already : what begins next week
 Is end o' the Trial, last link of a chain
 Whereof the first was forged three years ago
 When law addressed herself to set wrong right,
 And proved so slow in taking the first step 25
 That ever some new grievance, — tort, retort,
 On one or the other side, — o'ertook i' the game,
 Retarded sentence, till this deed of death
 Is thrown in, as it were, last bale to boat
 Crammed to the edge with cargo — or passengers ? 30
 ' *Trecentos inseris : ohe, jam satis est !*

*Huc appelle!*¹ — passengers, the word must be.”
 Long since, the boat was loaded to my eyes.
 To hear the rabble and brabble, you'd call the case
 Fused and confused past human finding out. 35
 One calls the square round, t' other the round square —
 And pardonably in that first surprise
 O' the blood that fell and splashed the diagram :
 But now we've used our eyes to the violent hue
 Can't we look through the crimson and trace lines? 40
 It makes a man despair of history,
 Eusebius² and the established fact — fig's end!
 Oh, give the fools their Trial, rattle away
 With the leash of lawyers, two on either side —
 One barks, one bites, — Masters Arcangeli 45
 And Spreti, — that 's the husband's ultimate hope
 Against the Fisc and the other kind of Fisc,
 Bound to do barking for the wife : bow — wow!
 Why, Excellency, we and his Highness here
 Would settle the matter as sufficiently 50
 As ever will Advocate This and Fiscal That
 And Judge the Other, with even — a word and a wink —
 We well know who for ultimate arbiter.
 Let us beware o' the basset-table³ — lest
 We jog the elbow of Her Eminence,⁴ 55
 Jostle his cards, — he 'll rap you out a . . . st!
 By the window-seat! And here 's the Marquis too!
 Indulge me but a moment : if I fail
 — Favored with such an audience, understand! —
 To set things right, why, class me with the mob 60
 As understander of the mind of man!

The mob, — now, that 's just how the error comes!
 Bethink you that you have to deal with *plebs*.⁵
 The commonalty ; this is an episode
 In burgress-life. — why seek to aggrandize, 65
 Idealize, denaturalize the class?
 People talk just as if they had to do
 With a noble pair that . . . Excellency, your ear!
 Stoop to me, Highness, — listen and look yourselves!
 This Pietro, this Violante, live their life 70

¹ *Trecentos inseris*, etc.: ho there! that is enough now! you are stowing in hundreds. (Horace, “*Satires*,” I. 5. 12).

² *Eusebius* : historian, 265-338.

³ *Basset* : a game of cards fashionable in the seventeenth century.

⁴ *Her Eminence* : an imitation of the Italian idiom, in which “*His Eminence*,”

as we should say, becomes “*Sua Eminenza*.” Browning uses this idiom occasionally in the present book (e.g. ll. 1632, 1634), but not regularly.

⁵ *Plebs* : the lowest political division of the Roman people — plebeians opposed to the patricians, senators, and knights.

At Rome in the easy way that 's far from worst
 Even for their betters, — themselves love themselves,
 Spend their own oil in feeding their own lamp
 That their own faces may grow bright thereby.
 They get to fifty and over : how 's the lamp? 75
 Full to the depth o' the wick, — moneys so much ;
 And also with a remnant, — so much more
 Of moneys, — which there 's no consuming now,
 But, when the wick shall moulder out some day,
 Failing fresh twist of tow to use up dregs, 80
 Will lie a prize for the passer-by, — to-wit
 Anyone that can prove himself the heir.
 Seeing, the couple are wanting in a child :
 Meantime their wick swims in the safe broad bowl
 O' the middle rank, — not raised a beacon's height 85
 For wind to ravage, nor dropped till lamp graze ground
 Like cresset, mudlarks¹ poke now here now there,
 Going their rounds to probe the ruts i' the road
 Or fish the luck o' the puddle. Pietro's soul
 Was satisfied when cronies smirked, " No wine 90
 Like Pietro's, and he drinks it every day !"
 His wife's heart swelled her boddice, joyed its fill
 When neighbors turned heads wistfully at church,
 Sighed at the load of lace that came to pray.
 Well, having got through fifty years of flare, 95
 They burn out so, indulge so their dear selves,
 That Pietro finds himself in debt at last,
 As he were any lordling of us all :
 And, now that dark begins to creep on day,
 Creditors grow uneasy, talk aside, 100
 Take counsel, then importune all at once.
 For if the good fat rosy careless man,
 Who has not laid a ducat by, decease —
 Let the lamp fall, no heir at hand to catch —
 Why, being childless, there 's a spilth i' the street 105
 O' the remnant, there 's a scramble for the dregs
 By the stranger : so, they grant him no long day
 But come in a body, clamor to be paid.

 What 's his resource? He asks and straight obtains
 The customary largess, dole dealt out 110
 To, what we call our " poor dear shame-faced ones,"
 In secret once a month to spare the shame
 O' the slothful and the spendthrift, — pauper-saints
 The Pope puts meat i' the mouth of, ravens they,
 And providence he — just what the mob admires! 115

¹ *Mudlarks* : sewer-cleaners and rag-pickers.

That is, instead of putting a prompt foot
 On selfish worthless human slugs whose slime
 Has failed to lubricate their path in life,
 Why, the Pope picks the first ripe fruit that falls
 And gracious puts it in the vermin's way. 120
 Pietro could never save a dollar? Straight
 He must be subsidized at our expense :
 And for his wife — the harmless household sheep
 One ought not to see harassed in her age —
 Judge, by the way she bore adversity. 125
 O' the patient nature you ask pity for!
 How long, now, would the roughest marketman,
 Handling the creatures huddled to the knife,
 Harass a mutton ere she made a mouth
 Or menaced biting? Yet the poor sheep here, 130
 Violante, the old innocent burgess-wife,
 In her first difficulty showed great teeth
 Fit to crunch up and swallow a good round crime.
 She meditates the tenure of the Trust,
Fidei commissum is the lawyer-phrase, 135
 These funds that only want an heir to take —
 Goes o'er the gamut o' the creditor's cry
 By semitones from whine to snarl high up
 And growl down low, one scale in sundry keys, —
 Pauses with a little compunction for the face 140
 Of Pietro frustrate of its ancient cheer. —
 Never a bottle now for friend at need. —
 Comes to a stop on her own frittered lace
 And neighborly condolences thereat,
 Then makes her mind up, sees the thing to do : 145
 And so, deliberate, snaps house-book clasp,
 Posts off to vespers, missal¹ beneath arm,
 Passes the proper San Lorenzo by,
 Dives down a little lane to the left, is lost
 In a labyrinth of dwellings best unnamed, 150
 Selects a certain blind one, black at base,
 Blinking at top, — the sign of we know what, —
 One candle in a casement set to wink
 Streetward, do service to no shrine inside, —
 Mounts thither by the filthy flight of stairs, 155
 Holding the cord by the wall, to the tip-top,
 Gropes for the door i' the dark, ajar of course,
 Raps, opens, enters in : up starts a thing
 Naked as needs be — “ What, you rogue, 't is you?
 Back, — how can I have taken a farthing yet? 160
 Mercy on me, poor sinner that I am!

¹ *Missal* : book of the mass, Roman Catholic prayer-book.

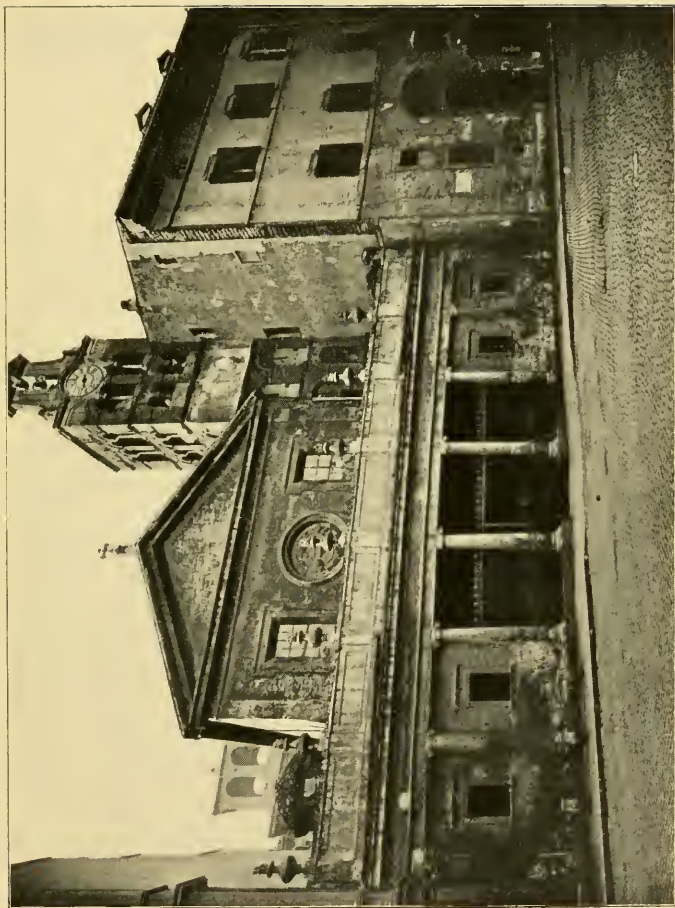
Here 's . . . why, I took you for Madonna's self
 With all that sudden swirl of silk i' the place!
 What may your pleasure be, my bonny dame?"
 Your Excellency supplies aught left obscure? 165
 One of those women that abound in Rome,
 Whose needs oblige them eke out one poor trade
 By another vile one: her ostensible work
 Was washing clothes, out in the open air
 At the cistern by Citorio; her true trade — 170
 Whispering to idlers, when they stopped and praised
 The ankles she let liberally shine
 In kneeling at the slab by the fountain-side,
 That there was plenty more to criticise
 At home, that eve, i' the house where candle blinked 175
 Decorously above, and all was done
 I' the holy fear of God and cheap beside.
 Violante, now, had seen this woman wash,
 Noticed and envied her propitious shape,
 Tracked her home to her house-top, noted too, 180
 And now was come to tempt her and propose
 A bargain far more shameful than the first
 Which trafficked her virginity away
 For a melon and three pauls¹ at twelve years old.
 Five minutes' talk with this poor child of Eve, 185
 Struck was the bargain, business at an end —
 "Then, six months hence, that person whom you trust,
 Comes, fetches whatsoever babe it be;
 I keep the price and secret, you the babe,
 Paying beside for mass to make all straight: 190
 Meantime, I pouch the earnest-money-piece."

Down stairs again goes fumbling by the rope
 Violante, triumphing in a flourish of fire
 From her own brain, self-lit by such success, —
 Gains church in time for the "*Magnificat*" 195
 And gives forth "My reproof is taken away,
 And blessed shall mankind proclaim me now,"
 So that the officiating priest turns round
 To see who proffers the obstreperous praise:
 Then home to Pietro, the enraptured-much 200
 But puzzled-more when told the wondrous news —
 How orisons and works of charity,
 (Beside that pair of pinners² and a coif,³
 Birth-day surprise last Wednesday was five weeks)
 Had borne fruit in the autumn of his life. — 205

¹ *Pauls*: Italian silver coins worth about ten cents each.

² *Pinners*: lappets of a head-dress.

³ *Coif*: a cap.



CHURCH OF SAN LORENZO IN LUCINA, ROME

They, or the Orvieto¹ in a double dose.
 Anyhow, she must keep house next six months,
 Lie on the settle, avoid the three-legged stool,
 And, chiefly, not be crossed in wish or whim,
 And the result was like to be an heir. 210

Accordingly, when time was come about,
 He found himself the sire indeed of this
 Francesca Vittoria Pompilia and the rest
 O' the names whereby he sealed her his, next day.
 A crime complete in its way is here, I hope? 215
 Lies to God, lies to man, every way lies
 To nature and civility and the mode :
 Flat robbery of the proper heirs thus foiled
 O' the due succession, — and, what followed thence,
 Robbery of God, through the confessor's ear 220
 Debarred the most note-worthy incident
 When all else done and undone twelve-month through
 Was put in evidence at Easter-time.
 All other peccadillos! — but this one
 To the priest who comes next day to dine with us? 225
 'T were inexpedient ; decency forbade.

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

I thought as much,
 But now, a question, — how long does it lie.
 The bad and barren bit of stuff you kick,
 Before encroached on and encompassed round
 With minute moss, weed, wild-flower — made alive 235
 By worm, and fly, and foot of the free bird?
 Your Highness, — healthy minds let bygones be,
 Leave old crimes to grow young and virtuous-like
 I' the sun and air ; so time treats ugly deeds :
 They take the natural blessing of all change. 240
 There was the joy o' the husband silly-sooth.
 The softening of the wife's old wicked heart,
 Virtues to right and left, profusely paid
 If so they might compensate the saved sin.
 And then the sudden existence, dewy-dear, 245
 O' the rose above the dungheap, the pure child
 As good as new created, since withdrawn

¹ *Orvieto* : probably a medicine of Ferrante, a celebrated charlatan who lived in Orvieto.

From the horror of the pre-appointed lot
 With the unknown father and the mother known
 Too well, — some fourteen years of squalid youth, 250
 And then libertinage, disease, the grave —
 Hell in life here, hereafter life in hell:
 Look at that horror and this soft repose!
 Why, moralist, the sin has saved a soul!
 Then, even the palpable grievance to the heirs — 255
 'Faith, this was no frank setting hand to throat
 And robbing a man, but . . . Excellency, by your leave,
 How did you get that marvel of a gem,
 The sapphire with the Graces grand and Greek? 260
 The story is, stooping to pick a stone
 From the pathway through a vineyard — no-man's-land —
 To pelt a sparrow with, you chanced on this:
 Why now, do those five clowns o' the family
 O' the vinedresser digest their porridge worse 265
 That not one keeps it in his goatskin pouch
 To do flint's service with the tinder-box?
 Don't cheat me, don't cheat you, don't cheat a friend,
 But are you so hard on who jostles just
 A stranger with no natural sort of claim 270
 To the havings and the holdings (here 's the point)
 Unless by misadventure, and defect
 Of that which ought to be — nay, which there 's none
 Would dare so much as wish to profit by—
 Since who dares put in just so many words
 "May Pietro fail to have a child, please God! 275
 So shall his house and goods belong to me,
 The sooner that his heart will pine betimes"?
 Well then, God doesn't please, nor heart shall pine!
 Because he has a child at last, you see,
 Or selfsame thing as though a child it were, 280
 He thinks, whose sole concern it is to think:
 If he accepts it why should you demur?

 Moreover, say that certain sin there seem,
 The proper process of unsinning sin
 Is to begin well-doing somehow else. 285
 Pietro, — remember, with no sin at all
 I' the substitution, — why, this gift of God
 Flung in his lap from over Paradise
 Steadied him a moment, set him straight
 On the good path he had been straying from. 290
 Henceforward no more wilfulness and waste,
 Cuppings, carousings, — these a sponge wiped out.
 All sort of self-denial was easy now
 For the child's sake, the chatelaine to be,

Who must want much and might want who knows what? 295
 And so, the debts were paid, habits reformed,
 Expense curtailed, the dowry set to grow.
 As for the wife, — I said, hers the whole sin :
 So, hers the exemplary penance. 'T was a text
 Whereon folk preached and praised, the district through : 300
 " Oh, make us happy and you make us good!
 It all comes of God giving her a child :
 Such graces follow God's best earthly gift! "

Here you put by my guard, pass to my heart
 By the home-thrust — " There 's a lie at base of all 305
 Why, thou exact Prince, is it a pearl or no,
 Yon globe upon the Principessa's neck?
 That great round glory of pellucid stuff,
 A fish secreted round a grain of grit!
 Do you call it worthless for the worthless core? 310
 (She doesn't, who well knows what she changed for it.)
 So, to our brace of burgesses again!
 You see so far i' the story, who was right,
 Who wrong, who neither, don't you? What, you don't?
 Eh? Well, admit there 's somewhat dark i' the case, 315
 Let 's on — the rest shall clear, I promise you.
 Leap over a dozen years : you find, these past,
 An old good easy creditable sire,
 A careful housewife's beaming bustling face,
 Both wrapped up in the love of their one child, 320
 The strange tall pale beautiful creature grown
 Lily-like out o' the cleft i' the sun-smit rock
 To bow its white miraculous birth of buds
 I' the way of wandering Joseph and his spouse, —
 So painters fancy : here it was a fact. 325
 And this their lily, — could they but transplant
 And set in vase to stand by Solomon's porch
 'Twixt lion and lion! — this Pompilia of theirs,
 Could they see worthily married, well bestowed,
 In house and home! And why despair of this 330
 With Rome to choose from, save the topmost rank?
 Themselves would help the choice with heart and soul,
 Throw their late savings in a common heap
 To go with the dowry, and be followed in time
 By the heritage legitimately hers : 335
 And when such paragon was found and fixed,
 Why, they might chant their "*Nunc dimittis* " ¹ straight.

Indeed the prize was simply full to a fault,

¹ *Nunc dimittis* : " Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace," etc., Luke ii. 22.

- Exorbitant for the suitor they should seek,
 And social class should choose among, these cits.¹ 340
 Yet there 's a latitude : exceptional white
 Amid the general brown o' the species, lurks
 A burgesse nearly an aristocrat,
 Legitimately in reach : look out for him!
 What banker, merchant, has seen better days, 345
 What second-rate painter a-pushing up,
 Poet a-slipping down, shall bid the best
 For this young beauty with the thumping purse?
 Alack, were it but one of such as these
 So like the real thing that they pass for it, 350
 All had gone well ! Unluckily, poor souls,
 It proved to be the impossible thing itself,
 Truth and not sham : hence ruin to them all.
- For, Guido Franceschini was the head
 Of an old family in Arezzo, old 355
 To that degree they could afford be poor
 Better than most : the case is common too.
 Out of the vast door 'scutcheoned overhead,
 Creeps out a serving-man on Saturdays
 To cater for the week, — turns up anon 360
 I' the market, chaffering for the lamb's least leg,
 Or the quarter-fowl, less entrails, claws and comb
 Then back again with prize, — a liver begged
 Into the bargain, gizzard overlooked.
 He 's mincing these to give the beans a taste, 365
 When, at your knock, he leaves the simmering soup,
 Waits on the curious stranger-visitant,
 Napkin in half-wiped hand, to show the rooms,
 Point pictures out have hung their hundred years.
 "Priceless," he tells you, — puts in his place at once 370
 The man of money : yes, you 're banker-king
 Or merchant-kaiser, wallow in your wealth
 While patron, the house-master, can't afford
 To stop our ceiling-hole that rain so rots :
 But he 's the man of mark, and there 's his shield, 375
 And yonder 's the famed Rafael, first in kind.
 The painter painted for his grandfather,
 And you have paid to see : "Good morning, Sir!"
 Such is the law of compensation. Still
 The poverty was getting nigh acute ; 380
 There gaped so many noble mouths to feed,
 Beans must suffice unflavored of the fowl.
 The mother, — hers would be a spun-out life

¹ *Cits* : abbreviation of citizens.

- I' the nature of things ; the sisters had done well
 And married men of reasonable rank : 385
 But that sort of illumination stops.
 Throws back no heat upon the parent-hearth.
 The family instinct felt out for its fire
 To the Church, — the Church traditionally helps
 A second son : and such was Paolo, 390
 Established here at Rome these thirty years,
 Who played the regular game, — priest and Abate,
 Made friends, owned house and land, became of use
 To a personage : his course lay clear enough.
 The youngest caught the sympathetic flame, 395
 And, though unfledged wings kept him still i' the cage,
 Yet he shot up to be a Canon, so
 Clung to the higher perch and crowed in hope.
 Even our Guido, eldest brother, went
 As far i' the way o' the Church as safety seemed, 400
 He being Head o' the House, ordained to wive, —
 So, could but dally with an Order or two
 And testify good-will i' the cause : he clipped
 His top-hair and thus far affected Christ.
 But main promotion must fall otherwise, 405
 Though still from the side o' the Church : and here was he
 At Rome, since first youth, worn threadbare of soul
 By forty-six years' rubbing on hard life,
 Getting fast tired o' the game whose word is — " Wait!
 When one day, — he too having his Cardinal 410
 To serve in some ambiguous sort, as serve
 To draw the coach the plumes o' the horses' heads, —
 The Cardinal saw fit to dispense with him,
 Ride with one plume the less ; and off it dropped.
- Guido thus left, — with a youth spent in vain 415
 And not a penny in purse to show for it, —
 Advised with Paolo, bent no doubt in chafe
 The black brows somewhat formidably, growled
 " Where is the good I came to get at Rome?
 Where the repayment of the servitude 420
 To a purple popinjay, whose feet I kiss,
 Knowing his father wiped the shoes of mine? "
 " Patience," pats Paolo the recalcitrant —
 " You have not had, so far, the proper luck,
 Nor do my gains suffice to keep us both : 425
 A modest competency is mine, not more.
 You are the Count however, yours the style,
 Heirdom and state, — you can't expect all good.
 Had I, now, held your hand of cards . . . well, well —
 What 's yet unplayed, I 'll look at, by your leave, 430

Over your shoulder. — I who made my game,
 Let 's see, if I can't help to handle yours.
 Fie on you, all the Honors in your fist.
 Countship, Househeadship. — how have you misdealt!
 Why, in the first place, these will marry a man! 435
*Notum tonsoribus!*¹ To the Tonsor² then!
 Come, clear your looks, and choose your freshest suit,
 And, after function 's done with, down we go
 To the woman-dealer in perukes, a wench
 I and some others settled in the shop 440
 At Place Colonna: she 's an oracle. Hmm!
 'Dear, 't is my brother: brother, 't is my dear.
 Dear, give us counsel! Whom do you suggest
 As properest party in the quarter round
 For the Count here? — he is minded to take wife, 445
 And further tells me he intends to slip
 Twenty zecchines³ under the bottom-scalp
 Of his old wig when he sends it to revive
 For the wedding: and I add a trifle too.
 You know what personage I 'm potent with.' " 450
 And so plumped out Pompilia's name the first.
 She told them of the household and its ways,
 The easy husband and the shrewder wife
 In Via Vittoria, — how the tall young girl.
 With hair black as yon patch and eyes as big 455
 As yon pomander⁴ to make freckles fly,
 Would have so much for certain, and so much more
 In likelihood. — why, it suited, slipped as smooth
 As the Pope's pantoufle⁵ does on the Pope's foot.
 "I 'll to the husband!" Guido ups and cries. 460
 "Ay, so you 'd play your last court-card, no doubt!"
 Puts Paolo in with a groan — "Only, you see.
 'T is I, this time, that supervise your lead.
 Priests play with women, maids, wives, mothers — why?
 These play with men and take them off our hands. 465
 Did I come, counsel with some cut-beard gruff
 Or rather this sleek young-old barberess?
 Go, brother, stand you rapt in the ante-room
 Of Her Efficacy⁶ my Cardinal
 For an hour, — he likes to have lord-suitors lounge, — 470
 While I betake myself to the gray mare,
 The better horse, — how wise the people's word! —

¹ *Notum tonsoribus*: "known to the barbers." See note, II, 114.

² *Tonsor*: barber.

³ *Zecchines*: sequins, coins worth about \$2.25 each.

⁴ *Pomander*: a ball of pomade for the skin.

⁵ *Pantoufle*: slipper.

⁶ *Her Efficacy*: similar idiom to that referred to in line 55.

And wait on Madam Violante."

Said and done.

He was at Via Vittoria in three skips :
 Proposed at once to fill up the one want 475
 O' the burgess-family which, wealthy enough,
 And comfortable to heart's desire, yet crouched
 Outside a gate to heaven, — locked, bolted, barred,
 Whereof Count Guido had a key he kept
 Under his pillow, but Pompilia's hand 480
 Might slide behind his neck and pilfer thence.
 The key was fairy ; its mere mention made
 Violante feel the thing shoot one sharp ray
 That reached the womanly heart : so — " I assent!
 Yours be Pompilia, hers and ours that key 485
 To all the glories of the greater life!
 There 's Pietro to convince : leave that to me ! "

Then was the matter broached to Pietro ; then
 Did Pietro make demand and get response
 That in the Countship was a truth, but in 490
 The counting up of the Count's cash, a lie.
 He thereupon stroked grave his chin, looked great,
 Declined the honor. Then the wife wiped tear,
 Winked with the other eye turned Paolo-ward,
 Whispered Pompilia, stole to church at eve, 495
 Found Guido there and got the marriage done,
 And finally begged pardon at the feet
 Of her dear lord and master. Whereupon
 Quoth Pietro — " Let us make the best of things ! "
 " I knew your love would license us," quoth she : 500
 Quoth Paolo once more, " Mothers, wives and maids,
 These be the tools wherewith priests manage men."

Now, here take breath and ask, — which bird o' the brace
 Decoyed the other into clapnet? Who
 Was fool, who knave? Neither and both, perchance. 505
 There was a bargain mentally proposed
 On each side, straight and plain and fair enough ;
 Mind knew its own mind : but when mind must speak,
 The bargain have expression in plain terms,
 There came the blunder incident to words, 510
 And in the clumsy process, fair turned foul.
 The straight backbone-thought of the crooked speech
 Were just — " I Guido truck my name and rank
 For so much money and youth and female charms. —
 We Pietro and Violante give our child 515
 And wealth to you for a rise i' the world thereby."
 Such naked truth while chambered in the brain

- Shocks nowise : walk it forth by way of tongue, —
 Out on the cynical unseemliness!
- Hence was the need, on either side, of a lie 520
 To serve as decent wrappage : so, Guido gives
 Money for money, — and they, bride for groom,
 Having, he, not a doit, they, not a child
 Honestly theirs, but this poor waif and stray.
 According to the words, each cheated each ; 525
 But in the inexpressive barter of thoughts,
 Each did give and did take the thing designed,
 The rank on this side and the cash on that —
 Attained the object of the traffic, so.
 The way of the world, the daily bargain struck 530
 In the first market! Why sells Jack his ware?
 “For the sake of serving an old customer.”
 Why does Jill buy it? “Simply not to break
 A custom, pass the old stall the first time.”
 Why, you know where the gist is of the exchange : 535
 Each sees a profit, throws the fine words in.
 Don't be too hard o' the pair! Had each pretence
 Been simultaneously discovered, stript
 From off the body o' the transaction, just
 As when a cook (will Excellency forgive?) 540
 Strips away those long rough superfluous legs
 From either side the crayfish, leaving folk
 A meal all meat henceforth, no garnishry,
 (With your respect, Prince!) — balance had been kept,
 No party blamed the other, — so, starting fair, 545
 All subsequent fence of wrong returned by wrong
 I' the matrimonial thrust and parry, at least
 Had followed on equal terms. But, as it chanced,
 One party had the advantage, saw the cheat
 Of the other first and kept its own concealed : 550
 And the luck o' the first discovery fell, beside,
 To the least adroit and self-possessed o' the pair.
 'T was foolish Pietro and his wife saw first
 The nobleman was penniless, and screamed
 “We are cheated!”
- Such unprofitable noise 555
 Angers at all times : but when those who plague,
 Do it from inside your own house and home,
 Gnats which yourself have closed the curtain round,
 Noise goes too near the brain and makes you mad.
 The gnats say, Guido used the candle-flame 560
 Unfairly, — worsened that first bad of his,
 By practising all kinds of cruelty
 To oust them and suppress the wail and whine,

That speedily he so scared and bullied them,
 Fain were they, long before five months had passed,
 To beg him grant, from what was once their wealth,
 Just so much as would help them back to Rome
 Where, when they finished paying the last doit 660
 O' the dowry, they might beg from door to door.
 So say the Comparini — as if it came 570
 Of pure resentment for this worse than bad,
 That then Violante, feeling conscience prick,
 Confessed her substitution of the child
 Whence all the harm came, — and that Pietro first
 Bethought him of advantage to himself 575
 I' the deed, as part revenge, part remedy
 For all miscalculation in the pact.

On the other hand "Not so!" Guido retorts —
 "I am the wronged, solely, from first to last,
 Who gave the dignity I engaged to give, 580
 Which was, is, cannot but continue gain.
 My being poor was a bye-circumstance,
 Miscalculated piece of untowardness,
 Might end to-morrow did heaven's windows ope,
 Or uncle die and leave me his estate. 585
 You should have put up with the minor flaw,
 Getting the main prize of the jewel. If wealth,
 Not rank, had been prime object in your thoughts,
 Why not have taken the butcher's son, the boy
 O' the baker or candlestick-maker? In all the rest, 590
 It was yourselves broke compact and played false,
 And made a life in common impossible.
 Show me the stipulation of our bond
 That you should make your profit of being inside
 My house, to hustle and edge me out o' the same, 595
 First make a laughing-stock of mine and me,
 Then round us in the ears from morn to night
 (Because we show wry faces at your mirth)
 That you are robbed, starved, beaten and what not!
 You fled a hell of your own lighting-up, 600
 Pay for your own miscalculation too:
 You thought nobility, gained at any price,
 Would suit and satisfy, — find the mistake,
 And now retaliate, not on yourselves, but me.
 And how? By telling me, i' the face of the world, 605
 I it is have been cheated all this while.
 Abominably and irreparably, — my name
 Given to a cur-cast mongrel, a drab's brat,
 A beggar's bye-blow, — thus depriving me
 Of what yourselves allege the whole and sole 610

- Saim on my part i' the marriage, — money to-wit.
 Cfhis thrust I have to parry by a guard
 Which leaves me open to a counter-thrust
 On the other side, — no way but there 's a pass
 Clean through me. If I prove, as I hope to do, 615
 There 's not one truth in this your odious tale
 O' the buying, selling, substituting — prove
 Your daughter was and is your daughter, — well,
 And her dowry hers and therefore mine, — what then?
 Why, where 's the appropriate punishment for this 620
 Enormous lie hatched for mere malice' sake
 To ruin me? Is that a wrong or no?
 And if I try revenge for remedy,
 Can I well make it strong and bitter enough?"
- I anticipate however — only ask, 625
 Which of the two here sinned most? A nice point!
 Which brownness is least black, — decide who can,
 Wager-by-battle-of-cheating! What do you say,
 Highness? Suppose, your Excellency, we leave
 The question at this stage, proceed to the next, 630
 Both parties step out, fight their prize upon,
 In the eye o' the world?
- They brandish law 'gainst law ;
 The grinding of such blades, each parry of each,
 Throws terrible sparks off, over and above the thrusts,
 And makes more sinister the fight, to the eye, 635
 Than the very wounds that follow. Beside the tale
 Which the Comparini have to re-assert,
 They needs must write, print, publish all abroad
 The straitnesses of Guido's household life —
 The petty nothings we bear privately 640
 But break down under when fools flock to jeer.
 What is it all to the facts o' the couple's case,
 How helps it prove Pompilia not their child,
 If Guido's mother, brother, kith and kin
 Fare ill, lie hard, lack clothes, lack fire, lack food? 645
 That 's one more wrong than needs.
- On the other hand,
 Guido, — whose cue is to dispute the truth
 O' the tale, reject the shame it throws on him, —
 He may retaliate, fight his foe in turn
 And welcome, we allow. Ay, but he can't! 650
 He 's at home, only acts by proxy here :
 Law may meet law, — but all the gibes and jeers,
 The superfluity of naughtiness,
 Those libels on his House, — how reach at them?
 Two hateful faces, grinning all a-glow, 655
- *

Not only make parade of spoil they filched,
 But foul him from the height of a tower, you see.
 Unluckily temptation is at hand —
 To take revenge on a trifle overlooked,
 A pet lamb they have left in reach outside, 660
 Whose first bleat, when he plucks the wool away,
 Will strike the grinner's grave: his wife remains
 Who, four months earlier, some thirteen years old,
 Never a mile away from mother's house
 And petted to the height of her desire, 665
 Was told one morning that her fate had come,
 She must be married — just as, a month before,
 Her mother told her she must comb her hair
 And twist her curls into one knot behind.
 These fools forgot their pet lamb, fed with flowers, 670
 Then 'ticed as usual by the bit of cake,
 Out of the bower into the butchery.
 Plague her, he plagues them threefold: but how plague?
 The world may have its word to say to that:
 You can't do some things with impunity. 675
 What remains . . . well, it is an ugly thought . . .
 But that he drive herself to plague herself —
 Herself disgrace herself and so disgrace
 Who seek to disgrace Guido?

There 's the clue

To what else seems gratuitously vile, 680
 If, as is said, from this time forth the rack
 Was tried upon Pompilia: 't was to wrench
 Her limbs into exposure that brings shame.
 The aim o' the cruelty being so crueller still,
 That cruelty almost grows compassion's self 685
 Could one attribute it to mere return
 O' the parents' outrage, wrong avenging wrong.
 They see in this a deeper deadlier aim,
 Not to vex just a body they held dear,
 But blacken too a soul they boasted white, 690
 And show the world their saint in a lover's arms,
 No matter how driven thither. — so they say.

On the other hand, so much is easily said,
 And Guido lacks not an apologist.
 The pair had nobody but themselves to blame. 695
 Being selfish beasts throughout, no less, no more:
 — Cared for themselves, their supposed good, nought else.
 And brought about the marriage; good proved bad,
 As little they cared for her its victim — nay,
 Meant she should stay behind and take the chance, 700

If haply they might wriggle themselves free.
 They baited their own hook to catch a fish
 With this poor worm, failed o' the prize, and then
 Sought how to unbait tackle, let worm float
 Or sink, amuse the monster while they 'scaped. 705
 Under the best stars Hymen brings above,
 Had all been honesty on either side,
 A common sincere effort to good end,
 Still, this would prove a difficult problem, Prince!
 — Given, a fair wife, aged thirteen years. 710
 A husband poor, care-bitten, sorrow-sunk,
 Little, long-nosed, bush-bearded, lantern-jawed,
 Forty-six years old, — place the two grown one,
 She, cut off sheer from every natural aid,
 In a strange town with no familiar face — 715
 He, in his own parade-ground or retreat
 If need were, free from challenge, much less check
 To an irritated, disappointed will —
 How evolve happiness from such a match?
 'T were hard to serve up a congenial dish 720
 Out of these ill-agreeing morsels. Duke,
 By the best exercise of the cook's craft,
 Best interspersions of spice, salt and sweet!
 But let two ghastly scullions concoct mess
 With brimstone, pitch, vitriol and devil's-dung¹ — 725
 Throw in abuse o' the man, his body and soul,
 Kith, kin and generation shake all slab
 At Rome, Arezzo, for the world to nose,
 Then end by publishing, for fiend's arch-prank,
 That, over and above sauce to the meat's self, 730
 Why, even the meat, bedevilled thus in dish,
 Was never a pheasant but a carrion-crow —
 Prince, what will then the natural loathing be?
 What wonder if this? — the compound plague o' the pair
 Pricked Guido, — not to take the course they hoped, 735
 That is, submit him to their statement's truth,
 Accept its obvious promise of relief,
 And thrust them out of doors the girl again
 Since the girl's dowry would not enter there.
 — Quit of the one if balked of the other: no! 740
 Rather did rage and hate so work in him,
 Their product proved the horrible conceit
 That he should plot and plan and bring to pass
 His wife might, of her own free will and deed,
 Relieve him of her presence, get her gone, 745
 And yet leave all the dowry safe behind.

¹ *Devil's-dung*: assafoetida, a vile smelling drug.

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

You see, the man was Aretine, had touch 750
O' the subtle air that breeds the subtle wit ;
Was noble too, of old blood thrice-refined
That shrinks from clownish coarseness in disgust :
Allow that such an one may take revenge,
You don't expect he'll catch up stone and fling, 755
Or try cross-buttock,¹ or whirl quarter-staff ?²
Instead of the honest drubbing clowns bestow,
When out of temper at the dinner spoilt,
On meddling mother-in-law and tiresome wife, —
Substitute for the clown a nobleman, 760
And you have Guido, practising, 't is said,
Immitigably from the very first,
The finer vengeance : this, they say, the fact
O' the famous letter shows — the writing traced
At Guido's instance by the timid wife 765
Over the pencilled words himself writ first —
Wherein she, who could neither write nor read,
Was made unblushingly declare a tale
To the brother, the Abate then in Rome,
How her putative parents had impressed, 770
On their departure, their enjoiment ; bade
“ We being safely arrived here, follow, you !
Poison your husband, rob, set fire to all,
And then by means o' the gallant you procure
With ease, by helpful eye and ready tongue, 775
Some brave youth ready to dare, do and die,
You shall run off and merrily reach Rome
Where we may live like flies in honey-pot : ” —
Such being exact the programme of the course
Imputed her as carried to effect. 780

They also say, — to keep her straight therein,
All sort of torture was piled, pain on pain,
On either side Pompilia's path of life,
Built round about and over against by fear,
Circumvallated month by month, and week 785
By week, and day by day, and hour by hour,
Close, closer and yet closer still with pain,
No outlet from the encroaching pain save just
Where stood one saviour like a piece of heaven,

¹ *Cross-buttock* : a blow across the back.

² *Quarter-staff* : a long, stout staff

Hell's arms would strain round but for this blue gap. 790
 She, they say further, first tried every chink,
 Every imaginable break i' the fire,
 As way of escape : ran to the Commissary,
 Who bade her not malign his friend her spouse ;
 Flung herself thrice at the Archbishop's feet, 795
 Where three times the Archbishop let her lie,
 Spend her whole sorrow and sob full heart forth,
 And then took up the slight load from the ground
 And bore it back for husband to chastise, —
 Mildly of course, — but natural right is right. 800
 So went she slipping ever yet catching at help,
 Missing the high till come to lowest and last,
 To-wit a certain friar of mean degree,
 Who heard her story in confession, wept,
 Crossed himself, showed the man within the monk. 805
 "Then, will you save me, you the one i' the world?
 I cannot even write my woes, nor put
 My prayer for help in words a friend may read, —
 I no more own a coin than have an hour
 Free of observance, — I was watched to church, 810
 Am watched now, shall be watched back presently, —
 How buy the skill of scribe i' the market-place?
 Pray you, write down and send whatever I say
 O' the need I have my parents take me hence!"
 The good man rubbed his eyes and could not choose — 815
 Let her dictate her letter in such a sense
 That parents, to save breaking down a wall,
 Might lift her over : she went back, heaven in heart.
 Then the good man took counsel of his couch,
 Woke and thought twice, the second thought the best : 820
 "Here am I, foolish body that I be,
 Caught all but pushing, teaching, who but I,
 My betters their plain duty, — what, I dare
 Help a case the Archbishop would not help,
 Mend matters, peradventure, God loves mar? 825
 What hath the married life but strifes and plagues
 For proper dispensation? So a fool
 Once touched the ark, — poor Uzzah¹ that I am!
 Oh married ones, much rather should I bid,
 In patience all of ye possess your souls! 830
 This life is brief and troubles die with it :
 Where were the prick to soar up homeward else?"
 So saying, he burnt the letter he had writ,
 Said *Ave* for her intention, in its place,

¹ *Uzzah* : 2 Samuel, vi. 6, 7; 1 Chronicles xiii. 10 (Hophni was wrongly put for Uzzah in earlier editions).

Took snuff and comfort, and had done with all. 835
 Then the grim arms stretched yet a little more
 And each touched each, all but one streak i' the midst,
 Whereat stood Caponsacchi, who cried, "This way,
 Out by me! Hesitate one moment more
 And the fire shuts out me and shuts in you! 840
 Here my hand holds you life out!" Whereupon
 She clasped the hand, which closed on hers and drew
 Pompilia out o' the circle now complete.
 Whose fault or shame but Guido's? — ask her friends.

But then this is the wife's — Pompilia's tale — 845
 Eve's . . . no, not Eve's, since Eve, to speak the truth,
 Was hardly fallen (our candor might pronounce)
 When simply saying in her own defence
 "The serpent tempted me and I did eat."
 So much of paradisaical nature, Eve's! 850
 Her daughters ever since prefer to urge
 "Adam so starved me I was fain accept
 The apple any serpent pushed my way."
 What an elaborate theory have we here,
 Ingeniously nursed up, pretentiously 855
 Brought forth, pushed forward amid trumpet-blast,
 To account for the thawing of an icicle,
 Show us there needed Ætna vomit flame
 Ere run the crystal into dew-drops! Else,
 How, unless hell broke loose to cause the step, 860
 How could a married lady go astray?
 Bless the fools! And 't is just this way they are blessed,
 And the world wags still, — because fools are sure
 — Oh, not of my wife nor your daughter! No!
 But of their own: the case is altered quite. 865
 Look now, — last week, the lady we all love, —
 Daughter o' the couple we all venerate,
 Wife of the husband we all cap before,
 Mother o' the babes we all breathe blessings on, —
 Was caught in converse with a negro page. 870
 Hell thawed that icicle, else "Why was it —
 Why?" asked and echoed the fools. "Because, you fools. —"
 So did the dame's self answer, she who could,
 With that fine candor only forthcoming
 When 't is no odds whether withheld or no — 875
 "Because my husband was the saint you say,
 And, — with that childish goodness, absurd faith,
 Stupid self-satisfaction, you so praise, —
 Saint to you, insupportable to me.
 Had he, — instead of calling me fine names, 880

Lucretia¹ and Susanna² and so forth,
 And curtaining Correggio carefully
 Lest I be taught that Leda³ had two legs, —
 — But once never so little tweaked my nose
 For peeping through my fan at Carnival, 885
 Confessing thereby 'I have no easy task —
 I need use all my powers to hold you mine,
 And then, — why 't is so doubtful if they serve,
 That — take this, as an earnest of despair!' —
 Why, we were quits: I had wiped the harm away, 890
 Thought 'The man fears me!' and foregone revenge."
 We must not want all this elaborate work
 To solve the problem why young Fancy-and-flesh
 Slips from the dull side of a spouse in years,
 Betakes it to the breast of Brisk-and-bold 895
 Whose love-scrapes furnish talk for all the town!
 Accordingly one word on the other side
 Tips over the piled-up fabric of a tale.
 Guido says — that is, always, his friends say —
 It is unlikely from the wickedness, 900
 That any man treat any woman so.
 The letter in question was her very own,
 Unprompted and unaided: she could write —
 As able to write as ready to sin, or free.
 When there was danger, to deny both facts. 905
 He bids you mark, herself from first to last
 Attributes all the so-styled torture just
 To jealousy, — jealousy of whom but just
 This very Caponsacchi! How suits here
 This with the other alleged motive. Prince? 910
 Would Guido make a terror of the man
 He meant should tempt the woman, as they charge?
 Do you fright your hare that you may catch your hare?
 Consider too, the charge was made and met
 At the proper time and place where proofs were plain — 915
 Heard patiently and disposed of thoroughly
 By the highest powers, possessors of most light,
 The Governor for the law, and the Archbishop
 For the gospel: which acknowledged primacies,
 'T is impudently pleaded, he could warp 920
 Into a tacit partnership with crime —
 He being the while, believe their own account,

¹ *Lucretia*: wife of Collatinus, whose praise of her above the wives of Tarquin and others was proved by finding her spinning at home, while the other wives were found dancing and revelling.

² *Susanna*: wife of Joacim, wrongly accused and condemned to death, but proved innocent by Daniel, and her accusers shown to be the guilty ones. See Apocrypha.

³ *Leda*: Correggio's picture of Leda and the Swan, now in the Berlin Museum.

Impotent, penniless and miserable!
 He further asks — Duke, note the knotty point! —
 How he, — concede him skill to play such part 925
 And drive his wife into a gallant's arms, —
 Could bring the gallant to play his part too
 And stand with arms so opportunely wide?
 How bring this Caponsacchi, — with whom, friends
 And foes alike agree, throughout his life 930
 He never interchanged a civil word
 Nor lifted courteous cap to — him how bend
 To such observancy of beck and call.
 — To undertake this strange and perilous feat
 For the good of Guido, using, as the lure, 935
 Pompilia whom, himself and she avouch,
 He had nor spoken with nor seen, indeed,
 Beyond sight in a public theatre,
 When she wrote letters (she that could not write!)
 The importunate shamelessly-protested love 940
 Which brought him, though reluctant, to her feet,
 And forced on him the plunge which, howsoe'er
 She might swim up i' the whirl, must bury him
 Under abysmal black: a priest contrive
 No better, no amour to be hushed up, 945
 But open flight and noon-day infamy?
 Try and concoct defence for such revolt!
 Take the wife's tale as true, say she was wronged, —
 Pray, in what rubric of breviary
 Do you find it registered — the part of a priest 950
 Is — that to right wrongs from the church he skip,
 Go journeying with a woman that 's a wife,
 And be pursued, o'ertaken and captured . . . how?
 In a lay-dress, playing the kind sentinel
 Where the wife sleeps (says he who best should know) 955
 And sleeping, sleepless, both have spent the night!
 Could no one else be found to serve at need —
 No woman — or if man, no safer sort
 Than this not well-reputed turbulence?
 Then, look into his own account o' the case! 960
 He, being the stranger and astonished one,
 Yet received protestations of her love
 From lady neither known nor cared about:
 Love, so protested, bred in him disgust
 After the wonder, — or incredulity, 965
 Such impudence seeming impossible.
 But, soon assured such impudence might be,
 When he had seen with his own eyes at last
 Letters thrown down to him i' the very street
 From behind lattice where the lady lurked, 970

And read their passionate summons to her side —
 Why then, a thousand thoughts swarmed up and in, —
 How he had seen her once, a moment's space,
 Observed she was both young and beautiful,
 Heard everywhere report she suffered much 975
 From a jealous husband thrice her age, — in short
 There flashed the propriety, expediency
 Of treating, trying might they come to terms,
 — At all events, granting the interview
 Prayed for, one so adapted to assist 980
 Decision as to whether he advance,
 Stand or retire, in his benevolent mood!
 Therefore the interview befell at length;
 And at this one and only interview,
 He saw the sole and single course to take — 985
 Bade her dispose of him, head, heart and hand,
 Did her behest and braved the consequence,
 Not for the natural end, the love of man
 For woman whether love be virtue or vice,
 But, please you, altogether for pity's sake — 990
 Pity of innocence and helplessness!
 And how did he assure himself of both?
 Had he been the house-inmate, visitor,
 Eye-witness of the described martyrdom,
 So, competent to pronounce its remedy 995
 Ere rush on such extreme and desperate course —
 Involving such enormity of harm.
 Moreover, to the husband judged thus, doomed
 And damned without a word in his defence?
 Not he! the truth was felt by instinct here. 1000
 — Process which saves a world of trouble and time.
 There's the priest's story: what do you say to it.
 Trying its truth by your own instinct too.
 Since that's to be the expeditious mode?
 "And now, do hear my version," Guido cries: 1005
 "I accept argument and inference both.
 It would indeed have been miraculous
 Had such a confidency sprung to birth
 With no more fanning from acquaintanceship
 Than here avowed by my wife and this priest. 1010
 Only, it did not: you must substitute
 The old stale unromantic way of fault,
 The commonplace adventure, mere intrigue
 In prose form with the unpoetic tricks.
 Cheatings and lies: they used the hackney chair 1015
 Satan jaunts forth with, shabby and serviceable,
 No gilded gimcrack-novelty from below,
 To bowl you along thither, swift and sure.

That same officious go-between, the wench
 Who gave and took the letters of the two, 1020
 Now offers self and service back to me :
 Bears testimony to visits night by night
 When all was safe, the husband far and away, —
 To many a timely slipping out at large
 By light o' the morning-star, ere he should wake. 1025
 And when the fugitives were found at last,
 Why, with them were found also, to belie
 What protest they might make of innocence,
 All documents yet wanting, if need were,
 To establish guilt in them, disgrace in me — 1030
 The chronicle o' the converse from its rise
 To culmination in this outrage : read!
 Letters from wife to priest, from priest to wife, —
 Here they are, read and say where they chime in
 With the other tale, superlative purity 1035
 O' the pair of saints! I stand or fall by these."

But then on the other side again, — how say
 The pair of saints? That not one word is theirs —
 No syllable o' the batch or writ or sent
 Or yet received by either of the two. 1040
 "Found," says the priest, "because he needed them,
 Failing all other proofs, to prove our fault.
 So, here they are, just as is natural.
 Oh yes — we had our missives, each of us!
 Not these, but to the full as vile, no doubt : 1045
 Hers as from me, — she could not read, so burnt, —
 Mine as from her, — I burnt because I read.
 Who forged and found them? *Cui profuerint!*"¹
 (I take the phrase out of your Highness' mouth)
 "He who would gain by her fault and my fall, 1050
 The trickster, schemer and pretender — he
 Whose whole career was lie entailing lie
 Sought to be sealed truth by the worst lie last!"

Guido rejoins — "Did the other end o' the tale
 Match this beginning! 'T is alleged I prove 1055
 A murderer at the end, a man of force
 Prompt, indiscriminate, effectual : good!
 Then what need all this trifling woman's-work,
 Letters and embassies and weak intrigue,
 When will and power were mine to end at once 1060
 Safely and surely? Murder had come first
 Not last with such a man, assure yourselves!

¹ *Cui profuerint* : whom they might profit.

The silent acquetta,¹ stilling at command —
 A drop a day i' the wine or soup, the dose, —
 The shattering beam that breaks above the bed 1065
 And beats out brains, with nobody to blame
 Except the wormy age which eats even oak. —
 Nay, the staunch steel or trusty cord, — who cares
 I' the blind old palace, a pitfall at each step,
 With none to see, much more to interpose 1070
 O' the two, three, creeping house-dog-servant-things
 Born mine and bred mine? Had I willed gross death,
 I had found nearer paths to thrust him prey
 Than this that goes meandering here and there
 Through half the world and calls down in its course 1075
 Notice and noise. — hate, vengeance, should it fail,
 Derision and contempt though it succeed!
 Moreover, what o' the future son and heir?
 The unborn babe about to be called mine. —
 What end in heaping all this shame on him, 1080
 Were I indifferent to my own black share?
 Would I have tried these crookednesses, say,
 Willing and able to effect the straight? ”

“Ay, would you!” — one may hear the priest retort,
 “Being as you are, i' the stock, a man of guile, 1085
 And ruffianism but an added graft.
 You, a born coward, try a coward's arms,
 Trick and chicane, — and only when these fail
 Does violence follow, and like fox you bite
 Caught out in stealing. Also, the disgrace 1090
 You hardly shrunk at, wholly shrivelled her:
 You plunged her thin white delicate hand i' the flame
 Along with your coarse horny brutish fist,
 Held them a second there, then drew out both
 — Yours roughed a little, hers ruined through and through.
 Your hurt would heal forthwith at ointment's touch — 1096
 Namely, succession to the inheritance
 Which bolder crime had lost you: let things change,
 The birth o' the boy warrant the bolder crime,
 Why, murder was determined, dared and done. 1100
 For me,” the priest proceeds with his reply,
 “The look o' the thing, the chances of mistake,
 All were against me, — that, I knew the first:
 But, knowing also what my duty was,
 I did it: I must look to men more skilled 1105
 In reading hearts than ever was the world.”

¹ *Acquetta*: Aqua Tofana, a poisonous liquid much used in Italy in the seventeenth century.

Highness, decide! Pronounce, Her Excellency!
 Or . . . even leave this argument in doubt,
 Account it a fit matter, taken up
 With all its faces, manifold enough, 1110
 To ponder on — what fronts us, the next stage,
 Next legal process? Guido, in pursuit,
 Coming up with the fugitives at the inn,
 Caused both to be arrested then and there
 And sent to Rome for judgment on the case — 1115
 Thither, with all his armory of proofs,
 Betook himself: 't is there we'll meet him now,
 Waiting the further issue.

Here you smile

“ And never let him henceforth dare to plead, —
 Of all pleas and excuses in the world 1120
 For any deed hereafter to be done, —
 His irrepressible wrath at honor's wound!
 Passion and madness irrepressible?
 “ Why, Count and cavalier, the husband comes
 And catches foe i' the very act of shame! 1125
 There's man to man, — nature must have her way, —
 We look he should have cleared things on the spot.
 Yes, then, indeed — even tho' it prove he erred —
 Though the ambiguous first appearance, mount
 Of solid injury, melt soon to mist, 1130
 Still. — had he slain the lover and the wife —
 Or, since she was a woman and his wife,
 Slain him, but stript her naked to the skin
 Or at best left no more of an attire
 Than patch sufficient to pin paper to, 1135
 Some one love-letter, infamy and all,
 As passport to the Paphos¹ fit for such,
 Safe-conduct to her natural home the stews, —
 Good! One had recognized the power o' the pulse.
 But when he stands, the stock-fish, — sticks to law — 1140
 Offers the hole in his heart, all fresh and warm,
 For scrivener's pen to poke and play about —
 Can stand, can stare, can tell his beads perhaps,
 Oh, let us hear no syllable o' the rage!
 Such rage were a convenient afterthought 1145
 For one who would have shown his teeth belike,
 Exhibited unbridled rage enough,
 Had but the priest been found, as was to hope,
 In serge, not silk, with crucifix, not sword:
 Whereas the gray innocuous grub, of yore, 1150

¹ *Paphos*: Paphos, in Cyprus, was the which was there accompanied by licentious headquarters of the worship of Aphrodite, rites and practices.

Had hatched a hornet, tickle to the touch,
 The priest was metamorphosed into knight.
 And even the timid wife, whose cue was — shriek,
 Bury her brow beneath his trampling foot, —
 She too sprang at him like a pythoiness : 1155
 So, gulp down rage, passion must be postponed,
 Calm be the word! Well, our word is — we brand
 This part o' the business, howsoever the rest
 Befall."

"Nay," interpose as prompt his friends —
 "This is the world's way! So you adjudge reward 1160
 To the forbearance and legality
 Yourselves begin by inculcating — ay,
 Exacting from us all with knife at throat!
 This one wrong more you add to wrong's amount, —
 You publish all, with the kind comment here, 1165
 'Its victim was too cowardly for revenge.'"
 Make it your own case, — you who stand apart!
 The husband wakes one morn from heavy sleep,
 With a taste of poppy in his mouth, — rubs eyes,
 Finds his wife flown, his strong box ransacked too, 1170
 Follows as he best can, overtakes i' the end.
 You bid him use his privilege : well, it seems
 He's scarce cool-blooded enough for the right move —
 Does not shoot when the game were sure, but stands
 Bewildered at the critical minute, — since 1175
 He has the first flash of the fact alone
 To judge from, act with, not the steady lights
 Of after-knowledge, — yours who stand at ease
 To try conclusions : he's in smother and smoke,
 You outside, with explosion at an end : 1180
 The sulphur may be lightning or a squib —
 He'll know in a minute, but till then, he doubts.
 Back from what you know to what he knew not!
 Hear the priest's lofty "I am innocent,"
 The wife's as resolute "You are guilty!" Come! 1185
 Are you not staggered? — pause, and you lose the move!
 Nought left you but a low appeal to law.
 "Coward" tied to your tail for compliment!
 Another consideration : have it your way!
 Admit the worst : his courage failed the Count, 1190
 He's cowardly like the best o' the burgesses
 He's grown incorporate with, — a very cur,
 Kick him from out your circle by all means!
 Why, trundled down this reputable stair,
 Still, the Church-door lies wide to take him in, 1195
 And the Court-porch also : in he sneaks to each, —
 "Yes, I have lost my honor and my wife,

And, being moreover an ignoble hound,
 I dare not jeopardize my life for them!"
 Religion and Law lean forward from their chairs, 1200
 "Well done, thou good and faithful servant!" Ay,
 Not only applaud him that he scorned the world,
 But punish should he dare do otherwise.
 If the case be clear or turbid, — you must say!

Thus, anyhow, it mounted to the stage 1205
 In the law-courts, — let's see clearly from this point!
 Where the priest tells his story true or false,
 And the wife her story, and the husband his,
 All with result as happy as before.

The courts would nor condemn nor yet acquit 1210
 This, that or the other, in so distinct a sense
 As end the strife to either's absolute loss:
 Pronounced, in place of something definite,
 "Each of the parties, whether goat or sheep 1215
 I' the main, has wool to show and hair to hide.

Each has brought somehow trouble, is somehow cause
 Of pains enough, — even though no worse were proved.
 Here is a husband, cannot rule his wife
 Without provoking her to scream and scratch
 And scour the fields, — causelessly, it may be: 1220

Here is that wife, — who makes her sex our plague,
 Wedlock, our bugbear, — perhaps with cause enough:
 And here is the truant priest o' the trio, worst
 Or best — each quality being conceivable.
 Let us impose a little mulct on each. 1225

We punish youth in state of pupilage
 Who talk at hours when youth is bound to sleep,
 Whether the prattle turn upon Saint Rose¹
 Or Donna Olimpia² of the Vatican:
 'T is talk, talked wisely or unwisely talked. 1230

I' the dormitory where to talk at all,
 Transgresses, and is mulct: as here we mean.
 For the wife, — let her betake herself, for rest,
 After her run, to a house of Convertites —
 Keep there, as good as real imprisonment: 1235
 Being sick and tired, she will recover so.
 For the priest, spritely strayer out of bounds,

¹ *Saint Rose*: the Virgin Martyr of Bethlehem who rejected the suit of Hamuel, and therefore was accused by him and condemned to be burned alive, but the flames caught at Hamuel and burned him instead; leaving her unhurt, and her stake budded and bloomed

with red and white roses, "the first that ever any man saw."

² *Olimpia*: the sister-in-law or the niece of Pope Innocent X. (1644) — both bore the name of Olimpia; — but the niece outdid her mother in voluptuousness.

- Well, at such crisis and extreme of straits, — 1330
 The man at bay, buffeted in this wise, —
 Happened the strangest accident of all.
 "Then," sigh friends, "the last feather broke his back,
 Made him forget all possible remedies
 Save one — he rushed to, as the sole relief 1335
 From horror and the abominable thing."
 "Or rather," laugh foes, "then did there befall
 The luckiest of conceivable events,
 Most pregnant with impunity for him,
 Which henceforth turned the flank of all attack, 1340
 And bade him do his wickedest and worst."
 — The wife's withdrawal from the Convertites,
 Visit to the villa where her parents lived,
 And birth there of his babe. Divergence here!
 I simply take the facts, ask what they show. 1345
- First comes this thunderclap of a surprise:
 Then follow all the signs and silences
 Premonitory of earthquake. Paolo first
 Vanished, was swept off somewhere, lost to Rome:
 (Wells dry up, while the sky is sunny and blue). 1350
 Then Guido girds himself for enterprise,
 Hies to Vittiano, counsels with his steward,
 Comes to terms with four peasants young and bold,
 And starts for Rome the Holy, reaches her
 At very holiest, for 't is Christmas Eve, 1355
 And makes straight for the Abate's dried-up font,
 The lodge where Paolo ceased to work the pipes.
 And then, rest taken, observation made
 And plan completed, all in a grim week,
 The five proceed in a body, reach the place. 1360
 — Pietro's, at the Paolina, silent, lone,
 And stupefied by the propitious snow.
 'T is one i' the evening: knock: a voice "Who's there?"
 "Friends with a letter from the priest your friend."
 At the door, straight smiles old Violante's self. 1365
 She falls, — her son-in-law stabs through and through,
 Reaches through her at Pietro — "With your son
 This is the way to settle suits, good sire!"
 He bellows "Mercy for heaven, not for earth!
 Leave to confess and save my sinful soul, 1370
 Then do your pleasure on the body of me!"
 — "Nay, father, soul with body must take its chance!"
 He presently got his portion and lay still.
 And last, Pompilia rushes here and there
 Like a dove among the lightnings in her brake 1375
 Falls also: Guido's, this last husband's-act.

He lifts her by the long dishevelled hair,
 Holds her away at arm's length with one hand,
 While the other tries if life come from the mouth —
 Looks out his whole heart's hate on the shut eyes, 1380
 Draws a deep satisfied breath, "So — dead at last!"
 Throws down the burden on dead Pietro's knees,
 And ends all with "Let us away, my boys!"

And, as they left by one door, in at the other
 Tumbled the neighbors — for the shrieks had pierced 1385
 To the mill and the grange, this cottage and that shed.
 Soon followed the Public Force; pursuit began
 Though Guido had the start and chose the road:
 So, that same night was he, with the other four,
 Overtaken near Baccano, — where they sank 1390
 By the way-side, in some shelter meant for beasts,
 And now lay heaped together, nuzzling swine,
 Each wrapped in bloody cloak, each grasping still
 His unwiped weapon, sleeping all the same
 The sleep o' the just, — a journey of twenty miles 1395
 Brought just and unjust to a level, you see.
 The only one i' the world that suffered aught
 By the whole night's toil and trouble, flight and chase,
 Was just the officer who took them. Head
 O' the Public Force, — Patrizj, zealous soul, 1400
 Who, having but duty to sustain weak flesh,
 Got heated, caught a fever and so died:
 A warning to the over-vigilant.
 — Virtue in a chafe should change her linen quick,
 Lest pleurisy get start of providence. 1405
 (That 's for the Cardinal, and told, I think!)

Well, they bring back the company to Rome
 Says Guido, "By your leave, I fain would ask
 How you found out 't was I who did the deed?
 What put you on my trace, a foreigner, 1410
 Supposed in Arezzo, — and assuredly safe
 Except for an oversight: who told you, pray?"
 "Why, naturally your wife!" Down Guido drops
 O' the horse he rode, — they have to steady and stay,
 At either side the brute that bore him, bound. 1415
 So strange it seemed his wife should live and speak!
 She had prayed — at least so people tell you now —
 For but one thing to the Virgin for herself,
 Not simply, as did Pietro 'mid the stabs, —
 Time to confess and get her own soul saved — 1420
 But time to make the truth apparent, truth
 For God's sake, lest men should believe a lie:

Which seems to have been about the single prayer
 She ever put up, that was granted her.
 With this hope in her head, of telling truth, — 1425
 Being familiarized with pain, beside, —
 She bore the stabbing to a certain pitch
 Without a useless cry, was flung for dead
 On Pietro's lap, and so attained her point.
 Her friends subjoin this — have I done with them? — 1430
 And cite the miracle of continued life
 (She was not dead when I arrived just now)
 As attestation to her probity.

Does it strike your Excellency? Why, your Highness,
 The self-command and even the final prayer, 1435
 Our candor must acknowledge explicable
 As easily by the consciousness of guilt.
 So, when they add that her confession runs
 She was of wifehood one white innocence
 In thought, word, act, from first of her short life 1440
 To last of it; praying, i' the face of death,
 That God forgive her other sins — not this.
 She is charged with and must die for, that she failed
 Anyway to her husband: while thereon
 Comments the old Religious — “So much good, 1445
 Patience beneath enormity of ill,
 I hear to my confusion, woe is me,
 Sinner that I stand, shamed in the walk and gait
 I have practised and grown old in, by a child!” —
 Guido's friends shrug the shoulder, “Just this same 1450
 Prodigious absolute calm in the last hour
 Confirms us, — being the natural result
 Of a life which proves consistent to the close.
 Having braved heaven and deceived earth throughout,
 She braves still and deceives still, gains thereby 1455
 Two ends, she prizes beyond earth or heaven:
 First sets her lover free, imperilled sore
 By the new turn things take: he answers yet
 For the part he played: they have summoned him indeed:
 The past ripped up, he may be punished still: 1460
 What better way of saving him than this?
 Then, — thus she dies revenged to the uttermost
 On Guido, drags him with her in the dark.
 The lower still the better. do you doubt?
 Thus, two ways, does she love her love to the end, 1465
 And hate her hate. — death, hell is no such price
 To pay for these. — lovers and haters hold.”
 But there's another parry for the thrust.
 “Confession,” cry folks — “a confession, think!

TERTIUM

Confession of the moribu
Which of them, my wise
Or the private other we
The private may contz
The acknowledgment
That other public on
However it be, — we
Her Eminence is pe
Can one find nothi
Catastrophe? De
You criticise the c
Maniacal gesture
But who poured
Recall the list of
First cheated in
Rendered anon
By the story, t
The last seal
By the open
Step out of l
What anoth
Mere world
Thinks of j
Guido pref
The court
In virtue '
Where tl
Self-sam
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'D THE BOOK.

that, revenging wrong, ill at first ; the final charge.	
if the case? — ask we.	1520
wants prompt redress ; a week, or now, revenge! ankles worse and worse.	
“ Not this once	1525
ed times rogue : ime? ortal too, ed times,	1530
years, nd worse! le this way,	
	1535
ur arm ubt	
ect. next	1540
ise,	
	1545
	1550
	1555

And, though a dozen follow and reinforce
 The aggressor, wound in front and wound in flank,
 Continues undisturbedly pursuit,
 And only after prostrating his prize
 Turns on the pettier, makes a general prey. 1565
 So Guido rushed against Violante, first
 Author of all his wrongs, *fons et origo*¹
Malorum. — drops first, deluge since, — which done,
 He finished with the rest. Do you blame a bull ?

In truth you look as puzzled as ere I preached! 1570
 How is that? There are difficulties perhaps
 On any supposition, and either side.
 Each party wants too much, claims sympathy
 For its object of compassion, more than just.
 Cry the wife's friends, "O the enormous crime 1575
 Caused by no provocation in the world!"
 "Was not the wife a little weak?" — inquire —
 "Punished extravagantly, if you please,
 But meriting a little punishment?
 One treated inconsiderately, say, 1580
 Rather than one deserving not at all
 Treatment and discipline o' the harsher sort?"
 No, they must have her purity itself,
 Quite angel, — and her parents angels too
 If an aged sort, immaculate, true and deed : 1585
 At all events, so seeming, till the fiend,
 Even Guido, by his folly, forced from them
 The untoward avowal of the trick o' the birth,
 Which otherwise were safe and secret now.
 Why, here you have the awfulest of crimes 1590
 For nothing! Hell broke loose on a butterfly!
 A dragon born of rose-dew and the moon!
 Yet here is the monster! Why he's a mere man —
 Born, bred and brought up in the usual way.
 His mother loves him, still his brothers stick 1595
 To the good fellow of the boyish games ;
 The Governor of his town knows and approves,
 The Archbishop of the place knows and assists :
 Here he has Cardinal This to vouch for the past,
 Cardinal That to trust for the future, — match 1600
 And marriage were a Cardinal's making, — in short,
 What if a tragedy be acted here
 Impossible for malice to improve,
 And innocent Guido with his innocent four
 Be added, all five, to the guilty three, 1605

¹ *Fons et origo Malorum* : the fount and origin of evils.

That we of these last days be edified
With one full taste o' the justice of the world?

The long and the short is, truth seems what I show: —
Undoubtedly no pains ought to be spared
To give the mob an inkling of our lights. 1610
It seems unduly harsh to put the man
To the torture, as I hear the court intends,
Though readiest way of twisting out the truth;
He is noble, and he may be innocent.
On the other hand, if they exempt the man 1615
(As it is also said they hesitate
On the fair ground, presumptive guilt is weak
I' the case of nobility and privilege), —
What crime that ever was, ever will be,
Deserves the torture? Then abolish it! 1620
You see the reduction *ad absurdum*, Sirs?

Her Excellency must pronounce, in fine!
What, she prefers going and joining play?
Her Highness finds it late, intends retire?
I am of their mind: only, all this talk talked, 1625
'T was not for nothing that we talked, I hope?
Both know as much about it, now, at least,
As all Rome: no particular thanks, I beg!
(You'll see, I have not so advanced myself,
After my teaching the two idiots here!) 1630

V.

COUNT GUIDO FRANCESCHINI.

[In Book V. Guido, having confessed to the murder under torture, presents his defence, in the course of which he tells the story from his point of view. He makes the most of the undoubted appearances in his favor, namely, the cheat perpetrated upon him by Violante and the elopement of Pompilia; by putting the worst possible construction upon them, he represents himself as justified in his actions because of the failure on the part of the so-called parents and Pompilia to fulfil their share of the agreement, and as goaded on, finally, when he hears of the birth of a child, to commit the murder as the lawful and only means by which he can vindicate his outraged honor.]

THANKS, Sir, but, should it please the reverend Court,
 I feel I can stand somehow, half sit down
 Without help, make shift to even speak, you see,
 Fortified by the sip of . . . why 't is wine,
 Velletri,¹ — and not vinegar and gall, 5
 So changed and good the times grow! Thanks, kind Sir!
 Oh, but one sip's enough! I want my head
 To save my neck, there's work awaits me still.
 How cautious and considerate . . . aie, aie, aie,
 Nor your fault, sweet Sir! Come, you take to heart 10
 An ordinary matter. Law is law.
 Noblemen were exempt, the vulgar thought,
 From racking; but, since law thinks otherwise,
 I have been put to the rack: all's over now,
 And neither wrist — what men style, out of joint: 15
 If any harm be, 't is the shoulder-blade,
 The left one, that seems wrong i' the socket, — Sirs,
 Much could not happen, I was quick to faint,
 Being past my prime of life, and out of health.
 In short, I thank you, — yes, and mean the word. 20
 Needs must the Court be slow to understand
 How this quite novel form of taking pain,
 This getting tortured merely in the flesh,
 Amounts to almost an agreeable change
 In my case, me fastidious, plied too much 25
 With opposite treatment, used (forgive the joke)
 To the rasp-tooth toying with this brain of mine,
 And, in and out my heart, the play o' the probe.

¹ *Velletri*: wine made at Velletri, whose volcanic soil was especially favorable for vine culture.

Four years have I been operated on
 I' the soul, do you see — its tense or tremulous part — 30
 My self-respect, my care for a good name,
 Pride in an old one. love of kindred — just
 A mother, brothers, sisters, and the like,
 That looked up to my face when days were dim,
 And fancied they found light there — no one spot, 35
 Foppishly sensitive, but has paid its pang.
 That, and not this you now oblige me with,
 That was the Vigil-torment,¹ if you please!
 The poor old noble House that drew the rags
 O' the Franceschini's once superb array 40
 Close round her, hoped to slink unchallenged by, —
 Pluck off these ! Turn the drapery inside out
 And teach the tittering town how scarlet wears!
 Show men the lucklessness, the improvidence
 Of the easy-natured Count before this Count, 45
 The father I have some slight feeling for,
 Who let the world slide, nor foresaw that friends
 Then proud to cap and kiss their patron's shoe,
 Would, when the purse he left held spider-webs,
 Properly push his child to wall one day! 50
 Mimic the tetchy humor, furtive glance,
 And brow where half was furious, half fatigued,
 O' the same son got to be of middle age,
 Sour, saturnine, — your humble servant here, —
 When things go cross and the young wife, he finds 55
 Take to the window at a whistle's bid,
 And yet demurs thereon, preposterous fool ! —
 Whereat the worthies judge he wants advice
 And beg to civilly ask what 's evil here,
 Perhaps remonstrate on the habit they deem 60
 He 's given unduly to, of beating her :
 . . . Oh, sure he beats her — why says John so else,
 Who is cousin to George who is sib² to Tecla's self
 Who cooks the meal and combs the lady's hair?
 What ! 'T is my wrist you merely dislocate 65
 For the future when you mean me martyrdom?
 — Let the old mother's economy alone,
 How the brocade-strips saved o' the seamy side
 O' the wedding-gown buy raiment for a year ?
 — How she can dress and dish up — lordly dish 70
 Fit for a duke, lamb's head and purtenance —
 With her proud hands, feast household so a week?
 No word o' the wine rejoicing God and man
 The less when three-parts water? Then, I say,

¹ *Vigil-torment* : see note, I. 972.

² *Sib* : see note, II. 509.

A trifle of torture to the flesh, like yours, While soul is spared such foretaste of hell-fire, Is naught. But I curtail the catalogue Through policy, — a rhetorician's trick, — Because I would reserve some choicer points O' the practice, more exactly parallel (Having an eye to climax) with what gift, Eventual grace the Court may have in store I' the way of plague — what crown of punishments. When I am hanged or headed, ¹ time enough	75
To prove the tenderness of only that, Mere heading, hanging, — not their counterpart, Not demonstration public and precise That I, having married the mongrel of a drab, Am bound to grant that mongrel-brat, my wife, Her mother's birthright-license as is just, — Let her sleep undisturbed, i' the family style, Her sleep out in the embraces of a priest, Nor disallow their bastard as my heir! Your sole mistake. — dare I submit so much To the reverend Court? — has been in all this pains	80
To make a stone roll down hill, — rack and wrench And rend a man to pieces, all for what? Why — make him ope mouth in his own defence, Show cause for what he has done, the irregular deed, (Since that he did it, scarce dispute can be)	85
And clear his fame a little, beside the luck Of stopping even yet, if possible, Discomfort to his flesh from noose or axe — For that, out come the implements of law! May it content my lords the gracious Court To listen only half so patient-long	90
As I will in that sense profusely speak, And — fie, they shall not call in screws to help! I killed Pompilia Franceschini, Sirs; Killed too the Comparini, husband, wife, Who called themselves, by a notorious lie, Her father and her mother to ruin me. There's the irregular deed: you want no more Than right interpretation of the same, And truth so far — am I to understand?	95
To that then, with convenient speed, — because Now I consider, — yes, despite my boast, There is an ailing in this omoplat ² May clip my speech all too abruptly short, Whatever the good-will in me. Now for truth!	100
	105
	110
	115
	120

¹ *Headed*: old form of beheaded.² *Omoplat*: shoulder-blade

I' the name of the indivisible Trinity!
 Will my lords, in the plenitude of their light,
 Weigh well that all this trouble has come on me
 Through my persistent treading in the paths
 Where I was trained to go, — wearing that yoke 125
 My shoulder was predestined to receive,
 Born to the hereditary stoop and crease?
 Noble, I recognized my nobler still,
 The Church, my suzerain; no mock-mistress, she;
 The secular owned the spiritual: mates of mine 130
 Have thrown their careless hoofs up at her call
 "Forsake the clover and come drag my wain!"
 There they go cropping: I protruded nose
 To halter, bent my back of docile beast,
 And now am wheeled.¹ one wide wound all of me, 135
 For being found at the eleventh hour o' the day
 Padding the mill-track, not neck-deep in grass:
 — My one fault, I am stiffened by my work,
 — My one reward, I help the Court to smile!

I am representative of a great line, 140
 One of the first of the old families
 In Arezzo, ancientest of Tuscan towns.
 When my worst foe is fain to challenge this,
 His worst exception runs — not first in rank
 But second, noble in the next degree 145
 Only; not malice' self maligns me more.
 So, my lord opposite has composed, we know,
 A marvel of a book, sustains the point
 That Francis² boasts the primacy 'mid saints;
 Yet not inaptly hath his argument 150
 Obtained response from yon my other lord
 In thesis published with the world's applause
 — Rather 't is Dominic³ such post befits:
 Why, at the worst, Francis stays Francis still,
 Second in rank to Dominic it may be, 155
 Still, very saintly, very like our Lord;
 And I at least descend from Guido once
 Homager⁴ to the Empire, nought below —
 Of which account as proof that, none o' the line
 Having a single gift beyond brave blood, 160
 Or able to do ought but give, give, give
 In blood and brain, in house and land and cash,
 Not get and garner as the vulgar may,

¹ *Wheeled*: marked by strokes

² *Francis*: St. Francis of Assisi, founder
 of the order of Franciscans, 1182-1226.

³ *Dominic*: St. Dominic, founder of the
 order of Dominicans, 1170-1221.

⁴ *Homager*: one who holds lands subject
 to homage.

We became poor as Francis or our Lord.
 Be that as it likes you, Sirs. — whenever it chanced 165
 Myself grew capable anyway of remark.
 (Which was soon — penury makes wit premature)
 This struck me, I was poor who should be rich
 Or pay that fault to the world which trifles not
 When lineage lacks the flag yet lifts the pole : 170
 On, therefore, I must move forthwith, transfer
 My stranded self, born fish with gill and fin
 Fit for the deep sea, now left flap bare-backed
 In slush and sand, a show to crawlers vile
 Reared of the low-tide and aright therein. 175
 The enviable youth with the old name,
 Wide chest, stout arms, sound brow and pricking veins,
 A heartful of desire, man's natural load,
 A brainful of belief, the noble's lot, —
 All this life, cramped and gasping, high and dry 180
 I' the wave's retreat, — the misery, good my lords,
 Which made you merriment at Rome of late, —
 It made me reason, rather — muse, demand
 — Why our bare dropping palace, in the street
 Where such-an-one whose grandfather sold tripe 185
 Was adding to his purchased pile a fourth
 Tall tower, could hardly show a turret sound?
 Why Countess Beatrice, whose son I am,
 Cowered in the winter-time as she spun flax,
 Blew on the earthen basket of live ash, 190
 Instead of jaunting forth in coach and six
 Like such-another widow who ne'er was wed?
 I asked my fellows, how came this about?
 " Why, Jack, the suttler's child, perhaps the camp's,
 Went to the wars, fought sturdily, took a town 195
 And got rewarded as was natural.
 She of the coach and six — excuse me there!
 Why, don't you know the story of her friend?
 A clown dressed vines on somebody's estate,
 His boy recoiled from muck, liked Latin more, 200
 Stuck to his pen and got to be a priest.
 Till one day . . . don't you mind that telling tract
 Against Molinos, the old Cardinal wrote? ¹
 He penned and dropped it in the patron's desk
 Who, deep in thought and absent much of mind, 205
 Licensed the thing, allowed it for his own ;
 Quick came promotion, — *suum cuique*,² Count!

¹ *Tract against Molinos* : probably imaginary. Cardinal Cibo, Secretary of State to Pope Innocent XI., wrote in 1686 a tract re-

hearsing and confuting the main propositions of Molinos.

² *Suum cuique* : let each have his own.

Oh, he can pay for coach and six, be sure!"
 "— Well, let me go, do likewise: war's the word —
 That way the Franceschini worked at first, 210
 I'll take my turn, try soldiership." — "What, you?
 The eldest son and heir and prop o' the house,
 So do you see your duty? Here's your post,
 Hard by the hearth and altar. (Roam from roof,
 This youngster, play the gipsy out of doors, 215
 And who keeps kith and kin that fall on us?)
 Stand fast, stick tight, conserve your gods at home!"
 "— Well then, the quiet course, the contrary trade!
 We had a cousin amongst us once was Pope,
 And minor glories manifold. Try the Church, 220
 The tonsure, and, — since heresy's but half-slain
 Even by the Cardinal's tract he thought he wrote. —
 Have at Molinos!" — "Have at a fool's head!
 You a priest? How were marriage possible?
 There must be Franceschini till time ends — 225
 That's your vocation. Make your brothers priests,
 Paul shall be porporate,¹ and Girolamo step
 Red-stockinged in the presence when you choose,
 But save one Franceschini for the age!
 Be not the vine but dig and dung its root, 230
 Be not a priest but gird up priesthood's loins,
 With one foot in Arezzo stride to Rome,
 Spend yourself there and bring the purchase back!
 Go hence to Rome, be guided!"

So I was.

I turned alike from the hill-side zig-zag thread 235
 Of way to the table-land a soldier takes,
 Alike from the low-lying pasture-place
 Where churchmen graze, recline and ruminant,
 — Ventured to mount no platform like my lords
 Who judge the world, bear brain I dare not brag — 240
 But stationed me, might thus the expression serve,
 As who should fetch and carry, come and go,
 Meddle and make i' the cause my lords love most —
 The public weal, which hangs to the law, which holds
 By the Church, which happens to be through God himself. 245
 Humbly I helped the Church till here I stand, —
 Or would stand but for the omoplat, you see!
 Bidden qualify for Rome, I, having a field,
 Went, sold it, laid the sum at Peter's foot:
 Which means — I settled home-accounts with speed, 250
 Set apart just a modicum should suffice

¹ *Porporate*: wearing purple, the color of a cardinal.

To hold the villa's head above the waves
 Of weed inundating its oil and wine,
 And prop roof, stanchion wall o' the palace so
 As to keep breath i' the body, out of heart 255
 Amid the advance of neighboring loftiness —
 (People like building where they used to beg) —
 Till succored one day, — shared the residue
 Between my mother and brothers and sisters there,
 Black-eyed babe Donna This and Donna That, 260
 As near to starving as might decently be,
 — Left myself journey-charges, change of suit,
 A purse to put i' the pocket of the Groom
 O' the Chamber of the patron, and a glove
 With a ring to it for the digits of the niece 265
 Sure to be helpful in his household, — then
 Started for Rome, and led the life prescribed.
 Close to the Church, though clean of it, I assumed
 Three or four orders of no consequence,
 — They cast out evil spirits and exorcise, 270
 For example; bind a man to nothing more,
 Give clerical savor to his layman's-salt,
 Facilitate his claim to loaf and fish
 Should miracle leave, beyond what feeds the flock,
 Fragments to brim the basket of a friend — 275
 While, for the world's sake, I rode, danced and gamed,
 Quitted me like a courtier, measured mine
 With whatsoever blade had fame in fence,
 — Ready to let the basket go its round
 Even though my turn was come to help myself, 280
 Should Dives count on me at dinner-time
 As just the understander of a joke
 And not immoderate in repartee.
*Utrique sic paratus.*¹ Sirs, I said,
 "Here," (in the fortitude of years fifteen, 285
 So good a pedagogue is penury)
 "Here wait, do service, — serving and to serve!
 And, in due time, I nowise doubt at all,
 The recognition of my service comes.
 Next year I'm only sixteen. I can wait." 290

I waited thirty years, may it please the Court :
 Saw meanwhile many a denizen o' the dung
 Hop, skip, jump o'er my shoulder, make him wings
 And fly aloft, — succeed, in the usual phrase.
 Every one soon or late comes round by Rome : 295
 Stand still here, you 'll see all in turn succeed.

¹ *Utrique sic paratus* : thus prepared for either.

Why, look you, so and so, the physician here,
 My father's lacquey's son we sent to school,
 Doctored and dosed this Eminence and that, 300
 Salved the last Pope his certain obstinate sore,
 Soon bought land as became him. names it now :
 I grasp bell at his griffin-guarded gate,
 Traverse the half-mile avenue, — a term,¹
 A cypress, and a statue, three and three. —
 Deliver message from my Monsignor, 305
 With varletry at lounge i' the vestibule
 I 'm barred from who bear mud upon my shoe.
 My father's chaplain's nephew. Chamberlain. —
 Nothing less, please you! — courteous all the same,
 — He does not see me though I wait an hour 310
 At his staircase-landing 'twixt the brace of busts,
 A noseless Sylla. Marius² maimed to match.
 My father gave him for a hexastich³
 Made on my birthday, — but he sends me down,
 To make amends, that relic I prize most — 315
 The unburnt end o' the very candle. Sirs,
 Purfled⁴ with paint so prettily round and round,
 He carried in such state last Peter's-day, —
 In token I, his gentleman and squire,
 Had held the bridle, walked his managed mule 320
 Without a tittup⁵ the procession through.
 Nay, the official, — one you know, sweet lords! —
 Who drew the warrant for my transfer late
 To the New Prisons⁶ from Tordinona,⁷ — he
 Graciously had remembrance — “Francesc . . . ha? 325
 His sire, now — how a thing shall come about! —
 Paid me a dozen florins above the fee,
 For drawing deftly up a deed of sale
 When troubles fell so thick on him, good heart,
 And I was prompt and pushing! By all means! 330
 At the New Prisons be it his son shall lie, —
 Anything for an old friend!” and thereat
 Signed name with triple flourish underneath.
 These were my fellows, such their fortunes now,
 While I — kept fasts and feasts innumerable, 335
 Matins and vespers, functions to no end

¹ *Term*: a figure of Terminus, the god of boundaries, consisting of a bust ending in a rectangular pedestal.

² *Sylla, Marius*: Roman generals.

³ *Hexastich*: stanza of six lines.

⁴ *Purfled*: decorated.

⁵ *Tittup*: a skittish prance or canter.

⁶ *New Prisons*: built by Innocent X., were the first prisons on the cellular system in Europe

⁷ *Tordinona*: Tower of Nona, used as a prison, and destroyed in 1690; therefore Guido could not have been imprisoned in it.

I' the train of Monsignor and Eminence,
 As gentleman-squire, and for my zeal's reward
 Have rarely missed a place at the table-foot
 Except when some Ambassador, or such like, 340
 Brought his own people. Brief, one day I felt
 The tick of time inside me, turning-point
 And slight sense there was now enough of this :
 That I was near my seventh climacteric,
 Hard upon, if not over, the middle life. 345
 And although fed by the east-wind, fulsome-fine
 With foretaste of the Land of Promise, still
 My gorge gave symptom it might play me false ;
 Better not press it further, — be content
 With living and dying only a nobleman, 350
 Who merely had a father great and rich,
 Who simply had one greater and richer yet,
 And so on back and back till first and best
 Began i' the night ; I finish in the day.
 " The mother must be getting old," I said ; 355
 " The sisters are well wedded away, our name
 Can manage to pass a sister off, at need,
 And do for dowry ; both my brothers thrive —
 Regular priests they are, nor, bat-like, 'bide
 'Twixt flesh and fowl with neither privilege. 360
 My spare revenue must keep me and mine.
 I am tired : Arezzo's air is good to breathe ;
 Vittiano, — one limes¹ flocks of thrushes there ;
 A leathern coat costs little and lasts long :
 Let me bid hope good-bye, content at home!" 365
 Thus, one day, I disbosomed me and bowed.
 Whereat began the little buzz and thrill
 O' the gazers round me ; each face brightened up :
 As when at your Casino, deep in dawn,
 A gamester says at last, " I play no more, 370
 Forego gain, acquiesce in loss, withdraw
 Anyhow : " and the watchers of his ways,
 A trifle struck compunctious at the word,
 Yet sensible of relief, breathe free once more,
 Break up the ring, venture polite advice — 375
 " How, Sir? So scant of heart and hope indeed?
 Retire with neither cross nor pile from play? —
 So incurious, so short-casting? — give your chance
 To a younger, stronger, bolder spirit belike,
 Just when luck turns and the fine throw sweeps all?" 380
 Such was the chorus : and its good-will meant —
 " See that the loser leave door handsomely!

¹ *Limes* : 'ensnares.

There's an ill look, — it's sinister, spoils sport,
 When an old bruised and battered year-by-year
 Fighter with fortune, not a penny in poke, 385
 Reels down the steps of our establishment
 And staggers on broad daylight and the world,
 In shagrag beard and doleful doublet, drops
 And breaks his heart on the outside: people prate
 'Such is the profit of a trip upstairs!' 390
 Contrive he sidle forth, baulked of the blow
 Best dealt by way of moral, bidding down
 No curse but blessings rather on our heads
 For some poor prize he bears at tattered breast,
 Some palpable sort of kind of good to set 395
 Over and against the grievance: give him quick!"
 Whereon protested Paul, "Go hang yourselves!
 Leave him to me. Count Guido and brother of mine,
 A word in your ear! Take courage, since faint heart
 Ne'er won . . . aha, fair lady, don't men say? 400
 There's a *sors*,¹ there's a right Virgilian dip!²
 Do you see the happiness o' the hint? At worst,
 If the Church want no more of you, the Court
 No more, and the Camp as little, the ingrates, — come,
 Count you are counted: still you've coat to back, 405
 Not cloth of gold and tissue, as we hoped,
 But cloth with sparks and spangles on its frieze
 From Camp, Court, Church, enough to make a shine,
 Entitle you to carry home a wife
 With the proper dowry, let the worst betide! 410
 Why, it was just a wife you meant to take!"

Now, Paul's advice was weighty: priests should know:
 And Paul apprised me, ere the week was out,
 That Pietro and Violante, the easy pair,
 The cits enough, with stomach to be more, 415
 Had just the daughter and exact the sum
 To truck³ for the quality of myself: "She's young,
 Pretty and rich: you're noble, classic, choice.
 Is it to be a match?" "A match," said I.
 Done! He proposed all, I accepted all, 420
 And we performed all. So I said and did
 Simply. As simply followed, not at first
 But with the outbreak of misfortune, still
 One comment on the saying and doing — "What?
 No blush at the avowal you dared buy 425

¹ *Sors*: lot.³ *Truck*: exchange.

² *There's a right Virgilian dip!* the Romans used to open their Virgil at random for guidance.

A girl of age beseems your granddaughter,
Like ox or ass? Are flesh and blood a ware?
Are heart and soul a chattel?"

Softly, Sirs!

Will the Court of its charity teach poor me
Anxious to learn, of any way i' the world, 430
Allowed by custom and convenience, save
This same which, taught from my youth up, I trod?
Take me along with you; where was the wrong step?
If what I gave in barter, style and state
And all that hangs to Franceschinihood, 435
Were worthless, — why, society goes to ground,
Its rules are idiot's-rambling. Honor of birth, —
If that thing has no value, cannot buy
Something with value of another sort,
You've no reward nor punishment to give 440
I' the giving or the taking honor; straight
Your social fabric, pinnacle to base,
Comes down a-clatter, like a house of cards.
Get honor, and keep honor free from flaw,
Aim at still higher honor, — gabble o' the goose! 445
Go bid a second blockhead like myself
Spend fifty years in guarding bubbles of breath,
Soapsuds with air i' the belly, gilded brave,
Guarded and guided, all to break at touch
O' the first young girl's hand and first old fool's purse! 450
All my privation and endurance, all
Love, loyalty and labor dared and did,
Fiddle-de-dee! — why, doer and darer both, —
Count Guido Franceschini had hit the mark
Far better, spent his life with more effect, 455
As a dancer or a prizier, trades that pay!
On the other hand, bid this buffoonery cease,
Admit that honor is a privilege,
The question follows, privilege worth what?
Why, worth the market-price, — now up, now down, 460
Just so with this as with all other ware:
Therefore essay the market, sell your name,
Style and condition to who buys them best!
"Does my name purchase," had I dared inquire,
"Your niece, my lord?" there would have been rebuff 465
Though courtesy, your Lordship cannot else —
"Not altogether! Rank for rank may stand:
But I have wealth beside, you — poverty;
Your scale flies up there: bid a second bid
Rank too and wealth too!" Reasoned like yourself! 470
But was it to you I went with goods to sell?

This time 't was my scale quietly kissed the ground,
 Mere rank against mere wealth — some youth beside,
 Some beauty too, thrown into the bargain, just
 As the buyer likes or lets alone. I thought 475
 To deal o' the square: others find fault, it seems:
 The thing is, those my offer most concerned,
 Pietro, Violante, cried they fair or foul?
 What did they make o' the terms? Preposterous terms?
 Why then accede so promptly, close with such 480
 Nor take a minute to chaffer? Bargain struck,
 They straight grew bilious, wished their money back,
 Repented them, no doubt: why, so did I,
 So did your Lordship, if town-talk be true,
 Of paying a full farm's worth for that piece 485
 By Pietro of Cortona¹ — probably
 His scholar *Ciro Ferri*² may have retouched —
 You caring more for color than design —
 Getting a little tired of cupids too.
 That 's incident to all the folk who buy! 490
 I am charged, I know, with gilding fact by fraud;
 I falsified and fabricated, wrote
 Myself down roughly richer than I prove,
 Rendered a wrong revenue, — grant it all!
 Mere grace, mere coquetry such fraud, I say: 495
 A flourish round the figures of a sum
 For fashion's sake, that deceives nobody.
 The veritable backbone, understood
 Essence of this same bargain, blank and bare,
 Being the exchange of quality for wealth, — 500
 What may such fancy-flights be? Flecks of oil
 Flirted by chapmen where plain dealing grates.
 I may have dripped a drop — "My name I sell;
 Not but that I too boast my wealth" — as they,
 " — We bring you riches; still our ancestor 505
 Was hardly the rapsallion folk saw flogged,
 But heir to we know who, were rights of force!"
 They knew and I knew where the backbone lurked
 I' the writhings of the bargain, lords, believe!
 I paid down all engaged for, to a doit, 510
 Delivered them just that which, their life long,
 They hungered in the hearts of them to gain —
 Incorporation with nobility thus
 In word and deed: for that they gave me wealth.
 But when they came to try their gain, my gift, 515
 Quit Rome and qualify for Arezzo, take

¹ *Pietro of Cortona*: mainly a scenic and fresco painter, 1596-1669.

² *Ciro Ferri*: a pupil of Cortona who imitated his master, 1634-1689.

The tone o' the new sphere that absorbed the old,
 Put away gossip Jack and goody Joan
 And go become familiar with the Great,
 Greatness to touch and taste and handle now. — 520
 Why then, — they found that all was vanity,
 Vexation, and what Solomon describes!
 The old abundant city-fare was best,
 The kindly warmth o' the commons, the glad clap
 Of the equal on the shoulder, the frank grin 525
 Of the underling at all so many spoons
 Fire-new at neighborly treat, — best, best and best
 Beyond compare! — down to the loll itself
 O' the pot-house settle, — better such a bench
 Than the stiff crucifixion by my dais 530
 Under the piecemeal damask canopy
 With the coroneted coat of arms a-top!
 Poverty and privation for pride's sake,
 All they engaged to easily brave and bear, —
 With the fit upon them and their brains a-work, — 535
 Proved unendurable to the sobered sots.
 A banished prince, now, will exude a juice
 And salamander-like support the flame :
 He dines on chestnuts, chucks the husks to help
 The broil o' the brazier, pays the due baioc,¹ 540
 Goes off light-hearted : his grimace begins
 At the funny humors of the christening-feast
 Of friend the money-lender, — then he's touched
 By the flame and frizzles at the babe to kiss!
 Here was the converse trial, opposite mind : 545
 Here did a petty nature split on rock
 Of vulgar wants predestinate for such —
 One dish at supper and weak wine to boot!
 The prince had grinned and borne : the citizen shrieked,
 Summoned the neighborhood to attest the wrong, 550
 Made noisy protest he was murdered, — stoned
 And burned and drowned and hanged. — then broke away,
 He and his wife, to tell their Rome the rest.
 And this you admire, you men o' the world, my lords?
 This moves compassion, makes you doubt my faith? 555
 Why, I appeal to . . . sun and moon? Not I!
 Rather to Plautus,² Terence,³ Boccaccio's Book,⁴
 My townsman, frank Ser Franco's merry Tales, — ⁵

¹ *Baioc* : about a halfpenny

² *Plautus* : a famous comic poet of Rome, died 184 B.C.

³ *Terence* : celebrated dramatist, writer of comedies, died 159 B.C.

⁴ *Boccaccio's Book* : "Decameron" (1313-1375).

⁵ *Ser Franco* : apparently Franco Sacchetti, who lived about 1335-1410, author of stories in the manner of Boccaccio. Petrarch,

To all who strip a vizard from a face,
 A body from its padding, and a soul 560
 From froth and ignorance it styles itself, —
 If this be other than the daily hap
 Of purblind greed that dog-like still drops bone,
 Grasps shadow, and then howls the case is hard!

So much for them so far: now for myself, 565
 My profit or loss i' the matter: married am I:
 Text whereon friendly censors burst to preach.
 Ay, at Rome even, long ere I was left
 To regulate her life for my young bride
 Alone at Arezzo, friendliness outbroke 570
 (Sifting my future to predict its fault)
 "Purchase and sale being thus so plain a point,
 How of a certain soul bound up, may-be,
 I' the barter with the body and money-bags?
 From the bride's soul what is it you expect?" 575
 Why, loyalty and obedience, — wish and will
 To settle and suit her fresh and plastic mind
 To the novel, not disadvantageous mould!
 Father and mother shall the woman leave,
 Cleave to the husband, be it for weal or woe: 580
 There is the law: what sets this law aside
 In my particular case? My friends submit
 "Guide, guardian, benefactor, — fee, faw, fum,
 The fact is you are forty-five years old,
 Nor very comely even for that age: 585
 Girls must have boys." Why, let girls say so then,
 Nor call the boys and men, who say the same,
 Brute this and beast the other as they do!
 Come, cards on table! When you chaunt us next
 Epithalamium full to overflow 590
 With praise and glory of white womanhood,
 The chaste and pure — troll no such lies o'er lip!
 Put in their stead a crudity or two.
 Such short and simple statement of the case
 As youth chalks on our walls at spring of year! 595
 No! I shall still think nobler of the sex,
 Believe a woman still may take a man
 For the short period that his soul wears flesh,
 And, for the soul's sake, understand the fault
 Of armor frayed by fighting. Tush, it tempts 600
 One's tongue too much! I'll say — the law's the law:
 With a wife I look to find all wifeliness,

to whom the term "townsman" better applies Florentine), wrote nothing that can be de-
 (since Sacchetti, though a Tuscan, was a scribed as "merry tales."

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

Such was the pact: Pompilia from the first
Broke it, refused from the beginning day
Either in body or soul to cleave to mine,
And published it forthwith to all the world.
No rupture, — you must join ere you can break, —
Before we had cohabited a month
She found I was a devil and no man, —
Made common cause with those who found as much.
Her parents, Pietro and Violante, — moved
Heaven and earth to the rescue of all three.
In four months' time, the time o' the parents' stay,
Arezzo was a-ringing, bells in a blaze,
With the unimaginable story rife
I' the mouth of man, woman and child — to-wit
My misdemeanor. First the lighter side,
Ludicrous face of things, — how very poor
The Franceschini had become at last,
The meanness and the misery of each shift
To save a soldo,¹ stretch and make ends meet.
Next, the more hateful aspect, — how myself
With cruelty beyond Caligula's²
Had stripped and beaten, robbed and murdered them,
The good old couple, I decoyed, abused,
Plundered and then cast out, and happily so,
Since, — in due course the abominable comes, —
Woe worth the poor young wife left lonely here!
Repugnant in my person as my mind,
I sought, — was ever heard of such revenge?
— To lure and bind her to so cursed a couch,
Such co-embrace with sulphur, snake and toad,
That she was fain to rush forth, call the stones
O' the common street to save her, not from hate
Of mine merely, but . . . must I burn my lips
With the blister of the lie? . . . the satyr-love
Of whom but my own brother, the young priest,
Too long enforced to lenten fare belike,
Now tempted by the morsel tossed him full
I' the trencher where lay bread and herbs at best.
Mark, this yourselves say! — this, none disallows,
Was charged to me by the universal voice
At the instigation of my four-months' wife! —
And then you ask "Such charges so preferred,

¹ *Soldo* : about a penny.

² *Caligula* : a Roman emperor, celebrated
for his cruelties, murdered A.D. 41.

(Truly or falsely, here concerns us not)
 Pricked you to punish now if not before? —
 Did not the harshness double itself, the hate
 Harden?" I answer "Have it your way and will!" 650
 Say my resentment grew apace: what then?
 Do you cry out on the marvel? When I find
 That pure smooth egg which, laid within my nest,
 Could not but hatch a comfort to us all,
 Issues a cockatrice for me and mine, 655
 Do you stare to see me stamp on it? Swans are soft:
 Is it not clear that she you call my wife,
 That any wife of any husband, caught
 Whetting a sting like this against his breast, —
 Speckled with fragments of the fresh-broke shell, 660
 Married a month and making outcry thus, —
 Proves a plague-prodigy to God and man?
 She married: what was it she married for,
 Counted upon and meant to meet thereby?
 "Love" suggests some one, "love, a little word 665
 Whereof we have not heard one syllable."
 So, the Pompilia, child, girl, wife, in one,
 Wanted the beating pulse, the rolling eye,
 The frantic gesture, the devotion due
 From Thyrsis¹ to Neæra!² Guido's love — 670
 Why not Provençal roses in his shoe,
 Plume to his cap, and trio of guitars
 At casement, with a bravo close beside?
 Good things all these are, clearly claimable
 When the fit price is paid the proper way. 675
 Had it been some friend's wife, now, threw her fan
 At my foot, with just this pretty scrap attached,
 "Shame, death, damnation — fall these as they may,
 So I find you, for a minute! Come this eve!"
 — Why, at such sweet self-sacrifice, — who knows? 680
 I might have fired up, found me at my post,
 Ardent from head to heel, nor feared catch cough.
 Nay, had some other friend's . . . say, daughter, tripped
 Upstairs and tumbled flat and frank on me,
 Bareheaded and barefooted, with loose hair 685
 And garments all at large, — cried "Take me thus!
 Duke So-and-So, the greatest man in Rome —
 To escape his hand and heart have I broke bounds,
 Traversed the town and reached you!" — then, indeed,
 The lady had not reached a man of ice! 690
 I would have rummaged, ransacked at the word

¹ *Thyrsis*: a young Arcadian shepherd in Virgil's Seventh Eclogue.

² *Neæra*: a country maid mentioned in Virgil's Eclogues III. and V.

Those old odd corners of an empty heart
 For remnants of dim love the long disused,
 And dusty crumbings of romance! But here,
 We talk of just a marriage, if you please — 695
 The every-day conditions and no more ;
 Where do these bind me to bestow one drop
 Of blood shall dye my wife's true-love-knot pink?
 Pompilia was no pigeon, Venus' pet,
 That shuffled from between her pressing paps 700
 To sit on my rough shoulder, — but a hawk,
 I bought at a hawk's price and carried home
 To do hawk's service — at the Rotunda, say,
 Where, six o' the callow nestlings in a row,
 You pick and choose and pay the price for such. 705
 I have paid my pound, await my penny's worth,
 So, hoodwink, starve and properly train my bird,
 And, should she prove a haggard, — twist her neck!
 Did I not pay my name and style, my hope
 And trust, my all? Through spending these amiss 710
 I am here! 'T is scarce the gravity of the Court
 Will blame me that I never piped a tune,
 Treated my falcon-gentle like my finch.
 The obligation I incurred was just
 To practise mastery, prove my mastership: — 715
 Pompilia's duty was — submit herself,
 Afford me pleasure, perhaps cure my bile.
 Am I to teach my lords what marriage means,
 What God ordains thereby and man fulfils
 Who, docile to the dictate, treads the house? 720
 My lords have chosen the happier part with Paul
 And neither marry nor burn, — yet priestliness
 Can find a parallel to the marriage-bond
 In its own blessed special ordinance
 Whereof indeed was marriage made the type: 725
 The Church may show her insubordinate,
 As marriage her refractory. How of the Monk
 Who finds the claustral regimen too sharp
 After the first month's essay? What 's the mode
 With the Deacon who supports indifferently 730
 The rod o' the Bishop when he tastes its smart
 Full four weeks? Do you straightway slacken hold
 Of the innocents, the all-unwary ones
 Who, eager to profess, mistook their mind? —
 Remit a fast-day's rigor to the Monk 735
 Who fancied Francis' manna¹ meant roast quails. —
 Concede the Deacon sweet society,

¹ *Francis' manna*: the Franciscans depended upon alms for their food and living.

He never thought the Levite-rule¹ renounced, —
 Or rather prescribe short chain and sharp scourge
 Corrective of such peccant humors? This — 740
 I take to be the Church's mode, and mine.
 If I was over-harsh, — the worse i' the wife
 Who did not win from harshness as she ought,
 Wanted the patience and persuasion, lore
 Of love, should cure me and console herself. 745
 Put case that I mishandle, flurry and fright
 My hawk through clumsiness in sportsmanship,
 Twitch out five pens where plucking one would serve —
 What, shall she bite and claw to mend the case?
 And, if you find I pluck five more for that, 750
 Shall you weep "How he roughs the turtle there?"

Such was the starting; now of the further step.
 In lieu of taking penance in good part,
 The Monk, with hue and cry, summons a mob
 To make a bonfire of the convent, say, — 755
 And the Deacon's pretty piece of virtue (save
 The ears o' the Court! I try to save my head)
 Instructed by the ingenuous postulant,
 Taxes the Bishop with adultery, (mud
 Needs must pair off with mud, and filth with filth) — 760
 Such being my next experience. Who knows not —
 The couple, father and mother of my wife,
 Returned to Rome, published before my lords,
 Put into print, made circulate far and wide
 That they had cheated me who cheated them? 765
 Pompilia, I supposed their daughter, drew
 Breath first 'mid Rome's worst rankness, through the deed
 Of a drab and a rogue, was by-blow bastard-babe
 Of a nameless strumpet, passed off, palmed on me
 As the daughter with the dowry. Daughter? Dirt 770
 O' the kennel! Dowry? Dust o' the street! Nought more,
 Nought less, nought else but — oh — ah — assuredly
 A Franceschini and my very wife!
 Now take this charge as you will, for false or true, —
 This charge, preferred before your very selves 775
 Who judge me now, — I pray you, adjudge again,
 Classing it with the cheats or with the lies,
 By which category I suffer most!
 But of their reckoning, theirs who dealt with me
 In either fashion. — I reserve my word, 780
 Justify that in its place; I am now to say.
 Whichever point o' the charge might poison most,

¹ *Levite-rule* = priest-rule.

Pompilia's duty was no doubtful one.
 You put the protestation in her mouth
 " Henceforward and forevermore, avaunt 785
 Ye fiends, who drop disguise and glare revealed
 In your own shape, no longer father mine
 Nor mother mine! Too nakedly you hate
 Me whom you looked as if you loved once, — me
 Whom, whether true or false, your tale now damns, 790
 Divulged thus to my public infamy,
 Private perdition, absolute overthrow.
 For, hate my husband to your hearts' content,
 I, spoil and prey of you from first to last,
 I who have done you the blind service, lured 795
 The lion to your pitfall, — I, thus left
 To answer for my ignorant bleating there,
 I should have been remembered and withdrawn
 From the first o' the natural fury, not flung loose
 A proverb and a by-word men will mouth. 800
 At the cross-way, in the corner, up and down
 Rome and Arezzo, — there, full in my face,
 If my lord, missing them and finding me,
 Content himself with casting his reproach
 To drop i' the street where such impostors die. 805
 Ah, but — that husband, what the wonder were! —
 If, far from casting thus away the rag
 Smear'd with the plague his hand had chanced upon,
 Sewn to his pillow by Locusta's wile.¹ —
 Far from abolishing, root, stem and branch, 810
 The misgrowth of infectious mistletoe
 Foisted into his stock for honest graft, —
 If he repudiate not, renounce nowise,
 But, guarding, guiding me, maintain my cause
 By making it his own, (what other way?) 815
 — To keep my name for me, he call it his,
 Claim it of who would take it by their lie. —
 To save my wealth for me — or babe of mine
 Their lie was framed to beggar at the birth —
 He bid them loose grasp, give our gold again : 820
 If he become no partner with the pair
 Even in a game which, played adroitly, gives
 Its winner life's great wonderful new chance, —
 Of marrying, to-wit, a second time, —
 Ah, if he did thus, what a friend were he! 825
 Anger he might show, — who can stamp out flame
 Yet spread no black o' the brand? — yet, rough albeit

¹ *Locusta*: the name of a notorious female typical of any poisoner. She helped Nero to poison Britannicus.

In the act, as whose bare feet feel embers scorch,
 What grace were his, what gratitude were mine!"
 Such protestation should have been my wife's. 830
 Looking for this, do I exact too much?
 Why, here 's the. — word for word, so much, no more, —
 Awo! she made, her pure spontaneous speech
 To my brother the Abate at first blush,
 Ere the good impulse had begun to fade : 835
 So did she make confession for the pair,
 So pour forth praises in her own behalf.
 " Ay, the false letter," interpose my lords —
 " The simulated writing, — 't was a trick :
 You traced the signs, she merely marked the same, 840
 The product was not hers but yours." Alack,
 I want no more impulsion to tell truth
 From the other trick, the torture inside there!
 I confess all — let it be understood —
 And deny nothing! If I baffle you so, 845
 Can so fence, in the plenitude of right,
 That my poor lathen¹ dagger puts aside
 Each pass o' the Bilboa,² beats you all the same, —
 What matters inefficiency of blade?
 Mine and not hers the letter, — conceded, lords! 850
 Impute to me that practice! — take as proved
 I taught my wife her duty, made her see
 What it behoved her see and say and do,
 Feel in her heart and with her tongue declare,
 And, whether sluggish or recalcitrant, 855
 Forced her to take the right step, I myself
 Was marching in marital rectitude!
 Why who finds fault here, say the tale be true?
 Would not my lords commend the priest whose zeal
 Seized on the sick, morose or moribund, 860
 By the palsy-smitten finger, made it cross
 His brow correctly at the critical time?
 — Or answered for the inarticulate babe
 At baptism, in its stead declared the faith,
 And saved what else would perish unprofessed? 865
 True, the incapable hand may rally yet,
 Renounce the sign with renovated strength, —
 The babe may grow up man and Molinist, —
 And so Pompilia, set in the good path
 And left to go alone there, soon might see 870
 That too frank-forward, all too simple-straight

¹ *Lathen* = latten, a kind of brass or bronze. See note, I. 1231.

² *Bilboa* : a flexible-bladed cutlass named from Bilboa, the Spanish adventurer and American discoverer.

Her step was, and decline to tread the rough,
 When here lay, tempting foot, the meadow-side,
 And there the coppice rang with singing-birds!
 Soon she discovered she was young and fair, 875
 That many in Arezzo knew as much.
 Yes, this next cup of bitterness, my lords,
 Had to begin go filling, drop by drop,
 Its measure up of full disgust for me,
 Filtered into by every noisome drain — 880
 Society's sink toward which all moisture runs.
 Would not you prophesy — "She on whose brow is stamped
 The note of the imputation that we know, —
 Rightly or wrongly mothered with a whore, —
 Such an one, to disprove the frightful charge, 885
 What will she but exaggerate chastity,
 Err in excess of wifehood, as it were,
 Renounce even levities permitted youth,
 Though not youth struck to age by a thunderbolt?
 Cry 'wolf' i' the sheepfold, where's the sheep dares bleat, 890
 Knowing the shepherd listens for a growl?"
 So you expect. How did the devil decree?
 Why, my lords, just the contrary of course!
 It was in the house from the window, at the church
 From the hassock, — where the theatre lent its lodge, 895
 Or staging for the public show left space, —
 That still Pompilia needs must find herself
 Launching her looks forth, letting looks reply
 As arrows to a challenge; on all sides
 Ever new contribution to her lap, 900
 Till one day, what is it knocks at my clenched teeth
 But the cup full, curse-collected all for me?
 And I must needs drink, drink this gallant's praise,
 That minion's prayer, the other fop's reproach,
 And come at the drégs to — Caponsacchi! 905
 I, — chin-deep in a marsh of misery,
 Struggling to extricate my name and fame
 And fortune from the marsh would drown them all.
 My face the sole unstrangled part of me, —
 I must have this new gad-fly in that face, 910
 Must free me from the attacking lover too!
 Men say I battled ungracefully enough —
 Was harsh, uncouth and ludicrous beyond
 The proper part o' the husband: have it so!
 Your lordships are considerate at least — 915
 You order me to speak in my defence
 Plainly, expect no quavering tuneful trills
 As when you bid a singer solace you, —
 Nor look that I shall give it, for a grace,

- Stans pede in uno*:¹— you remember well 920
 In the one case, 't is a plainsong² too severe,
 This story of my wrongs,— and that I ache
 And need a chair, in the other. Ask you me
 Why, when I felt this trouble flap my face,
 Already pricked with every shame could perch,— 925
 When, with her parents, my wife plagued me too,—
 Why I enforced not exhortation mild
 To leave whore's-tricks and let my brows alone,
 With mulct of comfits, promise of perfume?
- “Far from that! No you took the opposite course, 930
 Breathed threatenings, “age and slaughter!” What you will!
 And the end has come, the doom is verily here,
 Unhindered by the threatening. See fate's flare
 Full on each face of the dead guilty three!
 Look at them well, and now, lords, look at this! 935
 Tell me: if on that day when I found first
 That Capsonsacchi thought the nearest way
 To his church was some half-mile round by my door,
 And that he so admired, shall I suppose,
 The manner of the swallows' come-and-go 940
 Between the props o' the window over-head,—
 That window happening to be my wife's,—
 As to stand gazing by the hour on high,
 Of May-eves, while she sat and let him smile,—
 If I,— instead of threatening, talking big, 945
 Showing hair-powder, a prodigious pinch,
 For poison in a bottle,— making believe
 At desperate doings with a bauble-sword,
 And other bugaboo-and-baby-work,—
 Had, with the vulgarest household implement, 950
 Calmly and quietly cut off, clean thro' bone
 But one joint of one finger of my wife.
 Saying “For listening to the serenade.
 Here's your ring-finger shorter a full third:
 Be certain I will slice away next joint, 955
 Next time that anybody underneath
 Seems somehow to be sauntering as he hoped
 A flower would eddy out of your hand to his
 While you please fidget with the branch above
 O' the rose-tree in the terrace!”— had I done so, 960
 Why, there had followed a quick sharp scream, some pain,

¹ *Stans pede in uno*: “standing on one foot,” a metaphor descriptive of anything done easily or off-hand; from Horace, “Satires,” i.

² *Plainsong*: simple early chants of the church.

Much calling for plaister, damage to the dress,
 A somewhat sulky countenance next day,
 Perhaps reproaches. — but reflections too!
 I don't hear much of harm that Malchus did 965
 After the incident of the ear, my lords!
 Saint Peter took the efficacious way;
 Malchus was sore but silenced for his life:
 He did not hang himself i' the Potter's Field
 Like Judas, who was trusted with the bag 970
 And treated to sops after he proved a thief.
 So, by this time, my true and obedient wife
 Might have been telling beads with a gloved hand;
 Awkward a little at pricking hearts and darts
 On sampler possibly, but well otherwise: 975
 Not where Rome shudders now to see her lie.
 I give that for the course a wise man takes;
 I took the other however, tried the fool's,
 The lighter remedy, brandished rapier dread
 With cork-ball at the tip, boxed Malchus' ear 980
 Instead of severing the cartilage.
 Called her a terrible nickname, and the like,
 And there an end: and what was the end of that?
 What was the good effect o' the gentle course?
 Why, one night I went drowsily to bed, 985
 Dropped asleep suddenly, not sudd'ently woke,
 But did wake with rough rousing and loud cry,
 To find noon in my face, a crowd in my room,
 Fumes in my brain, fire in my throat, my wife
 Gone God knows whither, — rifled vesture-chest, 990
 And ransacked money-coffer. "What does it mean?"
 The servants had been drugged too, stared and yawned
 "It must be that our lady has eloped!"
 — "Whither and with whom?" — "With whom but the Canon's
 self?
 One recognizes Caponsacchi there!" — 995
 (By this time the admiring neighborhood
 Joined chorus round me while I rubbed my eyes)
 "T is months since their intelligence began, —
 A comedy the town was privy to, —
 He wrote and she wrote, she spoke, he replied, 1000
 And going in and out your house last night
 Was easy work for one . . . to be plain with you . . .
 Accustomed to do both, at dusk and dawn
 When you were absent, — at the villa, you know,
 Where husbandry required the master-mind. 1005
 Did not you know? Why, we all knew, you see!"
 And presently, bit by bit, the full and true
 Particulars of the tale were volunteered

With all the breathless zeal of friendship — “ Thus
 Matters were managed : at the seventh hour of night ” . . . 1010
 — “ Later, at daybreak ” . . . “ Caponsacchi came ” . . .
 — “ While you and all your household slept like death,
 Drugged as your supper was with drowsy stuff ” . . .
 — “ And your own cousin Guillichini too —
 Either or both entered your dwelling-place, 1015
 Plundered it at their pleasure, made prize of all,
 Including your wife . . . ” — “ Oh, your wife led the way;
 Out of doors, on to the gate . . . ” — “ But gates are shut,
 In a decent town, to darkness and such deeds :
 They climbed the wall — your lady must be lithe — 1020
 At the gap, the broken bit . . . ” — “ Torrione, true!
 To escape the questioning guard at the proper gate,
 Clemente, where at the inn, hard by, ‘ the Horse,’
 Just outside, a calash in readiness
 Took the two principals, all alone at last, 1025
 To gate San Spirito, which o’erlooks the road,
 Leads to Perugia, Rome and liberty.”
 Bit by bit thus made-up mosaic-wise,
 Flat lay my fortune, — tessellated floor,
 Imperishable tracery devils should foot 1030
 And frolic it on, around my broken gods,
 Over my desecrated hearth.

So much

For the terrible effect of threatening, Sirs!
 Well, this way I was shaken wide awake,
 Doctored and drenched, somewhat unpoisoned so. 1035
 Then, set on horseback and bid seek the lost,
 I started alone, head of me, heart of me
 Fire, and each limb as languid . . . ah, sweet lords,
 Bethink you ! — poison-torture, try persuade
 The next refractory Molinist with that ! . . . 1040
 Floundered thro’ day and night, another day
 And yet another night, and so at last,
 As Lucifer kept falling to find hell.
 Tumbled into the court-yard of an inn
 At the end, and fell on whom I thought to find, 1045
 Even Caponsacchi. — what part once was priest,
 Cast to the winds now with the cassock-rags.
 In cape and sword a cavalier confessed,
 There stood he chiding dilatory grooms,
 Chafing that only horseflesh and no team 1050
 Of eagles would supply the last relay,
 Whirl him along the league, the one post more
 Between the couple and Rome and liberty.
 ’T was dawn, the couple were rested in a sort ;
 And though the lady, tired, — the tenderer sex, — 1055



PERUGIA.

Somebody forged the letters in our name! —
 Both in a breath protested presently.
 Alia, Sacchetti again! — “ Dame,” — quoth the Duke,
 “ What meaneth this epistle, counsel me,
 I pick from out thy placket and peruse, 1150
 Wherein my page averreth thou art white
 And warm and wonderful 'twixt pap and pap? ”
 “ Sir,” laughed the Lady. “ 't is a counterfeit!
 Thy page did never stroke but Dian's breast,
 The pretty hound I nurture for thy sake : 1155
 To lie were losel, — by my fay, no more! ”
 And no more say I too, and spare the Court.

Ah, the Court! yes, I come to the Court's self ;
 Such the case, so complete in fact and proof,
 I laid at the feet of law, — there sat my lords, 1160
 Here sit they now, so may they ever sit
 In easier attitude than suits my haunch!
 In this same chamber did I bare my sores
 O' the soul and not the body. — shun no shame,
 Shrink from no probing of the ulcerous part, 1165
 Since confident in Nature, — which is God. —
 That she who, for wise ends, concocts a plague,
 Curbs, at the right time, the plague's virulence too :
 Law renovates even Lazarus, — cures me!
 Cæsar thou seekest? To Cæsar thou shalt go! 1170
 Cæsar's at Rome : to Rome accordingly!

The case was soon decided : both weights, cast
 I' the balance, vibrate, neither kicks the beam,
 Here away, there away, this now and now that.
 To every one o' my grievances law gave 1175
 Redress, could purblind eye but see the point.
 The wife stood a convicted runagate
 From house and husband, — driven to such a course
 By what she somehow took for cruelty,
 Oppression and imperilment of life — 1180
 Not that such things were, but that so they seemed :
 Therefore, the end conceded lawful, (since
 To save life there 's no risk should stay our leap)
 It follows that all means to the lawful end
 Are lawful likewise, — poison, theft and flight. 1185
 As for the priest's part, did he meddle or make,
 Enough that he too thought life jeopardized ;
 Concede him then the color charity
 Casts on a doubtful course, — if blackish white
 Or whitish black, will charity hesitate? 1190
 What did he else but act the precept out,

Leave, like a provident shepherd, his safe flock
 To follow the single lamb and strayaway?
 Best hope so and think so, — that the ticklish time
 I' the carriage, the tempting privacy, the last 1195
 Somewhat ambiguous accident at the inn,
 — All may bear explanation: may? then, must!
 The letters, — do they so incriminate?
 But what if the whole prove a prank o' the pen,
 Flight of the fancy, none of theirs at all, 1200
 Bred of the vapors of my brain belike,
 Or at worst mere exercise of scholar's-wit
 In the courtly Caponsacchi: verse, convict?
 Did not Catullus¹ write less seemly once?
 Yet *doctus* and unblemished he abides. 1205
 Wherefore so ready to infer the worst?
 Still, I did righteously in bringing doubts
 For the law to solve, — take the solution now!
 "Seeing that the said associates, wife and priest,
 Bear themselves not without some touch of blame 1210
 — Else why the pother, scandal and outcry
 Which trouble our peace and require chastisement?
 We, for complicity in Pompilia's flight
 And deviation, and carnal intercourse
 With the same, do set aside and relegate 1215
 The Canon Caponsacchi for three years
 At Civita in the neighborhood of Rome:
 And we consign Pompilia to the care
 Of a certain Sisterhood of penitents
 I' the city's self, expert to deal with such." 1220
 Word for word, there 's your judgment! Read it, lords,
 Re-utter your deliberate penalty
 For the crime yourselves establish! Your award —
 Who chop a man's right-hand off at the wrist
 For tracing with forefinger words in wine 1225
 O' the table of a drinking-booth that bear
 Interpretation as they mocked the Church!
 — Who brand a woman black between the breasts
 For sinning by connection with a Jew:
 While for the Jew's self — pudency be dumb! 1230
 You mete out punishment such and such, yet so
 Punish the adultery of wife and priest!
 Take note of that, before the Molinists do.
 And read me right the riddle, since right must be!
 While I stood rapt away with wonderment, 1235
 Voices broke in upon my mood and muse.
 'Do you sleep?' began the friends at either ear,

¹ *Catullus*: a learned but wanton poet, 87-47 B.C.

"The case is settled, — you willed it should be so —
 None of our counsel, always recollect!
 With law's award, budge! Back into your place! 1240
 Your betters shall arrange the rest for you.
 We 'll enter a new action, claim divorce:
 Your marriage was a cheat themselves allow:
 You erred i' the person, — might have married thus
 Your sister or your daughter unaware. 1245
 We 'll gain you, that way, liberty at least,
 Sure of so much by law's own showing. Up
 And off with you and your unluckiness —
 Leave us to bury the blunder, sweep things smooth!"
 I was in humble frame of mind, be sure! 1250
 I bowed, betook me to my place again.
 Station by station I retraced the road,
 Touched at this hostel, passed this post-house by,
 Where, fresh-remembered yet, the fugitives
 Had risen to the heroic stature: still — 1255
 "That was the bench they sat on, — there 's the board
 They took the meal at, — yonder garden-ground
 They leaned across the gate of," — ever a word
 O' the Helen and the Paris, with "Ha! you 're he,
 The . . . much-commiserated husband?" step 1260
 By step, across the pelting, did I reach
 Arezzo, underwent the archway's grin,
 Traversed the length of sarcasm in the street,
 Found myself in my horrible house once more,
 And after a colloquy . . . no word assists! 1265
 With the mother and the brothers, stiffened me
 Straight out from head to foot as dead man does,
 And, thus prepared for life as he for hell,
 Marched to the public Square and met the world.
 Apologize for the pincers, palliate screws? 1270
 Ply me with such toy-trifles, I entreat!
 Trust who has tried both sulphur and sops-in-wine!

I played the man as I best might, bade friends
 Put non-essentials by and face the fact.
 "What need to hang myself as you advise? 1275
 The paramour is banished, — the ocean's width,
 Or the suburb's length, — to Ultima Thule,¹ say,
 Or Proxima Civitas,² what 's the odds of name
 And place? He 's banished, and the fact 's the thing.
 Why should law banish innocence an inch? 1280

¹ *Ultima Thule*: the name given by the ancients to the farthest land known to the north, supposed to be either Iceland or the Orkneys.

² *Proxima Civitas*: the nearest city.

Here 's guilt then, what else do I care to know?
 The adulteress lies imprisoned, — whether in a well
 With bricks above and a snake for company,
 Or tied by a garter to a bed-post, — much
 I mind what 's little, — least 's enough and to spare! * 1285
 The little fillip on the coward's cheek
 Serves as though crab-tree cudgel broke his pate.
 Law has pronounced there 's punishment, less or more :
 And I take note o' the fact and use it thus —
 For the first flaw in the original bond, 1290
 I claim release. My contract was to wed
 The daughter of Pietro and Violante. Both
 Protest they never had a child at all.
 ¶hen I have never made a contract : good!
 Cancel me quick the thing pretended one. 1295
 I shall be free. What matter if hurried over
 The harbor-boom by a great favoring tide,
 Or the last of a spent ripple that lifts and leaves?
 The Abate is about it. Laugh who wins!
 You shall not laugh me out of faith in law! 1300
 I listen, through all your noise, to Rome!"

Rome spoke.

In three months letters thence admonished me,
 "Your plan for the divorce is all a mistake.
 It would hold, now, had you, taking thought to wed
 Rachel of the blue eye and golden hair, 1305
 Found swarth-skinned Leah cumber couch next day :
 But Rachel, blue-eyed golden-haired aright,
 Proving to be only Laban's child, not Lot's,
 Remains yours all the same for ever more.
 No whit to the purpose is your plea : you err 1310
 I' the person and the quality — nowise
 In the individual, — that 's the case in point!
 You go to the ground, — are met by a cross-suit
 For separation, of the Rachel here,
 From bed and board, — she is the injured one, 1315
 You did the wrong and have to answer it.
 As for the circumstance of imprisonment
 And color it lends to this your new attack,
 Never fear, that point is considered too!
 The durance is already at an end ; 1320
 The convent-quiet preyed upon her health,
 She is transferred now to her parents' house
 — No-parents, when that cheats and plunders you.
 But parentage again confessed in full,
 When such confession pricks and plagues you more — 1325
 As now — for, this their house is not the house
 In Via Vittoria wherein neighbors' watch

Might incommode the freedom of your wife,
 But a certain villa smothered up in vines
 At the town's edge by the gate i' the Pauline Way, 1330
 Out of eye-reach, out of ear-shot, little and lone,
 Whither a friend. — at Civita, we hope,
 A good half-dozen-hours' ride off. — might, some eve,
 Betake himself, and whence ride back, some morn,
 Nobody the wiser: but be that as it may, 1335
 Do not afflict your brains with trifles now.
 You have still three suits to manage, all and each
 Ruinous truly should the event play false.
 It is indeed the likelier so to do.
 That brother Paul, your single prop and stay, 1340
 After a vain attempt to bring the Pope
 To set aside procedures, sit himself
 And summarily use prerogative,
 Afford us the infallible finger's tact
 To disentwine your tangle of affairs, 1345
 Paul. — finding it moreover past his strength
 To stem the irruption, bear Rome's ridicule
 Of . . . since friends must speak . . . to be round with you . . .
 Of the old outwitted husband, wronged and wroth,
 Pitted against a brace of juveniles — 1350
 A brisk priest who is versed in Ovid's art¹
 More than his Summa,² and a gamesome wife
 Able to act Corinna³ without book,
 Beside the waggish parents who played dupes
 To dupe the duper — (and truly divers scenes 1355
 Of the Arezzo palace, tickle rib
 And tease eye till the tears come, so we laugh;
 Nor wants the shock at the inn its comic force,
 And then the letters and poetry — *merum sal!*⁴)
 — Paul, finally, in such a state of things, 1360
 After a brief temptation to go jump
 And join the fishes in the Tiber, drowns
 Sorrow another and a wiser way:
 House and goods, he has sold all off, is gone,
 Leaves Rome. — whether for France or Spain, who knows? 1365
 Or Britain almost divided from our orb.
 You have lost him anyhow."

Now, — I see my lords

Shift in their seat. — would I could do the same!
 They probably please expect my bile was moved

¹ *Ovid's art*: Ovid wrote a book on "The Art of Love."

² *Summa*: the "Summa Theologiæ," by St. Thomas Aquinas, from which the priests of the Roman Church study their theology.

³ *Corinna*: Ovid's mistress Julia was celebrated by him under the name of *Corinna*.

⁴ *Merum sal*: pure salt.

To purpose, nor much blame me : now, they judge, 1370
 The fiery titillation urged my flesh
 Break through the bonds. By your pardon, no, sweet Sirs!
 I got such missives in the public place ;
 When I sought home, — with such news, mounted stair
 And sat at last in the sombre gallery, 1375
 ('T was Autumn, the old mother in bed betimes,
 Having to bear that cold, the finer frame
 Of her daughter-in-law had found intolerable —
 The brother, walking misery away
 O' the mountain-side with dog and gun belike) 1380
 As I supped, ate the coarse bread, drank the wine
 Weak once, now acrid with the toad's-head-squeeze,
 My wife's bestowment, — I broke silence thus :
 " Let me, a man, manfully meet the fact,
 Confront the worst o' the truth, end, and have peace! 1385
 I am irremediably beaten here, —
 The gross illiterate vulgar couple, — bah!
 Why, they have measured forces, mastered mine,
 Made me their spoil and prey from first to last.
 They have got my name, — 't is nailed now fast to theirs, 1390
 The child or changeling is anyway my wife ;
 Point by point as they plan they execute,
 They gain all, and I lose all — even to the lure
 That led to loss, — they have the wealth again
 They hazarded awhile to hook me with, 1395
 Have caught the fish and find the bait entire :
 They even have their child or changeling back
 To trade with, turn to account a second time.
 The brother presumably might tell a tale
 Or give a warning, — he, too, flies the field. 1400
 And with him vanish help and hope of help.
 They have caught me in the cavern where I fell,
 Covered my loudest cry for human aid
 With this enormous paving-stone of shame.
 Well, are we demigods or merely clay? 1405
 Is success still attendant on desert?
 Is this, we live on, heaven and the final state.
 Or earth which means probation to the end?
 Why claim escape from man's predestined lot
 Of being beaten and baffled? — God's decree, 1410
 In which I, bowing bruised head, acquiesce.
 One of us Franceschini fell long since
 I' the Holy Land, betrayed, tradition runs,
 To Paynims by the feigning of a girl
 He rushed to free from ravisher, and found 1415
 Lay safe enough with friends in ambuscade
 Who flayed him while she clapped her hands and laughed :

Let me end, falling by a like device.
 It will not be so hard. I am the last
 O' my line which will not suffer any more. 1420
 I have attained to my full fifty years,
 (About the average of us all, 't is said,
 Though it seems longer to the unlucky man)
 — Lived through my share of life; let all end here.
 Me and the house and grief and shame at once. 1425
 Friends my informants, — I can bear your blow!"
 And I believe 't was in no unmeet match
 For the stoic's mood, with something like a smile,
 That, when morose December roused me next,
 I took into my hand, broke seal to read 1430
 The new epistle from Rome. "All to no use!
 Whate'er the turn next injury take," smiled I,
 "Here's one has chosen his part and knows his cue.
 I am done with, dead now; strike away, good friends!
 Are the three suits decided in a trice? 1435
 Against me, — there 's no question! How does it go?
 Is the parentage of my wife demonstrated
 Infamous to her wish? Parades she now
 Loosed of the cincture that so irked the loin?
 Is the last penny extracted from my purse 1440
 To mulct me for demanding the first pound
 Was promised in return for value paid?
 Has the priest, with nobody to court beside,
 Courted the Muse in exile, hitched my hap
 Into a rattling ballad-rhyme which, bawled 1445
 At tavern-doors, wakes rapture everywhere,
 And helps cheap wine down throat this Christmas time,
 Beating the bagpipes? Any or all of these!
 As well, good friends, you cursed my palace here
 To its old cold stone face, — stuck your cap for crest 1450
 Over the shield that 's extant in the Square, —
 Or spat on the statue's cheek, the impatient world
 Sees cumber tomb-top in our family church:
 Let him creep under covert as I shall do,
 Half below-ground already indeed. Good-bye! 1455
 My brothers are priests, and childless so; that 's well —
 And, thank God most for this, no child leave I —
 None after me to bear till his heart break
 The being a Franceschini and my son!"

"Nav." said the letter, "but you have just that! 1460
 A babe, your veritable son and heir —
 Lawful. — 't is only eight months since your wife
 Left you, — so, son and heir, your babe was born
 Last Wednesday in the villa, — you see the cause

- For quitting Convent without beat of drum, 1465
 Stealing a hurried march to this retreat
 That 's not so savage as the Sisterhood
 To slips and stumbles: Pietro's heart is soft,
 Violante leans to pity's side. — the pair
 Ushered you into life a bouncing boy: 1470
 And he's already hidden away and safe
 From any claim on him you mean to make —
 They need him for themselves, — don't fear, they know
 The use o' the bantling, — the nerve thus laid bare
 To nip at, new and nice, with finger-nail! " 1475
- Then I rose up like fire, and fire-like roared.
 What, all is only beginning not ending now?
 The worm which wormed its way from skin through flesh
 To the bone and there lay biting, did its best, —
 What, it goes on to scrape at the bone's self, 1480
 Will wind to inmost marrow and madden me?
 There 's to be yet my representative,
 Another of the name shall keep displayed
 The flag with the ordure on it, brandish still
 The broken sword has served to stir a jakes? 1485
 Who will he be, how will you call the man?
 A Franceschini, — when who cut my purse,
 Filched my name, hemmed me round, hustled me hard
 As rogues at a fair some fool they strip i' the midst,
 When these count gains, vaunt pillage presently: — 1490
 But a Caponsacchi, oh, be very sure!
 When what demands its tribute of applause
 Is the cunning and impudence o' the pair of cheats,
 The lies and lust o' the mother, and the brave
 Bold carriage of the priest, worthily crowned 1495
 By a witness to his feat i' the following age, —
 And how this three-fold cord could hook and fetch
 And land leviathan that king of pride!
 Or say, by some mad miracle of chance,
 Is he indeed my flesh and blood, this babe? 1500
 Was it because fate forged a link at last
 Betwixt my wife and me, and both alike
 Found we had henceforth some one thing to love,
 Was it when she could damn my soul indeed
 She unlatched door, let all the devils o' the dark 1505
 Dance in on me to cover her escape?
 Why then, the surplusage of disgrace, the spilth
 Over and above the measure of infamy,
 Failing to take effect on my coarse flesh
 Seasoned with scorn now, saturate with shame, — 1510
 Is saved to instil on and corrode the brow,

The baby-softness of my first-born child —
 The child I had died to see though in a dream,
 The child I was bid strike out for, beat the wave
 And baffle the tide of troubles where I swam, 1515
 So I might touch shore, lay down life at last
 At the feet so dim and distant and divine
 Of the apparition, as 't were Mary's Babe
 Had held, through night and storm, the torch aloft, —
 Born now in very deed to bear this brand 1520
 On forehead and curse me who could not save!
 Rather be the town talk true, square's jest, street's jeer
 True, my own inmost heart's confession true,
 And he the priest's bastard and none of mine!
 Ay, there was cause for flight, swift flight and sure! 1525
 The husband gets unruly, breaks all bounds
 When he encounters some familiar face,
 Fashion of feature, brow and eyes and lips
 Where he least looked to find them, — time to fly!
 This bastard then, a nest for him is made, 1530
 As the manner is of vermin, in my flesh :
 Shall I let the filthy pest buzz, flap and sting,
 Busy at my vitals and, nor hand nor foot
 Lift, but let be, lie still and rot resigned?
 No, I appeal to God, — what says Himself, 1535
 How lessons Nature when I look to learn?
 Why, that I am alive, am still a man
 With brain and heart and tongue and right-hand too —
 Nay, even with friends, in such a cause as this,
 To right me if I fail to take my right. 1540
 No more of law ; a voice beyond the law
 Enters my heart, *Quis est pro Domino?*¹

Myself, in my own Vittiano, told the tale
 To my own serving-people summoned there :
 Told the first half of it, scarce heard to end 1545
 By judges who got done with judgment quick
 And clamored to go execute her 'hest —
 Who cried " Not one of us that dig your soil
 And dress your vineyard, prune your olive-trees,
 But would have brained the man debauched our wife, 1550
 And staked the wife whose lust allured the man,
 And paunched the Duke, had it been possible,
 Who ruled the land yet barred us such revenge!"
 I fixed on the first whose eyes caught mine, some four
 Resolute youngsters with the heart still fresh, 1555
 Filled my purse with the residue o' the coin

¹ *Quis est pro Domino* : who is on the Lord's side ?

Uncaught-up by my wife whom haste made blind,
 Donned the first rough and rural garb I found,
 Took whatsoever weapon came to hand,
 And out we flung and on we ran or reeled 1560
 Romeward. I have no memory of our way.
 Only that, when at intervals the cloud
 Of horror about me opened to let in life,
 I listened to some song in the ear, some snatch
 Of a legend, relic of religion, stray 1565
 Fragment of record very strong and old
 Of the first conscience, the anterior right,
 The God's-gift to mankind, impulse to quench
 The antagonistic spark of hell and tread
 Satan and all his malice into dust, 1570
 Declare to the world the one law, right is right.
 Then the cloud re-encompassed me, and so
 I found myself, as on the wings of winds,
 Arrived: I was at Rome on Christmas Eve.

Festive bells — everywhere the Feast o' the Babe, 1575
 Joy upon earth, peace and good will to man!
 I am baptized. I started and let drop
 The dagger. "Where is it, His promised peace?"
 Nine days o' the Birth-Feast did I pause and pray
 To enter into no temptation more. 1580
 I bore the hateful house, my brother's once,
 Deserted, — let the ghost of social joy
 Mock and make mouths at me from empty room
 And idle door that missed the master's step, —
 Bore the frank wonder of incredulous eyes, 1585
 As my own people watched without a word,
 Waited, from where they huddled round the hearth
 Black like all else, that nod so slow to come.
 I stopped my ears even to the inner call
 Of the dread duty, only heard the song 1590
 "Peace upon earth," saw nothing but the face
 O' the Holy Infant and the halo there
 Able to cover yet another face
 Behind it, Satan's which I else should see.
 But, day by day, joy waned and withered off: 1595
 The Babe's face, premature with peak and pine,
 Sank into wrinkled ruinous old age,
 Suffering and death, then mist-like disappeared,
 And showed only the Cross at end of all,
 Left nothing more to interpose 'twixt me 1600
 And the dread duty: for the angels' song,
 "Peace upon earth," louder and louder pealed
 "O Lord, how long, how long be avenged?"

On the ninth day, this grew too much for man.
 I started up — "Some end must be!" At once, 1605
 Silence: then, scratching like a death-watch-tick,
 Slowly within my brain was syllabled,
 "One more concession, one decisive way
 And but one, to determine thee the truth, —
 This way, in fine, I whisper in thy ear: 1610
 Now doubt, anon decide, thereupon act!"

"That is a way, thou whisperest in my ear!
 I doubt, I will decide, then act," said I —
 Then beckoned my companions: "Time is come!"

And so, all yet uncertain save the will 1615
 To do right, and the daring ought save leave
 Right undone, I did find myself at last
 I' the dark before the villa with my friends,
 And made the experiment, the final test,
 Ultimate chance that ever was to be 1620
 For the wretchedness inside. I knocked, pronounced
 The name, the predetermined touch for truth,
 "What welcome for the wanderer? Open straight —"
 To the friend, physician, friar upon his rounds,
 Traveller belated, beggar lame and blind? 1625
 No, but — "to Caponsacchi!" And the door
 Opened.

And then, — why, even then, I think,
 I' the minute that confirmed my worst of fears.
 Surely, — I pray God that I think aright! —
 Had but Pompilia's self, the tender thing 1630
 Who once was good and pure, was once my lamb
 And lay in my bosom, had the well-known shape
 Fronted me in the door-way, — stood there faint
 With the recent pang perhaps of giving birth
 To what might, though by miracle, seem my child, — 1635
 Nay more. I will say, had even the aged fool
 Pietro, the dotard, in whom folly and age
 Wrought, more than enmity or malevolence,
 To practise and conspire against my peace, —
 Had either of these but opened, I had paused. 1640
 But it was she the hag, she that brought hell
 For a dowry with her to her husband's house,
 She the mock-mother, she that made the match
 And married me to perdition, spring and source
 O' the fire inside me that boiled up from heart 1645
 To brain and hailed the Fury gave it birth, —
 Violante Comparini, she it was,
 With the old grin amid the wrinkles yet,

Opened : as if in turning from the Cross,
 With trust to keep the sight and save my soul. 1650
 I had stumbled, first thing, on the serpent's head
 Coiled with a leer at foot of it.

 There was the end!
 Then was I rapt away by the impulse, one
 Immeasurable everlasting wave of a need
 To abolish that detested life. 'T was done : 1655
 You know the rest and how the folds o' the thing,
 Twisting for help, involved the other two
 More or less serpent-like : how I was mad,
 Blind, stamped on all, the earth-worms with the asp,
 And ended so.

 You came on me that night, 1660
 Your officers of justice, — caught the crime
 In the first natural frenzy of remorse?
 Twenty miles off, sound sleeping as a child
 On a cloak i' the straw which promised shelter first,
 With the bloody arms beside me. — was it not so? 1665
 Wherefore not? Why, how else should I be found?
 I was my own self, had my sense again,
 My soul safe from the serpents. I could sleep :
 Indeed and, dear my lords, I shall sleep now,
 Spite of my shoulder, in five minutes' space, 1670
 When you dismiss me, having truth enough!
 It is but a few days are passed, I find,
 Since this adventure. Do you tell me, four?
 Then the dead are scarce quiet where they lie,
 Old Pietro, old Violante, side by side 1675
 At the church Lorenzo, — oh, they know it well!
 So do I. But my wife is still alive,
 Has breath enough to tell her story yet,
 Her way, which is not mine, no doubt at all.
 And Caponsacchi, you have summoned him. — 1680
 Was he so far to send for? Not at hand?
 I thought some few o' the stabs were in his heart,
 Or had not been so lavish : less had served.
 Well, he too tells his story, — florid prose
 As smooth as mine is rough. You see, my lords, 1685
 There will be a lying intoxicating smoke
 Born of the blood, — confusion probably, —
 For lies breed lies — but all that rests with you!
 The trial is no concern of mine ; with me
 The main of the care is over : I at least 1690
 Recognize who took that huge burthen off,
 Let me begin to live again. I did
 God's bidding and man's duty, so, breathe free ;
 Look you to the rest! I heard Himself prescribe,

That great Physician, and dared lance the core 1695
 Of the bad ulcer ; and the rage abates,
 I am myself and whole now : I prove cured
 By the eyes that see, the ears that hear again,
 The limbs that have relearned their youthful play,
 The healthy taste of food and feel of clothes 1700
 And taking to our common life once more.
 All that now urges my defence from death.
 The willingness to live, what means it else?
 Before. — but let the very action speak!
 Judge for yourselves, what life seemed worth to me 1705
 Who, not by proxy but in person, pitched
 Head-foremost into danger as a fool
 That never cares if he can swim or no —
 So he but find the bottom, braves the brook.
 No man omits precaution, quite neglects 1710
 Secrecy, safety, schemes not how retreat,
 Having schemed he might advance. Did I so scheme?
 Why, with a warrant which 't is ask and have,
 With horse thereby made mine without a word,
 I had gained the frontier and slept safe that night. 1715
 Then, my companions, — call them what you please,
 Slave or stipendiary, — what need of one
 To me whose right-hand did its owner's work?
 Hire an assassin yet expose yourself?
 As well buy glove and then thrust naked hand 1720
 I' the thorn-bush. No, the wise man stays at home,
 Sends only agents out, with pay to earn :
 At home, when they come back, — he straight discards
 Or else disowns. Why use such tools at all
 When a man's foes are of his house, like mine. 1725
 Sit at his board, sleep in his bed? Why noise,
 When there 's the *acquetta* and the silent way?
 Clearly my life was valueless.

But now

Health is returned, and sanity of soul
 Nowise indifferent to the body's harm. 1730
 I find the instinct bids me save my life ;
 My wits, too, rally round me ; I pick up
 And use the arms that strewed the ground before,
 Unnoticed or spurned aside : I take my stand,
 Make my defence. God shall not lose a life 1735
 May do Him further service, while I speak
 And you hear, you my judges and last hope!
 You are the law : 't is to the law I look.
 I began life by hanging to the law,
 To the law it is I hang till life shall end. 1740

My brother made appeal to the Pope, 't is true,
 To stay proceedings, judge my cause himself
 Nor trouble law, — some fondness of conceit
 That rectitude, sagacity sufficed
 The investigator in a case like mine, 1745
 Dispensed with the machine of law. The Pope
 Knew better, set aside my brother's plea
 And put me back to law, — referred the cause
Ad judices meos,¹ — doubtlessly did well.
 Here, then, I clutch my judges, — I claim law — 1750
 Cry, by the higher law whereof your law
 O' the land is humbly representative, —
 Cry, on what point is it, where either accuse,
 I fail to furnish you defence? I stand
 Acquitted, actually or virtually, 1755
 By every intermediate kind of court
 That takes account of right or wrong in man,
 Each unit in the series that begins
 With God's throne, ends with the tribunal here.
 God breathes, not speaks, his verdicts, felt not heard, 1760
 Passed on successively to each court I call
 Man's conscience, custom, manners, all that make
 More and more effort to promulgate, mark
 God's verdict in determinable words,
 Till last come human jurists — solidify 1765
 Fluid result, — what's fixable lies forged,
 Statute, — the residue escapes in fume,
 Yet hangs aloft, a cloud, as palpable
 To the finer sense as word the legist² welds.
 Justinian's Pandects³ only make precise 1770
 What simply sparkled in men's eyes before,
 Twitched in their brow or quivered on their lip,
 Waited the speech they called but would not come.
 These courts then, whose decree your own confirms, —
 Take my whole life, not this last act alone, 1775
 Look on it by the light reflected thence!
 What has Society to charge me with?
 Come, unreservedly, — favor none nor fear, —
 I am Guido Franceschini, am I not?
 You know the courses I was free to take? 1780
 I took just that which let me serve the Church,
 I gave it all my labor in body and soul
 Till these broke down i' the service. "Specify?"
 Well, my last patron was a Cardinal.

¹ *Ad judices meos* : to my judges.

² *Legist* : a lawyer.

³ *Justinian's Pandects* : the digest of Roman jurists made by order of Justinian in the sixth century.

I left him unconvicted of a fault — 1785
 Was even helped, by way of gratitude,
 Into the new life that I left him for,
 This very misery of the marriage, — he
 Made it, kind soul, so far as in him lay —
 Signed the deed where you yet may see his name. 1790
 He is gone to his reward, — dead, being my friend
 Who could have helped here also, — that, of course!
 So far, there's my acquittal, I suppose.
 Then comes the marriage itself — no question, lords,
 Of the entire validity of that! 1795
 In the extremity of distress, 't is true,
 For after-reasons, furnished abundantly,
 I wished the thing invalid, went to you
 Only some months since, set you duly forth
 My wrong and prayed your remedy, that a cheat 1800
 Should not have force to cheat my whole life long.
 "Annul a marriage? 'T is impossible!
 Though ring about your neck be brass not gold,
 Needs must it clasp, gangrene you all the same!"
 Well, let me have the benefit, just so far, 1805
 O' the fact announced, — my wife then is my wife,
 I have allowance for a husband's right.
 I am charged with passing right's due bound, — such acts
 As I thought just, my wife called cruelty,
 Complained of in due form, — convoked no court 1810
 Of common gossipry, but took her wrongs —
 And not once, but so long as patience served —
 To the town's top, jurisdiction's pride of place.
 To the Archbishop and the Governor.
 These heard her charge with my reply, and found 1815
 That futile, this sufficient: they dismissed
 The hysteric querulous rebel, and confirmed
 Authority in its wholesome exercise,
 They, with directest access to the facts.
 "— Ay, for it was their friendship favored you, 1820
 Hereditary alliance against a breach
 I' the social order: prejudice for the name
 Of Franceschini!" — So I hear it said:
 But not here. You, lords, never will you say
 "Such is the nullity of grace and truth, 1825
 Such the corruption of the faith, such lapse
 Of law, such warrant have the Molinists
 For daring reprehend us as they do, —
 That we pronounce it just a common case,
 Two dignitaries, each in his degree 1830
 First, foremost, this the spiritual head, and that
 The secular arm o' the body politic,

- Should, for mere wrongs' love and injustice' sake,
 Side with, aid and abet in cruelty
 This broken beggarly noble, — bribed perhaps 1835
 By his watered wine and mouldy crust of bread —
 Rather than that sweet tremulous flower-like wife
 Who kissed their hands and curled about their feet
 Looking the irresistible loveliness
 In tears that takes man captive, turns " . . . enough! 1840
 Do you blast your predecessors? What forbids
 Posterity to trebly blast yourselves
 Who set the example and instruct their tongue?
 You dreaded the crowd, succumbed to the popular cry,
 Or else, would nowise seem defer thereto 1845
 And yield to public clamor though i' the right!
 You ridded your eye of my unseemliness,
 The noble whose misfortune wearied you, —
 Or, what 's more probable, made common cause
 With the cleric section, punished in myself 1850
 Maladroit uncomplaisant laity,
 Defective in behavior to a priest
 Who claimed the customary partnership
 I' the house and the wife. Lords, any lie will serve!
 Look to it, — or allow me freed so far! 1855
- Then I proceed a step, come with clean hands
 Thus far, re-tell the tale told eight months since.
 The wife, you allow so far, I have not wronged,
 Has fled my roof, plundered me and decamped
 In company with the priest her paramour : 1860
 And I gave chase, came up with, caught the two
 At the wayside inn where both had spent the night,
 Found them in flagrant fault, and found as well,
 By documents with name and plan and date,
 The fault was furtive then that's flagrant now, 1865
 Their intercourse a long established crime.
 I did not take the license law's self gives
 To slay both criminals o' the spot at the time,
 But held my hand, — preferred play prodigy
 Of patience which the world calls cowardice, 1870
 Rather than seem anticipate the law
 And cast discredit on its organs, — you.
 So, to your bar I brought both criminals,
 And made my statement : heard their counter-charge,
 Nay, — their corroboration of my tale, 1875
 Nowise disputing its allegements, not
 I' the main, not more than nature's decency
 Compels men to keep silence in this kind, —
 Only contending that the deeds avowed

- Would take another color and bear excuse. 1880
 You were to judge between us ; so you did.
 You disregard the excuse, you breathe away
 The color of innocence and leave guilt black,
 "Guilty" is the decision of the court,
 And that I stand in consequence untouched, 1885
 One white integrity from head to heel,
 Not guilty? Why then did you punish them?
 True, punishment has been inadequate —
 'T is not I only, not my friends that joke,
 My foes that jeer, who echo "inadequate" — 1890
 For, by a chance that comes to help for once,
 The same case simultaneously was judged
 At Arezzo, in the province of the Court
 Where the crime had its beginning but not end.
 They then, deciding on but half o' the crime, 1895
 The effraction, robbery, — features of the fault
 I never cared to dwell upon at Rome, —
 What was it they adjudged as penalty
 To Pompilia, — the one criminal o' the pair
 Amenable to their judgment, not the priest 1900
 Who is Rome's? Why, just imprisonment for life
 I' the Stinche.¹ There was Tuscany's award
 To a wife that robs her husband : you at Rome —
 Having to deal with adultery in a wife
 And, in a priest, breach of the priestly vow — 1905
 Give gentle sequestration for a month
 In a manageable Convent, then release,
 You call imprisonment, in the very house
 O' the very couple, which the aim and end
 Of the culprits' crime was — just to reach and rest 1910
 And there take solace and defy me : well, —
 This difference 'twixt their penalty and yours
 Is immaterial : make your penalty less —
 Merely that she should henceforth wear black gloves
 And white fan, she who wore the opposite — 1915
 Why, all the same the fact o' the thing subsists.
 Reconcile to your conscience as you may,
 Be it on your own heads, you pronounced but half
 O' the penalty for heinousness like hers
 And his, that pays a fault at Carnival 1920
 Of comfit-pelting past discretion's law,
 Or accident to handkerchief in Lent
 Which falls perversely as a lady kneels
 Abruptly, and but half conceals her neck!
 I acquiesce for my part : punished, though 1925

¹ *Stinche* : a prison.

By a pin-point scratch, means guilty : guilty means
 — What have I been but innocent hitherto?
 Anyhow, here the offence, being punished, ends.

Ends? — for you deemed so, did you not, sweet lords?
 That was throughout the veritable aim 1930
 O' the sentence light or heavy, — to redress
 Recognized wrong? You righted me, I think?
 Well then, — what if I, at this last of all,
 Demonstrate you, as my whole pleading proves,
 No particle of wrong received thereby 1935
 One atom of right? — that cure grew worse disease?
 That in the process you call "justice done"
 All along you have nipped away just inch
 By inch the creeping climbing length of plague
 Breaking my tree of life from root to branch, 1940
 And left me, after all and every act
 Of your interference, — lightened of what load?
 At liberty wherein? Mere words and wind!
 "Now I was saved, now I should feel no more
 The hot breath, find a respite from fixed eye 1945
 And vibrant tongue!" Why, scarce your back was turned,
 There was the reptile, that feigned death at first,
 Renewing its detested spire and spire
 Around me, rising to such heights of hate
 That, so far from mere purpose now to crush 1950
 And coil itself on the remains of me,
 Body and mind, and there flesh fang content,
 Its aim is now to evoke life from death,
 Make me anew, satisfy in my son
 The hunger I may feed but never sate, 1955
 Tormented on to perpetuity, —
 My son, whom, dead, I shall know, understand,
 Feel, hear, see, never more escape the sight
 In heaven that 's turned to hell, or hell returned
 (So rather say) to this same earth again, — 1960
 Moulded into the image and made one,
 Fashioned of soul as featured like in face,
 First taught to laugh and lisp and stand and go
 By that thief, poisoner and adulteress
 I call Pompilia, he calls . . . sacred name, 1965
 Be unpronounced, be unpolluted here!
 And last led up to the glory and prize of hate
 By his . . . foster-father, Caponsacchi's self,
 The perjured priest, pink of conspirators,
 Tricksters and knaves, yet polished, superfine, 1970
 Manhood to model adolescence by!
 Lords, look on me, declare, — when, what I show,

Is nothing more nor less than what you deemed
 And doled me out for justice, — what did you say?
 For reparation, restitution and more. — 1975
 Will you not thank, praise, bid me to your breasts
 For having done the thing you thought to do,
 And thoroughly trampled out sin's life at last?
 I have heightened phrase to make your soft speech serve,
 Doubled the blow you but essayed to strike. 1980
 Carried into effect your mandate here
 That else had fallen to ground: mere duty done,
 Oversight of the master just supplied
 By zeal i' the servant. I, being used to serve,
 Have simply . . . what is it they charge me with? 1985
 Blackened again, made legible once more
 Your own decree, not permanently writ,
 Rightly conceived but all too faintly traced.
 It reads efficient, now, comminatory,
 A terror to the wicked, answers so 1990
 The mood o' the magistrate, the mind of law.
 Absolve, then, me, law's mere executant!
 Protect your own defender, — save me, Sirs!
 Give me my life, give me my liberty,
 My good name and my civic rights again! 1995
 It would be too fond, too complacent play
 Into the hands o' the devil, should we lose
 The game here, I for God: a soldier-bee¹
 That yields his life, exenterate² with the stroke
 O' the 'sting that saves the hive. I need that life. 2000
 Oh, never fear! I'll find life plenty use
 Though it should last five years more, aches and all!
 For, first thing, there 's the mother's age to help —
 Let her come break her heart upon my breast
 Not on the blank stone of my nameless tomb! 2005
 The fugitive brother has to be bidden back
 To the old routine, repugnant to the tread,
 Of daily suit and service to the Church, —
 Thro' gibe and jest, those stones that Shimei flung!
 Ay, and the spirit-broken youth at home, 2010
 The awe-struck altar-ministrant, shall make
 Amends for faith now palsied at the source,
 Shall see truth yet triumphant, justice yet
 A victor in the battle of this world!
 Give me — for last, best gift — my son again, 2015
 Whom law makes mine. — I take him at your word,

¹ *Soldier-bee*: a bee that fights for the protection of the hive and sacrifices his life in the act of using his sting.

² *Exenterate*: disembowelled.

Mine be he, by miraculous mercy, lords!
 Let me lift up his youth and innocence
 To purify my palace, room by room
 Purged of the memories, lend from his bright brow 2020
 Light to the old proud paladin my sire
 Shrunken now for shame into the darkest shade
 O' the tapestry, showed him once and shrouds him now!
 Then may we, — strong from that rekindled smile, —
 Go forward, face new times, the better day. 2025
 And when, in times made better through your brave
 Decision now, — might but Utopia be! —
 Rome rife with honest women and strong men,
 Manners reformed, old habits back once more,
 Customs that recognize the standard worth, — 2030
 The wholesome household rule in force again,
 Husbands once more God's representative,
 Wives like the typical Spouse once more, and Priests
 No longer men of Belial, with no aim
 At leading silly women captive. but 2035
 Of rising to such duties as yours now, —
 Then will I set my son at my right-hand
 And tell his father's story to this point,
 Adding "The task seemed superhuman, still
 I dared and did it, trusting God and law : 2040
 And they approved of me : give praise to both!"
 And if, for answer, he shall stoop to kiss
 My hand, and peradventure start thereat, —
 I engage to smile "That was an accident
 I' the necessary process, — just a trip 2045
 O' the torture-irons in their search for truth, —
 Hardly misfortune, and no fault at all."

VI.

GIUSEPPE CAPONSACCHI.

[Book VI. gives the story from Caponsacchi's point of view, and, moreover, carries with every word the direct impress of his personality, so that the verity of his account, the essential quality of Pompilia's influence upon his character, and the inmost nature both of his service to her and his love for her are clearly and convincingly revealed.]

ANSWER you, Sirs? Do I understand aright?
 Have patience? In this sudden smoke from hell, —
 So things disguise themselves. — I cannot see
 My own hand held thus broad before my face
 And know it again. Answer you? Then that means 5
 Tell over twice what I, the first time, told
 Six months ago: 't was here, I do believe,
 Fronting you same three in this very room,
 I stood and told you: yet now no one laughs,
 Who then . . . nay, dear my lords, but laugh you did, 10
 As good as laugh, what in a judge we style
 Laughter — no levity. nothing indecorous, lords!
 Only, — I think I apprehend the mood:
 There was the blameless shrug, permissible smirk,
 The pen's pretence at play with the pursed mouth, 15
 The titter stifled in the hollow palm
 Which rubbed the eyebrow and caressed the nose,
 When I first told my tale: they meant, you know,
 "The sly one, all this we are bound believe!"
 Well, he can say no other than what he says. 20
 We have been young, too, — come, there's greater guilt!
 Let him but decently disembroil himself,
 Scramble from out the scrape nor move the mud, —
 We solid ones may risk a finger-stretch!"
 And now you sit as grave, stare as aghast 25
 As if I were a phantom: now 't is — "Friend,
 Collect yourself!" — no laughing matter more —
 "Counsel the Court in this extremity,
 Tell us again!" — tell that, for telling which,
 I got the jocular piece of punishment. 30
 Was sent to lounge a little in the place
 Whence now of a sudden here you summon me
 To take the intelligence from just — your lips!
 You, Judge Tommati, who then tittered most, —

That she I helped eight months since to escape 35
 Her husband, was retaken by the same,
 Three days ago, if I have seized your sense, —
 (I being disallowed to interfere,
 Meddle or make in a matter none of mine,
 For you and law were guardians quite enough 40
 O' the innocent, without a pert priest's help) —
 And that he has butchered her accordingly,
 As she foretold and as myself believed, —
 And, so foretelling and believing so.
 We were punished, both of us, the merry way : 45
 Therefore, tell once again the tale! For what?
 Pompilia is only dying while I speak!
 Why does the mirth hang fire and miss the smile?
 My masters, there 's an old book, you should con 50
 For strange adventures, applicable yet,
 'T is stuffed with. Do you know that there was once
 This thing : a multitude of worthy folk
 Took recreation, watched a certain group
 Of soldiery intent upon a game, —
 How first they wrangled, but soon fell to play, 55
 Threw dice, — the best diversion in the world.
 A word in your ear, — they are now casting lots,
 Ay, with that gesture quaint and cry uncouth.
 For the coat of One ¹ murdered an hour ago!
 I am a priest, — talk of what I have learned. 60
 Pompilia is bleeding out her life belike,
 Gaspng away the latest breath of all.
 This minute, while I talk — not while you laugh?

Yet, being sobered now, what is it you ask 65
 By way of explanation? There 's the fact!
 It seems to fill the universe with sight
 And sound, — from the four corners of this earth
 Tells itself over, to my sense at least.
 But you may want it lower set i' the scale. —
 Too vast, too close it clangs in the ear, perhaps ; 70
 You 'd stand back just to comprehend it more.
 Well then, let me, the hollow rock, condense
 The voice o' the sea and wind, interpret you
 The mystery of this murder. God above!
 It is too paltry, such a transference 75
 O' the storm's roar to the cranny of the stone!

This deed, you saw begin — why does its end
 Surprise you? Why should the event enforce

¹ *Casting lots . . . for the coat of One : Matthew xxvii. 35.*

- The lesson, we ourselves learned, she and I,
 From the first o' the fact, and taught you, all in vain? 80
 This Guido from whose throat you took my grasp,
 Was this man to be favored, now, or feared,
 Let do his will, or have his will restrained,
 In the relation with Pompilia? Say!
 Did any other man need interpose 85
 — Oh, though first comer, though as strange at the work
 As fribble must be, coxcomb, fool that 's near
 To knave as, say, a priest who fears the world —
 Was he bound brave the peril, save the doomed,
 Or go on, sing his snatch and pluck his flower, 90
 Keep the straight path and let the victim die?
 I held so; you decided otherwise,
 Saw no such peril, therefore no such need
 To stop song, loosen flower, and leave path. Law,
 Law was aware and watching, would suffice, 95
 Wanted no priest's intrusion, palpably
 Pretence, too manifest a subterfuge!
 Whereupon I, priest, coxcomb, fribble and fool,
 Ensconced me in my corner, thus rebuked,
 A kind of culprit, over-zealous hound 100
 Kicked for his pains to kennel; I gave place,
 To you, and let the law reign paramount:
 I left Pompilia to your watch and ward,
 And now you point me — there and thus she lies!
- Men, for the last time, what do you want with me? 105
 Is it, — you acknowledge, as it were, a use,
 A profit in employing me? — at length
 I may conceivably help the august law?
 I am free to break the blow, next hawk that swoops
 On next dove, nor miss much of good repute? 110
 Or what if this your summons, after all,
 Be but the form of mere release, no more,
 Which turns the key and lets the captive go?
 I have paid enough in person at Civita,
 Am free, — what more need I concern me with? 115
 Thank you! I am rehabilitated then,
 A very reputable priest. But she —
 The glory of life, the beauty of the world,
 The splendor of heaven, . . . well, Sirs, does no one move?
 Do I speak ambiguously? The glory, I say, 120
 And the beauty, I say, and splendor, still say I,
 Who, priest and trained to live my whole life long
 On beauty and splendor, solely at their source,
 God, — have thus recognized my food in her,
 You tell me, that 's fast dying while we talk, 125

Pompilia! How does lenity to me,
 Remit one death-bed pang to her? Come, smile!
 The proper wink at the hot-headed youth
 Who lets his soul show, through transparent words,
 The mundane love that 's sin and scandal too! 130
 You are all struck acquiescent now, it seems :
 It seems the oldest, gravest signor here.
 Even the redoubtable Tommati, sits
 Chop-fallen, — understands how law might take
 Service like mine, of brain and heart and hand, 135
 In good part. Better late than never, law
 You understand of a sudden, gospel too
 Has a claim here, may possibly pronounce
 Consistent with my priesthood, worthy Christ,
 That I endeavored to save Pompilia?

Then, 140

You were wrong, you see : that 's well to see, though late :
 That 's all we may expect of man, this side
 The grave : his good is — knowing he is bad :
 Thus will it be with us when the books ope
 And we stand at the bar on judgment-day. 145
 Well then, I have a mind to speak, see cause
 To relume the quenched flax by this dreadful light,
 Burn my soul out in showing you the truth.
 I heard, last time I stood here to be judged,
 What is priest's-duty, — labor to pluck tares 150
 And weed the corn of Molinism ; let me
 Make you hear, this time, how, in such a case,
 Man, be he in the priesthood or at plough,
 Mindful of Christ or marching step by step
 With . . . what 's his style, the other potentate 155
 Who bids have courage and keep honor safe,
 Nor let minuter admonition tease? —
 How he is bound, better or worse, to act.
 Earth will not end through this misjudgment, no!
 For you and the others like you sure to come, 160
 Fresh work is sure to follow, — wickedness
 That wants withstanding. Many a man of blood,
 Many a man of guile will clamor yet,
 Bid you redress his grievance, — as he clutched
 The prey, forsooth a stranger stepped between, 165
 And there 's the good gripe in pure waste! My part
 Is done ; i' the doing it, I pass away
 Out of the world. I want no more with earth.
 Let me, in heaven's name, use the very snuff
 O' the taper in one last spark shall show truth 170
 For a moment, show Pompilia who was true!

Not for her sake, but yours : if she is dead,
 Oh, Sirs, she can be loved by none of you
 Most or least priestly! Saints, to do us good,
 Must be in heaven, I seem to understand : 175
 We never find them saints before, at least.
 Be her first prayer then presently for you —
 She has done the good to me . . .

What is all this?

There. I was born, have lived, shall die, a fool!
 This is a foolish outset : — might with cause 180
 Give color to the very lie o' the man,
 The murderer, — make as if I loved his wife.
 In the way he called love. He is the fool there!
 Why, had there been in me the touch of taint,
 I had picked up so much of knaves'-policy 185
 As hide it, keep one hand pressed on the place
 Suspected of a spot would damn us both.
 Or no, not her! — not even if any of you
 Dares think that I, i' the face of death, her death
 That 's in my eyes and ears and brain and heart, 190
 Lie. — if he does, let him! I mean to say,
 So he stop there, stay thought from smirching her
 The snow-white soul that angels fear to take
 Untenderly. But, all the same, I know
 I too am taintless, and I bare my breast. 195
 You can't think, men as you are, all of you,
 But that, to hear thus suddenly such an end
 Of such a wonderful white soul, that comes
 Of a man and murderer calling the white black,
 Must shake me, trouble and disadvantage. Sirs, 200
 Only seventeen!

Why, good and wise you are!

You might at the beginning stop my mouth :
 So, none would be to speak for her, that knew.
 I talk impertinently, and you bear,
 All the same. This it is to have to do 205
 With honest hearts : they easily may err.
 But in the main they wish well to the truth.
 You are Christians ; somehow, no one ever plucked
 A rag, even, from the body of the Lord.
 To wear and mock with, but, despite himself, 210
 He looked the greater and was the better. Yes,
 I shall go on now. Does she need or not
 I keep calm? Calm I'll keep as monk that croons
 Transcribing battle, earthquake, famine, plague,
 From parchment to his cloister's chronicle. 215
 Not one word more from the point now!

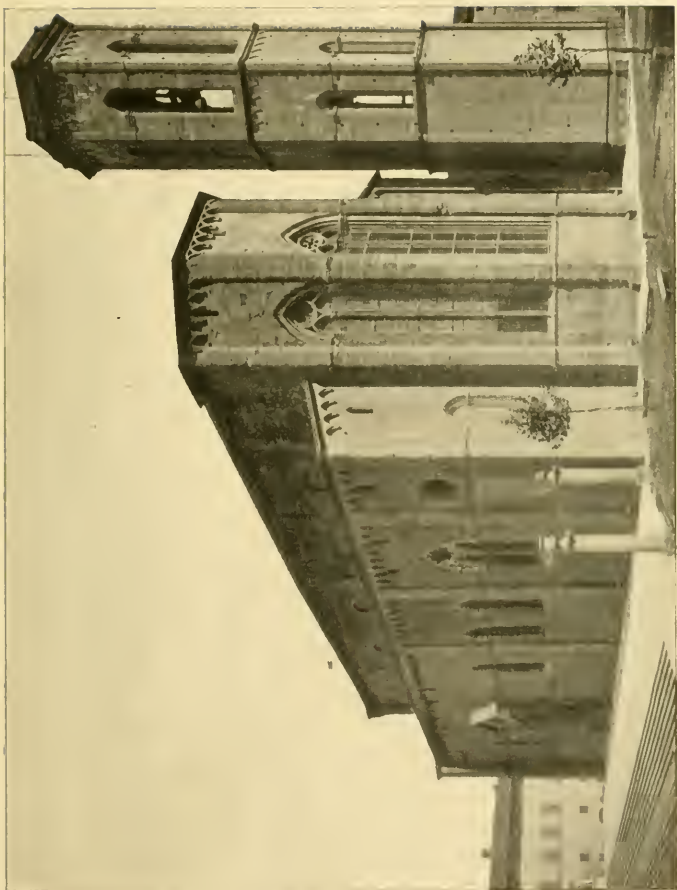
I begin.

Yes, I am one of your body and a priest.
 Also I am a younger son o' the House
 Oldest now, greatest once, in my birth-town
 Arezzo, I recognize no equal there — 220
 (I want all arguments, all sorts of arms
 That seem to serve, — use this for a reason, wait!)
 Not therefore thrust into the Church, because
 O' the piece of bread one gets there. We were first
 Of Fiesole, that rings still with the fame 225
 Of Capo-in-Sacco ¹ our progenitor:
 When Florence ruined Fiesole, our folk
 Migrated to the victor-city, and there
 Flourished, — our palace and our tower attest,
 In the Old Mercato,² — this was years ago, 230
 Four hundred, full, — no, it wants fourteen just.
 Our arms are those of Fiesole itself,
 The shield quartered with white and red: a branch
 Are the Salviati of us, nothing more.
 That were good help to the Church? But better still — 235
 Not simply for the advantage of my birth
 I' the way of the world, was I proposed for priest;
 But because there 's an illustration, late
 I' the day, that 's loved and looked to as a saint
 Still in Arezzo, he was bishop of 240
 Sixty years since: he spent to the last doit
 His bishop's-revenue among the poor,
 And used to tend the needy and the sick,
 Barefoot, because of his humility.
 He it was, — when the Granduke Ferdinand ³ 245
 Swore he would raze our city, plough the place
 And sow it with salt, because we Aretines
 Had tied a rope about the neck, to hale
 The statue of his father from its base
 For hate's sake, — he availed by prayers and tears 250
 To pacify the Duke and save the town.
 This was my father's father's brother. You see,
 For his sake, how it was I had a right
 To the self-same office, bishop in the egg,
 So, grew i' the garb and prattled in the school, 255
 Was made expect, from infancy almost,
 The proper mood o' the priest; till time ran by
 And brought the day when I must read the vows,

¹ *Capo-in-Sacco* :"Already had Caponsacco to the Market
From Fiesole descended."

(Dante's "Paradiso," xvi. 121.)

² *Mercato* : market (see preceding note).³ *Ferdinand* : Ferdinand II., Grand-duke
of Tuscany, 1621-1670, one of the Medici.



CATHEDRAL OF AREZZO.

111

Declare the world renounced and undertake
 To become priest and leave probation, — leap 260
 Over the ledge into the other life,
 Having gone trippingly hitherto up to the height
 O'er the wan water. Just a vow to read!

I stopped short awe-struck. "How shall holiest flesh
 Engage to keep such vow inviolate, 265
 How much less mine? I know myself too weak,
 Unworthy! Choose a worthier stronger man!"
 And the very Bishop smiled and stopped my mouth
 In its mid-protestation. "Incapable?

Qualmish of conscience? Thou ingenuous boy! 270
 Clear up the clouds and cast thy scruples far!
 I satisfy thee there 's an easier sense

Wherein to take such vow than suits the first
 Rough rigid reading. Mark what makes all smooth,
 Nay, has been even a solace to myself! 275

The Jews who needs must, in their synagogue,
 Utter sometimes the holy name of God,
 A thing their superstition boggles at,
 Pronounce aloud the ineffable sacrosanct,¹—
 How does their shrewdness help them? In this wise; 280
 Another set of sounds they substitute,

Jumble so consonants and vowels — how
 Should I know? — that there grows from out the old
 Quite a new word that means the very same —
 And o'er the hard place slide they with a smile. 285

Giuseppe Maria Caponsacchi mine,
 Nobody wants you in these latter days
 To prop the Church by breaking your back-bone,—
 As the necessary way was once, we know,
 When Diocletian² flourished and his like. 290

That building of the buttress-work was done
 By martyrs and confessors: let it bide,
 Add not a brick, but, where you see a chink,
 Stick in a sprig of ivy or root a rose
 Shall make amends and beautify the pile! 295

We profit as you were the painfullest
 O' the martyrs, and you prove yourself a match
 For the cruelest confessor ever was,
 If you march boldly up and take your stand
 Where their blood soaks, their bones yet strew the soil, 300
 And cry 'Take notice, I the young and free

¹ *Sacrosanct*: the Hebrews, regarding the Sacred Name as unspeakable, substitute *Adonai* for *Jahwé* in reading.

² *Diocletian*: the Roman Emperor (284-305) under whom the last persecutions of the Christians were held.

And well-to-do i' the world, thus leave the world,
 Cast in my lot thus with no gay young world
 But the grand oid Church: she tempts me of the two!¹
 Renounce the world? Nay, keep and give it us! 305
 Let us have you, and boast of what you bring.
 We want the pick o' the earth to practise with,
 Not its offscouring, halt and deaf and blind
 In soul and body. There 's a rubble-stone
 Unfit for the front o' the building, stuff to stow 310
 In a gap behind and keep us weather-tight;
 There 's porphyry for the prominent place. Good lack!
 Saint Paul has had enough and to spare, I trow,
 Of ragged run-away Onesimus:¹
 He wants the right-hand with the signet-ring 315
 Of King Agrippa,² now, to shake and use.
 I have a heavy scholar cloistered up,
 Close under lock and key, kept at his task
 Of letting Fénelon³ know the fool he is,
 In a book I promise Christendom next Spring. 320
 Why, if he covets so much meat, the clown,
 As a lark's wing next Friday, or, any day,
 Diversion beyond catching his own fleas,
 He shall be properly swinged, I promise him.
 But you, who are so quite another paste 325
 Of a man,—do you obey me? Cultivate
 Assiduous that superior gift you have
 Of making madrigals—(who told me? Ah!)
 Get done a Marinesque Adoniad⁴ straight
 With a pulse o' the blood a-pricking, here and there, 330
 That I may tell the lady 'And he 's ours!' ”

So I became a priest: those terms changed all,
 I was good enough for that, nor cheated so;
 I could live thus and still hold head erect.
 Now you see why I may have been before 335
 A fribble and coxcomb, yet, as priest, break word
 Nowise, to make you disbelieve me now.
 I need that you should know my truth. Well, then,
 According to prescription did I live,
 —Conformed myself, both read the breviary 340
 And wrote the rhymes, was punctual to my place
 I' the Pieve,⁵ and as diligent at my post

¹ *Onesimus*: Philemon, verses 11, 18.

² *Agrippa*: Acts xxvii.

³ *Fénelon*: the French preacher and archbishop of Cambrai (1651-1731) who adopted the mystical doctrines of Molinos.

⁴ *A Marinesque Adoniad*: alluding to the

“Adone” of Giovanni Battista Marini (or Marini), published in 1623, and very popular during the seventeenth century.

⁵ *Pieve*: Sta. Maria della Pieve, one of the principal parish churches in Arezzo.

Where beauty and fashion rule. I throve apace,
 Sub-deacon, Canon, the authority
 For delicate play at tarocs,¹ and arbiter 345
 O' the magnitude of fan-mounts : all the while
 Wanting no whit the advantage of a hint
 Benignant to the promising pupil, — thus :
 " Enough attention to the Countess now,
 The young one ; 't is her mother rules the roast, 350
 We know where, and puts in a word : go pay
 Devoir to-morrow morning after mass!
 Break that rash promise to preach, Passion-week!
 Has it escaped you the Archbishop grunts
 And snuffles when one grieves to tell his Grace 355
 No soul dares treat the subject of the day
 Since his own masterly handling it (ha, ha!)
 Five years ago, — when somebody could help
 And touch up an odd phrase in time of need.
 (He, he!) — and somebody helps you, my son!
 Therefore, don't prove so indispensable 360
 At the Pieve, sit more loose i' the seat, nor grow
 A fixture by attendance morn and eve!
 Arezzo 's just a haven midway Rome —
 Rome 's the eventual harbor, — make for port. 365
 Crowd sail, crack cordage! And your cargo be
 A polished presence, a genteel manner, wit
 At will, and tact at every pore of you!
 I sent our lump of learning, Brother Clout,
 And Father Slouch, our piece of piety, 370
 To see Rome and try suit the Cardinal.
 Thither they clump-clumped, beads and book in hand,
 And ever since 't is meat for man and maid
 How both flopped down, prayed blessing on bent pate
 Bald many an inch beyond the tonsure's need, 375
 Never once dreaming, the two moony dolts,
 There 's nothing moves his Eminence so much
 As — far from all this awe at sanctitude —
 Heads that wag, eyes that twinkle, modified mirth
 At the closet-lectures on the Latin tongue 380
 A lady learns so much by, we know where.
 Why, body o' Bacchus, you should crave his rule
 For pauses in the elegiac couplet, chasms
 Permissible only to Catullus!² There!
 Now go to duty : brisk, break Priscian's head³ 385

¹ *Tarocs* : a card game.

² *Catullus* : the Latin poet, especially distinguished for the elegance and polish of his verse (87-47 B.C.).

³ *Break Priscian's head* : break the rules of classical Latin grammar, on which Priscian was the most famous ancient authority.

By reading the day's office — there 's no help.
 You 've Ovid¹ in your poke to plaster that ;
 Amen 's at the end of all : then sup with me ! ”

Well, after three or four years of this life,
 In prosecution of my calling, I 390
 Found myself at the theatre one night
 With a brother Canon, in a mood and mind
 Proper enough for the place, amused or no :
 When I saw enter, stand, and seat herself
 A lady, young, tall, beautiful, strange and sad. 395
 It was as when, in our cathedral once,
 As I got yawningly through matin-song,
 I saw *facchini*² bear a burden up,
 Base it on the high-altar, break away
 A board or two, and leave the thing inside 400
 Lofty and lone : and lo, when next I looked,
 There was the Rafael ! I was still one stare,
 When — “ Nay, I 'll make her give you back your gaze ” —
 Said Canon Conti ; and at the word he tossed
 A paper-twist of comfits to her lap, 405
 And dodged and in a trice was at my back
 Nodding from over my shoulder. Then she turned,
 Looked our way, smiled the beautiful sad strange smile.
 “ Is not she fair ? 'T is my new cousin,” said he :
 “ The fellow lurking there i' the black o' the box 410
 Is Guido, the old scapegrace : she 's his wife,
 Married three years since : how his Countship sulks !
 He has brought little back from Rome beside,
 After the bragging, bullying. A fair face,
 And — they do say — a pocketful of gold 415
 When he can worry both her parents dead.
 I don't go much there, for the chamber 's cold
 And the coffee pale. I got a turn at first
 Paying my duty : I observed they crouched
 — The two old frightened family spectres — close 420
 In a corner, each on each like mouse on mouse
 I' the cat's cage : ever since, I stay at home.
 Hallo, there 's Guido, the black, mean and small,
 Bends his brows on us — please to bend your own
 On the shapely nether limbs of Light-skirts there 425
 By way of a diversion ! I was a fool
 To fling the sweetmeats. Prudence, for God's love !

¹ *Ovid* : distinctively a secular favorite among Latin poets (43 B.C.—18 A.D.) because of his love themes and tales of Pagan gods.

² *Facchini* : porters.

To-morrow I 'll make my peace, e'en tell some fib,
Try if I can't find means to take you there."

That night and next day did the gaze endure, 430
Burnt to my brain, as sunbeam thro' shut eyes,
And not once changed the beautiful sad strange smile.
At vespers Conti leaned beside my seat
I' the choir, — part said, part sung — "*In ex-cel-sis* —
All's to no purpose; I have louted low, 435
But he saw you staring — *quia sub* — don't incline
To know you nearer: him we would not hold
For Hercules, — the man would lick your shoe
If you and certain efficacious friends
Managed him warily, — but there 's the wife: 440
Spare her, because he beats her, as it is,
She 's breaking her heart quite fast enough — *jam tu* —
So, be you rational and make amends
With little Light-skirts yonder — *in secula*
Secu-lo-o-o-o-rum.¹ Ah, you rogue! Every one knows 445
What great dame she makes jealous: one against one,
Play, and win both!"

Sirs, ere the week was out,
I saw and said to myself "Light-skirts hides teeth
Would make a dog sick, — the great dame shows spite
Should drive a cat mad: 't is but poor work this — 450
Counting one's fingers till the sonnet 's crowned.
I doubt much if Marino² really be
A better bard than Dante after all.
'T is more amusing to go pace at eve.
I' the Duomo, — watch the day's last gleam outside 455
Turn, as into a skirt of God's own robe,
Those lancet-windows' jewelled miracle. —
Than go eat the Archbishop's ortolans.
Digest his jokes. Luckily Lent is near:
Who cares to look will find me in my stall 460
At the Pieve, constant to this faith at least —
Never to write a canzonet³ any more."

So, next week, 't was my patron spoke abrupt,
In altered guise. "Young man, can it be true
That after all your promise of sound fruit, 565
You have kept away from Countess young or old

¹ *In excelsis* . . . *secula seculorum*: the gloria chanted at the end of each Psalm; in Latin in Roman Catholic churches, in English in the Anglican church.

² *Marino*: the Italian poet, who wrote the

"Adonis" already referred to (l. 323), and who was famed in his day (1569) and patronized by cardinals and kings.

³ *Canzonet*: a one-, two-, or three-part song.

And gone play truant in church all day long?
 Are you turning Molinist?" I answered quick:
 "Sir, what if I turned Christian? It might be.
 The fact is, I am troubled in my mind, 470
 Beset and pressed hard by some novel thoughts.
 This your Arezzo is a limited world;
 There's a strange Pope, — 't is said, a priest who thinks.
 Rome is the port, you say: to Rome I go.
 I will live alone, one does so in a crowd, 475
 And look into my heart a little." "Lent
 Ended," — I told friends — "I shall go to Rome."

One evening I was sitting in a muse
 Over the opened "Summa,"¹ darkened round
 By the mid-March twilight, thinking how my life 480
 Had shaken under me, — broke short indeed
 And showed the gap 'twixt what is, what should be, —
 And into what abysm the soul may slip.
 Leave aspiration here, achievement there,
 Lacking omnipotence to connect extremes — 485
 Thinking moreover . . . oh, thinking, if you like,
 How utterly dissociated was I
 A priest and celibate, from the sad strange wife
 Of Guido, — just as an instance to the point,
 Nought more, — how I had a whole store of strengths 490
 Eating into my heart, which craved employ,
 And she, perhaps, need of a finger's help, —
 And yet there was no way in the wide world
 To stretch out mine and so relieve myself, —
 How when the page o' the Summa preached its best, 495
 Her smile kept glowing out of it, as to mock
 The silence we could break by no one word, —
 There came a tap without the chamber-door,
 And a whisper; when I bade who tapped speak out.
 And, in obedience to my summons, last 500
 In glided a masked muffled mystery,
 Laid lightly a letter on the opened book,
 Then stood with folded arms and foot demure,
 Pointing as if to mark the minutes' flight.

I took the letter, read to the effect 505
 That she, I lately flung the comfits to,
 Had a warm heart to give me in exchange,
 And gave it, — loved me and confessed it thus,
 And bade me render thanks by word of mouth,
 Going that night to such a side o' the house 510

¹ *Summa*: the "Summa Theologiæ," or Summary of Theology, of Thomas Aquinas.

Where the small terrace overhangs a street
Blind and deserted, not the street in front:
Her husband being away, the surly patch,
At his villa of Vittiano.

“ And you? ” — I asked:
“ What may you be? ” “ Count Guido’s kind of maid — 515
Most of us have two functions in his house.
We all hate him, the lady suffers much,
’T is just we show compassion, furnish help,
Specially since her choice is fixed so well.
What answer may I bring to cheer the sweet 520
Pompilia? ”

Then I took a pen and wrote
“ No more of this! That you are fair, I know:
But other thoughts now occupy my mind.
I should not thus have played the insensible
Once on a time. What made you, — may one ask, — 525
Marry your hideous husband? ’T was a fault,
And now you taste the fruit of it. Farewell.”

“ There! ” smiled I as she snatched it and was gone —
“ There, let the jealous miscreant, — Guido’s self,
Whose mean soul grins through this transparent trick, — 530
Be balked so far, defrauded of his aim!
What fund of satisfaction to the knave,
Had I kicked this his messenger down stairs,
Trussed to the middle of her impudence,
And set his heart at ease so! No, indeed! 535
There’s the reply which he shall turn and twist
At pleasure, snuff at till his brain grow drunk,
As the bear does when he finds a scented glove
That puzzles him, — a hand and yet no hand,
Of other perfume than his own foul paw! 540
Last month, I had doubtless chosen to play the dupe,
Accepted the mock-invitation, kept
The sham appointment, cudgel beneath cloak,
Prepared myself to pull the appointer’s self
Out of the window from his hiding-place 545
Behind the gown of this part-messenger
Part-mistress who would personate the wife.
Such had seemed once a jest permissible:
Now I am not i’ the mood.”

Back next morn brought
The messenger, a second letter in hand. 550

" You are cruel, Thyrsis, and Myrtilla¹ moans
 Neglected but adores you, makes request
 For mercy : why is it you dare not come ?
 Such virtue is scarce natural to your age.
 You must love some one else ; I hear you do, 555
 The Baron's daughter or the Advocate's wife,
 Or both, — all 's one, would you make me the third —
 I take the crumbs from table gratefully
 Nor grudge who feasts there. 'Faith, I blush and blaze!
 Yet if I break all bounds, there 's reason sure. 560
 Are you determinedly bent on Rome ?
 I am wretched here, a monster tortures me :
 Carry me with you ! Come and say you will !
 Concert this very evening ! Do not write !
 I am ever at the window of my room 565
 Over the terrace, at the *Ave*.² Come ! "

I questioned — lifting half the woman's mask
 To let her smile loose. " So, you gave my line
 To the merry lady ? " " She kissed off the wax,
 And put what paper was not kissed away, 570
 In her bosom to go burn : but merry, no !
 She wept all night when evening brought no friend,
 Alone, the unkind missive at her breast ;
 Thus Philomel,³ the thorn at her breast too,
 Sings " . . . "Writes this second letter ? " " Even so ! 575
 Then she may peep at vespers forth ? " — " What risk
 Do we run o' the husband ? " — " Ah, — no risk at all !
 He is more stupid even than jealous. Ah —
 That was the reason ? Why, the man 's away !
 Beside, his bugbear is that friend of yours, 580
 Fat little Canon Conti. He fears him,
 How should he dream of you ? I told you truth :
 He goes to the villa at Vittiano — 't is
 The time when Spring-sap rises in the vine —
 Spends the night there. And then his wife 's a child : 585
 Does he think a child outwits him ? A mere child :
 Yet so full grown, a dish for any duke.
 Don't quarrel longer with such cates, but come ! "
 I wrote " In vain do you solicit me.
 I am a priest : and you are wedded wife, 590
 Whatever kind of brute your husband prove.

¹ *Thyrsis and Myrtilla* : common names in pastoral poetry for shepherd and maid in love with each other.

² *Ave* : *Ave Maria* or " Hail Mary," etc., the prayer used at evening.

³ *Philomel* : Philomela's sorrows are sung by the nightingale into whose form the maiden passed, according to the fable referred to here. See also, Shakespeare, " Rape of Lucrece," 1135.

I have scruples, in short. Yet should you really show
Sign at the window . . . but nay, best be good!
My thoughts are elsewhere." "Take her that!"

"Again

Let the incarnate meanness, cheat and spy, 595

Mean to the marrow of him, make his heart

His food, anticipate hell's worm once more!

Let him watch shivering at the window — ay,

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

And lackey-of-lies, — a sage economy. — 600

Paid with embracings for the rank brass coin, —

Let her report and make him chuckle o'er

The break-down of my resolution now.

And lour at disappointment in good time!

— So tantalize and so enrage by turns, 605

Until the two fall each on the other like

Two famished spiders, as the coveted fly

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

And so the missives followed thick and fast

For a month, say, — I still came at every turn 610

On the soft sly adder, endlong 'neath my tread.

I was met i' the street, made sign to in the church,

A slip was found i' the door-sill, scribbled word

"Twixt page and page o' the prayer-book in my place.

A crumpled thing dropped even before my feet, 615

Pushed through the blind, above the terrace-rail,

As I passed, by day, the very window once.

And ever from corners would be peering up

The messenger, with the self-same demand

"Obdurate still, no flesh but adamant? 620

Nothing to cure the wound, assuage the throe

O' the sweetest lamb that ever loved a bear?"

And ever my one answer in one tone —

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

Unplagued of vain talk, visions not for him! 625

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

One day, a variation: thus I read:

"You have gained little by timidity.

My husband has found out my love at length,

Sees cousin Conti was the stalking-horse, 630

And you the game he covered, poor fat soul!

My husband is a formidable foe,

Will stick at nothing to destroy you. Stand

Prepared, or better, run till you reach Rome!

I bade you visit me, when the last place 635

My tyrant would have turned suspicious at.

Or cared to seek you in, was . . . why say, where?

But now all 's changed : beside, the season 's past
 At the villa, — wants the master's eye no more.
 Anyhow, I beseech you, stay away
 From the window! He might well be posted there." 640

I wrote — " You raise my courage, or call up
 My curiosity, who am but man.
 Tell him he owns the palace, not the street
 Under — that 's his and yours and mine alike. 645
 If it should please me pad the path this eve,
 Guido will have two troubles, first to get
 Into a rage and then get out again.
 Be cautious, though : at the *Arve!*"

You of the Court!

When I stood question here and reached this point 650
 O' the narrative, — search notes and see and say
 If some one did not interpose with smile
 And sneer, "And prithee why so confident
 That the husband must, of all needs, not the wife,
 Fabricate thus, — what if the lady loved? 655
 What if she wrote the letters?"

Learned Sir,

I told you there 's a picture in our church.
 Well, if a low-browed verger sidled up
 Bringing me, like a blotch, on his prod's point,
 A transfixed scorpion, let the reptile writhe, 660
 And then said " See a thing that Rafael made —
 This venom issued from Madonna's mouth!"
 I should reply, " Rather, the soul of you
 Has issued from your body, like from like,
 By way of the ordure-corner!"

But no less, 665

I tired of the same long black teasing lie
 Obtruded thus at every turn ; the pest
 Was far too near the picture, anyhow :
 One does Madonna service, making clowns
 Remove their dung-heap from the sacristy. 670
 " I will to the window, as he tempts," said I :
 " Yes, whom the easy love has failed allure,
 This new bait of adventure tempts, — thinks he.
 Though the imprisoned lady keeps afar,
 There will they lie in ambush, heads alert, 675
 Kith, kin, and Count mustered to bite my heel.
 No mother nor brother viper of the brood
 Shall scuttle off without the instructive bruise!"

So I went : crossed street and street : " The next street's turn,
 I stand beneath the terrace, see, above, 680

The black of the ambush-window. Then, in place
 Of hand's throw of soft prelude over lute,
 And cough that clears way for the ditty last." —
 I began to laugh already — "he will have
 · Out of the hole you hide in, on to the front, 685
 Count Guido Franceschini, show yourself!
 Hear what a man thinks of a thing like you,
 And after, take this foulness in your face! "

The words lay living on my lip, I made
 The one-turn more — and there at the window stood, 690
 Framed in its black square length, with lamp in hand,
 Pompilia; the same great, grave, grievful air
 As stands i' the dusk, on altar that I know,
 Left alone with one moonbeam in her cell,
 Our Lady of all the Sorrows.¹ Ere I knelt — 695
 Assured myself that she was flesh and blood —
 She had looked one look and vanished.

I thought — "Just so :
 It was herself, they have set her there to watch —
 Stationed to see some wedding-band go by,
 On fair pretence that she must bless the bride, 700
 Or wait some funeral with friends wind past,
 And crave peace for the corpse that claims its due.
 She never dreams they used her for a snare,
 And now withdraw the bait has served its turn.
 Well done, the husband, who shall fare the worse!" 705
 And on my lip again was — "Out with thee,
 Guido!" When all at once she reappeared ;
 But, this time, on the terrace overhead,
 So close above me, she could almost touch
 My head if she bent down : and she did bend, 710
 While I stood still as stone, all eye, all ear.

She began — "You have sent me letters, Sir :
 I have read none, I can neither read nor write ;
 But she you gave them to, a woman here,
 One of the people in whose power I am, 715
 Partly explained their sense, I think, to me
 Obligated to listen while she inculcates
 That you, a priest, can dare love me, a wife,
 Desire to live or die as I shall bid,
 (She makes me listen if I will or no) 720
 Because you saw my face a single time.

¹ *Our Lady*: the Virgin Mary painted with a sword in her breast to represent her griefs, St. Luke xi. 35.

It cannot be she says the thing you mean ;
 Such wickedness were deadly to us both :
 But good true love would help me now so much —
 I tell myself, you may mean good and true. 725
 You offer me. I seem to understand,
 Because I am in poverty and starve,
 Much money, where one piece would save my life.
 The silver cup upon the altar-cloth
 Is neither yours to give nor mine to take ; 730
 But I might take one bit of bread therefrom,
 Since I am starving, and return the rest,
 Yet do no harm : this is my very case.
 I am in that strait, I may not dare abstain
 From so much of assistance as would bring 735
 The guilt of theft on neither you nor me ;
 But no superfluous particle of aid.
 I think, if you will let me state my case,
 Even had you been so fancy-fevered here.
 Not your sound self, you must grow healthy now — 740
 Care only to bestow what I can take.
 That it is only you in the wide world,
 Knowing me nor in thought nor word nor deed,
 Who, all unprompted save by your own heart,
 Come proffering assistance now, — were strange 745
 But that my whole life is so strange : as strange
 It is, my husband whom I have not wronged
 Should hate and harm me. For his own soul's sake,
 Hinder the harm ! But there is something more,
 And that the strangest : it has got to be 750
 Somehow for my sake too, and yet not mine,
 — This is a riddle — for some kind of sake
 Not any clearer to myself than you,
 And yet as certain as that I draw breath, —
 I would fain live, not die — oh no, not die ! 755
 My case is, I was dwelling happily
 At Rome with those dear Comparini, called
 Father and mother to me ; when at once
 I found I had become Count Guido's wife :
 Who then, not waiting for a moment, changed 760
 Into a fury of fire, if once he was
 Merely a man : his face threw fire at mine.
 He laid a hand on me that burned all peace,
 All joy, all hope, and last all fear away,
 Dipping the bough of life, so pleasant once, 765
 In fire which shrivelled leaf and bud alike,
 Burning not only present life but past,
 Which you might think was safe beyond his reach.
 He reached it, though, since that beloved pair,

My father once, my mother all those years, 770
 That loved me so, now say I dreamed a dream
 And bid me wake, henceforth no child of theirs,
 Never in all the time their child at all.
 Do you understand? I cannot: yet so it is.
 Just so I say of you that proffer help: 775
 I cannot understand what prompts your soul,
 I simply needs must see that it is so,
 Only one strange and wonderful thing more.
 They came here with me, those two dear ones, kept
 All the old love up, till my husband, till 780
 His people here so tortured them, they fled.
 And now, is it because I grow in flesh
 And spirit one with him their torturer,
 That they, renouncing him, must cast off me?
 If I were graced by God to have a child, 785
 Could I one day deny God graced me so?
 Then, since my husband hates me, I shall break
 No law that reigns in this fell house of hate,
 By using — letting have effect so much
 Of hate as hides me from that whole of hate 790
 Would take my life which I want and must have —
 Just as I take from your excess of love
 Enough to save my life with, all I need.
 The Archbishop said to murder me were sin:
 My leaving Guido were a kind of death 795
 With no sin, — more death, he must answer for.
 Hear now what death to him and life to you
 I wish to pay and owe. Take me to Rome!
 You go to Rome, the servant makes me hear.
 Take me as you would take a dog, I think, 800
 Masterless left for strangers to maltreat:
 Take me home like that — leave me in the house
 Where the father and the mother are; and soon
 They'll come to know and call me by my name.
 Their child once more, since child I am, for all 805
 They now forget me, which is the worst o' the dream —
 And the way to end dreams is to break them, stand.
 Walk, go: then help me to stand, walk and go!
 The Governor said the strong should help the weak:
 You know how weak the strongest women are. 810
 How could I find my way there by myself?
 I cannot even call out, make them hear —
 Just as in dreams: I have tried and proved the fact.
 I have told this story and more to good great men,
 The Archbishop and the Governor: they smiled. 815
 'Stop your mouth, fair one!' — presently they frowned,
 'Get you gone, disengage you from our feet!'

I went in my despair to an old priest,
 Only a friar, no great man like these two,
 But good, the Augustinian, people name 820
 Romano. — he confessed me two months since :
 He fears God, why then needs he fear the world?
 And when he questioned how it came about
 That I was found in danger of a sin —
 Despair of any help from providence, — 825
 ‘ Since, though your husband outrage you,’ said he,
 ‘ That is a case too common, the wives die
 Or live, but do not sin so deep as this ’ —
 Then I told — what I never will tell you —
 How, worse than husband’s hate, I had to bear 830
 The love, — soliciting to shame called love, —
 Of his brother, — the young idle priest i’ the house
 With only the devil to meet there. ‘ This is grave —
 Yes, we must interfere : I counsel, — write
 To those who used to be your parents once, 835
 Of dangers here, bid them convey you hence!’
 ‘ But,’ said I, ‘ when I neither read nor write?’
 Then he took pity and promised ‘ I will write.’
 If he did so, — why, they are dumb or dead :
 Either they give no credit to the tale, 840
 Or else, wrapped wholly up in their own joy
 Of such escape, they care not who cries, still
 I’ the clutches. Anyhow, no word arrives.
 All such extravagance and dreadfulness
 Seems incident to dreaming, cured one way. — 845
 Wake me! The letter I received this morn,
 Said — if the woman spoke your very sense —
 ‘ You would die for me : ’ I can believe it now :
 For now the dream gets to involve yourself.
 First of all, you seemed wicked and not good, 850
 In writing me those letters : you came in
 Like a thief upon me. I this morning said
 In my extremity, entreat the thief!
 Try if he have in him no honest touch!
 A thief might save me from a murderer. 855
 ‘ T was a thief said the last kind word to Christ :
 Christ took the kindness and forgave the theft :
 And so did I prepare what I now say.
 But now, that you stand and I see your face,
 Though you have never uttered word yet, — well, I know, 860
 Here too has been dream-work, delusion too,
 And that at no time, you with the eyes here,
 Ever intended to do wrong by me,
 Nor wrote such letters therefore. It is false,
 And you are true, have been true, will be true. 865

To Rome then, — when is it you take me there?
Each minute lost is mortal. When? — I ask."

I answered "It shall be when it can be.
I will go hence and do your pleasure, find
The sure and speedy means of travel, then 870
Come back and take you to your friends in Rome.
There wants a carriage, money and the rest, —
A day's work by to-morrow at this time.
How shall I see you and assure escape?"

She replied, "Pass, to-morrow at this hour. 875
If I am at the open window, well:
If I am absent, drop a handkerchief
And walk by! I shall see from where I watch,
And know that all is done. Return next eve.
And next, and so till we can meet and speak!" 880
"To-morrow at this hour I pass," said I.
She was withdrawn.

Here is another point
I bid you pause at. When I told thus far,
Some one said, subtly, "Here at least was found
Your confidence in error, — you perceived 885
The spirit of the letters, in a sort,
Had been the lady's, if the body should be
Supplied by Guido: say, he forged them all!
Here was the unforger fact — she sent for you,
Spontaneously elected you to help, 890
— What men call, loved you: Guido read her mind,
Gave it expression to assure the world
The case was just as he foresaw: he wrote,
She spoke."

Sirs, that first simile serves still, —
That falsehood of a scorpion hatched, I say. 895
Nowhere i' the world but in Madonna's mouth.
Go on! Suppose, that falsehood foiled, next eve
Pictured Madonna raised her painted hand,
Fixed the face Rafael bent above the Babe,
On my face as I flung me at her feet: 900
Such miracle vouchsafed and manifest.
Would that prove the first lying tale was true?
Pompilia spoke, and I at once received,
Accepted my own fact, my miracle
Self-authorized and self-explained, — she chose 905
To summon me and signify her choice.
Afterward, — oh! I gave a passing glance
To a certain ugly cloud-shape, goblin-shred
Of hell-smoke hurrying past the splendid moon

Out now to tolerate no darkness more, 910
 And saw right through the thing that tried to pass
 For truth and solid, not an empty lie :
 " So, he not only forged the words for her
 But words for me, made letters he called mine :
 What I sent, he retained, gave these in place, 915
 All by the mistress-messenger! As I
 Recognized her, at potency of truth,
 So she, by the crystalline soul, knew me,
 Never mistook the signs. Enough of this —
 Let the wraith go to nothingness again, 920
 Here is the orb, have only thought for her!"

" Thought?" nay, Sirs, what shall follow was not thought :
 I have thought sometimes, and thought long and hard.
 I have stood before, gone round a serious thing,
 Tasked my whole mind to touch and clasp it close, 925
 As I stretch forth my arm to touch this bar.
 God and man, and what duty I owe both, —
 I dare to say I have confronted these
 In thought : but no such faculty helped here.
 I put forth no thought, — powerless, all that night 930
 I paced the city : it was the first Spring.
 By the invasion I lay passive to.
 In rushed new things, the old were rapt away ;
 Alike abolished — the imprisonment
 Of the outside air, the inside weight o' the world 935
 That pulled me down. Death meant, to spurn the ground.
 Soar to the sky, — die well and you do that.
 The very immolation made the bliss ;
 Death was the heart of life, and all the harm
 My folly had crouched to avoid, now proved a veil 940
 Hiding all gain my wisdom strove to grasp :
 As if the intense centre of the flame
 Should turn a heaven to that devoted fly
 Which hitherto, sophist alike and sage,
 Saint Thomas¹ with his sober gray goose-quill, 945
 And sinner Plato by Cephisian² reed,
 Would fain, pretending just the insect's good,
 Whisk off, drive back, consign to shade again.
 Into another state, under new rule
 I knew myself was passing swift and sure ; 950
 Whereof the initiatory pang approached,
 Felicitous annoy, as bitter-sweet
 As when the virgin-band, the victors chaste,

¹ *Saint Thomas* : Aquinas. See note on
l. 484.

² *Cephisian reed* : the reeds of Cephisus,
one of the rivers of Athens.



CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA DELLA PIEVE, AREZZO. INTERIOR.

Feel at the end the earthly garments drop,
 And rise with something of a rosy shame 955
 Into immortal nakedness: so I
 Lay, and let come the proper throe would thrill
 Into the ecstasy and outthrob pain.

I' the gray of dawn it was I found myself 960
 Facing the pillared front o' the Pieve — mine,
 My church: it seemed to say for the first time
 "But am not I the Bride, the mystic love
 O' the Lamb, who took thy plighted troth, my priest,
 To fold thy warm heart on my heart of stone
 And freeze thee nor unfasten any more? 965
 This is a fleshly woman, — let the free
 Bestow their life-blood, thou art pulseless now!"
 See! Day by day I had risen and left this church
 At the signal waved me by some foolish fan,
 With half a curse and half a pitying smile 970
 For the monk I stumbled over in my haste,
 Prostrate and corpse-like at the altar-foot
 Intent on his *corona*¹: then the church
 Was ready with her quip, if word conduced,
 To quicken my pace nor stop for prating — "There!
 Be thankful you are no such ninny, go 975
 Rather to teach a black-eyed novice cards
 Than gabble Latin and protrude that nose
 Smoothed to a sheep's through no brains and much faith!"
 That sort of incentive! Now the church changed tone — 980
 Now, when I found out first that life and death
 Are means to an end, that passion uses both,
 Indisputably mistress of the man
 Whose form of worship is self-sacrifice:
 Now, from the stone lungs sighed the scranell voice 985
 "Leave that live passion, come be dead with me!"
 As if, i' the fabled garden,² I had gone
 On great adventure, plucked in ignorance
 Hedge-fruit, and feasted to satiety. 990
 Laughing at such high fame for hips and haws,
 And scorned the achievement: then come all at once
 O' the prize o' the place, the thing of perfect gold,
 The apple's self: and, scarce my eye on that,
 Was 'ware as well o' the seven-fold dragon's watch.

Sirs, I obeyed. Obedience was too strange, — 995
 This new thing that had been struck into me

¹ *His corona*: his rosary.

where the golden apple was guarded by a

² *The fabled garden*: of the Hesperides, dragon.

By the look o' the lady, — to dare disobey
 The first authoritative word. 'T was God's.
 I had been lifted to the level of her,
 Could take such sounds into my sense. I said 1000
 "We two are cognisant o' the Master now;
 She it is bids me bow the head: how true,
 I am a priest! I see the function here;
 I thought the other way self-sacrifice:
 This is the true, seals up the perfect sum. 1005
 I pay it, sit down, silently obey."

So, I went home. Dawn broke, noon broadened, I —
 I sat stone-still, let time run over me.
 The sun slanted into my room, had reached
 The west. I opened book, — Aquinas blazed 1010
 With one black name only on the white page.
 I looked up, saw the sunset: vespers rang:
 "She counts the minutes till I keep my word
 And come say all is ready. I am a priest.
 Duty to God is duty to her: I think 1015
 God, who created her, will save her too
 Some new way, by one miracle the more,
 Without me. Then, prayer may avail perhaps."
 I went to my own place i' the Pieve, read
 The office: I was back at home again 1020
 Sitting i' the dark. "Could she but know — but know
 That, were there good in this distinct from God's,
 Really good as it reached her, though procured
 By a sin of mine, — I should sin: God forgives.
 She knows it is no fear withholds me: fear? 1025
 Of what? Suspense here is the terrible thing.
 If she should, as she counts the minutes, come
 On the fantastic notion that I fear
 The world now, fear the Archbishop, fear perhaps
 Count Guido, he who, having forged the lies, 1030
 May wait the work, attend the effect, — I fear
 The sword of Guido! Let God see to that —
 Hating lies, let not her believe a lie!"

Again the morning found me. "I will work,
 Tie down my foolish thoughts. Thank God so far! 1035
 I have saved her from a scandal, stopped the tongues
 Had broken else into a cackle and hiss
 Around the noble name. Duty is still
 Wisdom: I have been wise." So the day wore.

At evening — "But, achieving victory, 1040
 I must not blink the priest's peculiar part,

Nor shrink to counsel, comfort : priest and friend —
 How do we discontinue to be friends?
 I will go minister, advise her seek
 Help at the source, — above all, not despair : 1045
 There may be other happier help at hand.
 I hope it, — wherefore then neglect to say? ”

There she stood — leaned there, for the second time,
 Over the terrace, looked at me, then spoke :
 “ Why is it you have suffered me to stay 1050
 Breaking my heart two days more than was need?
 Why delay help, your own heart yearns to give?
 You are again here, in the self-same mind,
 I see here, steadfast in the face of you, —
 You grudge to do no one thing that I ask. 1055
 Why then is nothing done? You know my need.
 Still, through God’s pity on me, there is time
 And one day more : shall I be saved or no? ”
 I answered — “ Lady, waste no thought, no word
 Even to forgive me! Care for what I care — 1060
 Only! Now follow me as I were fate!
 Leave this house in the dark to-morrow night,
 Just before daybreak : — there ’s new moon this eve —
 It sets, and then begins the solid black.
 Descend, proceed to the Torrione, step 1065
 Over the low dilapidated wall,
 Take San Clemente, there ’s no other gate
 Unguarded at the hour : some paces thence
 An inn stands ; cross to it : I shall be there. ”

She answered, “ If I can but find the way. 1070
 But I shall find it. Go now! ”

I did go,
 Took rapidly the route myself prescribed.
 Stopped at Torrione, climbed the ruined place,
 Proved that the gate was practicable, reached
 The inn, no eye, despite the dark, could miss, 1075
 Knocked there and entered, made the host secure :
 “ With Caponsacchi it is ask and have ;
 I know my betters. Are you bound for Rome?
 I get swift horse and trusty man, ” said he.

Then I retraced my steps, was found once more 1080
 In my own house for the last time : there lay
 The broad pale opened Summa. “ Shut his book,
 There ’s other showing! ’T was a Thomas too
 Obtained, — more favored than his namesake here, —

A gift, tied faith fast, foiled the tug of doubt, — 1085
 Our Lady's girdle;¹ down he saw it drop
 As she ascended into heaven, they say:
 He kept that safe and bade all doubt adieu.
 I too have seen a lady and hold a grace."

I know not how the night passed: morning broke; 1090
 Presently came my servant. "Sir, this eve—
 Do you forget?" I started. "How forget?
 What is it you know?" "With due submission, Sir
 This being last Monday in the month but one
 And a vigil, since to-morrow is Saint George, 1095
 And feast day, and moreover day for copes,
 And Canon Conti now away a month,
 And Canon Crispi sour because, forsooth,
 You let him sulk in stall and bear the brunt
 Of the octave . . . Well, Sir, 't is important!"

"True! 1100
 Hearken, I have to start for Rome this night.
 No word, lest Crispi overboil and burst!
 Provide me with a laic dress! Throw dust
 I' the Canon's eye, stop his tongue's scandal so!
 See there 's a sword in case of accident." 1105
 I knew the knave, the knave knew me.

And thus

Through each familiar hindrance of the day
 Did I make steadily for its hour and end, —
 Felt time's old barrier-growth of right and fit
 Give way through all its twines, and let me go. 1110
 Use and wont recognized the excepted man,
 Let speed the special service. — and I sped
 Till, at the dead between midnight and morn,
 There was I at the goal, before the gate,
 With a tune in the ears, low leading up to loud, 1115
 A light in the eyes, faint that would soon be flare,
 Ever some spiritual witness new and new
 In faster frequency, crowding solitude
 To watch the way o' the warfare, — till, at last,
 When the ecstatic minute must bring birth, 1120
 Began a whiteness in the distance, waxed
 Whiter and whiter, near grew and more near,
 Till it was she: there did Pompilia come:
 The white I saw shine through her was her soul's,
 Certainly, for the body was one black, 1125
 Black from head down to foot. She did not speak,

¹ *Our Lady's girdle*: according to the tradition, the Virgin, on her ascent to heaven, loosened her girdle, which fell into the hands of the doubting apostle, St. Thomas.

Glided into the carriage, — so a cloud
 • Gathers the moon up. “ By San Spirito,
 To Rome, as if the road burned underneath!
 Reach Rome, then hold my head in pledge, I pay 1130
 The run and the risk to heart’s content!” Just that
 I said, — then, in another tick of time,
 Sprang, was beside her, she and I alone.

So it began, our flight thro’ dusk to clear,
 Through day and night and day again to night 1135
 Once more, and to last dreadful dawn of all.
 Sirs, how should I lie quiet in my grave
 Unless you suffer me wring, drop by drop,
 My brain dry, make a riddance of the drench
 Of minutes with a memory in each, 1140
 Recorded motion, breath or look of hers,
 Which poured forth would present you one pure glass,
 Mirror you plain, — as God’s sea,¹ glassed in gold,
 His saints, — the perfect soul Pompilia? Men,
 You must know that a man gets drunk with truth 1145
 Stagnant inside him! Oh, they’ve killed her, Sirs!
 Can I be calm?

Calmly! Each incident
 Proves, I maintain, that action of the flight
 For the true thing it was. The first faint scratch
 O’ the stone will test its nature, teach its worth 1150
 To idiots who name Parian² — coprolite.³
 After all, I shall give no glare — at best
 Only display you certain scattered lights
 Laniping the rush and roll of the abyss:
 Nothing but here and there a fire-point pricks 1155
 Wavelet from wavelet: well!

For the first hour
 We both were silent in the night, I know:
 Sometimes I did not see nor understand.
 Blackness engulfed me, — partial stupor, say —
 Then I would break way, breathe through the surprise, 1160
 And be aware again, and see who sat
 In the dark vest with the white face and hands.
 I said to myself — “ I have caught it, I conceive
 The mind o’ the mystery: ’t is the way they wake
 And wait, two martyrs somewhere in a tomb 1165
 Each by each as their blessing was to die;
 Some signal they are promised and expect, —
 When to arise before the trumpet scares:

¹ *God’s sea*: Revelation, iv. 6.

² *Parian*: pure marble from Paros.

³ *Coprolite*: petrified dung of carnivorous reptiles.

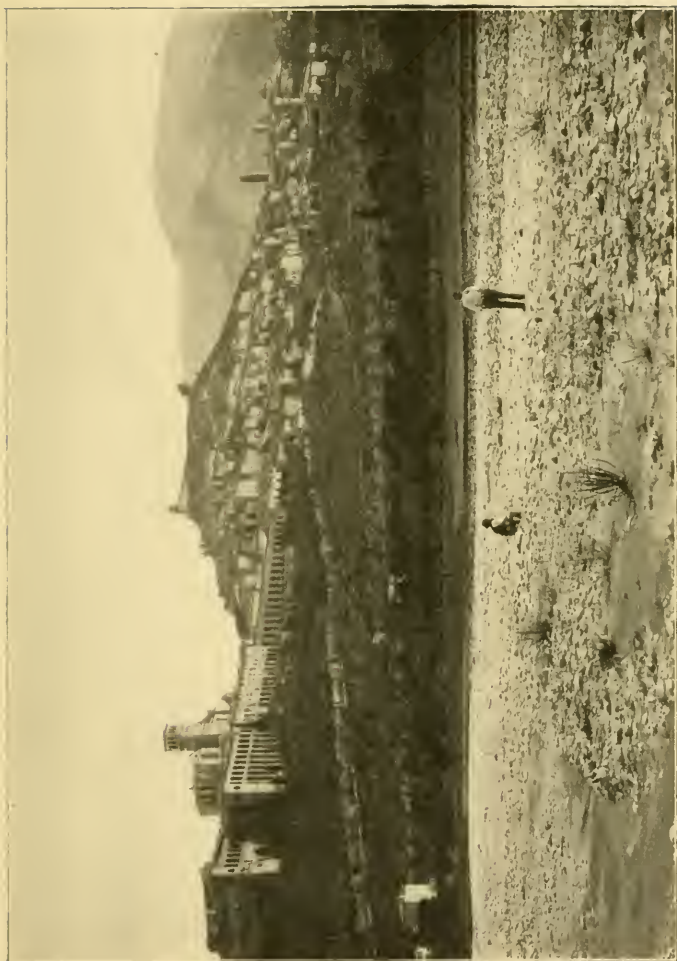
So, through the whole course of the world they wait
 The last day, but so fearless and so safe! 1170
 No otherwise, in safety and not fear,
 I lie, because she lies too by my side."
 You know this is not love, Sirs, — it is faith,
 The feeling that there 's God, he reigns and rules
 Out of this low world: that is all; no harm! 1175
 At times she drew a soft sigh — music seemed
 Always to hover just above her lips,
 Not settle, — break a silence music too.

In the determined morning, I first found
 Her head erect, her face turned full to me, 1180
 Her soul intent on mine through two wide eyes.
 I answered them. "You are saved hitherto.
 We have passed Perugia, — gone round by the wood,
 Not through, I seem to think, — and opposite
 I know Assisi; this is holy ground."¹ 1185
 Then she resumed. "How long since we both left
 Arezzo?" "Years — and certain hours beside."

It was at . . . ah, but I forget the names!
 'Tis a mere post-house and a hovel or two;
 I left the carriage and got bread and wine 1190
 And brought it her. "Does it detain to eat?"
 "They stay perforce, change horses, — therefore eat!
 We lose no minute: we arrive, be sure!"
 This was — I know not where — there 's a great hill
 Close over, and the stream has lost its bridge, 1195
 One fords it. She began — "I have heard say
 Of some sick body that my mother knew,
 'T was no good sign when in a limb diseased
 All the pain suddenly departs, — as if
 The guardian angel discontinued pain 1200
 Because the hope of cure was gone at last:
 The limb will not again exert itself.
 It needs be pained no longer: so with me,
 — My soul whence all the pain is past at once:
 All pain must be to work some good in the end. 1205
 True, this I feel now, this may be that good,
 Pain was because of, — otherwise, I fear!"

She said, — a long while later in the day,
 When I had let the silence be, — abrupt —
 "Have you a mother?" "She died, I was born." 1210

¹ *Assisi . . . holy ground*: because St. order of Franciscan monks and the monastery
 Francis was born there in 1182, founder of the of St. Francis.



ASSISI.

"A sister then?" "No sister." "Who was it —
 What woman were you used to serve this way,
 Be kind to, till I called you and you came?"
 I did not like that word. Soon afterward —
 "Tell me, are men unhappy, in some kind 1215
 Of mere unhappiness at being men,
 As women suffer, being womanish?
 Have you, now, some unhappiness, I mean,
 Born of what may be man's strength overmuch,
 To match the undue susceptibility, 1220
 The sense at every pore when hate is close?
 It hurts us if a baby hides its face
 Or child strikes at us punily, calls names
 Or makes a mouth, — much more if stranger men
 Laugh or frown, — just as that were much to bear! 1225
 Yet rocks split, — and the blow-ball does no more,
 Quivers to feathery nothing at a touch;
 And strength may have its drawback weakness scapes."
 Once she asked "What is it that made you smile,
 At the great gate with the eagles and the snakes, 1230
 Where the company entered, 'tis a long time since?"
 " — Forgive — I think you would not understand:
 Ah, but you ask me, — therefore, it was this.
 That was a certain bishop's villa-gate,
 I knew it by the eagles, — and at once 1235
 Remembered this same bishop was just he
 People of old were wont to bid me please
 If I would catch preferment: so, I smiled
 Because an impulse came to me, a whim —
 What if I prayed the prelate leave to speak, 1240
 Began upon him in his presence-hall
 — 'What, still at work so gray and obsolete?
 Still rocheted and mitred more or less?
 Don't you feel all that out of fashion now?
 I find out when the day of things is done!' " 1245

At eve we heard the *angelus*:¹ she turned —
 "I told you I can neither read nor write.
 My life stopped with the play-time; I will learn,
 If I begin to live again: but you —
 Who are a priest — wherefore do you not read 1250
 The service at this hour? Read Gabriel's song,
 The lesson, and then read the little prayer
 To Raphael, proper for us travellers!"
 I did not like that, neither, but I read.

¹ *The angelus*: the brief service said at consisting of the *Ave*, or "Hail, Mary," etc., the toll of the bell, at morn, noon, and night, with versicle response and a collect.

When we stopped at Foligno it was dark. 1255
 The people of the post came out with lights :
 The driver said, " This time to-morrow, may
 Saints only help, relays continue good,
 Nor robbers hinder, we arrive at Rome."
 I urged, " Why tax your strength a second night? 1260
 Trust me, alight here and take brief repose!
 We are out of harm's reach, past pursuit : go sleep
 If but an hour! I keep watch, guard the while
 Here in the doorway." But her whole face changed,
 The misery grew again about her mouth, 1265
 The eyes burned up from faintness, like the fawn's
 Tired to death in the thicket, when she feels
 The probing spear o' the huntsman. " Oh, no stay!"
 She cried, in the fawn's cry, " On to Rome, on, on—
 Unless 't is you who fear, — which cannot be!" 1270

We did go on all night ; but at its close
 She was troubled, restless, moaned low, talked at whiles
 To herself, her brow on quiver with the dream :
 Once, wide awake, she menaced, at arms' length
 Waved away something — " Never again with you ! 1275
 My soul is mine, my body is my soul's :
 You and I are divided ever more
 In soul and body : get you gone !" Then I —
 " Why, in my whole life I have never prayed!
 Oh, if the God, that only can, would help! 1280
 Am I his priest with power to cast out fiends?
 Let God arise and all his enemies
 Be scattered!" By morn there was peace, no sigh
 Out of the deep sleep.

When she woke at last,
 I answered the first look — " Scarce twelve hours more. 1285
 Then, Rome! There probably was no pursuit,
 There cannot now be peril : bear up brave!
 Just some twelve hours to press through to the prize :
 Then, no more of the terrible journey!" " Then,
 No more o' the journey : if it might but last! 1290
 Always, my life-long, thus to journey still!
 It is the interruption that I dread, —
 With no dread, ever to be here and thus!
 Never to see a face nor hear a voice!
 Yours is no voice ; you speak when you are dumb ; 1295
 Nor face, I see it in the dark. I want
 No face nor voice that change and grow unkind."
 That I liked, that was the best thing she said.

In the broad day, I dared entreat. "Descend!"
 I told a woman, at the garden-gate 1300
 By the post-house, white and pleasant in the sun,
 "It is my sister, — talk with her apart!
 She is married and unhappy, you perceive;
 I take her home because her head is hurt;
 Comfort her as you women understand!" 1305
 So, there I left them by the garden-wall,
 Paced the road, then bade put the horses to,
 Came back, and there she sat: close to her knee,
 A black-eyed child still held the bowl of milk,
 Wondered to see how little she could drink, 1310
 And in her arms the woman's infant lay.
 She smiled at me "How much good this has done!
 This is a whole night's rest and how much more!
 I can proceed now, though I wish to stay.
 How do you call that tree with the thick top 1315
 That holds in all its leafy green and gold
 The sun now like an immense egg of fire?"
 (It was a million-leaved mimosa.) "Take
 The babe away from me and let me go!"
 And in the carriage "Still a day, my friend!
 And perhaps half a night, the woman fears. 1320
 I pray it finish since it cannot last
 There may be more misfortune at the close,
 And where will you be? God suffice me then!"
 And presently — for there was a roadside-shrine — 1325
 "When I was taken first to my own church
 Lorenzo in Lucina, being a girl,
 And bid confess my faults, I interposed
 'But teach me what fault to confess and know!'
 So, the priest said — 'You should bethink yourself: 1330
 Each human being needs must have done wrong!'
 Now, be you candid and no priest but friend —
 Were I surprised and killed here on the spot,
 A runaway from husband and his home,
 Do you account it were in sin I died? 1335
 My husband used to seem to harm me, not . . .
 Not on pretence he punished sin of mine,
 Nor for sin's sake and lust of cruelty,
 But as I heard him bid a farming-man
 At the villa take a lamb once to the wood 1340
 And there ill-treat it, meaning that the wolf
 Should hear its cries, and so come, quick be caught,
 Enticed to the trap: he practised thus with me
 That so, whatever were his gain thereby,
 Others than I might become prey and spoil. 1345
 Had it been only between our two selves, —

His pleasure and my pain. — why, pleasure him
 By dying, nor such need to make a coil!
 But this was worth an effort, that my pain
 Should not become a snare, prove pain threefold 1350
 To other people — strangers — or unborn —
 How should I know? I sought release from that —
 I think, or else from, — dare I say, some cause,
 Such as is put into a tree, which turns
 Away from the north wind with what nest it holds, — 1355
 The woman said that trees so turn: now, friend,
 Tell me, because I cannot trust myself!
 You are a man: what have I done amiss?"
 You must conceive my answer, — I forget —
 Taken up wholly with the thought, perhaps, 1360
 This time she might have said, — might, did not say —
 "You are a priest." She said, "my friend."
 Day wore,
 We passed the places, somehow the calm went,
 Again the restless eyes began to rove
 In new fear of the foe mine could not see. 1365
 She wandered in her mind, — addressed me once
 "Gaetano!" — that is not my name: whose name?¹
 I grew alarmed, my head seemed turning too.
 I quickened pace with promise now, now threat:
 Bade drive and drive, nor any stopping more. 1370
 "Too deep i' the thick of the struggle, struggle through!
 Then drench her in repose though death's self pour
 The plenitude of quiet, — help us, God,
 Whom the winds carry!"
 Suddenly I saw
 The old tower, and the little white-walled clump 1375
 Of buildings and the cypress-tree or two, —
 "Already Castelnuovo — Rome!" I cried.
 "As good as Rome. — Rome is the next stage, think!
 This is where travellers' hearts are wont to beat.
 Say you are saved, sweet lady!" Up she woke. 1380
 The sky was fierce with color from the sun
 Setting. She screamed out "No, I must not die!
 Take me no farther, I should die: stay here!
 I have more life to save than mine!"
 She swooned.
 We seemed safe: what was it foreboded so? 1385
 Out of the coach into the inn I bore
 The motionless and breathless pure and pale
 Pompilia, — bore her through a pitying group
 And laid her on a couch, still calm and cured

¹ *Gaetano . . . whose name: see Book VII. 101.*

By deep sleep of all woes at once. The host
Was urgent "Let her stay an hour or two!" 1390
Leave her to us, all will be right by morn!"
Oh, my foreboding! But I could not choose.

I paced the passage, kept watch all night long.
I listened,— not one movement, not one sigh. 1395
"Fear not: she sleeps so sound!" they said: but I
Feared, all the same, kept fearing more and more,
Found myself throb with fear from head to foot,
Filled with a sense of such impending woe,
That, at first pause of night, pretence of gray, 1400
I made my mind up it was morn.— "Reach Rome,
Lest hell reach her! A dozen miles to make,
Another long breath, and we emerge!" I stood
I' the court-yard, roused the sleepy grooms. "Have out
Carriage and horse, give haste, take gold!" said I. 1405
While they made ready in the doubtful morn,—
'T was the last minute,— needs must I ascend
And break her sleep; I turned to go.

And there
Faced me Count Guido, there posed the mean man
As master,— took the field, encamped his rights, 1410
Challenged the world: there leered new triumph, there
Scowled the old malice in the visage bad
And black o' the scamp. Soon triumph suppld the tongue
A little, malice glued to his dry throat,
And he part howled, part hissed . . . oh, how he kept 1415
Well out o' the way, at arm's length and to spare! —
"My salutation to your priestship! What?
Matutinal, busy with book so soon
Of an April day that's damp as tears that now
Deluge Arezzo at its darling's flight? — 1420
'T is unfair, wrongs femininity at large,
To let a single dame monopolize
A heart the whole sex claims, should share alike:
Therefore I overtake you, Canon! Come!
The lady,— could you leave her side so soon? 1425
You have not yet experienced at her hands
My treatment, you lay down undrugged, I see!
Hence this alertness — hence no death-in-life
Like what held arms fast when she stole from mine.
To be sure, you took the solace and repose 1430
That first night at Foligno! — news abound
O' the road by this time,— men regaled me much,
As past them I came halting after you,

Vulcan pursuing Mars,¹ as poets sing, —
 Still at the last here pant I, but arrive, 1435
 Vulcan — and not without my Cyclops too,
 The Commissary and the unpoisoned arm
 O' the Civil Force, should Mars turn mutineer.
 Enough of fooling: capture the culprits, friend!
 Here is the lover in the smart disguise 1440
 With the sword, — he is a priest, so mine lies still.
 There upstairs hides my wife the runaway,
 His leman: the two plotted, poisoned first,
 Plundered me after, and eloped thus far
 Where now you find them. Do your duty quick! 1445
 Arrest and hold him! That's done: now catch her!"
 During this speech of that man, — well, I stood
 Away, as he managed, — still, I stood as near
 The throat of him, with these two hands, my own. —
 As now I stand near yours, Sir, — one quick spring, 1450
 One great good satisfying gripe, and lo!
 There had he lain abolished with his lie,
 Creation purged o' the miscreate, man redeemed,
 A spittle wiped off from the face of God!
 I, in some measure, seek a poor excuse 1455
 For what I left undone, in just this fact
 That my first feeling at the speech I quote
 Was — not of what a blasphemy was dared,
 Not what a bag of venom'd purulence
 Was split and noisome, — but how splendidly 1460
 Mirthful, how ludicrous a lie was launched!
 Would Molière's² self wish more than hear such man
 Call, claim such woman for his own, his wife
 Even though, in due amazement at the boast,
 He had stammered, she moreover was divine? 1465
 She to be his, — were hardly less absurd
 Than that he took her name into his mouth,
 Licked, and then let it go again, the beast.
 Signed with his slaver. Oh, she poisoned him,
 Plundered him, and the rest! Well, what I wished 1470
 Was, that he would but go on, say once more
 So to the world, and get his meed of men,
 The fist's reply to the filth. And while I mused,
 The minute, oh the misery, was gone!
 On either idle hand of me there stood 1475
 Really an officer, nor laughed i' the least:

¹ *Vulcan pursuing Mars*: the story of Vulcan's discovering the love of Venus and Mars, already referred to by Guido. Juan," wherein Molière (1622-1673) makes the libertine husband claim Donna Elvire, the nun, as his wife.

² *Molière's*: an allusion to the play "Don

Nay, rendered justice to his reason, laid
 Logic to heart as 't were submitted them
 "Twice two makes four."

"And now, catch her!" he cried.

That sobered me. "Let myself lead the way — 1480
 Ere you arrest me, who am somebody,
 Being, as you hear, a priest and privileged, —
 To the lady's chamber! I presume you — men
 Expert, instructed how to find out truth,
 Familiar with the guise of guilt. Detect 1485
 Guilt on her face when it meets mine, then judge
 Between us and the mad dog howling there!"
 Up we all went together, in they broke
 O' the chamber late my chapel. There she lay,
 Composed as when I laid her, that last eve, 1490
 O' the couch, still breathless, motionless, sleep's self,
 Wax-white, seraphic, saturate with the sun
 O' the morning that now flooded from the front
 And filled the window with a light like blood.
 "Behold the poisoner, the adulteress, 1495
 — And feigning sleep too! Seize, bind!" Guido hissed.

She started up, stood erect, face to face
 With the husband: back he fell, was buttressed there
 By the window all a-flame with morning-red,
 He the black figure, the opprobrious blur 1500
 Against all peace and joy and light and life.
 "Away from between me and hell!" she cried:
 "Hell for me, no embracing any more!
 I am God's, I love God. God — whose knees I clasp,
 Whose utterly most just award I take, 1505
 But bear no more love-making devils: hence!"
 I may have made an effort to reach her side
 From where I stood i' the door-way, — anyhow
 I found the arms, I wanted, pinioned fast,
 Was powerless in the clutch to left and right 1510
 O' the rabble pouring in, rascality
 Enlisted, rampant on the side of hearth
 Home and the husband, — pay in prospect too!
 They heaped themselves upon me. "Ha! — and him
 Also you outrage? Him, too, my sole friend, 1515
 Guardian and saviour? That I baulk you of,
 Since — see how God can help at last and worst!"
 She sprang at the sword that hung beside him, seized,
 Drew, brandished it, the sunrise burned for joy
 O' the blade, "Die," cried she, "devil, in God's name!" 1520
 Ah, but they all closed round her, twelve to one
 — The unmanly men, no woman-mother made,

Spawned somehow! Dead-white and disarmed she lay.
 No matter for the sword, her word sufficed
 To spike the coward through and through: he shook, 1525
 Could only spit between the teeth — "You see?
 You hear? Bear witness, then! Write down . . . but no —
 Carry these criminals to the prison-house,
 For first thing! I begin my search meanwhile
 After the stolen effects, gold, jewels, plate, 1530
 Money and clothes, they robbed me of and fled,
 With no few amorous pieces, verse and prose,
 I have much reason to expect to find."

When I saw that — no more than the first mad speech,
 Made out the speaker mad and a laughing-stock, 1535
 So neither did this next device explode
 One listener's indignation, — that a scribe
 Did sit down, set himself to write indeed,
 While sundry knaves began to peer and pry
 In corner and hole, — that Guido, wiping brow 1540
 And getting him a countenance, was fast
 Losing his fear, beginning to strut free
 O' the stage of his exploit, snuff here, sniff there, —
 Then I took truth in, guessed sufficiently
 The service for the moment. "What I say, 1545
 Slight at your peril! We are aliens here,
 My adversary and I, called noble both;
 I am the nobler, and a name men know.
 I could refer our cause to our own Court
 In our own country, but prefer appeal 1550
 To the nearer jurisdiction. Being a priest,
 Though in a secular garb, — for reasons good
 I shall adduce in due time to my peers, —
 I demand that the Church I serve, decide
 Between us, right the slandered lady there. 1555
 A Tuscan noble, I might claim the Duke:
 A priest, I rather choose the Church, — bid Rome
 Cover the wronged with her inviolate shield."

There was no refusing this: they bore me off,
 They bore her off, to separate cells o' the same 1560
 Ignoble prison, and, separate, thence to Rome.
 Pompilia's face, then and thus, looked on me
 The last time in this life: not one sight since,
 Never another sight to be! And yet
 I thought I had saved her. I appealed to Rome: 1565
 It seems I simply sent her to her death.
 You tell me she is dying now, or dead;

I cannot bring myself to quite believe
 This is a place you torture people in :
 What if this your intelligence were just 1570
 A subtlety, an honest wile to work
 On a man at unawares? 'T were worthy you.
 No, Sirs, I cannot have the lady dead!
 That erect form, flashing brow, fulgurant eye,
 That voice immortal (oh, that voice of hers!) 1575
 That vision in the blood-red daybreak — that
 Leap to life of the pale electric sword
 Angels go armed with, — that was not the last
 O' the lady! Come, I see through it, you find —
 Know the manœuvre! Also herself said 1580
 I had saved her: do you dare say she spoke false?
 Let me see for myself if it be so!
 Though she were dying, a Priest might be of use,
 The more when he's a friend too, — she called me
 Far beyond "friend." Come, let me see her — indeed 1585
 It is my duty, being a priest: I hope
 I stand confessed, established, proved a priest?
 My punishment had motive that, a priest
 I, in a laic garb, a mundane mode,
 Did what were harmlessly done otherwise. 1590
 I never touched her with my finger-tip
 Except to carry her to the couch, that eve,
 Against my heart, beneath my head, bowed low,
 As we priests carry the paten:¹ that is why
 — To get leave and go see her of your grace — 1595
 I have told you this whole story over again.
 Do I deserve grace? For I might lock lips,
 Laugh at your jurisdiction: what have you
 To do with me in the matter? I suppose
 You hardly think I donned a bravo's dress 1600
 To have a hand in the new crime; on the old,
 Judgment's delivered, penalty imposed,
 I was chained fast at Civita hand and foot —
 She had only you to trust to, you and Rome,
 Rome and the Church, and no pert meddling priest 1605
 Two days ago, when Guido, with the right,
 Hacked her to pieces. One might well be wroth;
 I have been patient, done my best to help:
 I come from Civita and punishment
 As friend of the Court — and for pure friendship's sake 1610
 Have told my tale to the end, — nay, not the end —
 For, wait — I'll end — not leave you that excuse!

¹ *The paten*: the plate or chalice on which the sacred bread of the communion service is carried.

When we were parted, — shall I go on there?
 I was presently brought to Rome — yes, here I stood
 Opposite yonder very crucifix — 1615
 And there sat you and you, Sirs, quite the same.
 I heard charge, and bore question, and told tale
 Noted down in the book there. — turn and see
 If, by one jot or tittle, I vary now!
 I' the color the tale takes, there's change perhaps; 1620
 'T is natural, since the sky is different,
 Eclipse in the air now; still, the outline stays.
 I showed you how it came to be my part
 To save the lady. Then your clerk produced
 Papers, a pack of stupid and impure 1625
 Banalities called letters about love —
 Love, indeed, — I could teach who styled them so,
 Better, I think, though priest and loveless both!
 " — How was it that a wife, young, innocent,
 And stranger to your person, wrote this page? " — 1630
 " — She wrote it when the Holy Father wrote
 The bestiality that posts thro' Rome,
 Put in his mouth by Pasquin."¹ " Nor perhaps
 Did you return these answers, verse and prose,
 Signed, sealed and sent the lady? There's your hand! " 1635
 " — This precious piece of verse, I really judge,
 Is meant to copy my own character.
 A clumsy mimic; and this other prose,
 Not so much even; both rank forgery:
 Verse, quotha? Bembo's² verse! When Saint John wrote 1640
 The tract '*De Tribus*,'³ I wrote this to match."
 " — How came it, then, the documents were found
 At the inn on your departure? " — " I opine,
 Because there were no documents to find
 In my presence, — you must hide before you find. 1645
 Who forged them hardly practised in my view;
 Who found them waited till I turned my back."
 " — And what of the clandestine visits paid,
 Nocturnal passage in and out the house
 With its lord absent? 'T is alleged you climbed . . ." 1650
 " — Flew on a broomstick to the man i' the moon!
 Who witnessed or will testify this trash? "
 " — The trusty servant, Margherita's self,
 Even she who brought you letters, you confess,

¹ *Pasquin*: the name given to a statue in Rome (from Pasquino, a cobbler, whose shop opposite to it was a centre of gossip) on which anonymous squibs were posted.

² *Bembo*: secretary to Pope Leo X., and a well-known man of letters (1470-1547).

³ *De Tribus*: the blasphemous and legendary tract "De Tribus Impostoribus" (Moses, Mahomet, and Christ), often referred to in the Middle Ages. (For an account of this curious tradition of a non-existent or secret work see "Poet-lore," Vol. VI. p. 248.)

And, you confess, took letters in reply : 1655
 Forget not we have knowledge of the facts!"
 " — Sirs, who have knowledge of the facts, defray
 The expenditure of wit I waste in vain,
 Trying to find out just one fact of all!
 She who brought letters from who could not write, 1660
 And took back letters to who could not read, —
 Who was that messenger, of your charity?"
 " — Well, so far favors you the circumstance
 That this same messenger . . . how shall we say? . . .
Sub imputatione meretricis 1665
Laborat,¹ — which makes accusation null :
 We waive this woman's : naught makes void the next.
 Borsi, called Venerino, he who drove,
 O' the first night when you fled away, at length
 Deposits to your kissings in the coach, 1670
 — Frequent, frenetic . . ." "When deposed he so?"
 "After some weeks of sharp imprisonment . . ."
 " — Granted by friend the Governor, I engage —"
 " — For his participation in your flight!
 At length his obduracy melting made 1675
 The avowal mentioned. . . ." "Was dismissed forthwith
 To liberty, poor knave, for recompense.
 Sirs, give what credit to the lie you can!
 For me, no word in my defence I speak,
 And God shall argue for the lady!"
 So 1680
 Did I stand question, and make answer, still
 With the same result of smiling disbelief,
 Polite impossibility of faith
 In such affected virtue in a priest ;
 But a showing fair play, an indulgence, even, 1685
 To one no worse than others after all —
 Who had not brought disgrace to the order, played
 Discreetly, ruffled gown nor ripped the cloth
 In a bungling game at romps : I have told you, Sirs —
 If I pretended simply to be pure, 1690
 Honest and Christian in the case, — absurd!
 As well go boast myself above the needs
 O' the human nature, careless how meat smells,
 Wine tastes, — a saint above the smack! But once
 Abate my crest, own flaws i' the flesh, agree 1695
 To go with the herd, be hog no more nor less,
 Why, hogs in common herd have common rights :
 I must not be unduly borne upon,
 Who just romanced a little, sowed wild oats,

¹ *Sub imputatione meretricis laborat* : "labors under the imputation of unchastity."

- But 'scaped without a scandal, flagrant fault. 1700
 My name helped to a mirthful circumstance :
 " Joseph " would do well to amend his plea :
 Undoubtedly — some toying with the wife,
 But as for ruffian violence and rape,
 Potiphar¹ pressed too much on the other side! 1705
 The intrigue, the elopement, the disguise, — well charged!
 The letters and verse looked hardly like the truth.
 Your apprehension was — of guilt enough
 To be compatible with innocence,
 So, punished best a little and not too much. 1710
 Had I struck Guido Franceschini's face,
 You had counselled me withdraw for my own sake,
 Baulk him of bravo-hiring. Friends came round,
 Congratulated, " Nobody mistakes!
 The pettiness o' the forfeiture defines 1715
 The peccadillo: Guido gets his share :
 His wife is free of husband and hook-nose,
 The mouldy viands and the mother-in-law.
 To Civita with you and amuse the time,
 Travesty us '*De Raptu Helenæ!*'² 1720
 A funny figure must the husband cut
 When the wife makes him skip, — too ticklish, eh?
 Do it in Latin, not the Vulgar, then!
 Scazons³ — we 'll copy and send his Eminence.
 Mind — one iambus in the final foot! 1725
 He 'll rectify it, be your friend for life!"
 Oh, Sirs, depend on me for much new light
 Thrown on the justice and religion here
 By this proceeding, much fresh food for thought!
- And I was just set down to study these 1730
 In relegation, two short days ago,
 Admiring how you read the rules, when, clap,
 A thunder comes into my solitude —
 I am caught up in a whirlwind and cast here.
 Told of a sudden, in this room where so late 1735
 You dealt out law adroitly, that those scales,
 I meekly bowed to, took my allotment from,
 Guido has snatched at, broken in your hands.
 Metes to himself the murder of his wife,
 Full measure, pressed down, running over now! 1740
 Can I assist to an explanation? — Yes,
 I rise in your esteem, sagacious Sirs,

¹ *Potiphar*: Genesis xxxix. 10.³ *Scazons*: iambic verses, with a spondee² *De Raptu Helenæ*: of the carrying off in the final foot instead of an iambus.
of Helen of Troy.

Stand up a renderer of reasons, not
 The officious priest would personate Saint George
 For a mock Princess in undragoned days. 1745
 What, the blood startles you? What, after all
 The priest who needs must carry sword on thigh
 May find imperative use for it? Then, there was
 A Princess, was a dragon belching flame,
 And should have been a Saint George also? Then, 1750
 There might be worse schemes than to break the bonds
 At Arezzo, lead her by the little hand.
 Till she reached Rome, and let her try to live?
 But you were law and gospel, — would one please
 Stand back, allow your faculty elbow-room? 1755
 You blind guides who must needs lead eyes that see!
 Fools, alike ignorant of man and God!
 What was there here should have perplexed your wit
 For a wink of the owl-eyes of you? How miss, then,
 What's now forced on you by this flare of fact — 1760
 As if Saint Peter failed to recognize
 Nero as no apostle, John or James,
 Till some one burned a martyr, made a torch
 O' the blood and fat to show his features by!
 Could you fail read this cartulary aright 1765
 On head and front of Franceschini there,
 Large-lettered like hell's masterpiece of print, —
 That he, from the beginning pricked at heart
 By some lust, lech of hate against his wife,
 Plotted to plague her into overt sin 1770
 And shame, would slay Pompilia body and soul,
 And save his mean self — miserably caught
 I' the quagmire of his own tricks, cheats and lies?
 — That himself wrote those papers, — from himself
 To himself, — which, i' the name of me and her, 1775
 His mistress-messenger gave her and me,
 Touching us with such pustules of the soul
 That she and I might take the taint, be shown
 To the world and shuddered over, speckled so?
 — That the agent put her sense into my words, 1780
 Made substitution of the thing she hoped,
 For the thing she had and held, its opposite,
 While the husband in the background bit his lips
 At each fresh failure of his precious plot?
 — That when at the last we did rush each on each, 1785
 By no chance but because God willed it so —
 The spark of truth was struck from out our souls —
 Made all of me, descried in the first glance,
 Seem fair and honest and permissible love
 O' the good and true — as the first glance told me 1790

There was no duty patent in the world
 Like daring try be good and true myself,
 Leaving the shows of things to the Lord of Show
 And Prince o' the Power of the Air. Our very flight,
 Even to its most ambiguous circumstance, 1795
 Irrefragably proved how futile, false . . .
 Why, men — men and not boys — boys and not babes —
 Babes and not beasts — beasts and not stocks and stones! —
 Had the liar's lie been true one pin-point speck,
 Were I the accepted suitor, free o' the place, 1800
 Disposer of the time, to come at a call
 And go at a wink as who should say me nay, —
 What need of flight, what were the gain therefrom
 But just damnation, failure or success?
 Damnation pure and simple to her the wife 1805
 And me the priest — who bartered private bliss
 For public reprobation, the safe shade
 For the sunshine which men see to pelt me by :
 What other advantage, — we who led the days
 And nights alone i' the house, — was flight to find? 1810
 In our whole journey did we stop an hour,
 Diverge a foot from straight road till we reached
 Or would have reached — but for that fate of ours —
 The father and mother, in the eye of Rome,
 The eye of yourselves we made aware of us 1815
 At the first fall of misfortune? And indeed
 You did so far give sanction to our flight,
 Confirm its purpose, as lend helping hand,
 Deliver up Pompilia not to him
 She fled, but those the flight was ventured for. 1820
 Why then could you, who stopped short, not go on
 One poor step more, and justify the means,
 Having allowed the end? — not see and say
 " Here 's the exceptional conduct that should claim
 To be exceptionally judged on rules 1825
 Which, understood, make no exception here " —
 Why play instead into the devil's hands
 By dealing so ambiguously as gave
 Guido the power to intervene like me,
 Prove one exception more? I saved his wife 1830
 Against law : against law he slays her now :
 Deal with him!

I have done with being judged.
 I stand here guiltless in thought, word and deed,
 To the point that I apprise you. — in contempt
 For all misapprehending ignorance 1835
 O' the human heart, much more the mind of Christ, —

That I assuredly did bow, was blessed
 By the revelation of Pompilia. There!
 Such is the final fact I fling you, Sirs,
 To mouth and mumble and misinterpret: there! 1840
 "The priest's in love," have it the vulgar way!
 Unpriest me, rend the rags o' the vestment, do —
 Degrade deep, disenfranchise all you dare —
 Remove me from the midst, no longer priest
 And fit companion for the like of you — 1845
 Your gay Abati with the well-turned leg
 And rose i' the hat-rim, Canons, cross at neck
 And silk mask in the pocket of the gown,
 Brisk Bishops with the world's musk still unbrushed
 From the rochet; I'll no more of these good things: 1850
 There's a crack somewhere, something that's unsound
 I' the rattle!

For Pompilia — be advised,
 Build churches, go pray! You will find me there,
 I know, if you come, — and you will come, I know.
 Why, there's a Judge weeping! Did not I say 1855
 You were good and true at bottom? You see the truth —
 I am glad I helped you: she helped me just so.

But for Count Guido, — you must counsel there!
 I bow my head, bend to the very dust,
 Break myself up in shame of faultiness. 1860
 I had him one whole moment, as I said —
 As I remember, as will never out
 O' the thoughts of me, — I had him in arm's reach
 There, — as you stand, Sir, now you cease to sit, —
 I could have killed him ere he killed his wife, 1865
 And did not: he went off alive and well
 And then effected this last feat — through me!
 Me — not through you — dismiss that fear! 'T was you
 Hindered me staying here to save her, — not
 From leaving you and going back to him 1870
 And doing service in Arezzo. Come.
 Instruct me in procedure! I conceive —
 In all due self-abasement might I speak —
 How you will deal with Guido: oh, not death!
 Death, if it let her life be: otherwise 1875
 Not death, — your lights will teach you clearer! I
 Certainly have an instinct of my own
 I' the matter: bear with me and weigh its worth!
 Let us go away — leave Guido all alone
 Back on the world again that knows him now! 1880
 I think he will be found (indulge so far!)
 Not to die so much as slide out of life,

Pushed by the general horror and common hate
 Low, lower, — left o' the very ledge of things,
 I seem to see him catch convulsively 1885
 One by one at all honest forms of life,
 At reason, order, decency and use —
 To cramp him and get foothold by at least ;
 And still they disengage them from his clutch.
 "What, are you he, then, had Pompilia once 1890
 And so forewent her? Take not up with us!"
 And thus I see him slowly and surely edged
 Off all the table-land whence life upsprings
 Aspiring to be immortality,
 As the snake, hatched on hill-top by mischance, 1895
 Despite his wriggling, slips, slides, slidders down
 Hill-side, lies low and prostrate on the smooth
 Level of the outer place, lapsed in the vale :
 So I lose Guido in the loneliness,
 Silence and dusk, till at the doleful end, 1900
 At the horizontal line, creation's verge,
 From what just is to absolute nothingness —
 Whom is it, straining onward still, he meets?
 What other man deep further in the fate,
 Who, turning at the prize of a foothall 1905
 To flatter him and promise fellowship,
 Discovers in the act a frightful face —
 Judas, made monstrous by much solitude!
 The two are at one now! Let them love their love
 That bites and claws like hate, or hate their hate 1910
 That mops and mows and makes as it were love!
 There, let them each tear each in devil's-fun,
 Or fondle this the other while malice aches —
 Both teach, both learn detestability!
 Kiss him the kiss, Iscariot! Pay that back, 1915
 That smatch o' the slaver blistering on your lip,
 By the better trick, the insult he spared Christ —
 Lure him the lure o' the letters, Aretine!
 Lick him o'er slimy-smooth with jelly-filth
 O' the verse-and-prose pollution in love's guise! 1920
 The cockatrice is with the basilisk!
 There let them grapple, denizens o' the dark,
 Foes or friends, but indissolubly bound,
 In their one spot out of the ken of God
 Or care of man, for ever and ever more! 1925

Why, Sirs, what 's this? Why, this is sorry and strange!
 Futility, divagation: this from me
 Bound to be rational, justify an act
 Of sober man! — whereas, being moved so much,

I give you cause to doubt the lady's mind : 1930
 A pretty sarcasm for the world! I fear
 You do her wit injustice, — all through me!
 Like my fate all through, — ineffective help!
 A poor rash advocate I prove myself.
 You might be angry with good cause: but sure 1935
 At the advocate, — only at the undue zeal
 That spoils the force of his own plea, I think?
 My part was just to tell you how things stand,
 State facts and not be flustered at their fume.
 But then 't is a priest speaks: as for love, — no! 1940
 If you let buzz a vulgar fly like that
 About your brains, as if I loved, forsooth,
 Indeed, Sirs, you do wrong! We had no thought
 Of such infatuation, she and I :
 There are many points that prove it: do be just! 1945
 I told you, — at one little roadside-place
 I spent a good half-hour, paced to and fro
 The garden; just to leave her free awhile,
 I plucked a handful of Spring herb and bloom :
 I might have sat beside her on the bench 1950
 Where the children were: I wish the thing had been,
 Indeed: the event could not be worse, you know :
 One more half-hour of her saved! She's dead now, Sirs!
 While I was running on at such a rate,
 Friends should have plucked me by the sleeve: I went 1955
 Too much o' the trivial outside of her face
 And the purity that shone there — plain to me,
 Not to you, what more natural? Nor am I
 Infatuated, — oh, I saw, be sure!
 Her brow had not the right line, leaned too much, 1960
 Painters would say; they like the straight-up Greek :
 This seemed bent somewhat with an invisible crown
 Of martyr and saint, not such as art approves.
 And how the dark orbs dwelt deep underneath,
 Looked out of such a sad sweet heaven on me! 1965
 The lips, compressed a little, came forward too,
 Careful for a whole world of sin and pain.
 That was the face, her husband makes his plea,
 He sought just to disfigure, — no offence
 Beyond that! Sirs, let us be rational! 1970
 He needs must vindicate his honor, — ay,
 Yet shirks, the coward, in a clown's disguise,
 Away from the scene, endeavors to escape.
 Now, had he done so, slain and left no trace
 O' the slayer, — what were vindicated, pray? 1975
 You had found his wife disfigured or a corpse,
 For what and by whom? It is too palpable!

Then, here 's another point involving law :
 I use this argument to show you meant
 No calumny against us by that title 1980
 O' the sentence, — liars try to twist it so :
 What penalty it bore, I had to pay
 Till further proof should follow of innocence —
Probationis ob defectum,¹ — proof?
 How could you get proof without trying us? 1985
 You went through the preliminary form,
 Stopped there, contrived this sentence to amuse
 The adversary. If the title ran
 For more than fault imputed and not proved,
 That was a simple penman's error, else 1990
 A slip i' the phrase, — as when we say of you
 "Charged with injustice" — which may either be
 Or not be, — 't is a name that sticks meanwhile.
 Another relevant matter : fool that I am!
 Not what I wish true, yet a point friends urge : 1995
 It is not true, — yet, since friends think it helps, —
 She only tried me when some others failed —
 Began with Conti, whom I told you of,
 And Guillichini, Guido's kinsfolk both,
 And when abandoned by them, not before, 2000
 Turned to me. That 's conclusive why she turned.
 Much good they got by the happy cowardice!
 Conti is dead, poisoned a month ago :
 Does that much strike you as a sin? Not much,
 After the present murder, — one mark more 2005
 On the Moor's skin, — what is black by blacker still?
 Conti had come here and told truth. And so
 With Guillichini ; he 's condemned of course
 To the galleys, as a friend in this affair,
 Tried and condemned for no one thing i' the world, 2010
 A fortnight since by who but the Governor? —
 The just judge, who refused Pompilia help
 At first blush, being her husband's friend, you know.
 There are two tales to suit the separate courts,
 Arezzo and Rome : he tells you here, we fled 2015
 Alone, unhelped, — lays stress on the main fault,
 The spiritual sin, Rome looks to : but elsewhere
 He likes best we should break in, steal, bear off,
 Be fit to brand and pillory and flog —
 That 's the charge goes to the heart of the Governor : 2020
 If these unpriest me, you and I may yet
 Converse, Vincenzo Marzi-Medici!
 Oh, Sirs, there are worse men than you, I say!

¹ *Probationis ob defectum* : "for want of sufficient proof."

More easily duped, I mean; this stupid lie,
 Its liar never dared propound in Rome,
 He gets Arezzo to receive, — nay more,
 Gets Florence and the Duke to authorize!
 This is their Rota's sentence, their Granduke
 Signs and seals! Rome for me henceforw?
 Where better men are, — most of all, that,
 The Augustinian of the Hospital,
 Who writes the letter,¹ — he confesse^d
 Many a dying person, never one
 So sweet and true and pure and beat nature absolutely self-poised,
 A good man! Will you make him Po nerring certainty in spite of
 Not that he is not good too, this we ha^l those who had brought
 But old, — else he would have his word i darkest crime of all as
 His truth to teach the world: I thirst for t on of perfect love.]
 But shall not drink it till I reach the source. ¶

Sirs, I am quiet again. You see, we are
 So very pitiable, she and I,
 Who had conceivably been otherwise. 5
 Forget distemperature and idle heat!
 Apart from truth's sake, what 's to move so much? 8
 Pompilia will be presently with God; 2045
 I am, on earth, as good as out of it,
 A relegated priest; when exile ends,
 I mean to do my duty and live long.
 She and I are mere strangers now: but priests
 Should study passion; how else cure mankind, 2050
 Who come for help in passionate extremes?
 I do but play with an imagined life
 Of who, unfettered by a vow, unblessed
 By the higher call, — since you will have it so, —
 Leads it companioned by the woman there. 2055
 To live, and see her learn, and learn by her,
 Out of the low obscure and petty world —
 Or only see one purpose and one will
 Evolve themselves i' the world, change wrong to right:
 To have to do with nothing but the true, 2060
 The good, the eternal — and these, not alone
 In the main current of the general life,
 But small experiences of every day,

¹ *Augustinian . . . who writes the letter*: not say more for fear of being taxed with partiality. I know well that God alone can examine the heart. But I know also that from the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks; and that my great St. Augustine says: 'As the life was, so is its end.'

Frà Celestino Angelo di Sant Anna, the Augustinian monk who confessed Pompilia, and whose deposition is given in a contemporary pamphlet describing the case, which fell into Browning's hands in London. The confessor concluded his deposition as follows: "I do

Then æterns of the particular hearth and home :
 I use turn not only by a comet's rush 2065
 No calrose's birth, — not by the grandeur, God —
 O' the se comfort, Christ. All this, how far away!
 What pe^lectation, meet for a minute's dream! —
 Till furthe^rudging student trims his lamp,
Probationis ^olutarch,^l puts him in the place 2070
 How could y^oGrecian ; draws the patched gown close,
 You went thro^ugh should I fight, save or rule the world! " —
 Stopped there, co^ontentedly, awakes
 The adversary. ary nothingness.
 For more than ^h communion, pass content . . . 2075
 That was a si'
 A slip i' the t, good God! Miserable me!
 " Charged
 Or not b^e : whose book relates the lives of Greek and Roman heroes.
 Another
 Not v'
 It i'
 c

VII.

POMPILIA.

[Pompilia, as she lies dying in the hospital, tells the story of her life with a simplicity, directness, and compassionateness that reveal a nature absolutely self-poised, — a nature that perceives the intrinsically right with unerring certainty in spite of Church, law, and public opinion, yet is forgiving toward those who had brought upon her such agonies of spirit, and can even accept the darkest crime of all as the means by which she will immediately attain the realization of perfect love.]

I AM just seventeen years and five months old,
 And, if I lived one day more, three full weeks ;
 'T is writ so in the church's register,
 Lorenzo in Lucina, all my names
 At length, so many names for one poor child, 5
 — Francesca Camilla Vittoria Angela
 Pompilia Comparini, — laughable!
 Also 't is writ that I was married there
 Four years ago : and they will add, I hope,
 When they insert my death, a word or two, — 10
 Omitting all about the mode of death, —
 This, in its place, this which one cares to know,
 That I had been a mother of a son
 Exactly two weeks. It will be through grace
 O' the Curate, not through any claim I have ; 15
 Because the boy was born at, so baptized
 Close to, the Villa, in the proper church :
 A pretty church, I say no word against,
 Yet stranger-like, — while this Lorenzo seems
 My own particular place, I always say. 20
 I used to wonder, when I stood scarce high
 As the bed here, what the marble lion meant,¹
 With half his body rushing from the wall,
 Eating the figure of a prostrate man —
 (To the right, it is, of entry by the door) 25
 An ominous sign to one baptized like me,
 Married, and to be buried there, I hope.
 And they should add, to have my life complete,
 He is a boy and Gaetan by name —

¹ *What the marble lion meant* : a lion preying on a man symbolized the severity of the Church toward the impenitent or heretical. The lions in the portico are, together with the Campanile, the oldest part of the church of San Lorenzo.

Gaetano, for a reason, — if the friar
 Don Celestine will ask this grace for me 30
 Of Curate Ottoboni: he it was
 Baptized me: he remembers my whole life
 As I do his gray hair.

All these few things
 I know are true, — will you remember them? 35
 Because time flies. The surgeon cared for me,
 To count my wounds, — twenty-two dagger-wounds,
 Five deadly, but I do not suffer much —
 Or too much pain, — and am to die to-night.

Oh how good God is that my babe was born, 40
 — Better than born, baptized and hid away
 Before this happened, safe from being hurt!
 That had been sin God could not well forgive:
 He was too young to smile and save himself.
 When they took, two days after he was born, 45
 My babe away from me to be baptized
 And hidden awhile, for fear his foe should find, —
 The country-woman, used to nursing babes,
 Said “Why take on so? where is the great loss?
 The next three weeks he will but sleep and feed, 50
 Only begin to smile at the month’s end;
 He would not know you, if you kept him here,
 Sooner than that; so, spend three merry weeks
 Snug in the Villa, getting strong and stout,
 And then I bring him back to be your own, 55
 And both of you may steal to — we know where!”
 The month — there wants of it two weeks this day!
 Still, I half fancied when I heard the knock
 At the Villa in the dusk, it might prove she —
 Come to say “Since he smiles before the time, 60
 Why should I cheat you out of one good hour?
 Back I have brought him; speak to him and judge!”
 Now I shall never see him; what is worse,
 When he grows up and gets to be my age,
 He will seem hardly more than a great boy; 65
 And if he asks “What was my mother like?”
 People may answer “Like girls of seventeen” —
 And how can he but think of this and that,
 Lucias, Marias, Sofias, who titter or blush
 When he regards them as such boys may do? 70
 Therefore I wish some one will please to say
 I looked already old though I was young;
 Do I not . . . say, if you are by to speak . . .
 Look nearer twenty? No more like, at least,

Girls who look arch or redden when boys laugh, 75
 Than the poor Virgin that I used to know
 At our street-corner in a lonely niche, —
 The babe, that sat upon her knees, broke off, —
 Thin white glazed clay, you pitied her the more :
 She, not the gay ones, always got my rose. 80

How happy those are who know how to write!
 Such could write what their son should read in time,
 Had they a whole day to live out like me.
 Also my name is not a common name,
 "Pompilia," and may help to keep apart 85
 A little the thing I am from what girls are.
 But then how far away, how hard to find
 Will anything about me have become,
 Even if the boy bethink himself and ask!
 No father that he ever knew at all, 90
 Nor ever had — no, never had, I say!
 That is the truth, — nor any mother left,
 Out of the little two weeks that she lived,
 Fit for such memory as might assist :
 As good too as no family, no name, 95
 Not even poor old Pietro's name, nor hers,
 Poor kind unwise Violante, since it seems
 They must not be my parents any more.
 That is why something put it in my head
 To call the boy "Gaetano" — no old name 100
 For sorrow's sake ; I looked up to the sky
 And took a new saint¹ to begin anew.
 One who has only been made saint — how long?
 Twenty-five years : so, carefuller, perhaps,
 To guard a namesake than those old saints grow, 105
 Tired out by this time, — see my own five saints!

On second thoughts, I hope he will regard
 The history of me as what some one dreamed,
 And get to disbelieve it at the last :
 Since to myself it dwindles fast to that, 110
 Sheer dreaming and impossibility, —
 Just in four days too! All the seventeen years,
 Not once did a suspicion visit me
 How very different a lot is mine
 From any other woman's in the world. 115
 The reason must be, 't was by step and step
 It got to grow so terrible and strange.

¹ *A new saint* : St. Gaetan or Cajetan, 1480-1547, and was canonized by Clement X. founder of the order of Theatins, who lived in 1671.

These strange woes stole on tiptoe, as it were,
 Into my neighborhood and privacy,
 Sat down where I sat, laid them where I lay ; 120
 And I was found familiarized with fear,
 When friends broke in, held up a torch and cried
 " Why, you Pompilia in the cavern thus,
 How comes that arm of yours about a wolf?
 And the soft length, — lies in and out your feet 125
 And laps you round the knee, — a snake it is!"
 And so on.

Well, and they are right enough,
 By the torch they hold up now : for first, observe,
 I never had a father, — no, nor yet
 A mother : my own boy can say at least 130
 " I had a mother whom I kept two weeks!"
 Not I, who little used to doubt . . . / doubt
 Good Pietro, kind Violante, gave me birth?
 They loved me always as I love my babe
 (— Nearly so, that is — quite so could not be —) 135
 Did for me all I meant to do for him,
 Till one surprising day, three years ago,
 They both declared, at Rome, before some judge
 In some Court where the people flocked to hear,
 That really I had never been their child, 140
 Was a mere castaway, the careless crime
 Of an unknown man, the crime and care too much
 Of a woman known too well, — little to these,
 Therefore, of whom I was the flesh and blood :
 What then to Pietro and Violante, both 145
 No more my relatives than you or you?
 Nothing to them! You know what they declared.

So with my husband, — just such a surprise,
 Such a mistake, in that relationship!
 Every one says that husbands love their wives, 150
 Guard them and guide them, give them happiness ;
 'T is duty, law, pleasure, religion : well,
 You see how much of this comes true in mine!
 People indeed would fain have somehow proved
 He was no husband : but he did not hear, 155
 Or would not wait, and so has killed us all.
 Then there is . . . only let me name one more!
 There is the friend, — men will not ask about,
 But tell untruths of, and give nicknames to,
 And think my lover, most surprise of all! 160
 Do only hear, it is the priest they mean,
 Giuseppe Caponsacchi : a priest — love,

And love me! Well, yet people think he did.
 I am married, he has taken priestly vows,
 They know that, and yet go on, say, the same, 165
 "Yes, how he loves you!" "That was love" — they say.
 When anything is answered that they ask:
 Or else "No wonder you love him" — they say.
 Then they shake heads, pity much, scarcely blame —
 As if we neither of us lacked excuse, 170
 And anyhow are punished to the full,
 And downright love atones for everything!
 Nay, I heard read out in the public Court
 Before the judge, in presence of my friends,
 Letters 't was said the priest had sent to me, 175
 And other letters sent him by myself,
 We being lovers!

Listen what this is like!

When I was a mere child, my mother . . . that's
 Violante, you must let me call her so
 Nor waste time, trying to unlearn the word . . . 180
 She brought a neighbor's child of my own age
 To play with me of rainy afternoons;
 And, since there hung a tapestry on the wall.¹
 We two agreed to find each other out
 Among the figures. "Tisbe, that is you, 185
 With half-moon on your hair-knot, spear in hand,
 Flying, but no wings, only the great scarf
 Blown to a bluish rainbow at your back:
 Call off your hound and leave the stag alone!"
 "— And there are you, Pompilia, such green leaves 190
 Flourishing out of your five finger ends,
 And all the rest of you so brown and rough:
 Why is it you are turned a sort of tree?"
 You know the figures never were ourselves
 Though we nicknamed them so. Thus, all my life, — 195
 As well what was, as what, like this, was not. —
 Looks old, fantastic and impossible:
 I touch a fairy thing that fades and fades.
 — Even to my babe! I thought, when he was born,
 Something began for once that would not end, 200
 Nor change into a laugh at me, but stay
 For evermore, eternally quite mine.
 Well, so he is, — but yet they bore him off.
 The third day, lest my husband should lay traps
 And catch him, and by means of him catch me. 205
 Since they have saved him so, it was well done:

¹ *A tapestry on the wall*: this tapestry evidently represented Diana hunting a stag and hamadryads, or tree nymphs.

Yet thence comes such confusion of what was
 With what will be, — that late seems long ago,
 And, what years should bring round, already come,
 Till even he withdraws into a dream 210
 As the rest do: I fancy him grown great,
 Strong, stern, a tall young man who tutors me,
 Frowns with the others "Poor imprudent child!
 Why did you venture out of the safe street?
 Why go so far from help to that lone house? 215
 Why open at the whisper and the knock?"

Six days ago when it was New Year's-day,
 We bent above the fire and talked of him,
 What he should do when he was grown and great. 220
 Violante, Pietro, each had given the arm
 I leant on, to walk by, from couch to chair
 And fireside, — laughed, as I lay safe at last,
 "Pompilia's march from bed to board is made,
 Pompilia back again and with a babe,
 Shall one day lend his arm and help her walk!" 225
 Then we all wished each other more New Years.
 Pietro began to scheme — "Our cause is gained;
 The law is stronger than a wicked man:
 Let him henceforth go his way, leave us ours!
 We will avoid the city, tempt no more 230
 The greedy ones by feasting and parade, —
 Live at the other villa, we know where,
 Still farther off, and we can watch the babe
 Grow fast in the good air; and wood is cheap
 And wine sincere outside the city gate. 235
 I still have two or three old friends will grope
 Their way along the mere half-mile of road,
 With staff and lantern on a moonless night
 When one needs talk: they'll find me, never fear,
 And I'll find them a flask of the old sort yet!" 240
 Violante said "You chatter like a crow:
 Pompilia tires o' the tattle, and shall to bed:
 Do not too much the first day, — somewhat more
 To-morrow, and, the next, begin the cape
 And hood and coat! I have spun wool enough." 245
 Oh what a happy friendly eve was that!

And, next day, about noon, out Pietro went —
 He was so happy and would talk so much,
 Until Violante pushed and laughed him forth
 Sight-seeing in the cold, — "So much to see 250
 I' the churches! Swathe your throat three times!" she cried,
 "And, above all, beware the slippery ways,

And bring us all the news by supper-time!"
 He came back late, laid by cloak, staff and hat,
 Powdered so thick with snow it made us laugh, 255
 Rolled a great log upon the ash o' the hearth,
 And bade Violante treat us to a flask,
 Because he had obeyed her faithfully.
 Gone sight-see through the seven, and found no church
 To his mind like San Giovanni¹ — "There 's the fold, 260
 And all the sheep together, big as cats!
 And such a shepherd, half the size of life,
 Starts up and hears the angel" — when, at the door,
 A tap: we started up: you know the rest.

Pietro at least had done no harm, I know; 265
 Nor even Violante, so much harm as makes
 Such revenge lawful. Certainly she erred —
 Did wrong, how shall I dare say otherwise? —
 In telling that first falsehood, buying me
 From my poor faulty mother at a price, 270
 To pass off upon Pietro as his child.
 If one should take my babe, give him a name,
 Say he was not Gaetano and my own,
 But that some other woman made his mouth
 And hands and feet, — how very false were that! 275
 No good could come of that; and all harm did.
 Yet if a stranger were to represent
 "Needs must you either give your babe to me
 And let me call him mine for evermore,
 Or let your husband get him" — ah, my God, 280
 That were a trial I refuse to face!
 Well, just so here: it proved wrong but seemed right
 To poor Violante — for there lay, she said,
 My poor real dying mother in her rags,
 Who put me from her with the life and all, 285
 Poverty, pain, shame and disease at once,
 To die the easier by what price I fetched —
 Also (I hope) because I should be spared
 Sorrow and sin, — why may not that have helped?
 My father, — he was no one, any one, — 290
 The worse, the likelier, — call him — he who came,
 Was wicked for his pleasure, went his way,
 And left no trace to track by; there remained
 Nothing but me, the unnecessary life,
 To catch up or let fall, — and yet a thing 295

¹ *San Giovanni*: this church is built upon dates from the time of Constantine, and is the site of the ancient palace of Plautius Lateranus, hence it is called "The Lateran." It first in rank of the five patriarchal churches.

She could make happy, be made happy with,
This poor *Violante*, — who would frown thereat?

Well, God, you see! God plants us where we grow.
It is not that because a bud is born
At a wild briar's end, full i' the wild beast's way, 300
We ought to pluck and put it out of reach
On the oak-tree top, — say "There the bud belongs!"
She thought, moreover, real lies were lies told
For harm's sake; whereas this had good at heart,
Good for my mother, good for me, and good 305
For *Pietro* who was meant to love a babe,
And needed one to make his life of use,
Receive his house and land when he should die.
Wrong, wrong and always wrong! how plainly wrong!
For see, this fault kept pricking, as faults do, 310
All the same at her heart: this falsehood hatched,
She could not let it go nor keep it fast.
She told me so, — the first time I was found
Locked in her arms once more after the pain.
When the nuns let me leave them and go home, 315
And both of us cried all the cares away, —
This it was set her on to make amends,
This brought about the marriage — simply this!
Do let me speak for her you blame so much!
When *Paul*, my husband's brother, found me out, 320
Heard there was wealth for who should marry me,
So, came and made a speech to ask my hand
For *Guido*, — she, instead of piercing straight
Through the pretence to the ignoble truth,
Fancied she saw God's very finger point, 325
Designate just the time for planting me
(The wild-briar slip she plucked to love and wear)
In soil where I could strike real root, and grow,
And get to be the thing I called myself:
For, wife and husband are one flesh, God says, 330
And I, whose parents seemed such and were none,
Should in a husband have a husband now.
Find nothing, this time, but was what it seemed,
— All truth and no confusion any more.
I know she meant all good to me, all pain 335
To herself, — since how could it be aught but pain,
To give me up, so, from her very breast,
The wilding flower-tree-branch that, all those years,
She had got used to feel for and find fixed?
She meant well: has it been so ill i' the main? 340
That is but fair to ask: one cannot judge
Of what has been the ill or well of life,

The day that one is dying, — sorrows change
 Into not altogether sorrow-like ;
 I do see strangeness but scarce misery, 345
 Now it is over, and no danger more.
 My child is safe ; there seems not so much pain.
 It comes, most like, that I am just absolved,
 Purged of the past, the foul in me, washed fair, —
 One cannot both have and not have, you know, — 350
 Being right now, I am happy and color things.
 Yes, everybody that leaves life sees all
 Softened and bettered : so with other sights :
 To me at least was never evening yet
 But seemed far beautifuller than its day, 355
 For past is past.

There was a fancy came,
 When somewhere, in the journey with my friend,
 We stepped into a hovel to get food ;
 And there began a yelp here, a bark there. — 360
 Misunderstanding creatures that were wroth
 And vexed themselves and us till we retired.
 The hovel is life : no matter what dogs bit
 Or cats scratched in the hovel I break from,
 All outside is lone field, moon and such peace —
 Flowing in, filling up as with a sea 365
 Whereon comes Someone, walks fast on the white,
 Jesus Christ's self, Don Celestine declares,
 To meet me and calm all things back again.

Beside, up to my marriage, thirteen years
 Were, each day, happy as the day was long : 370
 This may have made the change too terrible.
 I know that when Violante told me first
 The cavalier — she meant to bring next morn,
 Whom I must also let take, kiss my hand —
 Would be at San Lorenzo the same eve 375
 And marry me, — which over, we should go
 Home both of us without him as before,
 And, till she bade speak, I must hold my tongue,
 Such being the correct way with girl-brides,
 From whom one word would make a father blush, — 380
 I know, I say, that when she told me this,
 — Well, I no more saw sense in what she said
 Than a lamb does in people clipping wool ;
 Only lay down and let myself be clipped.
 And when next day the cavalier who came — 385
 (Tisbe had told me that the slim young man
 With wings at head, and wings at feet, and sword

Threatening a monster, in our tapestry,
 Would eat a girl else, — was a cavalier¹)
 When he proved Guido Franceschini, — old 390
 And nothing like so tall as I myself,
 Hook-nosed and yellow in a bush of beard,
 Much like a thing I saw on a boy's wrist,
 He called an owl and used for catching birds, —
 And when he took my hand and made a smile — 395
 Why, the uncomfortableness of it all
 Seemed hardly more important in the case
 Than, — when one gives you, say, a coin to spend, —
 Its newness or its oldness; if the piece
 Weigh properly and buy you what you wish, 400
 No matter whether you get grime or glare!
 Men take the coin, return you grapes and figs.
 Here, marriage was the coin, a dirty piece
 Would purchase me the praise of those I loved :
 About what else should I concern myself? 405

So, hardly knowing what a husband meant,
 I supposed this or any man would serve,
 No whit the worse for being so uncouth :
 For I was ill once and a doctor came
 With a great ugly hat, no plume thereto, 410
 Black jerkin and black buckles and black sword,
 And white sharp beard over the ruff in front,
 And oh so lean, so sour-faced and austere! —
 Who felt my pulse, made me put out my tongue,
 Then oped a phial, dripped a drop or two 415
 Of a black bitter something, — I was cured!
 What mattered the fierce beard or the grim face?
 It was the physic beautified the man,
 Master Malpichi,² — never met his match
 In Rome, they said, — so ugly all the same! 420

However, I was hurried through a storm,
 Next dark eve of December's deadeat day —
 How it rained! — through our street and the Lion's-mouth³
 And the bit of Corso, — cloaked round, covered close,
 I was like something strange or contraband, — 425
 Into blank San Lorenzo, up the aisle,
 My mother keeping hold of me so tight,
 I fancied we were come to see a corpse

¹ *Cavalier* : Perseus rescuing Andromeda from the sea-monster.

² *Master Malpichi* : there was a great physician named "Marcello Malpighi" who

is probably meant. He became physician to Pope Innocent XII. (1628-1694).

³ *Lion's-mouth* : the name of a street in Rome. *Via di Bocca di Leone*.

Before the altar which she pulled me toward.
 There we found waiting an unpleasant priest 430
 Who proved the brother, not our parish friend,
 But one with mischief-making mouth and eye.
 Paul, whom I know since to my cost. And then
 I heard the heavy church-door lock out help
 Behind us: for the customary warmth, 435
 Two tapers shivered on the altar. "Quick —
 Lose no time!" cried the priest. And straightway down
 From . . . what 's behind the altar where he hid —
 Hawk-nose and yellowness and bush and all,
 Stepped Guido, caught my hand, and there was I 440
 O' the chancel, and the priest had opened book,
 Read here and there, made me say that and this,
 And after, told me I was now a wife,
 Honored indeed, since Christ thus weds the Church,
 And therefore turned he water into wine, 445
 To show I should obey my spouse like Christ.
 Then the two slipped aside and talked apart,
 And I, silent and scared, got down again
 And joined my mother who was weeping now.
 Nobody seemed to mind us any more, 450
 And both of us on tiptoe found our way
 To the door which was unlocked by this, and wide.
 When we were in the street, the rain had stopped,
 All things looked better. At our own house-door,
 Violante whispered "No one syllable 455
 To Pietro! Girl-brides never breathe a word!"
 "— Well treated to a wetting, draggle-tails!"
 Laughed Pietro as he opened — "Very near
 You made me brave the gutter's roaring sea
 To carry off from roost old dove and young, 460
 Trussed up in church, the cote, by me, the kite!
 What do these priests mean, praying folk to death
 On stormy afternoons, with Christmas close
 To wash our sins off nor require the rain?"
 Violante gave my hand a timely squeeze, 465
 Madonna saved me from immodest speech,
 I kissed him and was quiet, being a bride.
 When I saw nothing more, the next three weeks,
 Of Guido — "Nor the Church sees Christ" thought I:
 "Nothing is changed however, wine is wine 470
 And water only water in our house.
 Nor did I see that ugly doctor since
 That cure of the illness: just as I was cured,
 I am married, — neither scarecrow will return."

Three weeks, I chuckled — "How would Giulia stare, 475

And Tecla smile and Tisbe laugh outright,
 Were it not impudent for brides to talk! —
 Until one morning, as I sat and sang
 At the broidery-frame alone i' the chamber, — loud
 Voices, two, three together, sobbings too, 480
 And my name, "Guido," "Paolo," flung like stones
 From each to the other! In I ran to see.
 There stood the very Guido and the priest
 With sly face, — formal but nowise afraid, —
 While Pietro seemed all red and angry, scarce 485
 Able to stutter out his wrath in words;
 And this it was that made my mother sob,
 As he reproached her — "You have murdered us,
 Me and yourself and this our child beside!"
 Then Guido interposed "Murdered or not, 490
 Be it enough your child is now my wife!
 I claim and come to take her." Paul put in,
 "Consider — kinsman, dare I term you so? —
 What is the good of your sagacity
 Except to counsel in a strait like this? 495
 I guarantee the parties man and wife
 Whether you like or loathe it, bless or ban.
 May spilt milk be put back within the bowl,—
 The done thing, undone? You, it is, we look
 For counsel to, you fitliest will advise! 500
 Since milk, though spilt and spoilt, does marble good,
 Better we down on knees and scrub the floor,
 Than sigh, 'the waste would make a syllabub!'
 Help us so turn disaster to account,
 So predispose the groom, he needs shall grace 505
 The bride with favor from the very first,
 Not begin marriage an embittered man!"
 He smiled, — the game so wholly in his hands!
 While fast and faster sobbed Violante — "Ay,
 All of us murdered, past averting now! 510
 O my sin, O my secret!" and such like.

Then I began to half surmise the truth ;
 Something had happened, low, mean, underhand,
 False, and my mother was to blame, and I
 To pity, whom all spoke of, none addressed : 515
 I was the chattel that had caused a crime.
 I stood mute, — those who tangled must untie
 The embroilment. Pietro cried "Withdraw, my child!
 She is not helpful to the sacrifice
 At this stage, — do you want the victim by 520
 While you discuss the value of her blood?

For her sake, I consent to hear you talk :
Go, child, and pray God help the innocent!"

I did go and was praying God, when came
Violante, with eyes swollen and red enough, 525
But movement on her mouth for make-believe
Matters were somehow getting right again.
She bade me sit down by her side and hear.
" You are too young and cannot understand,
Nor did your father understand at first. 530
I wished to benefit all three of us,
And when he failed to take my meaning, — why,
I tried to have my way at unaware —
Obtained him the advantage he refused.
As if I put before him wholesome food 535
Instead of broken victual, — he finds change
I' the viands, never cares to reason why,
But falls to blaming me, would fling the plate
From window, scandalize the neighborhood,
Even while he smacks his lips, — men's way, my child! 540
But either you have prayed him unperverse
Or I have talked him back into his wits :
And Paolo was a help in time of need, —
Guido, not much — my child, the way of men!
A priest is more a woman than a man, 545
And Paul did wonders to persuade. In short,
Yes, he was wrong, your father sees and says ;
My scheme was worth attempting : and bears fruit,
Gives you a husband and a noble name,
A palace and no end of pleasant things. 550
What do you care about a handsome youth?
They are so volatile, and tease their wives!
This is the kind of man to keep the house.
We lose no daughter. — gain a son, that 's all :
For 't is arranged we never separate, 555
Nor miss, in our gray time of life, the tints
Of you that color eve to match with morn.
In good or ill, we share and share alike,
And cast our lots into a common lap,
And all three die together as we lived! 560
Only, at Arezzo, — that 's a Tuscan town,
Not so large as this noisy Rome, no doubt,
But older far and finer much, say folk, —
In a great palace where you will be queen,
Know the Archbishop and the Governor, 565
And we see homage done you ere we die.
Therefore, be good and pardon!" — " Pardon what?

You know things, I am very ignorant :
All is right if you only will not cry!"

And so an end! Because a blank begins 570
From when, at the word, she kissed me hard and hot,
And took me back to where my father leaned
Opposite Guido — who stood eyeing him,
As eyes the butcher the cast panting ox
That feels his fate is come, nor struggles more, — 575
While Paul looked archly on, pricked brow at whites
With the pen-point as to punish triumph there, —
And said "Count Guido, take your lawful wife
Until death part you!"

All since is one blank,
Over and ended; a terrific dream. 580
It is the good of dreams — so soon they go!
Wake in a horror of heart-beats, you may —
Cry "The dread thing will never from my thoughts!"
Still, a few daylight doses of plain life,
Cock-crow and sparrow-chirp, or bleat and bell 585
Of goats that trot by, tinkling, to be milked;
And when you rub your eyes awake and wide,
Where is the harm o' the horror? Gone! So here.
I know I wake, — but from what? Blank, I say!
This is the note of evil: for good lasts. 590
Even when Don Celestine bade "Search and find!
For your soul's sake, remember what is past,
The better to forgive it," — all in vain!
What was fast getting indistinct before,
Vanished outright. By special grace perhaps, 595
Between that first calm and this last, four years
Vanish, — one quarter of my life, you know.
I am held up, amid the nothingness,
By one or two truths only — thence I hang,
And there I live, — the rest is death or dream, 600
All but those points of my support. I think
Of what I saw at Rome once in the Square
O' the Spaniards,¹ opposite the Spanish House:
There was a foreigner had trained a goat,
A shuddering white woman of a beast, 605
To climb up, stand straight on a pile of sticks
Put close, which gave the creature room enough:
When she was settled there he, one by one,
Took away all the sticks, left just the four

¹ *Square o' the Spaniards*: Piazza di Spagne is in the centre of the strangers' quarter in Rome.

Whereon the little hoofs did really rest, 610
 There she kept firm, all underneath was air.
 So, what I hold by, are my prayer to God,
 My hope, that came in answer to the prayer,
 Some hand would interpose and save me — hand
 Which proved to be my friend's hand: and, —blest bliss, — 615
 That fancy which began so faint at first,
 That thrill of dawn's suffusion through my dark,
 Which I perceive was promise of my child,
 The light his unborn face sent long before, —
 God's way of breaking the good news to flesh. 620
 That is all left now of those four bad years.
 Don Celestine urged " But remember more!
 Other men's faults may help me find your own.
 I need the cruelty exposed, explained.
 Or how can I advise you to forgive?" 625
 He thought I could not properly forgive
 Unless I ceased forgetting, — which is true:
 For, bringing back reluctantly to mind
 My husband's treatment of me, — by a light
 That 's later than my life-time, I review 630
 And comprehend much and imagine more,
 And have but little to forgive at last.
 For now, — be fair and say, — is it not true
 He was ill-used and cheated of his hope
 To get enriched by marriage? Marriage gave 635
 Me and no money, broke the compact so:
 He had a right to ask me on those terms.
 As Pietro and Violante to declare
 They would not give me: so the bargain stood:
 They broke it, and he felt himself aggrieved, 640
 Became unkind with me to punish them.
 They said 't was he began deception first,
 Nor, in one point whereto he pledged himself,
 Kept promise: what of that, suppose it were?
 Echoes die off, scarcely reverberate 645
 Forever, — why should ill keep echoing ill,
 And never let our ears have done with noise?
 Then my poor parents took the violent way
 To thwart him, — he must needs retaliate, — wrong,
 Wrong, and all wrong, — better say, all blind! 650
 As I myself was, that is sure, who else
 Had understood the mystery: for his wife
 Was bound in some sort to help somehow there.
 It seems as if I might have interposed,
 Blunted the edge of their resentment so, 655
 Since he vexed me because they first vexed him;
 " I will entreat them to desist, submit,

Give him the money and be poor in peace, —
 Certainly not go tell the world: perhaps
 He will grow quiet with his gains."

Yes, say 660

Something to this effect and you do well!
 But then you have to see first: I was blind.
 That is the fruit of all such wormy ways,
 The indirect, the unapproved of God:
 You cannot find their author's end and aim, 665
 Not even to substitute your good for bad,
 Your straight for the irregular; you stand
 Stupefied, profitless, as cow or sheep
 That miss a man's mind, anger him just twice
 By trial at repairing the first fault. 670
 Thus, when he blamed me, "You are a coquette,
 A lure-owl posturing to attract birds,
 You look love-lures at theatre and church,
 In walk, at window!" — that, I knew, was false:
 But why he charged me falsely, whither sought 675
 To drive me by such charge, — how could I know?
 So, unaware, I only made things worse.
 I tried to soothe him by abjuring walk,
 Window, church, theatre, for good and all,
 As if he had been in earnest: that, you know, 680
 Was nothing like the object of his charge.
 Yes, when I got my maid to supplicate
 The priest, whose name she read when she would read
 Those feigned false letters I was forced to hear
 Though I could read no word of, — he should cease 685
 Writing, — nay, if he minded prayer of mine,
 Cease from so much as even pass the street
 Whereon our house looked, — in my ignorance
 I was just thwarting Guido's true intent;
 Which was, to bring about a wicked change 690
 Of sport to earnest, tempt a thoughtless man
 To write indeed, and pass the house, and more,
 Till both of us were taken in a crime.
 He ought not to have wished me thus act lies,
 Simulate folly: but, — wrong or right, the wish, — 695
 I failed to apprehend its drift. How plain
 It follows, — if I fell into such fault,
 He also may have overreached the mark,
 Made mistake, by perversity of brain,
 I' the whole sad strange plot, the grotesque intrigue 700
 To make me and my friend unself ourselves,
 Be other man and woman than we were!
 Think it out, you who have the time! for me, —

I cannot say less ; more I will not say.
 Leave it to God to cover and undo! 705
 Only, my dulness should not prove too much!
 — Not prove that in a certain other point
 Wherein my husband blamed me, — and you blame,
 If I interpret smiles and shakes of head, —
 I was dull too. Oh, if I dared but speak! 710
 Must I speak? I am blamed that I forwent
 A way to make my husband's favor come.
 That is true: I was firm, withstood, refused . . .
 — Women as you are, how can I find the words?
 I felt there was just one thing Guido claimed 715
 I had no right to give nor he to take ;
 We being in estrangement, soul from soul :
 Till, when I sought help, the Archbishop smiled,
 Inquiring into privacies of life,
 — Said I was blameable — (he stands for God) 720
 Nowise entitled to exemption there.
 Then I obeyed, — as surely had obeyed
 Were the injunction " Since your husband bids,
 Swallow the burning coal he proffers you! "
 But I did wrong, and he gave wrong advice 725
 Though he were thrice Archbishop, — that, I know! —
 Now I have got to die and see things clear.
 Remember I was barely twelve years old —
 A child at marriage: I was let alone
 For weeks, I told you, lived my child-life still 730
 Even at Arezzo, when I woke and found
 First . . . but I need not think of that again —
 Over and ended! Try and take the sense
 Of what I signify, if it must be so.
 After the first, my husband, for hate's sake, 735
 Said one eve, when the simpler cruelty
 Seemed somewhat dull at edge and fit to bear,
 " We have been man and wife six months almost :
 How long is this your comedy to last?
 Go this night to my chamber, not your own! " 740
 At which word, I did rush — most true the charge —
 And gain the Archbishop's house — he stands for God —
 And fall upon my knees and clasp his feet,
 Praying him hinder what my estranged soul
 Refused to bear, though patient of the rest : 745
 " Place me within a convent, " I implored —
 " Let me henceforward lead the virgin life
 You praise in Her you bid me imitate! "
 What did he answer? " Folly of ignorance!
 Know, daughter, circumstances make or mar 750
 Virginity, — 't is virtue or 't is vice.

- That which was glory in the Mother of God
 Had been, for instance, damnable in Eve
 Created to be mother of mankind.
 Had Eve, in answer to her Maker's speech
 'Be fruitful, multiply, replenish earth' — 755
 Pouted 'But I choose rather to remain
 Single.' — why, she had spared herself forthwith
 Further probation by the apple and snake,
 Been pushed straight out of Paradise! For see — 760
 If motherhood be qualified impure,
 I catch you making God command Eve sin!
 — A blasphemy so like these Molinists',
 I must suspect you dip into their books."
 Then he pursued " 'T was in your covenant!" 765
- No! There my husband never used deceit.
 He never did by speech nor act imply
 "Because of our souls' yearning that we meet
 And mix in soul through flesh, which yours and mine
 Wear and impress, and make their visible selves, 770
 — All which means, for the love of you and me,
 Let us become one flesh, being one soul!"
 He only stipulated for the wealth;
 Honest so far. But when he spoke as plain —
 Dreadfully honest also — "Since our souls 775
 Stand each from each, a whole world's width between,
 Give me the fleshly vesture I can reach
 And rend and leave just fit for hell to burn!" —
 Why, in God's name, for Guido's soul's own sake
 Imperilled by polluting mine, — I say, 780
 I did resist; would I had overcome!
- My heart died out at the Archbishop's smile;
 — It seemed so stale and worn a way o' the world,
 As though 't were nature frowning — "Here is Spring,
 The sun shines as he shone at Adam's fall, 785
 The earth requires that warmth reach everywhere:
 What, must your patch of snow be saved forsooth
 Because you rather fancy snow than flowers?"
 Something in this style he began with me.
 Last he said, savagely for a good man, 790
 "This explains why you call your husband harsh,
 Harsh to you, harsh to whom you love. God's Bread!
 The poor Count has to manage a mere child
 Whose parents leave untaught the simplest things
 Their duty was and privilege to teach, — 795
 Goodwives' instruction, gossips' lore: they laugh
 And leave the Count the task, — or leave it me!"

Then I resolved to tell a frightful thing.
 "I am not ignorant, — know what I say,
 Declaring this is sought for hate, not love. 800
 Sir, you may hear things like almighty God.
 I tell you that my housemate, yes — the priest
 My husband's brother, Canon Girolamo —
 Has taught me what depraved and misnamed love
 Means, and what outward signs denote the sin, 805
 For he solicits me and says he loves,
 The idle young priest with nought else to do.
 My husband sees this, knows this, and lets be.
 Is it your counsel I bear this beside?"
 "— More scandal, and against a priest this time! 810
 What, 't is the Canon now?" — less snappishly —
 "Rise up, my child, for such a child you are,
 The rod were too advanced a punishment!
 Let's try the honeyed cake. A parable!
 'Without a parable spake He not to them.' 815
 There was a ripe round long black toothsome fruit,
 Even a flower-fig, the prime boast of May:
 And, to the tree, said . . . either the spirit o' the fig,
 Or, if we bring in men, the gardener,
 Archbishop of the orchard — had I time 820
 To try o' the two which fits in best: indeed
 It might be the Creator's self, but then
 The tree should bear an apple, I suppose, —
 Well, anyhow, one with authority said
 'Ripe fig, burst skin, regale the fig-pecker — 825
 The bird whereof thou art a perquisite!'
 'Nay,' with a flounce, replied the restif fig,
 'I much prefer to keep my pulp myself:
 He may go breakfastless and dinnerless.
 Supperless of one crimson seed, for me!' 830
 So, back she flopped into her bunch of leaves.
 He flew off, left her, — did the natural lord, —
 And lo, three hundred thousand bees and wasps
 Found her out, feasted on her to the shuck:
 Such gain the fig's that gave its bird no bite! 835
 The moral, — fools elude their proper lot,
 Tempt other fools, get ruined all alike.
 Therefore go home, embrace your husband quick!
 Which if his Canon brother chance to see,
 He will the sooner back to book again." 840

So, home I did go; so, the worst befell:
 So, I had proof the Archbishop was just man,
 And hardly that, and certainly no more.
 For, miserable consequence to me,

My husband's hatred waxed nor waned at all, 845
 His brother's boldness grew effrontery soon,
 And my last stay and comfort in myself
 Was forced from me : henceforth I looked to God
 Only, nor cared my desecrated soul
 Should have fair walls, gay windows for the world. 850
 God's glimmer, that came through the ruin-top,
 Was witness why all lights were quenched inside :
 Henceforth I asked God counsel, not mankind:

So, when I made the effort, freed myself,
 They said — "No care to save appearance here! 855
 How cynic, — when, how wanton, were enough!"
 — Adding, it all came of my mother's life —
 My own real mother, whom I never knew,
 Who did wrong (if she needs must have done wrong)
 Through being all her life, not my four years, 860
 At mercy of the hateful : every beast
 O' the field was wont to break that fountain-fence,
 Trample the silver into mud so murk
 Heaven could not find itself reflected there.
 Now they cry "Out on her, who, plashy pool, 865
 Bequeathed turbidity and bitterness
 To the daughter-stream where Guido dipt and drank!"

Well, since she had to bear this brand — let me!
 The rather do I understand her now,
 From my experience of what hate calls love, — 870
 Much love might be in what their love called hate.
 If she sold . . . what they call, sold . . . me her child —
 I shall believe she hoped in her poor heart
 That I at least might try be good and pure,
 Begin to live untempted, not go doomed 875
 And done with ere once found in fault, as she.
 Oh and, my mother, it all came to this?
 Why should I trust those that speak ill of you,
 When I mistrust who speaks even well of them?
 Why, since all bound to do me good, did harm, 880
 May not you, seeming as you harmed me most,
 Have meant to do most good — and feed your child
 From bramble-bush, whom not one orchard-tree
 But drew bough back from, nor let one fruit fall?
 This it was for you sacrificed your babe? 885
 Gained just this, giving your heart's hope away
 As I might give mine, loving it as you,
 If . . . but that never could be asked of me!

There, enough! I have my support again,

Again the knowledge that my babe was, is, 890
 Will be mine only. Him, by death, I give
 Outright to God, without a further care, —
 But not to any parent in the world, —
 So to be safe : why is it we repine?
 What guardianship were safer could we choose? 895
 All human plans and projects come to nought :
 My life, and what I know of other lives,
 Prove that : no plan nor project! God shall care!

And now you are not tired? How patient then
 All of you, — Oh yes, patient this long while 900
 Listening, and understanding, I am sure!
 Four days ago, when I was sound and well
 And like to live, no one would understand.
 People were kind, but smiled " And what of him,
 Your friend, whose tonsure the rich dark-brown hides? 905
 There, there! — your lover, do we dream he was?
 A priest too — never were such naughtiness!
 Still, he thinks many a long think, never fear,
 After the shy pale lady, — lay so light
 For a moment in his arms, the lucky one!" 910
 And so on : wherefore should I blame you much?
 So we are made, such difference in minds,
 Such difference too in eyes that see the minds !
 That man, you misinterpret and misprise —
 The glory of his nature, I had thought, 915
 Shot itself out in white light, blazed the truth
 Through every atom of his act with me :
 Yet where I point you, through the crystal shrine,
 Purity in quintessence, one dew-drop,
 You all decry a spider in the midst. 920
 One says " The head of it is plain to see,"
 And one, " They are the feet by which I judge,"
 All say, " Those films were spun by nothing else."

Then, I must lay my babe away with God,
 Nor think of him again for gratitude. 925
 Yes, my last breath shall wholly spend itself
 In one attempt more to disperse the stain,
 The mist from other breath fond mouths have made,
 About a lustrous and pellucid soul :
 So that, when I am gone but sorrow stays, 930
 And people need assurance in their doubt
 If God yet have a servant, man a friend,
 The weak a saviour and the vile a foe, —
 Let him be present, by the name invoked,
 Giuseppe-Maria Caponsacchi!

- There, 935
- Strength comes already with the utterance!
 I will remember once more for his sake
 The sorrow : for he lives and is belied.
 Could he be here, how he would speak for me!
- I had been miserable three drear years 940
 In that dread palace and lay passive now,
 When I first learned there could be such a man.
 Thus it fell : I was at a public play.
 In the last days of Carnival last March,
 Brought there I knew not why, but now know well. 945
 My husband put me where I sat, in front ;
 Then crouched down, breathed cold through me from behind,
 Stationed i' the shadow, — none in front could see, —
 I, it was, faced the stranger-throng beneath,
 The crowd with upturned faces, eyes one stare, 950
 Voices one buzz. I looked but to the stage,
 Whereon two lovers sang and interchanged
 " True life is only love, love only bliss :
 I love thee — thee I love ! " then they embraced.
 I looked thence to the ceiling and the walls. — 955
 Over the crowd, those voices and those eyes. —
 My thoughts went through the roof and out, to Rome
 On wings of music, waft of measured words, —
 Set me down there, a happy child again
 Sure that to-morrow would be festa-day, 960
 Hearing my parents praise past festas more,
 And seeing they were old if I was young,
 Yet wondering why they still would end discourse
 With " We must soon go, you abide your time,
 And, — might we haply see the proper friend 965
 Throw his arm over you and make you safe ! "
- Sudden I saw him ; into my lap there fell
 A foolish twist of comfits, broke my dream
 And brought me from the air and laid me low,
 As ruined as the soaring bee that 's reached 970
 (So Pietro told me at the Villa once)
 By the dust-handful. There the comfits lay :
 I looked to see who flung them, and I faced
 This Caponsacchi, looking up in turn.
 Ere I could reason out why, I felt sure, 975
 Whoever flung them, his was not the hand, —
 Up rose the round face and good-natured grin
 Of one who, in effect, had played the prank,
 From covert close beside the earnest face, —
 Fat waggish Conti, friend of all the world. 980

He was my husband's cousin, privileged
To throw the thing: the other, silent, grave,
Solemn almost, saw me, as I saw him.

There is a psalm Don Celestine recites,
"Had I a dove's wings, how I fain would flee!" 985
The psalm runs not "I hope, I pray for wings," —
Not "If wings fall from heaven, I fix them fast," —
Simply "How good it were to fly and rest,
Have hope now, and one day expect content!
How well to do what I shall never do!" 990
So I said "Had there been a man like that,
To lift me with his strength out of all strife
Into the calm, how I could fly and rest!
I have a keeper in the garden here
Whose sole employment is to strike me low 995
If ever I, for solace, seek the sun.
Life means with me successful feigning death,
Lying stone-like, eluding notice so,
Foregoing here the turf and there the sky.
Suppose that man had been instead of this!" 1000

Presently Conti laughed into my ear,
— Had tripped up to the raised place where I sat —
"Cousin, I flung them brutishly and hard!
Because you must be hurt, to look austere
As Caponsacchi yonder, my tall friend 1005
A-gazing now. Ah, Guido, you so close?
Keep on your knees, do! Beg her to forgive!
My cornet¹ battered like a cannon-ball.
Good-bye, I'm gone!" — nor waited the reply.

That night at supper, out my husband broke, 1010
"Why was that throwing, that buffoonery?
Do you think I am your dupe? What man would dare
Throw comfits in a stranger lady's lap?
'T was knowledge of you bred such insolence
In Caponsacchi; he dared shoot the bolt, 1015
Using that Conti for his stalking-horse.
How could you see him this once and no more,
When he is always haunting hereabout
At the street-corner or the palace-side,
Publishing my shame and your impudence? 1020
You are a wanton, — I a dupe, you think?
O Christ, what hinders that I kill her quick?"
Whereat he drew his sword and feigned a thrust.

¹ *Cornet*: a piece of paper twisted into a conical shape (such as is commonly used by grocers).

All this, now, — being not so strange to me,
 Used to such misconception day by day 1025
 And broken-in to bear, — I bore, this time,
 More quietly than woman should perhaps ;
 Repeated the mere truth and held my tongue.

Then he said, “ Since you play the ignorant,
 I shall instruct you. This amour, — commenced 1030
 Or finished or midway in act, all 's one, —
 'T is the town-talk ; so my revenge shall be.
 Does he presume because he is a priest ?
 I warn him that the sword I wear shall pink
 His lily-scented cassock through and through, 1035
 Next time I catch him underneath your eaves ! ”
 But he had threatened with the sword so oft
 And, after all, not kept his promise. All
 I said was “ Let God save the innocent !
 Moreover death is far from a bad fate. 1040
 I shall go pray for you and me, not him ;
 And then I look to sleep, come death or, worse,
 Life.” So, I slept.

There may have elapsed a week,
 When Margherita, — called my waiting-maid,
 Whom it is said my husband found too fair — 1045
 Who stood and heard the charge and the reply,
 Who never once would let the matter rest
 From that night forward, but rang changes still
 On this the thrust and that the shame, and how
 Good cause for jealousy cures jealous fools, 1050
 And what a paragon was this same priest
 She talked about until I stopped my ears, —
 She said, “ A week is gone ; you comb your hair,
 Then go mope in a corner, cheek on palm,
 Till night comes round again. — so, waste a week 1055
 As if your husband menaced you in sport.
 Have not I some acquaintance with his tricks ?
 Oh no, he did not stab the serving-man
 Who made and sang the rhymes about me once !
 For why ? They sent him to the wars next day. 1060
 Nor poisoned he the foreigner, my friend
 Who wagered on the whiteness of my breast, —
 The swarth skins of our city in dispute :
 For, though he paid me proper compliment,
 The Count well knew he was besotted with 1065
 Somebody else, a skin as black as ink,
 (As all the town knew save my foreigner)
 He found and wedded presently, — ‘ Why need

Better revenge?' — the Count asked. But what 's here?
 A priest that does not fight, and cannot wed, 1070
 Yet must be dealt with! If the Count took fire
 For the poor pastime of a minute, — me —
 What were the conflagration for yourself,
 Countess and lady-wife and all the rest?
 The priest will perish; you will grieve too late: 1075
 So shall the city-ladies' handsomest
 Frankest and liberalest gentleman
 Die for you, to appease a scurvy dog
 Hanging's too good for. Is there no escape?
 Were it not simple Christian charity 1080
 To warn the priest be on his guard, — save him
 Assured death, save yourself from causing it?
 I meet him in the street. Give me a glove,
 A ring to show for token! Mum's the word!"

I answered " If you were, as styled, my maid, 1085
 I would command you: as you are, you say,
 My husband's intimate, — assist his wife
 Who can do nothing but entreat ' Be still!'
 Even if you speak truth and a crime is planned,
 Leave help to God as I am forced to do! 1090
 There is no other help, or we should craze,
 Seeing such evil with no human cure.
 Reflect that God, who makes the storm desist,
 Can make an angry violent heart subside.
 Why should we venture teach Him governance? 1095
 Never address me on this subject more!"

Next night she said " But I went, all the same,
 — Ay, saw your Caponsacchi in his house.
 And come back stuffed with news I must outpour.
 I told him ' Sir, my mistress is a stone: 1100
 Why should you harm her for no good you get?
 For you do harm her — prow! about our place
 With the Count never distant half the street,
 Lurking at every corner, would you look!
 'T is certain she has witched you with a spell. 1105
 Are there not other beauties at your beck?
 We all know, Donna This and Monna That
 Die for a glance of yours, yet here you gaze!
 Go make them grateful, leave the stone its cold!'
 And he — oh, he turned first white and then red, 1110
 And then — ' To her behest I bow myself,
 Whom I love with my body and my soul:
 Only a word i' the bowing! See, I write
 One little word, no harm to see or hear!

Then, fear no further!' This is what he wrote. 1115
 I know you cannot read, — therefore, let me!
 'My idol!' . . .

But I took it from her hand
 And tore it into shreds. "Why, join the rest
 Who harm me? Have I ever done you wrong?
 People have told me 't is you wrong myself: 1120
 Let it suffice I either feel no wrong
 Or else forgive it, — yet you turn my foe!
 The others hunt me and you throw a noose!"

She muttered "Have your wilful way!" I slept.

Whereupon . . . no, I leave my husband out! 1125
 It is not to do him more hurt, I speak.
 Let it suffice, when misery was most,
 One day, I swooned and got a respite so.
 She stooped as I was slowly coming to,
 This Margherita, ever on my trace, 1130
 And whispered — "Caponsacchi!"

If I drowned,
 But woke afloat i' the wave with upturned eyes,
 And found their first sight was a star! I turned —
 For the first time, I let her have her will,
 Heard passively, — "The imposthume at such head, 1135
 One touch, one lancet-puncture would relieve, —
 And still no glance the good physician's way
 Who rids you of the torment in a trice!

Still he writes letters you refuse to hear.
 He may prevent your husband, kill himself, 1140
 So desperate and all fordone is he!

Just hear the pretty verse he made to-day!
 A sonnet from Mirtillo.¹ 'Peerless fair . . .'
 All poetry is difficult to read,
 — The sense of it is, anyhow, he seeks 1145

Leave to contrive you an escape from hell,
 And for that purpose asks an interview.
 I can write, I can grant it in your name,
 Or, what is better, lead you to his house.
 Your husband dashes you against the stones; 1150
 This man would place each fragment in a shrine:
 You hate him, love your husband!"

I returned

¹ *Mirtillo*: evidently used as the name of a pastoral lover who has written a sonnet to his love.

"It is not true I love my husband, — no,
 Nor hate this man. I listen while you speak,
 — Assured that what you say is false, the same : 1155
 Much as when once, to me a little child,
 A rough gaunt man in rags, with eyes on fire,
 A crowd of boys and idlers at his heels,
 Rushed as I crossed the Square, and held my head
 In his two hands, ' Here 's she will let me speak! 1160
 You little girl, whose eyes do good to mine,
 I am the Pope, am Sextus, now the Sixth ;
 And that Twelfth Innocent, proclaimed to-day,
 Is Lucifer disguised in human flesh!
 The angels met in conclave, crowned me! ' — thus 1165
 He gibbered and I listened ; but I knew
 All was delusion, ere folk interposed
 ' Unfasten him, the maniac! ' Thus I know
 All your report of Caponsacchi false,
 Folly or dreaming ; I have seen so much 1170
 By that adventure at the spectacle,
 The face I fronted that one first, last time :
 He would belie it by such words and thoughts.
 Therefore while you profess to show him me,
 I ever see his own face. Get you gone! " 1175

" — That will I, nor once open mouth again, —
 No, by Saint Joseph and the Holy Ghost!
 On your head be the damage, so adieu! "
 And so more days, more deeds I must forget,
 Till . . . what a strange thing now is to declare! 1180
 Since I say anything, say all if true!
 And how my life seems lengthened as to serve!
 It may be idle or inopportune,
 But, true? — why, what was all I said but truth,
 Even when I found that such as are untrue 1185
 Could only take the truth in through a lie?
 Now — I am speaking truth to the Truth's self :
 God will lend credit to my words this time.

It had got half through April, I arose 1190
 One vivid daybreak, — who had gone to bed
 In the old way my wont those last three years,
 Careless until, the cup drained, I should die.
 The last sound in my ear, the over-night,
 Had been a something let drop on the sly
 In prattle by Margherita, " Soon enough 1195
 Gaieties end, now Easter 's past : a week,
 And the Archbishop gets him back to Rome, —
 Every one leaves the town for Rome, this Spring, —

Even Caponsacchi, out of heart and hope,
 Resigns himself and follows with the flock." 1200
 I heard this drop and drop like rain outside
 Fast-falling through the darkness while she spoke :
 So had I heard with like indifference,
 " And Michael's pair of wings will arrive first
 At Rome, to introduce the company, 1205
 And bear him from our picture where he fights
 Satan, — expect to have that dragon loose
 And never a defender!" — my sole thought
 Being still, as night came, " Done, another day!
 How good to sleep and so get nearer death!" — 1210
 When, what, first thing at daybreak, pierced the sleep
 With a summons to me? Up I sprang alive,
 Light in me, light without me, everywhere
 Change! A broad yellow sunbeam was let fall
 From heaven to earth, — a sudden drawbridge lay, 1215
 Along which marched a myriad merry motes,
 Mocking the flies that crossed them and recrossed
 In rival dance, companions new-born too.
 On the house-eaves, a dripping shag of weed
 Shook diamonds on each dull gray lattice-square. 1220
 As first one, then another bird leapt by,
 And light was off, and lo was back again,
 Always with one voice, — where are two such joys? —
 The blessed building-sparrow! I stepped forth,
 Stood on the terrace, — o'er the roofs, such sky! 1225
 My heart sang, " I too am to go away,
 I too have something I must care about,
 Carry away with me to Romé, to Rome!
 The bird brings hither sticks and hairs and wool,
 And nowhere else i' the world; what fly breaks rank, 1230
 Falls out of the procession that befits,
 From window here to window there, with all
 The world to choose, — so well he knows his course?
 I have my purpose and my motive too,
 My march to Rome, like any bird or fly! 1235
 Had I been dead! How right to be alive!
 Last night I almost prayed for leave to die,
 Wished Guido all his pleasure with the sword
 Or the poison, — poison, sword, was but a trick,
 Harmless, may God forgive him the poor jest! 1240
 My life is charmed, will last till I reach Rome!
 Yesterday, but for the sin, — ah, nameless be
 The deed I could have dared against myself!
 Now — see if I will touch an unripe fruit,
 And risk the health I want to have and use! 1245
 Not to live, now, would be the wickedness, —

For life means to make haste and go to Rome
And leave Arezzo, leave all woes at once!"

Now, understand here, by no means mistake!
Long ago had I tried to leave that house 1250
When it seemed such procedure would stop sin;
And still failed more the more I tried — at first
The Archbishop, as I told you, — next, our lord
The Governor, — indeed I found my way,
I went to the great palace where he rules, 1255
Though I knew well 't was he who. — when I gave
A jewel or two, themselves had given me,
Back to my parents, — since they wanted bread,
They who had never let me want a nosegay, — he
Spoke of the jail for felons, if they kept 1260
What was first theirs, then mine, so doubly theirs,
Though all the while my husband's most of all!
I knew well who had spoke the word wrought this:
Yet, being in extremity, I fled
To the Governor, as I say, — scarce opened lip 1265
When — the cold cruel snicker close behind —
Guido was on my trace, already there,
Exchanging nod and wink for shrug and smile,
And I — pushed back to him and, for my pains
Paid with . . . but why remember what is past? 1270
I sought out a poor friar the people call
The Roman, and confessed my sin which came
Of their sin, — that fact could not be repressed, —
The frightfulness of my despair in God:
And, feeling, through the grate, his horror shake, 1275
Implored him, "Write for me who cannot write,
Apprise my parents, make them rescue me!
You bid me be courageous and trust God:
Do you in turn dare somewhat, trust and write
'Dear friends, who used to be my parents once, 1280
And now declare you have no part in me,
This is some riddle I want wit to solve,
Since you must love me with no difference,
Even suppose you altered, — there 's your hate,
To ask for: hate of you two dearest ones 1285
I shall find liker love than love found here,
If husbands love their wives. Take me away
And hate me as you do the gnats and fleas,
Even the scorpions! How I shall rejoice!
Write that and save me!" And he promised — wrote 1290
Or did not write; things never changed at all:
He was not like the Augustinian here!
Last, in a desperation I appealed

To friends, whoever wished me better days,
 To Guillichini, that 's of kin, — "What, I — 1295
 Travel to Rome with you? A flying gout
 Bids me deny my heart and mind my leg!"
 Then I tried Conti, used to brave — laugh back
 The louring thunder when his cousin scowled
 At me protected by his presence: "You — 1300
 Who well know what you cannot save me from, —
 Carry me off! What frightens you, a priest?"
 He shook his head, looked grave — "Above my strength!
 Guido has claws that scratch, shows feline teeth;
 A formidabler foe than I dare fret: 1305
 Give me a dog to deal with, twice the size!
 Of course I am a priest and Canon too,
 But . . . by the bye . . . though both, not quite so bold
 As he, my fellow-Canon, brother-priest,
 The personage in such ill odor here 1310
 Because of the reports — pure birth o' the brain!
 Our Caponsacchi, he 's your true Saint George
 To slay the monster, set the Princess free,
 And have the whole High-Altar to himself:
 I always think so when I see that piece 1315
 I' the Pieve,¹ that 's his church and mine, you know:
 Though you drop eyes at mention of his name!"

That name had got to take a half-grotesque
 Half-ominous, wholly enigmatic sense,
 Like any by-word, broken bit of song 1320
 Born with a meaning, changed by mouth and mouth
 That mix it in a sneer or smile, as chance
 Bids, till it now means nought but ugliness
 And perhaps shame.

— All this intends to say,
 That, over-night, the notion of escape 1325
 Had seemed distemper, dreaming; and the name. —
 Not the man, but the name of him, thus made
 Into a mockery and disgrace, — why, she
 Who uttered it persistently, had laughed,
 "I name his name, and there you start and wince 1330
 As criminal from the red tongs' touch!" — yet now,
 Now, as I stood letting morn bathe me bright,
 Choosing which butterfly should bear my news, —
 The white, the brown one, or that tinier blue, —
 The Margherita, I detested so, 1335

¹ *That piece i' the Pieve*: At the high altar is a picture by Vasari of Saint George killing the dragon.

In she came — “ The fine day, the good Spring time!
 What, up and out at window? That is best.
 No thought of Caponsacchi? — who stood there
 All night on one leg, like the sentry crane,
 Under the pelting of your water-spout — 1340
 Looked last look at your lattice ere he leave
 Our city, bury his dead hope at Rome.
 Ay, go to looking-glass and make you fine,
 While he may die ere touch one least loose hair
 You drag at with the comb in such a rage!” 1345

I turned — “ Tell Caponsacchi he may come!”

“ Tell him to come? Ah, but, for charity,
 A truce to fooling! Come? What, — come this eve?
 Peter and Paul! But I see through the trick!
 Yes, come, and take a flower-pot on his head,
 Flung from your terrace! No joke, sincere truth?” 1350

How plainly I perceived hell flash and fade
 O’ the face of her, — the doubt that first paled joy,
 Then, final reassurance I indeed
 Was caught now, never to be free again! 1355
 What did I care? — who felt myself of force
 To play with silk, and spurn the horsehair-springle.

“ But — do you know that I have bade him come,
 And in your name? I presumed so much,
 Knowing the thing you needed in your heart. 1360
 But somehow — what had I to show in proof?
 He would not come: half-promised, that was all,
 And wrote the letters you refused to read.
 What is the message that shall move him now?”

“ After the Ave Maria, at first dark, 1365
 I will be standing on the terrace, say!”

“ I would I had a good long lock of hair
 Should prove I was not lying! Never mind!”

Off she went — “ May he not refuse, that’s all —
 Fearing a trick!”

I answered, “ He will come.” 1370
 And, all day, I sent prayer like incense up
 To God the strong, God the beneficent,
 God ever mindful in all strife and strait,
 Who, for our own good, makes the need extreme,

Till at the last He puts forth might and saves. 1375
 An old rhyme came into my head and rang
 Of how a virgin, for the faith of God,
 Hid herself, from the Paynims that pursued,
 In a cave's heart ; until a thunderstone,
 Wrapped in a flame, revealed the couch and prey 1380
 And they laughed — " Thanks to lightning, ours at last ! "
 And she cried " Wrath of God, assert His love !
 Servant of God, thou fire, befriend His child ! "
 And lo, the fire she grasped at, fixed its flash,
 Lay in her hand a calm cold dreadful sword 1385
 She brandished till pursuers strewed the ground,
 So did the souls within them die away,
 As o'er the prostrate bodies, sworded, safe,
 She walked forth to the solitudes and Christ :
 So should I grasp the lightning and be saved ! 1390

And still, as the day wore, the trouble grew
 Whereby I guessed there would be born a star,
 Until at an intense throe of the dusk,
 I started up, was pushed, I dare to say,
 Out on the terrace, leaned and looked at last 1395
 Where the deliverer waited me : the same
 Silent and solemn face, I first descried
 At the spectacle, confronted mine once more.

So was that minute twice vouchsafed me, so
 The manhood, wasted then, was still at watch 1400
 To save me yet a second time : no change
 Here, though all else changed in the changing world!

I spoke on the instant, as my duty bade,
 In some such sense as this, whatever the phrase.

" Friend, foolish words were borne from you to me ; 1405
 Your soul behind them is the pure strong wind,
 Not dust and feathers which its breath may bear :
 These to the witless seem the wind itself,
 Since proving thus the first of it they feel.
 If by mischance you blew offence my way, 1410
 The straws are dropt, the wind desists no whit,
 And how such strays were caught up in the street
 And took a motion from you, why inquire ?
 I speak to the strong soul, no weak disguise.
 If it be truth, — why should I doubt it truth ? — 1415
 You serve God specially, as priests are bound,
 And care about me, stranger as I am,
 So far as wish my good, — that miracle

I take to intimate He wills you serve
 By saving me, — what else can He direct? 1420
 Here is the service. Since a long while now,
 I am in course of being put to death :
 While death concerned nothing but me, I bowed
 The head and bade, in heart, my husband strike.
 Now I imperil something more, it seems, 1425
 Something that's trulier me than this myself,
 Something I trust in God and you to save.
 You go to Rome, they tell me : take me there,
 Put me back with my people !”

He replied —
 The first word I heard ever from his lips, 1430
 All himself in it, — an eternity
 Of speech, to match the immeasurable depth
 O' the soul that then broke silence — “I am yours.”

So did the star rise, soon to lead my step,
 Lead on, nor pause before it should stand still 1435
 Above the House o' the Babe. — my babe to be,
 That knew me first and thus made me know him,
 That had his right of life and claim on mine,
 And would not let me die till he was born,
 But pricked me at the heart to save us both, 1440
 Saying “Have you the will? Leave God the way!”
 And the way was Caponsacchi — “mine,” thank God!
 He was mine, he is mine, he will be mine.

No pause i' the leading and the light! I know,
 Next night there was a cloud came, and not he : 1445
 But I prayed through the darkness till it broke
 And let him shine. The second night, he came.

“The plan is rash ; the project desperate :
 In such a flight needs must I risk your life,
 Give food for falsehood, folly or mistake, 1450
 Ground for your husband's rancor and revenge” —
 So he began again, with the same face.
 I felt that, the same loyalty — one star
 Turning now red that was so white before —
 One service apprehended newly : just 1455
 A word of mine and there the white was back!

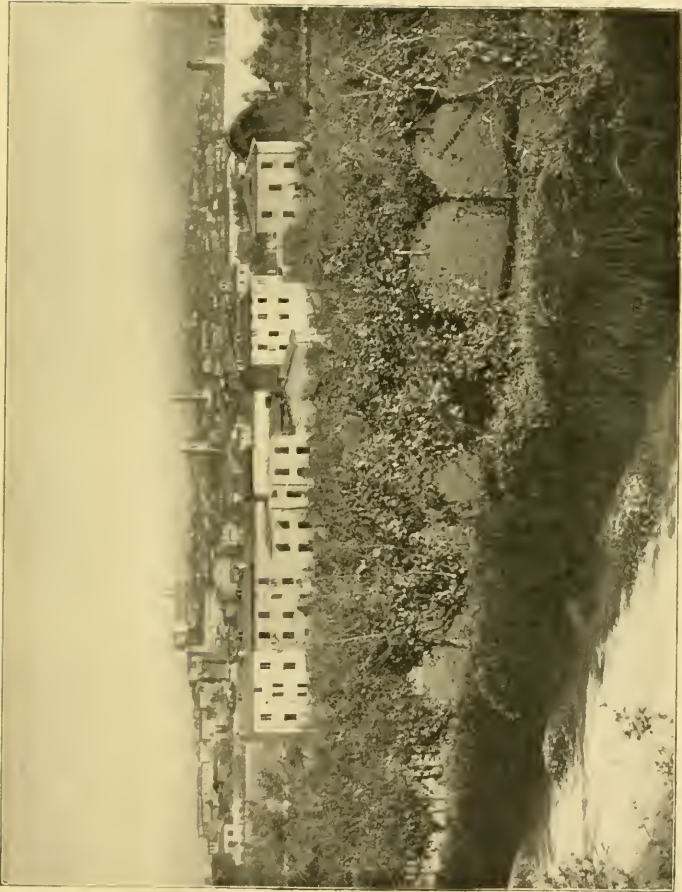
“No, friend, for you will take me! 'T is yourself
 Risk all. not I, — who let you, for I trust
 In the compensating great God : enough!
 I know you : when is it that you will come ?” 1460

“To-morrow at the day’s dawn.” Then I heard
 What I should do: how to prepare for flight
 And where to fly.

That night my husband bade
 “— You, whom I loathe, beware you break my sleep
 This whole night! Couch beside me like the corpse 1465
 I would you were!” The rest you know, I think —
 How I found Caponsacchi and escaped.

And this man, men call sinner? Jesus Christ!
 Of whom men said, with mouths Thyself mad’st once,
 “He hath a devil” — say he was Thy saint, 1470
 My Caponsacchi! Shield and show — unshroud
 In Thine own time the glory of the soul
 If aught obscure, — if ink-spot, from vile pens
 Scribbling a charge against him — (I was glad
 Then, for the first time, that I could not write) — 1475
 Flirted his way, have flecked the blaze!

For me,
 ‘T is otherwise: let men take, sift my thoughts
 — Thoughts I throw like the flax for sun to bleach!
 I did pray, do pray, in the prayer shall die,
 “Oh, to have Caponsacchi for my guide!” 1480
 Ever the face upturned to mine, the hand
 Holding my hand across the world. — a sense
 That reads, as only such can read, the mark
 God sets on woman, signifying so
 She should — shall peradventure — be divine; 1485
 Yet ’ware, the while, how weakness mars the print
 And makes confusion, leaves the thing men see.
 — Not this man sees, — who from his soul, re-writes
 The obliterated charter, — love and strength
 Mending what ’s marred. “So kneels a votarist, 1490
 Weeds some poor waste traditionary plot
 Where shrine once was, where temple yet may be,
 Purgings the place but worshipping the while,
 By faith and not by sight, sight clearest so, —
 Such way the saints work.” — says Don Celestine. 1495
 But I, not privileged to see a saint
 Of old when such walked earth with crown and palm,
 If I call “saint” what saints call something else —
 The saints must bear with me, impute the fault
 To a soul i’ the bud, so starved by ignorance, 1500
 Stinted of warmth, it will not blow this year
 Nor recognize the orb which Spring-flowers know
 But if meanwhile some insect with a heart



AREZZO.

Worth floods of lazy music, spendthrift joy —
 Some fire-fly renounced Spring for my dwarfed cup, 1505
 Crept close to me, brought lustre for the dark.
 Comfort against the cold, — what though excess
 Of comfort should miscall the creature — sun?
 What did the sun to hinder while harsh hands
 Petal by petal, crude and colorless, 1510
 Tore me? This one heart gave me all the Spring!
 Is all told? There 's the journey: and where 's time
 To tell you how that heart burst out in shine?
 Yet certain points do press on me too hard.
 Each place must have a name, though I forget: 1515
 How strange it was — there where the plain begins
 And the small river mitigates its flow —
 When eve was fading fast, and my soul sank,
 And he divined what surge of bitterness.
 In overtaking me, would float me back 1520
 Whence I was carried by the striding day —
 So, — “ This gray place was famous once,” said he —
 And he began that legend of the place
 As if in answer to the unspoken fear,
 And told me all about a brave man dead, 1525
 Which lifted me and let my soul go on!
 How did he know too, — at that town's approach
 By the rock-side, — that in coming near the signs
 Of life, the house-roofs and the church and tower,
 I saw the old boundary and wall o' the world 1530
 Rise plain as ever round me, hard and cold,
 As if the broken circlet joined again,
 Tightened itself about me with no break, —
 As if the town would turn Arezzo's self, —
 The husband there, — the friends my enemies, 1535
 All ranged against me, not an avenue
 To try, but would be blocked and drive me back
 On him, — this other, . . . oh the heart in that!
 Did not he find, bring, put into my arms
 A new-born babe? — and I saw faces beam 1540
 Of the young mother proud to teach me joy,
 And gossips round expecting my surprise
 At the sudden hole through earth that lets in heaven.
 I could believe himself by his strong will
 Had woven around me what I thought the world 1545
 We went along in, every circumstance,
 Towns, flowers and faces, all things helped so well!
 For, through the journey, was it natural
 Such comfort should arise from first to last?
 As I look back, all is one milky way: 1550
 Still bettered more, the more remembered, so

Do new stars bud while I but search for old,
 And fill all gaps i' the glory, and grow him —
 Him I now see makę the shine everywhere.
 Even at the last when the bewildered flesh, 1555
 The cloud of weariness about my soul
 Clogging too heavily, sucked down all sense, —
 Still its last voice was, "He will watch and care ;
 Let the strength go, I am content : he stays!"
 I doubt not he did stay and care for all — 1560
 From that sick minute when the head swam round,
 And the eyes looked their last and died on him,
 As in his arms he caught me, and, you say,
 Carried me in, that tragical red eve,
 And laid me where I next returned to life 1565
 In the other red of morning, two red plates
 That crushed together, crushed the time between,
 And are since then a solid fire to me, —
 When in, my dreadful husband and the world
 Broke, — and I saw him, master, by hell's right, 1570
 And saw my angel helplessly held back
 By guards that helped the malice — the lamb prone,
 The serpent towering and triumphant — then
 Came all the strength back in a sudden swell,
 I did for once see right, do right, give tongue 1575
 The adequate protest : for a worm must turn
 If it would have its wrong observed by God.
 I did spring up, attempt to thrust aside
 That ice-block 'twixt the sun and me, lay low
 The neutralizer of all good and truth. 1580
 If I sinned so, — never obey voice more
 O' the Just and Terrible, who bids us — "Bear!"
 Not — "Stand by, bear to see my angels bear!"
 I am clear it was on impulse to serve God
 Not save myself, — no — nor my child unborn! 1585
 Had I else waited patiently till now? —
 Who saw my old kind parents, silly-sooth
 And too much trustful, for their worst of faults,
 Cheated, brow-beaten, stripped and starved, cast out
 Into the kennel : I remonstrated, 1590
 Then sank to silence, for, — their woes at end,
 Themselves gone, — only I was left to plague.
 If only I was threatened and belied,
 What matter? I could bear it and did bear ;
 It was a comfort, still one lot for all : 1595
 They were not persecuted for my sake
 And I, estranged, the single happy one.
 But when at last, all by myself I stood
 Obeying the clear voice which bade me rise,

Not for my own sake but my babe unborn, 1600
 And take the angel's hand was sent to help —
 And found the old adversary athwart the path —
 Not my hand simply struck from the angel's, but
 The very angel's self made foul i' the face
 By the fiend who struck there, — that I would not bear, 1605
 That only I resisted! So, my first
 And last resistance was invincible.
 Prayers move God; threats, and nothing else, move men!
 I must have prayed a man as he were God
 When I implored the Governor to right 1610
 My parents' wrongs: the answer was a smile.
 The Archbishop, — did I clasp his feet enough,
 Hide my face hotly on them, while I told
 More than I dared make my own mother know?
 The profit was — compassion and a jest. 1615
 This time, the foolish prayers were done with, right
 Used might, and solemnized the sport at once.
 All was against the combat: vantage, mine?
 The runaway avowed, the accomplice-wife,
 In company with the plan-contriving priest? 1620
 Yet, shame thus rank and patent, I struck, bare.
 At foe from head to foot in magic mail,
 And off it withered, cobweb-armory
 Against the lightning! 'T was truth singed the lies
 And saved me, not the vain sword nor weak speech! 1625

You see, I will not have the service fail!
 I say, the angel saved me: I am safe!
 Others may want and wish, I wish nor want
 One point o' the circle plainer, where I stand
 Traced round about with white to front the world. 1630
 What of the calumny I came across,
 What o' the way to the end? — the end crowns all.
 The judges judged aright i' the main, gave me
 The uttermost of my heart's desire, a truce
 From torture and Arezzo, balm for hurt, 1635
 With the quiet nuns, — God recompense the good!
 Who said and sang away the ugly past.
 And, when my final fortune was revealed,
 What safety while, amid my parents' arms,
 My babe was given me! Yes, he saved my babe: 1640
 It would not have peeped forth, the bird-like thing,
 Through that Arezzo noise and trouble: back
 Had it returned nor ever let me see!
 But the sweet peace cured all, and let me live
 And give my bird the life among the leaves 1645
 God meant him! — Weeks and months of quietude,

- I could lie in such peace and learn so much —
 Begin the task, I see how needful now,
 Of understanding somewhat of my past, —
 Know life a little, I should leave so soon. 1650
 Therefore, because this man restored my soul,
 All has been right; I have gained my gain, enjoyed
 As well as suffered, — nay, got foretaste too
 Of better life beginning where this ends —
 All through the breathing-while allowed me thus, 1655
 Which let good premonitions reach my soul
 Unthwarted, and benignant influence flow
 And interpenetrate and change my heart,
 Uncrossed by what was wicked, — nay, unkind.
 For, as the weakness of my time drew nigh, 1660
 Nobody did me one disservice more,
 Spoke coldly or looked strangely, broke the love
 I lay in the arms of, till my boy was born,
 Born all in love, with nought to spoil the bliss
 A whole long fortnight: in a life like mine 1665
 A fortnight filled with bliss is long and much.
 All women are not mothers of a boy,
 Though they live twice the length of my whole life,
 And, as they fancy, happily all the same.
 There I lay, then, all my great fortnight long, 1670
 As if it would continue, broaden out
 Happily more and more, and lead to heaven:
 Christmas before me, — was not that a chance?
 I never realized God's birth before —
 How He grew likest God in being born. 1675
 This time I felt like Mary, had my babe
 Lying a little on my breast like hers.
 So all went on till, just four days ago —
 The night and the tap.
- Oh it shall be success
- To the whole of our poor family! My friends 1680
 . . . Nay, father and mother, — give me back my word!
 They have been rudely stripped of life, disgraced
 Like children who must needs go clothed too fine,
 Carry the garb of Carnival in Lent.
 If they too much affected frippery, 1685
 They have been punished and submit themselves,
 Say no word: all is over, they see God
 Who will not be extreme to mark their fault
 Or He had granted respite: they are safe.
- For that most woeful man my husband once, 1690
 Who, needing respite, still draws vital breath,

I — pardon him? So far as lies in me,
 I give him for his good the life he takes,
 Praying the world will therefore acquiesce.
 Let him make God amends, — none, none to me 1695
 Who thank him rather that, whereas strange fate
 Mockingly styled him husband and me wife,
 Himself this way at least pronounced divorce,
 Blotted the marriage-bond: this blood of mine
 Flies forth exultingly at any door, 1700
 Washes the parchment white, and thanks the blow.
 We shall not meet in this world nor the next,
 But where will God be absent? In His face
 Is light, but in His shadow healing too:
 Let Guido touch the shadow and be healed! 1705
 And as my presence was importunate, —
 My earthly good, temptation and a snare, —
 Nothing about me but drew somehow down
 His hate upon me, — somewhat so excused
 Therefore, since hate was thus the truth of him, — 1710
 May my evanishment for evermore
 Help further to relieve the heart that cast
 Such object of its natural loathing forth!
 So he was made; he nowise made himself:
 I could not love him, but his mother did. 1715
 His soul has never lain beside my soul:
 But for the unresisting body, — thanks!
 He burned that garment spotted by the flesh.
 Whatever he touched is rightly ruined: plague
 It caught, and disinfection it had craved 1720
 Still but for Guido; I am saved through him
 So as by fire; to him — thanks and farewell!

Even for my babe, my boy, there's safety thence —
 From the sudden death of me, I mean: we poor
 Weak souls, how we endeavor to be strong! 1725
 I was already using up my life, —
 This portion, now, should do him such a good,
 This other go to keep off such an ill!
 The great life; see, a breath and it is gone!
 So is detached, so left all by itself 1730
 The little life, the fact which means so much.
 Shall not God stoop the kindlier to His work,
 His marvel of creation, foot would crush,
 Now that the hand He trusted to receive
 And hold it, lets the treasure fall perforce? 1735
 The better; He shall have in orphanage
 His own way all the clearer: if my babe
 Outlived the hour — and he has lived two weeks —

It is through God who knows I am not by.
 Who is it makes the soft gold hair turn black, 1740
 And sets the tongue, might lie so long at rest,
 Trying to talk? Let us leave God alone!
 Why should I doubt He will explain in time
 What I feel now, but fail to find the words? —
 My babe nor was, nor is, nor yet shall be 1745
 Count Guido Franceschini's child at all —
 Only his mother's, born of love not hate!
 So shall I have my rights in after-time.
 It seems absurd, impossible to-day;
 So seems so much else, not explained but known! 1750

Ah! Friends, I thank and bless you every one!
 No more now: I withdraw from earth and man
 To my own soul, compose myself for God.

Well, and there is more! Yes, my end of breath
 Shall bear away my soul in being true! 1755
 He is still here, not outside with the world,
 Here, here, I have him in his rightful place!
 'T is now, when I am most upon the move,
 I feel for what I verily find — again
 The face, again the eyes, again, through all, 1760
 The heart and its immeasurable love
 Of my one friend, my only, all my own,
 Who put his breast between the spears and me.
 Ever with Caponsacchi! Otherwise
 Here alone would be failure, loss to me — 1765
 How much more loss to him, with life debarred
 From giving life, love locked from love's display,
 The day-star stopped its task that makes night morn!
 O lover of my life, O soldier-saint,
 No work begun shall ever pause for death! 1770
 Love will be helpful to me more and more
 I' the coming course, the new path I must tread —
 My weak hand in thy strong hand, strong for that!
 Tell him that if I seem without him now,
 That's the world's insight! Oh, he understands! 1775
 He is at Civita — do I once doubt
 The world again is holding us apart?
 He had been here, displayed in my behalf
 The broad brow that reverberates the truth,
 And flashed the word God gave him, back to man! 1780
 I know where the free soul is flown! My fate
 Will have been hard for even him to bear:
 Let it confirm him in the trust of God,
 Showing how holily he dared the deed!

And, for the rest,— say, from the deed, no touch 1785
 Of harm came, but all good, all happiness,
 Not one faint fleck of failure! Why explain?
 What I see, oh, he sees and how much more!
 Tell him,— I know not wherefore the true word
 Should fade and fall unuttered at the last — 1790
 It was the name of him I sprang to meet
 When came the knock, the summons and the end.
 “My great heart, my strong hand are back again!”
 I would have sprung to these, beckoning across
 Murder and hell gigantic and distinct 1795
 O’ the threshold, posted to exclude me heaven :
 He is ordained to call and I to come!
 Do not the dead wear flowers when dressed for God?
 Say,— I am all in flowers from head to foot!
 Say,— Not one flower of all he said and did, 1800
 Might seem to flit unnoticed, fade unknown.
 But dropped a seed, has grown a balsam-tree
 Whereof the blossoming perfumes the place
 At this supreme of moments! He is a priest ;
 He cannot marry therefore, which is right : 1805
 I think he would not marry if he could.
 Marriage on earth seems such a counterfeit,
 Mere imitation of the inimitable :
 In heaven we have the real and true and sure.
 ’T is there they neither marry nor are given 1810
 In marriage but are as the angels : right,
 Oh how right that is, how like Jesus Christ
 To say that! Marriage-making for the earth,
 With gold so much,— birth, power, repute so much,
 Or beauty, youth so much, in lack of these! 1815
 Be as the angels rather, who, apart,
 Know themselves into one, are found at length
 Married, but marry never, no, nor give
 In marriage ; they are man and wife at once
 When the true time is : here we have to wait 1820
 Not so long neither! Could we by a wish
 Have what we will and get the future now,
 Would we wish aught done undone in the past?
 So, let him wait God’s instant men call years ;
 Meantime hold hard by truth and his great soul, 1825
 Do out the duty! Through such souls alone
 God stooping shows sufficient of His light
 For us i’ the dark to rise by. And I rise.

VIII.

DOMINUS HYACINTHUS DE ARCHANGELIS,

PAUPERUM PROCURATOR.¹

[Dominus Hyacinthus de Archangelis regards the great Franceschini case simply as a fortunate chance for him to show off his superior skill as a lawyer, and thereby discomfit his rival, the Fisc. While his head is occupied in preparing what he considers a learned defence in support of the right of wounded honor to vindicate itself, based upon precedents drawn from animal life, and from Pagan and Christian custom, his heart is entirely occupied with his own domestic felicities.]

AH, my Giacinto, he 's no ruddy rogue,
 Is not Cinone?² What, to-day we 're eight?
 Seven and one 's eight, I hope, old curly-pate!
 — Branches me out his verb-tree on the slate,
Amo -as -avi -atum -are -ans. 5
 Up to *-aturus*, person, tense, and mood,
*Quies me cum subjunctivo*³ (I could cry)
 And chews Corderius⁴ with his morning crust!
 Look eight years onward, and he 's perched, he 's perched
 Dapper and deft on stool beside this chair, 10
 Cinozzo, Cinoncello, who but he?
 — Trying hi^s milk-teeth on some crusty case
 Like this, papa shall triturate⁵ full soon
 To smooth Papinianian⁶ pulp!

It trots

Already through my head, though noon be now, 15
 Does supper-time and what belongs to eve.
 Dispose, O Don, o' the day, first work then play!
 — The proverb bids. And "then" means, won't we hold
 Our little yearly lovesome frolic feast,
 Cinuolo's birth-night, Cinicello's own, 20
 That makes gruff January grin perforce!
 For too contagious grows the mirth, the warmth

¹ *Pauperum Procurator*: the official defender of criminals, as the "Fisc" is the official prosecutor.

² *Cinone*: a pet diminutive of Giacinto, as are Cinozzo, Cinoncello, Cinino, and various other forms occurring in this Book.

³ *Quies me cum subjunctivo*: a truce with the subjunctive.

⁴ *Corderius*: Mathurin Cordier, author of the most popular Latin school-book of the sixteenth century, the "Colloquia Scholastica."

⁵ *Triturate*: grind down.

⁶ *Papinianian*: from Papinius, a Roman jurist of the beginning of the third century.

Escaping from so many hearts at once —
 When the good wife, buxom and bonny yet,
 Jokes the hale grandsire, — such are just the sort 25
 To go off suddenly, — he who hides the key
 O' the box beneath his pillow every night, —
 Which box may hold a parchment (some one thinks)
 Will show a scribbled something like a name
 " Cinino, Ciniccino," near the end, 30
 To whom I give and I bequeath my lands,
 Estates, tenements, hereditaments,
 When I decease as honest grandsire ought."
 Wherefore — yet this one time again perhaps —
 Shan't my Orvieto ¹ fuddle his old nose! 35
 Then, uncles, one or the other, well i' the world,
 May — drop in, merely? — trudge through rain and wind,
 Rather! The smell-feasts rouse them at the hint
 There 's cookery in a certain dwelling-place!
 Gossips, too, each with keepsake in his poke, 40
 Will pick the way, thrid lane by lantern-light,
 And so find door, put galligaskin ² off
 At entry of a decent domicile
 Cornered in snug Condotti,³ — all for love,
 All to crush cup with Cinucciatolo!

Well, 45

Let others climb the heights o' the court, the camp!
 How vain are chambering and wantonness,
 Revel and rout and pleasures that make mad!
 Commend me to home-joy, the family board,
 Altar and hearth! These, with a brisk career, 50
 A source of honest profit and good fame,
 Just so much work as keeps the brain from rust,
 Just so much play as lets the heart expand,
 Honoring God and serving man, — I say,
 These are reality, and all else, — fluff, 55
 Nutshell and nought, — thank Flaccus ⁴ for the phrase!
 Suppose I had been Fisc, yet bachelor!

Why, work with a will, then! Wherefore lazy now?
 Turn up the hour-glass, whence no sand-grain slips
 But should have done its duty to the saint 60
 O' the day, the son and heir that 's eight years old!
 Let law come dimple Cinoncino's cheek,
 And Latin duple Cinarello's chin,

¹ *Orvieto*: a rich wine.² *Galligaskin*: large hose or trousers, evidently from the context worn as an outer protection.³ *Condotti*: a street which runs off the Corso.⁴ *Flaccus*: Horace, "Satires," ii. 5, 35, *quassa nuce*, a proverbial expression for something worthless.

The while we spread him fine and toss him flat
 This pulp that makes the pancake, trim our mass 65
 Of matter into Argument the First,
 Prime Pleading in defence of our accused,
 Which, once a-waft on paper wing, shall soar,
 Shall signalize before applausive Rome
 What study, and mayhap some mother-wit, 70
 Can do toward making Master fop and Fisc
 Old bachelor Bottinius bite his thumb.
 Now, how good God is! How falls plumb to point
 This murder, gives me Guido to defend
 Now, of all days i' the year, just when the boy 75
 Verges on Virgil, reaches the right age
 For some such illustration from his sire,
 Stimulus to himself! One might wait years
 And never find the chance which now finds me!
 The fact is, there 's a blessing on the hearth, 80
 A special providence for fatherhood!
 Here 's a man, and what 's more, a noble, kills
 — Not sneakingly but almost with parade —
 Wife's father and wife's mother and wife's self
 That 's mother's self of son and heir (like mine!) 85
 — And here stand I, the favored advocate,
 Who pluck this flower o' the field, no Solomon
 Was ever clothed in glorious gold to match,
 And set the same in Cinoncino's cap!
 I defend Guido and his comrades — I! 90
 Pray God, I keep me humble: not to me —
Non nobis,¹ Domine, sed tibi laus!
 How the fop chuckled when they made him Fisc!
 We 'll beat you, my Bottinius, all for love,
 All for our tribute to Cinotto's day. 95
 Why, 'sbuddikins, old Innocent himself
 May rub his eyes at the bustle, — ask "What 's this
 Rolling from out the rostrum, as a gust
 O' the *Pro Milone* ² had been prisoned there,
 And rattled Rome awake?" Awaken Rome, 100
 How can the Pope doze on in decency?
 He needs must wake up also, speak his word,
 Have his opinion like the rest of Rome,
 About this huge, this hurly-burly case:
 He wants who can excogitate the truth, 105
 Give the result in speech, plain black and white,
 To mumble in the mouth and make his own
 — A little changed, good man, a little changed!

¹ *Non nobis*, etc.: not unto us, O Lord,
 but to thee the praise.

² *Pro Milone*: Cicero's great speech in
 defence of Milo on a charge of murder.

No matter, so his gratitude be moved,
 By when my Giacintino gets of age, 110
 Mindful of who thus helped him at a pinch,
 Archangelus *Procurator Pauperum* —
 And proved Hortensius¹ *Redivivus!*

Whew!

To earn the *Est-est*,² merit the minced herb
 That mollifies the liver's leathery slice, 115
 With here a goose-foot, there a cock's-comb stuck,
 Cemented in an element of cheese!

I doubt if dainties do the grandsire good :
 Last June he had a sort of strangling . . . bah!
 He 's his own master, and his will is made. 120

So, liver fizz, law flit and Latin fly
 As we rub hands o'er dish by way of grace!
 May I lose cause if I vent one word more
 Except, — with fresh-cut quill we ink the white, —
P-r-o-pro Guidone et Sociis.³ There! 125

Count Guido married — or, in Latin due,
 What? *Duxit in uxorem*?⁴ — commonplace!
Tædas jugales iniit, subiit. — ha!

He underwent the matrimonial torch?
Connubio stabili sibi junxit. — hum! 130
 In stable bond of marriage bound his own?
 That 's clear of any modern taint: and yet . . .

Virgil is little help to who writes prose.
 He shall attack me Terence with the dawn,
 Shall Cinuccino! Mum, mind business, Sir! 135
 Thus circumstantially evolve we facts,

Ita se habet ideo series facti:
 He wedded, — ah, with owls⁵ for augury!
Nupserat, heu sinistris avibus.
 One of the blood Arezzo boasts her best, 140
Dominus Guido, nobili genere ortus,
Pompiliæ . . .

But the version afterward!

Curb we this ardor! Notes alone, to-day,

¹ *Hortensius*: the great Roman orator, contemporary with Cicero.

² *Est-est*: a wine so called because a nobleman once sent his servant in advance to write "Est," it is! on any inn where the wine was particularly good. At one inn it was so superlatively good that he wrote *Est-est*.

³ *Pro Guidone et Sociis*: for Guido and his associates.

⁴ *Duxit in uxorem*: as Browning gives a free version of most of the Latin used by Archangelis in his defence, literal translations are omitted from the notes. Only where no hint of the meaning can be gained from the text, will a translation be given.

⁵ *Owls for augury*: the owl was considered a bird of evil omen.

- The speech to-morrow and the Latin last :
 Such was the rule in Farinacci's¹ time. 145
 Indeed I hitched it into verse and good.
 Unluckily, law quite absorbs a man,
 Or else I think I too had poetized.
 "Law is the pork substratum of the fry,
 Goose-foot and cock's-comb are Latinity," — 150
 And in this case, if circumstance assist,
 We'll garnish law with idiom, never fear!
 Out-of-the-way events extend our scope :
 For instance, when Bottini brings his charge,
 "That letter which you say Pompilia wrote, — 155
 To criminate her parents and herself
 And disengage her husband from the coil, —
 That, Guido Franceschini wrote, say we :
 Because Pompilia could nor read nor write,
 Therefore he pencilled her such letter first, 160
 Then made her trace in ink the same again."
 — Ha, my Bottini, have I thee on hip?
 How will he turn this and break Tully's pate?
 "*Existimandum*" (don't I hear the dog!)
 "*Quod Guido designaverit elementa* 165
Dictæ epistolæ, quæ fuerint
(Superinducto ab ea calamo)
Notata atramento" — there 's a style! —
 "*Quia ipsa scribere nesciebat.*" Boh!
 Now, my turn! Either, *Insulse!*² (I outburst) 170
 Stupidly put! Inane is the response,
Inanis est responsio, or the like —
 To wit, that each of all those characters,
Quod singula elementa epistolæ,
 Had first of all been traced for her by him, 175
Fuerant per eum prius designata,
 And then, the ink applied a-top of that,
Et deinde, superinducto calamo,
 The piece, she says, became her handiwork,
Per eam, efformata ut ipsa asserit. 180
 Inane were such response! (a second time :)
 Her husband outlined her the whole, forsooth?
Vir ejus lineabat epistolam?
 What, she confesses that she wrote the thing,
Fatetur eam scripsisse, (scorn that scathes!)
 That she might pay obedience to her lord? 185
Ut viro obtemperaret, apices
 (Here repeat charge with proper varied phrase)
Eo designante, ipsaque calamum

¹ *Farinacci* : see note, VIII. 322.² *Insulse* : absurd.

Super inducente? By such argument, 190
Ita pariter, she seeks to show the same,
 (Ay, by Saint Joseph and what saints you please)
Epistolam ostendit, medius fidius,
 No voluntary deed but fruit of force!
Non voluntarie sed coacte scriptam! 195
 That 's the way to write Latin. friend my Fisc!
 Bottini is a beast, one barbarous :
 Look out for him when he attempts to say
 " Armed with a pistol, Guido followed her! "
 Will not I be beforehand with my Fisc, 200
 Cut away phrase by phrase from underfoot!
Guido Pompilium — Guido thus his wife
 Following with igneous engine, shall I have?
Armis munitus igneis persequens —
Arma sulphurea gestans, sulphury arms, 205
 Or, might one style a pistol — popping-piece?
Armatus breviori sclopulo?
 We 'll let him have been armed so, though it make
 Somewhat against us : I had thought to own —
 Provided with a simple travelling-sword, 210
ense solummodo viatorio
Instructus : but we 'll grant the pistol here :
 Better we lost the cause than lacked the gird
 At the Fisc's Latin, lost the Judge's laugh!
 It 's Venturini that decides for style. 215
 Tommati rather goes upon the law.
 So, as to law, —

Ah, but with law ne'er hope
 To level the fellow, — don't I know his trick!
 How he draws up, ducks under, twists aside!
 He 's a lean-gutted hectic rascal, fine 220
 As pale-haired red-eyed ferret which pretends
 'Tis ermine, pure soft snow from tail to snout.
 He eludes law by piteous looks aloft.
 Lets Latin glance off as he makes appeal
 To saint that 's somewhere in the ceiling-top : 225
 Do you suppose I don't conceive the beast?
 Plague of the ermine-vermin! For it takes,
 It takes, and here 's the fellow Fisc, you see,
 And Judge, you 'll not be long in seeing next!
 Confound the fop — he 's now at work like me : 230
 Enter his study, as I seem to do,
 Hear him read out his writing to himself!
 I know he writes as if he spoke : I hear
 The hoarse shrill throat, see shut eyes, neck shot-forth,
 — I see him strain on tiptoe, soar and pour 235

Eloquence out, nor stay nor stint at all —
 Perorate in the air, then quick to press
 With the product! What abuse of type and sheet!
 He 'll keep clear of my cast, my logic-throw,
 Let argument slide, and then deliver swift 240
 Some bowl from quite an unguessed point of stand —
 Having the luck o' the last word, the reply!
 A plaguy cast, a mortifying stroke :
 You face a fellow — cries " So, there you stand ?
 But I discourteous' jump clean o'er your head! 245
 You take ship-casementry for pilotage,
 Stop rat-holes, while a sea sweeps through the breach, —
 Hammer and fortify at puny points ?
 Do, clamp and tenon, make all tight and safe!
 'T is here and here and here you ship a sea. 250
 No good of your stopped leaks and littleness! "

Yet what do I name " little and a leak " ?
 The main defence o' the murder 's used to death,
 By this time, dry bare bones, no scrap we pick :
 Safer I worked the new, the unforeseen, 255
 The nice by-stroke, the fine and improvised
 Point that can titillate the brain o' the Bench
 Torpid with over-teaching, long ago!
 As if Tommati (that has heard, reheard
 And heard again, first this side and then that — 260
 Guido and Pietro, Pietro and Guido, din
 And deafen, full three years, at each long ear)
 Don't want amusement for instruction now,
 Won't rather feel a flea run o'er his ribs,
 Than a daw settle heavily on his head! 265
 Oh I was young and had the trick of fence,
 Knew subtle pass and push with careless right —
 My left arm ever quiet behind back.
 With dagger ready : not both hands to blade!
 Puff and blow, put the strength out, Blunderbore! 270
 There 's my subordinate, young Spreti, now,
 Pedant and prig, — he 'll pant away at proof,
 That 's his way!

Now for mine — to rub some life
 Into one's choppy fingers this cold day!
 I trust Cinuzzo ties on tippet, guards 275
 The precious throat on which so much depends!
 Guido must be all goose-flesh in his hole,
 Despite the prison-straw : bad Carnival
 For captives! no sliced fry for him, poor Count!

Carnival-time, — another providence! 280
 The town a-swarm with strangers to amuse,
 To edify, to give one's name and fame
 In charge of, till they find, some future day,
 Cintino come and claim it, his name too,
 Pledge of the pleasantness they owe papa — 285
 Who else was it cured Rome of her great qualms.
 When she must needs have her own judgment? — ay,
 When all her topping wits had set to work,
 Pronounced already on the case: mere boys,
 Twice Cineruggiolo's age with half his sense, 290
 As good as tell me, when I cross the court,
 "Master Arcangeli!" (plucking at my gown)
 "We can predict, we comprehend your play,
 We'll help you save your client." Tra-la-la!
 I've travelled ground, from childhood to this hour, 295
 To have the town anticipate my track?
 The old fox takes the plain and velvet path,
 The young hound's predilection, — prints the dew,
 Don't he, to suit their pulpy pads of paw?
 No! Burying nose deep down i' the briery bush, 300
 Thus I defend Count Guido.

Where are we weak?

First, which is foremost in advantage too,
 Our murder, — we call, killing, — is a fact
 Confessed, defended, made a boast of: good!
 To think the Fisc claimed use of torture here, 305
 And got thereby avowal plump and plain
 That gives me just the chance I wanted, — scope
 Not for brute-force but ingenuity,
 Explaining matters, not denying them!
 One may dispute, — as I am bound to do, 310
 And shall, — validity of process here:
 Inasmuch as a noble is exempt
 From torture which plebeians undergo
 In such a case: for law is lenient, lax,
 Remits the torture to a nobleman 315
 Unless suspicion be of twice the strength
 Attaches to a man born vulgarly:
 We don't card silk with comb that dresses wool.
 Moreover 't was severity undue
 In this case, even had the lord been lout. 320
 What utters, on this head, our oracle,
 Our Farinacci,¹ my Gamaliel² erst,

¹ *Farinacci*: Prosper Farinacci (1544-1613), author of a volume of "Variæ Quæstiones" and other legal treatises, which were regarded as of very high authority during the

seventeenth century. In 1599 he defended Beatrice Cenci on the charge of murdering her father.

² *Gamaliel*: see Acts xxii. 3.

In those immortal "Questions"? This I quote :
 "Of all the tools at Law's disposal, sure
 That named *Vigiliarum* is the best — 325
 That is, the worst — to whoso needs must bear :
 Lasting, as it may do, from some seven hours
 To ten; (beyond ten, we've no precedent;
 Certain have touched their ten, but, bah, they died!)
 It does so efficaciously convince, 330
 That, — speaking by much observation here, —
 Out of each hundred cases, by my count,
 Never I knew of patients beyond four
 Withstand its taste, or less than ninety-six
 End by succumbing: only martyrs four, 335
 Of obstinate silence, guilty or no, — against
 Ninety-six full confessors, innocent
 Or otherwise, — so shrewd a tool have we!
 No marvel either: in unwary hands,
 Death on the spot is no rare consequence : 340
 As indeed all but happened in this case
 To one of ourselves, our young tough peasant-friend
 The accomplice called Baldeschi: they were rough,
 Dosed him with torture as you drench a horse,
 Not modify your treatment to a man : 345
 So, two successive days he fainted dead,
 And only on the third essay, gave up,
 Confessed like flesh and blood. We could reclaim, —
 Blockhead Bottini giving cause enough!
 But no, — we'll take it as spontaneously 350
 Confessed: we'll have the murder beyond doubt.
 Ah, fortunate (the poet's word¹ reversed)
 Inasmuch as we know our happiness!
 Had the antagonist left dubiety,²
 Here were we proving murder a mere myth, 355
 And Guido innocent, ignorant, absent, — ay,
 Absent! He was — why, where should Christian be?
 Engaged in visiting his proper church,
 The duty of us all at Christmas-time,
 When Caponsacchi, the seducer, stung 360
 To madness by his relegation, cast
 About him and contrived a remedy
 In murder: since opprobrium broke afresh,
 By birth o' the babe, on him the imputed sire,
 He it was quietly sought to smother up 365
 His shame and theirs together, — killed the three,
 And fled — (go seek him where you please to search)
 Just at the time when Guido, touched by grace,

¹ *The poet's word*: see Virgil, "Georgics," ii. 458. ² *Dubiety*: doubtfulness.

Devotions ended, hastened to the spot,
 Meaning to pardon his convicted wife,
 "Neither do I condemn thee, go in peace!" — 370
 And thus arrived i' the nick of time to catch
 The charge o' the killing, though great-heartedly
 He came but to forgive and bring to life.
 Doubt ye the force of Christmas on the soul? 375
 "Is thine eye evil because mine is good?"

So, doubtless, had I needed argue here
 But for the full confession round and sound!
 Thus might you wrong some kingly alchemist, —
 Whose concern should not be with showing brass 380
 Transmuted into gold, but triumphing,
 Rather, about his gold changed out of brass,
 Not vulgarly to the mere sight and touch,
 But in the idea, the spiritual display,
 The apparition buoyed by winged words 385
 Hovering above its birth-place in the brain, —
 Thus would you wrong this excellent personage
 Forced, by the gross need, to gird apron round,
 Plant forge, light fire, ply bellows, — in a word,
 Demonstrate: when a faulty pipkin's crack 390
 May disconcert you his presumptive truth!
 Here were I hanging to the testimony
 Of one of these poor rustics — four, ye gods!
 Whom the first taste of friend the Fiscal's cord
 May drive into undoing my whole speech, 395
 Undoing, on his birthday, — what is worse, —
 My son and heir!

I wonder, all the same,
 Not so much at those peasants' lack of heart;
 But — Guido Franceschini, nobleman,
 Bear pain no better! Everybody knows 400
 It used once, when my father was a boy,
 To form a proper, nay, important point
 I' the education of our well-born youth,
 That they took torture handsomely at need,
 Without confessing in this clownish guise. 405
 Each noble had his rack for private use,
 And would, for the diversion of a guest,
 Bid it be set up in the yard of arms,
 And take thereon his hour of exercise, —
 Command the varletry stretch, strain their best, 410
 While friends looked on, admired my lord could smile
 'Mid tugging which had caused an ox to roar.
 Men are no longer men!

— And advocates

No longer Farinacci, let us add,
 If I one more time fly from point proposed! 415
 So, *Vindicatio*, — here begins the speech! —
Honoris causa; thus we make our stand:
 Honor in us had injury, we prove.
 Or if we fail to prove such injury
 More than misprision of the fact, — what then? 420
 It is enough, authorities declare.
 If the result, the deed in question now,
 Be caused by confidence that injury
 Is veritable and no figment: since,
 What, though proved fancy afterward, seemed fact 425
 At the time, they argue shall excuse result.
 That which we do, persuaded of good cause
 For what we do, hold justifiable! —
 So casuists bid: man, bound to do his best,
 They would not have him leave that best undone 430
 And mean to do his worst, — though fuller light
 Show best was worst and worst would have been best.
 Act by the present light! — they ask of man.
Ultra quod hic non agitur, besides,
 It is not anyway our business here, 435
De probatione adulterii,
 To prove what we thought crime was crime indeed
Ad irrogandam pœnam, and require
 Its punishment: such nowise do we seek:
Sed ad effectum, but 't is our concern, 440
Excusandi, here to simply find excuse.
Occisorem, for who did the killing-work,
Et ad illius defensionem, (mark
 The difference) and defend the man, just that!
Quo casu levior probatio 445
Exuberaret, to which end far lighter proof
 Suffices than the prior case would claim:
 It should be always harder to convict,
 In short, than to establish innocence.
 Therefore we shall demonstrate first of all 450
 That Honor is a gift of God to man
 Precious beyond compare: which natural sense
 Of human rectitude and purity, —
 Which white, man's soul is born with, — brooks no touch:
 Therefore, the sensitivest spot of all. 455
 Wounded by any wafture breathed from black,
 Is, — honor within honor, — like the eye
 Centred i' the ball, — the honor of our wife.
 Touch us o' the pupil of our honor, then,
 Not actually. — since so you slay outright, — 460
 But by a gesture simulating touch,

Presumable mere menace of such taint,—
 This were our warrant for eruptive ire
 "To whose dominion I impose no end."¹

(Virgil, now, should not be too difficult 465
 To Cinoncino, — say, the early books.
 Pen, truce to further gambols! *Poscimur!*²)

Nor can revenge of injury done here
 To the honor proved the life and soul of us,
 Be too excessive, too extravagant: 470
 Such wrong seeks and must have complete revenge.

Show we this, first, on the mere natural ground:
 Begin at the beginning and proceed
 Incontrovertibly. Theodoric,
 In an apt sentence Cassiodorus³ cites, 475
 Propounds for basis of all household law —

I hardly recollect it, but it ends,
 "Bird mates with bird, beast genders with his like,
 And brooks no interference." Bird and beast? 480

The very insects . . . if they wive or no,
 How dare I say when Aristotle⁴ doubts?

But the presumption is they likewise wive,
 At least the nobler sorts; for take the bee
 As instance, — copying King Solomon. —
 Why that displeasure of the bee to aught 485
 Which savors of incontinency, makes

The unchaste a very horror to the hive?
 Whence comes it bees obtain their epithet
 Of *castæ apes*, notably "the chaste"?
 Because, ingeniously saith Scaliger,⁵ 490

(The young sage, — see his book of Table-talk)
 "Such is their hatred of immodest act,
 They fall upon the offender, sting to death."

I mind a passage much confirmative
 I' the *Idyllist*⁶ (though I read him Latinized) 495
 "Why" asks a shepherd, "is this bank unfit
 For celebration of our vernal loves?"

¹ *To whose dominion*, etc.: "His ego nec metas rerum nec tempora pono; Imperium sine fine dedi" (Virgil, "Æneid," i. 278, 279).

² *Poscimur*: something is expected of us.

³ *Cassiodorus*: a Roman historian, statesman, and monk who lived about 468. He was raised by Theodoric, King of the Ostrogoths, to the highest offices. He was among the first of literary monks. His books were much read in the Middle Ages. See note, I. 228.

⁴ *Aristotle*: celebrated Greek writer on philosophy, ethics, physics, etc., 384-323 B.C.

⁵ *Scaliger*: Joseph Justice, son of Julius Cæsar Scaliger, both eminent men of learning.

⁶ *Idyllist*: Theocritus, a Greek poet who flourished in the third century B.C. He wrote a number of idylls (little pictures), principally portraying country life.

"Oh swain," returns the instructed shepherdess,
 "Bees swarm here, and would quick resent our warmth!"
 Only cold-blooded fish lack instinct here, 500
 Nor gain nor guard connubiality:
 But beasts, quadrupedal, mammiferous,
 Do credit to their beasthood: witness him
 That Ælian¹ cites, the noble elephant,
 (Or if not Ælian, somebody as sage) 505
 Who seeing, much offence beneath his nose,
 His master's friend exceed in courtesy
 The due allowance to his master's wife.
 Taught them good manners and killed both at once,
 Making his master and the world admire. 510
 Indubitably, then, that master's self,
 Favored by circumstance, had done the same
 Or else stood clear rebuked by his own beast.
Adeo, ut qui honorem spernit, thus,
 Who values his own honor not a straw, — 515
Et non recuperare curat, nor
 Labors by might and main to salve its wound,
Se ulciscendo, by revenging him,
Nil differat a belluis, is a brute,
Quinimo irrationabilior 520
Ipsismet belluis, nay, contrariwise,
 Much more irrational than brutes themselves,
 Should be considered, *reputetur!* How?
 If a poor animal feel honor smart,
 Taught by blind instinct nature plants in him, 525
 Shall man, — confessed creation's master-stroke,
 Nay, intellectual glory, nay, a god,
 Nay, of the nature of my Judges here, —
 Shall man prove the insensible, the block,
 The blot o' the earth he crawls on to disgrace? 530
 (Come, that's both solid and poetic!) Man
 Derogate, live for the low tastes alone.
 Mean creeping cares about the animal life?
*Absit*² such homage to vile flesh and blood!

(May Gigia have remembered, nothing stings 535
 Fried liver out of its monotony
 Of richness, like a root of fennel, chopped
 Fine with the parsley: parsley-sprigs, I said —
 Was there need I should say "and fennel too"?
 But no, she cannot have been so obtuse!
 To our argument! The fennel will be chopped.) 540

¹ Ælian: in his "De Natura Animalium," xi. 15.² *Absit*: away!

From beast to man next mount we — ay, but, mind,
 Still mere man, not yet Christian, — that, in time!
 Not too fast, mark you! 'Tis on Heathen grounds
 We next defend our act: then, fairly urge — 545
 If this were done of old, in a green tree,
 Allowed in the Spring rawness of our kind,
 What may be licensed in the Autumn dry
 And ripe, the latter harvest-tide of man?
 If, with his poor and primitive half-lights, 550
 The Pagan, whom our devils served for gods,
 Could stigmatize the breach of marriage-vow
 As that which blood, blood only might efface, —
 Absolve the husband, outraged, whose revenge
 Anticipated law, plied sword himself, — 555
 How with the Christian in full blaze of noon?
 Shall not he rather double penalty,
 Multiply vengeance, than, degenerate,
 Let privilege be minished, droop, decay?
 Therefore set forth at large the ancient law! 560
 Superabundant the examples be
 To pick and choose from. The Athenian Code,
 Solon's,¹ the name is serviceable, — then,
 The Laws of the Twelve Tables,² that fifteenth, —
 "Romulus"³ likewise rolls out round and large; 565
 The Julian⁴; the Cornelian⁵; Gracchus' Law⁶:
 So old a chime, the bells ring of themselves!
 Spreti can set that going if he please,
 I point you, for my part, the belfry plain,
 Intent to rise from dusk, *diluculum*,⁷ 570
 Into the Christian day shall broaden next.

First, the fit compliment to His Holiness
 Happily reigning: then sustain the point —
 All that was long ago declared as law
 By the natural revelation, stands confirmed 575
 By Apostle and Evangelist and Saint, —

¹ *The Athenian Code, Solon's*: see note, I. 219.

² *The Laws of the Twelve Tables*: this was the first Roman code of laws and applied to both Plebs and Patricians. It was drawn up 451 B.C. by ten Decemvirs elected for the purpose, and was engraved on twelve tables of brass.

³ *Romulus*: see note, I. 220.

⁴ *The Julian*: laws passed during the reign of Augustus were called *Leges Julia judiciorum publicorum et privatorum*.

Among these was one, *Lex Julia de adulteris*, which punished adultery. The reference is probably to this. See I. 224.

⁵ *Cornelian*: laws passed under the Dictator Lucius Cornelius Sulla. The law meant here is probably *Lex Cornelia de Sicariis*, a law referring to murderers. See note, I. 223.

⁶ *Gracchus' Law*: Caius Sempronius Gracchus, the Roman Tribune, who made many laws.

⁷ *Diluculum*: daybreak.

To-wit — that Honor is man's supreme good.
 Why should I baulk Saint Jerome¹ of his phrase?
Ubi honor non est, where no honor is,
Ibi contemptus est; and where contempt, 580
Ibi injuria frequens; and where that,
 The frequent injury, *ibi et indignatio*;
 And where the indignation, *ibi quies*
Nulla: and where there is no quietude,
 Why, *ibi*, there, the mind is often cast 585
 Down from the heights where it proposed to dwell,
Mens a proposito sæpe dejicitur.
 And naturally the mind is so cast down,
 Since harder 't is, *quum difficilius sit*,
Iram cohibere, to coerce one's wrath. 590
Quam miracula facere, than work miracles, —
 So Gregory² smiles in his First Dialogue.
 Whence we infer, the ingenuous soul, the man
 Who makes esteem of honor and repute,
 Whenever honor and repute are touched, 595
 Arrives at term of fury and despair,
 Loses all guidance from the reason-check :
 As in delirium or a frenzy-fit,
 Nor fury nor despair he satiates. — no,
 Not even if he attain the impossible, 600
 O'erturn the hinges of the universe
 To annihilate — not whoso caused the smart
 Solely, the author simply of his pain,
 But the place, the memory, *vituperii*.
 O' the shame and scorn: *quia*, — says Solomon, 605
 (The Holy Spirit speaking by his mouth
 In Proverbs, the sixth chapter near the end)
 — Because, the zeal and fury of a man,
Zelus et furor viri, will not spare,
Non parcat, in the day of his revenge, 610
In die vindictæ, nor will acquiesce,
Nec acquiescet, through a person's prayers,
Cujusdam precibus, — *nec suscipiet*,
 Nor yet take, *pro redemptione*, for
 Redemption, *dona plurium*, gifts of friends, 615
 Mere money-payment to compound for ache.
 Who recognizes not my client's case?
 Whereto, as strangely consentaneous³ here,
 Adduce Saint Bernard⁴ in the Epistle writ

¹ *Saint Jerome*: a Catholic writer of the fifth century distinguished for his zeal against the Christians. Died 420.

² *Gregory*: Pope Gregory the Great (550-640). Among other things he wrote "Dia-

logues with Peter the Deacon on the Lives and Miracles of the Italian Saints."

³ *Consentaneous*: consistent with.

⁴ *Saint Bernard*: The celebrated founder of the order of Bernardines (1091-1153). His

To Robertulus, his nephew : "Too much grief, 620
Dolor quippe nimius non deliberat,
Does not excogitate propriety,
Non verecundatur, nor knows shame at all,
Non consulit rationem, nor consults
Reason, *non dignitatis metuit* 625
Damnum, nor dreads the loss of dignity ;
Modum et ordinem, order and the mode,
Ignorat, it ignores " : why, trait for trait,
Was ever portrait limned so like the life?
(By Cavalier Maratta,¹ shall I say? 630
I hear he 's first in reputation now.)
Yes, that of Samson in the Sacred Text
That 's not so much the portrait as the man!
Samson in Gaza was the antetype
Of Guido at Rome : observe the Nazarite! 635
Blinded he was, — an easy thing to bear :
Intrepidly he took imprisonment,
Gyves, stripes and daily labor at the mill :
But when he found himself, i' the public place,
Destined to make the common people sport, 640
Disdain burned up with such an impetus
I' the breast of him that, all the man one fire,
Moriatur, roared he, let my soul's self die,
Anima mea, with the Philistines!
So, pulled down pillar, roof, and death and all,² 645
Multosque plures interfecit, ay,
And many more he killed thus, *moriens,*
Dying, *quam vivus,* than in his whole life.
Occiderat, he ever killed before.
Are these things writ for no example, Sirs? 650
One instance more, and let me see who doubts!
Our Lord Himself, made all of mansuetude,³
Sealing the sum of sufferance up, received
Opprobrium, contumely and buffeting
Without complaint : but when He found Himself 655
Touched in His honor never so little for once,
Then outbroke indignation pent before —
"*Honorem meum nemini dabo!*" "No,
My honor I to nobody will give!"
And certainly the example so hath wrought, 660
That whosoever, at the proper worth,
Apprises worldly honor and repute,
Esteems it nobler to die honored man

works were published in Paris by Gaume
(1835-1840).

² *So, pulled down pillar, etc.* : see Judges
xvi. 29.

¹ *Maratta* : see note, III. 59.

³ *Mansuetude* : gentleness.

Beneath Mannaia, than live centuries Disgraced in the eye o' the world. We find Saint Paul	665
No recreant to this faith delivered once : "Far worthier were it that I died," cries he, <i>Expedit mihi magis mori</i> , "than That any one should make my glory void,"	
<i>Quam ut gloriam meam quis evacuet!</i>	670
See, <i>ad Corinthienses</i> : whereupon Saint Ambrose makes a comment with much fruit, Doubtless my Judges long since laid to heart, So I desist from bringing forward here. (I can't quite recollect it.)	
	675
Have I proved <i>Satis superque</i> , both enough and to spare, That Revelation old and new admits The natural man may effervesce in ire, O'erflood earth, o'erfroth heaven with foamy rage, At the first puncture to his self-respect?	680
Then, Sirs, this Christian dogma, this law-bud Full-blown now, soon to bask the absolute flower Of Papal doctrine in our blaze of day, — Bethink you, shall we miss one promise-streak, One doubtful birth of dawn crepuscular, ¹	685
One dew-drop comfort to humanity, Now that the chalice teems with noonday wine? Yea, argue Molinists who bar revenge — Referring just to what makes out our case! Under old dispensation, argue they,	690
The doom of the adulterous wife was death, Stoning by Moses' law. ² "Nay, stone her not. Put her away!" next legislates our Lord; ³ And last of all, "Nor yet divorce a wife!" Ordains the Church. "she typifies ourself,	695
The Bride no fault shall cause to fall from Christ." Then, as no jot or tittle of the Law Has passed away — which who presumes to doubt? As not one word of Christ is rendered vain — Which, could it be though heaven and earth should pass?	700
— Where do I find my proper punishment For my adulterous wife, I humbly ask Of my infallible Pope, — who now remits Even the divorce allowed by Christ in lieu Of lapidation Moses licensed me?	705

¹ *Crepuscular* : glimmering.³ *Put her away*, etc. : see Matt. v. 32.² *Stoning by Moses' law* : see Deut. xxii.

The Gospel checks the Law which throws the stone,
 The Church tears the divorce-bill Gospel grants:
 Shall wives sin and enjoy impunity?
 What profits me the fulness of the days,
 The final dispensation, I demand, 710
 Unless Law, Gospel and the Church subjoin
 "But who hath barred thee primitive revenge,
 Which, like fire damped and dammed up, burns more fierce?
 Use thou thy natural privilege of man,
 Else wert thou found like those old ingrate Jews, 715
 Despite the manna-banquet on the board,
 A-longing after melons, cucumbers,
 And such like trash of Egypt left behind!"

(There was one melon had improved our soup:
 But did not Cinoncino need the rind 720
 To make a boat with? So I seem to think.)

Law, Gospel and the Church — from these we leap
 To the very last revelation, easy rule
 Befitting the well-born and thorough-bred
 O' the happy day we live in, not the dark 725
 O' the early rude and acorn-eating race.¹
 "Behold," quoth James,² "we bridle in a horse
 And turn his body as we would thereby!"
 Yea, but we change the bit to suit the growth,
 And rasp our colt's jaw with a rugged spike 730
 We hasten to remit our managed steed
 Who wheels round at persuasion of a touch.
 Civilization bows to decency,
 The acknowledged use and wont: 't is manners, — mild
 But yet imperative law, — which make the man. 735
 Thus do we pay the proper compliment
 To rank and that society of Rome,
 Hath so obliged us by its interest,
 Taken our client's part instinctively,
 As unaware defending its own cause. 740
 What *dictum* doth Society lay down
 I' the case of one who hath a faithless wife?
 Wherewithal should the husband cleanse his way?
 Be patient and forgive? Oh, language fails. —
 Shrinks from depicting his turpitude! 745
 For if wronged husband raise not hue and cry,

¹ *The early rude and acorn-eating race*: early Greek myths declare that the first men were born from oaks, and that acorns were their principal food. ² *Behold, quoth James*: see James iii. 3.

*Quod si maritus de adulterio non
 Conquereretur*, he's presumed a — foh!
Presumitur leno: so, complain he must.
 But how complain? At your tribunal, lords? 750
 Far weightier challenge suits your sense, I wot!
 You sit not to have gentlemen propose
 Questions gentility can itself discuss.
 Did not you prove that to our brother Paul?
 The Abate, *quum judicialiter*
Prosequeretur, when he tried the law, 755
Guidonis causam, in Count Guido's case,
Accidit ipsi, this befell himself,
Quod risum moverit et cachinnos, that
 He moved to mirth and cachinnation, all 760
 Or nearly all, *fere in omnibus*
Etiam sensatis et cordatis, men
 Strong-sensed, sound-hearted, nay, the very Court,
Ipsismet in iudicibus. I might add.
Non tamen dicam. In a cause like this, 765
 So multiplied were reasons *pro* and *con*,
 Delicate, intertwined and obscure,
 That Law refused loan of a finger-tip
 To unravel, re-adjust the hopeless twine,
 Since, half-a-dozen steps outside Law's seat, 770
 There stood a foolish trifler with a tool
 A-dangle to no purpose by his side,
 Had clearly cut the embroilment in a trice.
Asserunt enim unanimiter
Doctores, for the Doctors all assert, 775
 That husbands. *quod mariti*, must be held
Viles, cornuti reputantur, vile,
 Fronts branching forth a florid infamy,
Si propriis manibus, if with their own hands,
Non sumunt, they fail straight to take revenge, 780
Vindictam, but expect the deed be done
 By the Court — *expectant illam fieri*
Per iudices, qui summopere rident, which
 Gives an enormous guffaw for reply,
Et cachinnantur. For he ran away. 785
Deliquit enim, just that he might 'scape
 The censure of both counsellors and crowd,
Ut vulgi et doctorum evitaret
Censuram, and lest so he superadd
 To loss of honor ignominy too, 790
Et sic ne istam quoque ignominiam
Amisso honori superadderet.
 My lords, my lords, the inconsiderate step
 Was — we referred ourselves to Law at all!

Twit me not with " Law else had punished you! " 795
 Each punishment of the extra-legal step,
 To which the high-born preferably revert,
 Is ever for some oversight, some slip
 I' the taking vengeance, not for vengeance' self.
 A good thing, done unhandsomely, turns ill ; 800
 And never yet lacked ill the law's rebuke.
 For pregnant instance, let us contemplate
 The luck of Leonardus, — see at large
 Of Sicily's Decisions sixty-first.
 This Leonard finds his wife is false : what then ? 805
 He makes her own son snare her, and entice
 Out of the town walls to a private walk
 Wherein he slays her with commodity.
 They find her body half-devoured by dogs :
 Leonard is tried, convicted, punished, sent 810
 To labor in the galleys seven years long :
 Why ? For the murder ? Nay, but for the mode !
Malus modus occidendi, ruled the Court,
 An ugly mode of killing, nothing more !
 Another fructuous sample, — see " *De Re*
Criminali," in Matthæus'¹ divine piece. 815
 Another husband, in no better plight,
 Simulates absence, thereby tempts his wife ;
 On whom he falls, out of sly ambushade,
 Backed by a brother of his, and both of them 820
 Armed to the teeth with arms that law had blamed.
Nimis dolose, overwilily,
Fuisse operatum, did they work,
 Pronounced the law : had all been fairly done
 Law had not found him worthy, as she did, 825
 Of four years' exile. Why cite more ? Enough
 Is good as a feast — (unless a birthday-feast
 For one's Cinuccio) so, we finish here.
 My lords, we rather need defend ourselves
 Inasmuch as, for a twinkling of an eye, 830
 We hesitatingly appealed to law, —
 Than need deny that, on mature advice,
 We blushingly bethought us, bade revenge
 Back to its simple proper private way
 Of decent self-dealt gentlemanly death. 835
 Judges, here is the law, and here beside.
 The testimony ! Look to it !
 Pause and breathe !
 So far is only too plain ; we must watch :
 Bottini will scarce hazard an attack

¹ *Matthæus* : there was a Dutch jurist of this name born at Utrecht 1635, died 1710.

Here : best anticipate the fellow's play. 840
 And guard the weaker places — warily ask,
 What if considerations of a sort,
 Reasons of a kind, arise from out the strange
 Peculiar unforeseen new circumstance
 Of this our (candor owns) abnormal act, 845
 To bar the right of us revenging so?
 "Impunity were otherwise your meed :
 Go slay your wife and welcome," — may be urged, —
 "But why the innocent old couple slay,
 Pietro, Violante? You may do enough, 850
 Not too much, not exceed the golden mean :
 Neither brute-beast nor Pagan, Gentile, Jew,
 Nor Christian, no nor votarist of the mode,
 Is justified to push revenge so far."

No, indeed? Why, thou very sciolist! ¹ 855
The actual wrong, Pompilia seemed to do,
Was virtual wrong done by the parents here —
 Imposing her upon us as their child —
 Themselves allow : then, her fault was their fault,
 Her punishment be theirs accordingly! 860
 But wait a little, sneak not off so soon!
 Was this cheat solely harm to Guido, pray?
 The precious couple you call innocent, —
 Why, they were felons that Law failed to clutch,
Qui ut fraudarent, who that they might rob, 865
Legitime vocatos, folk law called,
Ad fidei commissum, true heirs to the Trust,
Partum supposuerunt, feigned this birth,
Immemores reos factos esse, blind
 To the fact that, guilty, they incurred thereby, 870
Ultimi supplicii, hanging or what's worse.
 Do you blame us that we turn Law's instruments,
 Not mere self-seekers, — mind the public weal,
 Nor make the private good our sole concern?
 That having — shall I say — secured a thief, 875
 Not simply we recover from his pouch
 The stolen article our property,
 But also pounce upon our neighbor's purse
 We opportunely find reposing there,
 And do him justice while we right ourselves? 880
 He owes us, for our part, a drubbing say,
 But owes our neighbor just a dance i' the air
 Under the gallows : so, we throttle him.
 That neighbor 's Law, that couple are the Thief,

¹ *Sciolist* : a smatterer.

We are the over ready to help Law — 885
 Zeal of her house hath eaten us up: for which,
 Can it be, Law intends to eat up us,
Crudum Priamum, devour poor Priam raw,
 ('T was Jupiter's own joke) with babes to boot,
Priamique pisinnos,¹ in Homeric phrase? 890
 Shame! — and so ends my period prettily.

But even, — prove the pair not culpable,
 Free as unborn babe from connivance at,
 Participation in, their daughter's fault:
 Ours the mistake. Is that a rare event? 895
Non semel, it is anything but rare,
In contingentia facti, that by chance,
Impunes evaserunt, go scot-free,
Qui, such well-meaning people as ourselves,
Iusto dolore moti, who aggrieved 900
 With cause, *apposuerunt manus*, lay
 Rough hands, *in innocentes*, on wrong heads.
 Cite we an illustrative case in point:
Mulier Smirnea quædam, good my lords,
 A gentlewoman lived in Smyrna once, 905
Virum et filium ex eo conceptum, who
 Both husband and her son begot by him
 Killed, *interfecerat, ex quo*, because,
Vir filium suum perdiderat, her spouse
 Had been beforehand with her, killed her son, 910
Matrimonii primi, of a previous bed.
Deinde accusata, then accused,
Apud Dolabellam, before him thât sat
 Proconsul, *nec duabus cædibus*
Contaminatam liberare, nor 915
 To liberate a woman doubly-dyed
 With murder, *voluit*, made he up his mind,
Nec condemnare, nor to doom to death,
Iusto dolore impulsam, one impelled
 By just grief; *sed remisit*, but sent her up 920
Ad Areopagum,² to the Hill of Mars,
Sapientissimorum judicium
Cætum, to that assembly of the sage
 Paralleled only by my judges here;
Ubi. cognito de causa, where, the cause 925
 Well weighed. *responsum est*, they gave reply,

¹ *Crudum Priamum . . . Priamique pisinnos*: a line from a translation of Homer by Attius Labeo. The translation as a whole is lost, but this line ("Iliad," iv. 35) is preserved by a scholiast on Persius. Pope's translation reads: "Let Priam bleed . . . Bleed all his sons" ("Iliad," iv. 55).

² *Ad Areopagum*: the Areopagus was a hill in Athens near the Acropolis, where the Supreme Court held its sessions.

Ut ipsa et accusator, that both sides
 O' the suit, *redirent*, should come back again,
Post centum annos, after a hundred years,
 For judgment; *et sic*, by which sage decree, 930
Duplici parricidio rea, one
 Convicted of a double parricide,
Quamvis etiam innocentem, though in truth
 Out of the pair, one innocent at least
 She, *occidisset*, plainly had put to death, 935
Undequaque, yet she altogether 'scaped,
Evasit impunis. See the case at length
 In Valerius, fittingly styled *Maximus*,¹
 That eighth book of his Memorable Facts.
 Nor Cyriacus² cites beside the mark : 940
Similiter uxor quæ mandaverat,
 Just so, a lady who had taken care,
Homicidium viri, that her lord be killed,
Ex denegatione debiti.
 For denegation of a certain debt, 945
Matrimonialis, he was loth to pay,
Fuit pecuniaria mulcta, was
 Amerced in a pecuniary mulct,
Punita, et ad pœnam, and to pains,
Temporalem, for a certain space of time, 950
In monasterio, in a convent.

(Ay,

In monasterio! He mismanages
In with the ablative, the accusative!
 I had hoped to have hitched the villain into verse
 For a gift, this very day, a complete list 955
 O' the prepositions each with proper case,
 Telling a story, long was in my head.
 "What prepositions take the accusative?
Ad to or at—*who saw the cat?*—down to
Ob. for, because of, *keep her claws off!*" Tush! 960
 Law in a man takes the whole liberty:
 The muse is fettered: just as Ovid found!³)

And now, sea widens and the coast is clear.
 What of the dubious act you bade excuse?
 Surely things broaden, brighten, till at length 965
 Remains — so far from act that needs defence —

¹ *Valerius Maximus*: a Latin writer of the first century who made a collection of historical anecdotes called "Books of Memorable Deeds and Utterances."

² *Cyriacus*: monk of the convent of Bi-

zona, in Syria (died 1817). He wrote homilies, canons, and epistles.

³ *As Ovid found*: Ovid scribbled verse in the margin of his paper, as a youth, when he ought to have been framing legal orations.

Apology to make for act delayed
 One minute, let alone eight mortal months
 Of hesitation! "Why procrastinate?"
 (Out with it my Bottinius, ease thyself!) 970
 "Right, promptly done, is twice right: right delayed
 Turns wrong. We grant you should have killed your wife,
 But killed o' the moment, at the meeting her
 In company with the priest: then did the tongue
 O' the Brazen Head¹ give license, 'Time is now!' 975
 Wait to make mind up? 'Time is past' it peals.
 Friend, you are competent to mastery
 O' the passions that confessedly explain
 An outbreak: you allow an interval,
 And then break out as if time's clock still clanged. 980
 You have forfeited your chance, and flat you fall
 Into the commonplace category
 Of men bound to go softly all their days,
 Obeying Law."
 Now, which way make response?
 What was the answer Guido gave, himself? 985
 — That so to argue came of ignorance
 How honor bears a wound. "For, wound," said he,
 "My body, and the smart soon mends and ends:
 While, wound my soul where honor sits and rules,
 Longer the sufferance, stronger grows the pain, 990
 Being *ex incontinenti*, fresh as first."
 But try another tack, urge common sense
 By way of contrast: say — Too true, my lords!
 We did demur, awhile did hesitate:
 Since husband sure should let a scruple speak 995
 Ere he slay wife, — for his own safety, lords!
 Carpers abound in this misjudging world:
 Moreover, there 's a nicety in law
 That seems to justify them should they carp.
 Suppose the source of injury a son, — 1000
 Father may slay such son yet run no risk:
 Why graced with such a privilege? Because
 A father so incensed with his own child,
 Or must have reason, or believe he has:
Quia semper, seeing that in such event, 1005
Presumitur, the law is bound suppose,
Quod capiat pater, that the sire must take,
Bonum consilium pro filio,

¹ *Brazen Head*: it was believed in the Middle Ages that a brazen head could be made which would speak. Roger Bacon is said to have accomplished this feat. When finished, a man was set to watch. At the end of the first half hour the head said, "Time is"; at the end of the second, "Time was"; at the end of the third, "Time 's past." Then it fell down with a crash and was shivered in pieces.

The best course as to what befits his boy,
 Through instinct, *ex instinctu*, of mere love, 1010
Amoris, and, *paterni*, fatherhood;
Quam confidentiam, which confidence,
Non habet, law declines to entertain,
De viro, of the husband: where finds he
 An instinct that compels him love his wife? 1015
 Rather is he presumably her foe.
 So, let him ponder long in this bad world
 Ere do the simplest act of justice.

But

Again — and here we brush Bottini's breast —
 Object you, "See the danger of delay! 1020
 Suppose a man murdered my friend last month:
 Had I come up and killed him for his pains
 In rage, I had done right, allows the law:
 I meet him now and kill him in cold blood,
 I do wrong, equally allows the law: 1025
 Wherein do actions differ, yours and mine?"
In plenitudine intellectus es?
 Hast thy wits, Fisc? To take such slayer's life,
 Returns it life to thy slain friend at all?
 Had he stolen ring instead of stabbing friend, — 1030
 To-day, to-morrow or next century,
 Meeting the thief, thy ring upon his thumb,
 Thou justifiably hadst wrung it thence:
 So, couldst thou wrench thy friend's life back again,
 Though prisoned in the bosom of his foe. 1035
 Why, law would look complacent on thy wrath.
 Our case is, that the thing we lost, we found:
 The honor, we were robbed of eight months since,
 Being recoverable at any day
 By death of the delinquent. Go thy ways! 1040
 Ere thou hast learned law, will be much to do,
 As said the gaby while he shod the goose.
 Nay, if you urge me, interval was none!
 From the inn to the villa — blank or else a bar
 Of adverse and contrarious incident 1045
 Solid between us and our just revenge!
 What with the priest who flourishes his blade,
 The wife who like a fury flings at us,
 The crowd — and then the capture, the appeal
 To Rome, the journey there, the jaunting thence 1050
 To shelter at the House of Convertites,
 The visits to the Villa, and so forth,
 Where was one minute left us all this while
 To put in execution that revenge



INTERIOR OF THE SISTINE CHAPEL.

We planned o' the instant? — as it were, plumped down 1055
 O' the spot, some eight months since, which round sound egg,
 Rome, more propitious than our nest, should hatch!
 Object not, " You reached Rome on Christmas-eve,
 And, despite liberty to act at once,
 Waited a whole and indecorous week!" 1060
 Hath so the Molinism, the canker, lords,
 Eaten to our bone? ' Is no religion left?
 No care for aught held holy by the Church?
 What, would you have us skip and miss those Feasts
 O' the Natal Time, must we go prosecute 1065
 Secular business on a sacred day?
 Should not the merest charity expect,
 Setting our poor concerns aside for once,
 We hurried to the song matutinal
 I' the Sistine,¹ and pressed forward for the Mass 1070
 The Cardinal that 's Camerlengo² chaunts,
 Then rushed on to the blessing of the Hat
 And Rapier, which the Pope sends to what prince
 Has done most detriment to the Infidel —
 And thereby whetted courage if 't were blunt? 1075
 Meantime, allow we kept the house a week,
 Suppose not we were idle in our mew!
 Picture us raging here and raving there —
 "' Money?' I need none. ' Friends?' The word is null.
 Restore the white was on that shield of mine 1080
 Borne at " . . . wherever might be shield to bear.
 " I see my grandsire, he who fought so well
 At " . . . here find out and put in time and place,
 Or else invent the fight his grandsire fought :
 " I see this! I see that!"

(See nothing else, 1085
 Or I shall scarce see lamb's fry in an hour!
 What to the uncle, as I bid advance
 The smoking dish? " Fry suits a tender tooth!
 Behoves we care a little for our kin —
 You, Sir, — who care so much for cousinship 1090
 As come to your poor loving nephew's feast!"
 He has the reversion of a long lease yet —
 Land to bequeath! He loves lamb's fry, I know!)

Here fall to be considered those same six
 Qualities; what Bottini needs must call 1095
 So many aggravations of our crime,

¹ *Sistine* : the chapel of the Papal palace in Rome, celebrated for its wonderful frescoes. Pope, who ranks highest among the cardinals, and presides during a vacancy in the

² *Camerlengo* : the chamberlain of the Holy See.

Parasite-growth upon mere murder's back.
 We summarily might dispose of such
 By some off-hand and jaunty fling, some skit —
 "So, since there 's proved no crime to aggravate, 1100
 A fico for your aggravations, Fisc!"
 No, — handle mischief rather, — play with spells
 Were meant to raise a spirit, and laugh the while
 We show that did he rise we stand his match!
 Therefore, first aggravation: we made up — 1105
 Over and above our simple murderous selves —
 A regular assemblage of armed men,
Coadunatio armatorum, — ay,
 Unluckily it was the very judge
 That sits in judgment on our cause to-day 1110
 Who passed the law as Governor of Rome:
 "Four men armed," — though for lawful purpose, mark!
 Much more for an acknowledged crime, — "shall die."
 We five were armed to the teeth, meant murder too?
 Why, that 's the very point that saves us, Fisc! 1115
 Let me instruct you. Crime nor done nor meant, —
 You punish still who arm and congregate:
 For wherefore use bad means to a good end?
 Crime being meant not done, — you punish still
 The means to crime, whereon you haply pounce, 1120
 Though accident have balked them of effect.
 But crime not only compassed but complete,
 Meant and done too? Why, since you have the end,
 Be that your sole concern, nor mind those means
 No longer to the purpose! Murdered we? 1125
 (— Which, that our luck was in the present case,
Quod contigisse in præsentī casu,
 Is palpable, *manibus palpatum est* —)
 Make murder out against us, nothing else!
 Of many crimes committed with a view 1130
 To one main crime, Law overlooks the less,
 Intent upon the large. Suppose a man
 Having in view commission of a theft,
 Climbs the town-wall: 't is for the theft he hangs,
 In case he stands convicted of such theft: 1135
 Law remits whipping, due to who clomb wall
 Through bravery or wantonness alone,
 Just to dislodge a daw's nest, plant a flag.
 So I interpret you the manly mind
 Of him about to judge both you and me, — 1140
 Our Governor, who, being no Fisc, my Fisc,
 Cannot have blundered on ineptitude!
 Next aggravation, — that the arms themselves
 Were specially of such forbidden sort

Through shape or length or breadth, as, prompt, Law plucks 1145
 From single hand of solitary man,
 Making him pay the carriage with his life :
Delatio armorum, arms against the rule,
Contra formam constitutionis, of
 Pope Alexander's blessed memory. 1150
 Such are the poignards with the double prong,
 Horn-like, when times make bold the antlered buck,
 Each prong of brittle glass — wherewith to stab
 And break off short and so let fragment stick
 Fast in the flesh to baffle surgery : 1155
 Such being the Genoese blade with hooked edge
 That did us service at the villa here.
Sed parcat mihi tam eximius vir,
 But, — let so rare a personage forgive, —
 Fisc, thy objection is a foppery! 1160
 Thy charge runs that we killed three innocents :
 Killed, dost see? Then, if killed, what matter how?
 By stick or stone, by sword or dagger, tool
 Long or tool short, round or triangular —
 Poor slain folk find small comfort in the choice! 1165
 Means to an end, means to an end, my Fisc!
 Nature cries out, "Take the first arms you find!"
Furor ministrat arma:¹ where 's a stone?
Unde mi lapidem, where darts for me?
Unde sagittas?² But subdue the bard 1170
 And rationalize a little. Eight months since,
 Had we, or had we not, incurred your blame
 For letting 'scape unpunished this bad pair?
 I think I proved that in last paragraph!
 Why did we so? Because our courage failed. 1175
 Wherefore? Through lack of arms to fight the foe :
 We had no arms or merely lawful ones,
 An unimportant sword and blunderbuss,
 Against a foe, pollut in potency,
 The *amasius*, and our vixen of a wife. 1180
 Well then, how culpably do we gird loin
 And once more undertake the high emprise,
 Unless we load ourselves this second time
 With handsome superfluity of arms,
 Since better is "too much" than "not enough," 1185
 And "*plus non vitiat*," too much does no harm,
 Except in mathematics, sages say.
 Gather instruction from the parable!
 At first we are advised — "A lad hath here

¹ *Furor ministrat arma*: Virgil, ² *Unde mi lapidem unde sagittas*:
 "Æneid," i 150. Horace, "Satires" ii, 7, 116.

Seven barley loaves and two small fishes: what
Is that among so many?" Aptly asked:
But put that question twice and, quite as apt,
The answer is "Fragments, twelve baskets full!" 1190

And, while we speak of superabundance, fling
We word by the way to fools who cast their flout 1195
On Guido — "Punishment were pardoned him,
But here the punishment exceeds offence:
He might be just, but he was cruel too!"

Why, grant there seems a kind of cruelty
In downright stabbing people he could maim, 1200
(If so you stigmatize the stern and strict)

Still, Guido meant no cruelty — may plead
Transgression of his mandate, over-zeal
O' the part of his companions: all he craved
Was, they should fray the faces of the folk, 1205
Merely disfigure, nowise make them die.

Solummodo fassus est, he owns no more,
Dedisse mandatum, than that he desired,
Ad sfrisiandum, dicam, that they hack
And hew, i' the customary phrase, his wife, 1210
Uxorem tantum, and no harm beside.

If his instructions then be misconceived,
Nay, disobeyed, impute you blame to him?
Cite me no Panicollus to the point,
As adverse! Oh, I quite expect his case — 1215

How certain noble youths of Sicily
Having good reason to mistrust their wives,
Killed them and were absolved in consequence:
While others who had gone beyond the need
By mutilation of each paramour — 1220

As Galba in the Horatian satire¹ grieved
— These were condemned to the galleys, cast for guilt
Exceeding simple murder of a wife.

But why? Because of ugliness, and not
Cruelty, in the said revenge, I trow! 1225

Ex causa abscissionis partium;
Qui nempe id facientes reputantur
Naturæ inimici, man revolts
Against them as the natural enemy.

Pray, grant to one who meant to slit the nose 1230
And slash the cheek and slur the mouth, at most,
A somewhat more humane award than these
Obtained, these natural enemies of man!

Objectum funditus corrut, flat you fall,
My Fise! I waste no kick on you, but pass. 1235

¹ *The Horatian satire*: "Satire" i. 2, 46.

Third aggravation : that our act was done —
 Not in the public street, where safety lies,
 Not in the bye-place, caution may avoid,
 Wood, cavern, desert, spots contrived for crime, —
 But in the very house, home, nook and nest, 1240
 O' the victims, murdered in their dwelling-place,
In domo ac habitatione propria,
 Where all presumably is peace and joy.
 The spider, crime, pronounce we twice a pest
 When, creeping from congenial cottage, she 1245
 Taketh hold with her hands, to horrify
 His household more, i' the palace of the king.
 All three were housed and safe and confident.
 Moreover, the permission that our wife
 Should have at length *domum pro carcere,* 1250
 Her own abode in place of prison — why,
 We ourselves granted, by our other self
 And proxy Paolo : did we make such grant,
 Meaning a lure? — elude the vigilance
 O' the jailer, lead her to commodious death, 1255
 While we ostensibly relented?

Ay,

Just so did we, nor otherwise, my Fisc!
 Is vengeance lawful? We demand our right,
 But find it will be questioned or refused
 By jailer, turnkey, hangdog, — what know we? 1260
 Pray, how is it we should conduct ourselves?
 To gain our private right — break public peace.
 Do you bid us? — trouble order with our broils?
 Endanger . . . shall I shrink to own . . . ourselves? —
 Who want no broken head nor bloody nose 1265
 (While busied slitting noses, breaking heads)
 From the first tipstaff that may interfere!
Nam quicquid sit, for howsoever it be,
An de consensu nostro, if with leave
 Or not, *a monasterio,* from the nuns, 1270
Educta esset, she had been led forth,
Potuimus id dissimulare, we
 May well have granted leave in pure pretence,
Ut aditum habere, that thereby
 An entry we might compass, a free move 1275
Potuissemus, to her easy death,
Ad eam occidendam. Privacy
 O' the hearth, and sanctitude of home, say you?
 Shall we give man's abode more privilege
 Than God's? — for in the churches where He dwells 1280
In quibus assistit Regum Rex, by means
 Of His essence, *per essentiam,* all the same,

- Et nihilominus*, therein, *in eis*,
Ex justa via delinquens, whoso dares
 To take a liberty on ground enough, 1285
 Is pardoned, *excusatur*: that 's our case —
 Delinquent through befitting cause. You hold,
 To punish a false wife in her own house
 Is graver than, what happens every day,
 To hale a debtor from his hiding-place 1290
 In church protected by the Sacrament?
 To this conclusion have I brought my Fisc?
 Foxes have holes, and fowls o' the air their nests;
 Praise you the impiety that follows. Fisc?
 Shall false wife yet have where to lay her head? 1295
 "*Contra Fiscum definitum est!*" He 's done!
 "*Surge et scribe*," make a note of it!
 — If I may dally with Aquinas' word.
- Or in the death-throe does he mutter still,
 Fourth aggravation, that we changed our garb, 1300
 And rusticized ourselves with uncouth hat,
 Rough vest and goatskin wrappage; murdered thus
Mutatione vestium, in disguise,
 Whereby mere murder got complexed with wile,
 Turned *homicidium ex insidiis*? Fisc, 1305
 How often must I round thee in the ears —
 All means are lawful to a lawful end?
 Concede he had the right to kill his wife:
 The Count indulged in a travesty; why?
De illa ut vindictam sumeret, 1310
 That on her he might lawful vengeance take,
Commodius, with more ease, *et tutius*,
 And safelier: wants he warrant for the step?
 Read to thy profit how the Apostle once
 For ease and safety, when Damascus raged, 1315
 Was let down in a basket by the wall
 To 'scape the malice of the governor
 (Another sort of Governor boasts Rome!)
 — Many are of opinion, — covered close,
 Concealed with — what except that very cioak 1320
 He left behind at Troas afterward?
 I shall not add a syllable: Molinists may!
 Well, have we more to manage? Ay, indeed!
 Fifth aggravation, that our wife reposed
Sub potestate iudicis, beneath 1325
 Protection of the judge, — her house was styled
 A prison, and his power became its guard
 In lieu of wall and gate and bolt and bar.
 This is a tough point, shrewd, redoubtable:

Because we have to supplicate that judge 1330
 Shall overlook wrong done the judgment-seat.
 Now, I might suffer my own nose be pulled,
 As man: but then as father . . . if the Fisc
 Touched one hair of my boy who held my hand
 In confidence he could not come to harm 1335
 Crossing the Corso, at my own desire,
 Going to see those bodies in the church —
 What would you say to that, Don Hyacinth?
 This is the sole and single knotty point:
 For, bid Tommati blink his interest, 1340
 You laud his magnanimity the while:
 But baulk Tommati's office, — he talks big!
 "My predecessors in the place, — those sons
 O' the prophets that may hope succeed me here, —
 Shall I diminish their prerogative? 1345
 Count Guido Franceschini's honor! — well,
 Has the Governor of Rome none?"

You perceive,

The cards are all against us. Make a push.
 Kick over table, as shrewd gamesters do!
 We, do you say, encroach upon the rights, 1350
 Deny the omnipotence o' the Judge forsooth?
 We, who have only been from first to last
 Intending that his purpose should prevail,
 Nay more, at times, anticipating it
 At risk of his rebuke?

But wait awhile! 1355

Cannot we lump this with the sixth and last
 Of the aggravations — that the Majesty
 O' the Sovereign here received a wound? to-wit,
Læsa Majestas, since our violence
 Was out of envy to the course of law. 1360
In odium litis? We cut short thereby
 Three pending suits, promoted by ourselves
 I' the main, — which worsens crime, *accedit ad*
Exasperationem criminis!

Yes, here the eruptive wrath with full effect! 1365
 How, did not indignation chain my tongue,
 Could I repel this last, worst charge of all!
 (There is a porcupine to barbacue;
 Gigia can jug a rabbit well enough,
 With sour-sweet sauce and pine-pips; but, good Lord, 1370
 Suppose the devil instigate the wench
 To stew, not roast him? Stew my porcupine?

If she does, I know where his quills shall stick!
 Come, I must go myself and see to things :
 I cannot stay much longer stewing here.) 1375
 Our stomach . . . I mean, our soul is stirred within,
 And we want words. We wounded Majesty?
 Fall under such a censure, we? — who yearned
 So much that Majesty dispel the cloud
 And shine on us with healing on her wings, 1380
 That we prayed Pope *Majestas*' very self
 To anticipate a little the tardy pack,
 Bell us forth deep the authoritative bay
 Should start the beagles into sudden yelp
 Unisonous, — and, Gospel leading Law, 1385
 Grant there assemble in our own behoof
 A Congregation, a particular Court,
 A few picked friends of quality and place,
 To hear the several matters in dispute, —
 Causes big, little and indifferent, 1390
 Bred of our marriage like a mushroom-growth, —
 All at once (can one brush off such too soon?)
 And so with laudable despatch decide
 Whether we, in the main (to sink detail)
 Were one the Pope should hold fast or let go. 1395
 "What, take the credit from the Law?" you ask?
 Indeed, we did! Law ducks to Gospel here :
 Why should Law gain the glory and pronounce
 A judgment shall immortalize the Pope?
 Yes : our self-abnegating policy 1400
 Was Joab's¹ — we would rouse our David's sloth,
 Bid him encamp against a city, sack
 A place whereto ourselves had long laid siege,
 Lest, taking it at last, it take our name
 Nor be styled *Innocentinopolis*.² 1405
 But no! The modesty was in alarm,
 The temperance refused to interfere.
 Returned us our petition with the word
 "*Ad judices suos*," "Leave him to his Judge!"
 As who should say "Why trouble my repose?" 1410
 Why consult Peter in a simple case,
 Peter's wife's sister in her fever-fit
 Might solve as readily as the Apostle's self?
 Are my Tribunals posed by aught so plain?
 Hath not my Court a conscience? It is of age, 1415
 Ask it!"

We do ask, — but, inspire reply

¹ Was Joab's : see 2 Samuel xii. 26-29.

² *Innocentinopolis* : the city of Innocent.

To the Court thou bidst me ask, as I have asked —
 Oh thou, who vigilantly dost attend
 To even the few, the ineffectual words
 Which rise from this our low and mundane sphere 1420
 Up to thy region out of smoke and noise,
 Seeking corroboration from thy nod
 Who art all justice — which means mercy too,
 In a low noisy smoky world like ours
 Where Adam's sin made peccable his seed! 1425
 We venerate the father of the flock,
 Whose last faint sands of life, the frittered gold,
 Fall noiselessly, yet all too fast, o' the cone
 And tapering heap of those collected years :
 Never have these been hurried in their flow, 1430
 Though justice fain would jog reluctant arm,
 In eagerness to take the forfeiture
 Of guilty life : much less shall mercy sue
 In vain that thou let innocence survive,
 Precipitate no minim of the mass 1435
 O' the all-so-precious moments of thy life,
 By pushing Guido into death and doom!

(Our Cardinal engages to go read
 The Pope my speech, and point its beauties out.
 They say, the Pope has one half-hour, in twelve, 1440
 Of something like a moderate return
 Of the intellectuals, — never much to lose!
 If I adroitly plant this passage there,
 The Fisc will find himself forestalled, I think,
 Though he stand, beat till the old ear-drum break! 1445
 — Ah, boy of my own bowels. Hyacinth,
 Wilt ever catch the knack, requite the pains
 Of poor papa, become proficient too
 I' the how and why and when, the time to laugh,
 The time to weep, the time, again, to pray, 1450
 And all the times prescribed by Holy Writ?
 Well, well, we fathers can but care, but cast
 Our bread upon the waters!)

In a word,
 These secondary charges go to ground,
 Since secondary, and superfluous. — motes 1455
 Quite from the main point : we did all and some,
 Little and much, adjunct and principal,
Causa honoris. Is there such a cause
 As the sake of honor? By that sole test try
 Our action, nor demand if more or less, 1460
 Because of the action's mode, we merit blame

- Or maybe deserve praise! The Court decides.
 Is the end lawful? It allows the means :
 What we may do, we may with safety do.
 And what means "safety" we ourselves must judge. 1465
 Put case a person wrongs me past dispute :
 If my legitimate vengeance be a blow,
 Mistrusting my bare arm can deal that blow,
 I claim co-operation of a stick ;
 Doubtful if stick be tough, I crave a sword ; 1470
 Diffident of ability in fence,
 I fee a friend, a swordsman to assist :
 Take one — he may be coward, fool or knave :
 Why not take fifty? — and if these exceed
 I' the due degree of drubbing, whom accuse 1475
 But the first author of the aforesaid wrong
 Who put poor me to such a world of pains?
 Surgery would have just excised a wart ;
 The patient made such pother, struggled so
 That the sharp instrument sliced nose and all. 1480
 Taunt us not that our friends performed for pay !
 Ourselves had toiled for simple honor's sake :
 But country clowns want dirt they comprehend,
 The piece of gold! Our reasons, which suffice
 Ourselves, be ours alone ; our piece of gold 1485
 Be, to the rustic, reason he approves!
 We must translate our motives like our speech,
 Into the lower phrase that suits the sense
 O' the limitedly apprehensive. Let
 Each level have its language! Heaven speaks first 1490
 To the angel, then the angel tames the word
 Down to the ear of Tobit :¹ he, in turn,
 Diminishes the message to his dog,
 And finally that dog finds how the flea
 (Which else, importunate, might check his speed) 1495
 Shall learn its hunger must have holiday,
 By application of his tongue or paw :
 So many varied sorts of language here,
 Each following each with pace to match the step,
Haud passibus æquis!
- Talking of which flea, 1500
- Reminds me I must put in special word
 For the poor humble following, — the four friends,
Sicarii, our assassins caught and caged.
 Ourselves are safe in your approval now :
 Yet must we care for our companions, plead 1505

¹ *Tobit* : Apocrypha, Book of Tobit, v. and vi.

The cause o' the poor, the friends (of old-world faith)
 Who lie in tribulation for our sake.
Pauperum Procurator is my style :
 I stand forth as the poor man's advocate :
 And when we treat of what concerns the poor, 1510
Et cum agatur de pauperibus,
 In bondage, *carceratis*, for their sake,
In eorum causis, natural piety,
Pietas, ever ought to win the day,
Triumphare debet, quia ipsi sunt, 1515
 Because those very paupers constitute,
Thesaurus Christi, all the wealth of Christ.
 Nevertheless I shall not hold you long
 With multiplicity of proofs, nor burn
 Candle at noon-tide, clarify the clear. 1520
 There beams a case refulgent from our books —
Castrensis, *Butringarius*,¹ everywhere
 I find it burn to dissipate the dark.
 'T is this : a husband had a friend, which friend
 Seemed to him over-friendly with his wife 1525
 In thought and purpose, — I pretend no more.
 To justify suspicion or dispel.
 He bids his wife make show of giving heed,
 Semblance of sympathy — propose, in fine,
 A secret meeting in a private place. 1530
 The friend, enticed thus, finds an ambuscade,
 To-wit, the husband posted with a pack
 Of other friends, who fall upon the first
 And beat his love and life out both at once.
 These friends were brought to question for their help ; 1535
 Law ruled " The husband being in the right,
 Who helped him in the right can scarce be wrong " —
Opinio, an opinion every way,
Multum tenenda cordi, heart should hold !
 When the inferiors follow as befits 1540
 The lead o' the principal, they change their name,
 And, *non dicuntur*, are no longer called
 His mandatories, *mandatorii*,
 But helpmates, *sed auxiliares* ; since
 To that degree does honor's sake lend aid, 1545
Adeo honoris causa est efficax,
 That not alone, *non solum*, does it pour
 Itself out, *se diffundat*, on mere friends.
 We bring to do our bidding of this sort,
In mandatorios simplices, but sucks 1550

¹ *Castrensis*, *Butringarius* : Paulus de Castro and Jacobus Butrigarius (as the name should be spelt), jurists of the sixteenth century.

Along with it in wide and generous whirl,
Sed etiam assassinii qualitate
Qualificatos, people qualified
 By the quality of assassination's self,
 Dare I make use of such neologism, 1555
Ut utar verbo.

Haste we to conclude.
 Of the other points that favor, leave some few
 For Spreti; such as the delinquents' youth.
 One of them falls short, by some months, of age
 Fit to be managed by the gallows; two 1560
 May plead exemption from our law's award,
 Being foreigners, subjects of the Granduke —
 I spare that bone to Spreti, and reserve
 Myself the juicier breast of argument —
 Flinging the breast-blade i' the face o' the Fisc, 1565
 Who furnished me the tid-bit: he must needs
 Play off his privilege and rack the clowns, —
 And they, at instance of the rack, confess
 All four unanimously made resolve, —
 The night o' the murder, in brief minute snatched 1570
 Behind the back of Guido as he fled, —
 That, since he had not kept his promise, paid
 The money for the murder on the spot,
 So, reaching home again, might please ignore
 The pact or pay them in improper coin, — 1575
 They one and all resolved, these hopeful friends,
 'T were best inaugurate the morrow's light,
 Nature recruited with her due repose,
 By killing Guido as he lay asleep
 Pillowed on wallet which contained their fee. 1580

I thank the Fisc for knowledge of this fact:
 What fact could hope to make more manifest
 Their rectitude, Guido's integrity?
 For who fails recognize the touching truth
 That these poor rustics bore no envy, hate, 1585
 Malice nor yet uncharitableness
 Against the people they had put to death?
 In them, did such an act reward itself?
 All done was to deserve the simple pay,
 Obtain the bread clowns earn by sweat of brow, 1590
 And missing which, they missed of everything —
 Hence claimed pay, even at expense of life
 To their own lord, so little warped (admire!)
 By prepossession, such the absolute
 Instinct of equity in rustic souls! 1595

Whereas our Count, the cultivated mind,
 He, wholly rapt in his serene regard
 Of honor, he contemplating the sun
 Who hardly marks if taper blink below. —
 He, dreaming of no argument for death 1600
 Except a vengeance worthy noble hearts, —
 Dared not so desecrate the deed, forsooth,
 Vulgarize vengeance, as defray its cost
 By money dug from out the dirty earth,
 Irritant mere, in Ovid's phrase, to ill. 1605
 What though he lured base hinds by lucre's hope, —
 The only motive they could masticate,
 Milk for babes, not strong meat which men require?
 The deed done, those coarse hands were soiled enough,
 He spared them the pollution of the pay. 1610
 So much for the allevement, thine, my Fisc,
Quo nil absurdius, than which naught more mad,
Excogitari potest, may be squeezed
 From out the cogitative brain of thee!
 And now, thou excellent the Governor! 1615
 (Push to the peroration) *cæterum*
Enixe supplico, I strive in prayer,
Ut dominis meis, that unto the Court,
Benigna fronte, with a gracious brow,
Et oculis serenis, and mild eyes, 1620
Perpendere placeat, it may please them weigh,
Quod dominus Guido, that our noble Count,
Occidit, did the killing in dispute,
Ut ejus honor tumulatus, that
 The honor of him buried fathom-deep 1625
 In infamy, *in infamia*, might arise,
Resurgeret, as ghost breaks sepulchre!
Occidit, for he killed, *uxorem*, wife,
Quia illi fuit, since she was to him,
Opprobrio, a disgrace and nothing more! 1630
Et genitores, killed her parents too,
Qui, who, *postposita verecundia*,
 Having thrown off all sort of decency,
Filiam repudiarunt, had renounced
 Their daughter, *atque declarare non* 1635
Erubuerunt, nor felt blush tinge cheek,
 Declaring, *meretricis genitam*
Esse, she was the offspring of a drab,
Ut ipse dehonestaretur, just
 That so himself might lose his social rank! 1640
Cujus mentem, and which daughter's heart and soul,
 They, *perverterunt*, turned from the right course,
Et ad illicitos amores non

- Dumtaxat pellexerunt*, and to love
 Not simply did alluringly incite, 1645
Sed vi obedientiæ, but by force
 O' the duty, *filialis*, daughters owe,
Coegerunt, forced and drove her to the deed :
Occidit, I repeat he killed the clan,
Ne scilicet amplius in dedecore, 1650
 Lest peradventure longer life might trail,
Viveret, link by link his turpitude,
Invisus consanguineis, hateful so
 To kith and kindred, *a nobilibus*
Notatus, shunned by men of quality, 1655
Relictus ab amicis, left i' the lurch
 By friends, *ab omnibus derisus*, turned
 A common hack-block to try edge of jokes.
Occidit, and he killed them here in Rome,
In Urbe, the Eternal City, Sirs, 1660
Nempe quæ alias spectata est,
 The appropriate theatre which witnessed once,
Matronam nobilem, Lucretia's self,
Abluere pudicitæ maculas,
 Wash off the spots of her pudicity, 1665
Sanguine proprio, with her own pure blood ;
Quæ vidit, and which city also saw,
Patrem, Virginius, *undequaque*, quite,
Impunem, with no sort of punishment,
 Nor, *et non illaudatum*, lacking praise, 1670
Sed polluentem parricidio,
 Imbrue his hands with butchery, *filix*,
 Of chaste Virginia, to avoid a rape,
Ne raperetur ad stupra ; so to heart,
Tanti illi cordi fuit, did he take, 1675
Suspicio, the mere fancy men might have,
Honoris amittendi, of fame's loss,
Ut potius voluerit filia
Orbari, he preferred to lose his child,
Quam illa incederet, rather than she walk 1680
 The ways an, *inhonesta*, child disgraced,
Licet non sponte, though against her will.
Occidit — killed them. I reiterate —
In propria domo, in their own abode,
Ut adultera et parentes, that each wretch, 1685
Conscii agnoscerent, might both see and say,
Nullum locum, there 's no place, *nullumque esse*
Asylum, nor yet refuge of escape,
Impenetrabilem, shall serve as bar,
Honori læso, to the wounded one 1690
 In honor ; *neve ibi opprobria*

Continuarentur, killed them on the spot,
 Moreover, dreading lest within those walls
 The opprobrium peradventure be prolonged,
Et domus quæ testis fuit turpium, 1695
 And that the domicile which witnessed crime,
Esset et pœnæ, might watch punishment :
Occidit, killed. I round you in the ears,
Quia alio modo, since by other mode,
Non poterat ejus existimatio, 1700
 There was no possibility his fame,
Læsa, gashed griesly, *tam enormiter*,
Ducere cicatrices, might be healed :
Occidit ut exemplum præberet
Uxoribus, killed her, so to lesson wives 1705
Jura conjugii, that the marriage-oath,
Esse servanda, must be kept henceforth :
Occidit denique, killed her, in a word,
Ut pro posse honestus viveret,
 That he, please God, might creditably live, 1710
Sin minus, but if fate willed otherwise,
Proprii honoris, of his outraged fame,
Offensi, by Mannaia, if you please,
Commiseranda victima caderet,
 The pitiable victim he should fall! 1715

Done! I' the rough, i' the rough! But done! And, lo,
 Landed and stranded lies my very speech,
 My miracle, my monster of defence —
 Leviathan into the nose whereof
 I have put fish-hook, pierced his jaw with thorn, 1720
 And given him to my maidens for a play!
 I' the rough: to-morrow I review my piece,
 Tame here and there undue floridity.
 It 's hard: you have to plead before these priests
 And poke at them with Scripture, or you pass 1725
 For heathen and, what 's worse, for ignorant
 O' the quality o' the Court and what it likes
 By way of illustration of the law.
 To-morrow stick in this, and throw out that,
 And, having first ecclesiasticized, 1730
 Regularize the whole, next emphasize,
 Then latinize, and lastly Cicero-ize,
 Giving my Fisc his finish. There 's my speech!
 And where 's my fry, and family and friends?
 Where 's that huge Hyacinth I mean to hug 1735
 Till he cries out, "*Jam satis!* Let me breathe!"
 Now, what an evening have I earned to-day!
 Hail, ye true pleasures, all the rest are false!

Oh the old mother, oh the fattish wife!
 Rogue Hyacinth shall put on paper toque, 1740
 And wrap himself around with mamma's veil
 Done up to imitate papa's black robe,
 (I 'm in the secret of the comedy, —
 Part of the program leaked out long ago!)
 And call himself the Advocate o' the Poor, 1745
 Mimic Don father that defends the Count:
 And for reward shall have a small full glass
 Of manly red rosolio to himself,
 — Always provided that he conjugate
Bibo, I drink, correctly — nor be found 1750
 Make the *perfectum*, *bipsi*,¹ as last year!
 How the ambitious do so harden heart
 As lightly hold by these home-sanctitudes.
 To me is matter of bewilderment —
 Bewilderment! Because ambition's range 1755
 Is nowise tethered by domestic tie.
 Am I refused an outlet from my home
 To the world's stage? — whereon a man should play
 The man in public, vigilant for law,
 Zealous for truth, a credit to his kind, 1760
 Nay, — since, employing talent so, I yield
 The Lord His own again with usury, —
 A satisfaction, yea, to God himself!
 Well, I have modelled me by Agur's wish,
 "Remove far from me vanity and lies, 1765
 Feed me with food convenient for me!" What
 I' the world should a wise man require beyond?
 Can I but coax the good fat little wife
 To tell her fool of a father the mad prank
 His scapegrace nephew played this time last year 1770
 At Carnival! He could not choose, I think,
 But modify that inconsiderate gift
 O' the cup and cover (somewhere in the will
 Under the pillow, someone seems to guess)
 — Correct that clause in favor of a boy 1775
 The trifle ought to grace, with name engraved,
 Would look so well, produced in future years
 To pledge a memory, when poor papa
 Latin and law are long since laid at rest —
Hyacintho dono dedit avus! Why, 1780
 The wife should get a necklace for her pains,
 The very pearls that made Violante proud,
 And Pietro pawned for half their value once, —
 Redeemable by somebody, *ne sit*

¹ *Bipsi*: the perfect should be *bibi*.

Marita quæ rotundioribus 1785

Onusta mammis . . . baccis ambulet :
Her bosom shall display the big round balls,
No braver proudly borne by wedded wife!
With which Horatian promise¹ I conclude.

Into the pigeon-hole with thee, my speech! 1790
Off and away, first work then play, play, play!
Bottini, burn thy books, thou blazing ass!
Sing "Tra-la-la, for lambkins, we must live!"

¹ *Horatian promise* : Horace, "Epodes," 8, 13.

IX.

JURIS DOCTOR JOHANNES-BAPTISTA BOTTINIUS,

FISCI ET REV. CAM. APOSTOL. ADVOCATUS.

[Pompilia's advocate, Dr. Bottinius, is presented in Book IX. in the process of writing down his speech. He builds, even out of the questionable and already refuted evidence brought against his client, a justification of her course as the only one a defenceless woman could take to avoid greater evil. He makes as elaborate claims for her purity as are consistent with the politic attitude of a man of the world toward the weakness of womanhood, adorning his speech with learned literary allusions ingeniously devised not only to throw an effective light upon his plea, but also to display becomingly his cultured style.]

HAD I God's leave, how I would alter things!
 If I might read instead of print my speech, —
 Ay, and enliven speech with many a flower
 Refuses obstinate to blow in print,
 As wildings planted in a prim parterre, — 5
 This scurvy room were turned an immense hall;
 Opposite, fifty judges in a row;
 This side and that of me, for audience — Rome:
 And, where yon window is, the Pope should hide —
 Watch, curtained, but peep visibly enough. 10
 A buzz of expectation! Through the crowd,
 Jingling his chain and stumping with his staff,
 Up comes an usher, louts him low, "The Court
 Requires the allocution of the Fisc!"
 I rise, I bend, I look about me, pause 15
 O'er the hushed multitude: I count — One, two —

Have ye seen, Judges, have ye, lights of law, —
 When it may hap some painter, much in vogue
 Throughout our city nutritive of arts,
 Ye summon to a task shall test his worth, 20
 And manufacture, as he knows and can,
 A work may decorate a palace-wall,
 Afford my lords their Holy Family, —
 Hath it escaped the acumen of the Court
 How such a painter sets himself to paint? 25
 Suppose that Joseph, Mary and her Babe
 A-journeying to Egypt, prove the piece:

Why, first he sedulously practiseth,
 This painter,—girding loin and lighting lamp,—
 On what may nourish eye, make facile hand; 30
 Getteth him studies (styled by draughtsmen so)
 From some assistant corpse of Jew or Turk
 Or, haply, Molinist, he cuts and carves,—
 This Luca or this Carlo or the like.
 To him the bones their inmost secret yield, 35
 Each notch and nodule signify their use:
 On him the muscles turn, in triple tier,
 And pleasantly entreat the entrusted man
 “Familiarize thee with our play that lifts
 Thus, and thus lowers again, leg, arm and foot!” 40
 —Ensuring due correctness in the nude.
 Which done, is all done? Not a whit, ye know!
 He.—to art’s surface rising from her depth,—
 If some flax-polled soft-bearded sire be found,
 May simulate a Joseph, (happy chance!)— 45
 Limneth exact each wrinkle of the brow,
 Loseth no involution, cheek or chap,
 Till lo, in black and white, the senior lives!
 Is it a young and comely peasant-nurse
 That poseth? (be the phrase accorded me!) 50
 Each feminine delight of florid lip,
 Eyes brimming o’er and brow bowed down with love,
 Marmoreal neck and bosom uberous,¹—
 Glad on the paper in a trice they go
 To help his notion of the Mother-maid: 55
 Methinks I see it, chalk a little stumped!
 Yea and her babe — that flexure of soft limbs,
 That budding face imbued with dewy sleep,
 Contribute each an excellence to Christ.
 Nay, since he humbly lent companionship, 60
 Even the poor ass, unpannied and elate
 Stands, perks an ear up, he a model too;
 While clouted shoon, staff, scrip and water-gourd,—
 Aught may betoken travel, heat and haste.—
 No jot nor tittle of these but in its turn 65
 Ministers to perfection of the piece:
 Till now, such piece before him, part by part.—
 Such prelude ended,—pause our painter may,
 Submit his fifty studies one by one,
 And in some sort boast “I have served my lords.” 70

But what? And hath he painted once this while?
 Or when ye cry “Produce the thing required,

¹ *Uberous*: full.

Show us our picture shall rejoice its niche,
 Thy Journey through the Desert done in oils! —
 What, doth he fall to shuffling 'mid his sheets, 75
 Fumbling for first this, then the other fact
 Consigned to paper, — “studies,” bear the term! —
 And stretch a canvas, mix a pot of paste,
 And fasten here a head and there a tail,
 (The ass hath one, my Judges!) so dove-tail 80
 Or, rather, ass-tail in, piece sornily out —
 By bits of reproduction of the life —
 The picture, the expected Family?
 I trow not! do I miss with my conceit
 The mark, my lords? — not so my lords were served! 85
 Rather your artist turns abrupt from these,
 And preferably buries him and broods
 (Quite away from aught vulgar and extern)
 On the inner spectrum, filtered through the eye,
 His brain-deposit, bred of many a drop,
E pluribus unum:¹ and the wiser he! 90
 For in that brain, — their fancy sees at work,
 Could my lords peep indulged, — results alone,
 Not processes which nourish such results,
 Would they discover and appreciate, — life 95
 Fed by digestion, not raw food itself,
 No gobbets but smooth comfortable chyme²
 Secreted from each snapped-up crudity, —
 Less distinct, part by part, but in the whole
 Truer to the subject, — the main central truth 100
 And soul o' the picture, would my Judges spy, —
 Not those mere fragmentary studied facts
 Which answer to the outward frame and flesh —
 Not this nose, not that eyebrow, the other fact
 Of man's staff, woman's stole or infant's clout, 105
 But lo, a spirit-birth conceived of flesh,
 Truth rare and real, not transcripts, fact and false.
 The studies — for his pupils and himself!
 The picture be for our eximious³ Rome
 And — who knows? — satisfy its Governor, 110
 Whose new wing to the villa he hath bought
 (God give him joy of it) by Capena, soon
 ('T is bruited) shall be glowing with the brush
 Of who hath long surpassed the Florentine,⁴
 The Urbinate⁵ and . . . what if I dared add, 115

¹ *E pluribus unum*: “one made out of many” (Virgil, “Moretum,” 103).

² *Chyme*: the matter into which food is reduced by the juices of the stomach.

³ *Eximious*: select or fastidious.

⁴ *The Florentine*: Michel Angelo.

⁵ *The Urbinate*: Rafael.

Even his master, yea the Cortonese, —
 I mean the accomplished *Ciro Ferri*,¹ Sirs!
 (— Did not he die? I'll see before I print.)

End we exordium. Phæbus plucks my ear!
 Thus then, just so and no whit otherwise, 120
 Have I, — engaged as I were *Ciro's* self,
 To paint a parallel, a Family,
 The patriarch *Pietro* with his wise old wife
 To boot (as if one introduced *Saint Anne*
 By bold conjecture to complete the group) 125
 And juvenile *Pompilia* with her babe.
 Who, seeking safety in the wilderness,
 Were all surprised by *Herod*, while outstretched
 In sleep beneath a palm-tree by a spring,
 And killed — the very circumstance I paint, 130
 Moving the pity and terror of my lords —
 Exactly so have I, a month at least.
 Your *Fiscal*, made me cognizant of facts,
 Searched out, pried into, pressed the meaning forth
 Of every piece of evidence in point, 135
 How bloody *Herod* slew these innocents, —
 Until the glad result is gained, the group
 Demonstrably presented in detail.
 Their slumber and his onslaught, — like as life.
 Yea and, availing me of help allowed 140
 By law, discreet provision lest my lords
 Be too much troubled by effrontery, —
 The rack, law plies suspected crime withal —
 (Law that hath listened while the lyric sang
 “*Lene tormentum ingenio admoveo*,”² 145
 Gently thou joggest, by a twinge the wit,
 “*Plerumque duro*,” else were slow to blab!)
 Through this concession my full cup runs o'er:
 The guilty owns his guilt without reserve. 1
 Therefore by part and part I clutch my case 150
 Which, in entirety now, — momentous task, —
 My lords demand, so render them I must,
 Since, one poor pleading more and I have done.
 But shall I ply my papers, play my proofs,
 Parade my studies, fifty in a row, 155
 As though the Court were yet in pupillage,
 Claimed not the artist's ultimate appeal?

¹ *Ciro Ferri*: a painter (1634–1689), pupil of *Pietro da Cortona*, who died about nine years before *Dr. Bottinius* wrote his speech.

² *Lene tormentum*, etc.: *Browning* himself supplies a translation, so that it is not necessary here and in other such places to give an English version.

- Much rather let me soar the height prescribed
 And, bowing low, proffer my picture's self!
 No more of proof, disproof, — such virtue was, 160
 Such vice was never in Pompilia, now!
 Far better say "Behold Pompilia!" — (for
 I leave the family as unmanageable,
 And stick to just one portrait, but life-size.)
 Hath calumny imputed to the fair 165
 A blemish, mole on cheek or wart on chin,
 Much more, blind hidden horrors best unnamed?
 Shall I descend to prove you, point by point,
 Never was knock-knee known nor splay-foot found
 In Phryne?¹ (I must let the portrait go, 170
 Content me with the model, I believe) —
 — I prove this? An indignant sweep of hand,
 Dash at and doing away with drapery,
 And, — use your eyes, Athenians, smooth she smiles!
 Or, — since my client can no longer smile, 175
 And more appropriate instances abound, —
 What is this Tale of Tarquin, how the slave
 Was caught by him, preferred to Collatine?²
 Thou, even from thy corpse-clothes virginal,
 Look'st the lie dead, Lucretia!
- Thus at least 180
- I, by the guidance of antiquity,
 (Our one infallible guide) now operate,
 Sure that the innocence thus shown is safe;
 Sure, too, that while I plead, the echoes cry,
 (Lend my weak voice thy trump, sonorous Fame!) 185
 "Monstrosity the Phrynean shape shall mar,
 Lucretia's soul comport with Tarquin's lie.
 When thistles grow on vines or thorns yield figs,
 Or oblique sentence leave this judgment-seat!"
- A great theme: may my strength be adequate! 190
 For — paint Pompilia, dares my feebleness?
 How did I unaware engage so much
 — Find myself undertaking to produce
 A faultless nature in a flawless form?
 What 's here? Oh, turn aside nor dare the blaze 195
 Of such a crown, such constellation, say,
 As jewels here thy front, Humanity!

¹ *Phryne*: alluding to the defence of the courtesan Phryné by Hyperides, who secured a verdict by displaying her unveiled beauty to the court.

² *Tale of . . . the slave . . . preferred to Collatine*: the threat of Sextus Tarquinius,

that he would swear he had found Lucretia with a slave of her husband's, if she did not yield to his wishes. The stab she gave herself in presence of Brutus and Collatinus struck "the lie dead." See Shakespeare's "Lucrece," 512 and 1830.

First, infancy, pellucid as a pearl;
 Then childhood — stone which, dew-drop at the first,
 (An old conjecture) sucks, by dint of gaze, 200
 Blue from the sky and turns to sapphire so:
 Yet both these gems eclipsed by, last and best,
 Womanliness and wifehood opaline,
 Its milk-white pallor, — chastity, — suffused
 With here and there a tint and hint of flame, — 205
 Desire, — the lapidary loves to find.
 Such jewels bind conspicuously thy brow,
 Pompilia, infant, child, maid, woman, wife —
 Crown the ideal in our earth at last!
 What should a faculty like mine do here? 210
 Close eyes, or else, the rashlier hurry hand!

Which is to say, — lose no time but begin!
Sermocinando ne declamem, Sirs,
Ultra clepsydrum,¹ as our preachers smile,
 Lest I exceed my hour-glass. Whereupon, 215
 As Flaccus² prompts, I dare the epic plunge —
 Begin at once with marriage, up till when
 Little or nothing would arrest your love,
 In the easeful life o' the lady; lamb and lamb,
 How do they differ? Know one, you know all 220
 Manners of maidenhood: mere maiden she.
 And since all lambs are like in more than fleece,
 Prepare to find that, lamb-like, she too frisks —
 O' the weaker sex, my lords, the weaker sex!
 To whom, the Teian³ teaches us, for gift, 225
 Not strength, — man's dower, — but beauty, nature gave,
 "Beauty in lieu of spears, in lieu of shields!"
 And what is beauty's sure concomitant,
 Nay, intimate essential character,
 But melting wiles, deliciousest deceits, 230
 The whole redoubted armory of love?
 Therefore of vernal pranks, dishevellings
 O' the hair of youth that dances April in,
 And easily-imagined Hebe-slips
 O'er sward which May makes over-smooth for foot — 235
 These shall we pry into? — or wiselier wink,
 Though numerous and dear they may have been?

¹ *Sermocinando*, etc.: let me not declaim beyond the clock with my discoursing.

² *Flaccus*: Horace, "Odes," ii. 4, 17.

³ *The Teian*: Anacreon, born at Teos in Ionia. The allusion is to Anacreon's second "Ode." "Nature gave horns to bulls, and hoofs to horses, swift-footedness to hares,

a gulf of teeth to lions, the power of swimming to fishes, flight to birds, thoughtfulness to men; for women she had naught besides. What then does she give? Beauty instead of all shield, instead of all spears? and any one being beautiful, vanquishes both steel and fire."

For lo, advancing Hymen and his pomp!
Discedunt nunc amores, loves, farewell!
Maneat amor, let love, the sole, remain! 240
 Farewell to dewiness and prime of life!
 Remains the rough determined day: dance done,
 To work, with plough and harrow! What comes next?
 'T is Guido henceforth guides Pompilia's step,
 Cries "No more friskings o'er the foodful glebe, 245
 Else, 'ware the whip!" Accordingly, — first crack
 O' the thong, — we hear that his young wife was barred,
Cohibita fuit, from the old free life,
Vitam liberiozem ducere.
 Demur we? Nowise: heifer brave the hind? 250
 We seek not there should lapse the natural law,
 The proper piety to lord and king
 And husband: let the heifer bear the yoke!
 Only, I crave he cast not patience off,
 This hind; for deem you she endures the whip, 255
 Nor winces at the goad, nay, restive, kicks?
 What if the adversary's charge be just,
 And all untowardly she pursue her way
 With groan and grunt, though hind strike ne'er so hard?
 If petulant remonstrance made appeal, 260
 Unseasonable, o'erprotracted, — if
 Importunate challenge taxed the public ear
 When silence more decorously had served
 For protestation, — if Pompilian plaint
 Wrought but to aggravate Guidonian ire, — 265
 Why, such mishaps, ungainly though they be,
 Ever companion change, are incident
 To altered modes and novelty of life:
 The philosophic mind expects no less,
 Smilingly knows and names the crisis, sits 270
 Waiting till old things go and new arrive.
 Therefore, I hold a husband but inept
 Who turns impatient at such transit-time,
 As if this running from the rod would last!

Since, even while I speak, the end is reached: 275
 Success awaits the soon-disheartened man.
 The parents turn their backs and leave the house,
 The wife may wail but none shall intervene:
 He hath attained his object, groom and bride
 Partake the nuptial bower no soul can see, 280
 Old things are passed and all again is new,
 Over and gone the obstacles to peace,
Novorum — tenderly the Mantuan¹ turns

¹ *The Mantuan*: Virgil. The quotation and reference is to the eclogue where Virgil

The expression, some such purpose in his eye —
Nascitur ordo! Every storm is laid, 285
 And forth from plain each pleasant herb may peep,
 Each bloom of wifehood in abeyance late:
 (Confer a passage in the Canticles.)¹

But what if, as 't is wont with plant and wife,
 Flowers, — after a suppression to good end, 290
 Still, when they do spring forth, — sprout here, spread there,
 Anywhere likelier than beneath the foot
 O' the lawful good-man gardener of the ground?
 He dug and dibbled.² sowed and watered, — still
 'T is a chance wayfarer shall pluck the increase. 295
 Just so, respecting persons not too much,
 The lady, foes allege, put forth each charm
 And proper floweret of feminity
 To whosoever had a nose to smell
 Or breast to deck: what if the charge be true? 300
 The fault were graver had she looked with choice,
 Fastidiously appointed who should grasp,
 Who, in the whole town, go without the prize!
 To nobody she destined donative,
 But, first come was first served, the accuser saith. 305
 Put case her sort of . . . in this kind . . . escapes
 Were many and oft and indiscriminate —
 Impute ye as the action were prepense,
 The gift particular, arguing malice so?
 Which butterfly of the wide air shall brag 310
 "I was preferred to Guido" — when 't is clear
 The cup, he quaffs at, lay with olent³ breast
 Open to gnat, midge, bee and moth as well?
 One chalice entertained the company;
 And if its peevish lord object the more, 315
 Mistake, misname such bounty in a wife,
 Haste we to advertise him — charm of cheek,
 Lustre of eye, allowance of the lip,
 All womanly components in a spouse,
 These are no household-bread each stranger's bite 320
 Leaves by so much diminished for the mouth
 O' the master of the house at supper-time:
 But rather like a lump of spice they lie,
 Morsel of myrrh, which scents the neighborhood
 Yet greets its lord no lighter by a grain. 325

sings the coming of a new era, the joys of renewed life, and the birth of a child of promise. "Eclogues," 4, 5.

¹ *Passage in the Canticles*: Song of Solomon ii. 11-14.

² *Dibbled*: used a dibble, a pointed instrument for making holes in the ground.

³ *Olent*: odorous.

Nay, even so, he shall be satisfied!
 Concede we there was reason in his wrong,
 Grant we his grievance and content the man!
 For lo, Pompilia, she submits herself;
 Ere three revolving years have crowned their course, 330
 Off and away she puts this same reproach
 Of lavish bounty, inconsiderate gift
 O' the sweets of wifehood stored to other ends:
 No longer shall he blame "She none excludes,"
 But substitute "She laudably sees all, 335
 Searches the best out and selects the same."
 For who is here, long sought and latest found,
 Waiting his turn unmoved amid the whirl,
 "*Constans in levitate*," — Ha, my lords?
 Calm in his levity, — indulge the quip! — 340
 Since 't is a levite bears the bell away,
 Parades him henceforth as Pompilia's choice.
 'T is no ignoble object, husband! Doubt'st?
 When here comes tripping Flaccus¹ with his phrase
 "Trust me, no miscreant singled from the mob, 345
Crede non illum tibi de scelestis
Plebe delectum," but a man of mark,
 A priest, dost hear? Why then, submit thyself!
 Priest, ay and very phœnix of such fowl,
 Well-born, of culture, young and vigorous, 350
 Comely too, since precise the precept points—
 On the selected levite be there found
 Nor mole nor scar nor blemish, lest the mind
 Come all uncandied through the thwarting flesh!
 Was not the son of Jesse ruddy, sleek. 355
 Pleasant to look on, pleasant every way?
 Since well he smote the harp and sweetly sang,
 And danced till Abigail came out to see,
 And seeing smiled and smiling ministered
 The raisin-cluster and the cake of figs, 360
 With ready meal refreshed the gifted youth,
 Till Nabal,² who was absent shearing sheep,
 Felt heart sink, took to bed (discreetly done —
 They might have been beforehand with him else)
 And died — would Guido have behaved as well! 365
 But ah, the faith of early days is gone,
*Heu prisca fides!*³ Nothing died in him
 Save courtesy, good sense and proper trust,
 Which, when they ebb from souls they should o'erflow.
 Discover stub, weed, sludge and ugliness. 370

¹ *Flaccus*: Horace, "Odes," II. 4, 17.

³ *Heu prisca fides*: "alas, the antique

² *Abigail . . . ministered . . . till Na- bal, etc.*: 1 Samuel xxv. 18, 37, 42.

(The Pope, we know, is Neapolitan
 And relishes a sea-side simile.)
 Deserted by each charitable wave,
 Guido, left high and dry, shows jealous now!
 Jealous avouched, paraded: tax the fool 375
 With any peccadillo, he responds
 "Truly I beat my wife through jealousy,
 Imprisoned her and punished otherwise,
 Being jealous: now would threaten, sword in hand,
 Now manage to mix poison in her sight, 380
 And so forth: jealously I dealt, in fine."
 Concede thus much, and what remains to prove?
 Have I to teach my masters what effect
 Hath jealousy, and how, befooling men,
 It makes false true, abuses eye and ear, 385
 Turns mere mist adamantine, loads with sound
 Silence, and into void and vacancy
 Crowds a whole phalanx of conspiring foes?
 Therefore who owns "I watched with jealousy
 My wife," adds "for no reason in the world!" 390
 What need that, thus proved madman, he remarked
 "The thing I thought a serpent proved an eel"? —
 Perchance the right Comacchian,¹ six foot length,
 And not an inch too long for that rare pie
 (Master Arcangeli has heard of such) 395
 Whose succulence makes fasting bearable;
 Meant to regale some moody splenetic
 Who, pleasing to mistake the donor's gift,
 Spying I know not what Lernæan snake²
 I' the luscious Lenten creature, stamps forsooth 400
 The dainty in the dust.

Enough! Prepare,
 Such lunes announced, for downright lunacy!
Insanit homo,³ threat succeeds to threat,
 And blow redoubles blow, — his wife, the block.
 But, if a block, shall not she jar the hand 405
 That buffets her? The injurious idle stone
 Rebounds and hits the head of him who flung.
 Causeless rage breeds, i' the wife now, rageful cause.
 Tyranny wakes rebellion from its sleep.
 Rebellion, say I? — rather, self-defence, 410
 Laudable wish to live and see good days,
 Pricks our Pompilia now to fly the fool

¹ *Comacchian*: a kind of eel, a dainty highly prized. ³ *Insanit homo*: "the man is insane."

² *Lernæan snake*: the hydra of Lerna, killed by Hercules.

By any means, at any price, — nay, more,
 Nay, most of all, i' the very interest
 O' the fool that, baffled of his blind desire 415
 At any price, were truliest victor so.
 Shall he effect his crime and lose his soul?
 No, dictates duty to a loving wife!
 Far better that the unconsummated blow,
 Adroitly baulked by her, should back again, 420
 Correctively admonish his own pate!

Crime then, — the Court is with me? — she must crush :
 How crush it? By all efficacious means ;
 And these, — why, what in woman should they be?
 "With horns the bull, with teeth the lion fights ; 425
 To woman," quoth the lyrist quoted late,¹
 "Nor teeth, nor horns, but beauty, Nature gave."
 Pretty i' the Pagan! Who dares blame the use
 Of armory thus allowed for natural, —
 Exclaim against a seeming-dubious play 430
 O' the sole permitted weapon, spear and shield
 Alike, resorted to i' the circumstance
 By poor Pompilia? Grant she somewhat plied
 Arts that allure, the magic nod and wink,
 The witchery of gesture, spell of word, 435
 Whereby the likelier to enlist this friend,
 Yea stranger, as a champion on her side?
 Such man, being but mere man, ('t was all she knew),
 Must be made sure by beauty's silken bond,
 The weakness that subdues the strong, and bows 440
 Wisdom alike and folly. Grant the tale
 O' the husband, which is false, were proved and true
 To the letter — or the letters, I should say,
 Abominations he professed to find
 And fix upon Pompilia and the priest, — 445
 Allow them hers — for though she could not write,
 In early days of Eve-like innocence
 That plucked no apple from the knowledge-tree,
 Yet, at the Serpent's word, Eve plucks and eats
 And knows — especially how to read and write : 450
 And so Pompilia, — as the move o' the maw,
 Quoth Persius,² makes a parrot bid " Good day!"
 A crow salute the concave, and a pie
 Endeavor at proficiency in speech, —

¹ *The lyrist quoted late* : Anacreon in his "Ode on Women" already given, 226.

² *Persius* : Epilogue to "Satires," 6-13.
 "Who was it made the parrot so glib with its 'good-morning,' and taught magpies to at-

tempt the feat of talking like men? That great teacher of art and bestower of mother-wit, the stomach, which has a knack of getting at speech when Nature refuses it."

So she, through hunger after fellowship, 455
 May well have learned, though late, to play the scribe :
 As indeed, there 's one letter on the list
 Explicitly declares did happen here.
 " You thought my letters could be none of mine,"
 She tells her parents — " mine, who wanted skill ; 460
 But now I have the skill, and write, you see !"
 She needed write love-letters, so she learned.
 "*Negatas artifex sequi voces*"¹ — though
 This letter nowise 'scapes the common lot,
 But lies i' the condemnation of the rest, 465
 Found by the husband's self who forged them all.
 Yet, for the sacredness of argument,
 For this once an exemption shall it plead —
 Anything, anything to let the wheels
 Of argument run glibly to their goal! 470
 Concede she wrote (which were preposterous)
 This and the other epistle, — what of it?
 Where does the figment touch her candid fame?
 Being in peril of her life — " my life,
 Not an hour's purchase," as the letter runs, — 475
 And having but one stay in this extreme,
 Out of the wide world but a single friend —
 What could she other than resort to him,
 And how with any hope resort but thus?
 Shall modesty dare bid a stranger brave 480
 Danger, disgrace, nay death in her behalf —
 Think to entice the sternness of the steel
 Yet spare love's loadstone moving manly mind?
 — Most of all, when such mind is hampered so
 By growth of circumstance athwart the life 485
 O' the natural man, that decency forbids
 He stoop and take the common privilege.
 Say frank " I love," as all the vulgar do.
 A man is wedded to philosophy,
 Married to statesmanship ; a man is old ; 490
 A man is fettered by the foolishness
 He took for wisdom and talked ten years since ;
 A man is, like our friend the Canon here,
 A priest, and wicked if he break his vow :
 Shall he dare love, who may be Pope one day? 495
 Despite the coil of such encumbrance here.
 Suppose this man could love, unhappily,
 And would love, dared he only let love show!
 In case the woman of his love, speaks first,
 From what embarrassment she sets him free! 500

¹ *Negatas artifex sequi voces* : " skillful at speaking the words denied."

“T is I who break reserve, begin appeal,
 Confess that, whether you love me or no,
 I love you!” What an ease to dignity,
 What help of pride from the hard high-backed chair
 Down to the carpet where the kittens bask, 505
 All under the pretence of gratitude!

From all which, I deduce — the lady here
 Was bound to proffer nothing short of love
 To the priest whose service was to save her. What?
 Shall she propose him lucre, dust o’ the mine, 510
 Rubbish o’ the rock, some diamond, muckworms prize,
 Some pearl secreted by a sickly fish?
 Scarcely! She caters for a generous taste.
 ’T is love shall beckon, beauty bid to breast,
 Till all the Samson sink into the snare!¹ 515
 Because, permit the end — permit therewith
 Means to the end!

How say you, good my lords?
 I hope you heard my adversary ring
 The changes on this precept: now, let me
 Reverse the peal! *Quia dato licito fine,* 520
Ad illum assequendum ordinata
Non sunt damnanda media, — licit end
 Enough was found in mere escape from death,
 To legalize our means illicit else
 Of feigned love, false allurements, fancied fact. 525
 Thus Venus losing Cupid on a day,
 (See that *Idyllium Moschi*²) seeking help,
 In the anxiety of motherhood.
 Allowably promised “Who shall bring report
 Where he is wandered to, my winged babe, 530
 I give him for reward a nectared kiss;
 But who brings safely back the truant’s self,
 His be a super-sweet makes kiss seem cold!”
 Are not these things writ for example-sake?

To such permitted motive, then, refer 535
 All those professions, else were hard explain,
 Of hope, fear, jealousy, and the rest of love!
 He is Myrtillus, Amaryllis³ she,
 She burns, he freezes, — all a mere device

¹ *Samson sink into the snare*: Judges xvi. but if thou bringest him, not the bare kiss, but yet more shalt thou win.”

² *Idyllium Moschi*: Idyll I. of Moschus. ³ *Myrtillus, Amaryllis*: names commonly given to lovers in pastoral verse.
 “Cypris, raising the hue and cry for Love, her child . . . ‘His prize is the kiss of Cypris,

To catch and keep the man, may save her life, 540
 Whom otherwise nor catches she nor keeps!
 Worst, once, turns best now: in all faith, she feigns:
 Feigning, — the liker innocence to guilt,
 The truer to the life in what she feigns!
 How if Ulysses, — when, for public good 545
 He sunk particular qualms and played the spy,¹
 Entered Troy's hostile gate in beggar's garb —
 How if he first had boggled at this clout,
 Grown dainty o'er that clack-dish? Grime is grace
 To whoso gropes amid the dung for gold. 550

Hence, beyond promises, we praise each proof
 That promise was not simply made to break,
 Mere moonshine-structure meant to fade at dawn:
 We praise, as consequent and requisite,
 What, enemies allege, were more than words, 555
 Deeds — meetings at the window, twilight-trysts,
 Nocturnal entertainments in the dim
 Old labyrinthine palace; lies, we know —
 Inventions we, long since, turned inside out.
 Must such external semblance of intrigue 560
 Demonstrate that intrigue there lurks perdue?
 Does every hazel-sheath disclose a nut?
 He were a Molinist who dared maintain
 That midnight meetings in a screened alcove
 Must argue folly in a matron — since 565
 So would he bring a slur on Judith's self,
 Commended beyond women, that she lured
 The lustful to destruction through his lust.
 Pompilia took not Judith's liberty,
 No faulchion find you in her hand to smite, 570
 No damsel to convey in dish the head
 Of Holophernes,² — style the Canon so —
 Or is it the Count? If I entangle me
 With my similitudes, — if wax wings melt,
 And earthward down I drop, not mine the fault: 575
 Blame your beneficence, O Court, O sun.
 Whereof the beamy smile affects my flight!
 What matter, so Pompilia's fame revive
 I' the warmth that proves the bane of Icarus?³

¹ *Ulysses . . . played the spy*: "Odyssey," iv. 316.

² *Judith and Holophernes*: Apocrypha, "Judith," xiii.

³ *Warmth . . . the bane of Icarus*: Dædalus turned his thoughts to arts unknown, and made himself and his son Icarus wings,

warning him not to fly too near the sun; but Icarus, touched with a desire to reach heaven, melted in the heat of the sun the wax that fastened his wings and fell into the waters of the Icarian Sea (Ovid, "Metamorphoses," viii. 3).

Yea, we have shown it lawful, necessary 580
 Pompilia leave her husband, seek the house
 O' the parents: and because 'twixt home and home
 Lies a long road with many a danger rife,
 Lions by the way and serpents in the path,
 To rob and ravish, — much behoves she keep 585
 Each shadow of suspicion from fair fame,
 For her own sake much, but for his sake more,
 The ingrate husband's. Evidence shall be,
 Plain witness to the world how white she walks
 I' the mire she wanders through ere Rome she reach. 590
 And who so proper witness as a priest?
 Gainsay ye? Let me hear who dares gainsay!
 I hope we still can punish heretics!
 "Give me the man," I say with him of Gath,¹
 "That we may fight together!" None, I think: 595
 The priest is granted me.

Then, if a priest,
 One juvenile and potent: else, mayhap,
 That dragon, our Saint George would slay. slays him.
 And should fair face accompany strong hand,
 The more complete equipment: nothing mars 600
 Work, else praiseworthy, like a bodily flaw
 I' the worker: as 't is said Saint Paul himself
 Deplored the check o' the puny presence,² still
 Cheating his fulmination of its flash,
 Albeit the bolt therein went true to oak. 605
 Therefore the agent, as prescribed, she takes, —
 Both juvenile and potent, handsome too, —
 In all obedience: "good," you grant again.
 Do you? I would you were the husband, lords!
 How prompt and facile might departure be! 610
 How boldly would Pompilia and the priest
 March out of door, spread flag at beat of drum,
 But that inapprehensive Guido grants
 Neither premiss nor yet conclusion here.
 And, purblind, dreads a bear in every bush! 615
 For his own quietude and comfort, then,
 Means must be found for flight in masquerade
 At hour when all things sleep. — "Save jealousy!"
 Right, Judges! Therefore shall the lady's wit
 Supply the boon thwart nature baulks him of, 620
 And do him service with the potent drug

¹ *With him of Gath*: Goliath (1 Samuel xvii. 8). In the Apocryphal Gospels, also, Paul is described as little. See "Acts of Paul and Thecla."

² *St. Paul . . . puny presence*: 2 Cor-

(Helen's nepenthe,¹ as my lords opine)
 Which respites blessedly each fretted nerve
 O' the much-enduring man: accordingly,
 There lies he, duly dosed and sound asleep, 625
 Relieved of woes or real or raved about.
 While soft she leaves his side, he shall not wake:
 Nor stop who steals away to join her friend.
 Nor do him mischief should he catch that friend
 Intent on more than friendly office. — nay, 630
 Nor get himself raw head and bones laid bare
 In payment of his apparition!

Thus

Would I defend the step, — were the thing true
 Which is a fable, — see my former speech, —
 That Guido slept (who never slept a wink) 635
 Through treachery, an opiate from his wife,
 Who not so much as knew what opiates mean.
 Now she may start: or hist. — a stoppage still!
 A journey is an enterprise of cost!
 As in campaigns, we fight but others pay, 640
*Suis expensis, nemo militat.*²
 'T is Guido's self we guard from accident,
 Ensuring safety to Pompilia, versed
 Nowise in misadventures by the way,
 Hard riding and rough quarters, the rude fare, 645
 The unready host. What magic mitigates
 Each plague of travel to the unpractised wife?
 Money, sweet Sirs! And were the fiction fact
 She helped herself thereto with liberal hand
 From out her husband's store, — what fitter us? 650
 Was ever husband's money destined to?
 With bag and baggage thus did Dido³ once
 Decamp, — for more authority, a queen!

So is she fairly on her route at last,
 Prepared for either fortune: nay and if 655
 The priest, now all a-glow with enterprise.
 Cool somewhat presently when fades the flush
 O' the first adventure, clouded o'er belike
 By doubts, misgivings how the day may die,
 Though born with such auroral brilliance, — if 660

¹ *Nepenthe*: a drug given to Helen by the Egyptian Polydamna, bringing quick forgetfulness of life's evils (Homer, "Odyssey," iv. 285.

² *Suis expensis, nemo militat*: "no one goeth a warfare at his own cost."

³ *Dido*: daughter of the King of Tyre, who, when her husband was murdered by her uncle for the sake of his riches, set sail, seeking a new kingdom and carrying away the coveted riches in order to throw them in the sea.

The brow seem over-pensive and the lip
 'Gin lag and lose the prattle lightsome late, —
 Vanquished by tedium of a prolonged jaunt
 In a close carriage o'er a jolting road,
 With only one young female substitute 665
 For seventeen other Canons of ripe age
 Were wont to keep him company in church, —
 Shall not Pompilia haste to dissipate
 The silent cloud that, gathering, bodes her bale? —
 Prop the irresoluteness may portend 670
 Suspension of the project, check the flight,
 Bring ruin on them both? Use every means,
 Since means to the end are lawful! What i' the way
 Of wile should have allowance like a kiss
 Sagely and sisterly administered, 675
Sororia saltem oscula?¹ We find
 Such was the remedy her wit applied
 To each incipient scruple of the priest,
 If we believe, — as, while my wit is mine
 I cannot, — what the driver testifies, 680
 Borsi, called Venerino, the mere tool
 Of Guido and his friend the Governor, —
 Avowal I proved wrung from out the wretch,
 After long rotting in imprisonment,
 As price of liberty and favor: long 685
 They tempted, he at last succumbed, and lo
 Counted them out full tale each kiss and more,
 "The journey being one long embrace," quoth he.
 Still, though we should believe the driver's lie,
 Nor even admit as probable excuse, 690
 Right reading of the riddle, — as I urged
 In my first argument, with fruit perhaps —
 That what the owl-like eyes (at back of head!)
 O' the driver, drowsed by driving night and day,
 Supposed a vulgar interchange of lips, 695
 This was but innocent jog of head 'gainst head,
 Cheek meeting jowl as apple may touch pear
 From branch and branch contiguous in the wind,
 When Autumn blusters and the orchard rocks: —
 That rapid run and the rough road were cause 700
 O' the casual ambiguity, no harm
 I' the world to eyes awake and penetrative.
 Say, — not to grasp a truth I can release
 And safely fight without, yet conquer still, —
 Say, she kissed him, say, he kissed her again! 705
 Such osculation was a potent means,

¹ *Sororia saltem oscula*: "sisterly kisses, anyhow."

A very efficacious help, no doubt:
 Such with a third part of her nectar did
 Venus imbue: why should Pompilia fling
 The poet's declaration in his teeth? — 710
 Pause to employ what, — since it had success,
 And kept the priest her servant to the end, —
 We must presume of energy enough,
 No whit superfluous, so permissible?

The goal is gained: day, night and yet a day 715
 Have run their round: a long and devious road
 Is traversed, — many manners, various men
 Passed in view, what cities did they see,
 What hamlets mark, what profitable food
 For after-meditation cull and store! 720
 Till Rome, that Rome whereof — this voice
 Would it might make our Molinists observe,
 That she is built upon a rock nor shall
 Their powers prevail against her! — Rome, I say,
 Is all but reached; one stage more and they stop 725
 Saved: pluck up heart, ye pair, and forward, then!

Ah, Nature — baffled she recurs, alas!
 Nature imperiously exacts her due,
 Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak:
 Pompilia needs must acquiesce and swoon. 730
 Give hopes alike and fears a breathing-while.
 The innocent sleep soundly: sound she sleeps,
 So let her slumber, then, unguarded save
 By her own chastity, a triple mail,
 And his good hand whose stalwart arms have borne 735
 The sweet and senseless burthen like a babe
 From coach to couch, — the serviceable strength!
 Nay, what and if he gazed rewardedly
 On the pale beauty prisoned in embrace,
 Stooped over, stole a balmy breath perhaps 740
 For more assurance sleep was not decease —
 “*Ut vidi*,” “how I saw!” succeeded by
 “*Ut perii*,” “how I sudden lost my brains!”
 — What harm ensued to her unconscious quite?
 For, curiosity — how natural! 745
 Importunateness — what a privilege
 In the ardent sex! And why curb ardor here?
 How can the priest but pity whom he saved?
 And pity is so near to love, and love
 So neighborly to all unreasonableness! 750
 As to love's object, whether love were sage
 Or foolish, could Pompilia know or care,

Hold, as it were, a deprecating hand,
 Statuesquely, in the Medicean mode,¹
 Before some shame which modesty would veil?
 Who blames the gesture prettily perverse? 800
 Thus, — lest ye miss a point illustrative, —
 Admit the husband's calumny — allow
 That the wife, having penned the epistle fraught
 With horrors, charge on charge of crime she heaped
 O' the head of Pietro and Violante — (still 805
 Presumed her parents) — having despatched the same
 To their arch-enemy Paolo, through free choice
 And no sort of compulsion in the world —
 Put case she next discards simplicity
 For craft, denies the voluntary act, 810
 Declares herself a passive instrument
 I' the husband's hands; that, duped by knavery,
 She traced the characters she could not write,
 And took on trust the unread sense which, read,
 And recognized were to be spurned at once: 815
 Allow this calumny, I reiterate!
 Who is so dull as wonder at the pose
 Of our Pompilia in the circumstance?
 Who sees not that the too-ingenuous soul,
 Repugnant even at a duty done 820
 Which brought beneath too scrutinizing glare
 The misdemeanors, — buried in the dark, —
 Of the authors of her being, as believed, —
 Stung to the quick at her impulsive deed,
 And willing to repair what harm it worked, 825
 She — wise in this beyond what Nero proved,
 Who when folk urged the candid juvenile
 To sign the warrant, doom the guilty dead,
 "Would I had never learned to write," quoth he!
 — Pompilia rose above the Roman, cried 830
 "To read or write I never learned at all!"
 O splendidly mendacious!

But time fleets:

Let us not linger: hurry to the end,
 Since flight does end and that disastrously.
 Beware ye blame desert for unsuccess, 835
 Disparage each expedient else to praise.
 Call failure folly! Man's best effort fails.
 After ten years' resistance Troy succumbed:
 Could valor save a town, Troy still had stood.
 Pompilia came off halting in no point 840

¹ *In the Medicean mode*: i.e. like the statue known as the *Venus de' Medici*.

Of courage, conduct, her long journey through :
 But nature sank exhausted at the close,
 And as I said, she swooned and slept all night.
 Morn breaks and brings the husband : we assist
 At the spectacle. Discovery succeeds. 845
 Ha, how is this? What moonstruck rage is here?
 Though we confess to partial frailty now,
 To error in a woman and a wife,
 Is 't by the rough way she shall be reclaimed?
 Who bursts upon her chambered privacy? 850
 What crowd profanes the chaste *cubiculum*?¹
 What outcries and lewd laughter, scurril gibe
 And ribald jest to scare the ministrant
 Good angels that commerce with souls in sleep?
 Why, had the worst crowned Guido to his wish. 855
 Confirmed his most irrational surmise,
 Yet there be bounds to man's emotion, checks
 To an immoderate astonishment.
 'T is decent horror, regulated wrath. 860
 Befit our dispensation : have we back
 The old Pagan license? Shall a Vulcan clap
 His net o' the sudden and expose the pair
 To the unquenchable universal mirth?
 A feat, antiquity saw scandal in
 So clearly, that the nauseous tale thereof — 865
 Demodocus² his nugatory song —
 Hath ever been concluded modern stuff
 Impossible to the mouth of the grave Muse,
 So, foisted into that Eighth Odyssey
 By some impertinent pickthank. O thou fool, 870
 Count Guido Franceschini, what didst gain
 By publishing thy secret to the world?
 Were all the precepts of the wise a waste —
 Bred in thee not one touch of reverence?
 Admit thy wife — admonish we the fool, — 875
 Were falseness' self, why chronicle thy shame?
 Much rather should thy teeth bite out thy tongue,
 Dumb lip consort with desecrated brow,
 Silence become historiographer,
 And thou — thine own Cornelius Tacitus!³ 880
 But virtue, barred, still leaps the barrier, lords!
 — Still, moon-like, penetrates the encroaching mist
 And bursts, all broad and bare, on night, ye know!

¹ *Cubiculum* : sleeping-room.

² *Demodocus* : the minstrel of the Phæacian king, whose song, given in the "Odyssey," viii. 330-450, relates the story of Vulcan referred to here.

³ *Cornelius Tacitus* : the Roman historian (54-110).

Surprised, then, in the garb of truth, perhaps,
 Pompilia, thus opposed, breaks obstacle, 885
 Springs to her feet, and stands Thalassian-pure,¹
 Confronts the foe, — nay, catches at his sword
 And tries to kill the intruder, he complains.
 Why, so she gave her lord his lesson back,
 Crowned him, this time, the virtuous woman's way, 890
 With an exact obedience ; he brought sword.
 She drew the same, since swords are meant to draw.
 Tell not me 't is sharp play with tools on edge!
 It was the husband chose the weapon here
 Why did not he inaugurate the game 895
 With some gentility of apophthegm
 Still pregnant on the philosophic page,
 Some captivating cadence still a-lisp
 O' the poet's lyre? Such spells subdue the surge,
 Make tame the tempest, much more mitigate 900
 The passions of the mind, and probably
 Had moved Pompilia to a smiling blush.
 No, he must needs prefer the argument
 O' the blow : and she obeyed, in duty bound.
 Returned him buffet ratiocinative — 905
 Ay, in the reasoner's own interest,
 For wife must follow whither husband leads,
 Vindicate honor as himself prescribes,
 Save him the very way himself bids save!
 No question but who jumps into a quag 910
 Should stretch forth hand and pray us "Pull me out
 By the hand!" such were the customary cry :
 But Guido pleased to bid "Leave hand alone!
 Join both feet, rather, jump upon my head :
 I extricate myself by the rebound!" 915
 And dutifully as enjoined she jumped —
 Drew his own sword and menaced his own life,
 Anything to content a wilful spouse.

 And so he was contented — one must do
 Justice to the expedient which succeeds, 920
 Strange as it seem : at flourish of the blade,
 The crowd drew back, stood breathless and abashed,
 Then murmured "This should be no wanton wife,
 No conscience-stricken sinner, caught i' the act,

¹ *Thalassian-pure* : probably refers to the congratulatory exclamation addressed to brides, "Thalassius," or "Talasius," for the origin of which Plutarch gives various accounts in his life of Romulus, one being that when some slaves were carrying off a damsel of superior beauty at the rape of the Sabines and some men of higher rank would have intervened, they cried that they were reserving her for Thalassius, who was so brave a young man that it was thought fit he should have the choicest prize.

And patiently awaiting our first stone : 925
 But a poor hard-pressed all-bewildered thing,
 Has rushed so far, misguidedly perhaps,
 Meaning no more harm than a frightened sheep.
 She sought for aid ; and if she made mistake
 I' the man could aid most, why — so mortals do : 930
 Even the blessed Magdalen mistook ¹
 Far less forgiveably : consult the place —
 Supposing him to be the gardener,
 ' Sir,' said she, and so following." Why more words ?
 Forthwith the wife is pronounced innocent : 935
 What would the husband more than gain his cause,
 And find that honor flash in the world's eye ;
 His apprehension was lest soil had smirched ?

So, happily the adventure comes to close
 Whereon my fat opponent grounds his charge 940
 Preposterous : at mid-day he groans " how dark !"
 Listen to me, thou Archangelic swine!
 Where is the ambiguity to blame,
 The flaw to find in our Pompilia? Safe
 She stands, see! Does thy comment follow quick 945
 " Safe, inasmuch as at the end proposed ;
 But thither she picked way by devious path —
 Stands dirtied, no dubiety at all!
 I recognize success, yet, all the same,
 Importunately will suggestion prompt — 950
 Better Pompilia gained the right to boast
 ' No devious path, no doubtful patch was mine,
 I saved my head nor sacrificed my foot.'
 Why, being in a peril, show mistrust
 Of the angels set to guard the innocent? 955
 Why rather hold by obvious vulgar help
 Of stratagem and subterfuge, excused
 Somewhat, but still no less a foil, a fault,
 Since low with high, and good with bad is linked?
 Methinks I view some ancient bas-relief. 960
 There stands Hesione² thrust out by Troy.
 Her father's hand has chained her to a crag,
 Her mother's from the virgin plucked the vest,
 At a safe distance both distressful watch,
 While near and nearer comes the snorting orc. 965
 I look that, white and perfect to the end,
 She wait till Jove despatch some demigod ;

¹ *Magdalen mistook* : St. John xx. 15. caused by her father's breach of faith, and

² *Hesione* : daughter of Laomedon, king saved by Hercules, son of Alcmena.
 of Troy, exposed on a rock to avert a plague

Not that, — impatient of celestial club
 Alcmena's son¹ should brandish at the beast, —
 She daub, disguise her dainty limbs with pitch, 970
 And so elude the purblind monster! Ay,
 The trick succeeds, but 't is an ugly trick,
 Where needs have been no trick!"

My answer? Faugh ;

Nimis incongrue! Too absurdly put!
Sententiam ego teneo contrariam, 975
 Trick, I maintain, had no alternative.
 The heavens were bound with brass, — Jove far at feast
 (No feast like that thou didst not ask me to,
 Arcangeli, — I heard of thy regale!)
 With the unblamed Æthiop,² — Hercules spun wool 980
 I' the lap of Omphale,³ while Virtue shrieked —
 The brute came paddling all the faster. You
 Of Troy, who stood at distance, where 's the aid
 You offered in the extremity? Most and least
 Gentle and simple, here the Governor, 985
 There the Archbishop, everywhere the friends,
 Shook heads and waited for a miracle,
 Or went their way, left Virtue to her fate.
 Just this one rough and ready man leapt forth!
 — Was found, sole anti-Fabius⁴ (dare I say) 990
 Who restored things, with no delay at all,
Qui haud cunctando rem restituit! He,
 He only, Caponsacchi 'mid a crowd,
 Caught Virtue up, carried Pompilia off
 Through gaping impotence of sympathy 995
 In ranged Arezzo: what you take for pitch,
 Is nothing worse, belike, than black and blue,
 Mere evanescent proof that hardy hands
 Did yeoman's service, cared not where the gripe
 Was more than duly energetic: bruised, 1000
 She smarts a little, but her bones are saved
 A fracture, and her skin will soon show sleek.
 How it disgusts when weakness, false-refined,
 Censures the honest rude effective strength, —
 When sickly dreamers of the impossible 1005

¹ *Alcmena's son*: Hercules.

² *With the unblamed Æthiop*: as described by Homer ("Iliad," i. 423), Zeus had gone to partake of the twelve-day feast of the Ethiopians.

³ *Omphale*: queen of Lydia, who so dominated over the great hero that he was

content to sit with her and spin wool while his great tasks were neglected.

⁴ *Anti-Fabius*: the antithesis of Q. Fabius Maximus, *qui cunctando restituit rem*, who, in the second Punic war, restored the fortunes of Rome by delay, *i.e.* by avoiding pitched battles.

Decry plain sturdiness which does the feat
 With eyes wide open!
 Did occasion serve,
 I could illustrate, if my lords allow ;
Quid vetat, what forbids I aptly ask
 With Horace, that I give my anger vent, 1010
 While I let breathe, no less, and recreate,
 The gravity of my Judges, by a tale?
 A case in point — what though an apologue
 Graced by tradition? — possibly a fact :
 Tradition must precede all scripture, words 1015
 Serve as our warrant ere our books can be :
 So, to tradition back we needs must go
 For any fact's authority : and this
 Hath lived so far (like jewel hid in muck)
 On page of that old lying vanity 1020
 Called "Sepher Toldoth Yeschu : " ¹ God be praised,
 I read no Hebrew, — take the thing on trust :
 But I believe the writer meant no good
 (Blind as he was to truth in some respects)
 To our pestiferous and schismatic . . . well, 1025
 My lords' conjecture be the touchstone, show
 The thing for what it is! The author lacks
 Discretion, and his zeal exceeds : but zeal, —
 How rare in our degenerate day! Enough!
 Here is the story : fear not, I shall chop 1030
 And change a little, else my Jew would press
 All too unmannerly before the Court.

It happened once, — begins this foolish Jew,
 Pretending to write Christian history, —
 That three, held greatest, best and worst of men, 1035
 Peter and John and Judas, spent a day
 In toil and travel through the country-side
 On some sufficient business — I suspect,
 Suppression of some Molinism i' the bud.
 Foot-sore and hungry, dropping with fatigue, 1040
 They reached by nightfall a poor lonely grange,
 Hostel or inn : so, knocked and entered there.
 "Your pleasure, great ones?" — "Shelter, rest and food!"
 For shelter, there was one bare room above ;
 For rest therein, three beds of bundled straw : 1045
 For food, one wretched starveling fowl, no more —
 Meat for one mouth, but mockery for three.
 "You have my utmost." How should supper serve?
 Peter broke silence : "To the spit with fowl!
 And while 't is cooking, sleep! — since beds there be, 1050
 And, so far, satisfaction of a want.

¹ *Sepher Toldoth Yeschu* : meaning the book of the generation of Jesus, an apocryphal writing concerning events of the New Testament. As Genesis v. 1 begins, "The book

Sleep we an hour, awake at supper-time,
 Then each of us narrate the dream he had,
 And he whose dream shall prove the happiest, point
 The clearliest out the dreamer as ordained 1055
 Beyond his fellows to receive the fowl,
 Him let our shares be cheerful tribute to,
 His the entire meal, may it do him good!"
 Who could dispute so plain a consequence?
 So said, so done: each hurried to his straw, 1060
 Slept his hour's sleep and dreamed his dream, and woke.
 "I," commenced John, "dreamed that I gained the prize
 We all aspire to: the proud place was mine,
 Throughout the earth and to the end of time
 I was the Loved Disciple: mine the meal!" 1065
 "But I," proceeded Peter, "dreamed, a word
 Gave me the headship of our company,
 Made me the Vicar and Vice-gerent, gave
 The keys of heaven and hell into my hand.
 And o'er the earth, dominion: mine the meal!" 1070
 "While I," submitted in soft under-tone
 The Iscariot — sense of his unworthiness
 Turning each eye up to the inmost white —
 With long-drawn sigh, yet letting both lips smack,
 "I have had just the pitifullest dream 1075
 That ever proved man meanest of his mates,
 And born foot-washer and foot-wiper, nay
 Foot-kisser to each comrade of you all!
 I dreamed I dreamed; and in that mimic dream
 (Impalpable to dream as dream to fact) 1080
 Methought I meanly chose to sleep no wink
 But wait until I heard my brethren snore;
 Then stole from couch, slipped noiseless o'er the planks,
 Slid downstairs, furtively approached the hearth,
 Found the fowl duly brown, both back and breast, 1085
 Hissing in harmony with the cricket's chirp,
 Grilled to a point; said no grace but fell to,
 Nor finished till the skeleton lay bare.
 In penitence for which ignoble dream,
 Lo, I renounce my portion cheerfully! 1090
 Fie on the flesh — be mine the ethereal gust,
 And yours the sublunary sustenance!
 See that whate'er be left ye give the poor!"
 Down the two scuttled, one on other's heel,
 Stung by a fell surmise; and found, alack, 1095
 A goodly savor, both the drumstick bones,
 And that which henceforth took the appropriate name
 O' the Merry-thought, in memory of the fact
 That to keep wide awake is man's best dream.

of the generation of Adam," so Matthew i 1 begins, "The book of the generation of Jesus."

So, — as was said once of Thucydides 1100
 And his sole joke,¹ “ The lion, lo, hath laughed! ” —
 Just so, the Governor and all that 's great
 I' the city, never meant that Innocence
 Should quite starve while Authority sat at meat ;
 They meant to fling a bone at banquet's end : 1105
 Wished well to our Pompilia — in their dreams,
 Nor bore the secular sword in vain — asleep.
 Just so the Archbishop and all good like him
 Went to bed meaning to pour oil and wine
 I' the wounds of her, next day, — but long ere day, 1110
 They had burned the one and drunk the other, while
 Just so, again, contrariwise, the priest
 Sustained poor Nature in extremity
 By stuffing barley-bread into her mouth,
 Saving Pompilia (grant the parallel) 1115
 By the plain homely and straightforward way
 Taught him by common sense. Let others shriek
 “ Oh what refined expedients did we dream
 Proved us the only fit to help the fair! ”
 He cried “ A carriage waits, jump in with me! ” 1120
 And now, this application pardoned, lords, —
 This recreative pause and breathing-while, —
 Back to beseeemingness and gravity!
 For Law steps in : Guido appeals to Law,
 Demands she arbitrate, — does well for once. 1125
 O Law, of thee how neatly was it said
 By that old Sophocles,² thou hast thy seat
 I' the very breast of Jove, no meanlier throned!
 Here is a piece of work now, hitherto
 Begun and carried on, concluded near, 1130
 Without an eye-glance cast thy sceptre's way ;
 And, lo the stumbling and discomfiture!
 Well may you call them “ lawless ” means, men take
 To extricate themselves through mother-wit
 When tangled haply in the toils of life! 1135
 Guido would try conclusions with his foe,
 Whoe'er the foe was and whate'er the offence ;
 He would recover certain dowry-dues ;
 Instead of asking Law to lend a hand,
 What pother of sword drawn and pistol cocked, 1140
 What peddling with forged letters and paid spies,
 Politic circumvention! — all to end

¹ *Thucydides* . . . *sole joke* : the Scholiast, commenting on a lighter passage near the end of Book I. of *Thucydides*' “ History of the Peloponnesian War,” observes that “ here the lion laughs.”

² *Sophocles* : “ *Edipus at Colonus*,” 1382. “ Justice, declared from of old, sits with Zeus in the might of the eternal laws.”

As it began — by loss of the fool's head,
 First in a figure, presently in a fact.
 It is a lesson to mankind at large. 1145
 How other were the end, would men be sage
 And bear confidingly each quarrel straight,
 O Law, to thy recipient mother-knees!
 How would the children light come and prompt go,
 This with a red-cheeked apple for reward, 1150
 The other, peradventure red-cheeked too
 I' the rear, by taste of birch for punishment.
 No foolish brawling murder any more!
 Peace for the household, practice for the Fisc,
 And plenty for the exchequer of my lords! 1155
 Too much to hope, in this world: in the next,
 Who knows? Since, why should sit the Twelve enthroned
 To judge the tribes, unless the tribes be judged?
 And 't is impossible but offences come:
 So, all 's one lawsuit, all one long leet-day!¹ 1160

Forgive me this digression — that I stand
 Entranced awhile at Law's first beam, outbreak
 O' the business, when the Count's good angel bade
 "Put up thy sword, born enemy to the ear,
 And let Law listen to thy difference!" 1165
 And Law does listen and compose the strife,
 Settle the suit, how wisely and how well!
 On our Pompilia, faultless to a fault,
 Law bends a brow maternally severe,
 Implies the worth of perfect chastity, 1170
 By fancying the flaw she cannot find.
 Superfluous sifting snow, nor helps nor harms:
 'T is safe to censure levity in youth,
 Tax womanhood with indiscretion, sure!
 Since toys, permissible to-day, become 1175
 Follies to-morrow: prattle shocks in church:
 And that curt skirt which lets a maiden skip,
 The matron changes for a trailing robe.
 Mothers may aim a blow with half-shut eyes
 Nodding above their spindles by the fire, 1180
 And chance to hit some hidden fault. else safe.
 Just so, Law hazarded a punishment —
 If applicable to the circumstance.
 Why, well! if not so apposite, well too.
 "Quit the gay range o' the world," I hear her cry, 1185
 "Enter, in lieu, the penitential pound:
 Exchange the gauds of pomp for ashes, dust! ^{شاه}

¹ *Leet-day*: day on which the court sits.

Leave each mollitious haunt of luxury!
 The golden-garnished silken-couched alcove,
 The many-columned terrace that so tempts 1190
 Feminine soul put foot forth, extend ear
 To fluttering joy of lover's serenade, —
 Leave these for cellular seclusion! mask
 And dance no more, but fast and pray! avaut —
 Be burned, thy wicked townsman's sonnet-book! 1195
 Welcome, mild hymnal by . . . some better scribe!
 For the warm arms were wont enfold thy flesh,
 Let wire-shirt plough and whipcord discipline! ”
 If such an exhortation proved, perchance,
 Inapplicable, words bestowed in waste, 1200
 What harm, since Law has store, can spend nor miss?

And so, our paragon submits herself,
 Goes at command into the holy house,
 And, also at command, comes out again :
 For, could the effect of such obedience prove 1205
 Too certain, too immediate? Being healed,
 Go blaze abroad the matter, blessed one!
 Art thou sound forthwith? Speedily vacate
 The step by pool-side, leave Bethesda free
 To patients plentifully posted round, 1210
 Since the whole need not the physician! Brief,
 She may betake her to her parents' place.
 Welcome her, father, with wide arms once more,
 Motion her, mother, to thy breast again!
 For why? Since Law relinquishes the charge, 1215
 Grants to your dwelling-place a prison's style,
 Rejoice you with Pompilia! golden days,
*Redeunt Saturnia regna.*¹ Six weeks slip,
 And she is domiciled in house and home
 As though she thence had never budged at all. 1220
 And thither let the husband, — joyous, ay,
 But contrite also — quick betake himself,
 Proud that his dove which lay among the pots
 Hath mued² those dingy feathers, — moulted now,
 Shows silver bosom clothed with yellow gold! 1225
 So shall he tempt her to the perch she fled,
 Bid to domestic bliss the truant back.

But let him not delay! Time fleets how fast,
 And opportunity, the irrevocable,
 Once flown will flout him! Is the furrow traced? 1230

¹ *Redeunt Saturnia regna* : Virgil's " Eclogues " again, iv. 5, already referred to, 285.

² *Mued* : moulted.

If field with corn ye fail preoccupy,
 Darnel for wheat and thistle-beards for grain,
Infelix lolium, carduus horridus,
 Will grow apace in combination prompt,
 Defraud the husbandman of his desire. 1235
 Already — hist — what murmurs 'monish now
 The laggard? — doubtful, nay, fantastic bruit
 Of such an apparition, such return
Interdum, to anticipate the spouse,
 Of Caponsacchi's very self! 'T is said, 1240
 When nights are lone and company is rare,
 His visitations brighten winter up.
 If so they did — which nowise I believe —
 (How can I? — proof abounding that the priest,
 Once fairly at his relegation-place, 1245
 Never once left it) still, admit he stole
 A midnight march, would fain see friend again,
 Find matter for instruction in the past,
 Renew the old adventure in such chat
 As cheers a fireside! He was lonely too, 1250
 He, too, must need his recreative hour.
 Shall it amaze the philosophic mind
 If he, long wont the empurpled cup to quaff,
 Have feminine society at will,
 Being debarred abruptly from all drink 1255
 Save at the spring which Adam used for wine,
 Dreads harm to just the health he hoped to guard,
 And, trying abstinence, gains malady?
 Ask Tozzi, now physician to the Pope!
 "Little by little break" — (I hear he bids 1260
 Master Arcangeli my antagonist,
 Who loves good cheer, and may indulge too much :
 So I explain the logic of the plea
 Wherewith he opened our proceedings late) —
 "Little by little break a habit, Don, 1265
 Become necessity to feeble flesh!"
 And thus, nocturnal taste of intercourse
 (Which never happened, — but, suppose it did)
 May have been used to dishabituate
 By sip and sip this drainer to the dregs 1270
 O' the draught of conversation, — heady stuff.
 Brewage which, broached, it took two days and nights
 To properly discuss i' the journey, Sirs!
 Such power has second nature, men call use,
 That undelightful objects get to charm 1275
 Instead of chafe : the daily colocynt¹

¹ *Colocynt* : a purgative drug made from the bitter seeds of the colocynt, an Asian fruit.

Tickles the palate by repeated dose,
 Old sores scratch kindly, the ass makes a push
 Although the mill-yoke-wound be smarting yet,
 For mill-door bolted on a holiday : 1280
 Nor must we marvel here if impulse urge
 To talk the old story over now and then,
 The hopes and fears, the stoppage and the haste, —
 Subjects of colloquy to surfeit once.
 "Here did you bid me twine a rosy wreath!" 1285
 "And there you paid my lips a compliment!"
 "Here you admired the tower could be so tall!"
 "And there you likened that of Lebanon
 To the nose of the beloved!" Trifles! still,
 "*Forsan et hæc olim*,"¹ — such trifles serve 1290
 To make the minutes pass in winter-time.

Husband, return then, I re-counsel thee!
 For, finally, of all glad circumstance
 Should make a prompt return imperative,
 What in the world awaits thee, dost suppose? 1295
 O' the sudden, as good gifts are wont befall,
 What is the hap of our unconscious Count?
 That which lights bonfire and sets cask a-tilt,
 Dissolves the stubborn'st heart in jollity.
 O admirable, there is born a babe, 1300
 A son, an heir, a Franceschini last
 And best o' the stock! Pompilia, thine the palm!
 Repaying incredulity with faith,
 Ungenerous thrift of each marital debt
 With bounty in profuse expenditure, 1305
 Pompilia scorns to have the old year end
 Without a present shall ring in the new —
 Bestows on her too-parsimonious lord
 An infant for the apple of his eye,
 Core of his heart, and crown completing life, 1310
 True *summum bonum* of the earthly lot!
 "We," saith ingeniously the sage, "are born
 Solely that others may be born of us."
 So, father, take thy child, for thine that child,
 Oh nothing doubt! In wedlock born, law holds 1315
 Baseness impossible: since "*filius est*
Quem nuptiæ demonstrant," twits the text
 Whoever dares to doubt.

Yet doubt he dares!

O faith, where art thou flown from out the world?

¹ *Forsan et hæc olim meminisse iuvabit*: day we shall take pleasure in recalling even Virgil, "*Æneid*," i. 203 — "Perchance one these experiences."

Already on what an age of doubt we fall! 1320
 Instead of each disputing for the prize,
 The babe is bandied here from that to this.
 Whose the babe? "*Cujum pecus?*"¹ Guido's lamb?
 "*An Melibæi?*" Nay, but of the priest!
 "*Non sed Ægonis!*" Some one must be sire: 1325
 And who shall say, in such a puzzling strait,
 If there were not vouchsafed some miracle
 To the wife who had been harassed and abused
 More than enough by Guido's family
 For non-production of the promised fruit 1330
 Of marriage? What if Nature, I demand,
 Touched to the quick by taunts upon her sloth,
 Had roused herself, put forth recondite power,
 Bestowed this birth to vindicate her sway,
 Like the strange favor, Maro memorized 1335
 As granted Aristæus when his hive
 Lay empty of the swarm? not one more bee —
 Not one more babe to Franceschini's house!
 And lo, a new birth filled the air with joy,
 Sprung from the bowels of the generous steer, 1340
 A novel son and heir rejoiced the Count!
 Spontaneous generation, need I prove
 Were facile feat to Nature at a pinch?
 Let whoso doubts, steep horsehair certain weeks
 In water, there will be produced a snake; 1345
 Spontaneous product of the horse, which horse
 Happens to be the representative —
 Now that I think on 't — of Arezzo's self,
 The very city our conception blessed:
 Is not a prancing horse the City-arms? 1350
 What sane eye fails to see coincidence?
Cur ego, boast thou, my Pompilia, then,
Desperem fieri sine conjuge
Mater — how well the Ovidian distich suits! —
Et parere intacto dummodo 1355
Casta viro? Such miracle was wrought!
 Note, further, as to mark the prodigy,
 The babe in question neither took the name
 Of Guido, from the sire presumptive, nor
 Giuseppe, from the sire potential, but 1360
 Gaetano — last saint of our hierarchy,
 And newest namer for a thing so new!
 What other motive could have prompted choice?

¹ *Cujum pecus*, etc.: a quotation from should be *verum*; "'Whose is this flock, Virgil, "Eclogues," iii. 1, except that *sed* — Melibæus?' 'Nay, Ægon's.'"

Therefore be peace again : exult, ye hills!
 Ye vales rejoicingly break forth in song! 1365
Incipe parve puer,¹ begin, small boy,
Risu cognoscere patrem, with a laugh
 To recognize thy parent! Nor do thou
 Boggle, oh parent, to return the grace!
Nec anceps hære, pater, puero 1370
Cognoscendo — one may well eke out the prayer!
 In vain! The perverse Guido doubts his eyes,
 Distrusts assurance, lets the devil drive.
 Because his house is swept and garnished now,
 He, having summoned seven like himself, 1375
 Must hurry thither, knock and enter in.
 And make the last worse than the first, indeed!
 Is he content? We are. No further blame
 O' the man and murder! They were stigmatized
 Befittingly: the Court heard long ago 1380
 My mind o' the matter, which, outpouring full,
 Has long since swept like surge, i' the simile
 Of Homer, overborne both dyke and dam,
 And whelmed alike client and advocate :
 His fate is sealed, his life as good as gone, 1385
 On him I am not tempted to waste word.
 Yet though my purpose holds, — which was and is
 And solely shall be to the very end,
 To draw the true *effigies* of a saint,
 Do justice to perfection in the sex. — 1390
 Yet let not some gross pamperer of the flesh
 And niggard in the spirit's nourishment,
 Whose feeding hath offuscated his wit
 Rather than law, — he never had, to lose —
 Let not such advocate object to me 1395
 I leave my proper function of attack!
 "What's this to Bacchus?" — (in the classic phrase,
 Well used, for once) he hiccups probably.
 O Advocate o' the Poor, thou born to make
 Their blessing void — *beati pauperes*!² 1400
 By painting saintship I depicture sin :
 Beside my pearl, I prove how black thy jet,
 And, through Pompilia's virtue, Guido's crime.

 Back to her, then, — with but one beauty more,
 End we our argument, — one crowning grace 1405
 Pre-eminent 'mid agony and death.

¹ *Incipe parve puer*, etc. : Virgil, "Eclogues," iv. 60, referred to. 285, 1218. the Mount, which the failure of Archangelis, advocate of the poor, will render vain in Guido's case.

² *Beati pauperes* : "Blessed are the poor," an allusion to the Beatitudes of the Sermon on

For to the last Pompilia played her part,
 Used the right means to the permissible end,
 And wily as an eel that stirs the mud
 Thick overhead, so baffling spearman's thrust, 1410
 She, while he stabbed her, simulated death,
 Delayed, for his sake, the catastrophe,
 Obtain herself a respite, four days' grace,
 Whereby she told her story to the world,
 Enabled me to make the present speech, 1415
 And, by a full confession, saved her soul.

Yet hold, even here would malice leer its last,
 Gurgle its choked remonstrance : snake, hiss free!
 Oh, that 's the objection? And to whom? — not her
 But me, forsooth — as, in the very act 1420
 Of both confession and (what followed close)
 Subsequent talk, chatter and gossipry,
 Babble to sympathizing he and she
 Whoever chose besiege her dying bed, —
 As this were found at variance with my tale, 1425
 Falsified all I have adduced for truth,
 Admitted not one peccadillo here,
 Pretended to perfection, first and last,
 O' the whole procedure — perfect in the end,
 Perfect i' the means, perfect in everything, 1430
 Leaving a lawyer nothing to excuse,
 Reason away and show his skill about !
 — A flight, impossible to Adamic flesh,
 Just to be fancied, scarcely to be wished,
 And, anyhow, unpleadable in court! 1435
 “ How reconcile,” gasps Malice, “ that with this?”

Your “ this,” friend, is extraneous to the law,
 Comes of men's outside meddling, the unskilled
 Interposition of such fools as press
 Out of their province. Must I speak my mind? 1440
 Far better had Pompilia died o' the spot
 Than found a tongue to wag and shame the law,
 Shame most of all herself, — could friendship fail
 And advocacy lie less on the alert :
 But no, they shall protect her to the end!
 Do I credit the alleged narration ? No!
 Lied our Pompilia then, to laud herself?
 Still, no ! Clear up what seems discrepancy?
 The means abound : art 's long, though time is short ;
 So, keeping me in compass, all I urge 1450
 Is — since, confession at the point of death,
Nam in articulo mortis, with the Church

Passes for statement honest and sincere,
Nemo presumitur reus esse. — then,
 If sure that all affirmed would be believed, 1455
 'T was charity, in her so circumstanced,
 To spend the last breath in one effort more
 For universal good of friend and foe :
 And, — by pretending utter innocence,
 Nay, freedom from each foible we forgive, 1460
 Re-integrate — not solely her own fame,
 But do the like kind office for the priest
 Whom telling the crude truth about might vex,
 Haply expose to peril, abbreviate
 Indeed the long career of usefulness 1465
 Presumably before him : while her lord,
 Whose fleeting life is forfeit to the law, —
 What mercy to the culprit if, by just
 The gift of such a full certificate
 Of his immitigable guiltiness, 1470
 She stifled in him the absurd conceit
 Of murder as it were a mere revenge
 — Stopped confirmation of that jealousy
 Which, did she but acknowledge the first flaw,
 The faintest foible, had emboldened him 1475
 To battle with the charge, baulk penitence,
 Bar preparation for impending fate!
 Whereas, persuade him that he slew a saint
 Who sinned not even where she may have sinned,
 You urge him all the brisklier to repent 1480
 Of most and least and aught and everything !
 Still, if this view of mine content you not,
 Lords, nor excuse the genial falsehood here,
 We come to our *Triarii*,¹ last resource :
 We fall back on the inexpugnable, 1485
 Submitting, — she confessed before she talked!
 The sacrament obliterates the sin :
 What is not, — was not, therefore, in a sense.
 Let Molinists distinguish, “Souls washed white
 But red once, still show pinkish to the eye!” 1490
 We say, abolishment is nothingness,
 And nothingness has neither head nor tail,
 End nor beginning ! Better estimate
 Exorbitantly, than disparage aught
 Of the efficacy of the act, I hope ! 1495

Solvuntur tabulae?² May we laugh and go?

¹ *Triarii* : the third rank in the old formation of the Roman legion, containing the oldest soldiers, and only called upon at the crisis of a battle.

² *Solvuntur tabulae* : from Horace, “Satires,” ii. 86 — *solventur risu tabulae*, “the court will break up in laughter.”

Well, — not before (in filial gratitude
 To Law, who, mighty mother, waves adieu)
 We take on us to vindicate Law's self!
 For, — yea, Sirs, — curb the start, curtail the stare! — 1500
 Remains that we apologize for haste
 I' the Law, our lady who here bristles up
 "Blame my procedure? Could the Court mistake?
 (Which were indeed a misery to think).
 Did not my sentence in the former stage 1505
 O' the business bear a title plain enough?
Decretum" — I translate it word for word —
 "'Decreed: the priest, for his complicity
 I' the flight and deviation of the dame,
 As well as for unlawful intercourse, 1510
 Is banished three years: ' crime and penalty,
 Declared alike. If he be taxed with guilt,
 How can you call Pompilia innocent?
 If both be innocent, have I been just?"

Gently, O mother, judge men — whose mistake 1515
 Is in the mere misapprehensiveness!
 The *Titulus*¹ a-top of your decree
 Was but to ticket there the kind of charge
 You in good time would arbitrate upon.
 Title is one thing, — arbitration's self, 1520
Probatio, quite another possibly.
Subsistit, there holds good the old response,
Responsio tradita, we must not stick,
Quod non sit attendendus Titulus,
 To the Title, *sed Probatio*, but the Proof, 1525
Resultans ex processu, the result
 O' the Trial, and the style of punishment,
Et pœna per sententiam imposita.
 All is tentative, till the sentence come:
 An indication of what men expect, 1530
 But nowise an assurance they shall find.
 Lords, what if we permissibly relax
 The tense bow, as the law-god Phœbus bids,
 Relieve our gravity at labor's close?
 I traverse Rome, feel thirsty, need a draught, 1535
 Look for a wine-shop, find it by the bough
 Projecting as to say "Here wine is sold!"
 So much I know, — "sold:" but what sort of wine?
 Strong, weak, sweet, sour, home-made or foreign drink?
 That much must I discover by myself. 1540
 "Wine is sold," quoth the bough, "but good or bad,

¹ *Titulus*: title.

Find, and inform us when you smack your lips!"
 Exactly so, Law hangs her title forth,
 To show she entertains you with such ease
 About such crime. Come in! she povers, you quaff. 1545
 You find the Priest good liquor in the main,
 But heady and provocative of brawls:
 Remand the residue to flask once more,
 Lay it low where it may deposit lees,
 I' the cellar: thence produce it presently, 1550
 Three years the brighter and the better!

Thus,

Law's son, have I bestowed my filial help,
 And thus I end, *tenax proposito*;
 Point to point as I purposed have I drawn
 Pompilia, and implied as terribly 1555
 Guido: so, gazing, let the world crown Law —
 Able once more, despite my impotence,
 And helped by the acumen of the Court,
 To eliminate, display, make triumph truth!
 What other prize than truth were worth the pains? 1560

There 's my oration — much exceeds in length
 That famed panegyric of Isocrates,¹
 They say it took him fifteen years to pen.
 But all those ancients could say nothing!
 He put in just what rushed into his head: 1565
 While I shall have to prune and pare and print.
 This comes of being born in modern times
 With priests for auditory. Still, it pays.

¹ *Isocrates*: the Attic rhetorician and orator whose "famed panegyric" was delivered 380 B.C. to stir up the Greeks to unite against Persia. Born 436, died 338 by his own hand after the battle of Chæronea, in despair of his country's fate.

X.

THE POPE.

[The final judgment being left to the Pope, his decision is against Guido. In this book he goes over the arguments that have led him to this decision, with the assurance that, should he have judged wrongly, God will accept his action because it has been instigated by a conscientious desire to find the truth. Except in Pompilia, whom he finds entirely worthy of praise, and Caponsacchi, whose sin in breaking priestly vows he justifies, he discovers avarice on all sides as the chief motive of action. Guido is denounced above all, because he had had the best opportunities for development, and because he has not availed himself of the several chances of repentance offered him. Overwhelmed with the predominance of evil, the Pope falls into religious philosophizing, finding in the purity and love of Pompilia a symbol of the assurance that through love the world will be saved, and in doubt, the spur to greater faith. His hope is that the summary sentence he pronounces on Guido may cause repentance, but he feels he dare not die without doing his utmost to avenge the wrong done by this man.]

LIKE to Ahasuerus,¹ that shrewd prince,
 I will begin, — as is, these seven years now,
 My daily wont, — and read a History
 (Written by one whose deft right hand was dust
 To the last digit, ages ere my birth) 5
 Of all my predecessors, Popes of Rome :
 For though mine ancient early dropped the pen,
 Yet others picked it up and wrote it dry,
 Since of the making books there is no end.
 And so I have the Papacy complete 10
 From Peter first to Alexander last :²
 Can question each and take instruction so.
 Have I to dare? — I ask, how dared this Pope?
 To suffer? — Suchanone, how suffered he?
 Being about to judge, as now, I seek 15
 How judged once, well or ill, some other Pope ;
 Study some signal judgment that subsists
 To blaze on, or else blot, the page which seals
 The sum up of what gain or loss to God
 Came of His one more Vicar in the world. 20
 So, do I find example, rule of life ;
 So, square and set in order the next page,
 Shall be stretched smooth o'er my own funeral cyst.

¹ *Ahasuerus* : see Esther vi. 1.

Peter to Pope Alexander VIII., who died in

² *Peter first to Alexander last* : St. 1691 and was succeeded by Innocent XII.

Eight hundred years exact before the year
 I was made Pope, men made Formosus¹ Pope, 25
 Say Sigebert² and other chroniclers.
 Ere I confirm or quash the Trial here
 Of Guido Franceschini and his friends,
 Read, — How there was a ghastly Trial once³
 Of a dead man by a live man, and both, Popes : 30
 Thus — in the antique penman's very phrase.

“ Then Stephen,⁴ Pope and seventh of the name,
 Cried out, in synod as he sat in state,
 While choler quivered on his brow and beard,
 ‘ Come into court, Formosus, thou lost wretch, 35
 That claimedst to be late Pope as even I ! ’

“ And at the word the great door of the church
 Flew wide, and in they brought Formosus' self,
 The body of him, dead, even as embalmed
 And buried duly in the Vatican 40
 Eight months before, exhumed thus for the nonce.
 They set it, that dead body of a Pope,
 Clothed in pontific vesture now again,
 Upright on Peter's chair as if alive.

“ And Stephen, springing up, cried furiously 45
 ‘ Bishop of Porto, wherefore didst presume
 To leave that see and take this Roman see,
 Exchange the lesser for the greater see,
 — A thing against the canons of the Church ? ’

“ Then one — (a Deacon who, observing forms, 50
 Was placed by Stephen to repel the charge,
 Be advocate and mouthpiece of the corpse) —
 Spoke as he dared, set stammeringly forth
 With white lips and dry tongue, — as but a youth,
 For frightful was the corpse-face to behold, — 55
 How nowise lacked there precedent for this.

“ But when, for his last precedent of all,
 Emboldened by the Spirit, out he blurts
 ‘ And, Holy Father, didst not thou thyself
 Vacate the lesser for the greater see, 60
 Half a year since change Arago for Rome ? ’

¹ *Formosus* : Pope (891-895).

² *Sigebert* : Sigebert II. king of Austrasia, afterwards a monk. He is set down as a saint in the Romish Calendar.

³ *How there was a ghastly Trial once :*

this and the accounts following of the successive decisions of the popes is given substantially as Browning gives it in Platina's "Lives of the Popes," Dr. Benham's edition.

⁴ *Stephen* : Pope (896-897).



POPE INNOCENT XII.

A scandal verily: and out spake a Jew 'Wot ye your Christ had vexed our Herod thus?'	100
“ Now when, Formosus being dead a year, His judge Pope Stephen tasted death in turn, Made captive by the mob and strangled straight, Romanus ¹ his successor for a month, Did make protest Formosus was with God, Holy, just, true in thought and word and deed. Next Theodore, ² who reigned but twenty days, Therein convoked a synod, whose decree Did reinstate, repope the late unpoped, And do away with Stephen as accursed. So that when presently certain fisher-folk (As if the queasy river could not hold Its swallowed Jonas, but discharged the meal) Produced the timely product of their nets, The mutilated man, Formosus, — saved From putrefaction by the embalmer's spice, Or, as some said, by sanctity of flesh, — 'Why, lay the body again,' bade Theodore, 'Among his predecessors, in the church And burial-place of Peter!' which was done. 'And,' added Luitprand, ³ 'many of repute, Pious and still alive, avouch to me That, as they bore the body up the aisle, The saints in imaged row bowed each his head For welcome to a brother-saint come back.' As for Romanus and this Theodore. These two Popes, through the brief reign granted each, Could but initiate what John ⁴ came to close And give the final stamp to: he it was Ninth of the name, (I follow the best guides) Who, — in full synod at Ravenna held With Bishops seventy-four, and present too Eude ⁵ King of France with his Archbishopry, — Did condemn Stephen, anathematize The disinterment, and make all blots blank, 'For,' argueth here Auxilius ⁶ in a place <i>De Ordinationibus</i> , ⁷ 'precedents	105 110 115 120 125 130 135

¹ *Romanus*: became Pope in September, 897, and held the see for three months and twenty-two days.

² *Theodore*: Pope in 898, held the office twenty days.

³ *Luitprand*: a chronicler of the tenth century, and Bishop of Cremona. Died about 970.

⁴ *John*: (IX.) became Pope in 898. He

removed to Ravenna on account of disturbances in Rome.

⁵ *Eude*: elected King of France in 888.

⁶ *Auxilius*: a French theologian who lived about 900 and wrote some treatises against Pope Sergius III.

⁷ *De Ordinationibus*: concerning ordinations.

Had been, no lack, before Formosus long,
Of Bishops so transferred from see to see,
Marinus,¹ for example: ' read the tract. 140

" But, after John, came Sergius,² reaffirmed
The right of Stephen, cursed Formosus, nay
Cast out, some say, his corpse a second time.
And here, — because the matter went to ground,
Fretted by new griefs, other cares of the age, — 145
Here is the last pronouncing of the Church,
Her sentence that subsists unto this day.
Yet constantly opinion hath prevailed
I' the Church, Formosus was a holy man."

Which of the judgments was infallible? 150
Which of my predecessors spoke for God?
And what availed Formosus that this cursed,
That blessed, and then this other cursed again?
" Fear ye not those whose power can kill the body
And not the soul," saith Christ. " but rather those 155
Can cast both soul and body into hell! "

John judged thus in Eight Hundred Ninety Eight,
Exact eight hundred years ago to-day.
When, sitting in his stead, Vice-gerent here,
I must give judgment on my own behoof. 160
So worked the predecessor: now, my turn!

In God's name! Once more on this earth of God's,
While twilight lasts and time wherein to work,
I take His staff with my uncertain hand,
And stay my six and fourscore years, my due 165
Labor and sorrow, on His judgment-seat,
And forthwith think, speak, act, in place of Him —
The Pope for Christ. Once more appeal is made
From man's assize to mine: I sit and see
Another poor weak trembling human wretch 170
Pushed by his fellows, who pretend the right,
Up to the gulf which, where I gaze, begins
From this world to the next. — gives way and way,
Just on the edge over the awful dark:
With nothing to arrest him but my feet. 175
He catches at me with convulsive face,
Cries " Leave to live the natural minute more! "
While hollowly the avengers echo " Leave?

¹ *Marinus*: there was an ecclesiastic of this name in the fourth century ² *Sergius*: (III.) Pope, from 904-911.

None! So has he exceeded man's due share
 In man's fit license, wrung by Adam's fall, 180
 To sin and yet not surely die, — that we,
 All of us sinful, all with need of grace,
 All chary of our life, — the minute more
 Or minute less of grace which saves a soul, —
 Bound to make common cause with who craves time, 185
 — We yet protest against the exorbitance
 Of sin in this one sinner, and demand
 That his poor sole remaining piece of time
 Be plucked from out his clutch: put him to death!
 Punish him now! As for the weal or woe 190
 Hereafter, God grant mercy! Man be just,
 Nor let the felon boast he went scot-free!"
 And I am bound, the solitary judge,
 To weigh the worth, decide upon the plea,
 And either hold a hand out, or withdraw 195
 A foot and let the wretch drift to the fall.
 Ay, and while thus I dally, dare perchance
 Put fancies for a comfort 'twixt this calm
 And yonder passion that I have to bear, —
 As if reprieve were possible for both 200
 Prisoner and Pope, — how easy were reprieve!
 A touch o' the hand-bell here, a hasty word
 To those who wait, and wonder they wait long,
 I' the passage there, and I should gain the life! —
 Yea, though I flatter me with fancy thus, 205
 I know it is but nature's craven-trick.
 The case is over, judgment at an end,
 And all things done now and irrevocable:
 A mere dead man is Franceschini here,
 Even as Formosus centuries ago. 210
 I have worn through this sombre wintry day,
 With winter in my soul beyond the world's,
 Over these dismalest of documents
 Which drew night down on me ere eve befell, —
 Pleadings and counter-pleadings, figure of fact 215
 Beside fact's self, these summaries to-wit. —
 How certain three were slain by certain five:
 I read here why it was, and how it went,
 And how the chief o' the five preferred excuse,
 And how law rather chose defence should lie, — 220
 — What argument he urged by wary word
 When free to play off wile, start subterfuge,
 And what the unguarded groan told, torture's feat
 When law grew brutal, outbroke, overbore
 And glutted hunger on the truth, at last, — 225
 No matter for the flesh and blood between.

All 's a clear rede and no more riddle now.
 Truth, nowhere, lies yet everywhere in these —
 Not absolutely in a portion, yet
 Evolvable from the whole: evolved at last 230
 Painfully, held tenaciously by me.
 Therefore there is not any doubt to clear
 When I shall write the brief word presently
 And chink the hand-bell, which I pause to do.
 Irresolute? Not I, more than the mound 235
 With the pine-trees on it yonder! Some surmise,
 Perchance, that since man's wit is fallible,
 Mine may fail here? Suppose it so. — what then?
 Say, — Guido, I count guilty, there 's no babe
 So guiltless, for I misconceive the man! 240
 What 's in the chance should move me from my mind?
 If, as I walk in a rough country-side,
 Peasants of mine cry "Thou art he can help,
 Lord of the land and counted wise to boot:
 Look at our brother, strangling in his foam, 245
 He fell so where we find him, — prove thy worth!"
 I may presume, pronounce, "A frenzy-fit,
 A falling-sickness or a fever-stroke!
 Breathe a vein, copiously let blood at once!"
 So perishes the patient, and anon 250
 I hear my peasants — "All was error, lord!
 Our story, thy prescription: for there crawled
 In due time from our hapless brother's breast
 The serpent which had stung him: bleeding slew
 Whom a prompt cordial had restored to health." 255
 What other should I say than "God so willed:
 Mankind is ignorant, a man am I:
 Call ignorance my sorrow, not my sin!"
 So and not otherwise, in after-time.
 If some acuter wit, fresh probing, sound 260
 This multifarious mass of words and deeds
 Deeper, and reach through guilt to innocence,
 I shall face Guido's ghost nor blench a jot.
 "God who set me to judge thee, meted out
 So much of judging faculty, no more: 265
 Ask Him if I was slack in use thereof!"
 I hold a heavier fault imputable
 Inasmuch as I changed a chaplain once,
 For no cause, — no, if I must bare my heart, —
 Save that he snuffled somewhat saying mass. 270
 For I am ware it is the seed of act,
 God holds appraising in His hollow palm,
 Not act grown great thence on the world below,
 Leafage and branchage, vulgar eyes admire.

Therefore I stand on my integrity, 275
 Nor fear at all: and if I hesitate,
 It is because I need to breathe awhile,
 Rest, as the human right allows, review
 Intent the little seeds of act, my tree, —
 The thought, which, clothed in deed, I give the world 280
 At chink of bell and push of arrased door.

O pale departure, dim disgrace of day!
 Winter 's in wane, his vengeful worst art thou,
 To dash the boldness of advancing March!
 Thy chill persistent rain has purged our streets 285
 Of gossipry; pert tongue and idle ear
 By this, consort 'neath archway, portico.
 But wheresoe'er Rome gathers in the gray,
 Two names now snap and flash from-mouth to mouth —
 (Sparks, flint and steel strike) Guido and the Pope. 290
 By this same hour to-morrow eve — aha,
 How do they call him? — the sagacious Swede¹
 Who finds by figures how the chances prove,
 Why one comes rather than another thing,
 As, say, such dots turn up by throw of dice, 295
 Or, if we dip in Virgil² here and there
 And prick for such a verse, when such shall point.
 Take this Swede, tell him, hiding name and rank,
 Two men are in our city this dull eve;
 One doomed to death, — but hundreds in such plight 300
 Slip aside, clean escape by leave of law
 Which leans to mercy in this latter time;
 Moreover in the plenitude of life
 Is he, with strength of limb and brain adroit,
 Presumably of service here: beside, 305
 The man is noble, backed by nobler friends:
 Nay, they so wish him well, the city's self
 Makes common cause with who — house-magistrate,
 Patron of hearth and home, domestic lord —
 But ruled his own, let aliens cavil. Die? 310
 He'll bribe a jailer or break prison first!
 Nay, a sedition may be helpful, give
 Hint to the mob to batter wall, burn gate,
 And bid the favorite malefactor march.
 Calculate now these chances of escape!
 "It is not probable, but well may be." 315

¹ *The sagacious Swede*: Swedenborg, born at Stockholm in 1688, died 1772. His theory of mathematical probabilities is referred to here. As he would have been only

ten years old at this time, the Pope could not have alluded to him in these terms.

² *If we dip in Virgil*: see note, V. 401.

Again, there is another man, weighed now
 By twice eight years beyond the seven-times-ten,
 Appointed overweight to break our branch.
 And this man's loaded branch lifts, more than snow, 320
 All the world's cark and care, though a bird's nest
 Were a superfluous burthen: notably
 Hath he been pressed, as if his age were youth,
 From to-day's dawn till now that day departs,
 Trying one question with true sweat of soul 325
 "Shall the said doomed man fittier die or live?"
 When a straw swallowed in his posset, stool
 Stumbled on where his path lies, any puff
 That 's incident to such a smoking flax,
 Hurries the natural end and quenches him! 330
 Now calculate, thou sage, the chances here,
 Say, which shall die the sooner, this or that?
 "That, possibly, this in all likelihood."
 I thought so: yet thou tripp'st, my foreign friend!
 No, it will be quite otherwise, — to-day 335
 Is Guido's last: my term is yet to run.

But say the Swede were right, and I forthwith
 Acknowledge a prompt summons and lie dead:
 Why, then I stand already in God's face
 And hear "Since by its fruit a tree is judged, 340
 Show me thy fruit, the latest act of thine!
 For in the last is summed the first and all, —
 What thy life last put heart and soul into,
 There shall I taste thy product." I must plead
 This condemnation of a man to-day. 345

Not so! Expect nor question nor reply
 At what we figure as God's judgment-bar!
 None of this vile way by the barren words
 Which, more than any deed, characterize 350
 Man as made subject to a curse: no speech —
 That still bursts o'er some lie which lurks inside,
 As the split skin across the coppery snake,
 And most denotes man! since, in all beside,
 In hate or lust or guile or unbelief,
 Out of some core of truth the excrescence comes, 355
 And, in the last resort, the man may urge
 "So was I made, a weak thing that gave way
 To truth, to impulse only strong since true,
 And hated, lusted, used guile, forewent faith."
 But when man walks the garden of this world 360
 For his own solace, and, unchecked by law,
 Speaks or keeps silence as himself sees fit,

Without the least incumbency to lie,
 — Why, can he tell you what a rose is like,
 Or how the birds fly, and not slip to false 365
 Though truth serve better? Man must tell his mate
 Of you, me and himself, knowing he lies,
 Knowing his fellow knows the same, — will think
 “He lies, it is the method of a man!”
 And yet will speak for answer “It is truth” 370
 To him who shall rejoin “Again a lie!”
 Therefore these filthy rags of speech, this coil
 Of statement, comment, query and response,
 Tatters all too contaminate for use,
 Have no renewing: He, the Truth, is, too, 375
 The Word. We men, in our degree, may know
 There, simply, instantaneously, as here
 After long time and amid many lies,
 Whatever we dare think we know indeed
 — That I am I, as He is He, — what else? 380
 But be man’s method for man’s life at least!
 Wherefore, Antonio Pignatelli, thou
 My ancient self, who wast no Pope so long
 But studiedst God and man, the many years
 I’ the school, i’ the cloister, in the diocese 385
 Domestic, legate-rule in foreign lands, —
 Thou other force in those old busy days
 Than this gray ultimate decrepitude, —
 Yet sensible of fires that more and more
 Visit a soul, in passage to the sky, 390
 Left nakeder than when flesh-robe was new —
 Thou, not Pope but the mere old man o’ the world,
 Supposed inquisitive and dispassionate,
 Wilt thou, the one whose speech I somewhat trust,
 Question the after-me, this self now Pope, 395
 Hear his procedure, criticise his work?
 Wise in its generation is the world.

This is why Guido is found reprobate.
 I see him furnished forth for his career,
 On starting for the life-chance in our world, 400
 With nearly all we count sufficient help :
 Body and mind in balance, a sound frame,
 A solid intellect : the wit to seek.
 Wisdom to choose, and courage wherewithal
 To deal in whatsoever circumstance 405
 Should minister to man, make life succeed.
 Oh, and much drawback! what were earth without?
 Is this our ultimate stage, or starting-place
 To try man’s foot, if it will creep or climb,

'Mid obstacles in seeming, points that prove 410
 Advantage for who vaults from low to high
 And makes the stumbling-block a stepping-stone?
 So, Guido, born with appetite, lacks food :
 Is poor, who yet could deftly play-off wealth :
 Straited, whose limbs are restless till at large. 415
 He, as he eyes each outlet of the cirque
 And narrow penfold for probation, pines
 After the good things just outside its grate,
 With less monition, fainter conscience-twitch,
 Rarer instinctive qualm at the first feel 420
 Of greed unseemly, prompting grasp undue,
 Than nature furnishes her main mankind,—
 Making it harder to do wrong than right
 The first time, careful lest the common ear
 Break measure, miss the outstep of life's march. 425
 Wherein I see a trial fair and fit
 For one else too unfairly fenced about,
 Set above sin, beyond his fellows here :
 Guarded from the arch-tempter all must fight,
 By a great birth, traditionary name, 430
 Diligent culture, choice companionship,
 Above all, conversancy with the faith
 Which puts forth for its base of doctrine just
 "Man is born nowise to content himself,
 But please God." He accepted such a rule, 435
 Recognized man's obedience ; and the Church,
 Which simply is such rule's embodiment,
 He clave to, he held on by, — nay, indeed.
 Near pushed inside of, deep as layman durst,
 Professed so much of priesthood as might sue 440
 For priest's exemption where the layman sinned,—
 Got his arm frocked which, bare, the law would bruise.
 Hence, at this moment, what 's his last resource,
 His extreme stay and utmost stretch of hope
 But that,— convicted of such crime as law 445
 Wipes not away save with a worldling's blood,—
 Guido, the three-parts consecrate, may 'scape?
 Nay, the portentous brothers of the man
 Are veritably priests, protected each
 May do his murder in the Church's pale, 450
 Abate Paul, Canon Girolamo!
 This is the man proves irreligiousest
 Of all mankind, religion's parasite!
 This may forsooth plead dinned ear, jaded sense.
 The vice o' the watcher who bides near the bell, 455
 Sleeps sound because the clock is vigilant,
 And cares not whether it be shade or shine.

Doling out day and night to all men else!
 Why was the choice o' the man to niche himself
 Perversely 'neath the tower where Time's own tongue 460
 Thus undertakes to sermonize the world?
 Why, but because the solemn is safe too,
 The belfry proves a fortress of a sort,
 Has other uses than to teach the hour :
 Turns sunscreen, paravent¹ and ombrifuge² 465
 To whoso seeks a shelter in its pale,
 — Ay, and attractive to unwary folk
 Who gaze at storied portal, statued spire,
 And go home with full head but empty purse,
 Nor dare suspect the sacristan the thief! 470
 Shall Judas, — hard upon the donor's heel,
 To filch the fragments of the basket, — plead
 He was too near the preacher's mouth, nor sat
 Attent with fifties in a company?
 No, — closer to promulgated decree, 475
 Clearer the censure of default. Proceed!

I find him bound, then, to begin life well ;
 Fortified by propitious circumstance,
 Great birth, good breeding, with the Church for guide,
 How lives he? Cased thus in a coat of proof. 480
 Mailed like a man-at-arms, though all the while
 A puny starveling, — does the breast pant big,
 The limb swell to the limit, emptiness
 Strive to become solidity indeed?
 Rather, he shrinks up like the ambiguous fish, 485
 Detaches flesh from shell and outside show,
 And steals by moonlight (I have seen the thing)
 In and out, now to prey and now to skulk.
 Armor he boasts when a wave breaks on beach,
 Or bird stoops for the prize : with peril nigh, — 490
 The man of rank, the much-befriended-man,
 The man almost affiliate to the Church,
 Such is to deal with, let the world beware!
 Does the world recognize, pass prudently?
 Do tides abate and sea-fowl hunt i' the deep? 495
 Already is the slug from out its mew,
 Ignobly faring with all loose and free,
 Sand-fly and slush-worm at their garbage-feast,
 A naked blotch no better than they all :
 Guido has dropped nobility, slipped the Church, 500
 Plays trickster if not cut-purse, body and soul
 Prostrate among the filthy feeders — faugh!

¹ *Paravent* : protection against wind.² *Ombrifuge* : refuge from rain.

And when Law takes him by surprise at last,
 Catches the foul thing on its carrion-prey,
 Behold, he points to shell left high and dry, 505
 Pleads " But the case out yonder is myself!"
 Nay, it is thou, Law prongs amid thy peers,
 Congenial vermin : that was none of thee,
 Thine outside, — give it to the soldier-crab!¹

For I find this black mark impinge the man, 510
 That he believes in just the vile of life.
 Low instinct, base pretension, are these truth?
 Then, that aforesaid armor, probity
 He figures in, is falsehood scale on scale ;
 Honor and faith, — a lie and a disguise, 515
 Probably for all livers in this world,
 Certainly for himself ! All say good words
 To who will hear. all do thereby bad deeds
 To who must undergo ; so thrive mankind!
 See this habitual creed exemplified 520
 Most in the last deliberate act ; as last,
 So, very sum and substance of the soul
 Of him that planned and leaves one perfect piece.
 The sin brought under jurisdiction now,
 Even the marriage of the man : this act 525
 I sever from his life as sample, show
 For Guido's self, intend to test him by,
 As, from a cup filled fairly at the fount,
 By the components we decide enough
 Or to let flow as late, or staunch the source. 530

He purposes this marriage, I remark,
 On no one motive that should prompt thereto —
 Farthest, by consequence, from ends alleged
 Appropriate to the action ; so they were :
 The best, he knew and feigned, the worst he took. 535
 Not one permissible impulse moves the man,
 From the mere liking of the eye and ear,
 To the true longing of the heart that loves,
 No trace of these : but all to instigate,
 Is what sinks man past level of the brute 540
 Whose appetite if brutish is a truth.
 All is the lust for money : to get gold, —
 Why, lie, rob, if it must be, murder ! Make
 Body and soul wring gold out, lured within
 The clutch of hate by love, the trap's pretence ! 545

¹ *Soldier-crab* : same as hermit-crab. It grows larger. It also sheds its own shell like all crabs, and while waiting for a new shell to inhabit the empty shell of molluscs, having to change its home from time to time as it form is in a very helpless condition.

What good else get from bodies and from souls?
 This got, there were some life to lead thereby,
 — What, where or how, appreciate those who tell
 How the toad lives: it lives, — enough for me!
 To get this good, — with but a groan or so, 550
 Then, silence of the victims, — were the feat.
 He foresaw, made a picture in his mind, —
 Of father and mother stunned and echoless
 To the blow, as they lie staring at fate's jaws
 Their folly danced into, till the woe fell; 555
 Edged in a month by strenuous cruelty
 From even the poor nook whence they watched the wolf
 Feast on their heart, the lamb-like child his prey;
 Plundered to the last remnant of their wealth,
 (What daily pittance pleased the plunderer dole) 560
 Hunted forth to go hide head, starve and die,
 And leave the pale awe-stricken wife, past hope
 Of help i' the world now, mute and motionless,
 His slave, his chattel, to first use, then destroy.
 All this, he bent mind how to bring about, 565
 Put plain in act and life, as painted plain,
 So have success, reach crown of earthly good,
 In this particular enterprise of man,
 By marriage — undertaken in God's face
 With all these lies so opposite God's truth, 570
 For end so other than man's end.

Thus schemes

Guido, and thus would carry out his scheme:
 But when an obstacle first blocks the path,
 When he finds none may boast monopoly
 Of lies and trick i' the tricking lying world, — 575
 That sorry timid natures, even this sort
 O' the Comparini, want nor trick nor lie
 Proper to the kind. — that as the gor-crow treats
 The bramble-finch so treats the finch the moth,
 And the great Guido is minutely matched 580
 By this same couple, — whether true or false
 The revelation of Pompilia's birth,
 Which in a moment brings his scheme to nought, —
 Then, he is piqued, advances yet a stage,
 Leaves the low region to the finch and fly, 585
 Soars to the zenith whence the fiercer fowl
 May dare the inimitable swoop. I see.
 He draws now on the curious crime, the fine
 Felicity and flower of wickedness;
 Determines, by the utmost exercise 590
 Of violence, made safe and sure by craft,

To satiate malice, pluck one last arch-pang
 From the parents, else would triumph out of reach,
 By punishing 'neir child; within reach yet,
 Who, by thought, word or deed, could nowise wrong 595
 I' the matte that now moves him. So plans he,
 Always subordinating (note the point!)
 Revenge, the manlier sin, to interest
 The meaner, — would pluck pang forth, but unclench
 No gripe in the act, let fall no money-piece. 600
 Hence a plan for so plaguing, body and soul,
 His wife, so putting, day by day, hour by hour,
 The untried torture to the untouched place,
 As must precipitate an end foreseen,
 Goad her into some plain revolt, most like 605
 Plunge upon patent suicidal shame,
 Death to herself, damnation by rebound
 To those whose hearts he, holding hers, holds still :
 Such plan as, in its bad completeness, shall
 Ruin the three together and alike, 610
 Yet leave himself in luck and liberty,
 No claim renounced, no right a forfeiture,
 His person unendangered, his good fame
 Without a flaw, his pristine worth intact. —
 While they, with all their claims and rights that cling, 615
 Shall forthwith crumble off him every side,
 Scorched into dust, a plaything for the winds.
 As when, in our Campagna, there is fired
 The nest-like work that overruns a hut :
 And, as the thatch burns here, there, everywhere, 620
 Even to the ivy and wild vine, that bound
 And blessed the home where men were happy once,
 There rises gradual, black amid the blaze,
 Some grim and unscathed nucleus of the nest, —
 Some old malicious tower, some obscene tomb 625
 They thought a temple in their ignorance,
 And clung about and thought to lean upon —
 There laughs it o'er their ravage, — where are they?
 So did his cruelty burn life about,
 And lay the ruin bare in dreadfulnes, 630
 Try the persistency of torment so
 Upon the wife, that, at extremity,
 Some crisis brought about by fire and flame,
 The patient frenzy-stung must needs break loose,
 Fly anyhow, find refuge anywhere. 635
 Even in the arms of who should front her first,
 No monster but a man — while nature shrieked
 "Or thus escape, or die!" The spasm arrived,
 Not the escape by way of sin, — O God,

Who shall pluck sheep Thou holdest, from Thy hand? 640
 Therefore she lay resigned to die, — so far
 The simple cruelty was foiled. Why then,
 Craft to the rescue, let craft supplement
 Cruelty and show hell a masterpiece!
 Hence this consummate lie, this love-intrigue, 645
 Unmanly simulation of a sin,
 With place and time and circumstance to suit —
 These letters false beyond all forgery —
 Not just handwriting and mere authorship,
 But false to body and soul they figure forth — 650
 As though the man had cut out shape and shape
 From fancies of that other Aretine,¹
 To paste below — incorporate the filth
 With cherub faces on a missal-page!

Whereby the man so far attains his end 655
 That strange temptation is permitted, — see!
 Pompilia wife, and Caponsacchi priest,
 Are brought together as nor priest nor wife
 Should stand, and there is passion in the place,
 Power in the air for evil as for good, 660
 Promptings from heaven and hell, as if the stars
 Fought in their courses for a fate to be.
 Thus stand the wife and priest, a spectacle,
 I doubt not, to unseen assemblage there.
 No lamp will mark that window for a shrine, 665
 No tablet signalize the terrace. teach
 New generations which succeed the old,
 The pavement of the street is holy ground;
 No bard describe in verse how Christ prevailed
 And Satan fell like lightning! Why repine? 670
 What does the world, told truth, but lie the more?

A second time the plot is foiled; nor, now.
 By corresponding sin for countercheck,
 No wile and trick that baffle trick and wile, —
 The play o' the parents! here the blot is blanced 675
 By God's gift of a purity of soul
 That will not take pollution, ermine-like
 Armed from dishonor by its own soft snow.
 Such was this gift of God who showed for once
 How He would have the world go white: it seems 680
 As a new attribute were born of each
 Champion of truth, the priest and wife I praise, —
 As a new safeguard sprang up in defence

¹ *That other Aretine*: Pietro Aretino, author of various obscene writings.

Of their new noble nature : so a thorn
 Comes to the aid of and completes the rose — 685
 Courage, to-wit, no woman's gift nor priest's,
 I' the crisis ; might leaps vindicating right.
 See how the strong aggressor, bad and bold,
 With every vantage, preconcerts surprise,
 Leaps of a sudden at his victim's throat 690
 In a byeway, — how fares he when face to face
 With Caponsacchi? Who fights, who fears now?
 There quails Count Guido, armed to the chattering teeth,
 Cowers at the steadfast eye and quiet word
 O' the Canon of the Pieve! There skulks crime 695
 Behind law called in to back cowardice!
 While out of the poor trampled worm the wife,
 Springs up a serpent!

But anon of these!

Him I judge now, — of him proceed to note,
 Failing the first, a second chance befriends 700
 Guido, gives pause ere punishment arrive.
 The law he called, comes, hears, adjudicates.
 Nor does amiss i' the main, — secludes the wife
 From the husband, respites the oppressed one, grants
 Probation to the oppressor, could he know 705
 The mercy of a minute's fiery purge!
 The furnace-coals alike of public scorn,
 Private remorse, heaped glowing on his head,
 What if, — the force and guile, the ore's alloy,
 Eliminate, his baser soul refined — 710
 The lost be saved even yet, so as by fire?
 Let him, rebuked, go softly all his days
 And, when no graver musings claim their due,
 Meditate on a man's immense mistake
 Who, fashioned to use feet and walk, deigns crawl — 715
 Takes the unmanly means — ay, though to ends
 Man scarce should make for, would but reach thro' wrong, —
 May sin, but nowise needs shame manhood so :
 Since fowlers hawk, shoot, nay and snare the game,
 And yet eschew vile practice, nor find sport 720
 In torch-light treachery or the luring owl.

But how hunts Guido? Why, the fraudulent trap —
 Late spurned to ruin by the indignant feet
 Of fellows in the chase who loved fair play —
 Here he picks up the fragments to the least, 725
 Lades him and hies to the old lurking-place
 Where haply he may patch again, refit
 The mischief, file its blunted teeth anew,

Make sure, next time, first snap shall break the bone.
 Craft, greed and violence complot revenge : 730
 Craft, for its quota, schemes to bring about
 And seize occasion and be safe withal :
 Greed craves its act may work both far and near,
 Crush the tree, branch and trunk and root beside.
 Whichever twig or leaf arrests a streak 735
 Of possible sunshine else would coin itself,
 And drop down one more gold piece in the path :
 Violence stipulates " Advantage proved,
 And safety sure, be pain the overplus!
 Murder with jagged knife! Cut but tear too! 740
 Foiled oft, starved long, glut malice for amends!"
 And what, craft's scheme? scheme sorrowful and strange
 As though the elements, whom mercy checked,
 Had mustered hate for one eruption more,
 One final deluge to surprise the Ark 745
 Cradled and sleeping on its mountain-top :
 Their outbreak-signal — what but the dove's coo,
 Back with the olive in her bill for news
 Sorrow was over? 'T is an infant's birth,
 Guido's first born, his son and heir, that gives 750
 The occasion : other men cut free their souls
 From care in such a case, fly up in thanks
 To God, reach, recognize His love for once :
 Guido cries " Soul, at last the mire is thine!
 Lie there in likeness of a money-bag 755
 My babe's birth so pins down past moving now,
 That I dare cut adrift the lives I late
 Scrupled to touch lest thou escape with them!
 These parents and their child my wife, — touch one,
 Lose all! Their rights determined on a head 760
 I could but hate, not harm, since from each hair
 Dangled a hope for me : now — chance and change!
 No right was in their child but passes plain
 To that child's child and through such child to me.
 I am a father now, — come what, come will, 765
 I represent my child ; he comes between —
 Cuts sudden off the sunshine of this life
 From those three : why, the gold is in his curls!
 Not with old Pietro's, Violante's head,
 Not his gray horror, her more hideous black — 770
 Go these, devoted to the knife!"
 'T is done :
 Wherefore should mind misgive, heart hesitate?
 He calls to counsel, fashions certain four
 Colorless natures counted clean till now,
 — Rustic simplicity, uncorrupted youth, 775

Ignorant virtue! Here 's the gold o' the prime
 When Saturn ruled,¹ shall shock our leaden day —
 The clown abash the courtier! Mark it, bards!
 The courtier tries his hand on clownship here,
 Speaks a word, names a crime, appoints a price, — 780
 Just breathes on what, suffused with all himself,
 Is red-hot henceforth past distinction now
 I' the common glow of hell. And thus they break
 And blaze on us at Rome, Christ's birthnight-eve!
 Oh angels that sang erst "On the earth, peace!" 785
 To man, good will!" — such peace finds earth to-day!
 After the seventeen hundred years, so man
 Wills good to man, so Guido makes complete
 His murder! what is it I said? — cuts loose
 Three lives that hitherto he suffered cling, 790
 Simply because each served to nail secure,
 By a corner of the money-bag, his soul, —
 Therefore, lives sacred till the babe's first breath
 O'erweights them in the balance, — off they fly!

So is the murder managed, sin conceived 795
 To the full: and why not crowned with triumph too?
 Why must the sin, conceived thus, bring forth death?
 I note how, within hair's-breadth of escape,
 Impunity and the thing supposed success.
 Guido is found when the check comes, the change, 800
 The monitory touch o' the tether — felt
 By few, not marked by many, named by none
 At the moment, only recognized aright
 I' the fulness of the days, for God's, lest sin
 Exceed the service, leap the line: such check — 805
 A secret which this life finds hard to keep,
 And, often guessed, is never quite revealed —
 Needs must trip Guido on a stumbling-block
 Too vulgar, too absurdly plain i' the path!
 Study this single oversight of care, 810
 This hebetude² that marred sagacity,
 Forgetfulness of all the man best knew, —
 How any stranger having need to fly,
 Needs but to ask and have the means of flight.
 Why, the first urchin tells you, to leave Rome, 815
 Get horses, you must show the warrant, just
 The banal scrap, clerk's scribble, a fair word buys,
 Or foul one, if a ducat sweeten word, —

¹ *The gold o' the prime when Saturn ruled*: Greek myth tells of an early golden age when all men were innocent. These innocent clowns revealed a sort of gold that was baser than lead.

² *Hebetude*: dulness.

And straight authority will back demand,
 Give you the pick o' the post-house! — how should he, 820
 Then, resident at Rome for thirty years,
 Guido, instruct a stranger! And himself
 Forgets just this poor paper scrap, wherewith
 Armed, every door he knocks at opens wide
 To save him: horsed and manned, with such advance 825
 O' the hunt behind, why, 't were the easy task
 Of hours told on the fingers of one hand,
 To reach the Tuscan frontier, laugh at home,
 Light-hearted with his fellows of the place, —
 Prepared by that strange shameful judgment, that 830
 Satire upon a sentence just pronounced
 By the Rota¹ and confirmed by the Granduke, —
 Ready in a circle to receive their peer,
 Appreciate his good story how, when Rome,
 The Pope-King and the populace of priests 835
 Made common cause with their confederate
 The other priestling who seduced his wife.
 He, all unaided, wiped out the affront
 With decent bloodshed and could face his friends,
 Frolic it in the world's eye. Ay, such tale 840
 Missed such applause, and by such oversight!
 So, tired and footsore, those blood-flustered five
 Went reeling on the road through dark and cold,
 The few permissible miles, to sink at length,
 Wallow and sleep in the first wayside straw, 845
 As the other herd quenched, i' the wash o' the wave,²
 — Each swine, the devil inside him: so slept they,
 And so were caught and caged — all through one trip,
 One touch of fool in Guido the astute!
 He curses the omission, I surmise, 850
 More than the murder. Why, thou fool and blind,
 It is the mercy-stroke that stops thy fate,
 Hamstrings and holds thee to thy hurt, — but how?
 On the edge o' the precipice! One minute more,
 Thou hadst gone farther and fared worse, my son, 855
 Fathoms down on the flint and fire beneath!
 Thy comrades each and all were of one mind,
 Thy murder done, to straightway murder thee
 In turn, because of promised pay withheld.
 So, to the last, greed found itself at odds 860
 With craft in thee, and, proving conqueror,

¹ *Rota*: formerly the supreme court of justice and universal court of appeal. It consisted of twelve members, called auditors, presided over by a dean. ² *I' the wash o' the wave*: see Matthew viii. 32.

Had sent thee, the same night that crowned thy hope,
Thither where, this same day, I see thee not,
Nor, through God's mercy, need, to-morrow, see.

Such I find Guido, midmost blotch of black 865
Discernible in this group of clustered crimes
Huddling together in the cave they call
Their palace outraged day thus penetrates.
Around him ranged, now close and now remote,
Prominent or obscure to meet the needs 870
O' the mage and master. I detect each shape
Subsidiary i' the scene nor loathed the less,
All alike colored, all descried akin
By one and the same pitchy furnace stirred
At the centre: see, they lick the master's hand, — 875
This fox-faced horrible priest, this brother-brute
The Abate, — why, mere wolfishness looks well,
Guido stands honest in the red o' the flame,
Beside this yellow that would pass for white,
Twice Guido, all craft but no violence, 880
This copier of the mien and gait and garb
Of Peter and Paul, that he may go disguised,
Rob halt and lame, sick folk i' the temple-porch!
Armed with religion, fortified by law,
A man of peace, who trims the midnight lamp 885
And turns the classic page — and all for craft,
All to work harm with, yet incur no scratch!
While Guido brings the study to a close,
Paul steps back the due distance, clear o' the trap
He builds and baits. Guido I catch and judge; 890
Paul is past reach in this world and my time:
That is a case reserved. Pass to the next,
The boy of the brood, the young Girolamo
Priest, Canon, and what more? nor wolf nor fox,
But hybrid, neither craft nor violence 895
Wholly, part violence part craft: such cross
Tempt speculation — will both blend one day.
And prove hell's better product? Or subside
And let the simple quality emerge,
Go on with Satan's service the old way? 900
Meanwhile, what promise. — what performance too!
For there 's a new distinctive touch, I see,
Lust — lacking in the two — hell's own blue tint
That gives a character and marks the man
More than a match for yellow and red. Once more, 905
A case reserved: why should I doubt? Then comes
The gaunt gray nightmare in the furthest smoke,
The hag that gave these three abortions birth,

Unmotherly mother and unwomanly
 Woman, that near turns motherhood to shame, 910
 Womanliness to loathing: no one word,
 No gesture to curb cruelty a whit
 More than the she-pard¹ thwarts her playsome whelps
 Trying their milk-teeth on the soft o' the throat
 O' the first fawn, flung, with those beseeching eyes, 915
 Flat in the covert! How should she but couch,
 Lick the dry lips, unsheath the blunted claw,
 Catch 'twixt her placid eyewinks at what chance
 Old bloody half-forgotten dream may flit,
 Born when herself was novice to the taste, 920
 The while she lets youth take its pleasure. Last,
 These God-abandoned wretched lumps of life,
 These four companions, — country-folk this time,
 Not tainted by the unwholesome civic breath,
 Much less the curse o' the Court! Mere striplings too, 925
 Fit to do human nature justice still!
 Surely when impudence in Guido's shape
 Shall propose crime and proffer money's-worth
 To these stout tall rough bright-eyed black-haired boys,
 The blood shall bound in answer to each cheek 930
 Before the indignant outcry break from lip!
 Are these i' the mood to murder, hardly loosed
 From healthy autumn-finish of ploughed glebe,
 Grapes in the barrel, work at happy end,
 And winter near with rest and Christmas play? 935
 How greet they Guido with his final task —
 (As if he but proposed "One vineyard more
 To dig, ere frost come, then relax indeed!")
 "Anywhere, anyhow and anyway,
 Murder me some three people, old and young, 940
 Ye never heard the names of, — and be paid
 So much!" And the whole four accede at once.
 Demur? Do cattle bidden march or halt?
 Is it some lingering habit, old fond faith
 I' the lord o' the land, instructs them, — birthright badge 945
 Of feudal tenure claims its slaves again?
 Not so at all, thou noble human heart!
 All is done purely for the pay, — which, earned,
 And not forthcoming at the instant, makes
 Religion heresy, and the lord o' the land 950
 Fit subject for a murder in his turn.
 The patron with cut throat and rifled purse,
 Deposited i' the roadside-ditch, his due,
 Naught hinders each good fellow trudging home,

¹ *She-pard*: a female leopard.

The heavier by a piece or two in poke, 955
 And so with new zest to the common life,
 Mattock and spade, plough-tail and wagon-shaft,
 Till some such other piece of luck betide,
 Who knows? Since this is a mere start in life,
 And none of them exceeds the twentieth year. 960
 Nay, more i' the background yet? Unnoticed forms
 Claim to be classed, subordinately vile?
 Complacent lookers-on that laugh. — perchance
 Shake head as their friend's horse-play grows too rough
 With the mere child he manages amiss — 965
 But would not interfere and make bad worse
 For twice the fractious tears and prayers: thou know'st
 Civility better, Marzi-Medici,
 Governor for thy kinsman the Granduke!
 Fit representative of law, man's lamp 970
 I' the magistrate's grasp full-flare, no rushlight-end
 Sputtering 'twixt thumb and finger of the priest!
 Whose answer to the couple's cry for help
 Is a threat, — whose remedy of Pompilia's wrong,
 A shrug o' the shoulder, and facetious word 975
 Or wink, traditional with Tuscan wits,
 To Guido in the doorway. Laud to law!
 The wife is pushed back to the husband, he
 Who knows how these home-squabblings persecute
 People who have the public good to mind, 980
 And work best with a silence in the court!

Ah, but I save my word at least for thee,
 Archbishop, who art under, i' the Church,
 As I am under God, — thou, chosen by both 985
 To do the shepherd's office, feed the sheep —
 How of this lamb that panted at thy foot
 While the wolf pressed on her within crook's reach?
 Wast thou the hireling that did turn and flee?
 With thee at least anon the little word!

Such denizens o' the cave now cluster round 990
 And heat the furnace sevenfold: time indeed
 A bolt from heaven should cleave roof and clear place,
 Transfix and show the world, suspiring flame,
 The main offender, scar and brand the rest
 Hurrying, each miscreant to his hole: then flood 995
 And purify the scene with outside day —
 Which yet, in the absolutest drench of dark,
 Ne'er wants a witness, some stray beauty-beam
 To the despair of hell.

First of the first,

Such I pronounce Pompilia, then as now 1000
 Perfect in whiteness : stoop thou down, my child,
 Give one good moment to the poor old Pope
 Heart-sick at having all his world to blame —
 Let me look at thee in the flesh as erst,
 Let me enjoy the old clean linen garb, 1005
 Not the new splendid vesture! Armed and crowned,
 Would Michael, yonder, be, nor crowned nor armed,
 The less pre-eminent angel? Everywhere
 I see in the world the intellect of man,
 That sword, the energy his subtle spear, 1010
 The knowledge which defends him like a shield —
 Everywhere ; but they make not up, I think,
 The marvel of a soul like thine, earth's flower
 She holds up to the softened gaze of God!
 It was not given Pompilia to know much, 1015
 Speak much, to write a book, to move mankind,
 Be memorized by who records my time.
 Yet if in purity and patience, if
 In faith held fast despite the plucking fiend,
 Safe like the signet stone with the new name 1020
 That saints are known by, — if in right returned
 For wrong, most pardon for worst injury,
 If there be any virtue, any praise, —
 Then will this woman-child have proved — who knows? —
 Just the one prize vouchsafed unworthy me, 1025
 Seven years a gardener of the untoward ground,
 I till, — this earth, my sweat and blood manure
 All the long day that barrenly grows dusk :
 At least one blossom makes me proud at eve
 Born 'mid the briers of my enclosure! Still 1030
 (Oh, here as elsewhere, nothingness of man!)
 Those be the plants, imbedded yonder South
 To mellow in the morning, those made fat
 By the master's eye, that yield such timid leaf,
 Uncertain bud, as product of his pains! 1035
 While — see how this mere chance-sown, cleft-nursed seed,
 That sprang up by the wayside 'neath the foot
 Of the enemy, this breaks all into blaze,
 Spreads itself, one wide glory of desire
 To incorporate the whole great sun it loves 1040
 From the inch-height whence it looks and longs! My flower,
 My rose, I gather for the breast of God,
 This I praise most in thee, where all I praise,
 That having been obedient to the end
 According to the light allotted, law 1045
 Prescribed thy life, still tried, still standing test, —
 Dutiful to the foolish parents first,

Submissive next to the bad husband, — nay,
 Tolerant of those meaner miserable
 That did his hests, eked out the dole of pain, — 1050
 Thou, patient thus, couldst rise from law to law,
 The old to the new, promoted at one cry
 O' the trump of God to the new service, not
 To longer bear, but henceforth fight, be found
 Sublime in new impatience with the foe! 1055
 Endure man and obey God: plant firm foot
 On neck of man, tread man into the hell
 Meet for him, and obey God all the more!
 Oh child that didst despise thy life so much
 When it seemed only thine to keep or lose, 1060
 How the fine ear felt fall the first low word
 "Value life, and preserve life for My sake!"
 Thou didst . . . how shall I say? . . . receive so long
 The standing ordinance of God on earth,
 What wonder if the novel claim had clashed 1065
 With old requirement, seemed to supersede
 Too much the customary law? But, brave,
 Thou at first prompting of what I call God,
 And fools call Nature, didst hear, comprehend,
 Accept the obligation laid on thee, 1070
 Mother elect, to save the unborn child,
 As brute and bird do, reptile and the fly,
 Ay and, I nothing doubt, even tree, shrub, plant
 And flower o' the field, all in a common pact
 To worthily defend the trust of trusts, 1075
 Life from the Ever Living: — didst resist —
 Anticipate the office that is mine —
 And with his own sword stay the upraised arm,
 The endeavor of the wicked, and defend
 Him who, — again in my default, — was there 1080
 For visible providence: one less true than thou
 To touch, i' the past, less practised in the right,
 Approved less far in all docility
 To all instruction, — how had such an one
 Made scruple "Is this motion a decree?" 1085
 It was authentic to the experienced ear
 O' the good and faithful servant. Go past me
 And get thy praise, — and be not far to seek
 Presently when I follow if I may!

 And surely not so very much apart 1090
 Need I place thee, my warrior-priest, — in whom
 What if I gain the other rose, the gold,¹

¹ *The other rose, the gold*: an ornament made of wrought gold, set with gems. It is

We grave to imitate God's miracle, Greet monarchs with, good rose in its degree? Irregular noble scapegrace — son the same!	1095
Faulty — and peradventure ours the fault Who still misteach, mislead, throw hook and line, Thinking to land leviathan ¹ forsooth, Tame the scaled neck, play with him as a bird, And bind him for our maidens! Better bear	1100
The King of Pride go wantoning awhile, Unplagued by cord in nose and thorn in jaw, Through deep to deep, followed by all that shine, Churning the blackness hoary: He who made The comely terror, He shall make the sword	1105
To match that piece of netherstone his heart, Ay, nor miss praise thereby; who else shut fire I' the stone, to leap from mouth at sword's first stroke, In lamps of love and faith, the chivalry That dares the right and disregards alike	1110
The yea and nay o' the world? Self-sacrifice, — What if an idol took it? Ask the Church Why she was wont to turn each Venus here, — Poor Rome perversely lingered round, despite Instruction, for the sake of purblind love, —	1115
Into Madonna's shape, and waste no whit Of aught so rare on earth as gratitude! All this sweet savor was not ours but thine, Nard of the rock, a natural wealth we name Incense, and treasure up as food for saints,	1120
When flung to us — whose function was to give Not find the costly perfume. Do I smile? Nay, Caponsacchi, much I find amiss, Blameworthy, punishable in this freak Of thine, this youth prolonged, though age was ripe,	1125
This masquerade in sober day, with change Of motley too, — now hypocrite's disguise, Now fool's-costume: which lie was least like truth, Which the ungainlier, more discordant garb With that symmetric soul inside my son,	1130
The churchman's or the worldling's, — let him judge, Our adversary who enjoys the task! I rather chronicle the healthy rage, — When the first moan broke from the martyr-maid At that uncaging of the beasts, — made bare	1135

blessed by the Pope on the fourth Sunday of
Lent, and afterwards frequently sent as a
mark of favor to some distinguished indi-
vidual, church, or civil community.

¹ *Leviathan*: Job xli. 102. See also same
allusion, V. 1498, and VIII. 1719.

My athlete on the instant, gave such good
 Great undisguised leap over post and pale
 Right into the mid-cirque, free fighting-place.
 There may have been rash stripping — every rag
 Went to the winds. — infringement manifold 1140
 Of laws prescribed pudicity, I tear,
 In this impulsive and prompt self-display!
 Ever such tax comes of the foolish youth ;
 Men mulct the wiser manhood, and suspect
 No veritable star swims out of cloud. 1145
 Bear thou such imputation, undergo
 The penalty I nowise dare relax, —
 Conventional chastisement and rebuke.
 But for the outcome, the brave starry birth
 Conciliating earth with all that cloud, 1150
 Thank heaven as I do! Ay, such championship
 Of God at first blush, such prompt cheery thud
 Of glove on ground that answers ringingly
 The challenge of the false knight, — watch we long
 And wait we vainly for its gallant like 1155
 From those appointed to the service, sworn
 His body-guard with pay and privilege —
 White-cinct, because in white walks sanctity,
 Red-socked, how else proclaim fine scorn of flesh,
 Unchariness of blood when blood faith begs! 1160
 Where are the men-at-arms with cross on coat?
 Aloof, bewraying their attire: whilst thou
 In mask and motley, pledged to dance not fight,
 Sprang'st forth the hero! In thought, word and deed,
 How throughout all thy warfare thou wast pure, 1165
 I find it easy to believe: and if
 At any fateful moment of the strange
 Adventure, the strong passion of that strait,
 Fear and surprise, may have revealed too much. —
 As when a thundrous midnight, with black air 1170
 That burns, rain-drops that blister, breaks a spell,
 Draws out the excessive virtue of some sheathed
 Shut unsuspected flower that hoards and hides
 Immensity of sweetness, — so, perchance,
 Might the surprise and fear release too much 1175
 The perfect beauty of the body and soul
 Thou savedst in thy passion for God's sake,
 He who is Pity. Was the trial sore?
 Temptation sharp? Thank God a second time!
 Why comes temptation but for man to meet 1180
 And master and make crouch beneath his foot,
 And so be pedestaled in triumph? Pray
 "Lead us into no such temptations, Lord!"

- Yea, but, O Thou whose servants are the bold,
 Lead such temptations by the head and hair, 1185
 Reluctant dragons, up to who dares fight,
 That so he may do battle and have praise!
 Do I not see the praise? — that while thy mates
 Bound to deserve i' the matter, prove at need
 Unprofitable through the very pains 1190
 We gave to train them well and start them fair, —
 Are found too stiff, with standing ranked and ranged,
 For onset in good earnest, too obtuse
 Of ear, through iteration of command,
 For catching quick the sense of the real cry, — 1195
 Thou, whose sword-hand was used to strike the lute,
 Whose sentry-station graced some wanton's gate,
 Thou didst push forward and show mettle, shame
 The laggards, and retrieve the day. Well done!
 Be glad thou hast let light into the world 1200
 Through that irregular breach o' the boundary, — see
 The same upon thy path and march assured,
 Learning anew the use of soldiership,
 Self-abnegation, freedom from all fear,
 Loyalty to the life's end! Ruminant, 1205
 Deserve the initiatory spasm, — once more
 Work, be unhappy but bear life, my son!
- And troop you, somewhere 'twixt the best and worst,
 Where crowd the indifferent product, all too poor
 Makeshift, starved samples of humanity! 1210
 Father and mother, huddle there and hide!
 A gracious eye may find you! Foul and fair,
 Sadly mixed natures: self-indulgent, — yet
 Self-sacrificing too: how the love soars,
 How the craft, avarice, vanity and spite 1215
 Sink again! So they keep the middle course,
 Slide into silly crime at unaware,
 Slip back upon the stupid virtue, stay
 Nowhere enough for being classed, I hope
 And fear. Accept the swift and rueful death, 1220
 Taught, somewhat sternlier than is wont, what waits
 The ambiguous creature, — how the one black tuft
 Steadies the aim of the arrow just as well
 As the wide faultless white on the bird's breast!
 Nay, you were punished in the very part 1225
 That looked most pure of speck, — 't was honest love
 Betrayed you, — did love seem most worthy pains,
 Challenge such purging, since ordained survive
 When all the rest of you was done with? Go!
 Never again elude the choice of tints! 1230

White shall not neutralize the black, nor good
 Compensate bad in man, absolve him so :
 Life's business being just the terrible choice.

So do I see, pronounce on all and some
 Grouped for my judgment now, — profess no doubt 1235
 While I pronounce : dark, difficult enough
 The human sphere, yet eyes grow sharp by use,
 I find the truth, dispart the shine from shade,
 As a mere man may, with no special touch
 O' the lynx-gift in each ordinary orb : 1240
 Nay, if the popular notion class me right,
 One of well-nigh decayed intelligence, —
 What of that? Through hard labor and good will,
 And habitude that gives a blind man sight
 At the practised finger-ends of him, I do 1245
 Discern, and dare decree in consequence,
 Whatever prove the peril of mistake.
 Whence, then, this quite new quick cold thrill, — cloudlike,
 This keen dread creeping from a quarter scarce
 Suspected in the skies I nightly scan? 1250
 What slacks the tense nerve, saps the wound-up spring
 Of the act that should and shall be, sends the mount
 And mass o' the whole man's-strength, — conglobed so late —
 Shudderingly into dust, a moment's work?
 While I stand firm, go fearless, in this world, 1255
 For this life recognize and arbitrate,
 Touch and let stay, or else remove a thing,
 Judge "This is right, this object out of place,"
 Candle in hand that helps me and to spare, —
 What if a voice deride me, "Perk and pry! 1260
 Brighten each nook with thine intelligence!
 Play the good householder, ply man and maid
 With tasks prolonged into the midnight, test
 Their work and nowise stint of the due wage
 Each worthy worker : but with gyves and whip 1265
 Pay thou misprision of a single point
 Plain to thy happy self who lift'st the light,
 Lament'st the darkling, — bold to all beneath!
 What if thyself adventure, now the place
 Is purged so well? Leave pavement and mount roof, 1270
 Look round thee for the light of the upper sky,
 The fire which lit thy fire which finds default
 In Guido Franceschini to his cost!
 What if, above in the domain of light,
 Thou miss the accustomed signs, remark eclipse? 1275
 Shalt thou still gaze on ground nor lift a lid, —
 Steady in thy superb prerogative,

Thy inch of inkling, — nor once face the doubt
I' the sphere above thee, darkness to be felt?"

- Yet my poor spark had for its source, the sun ; 1280
Thither I sent the great looks which compel
Light from its fount : all that I do and am
Comes from the truth, or seen or else surmised,
Remembered or divined, as mere man may :
I know just so, nor otherwise. As I know, 1285
I speak. — what should I know, then, and how speak
Were there a wild mistake of eye or brain
As to recorded governance above?
If my own breath, only, blew coal alight
I styled celestial and the morning-star? 1290
I, who in this world act resolvedly,
Dispose of men, their bodies and their souls,
As they acknowledge or gainsay the light
I show them, — shall I too lack courage? — leave
I, too, the post of me, like those I blame? 1295
Refuse, with kindred inconsistency,
To grapple danger whereby souls grow strong?
I am near the end ; but still not at the end ;
All to the very end is trial in life :
At this stage is the trial of my soul 1300
Danger to face, or danger to refuse?
Shall I dare try the doubt now, or not dare?
- O Thou, — as represented here to me
In such conception as my soul allows, —
Under Thy measureless, my atom width! — 1305
Man's mind, what is it but a convex glass
Wherein are gathered all the scattered points
Picked out of the immensity of sky,
To re-unite there, be our heaven for earth,
Our known unknown, our God revealed to man? 1310
Existent somewhere, somehow, as a whole ;
Here, as a whole proportioned to our sense, —
There, (which is nowhere, speech must babble thus!)
In the absolute immensity, the whole
Appreciable solely by Thyself, — 1315
Here, by the little mind of man, reduced
To littleness that suits his faculty,
In the degree appreciable too ;
Between Thee and ourselves — nay even, again,
Below us, to the extreme of the minute, 1320
Appreciable by how many and what diverse
Modes of the life Thou madest be! (why live
Except for love, — how love unless they know?)

Each of them, only filling to the edge,
 Insect or angel, his just length and breadth, 1325
 Due facet of reflection, — full, no less,
 Angel or insect, as Thou framedst things.
 I it is who have been appointed here
 To represent Thee, in my turn, on earth,
 Just as, if new philosophy know aught, 1330
 This one earth, out of all the multitude
 Of peopled worlds, as stars are now supposed, —
 Was chosen, and no sun-star of the swarm,
 For stage and scene of Thy transcendent act
 Beside which even the creation fades 1335
 Into a puny exercise of power.
 Choice of the world, choice of the thing I am,
 Both emanate alike from Thy dread play
 Of operation outside this our sphere
 Where things are classed and counted small or great, — 1340
 Incomprehensibly the choice is Thine!
 I therefore bow my head and take Thy place.
 There is, beside the works, a tale of Thee
 In the world's mouth, which I find credible:
 I love it with my heart: unsatisfied, 1345
 I try it with my reason, nor discept
 From any point I probe and pronounce sound.
 Mind is not matter nor from matter, but
 Above. — leave matter then, proceed with mind!
 Man's be the mind recognized at the height, — 1350
 Leave the inferior minds and look at man!
 Is he the strong, intelligent and good
 Up to his own conceivable height? Nowise.
 Enough o' the low, — soar the conceivable height,
 Find cause to match the effect in evidence, 1355
 The work i' the world, not man's but God's; leave man!
 Conjecture of the worker by the work:
 Is there strength there? — enough: intelligence?
 Ample: but goodness in a like degree?
 Not to the human eye in the present state, 1360
 An isoscele deficient in the base.¹
 What lacks, then, of perfection fit for God
 But just the instance which this tale supplies
 Of love without a limit? So is strength,
 So is intelligence; let love be so, 1365
 Unlimited in its self-sacrifice,
 Then is the tale true and God shows complete.
 Beyond the tale, I reach into the dark,

¹ *An isoscele deficient in the base*: two are visible; the third, goodness, is not so in sides of the triangle, strength and intelligence, the present state of our knowledge.

Feel what I cannot see, and still faith stands :
 I can believe this dread machinery 1370
 Of sin and sorrow, would confound me else,
 Devised, — all pain, at most expenditure
 Of pain by Who devised pain, — to evolve,
 By new machinery in counterpart,
 The moral qualities of man — how else? — 1375
 To make him love in turn and be beloved,
 Creative and self-sacrificing too,
 And thus eventually God-like, (ay,
 "I have said ye are Gods,"¹ — shall it be said for naught?)
 Enable man to wring, from out all pain, 1380
 All pleasure for a common heritage
 To all eternity: this may be surmised,
 The other is revealed, — whether a fact,
 Absolute, abstract, independent truth,
 Historic, not reduced to suit man's mind, — 1385
 Or only truth reverberate, changed, made pass
 A spectrum into mind, the narrow eye, —
 The same and not the same, else unconceived —
 Though quite conceivable to the next grade
 Above it in intelligence, — as truth 1390
 Easy to man were blindness to the beast
 By parity of procedure, — the same truth
 In a new form, but changed in either case :
 What matter so intelligence be filled?
 To a child, the sea is angry, for it roars : 1395
 Frost bites, else why the tooth-like fret on face?
 Man makes acoustics deal with the sea's wrath;
 Explains the choppy cheek by chymic law,² —
 To man and child remains the same effect
 On drum of ear and root of nose, change cause 1400
 Never so thoroughly: so my heart be struck,
 What care I, — by God's gloved hand or the bare?
 Nor do I much perplex me with aught hard,
 Dubious in the transmitting of the tale, —
 No, nor with certain riddles set to solve. * 1405
 This life is training and a passage; pass, —
 Still, we march over some flat obstacle
 We made give way before us; solid truth
 In front of it, what motion for the world?
 The moral sense grows but by exercise. 1410
 'T is even as man grew probatively
 Initiated in Godship, set to make
 A fairer moral world than this he finds,

¹ *I have said ye are Gods* : see John x. 34. an obsolete form of chime, to sound in har-

² *Chymic law* : law of sound. Chyme is monious accord.

Guess now what shall be known hereafter. Deal
 Thus with the present problem: as we see. 1415
 A faultless creature is destroyed, and sin
 Has had its way i' the world where God should rule.
 Ay, but for this irrelevant circumstance
 Of inquisition after blood, we see
 Pompilia lost and Guido saved: how long? 1420
 For his whole life: how much is that whole life?
 We are not babes, but know the minute's worth,
 And feel that life is large and the world small,
 So, wait till life have passed from out the world.
 Neither does this astonish at the end, 1425
 That whereas I can so receive and trust,
 Other men, made with hearts and souls the same,
 Reject and disbelieve, — subordinate
 The future to the present,— sin, nor fear.
 This I refer still to the foremost fact, 1430
 Life is probation and the earth no goal
 But starting-point of man: compel him strive,
 Which means, in man, as good as reach the goal, —
 Why institute that race, his life, at all?
 But this does overwhelm me with surprise, 1435
 Touch me to terror, — not that faith, the pearl,
 Should be let lie by fishers wanting food, —
 Nor seen and handled by a certain few
 Critical and contemptuous, straight consigned
 To shore and shingle for the pebble it proves, — 1440
 But that, when haply found and known and named
 By the residue made rich for evermore.
 These, — that these favored ones, should in a trice
 Turn, and with double zest go dredge for whelks,
 Mud-worms that make the savory soup! Enough 1445
 O' the disbelievers, see the faithful few!
 How do the Christians here deport them, keep
 Their robes of white unspotted by the world?
 What is this Aretine Archbishop, this
 Man under me as I am under God, 1450
 This champion of the faith, I armed and decked,
 Pushed forward, put upon a pinnacle,
 To show the enemy his victor, — see!
 What 's the best fighting when the couple close?
 Pompilia cries, "Protect me from the wolf!" 1455
 He — "No, thy Guido is rough, heady, strong,
 Dangerous to disquiet: let him bide!
 He needs some bone to mumble, help amuse
 The darkness of his den with: so, the fawn
 Which limps up bleeding to my foot and lies. 1460
 — Come to me, daughter! — thus I throw him back!"

Have we misjudged here, over-armed our knight,
 Given gold and silk where plain hard steel serves best,
 Enfeebled whom we sought to fortify,
 Made an archbishop and undone a saint? 1465
 Well, then, descend these heights, this pride of life,
 Sit in the ashes with a barefoot monk
 Who long ago stamped out the worldly sparks,
 By fasting, watching, stone cell and wire scourge,
 — No such indulgence as unknits the strength — 1470
 These breed the tight nerve and tough cuticle,
 And the world's praise or blame runs rillet-wise
 Off the broad back and brawny breast, we know!
 He meets the first cold sprinkle of the world,
 And shudders to the marrow. "Save this child?" 1475
 Oh, my superiors, oh, the Archbishop's self!
 Who was it dared lay hand upon the ark
 His betters saw fall nor put finger forth?
 Great ones could help yet help not: why should small?
 I break my promise: let her break her heart!" 1480
 These are the Christians not the worldlings, not
 The sceptics, who thus battle for the faith!
 If foolish virgins disobey and sleep,
 What wonder? But, this time, the wise that watch,
 Sell lamps and buy lutes, exchange oil for wine, 1485
 The mystic Spouse betrays the Bridegroom here.
 To our last resource, then! Since all flesh is weak,
 Bind weaknesses together, we get strength:
 The individual weighed, found wanting, try
 Some institution, honest artifice 1490
 Whereby the units grow compact and firm!
 Each props the other, and so stand is made
 By our embodied cowards that grow brave.
 The Monastery called of Convertites.
 Meant to help women because these helped Christ, — 1495
 A thing existent only while it acts,
 Does as designed, else a nonentity, —
 For what is an idea unrealized? —
 Pompilia is consigned to these for help.
 They do help: they are prompt to testify 1500
 To her pure life and saintly dying days.
 She dies, and lo, who seemed so poor, proves rich.
 What does the body that lives through helpfulness
 To women for Christ's sake? The kiss turns bite,
 The dove's note changes to the crow's cry: judge! 1505
 "Seeing that this our Convent claims of right
 What goods belong to those we succour, be
 The same proved women of dishonest life, —
 And seeing that this Trial made appear

Pompilia was in such predicament, — 1510
 The Convent hereupon pretends to said
 Succession of Pompilia, issues writ,
 And takes possession by the Fisc's advice."
 Such is their attestation to the cause
 Of Christ, who had one saint at least, they hoped : 1515
 But, is a title-deed to filch, a corpse
 To slander, and an infant-heir to cheat?
 Christ must give up his gains then! They unsay
 All the fine speeches. — who was saint is whore.
 Why, scripture yields no parallel for this! 1520
 The soldiers only threw dice for Christ's coat ;
 We want another legend of the Twelve
 Disputing if it was Christ's coat at all,
 Claiming as prize the woof of price — for why?
 The Master was a thief, purloined the same, 1525
 Or paid for it out of the common bag!
 Can it be this is end and outcome, all
 I take with me to show as stewardship's fruit,
 The best yield of the latest time, this year
 The seventeen-hundredth since God died for man? 1530
 Is such effect proportionate to cause?
 And still the terror keeps on the increase
 When I perceive . . . how can I blink the fact?
 That the fault, the obduracy to good,
 Lies not with the impracticable stuff 1535
 Whence man is made, his very nature's fault,
 As if it were of ice the moon may gild
 Not melt, or stone't was meant the sun should warm
 Not make bear flowers, — nor ice nor stone to blame :
 But it can melt, that ice, can bloom, that stone, 1540
 Impassible to rule of day and night!
 This terrifies me, thus compelled perceive,
 Whatever love and faith we looked should spring
 At advent of the authoritative star,
 Which yet lie sluggish, curdled at the source, — 1545
 These have leapt forth profusely in old time,
 These still respond with promptitude to-day.
 At challenge of — what unacknowledged powers
 O' the air, what uncommissioned meteors, warmth
 By law, and light by rule should supersede? 1550
 For see this priest, this Caponsacchi, stung
 At the first summons, — " Help for honor's sake,
 Play the man, pity the oppressed! " — no pause,
 How does he lay about him in the midst,
 Strike any foe, right wrong at any risk, 1555
 All blindness, bravery and obedience! — blind?
 Ay, as a man would be inside the sun,

Delirious with the plenitude of light
 Should interfuse him to the finger-ends —
 Let him rush straight, and how shall he go wrong? 1560
 Where are the Christians in their panoply?
 The loins we girt about with truth, the breasts
 Righteousness plated round, the shield of faith,
 The helmet of salvation, and that sword
 O' the Spirit, even the word of God, — where these? 1565
 Slunk into corners! Oh, I hear at once
 Hubbub of protestation! "What, we monks,
 We friars, of such an order, such a rule,
 Have not we fought, bled, left our martyr-mark
 At every point along the boundary-line 1570
 'Twixt true and false, religion and the world,
 Where this or the other dogma of our Church
 Called for defence?" And I, despite myself,
 "How can I but speak loud what truth speaks low,
 Or better than the best, or nothing serves! 1575
 What boots deed, I can cap and cover straight
 With such another doughtiness to match,
 Done at an instinct of the natural man?"
 Immolate body, sacrifice soul too, —
 Do not these publicans the same? Outstrip! 1580
 Or else stop race you boast runs neck and neck,
 You with the wings, they with the feet, — for shame!
 Oh, I remark your diligence and zeal!
 Five years long, now, rounds faith into my ears,
 "Help thou, or Christendom is done to death!" 1585
 Five years since, in the Province of To-kien,
 Which is in China as some people know,
 Maigrot, my Vicar Apostolic there,
 Having a great qualm, issues a decree.
 Alack, the converts use as God's name, not 1590
Tien-chu but plain *Tien* or else mere *Shang-ti*.
 As Jesuits please to fancy politic,
 While, say Dominicans, it calls down fire, —
 For *Tien* means heaven, and *Shang-ti*, supreme prince,
 While *Tien-chu* means the lord of heaven: all cry, 1595
 "There is no business urgent for despatch
 As that thou send a legate, specially
 Cardinal Tournon,¹ straight to Pekin, there
 To settle and compose the difference!"
 So have I seen a potentate all fume 1600
 For some infringement of his realm's just right,

¹ *Cardinal Tournon*: was appointed by indiscreet zeal caused him to be imprisoned
 the Pope, apostolic vicar in India. In 1701 by the emperor.
 he went on a mission to China, where his

Some menace to a mud-built straw-thatched farm
 O' the frontier ; while inside the mainland lie,
 Quite undisputed-for in solitude,
 Whole cities plague may waste or famine sap : 1605
 What if the sun crumble, the sands encroach,
 While he looks on sublimely at his ease?
 How does their ruin touch the empire's bound?

And is this little all that was to be?
 Where is the gloriously-decisive change, 1610
 Metamorphosis the immeasurable
 Of human clay to divine gold, we looked
 Should, in some poor sort, justify its price?
 Had an adept of the mere Rosy Cross¹
 Spent his life to consummate the Great Work,² 1615
 Would not we start to see the stuff it touched
 Yield not a grain more than the vulgar got
 By the old smelting-process years ago?
 If this were sad to see in just the sage
 Who should profess so much, perform no more, 1620
 What is it when suspected in that Power
 Who undertook to make and made the world,
 Devised and did effect man, body and soul,
 Ordained salvation for them both, and yet . . .
 Well, is the thing we see, salvation?

I

Put no such dreadful question to myself, 1625
 Within whose circle of experience burns
 The central truth, Power, Wisdom, Goodness, — God :
 I must outlive a thing ere know it dead :
 When I outlive the faith there is a sun, 1630
 When I lie, ashes to the very soul, —
 Someone, not I, must wail above the heap,
 " He died in dark whence never morn arose."
 While I see day succeed the deepest night —
 How can I speak but as I know? — my speech 1635
 Must be, throughout the darkness, " It will end :
 The light that did burn, will burn!" Clouds obscure —
 But for which obscuration all were bright?
 Too hastily concluded! Sun-suffused,
 A cloud may soothe the eye made blind by blaze, — 1640
 Better the very clarity of heaven :

¹ *An adept of the Rosy Cross* : a member that by digesting light with dew the philosopher's stone might be discovered.
 derived from *ros*, dew, and *crux*, cross. ² *Great Work* : Magnum opus of the
Crux is in alchemy the synonym of light, so sages, " to find the absolute in the infinite,
 the Rosicrucians were those who believed the indefinite and the finite."

The soft streaks are the beautiful and dear.
 What but the weakness in a faith supplies
 The incentive to humanity, no strength
 Absolute, irresistible, comports? 1645
 How can man love but what he yearns to help?
 And that which men think weakness within strength,
 But angels know for strength and stronger yet —
 What were it else but the first things made new,
 But repetition of the miracle, 1650
 The divine instance of self-sacrifice
 That never ends and aye begins for man?
 So, never I miss footing in the maze,
 No, — I have light nor fear the dark at all.

But are mankind not real, who pace outside 1655
 My petty circle, world that's measured me?
 And when they stumble even as I stand,
 Have I a right to stop ear when they cry,
 As they were phantoms who took clouds for crags.
 Tripped and fell, where man's march might safely move? 1660
 Beside, the cry is other than a ghost's,
 When out of the old time there pleads some bard,
 Philosopher, or both,¹ and — whispers not,
 But words it boldly. "The inward work and worth 1665
 Of any mind, what other mind may judge
 Save God who only knows the thing He made,
 The veritable service He exacts?
 It is the outward product men appraise.
 Behold, an engine hoists a tower aloft :
 'I looked that it should move the mountain too!' 1670
 Or else 'Had just a turret toppled down.
 Success enough!' — may say the Machinist
 Who knows what less or more result might be :
 But we, who see that done we cannot do,
 'A feat beyond man's force.' we men must say. 1675
 Regard me and that shake I gave the world!
 I was born, not so long before Christ's birth
 As Christ's birth haply did precede thy day, —
 But many a watch before the star of dawn :
 Therefore I lived, — it is thy creed affirms, 1680
 Pope Innocent, who art to answer me! —
 Under conditions, nowise to escape.
 Whereby salvation was impossible.
 Each impulse to achieve the good and fair,
 Each aspiration to the pure and true, 1685
 Being without a warrant or an aim,

¹ *Some bard, philosopher, or both* : the following speech is put into the mouth of Euripides.

Was just as sterile a felicity
 As if the insect, born to spend his life
 Soaring his circles, stopped them to describe
 (Painfully motionless in the mid-air) 1690
 Some word of weighty counsel for man's sake,
 Some 'Know thyself' or 'Take the golden mean!'¹
 — Forwent his happy dance and the glad ray,
 Died half an hour the sooner and was dust.
 I, born to perish like the brutes, or worse, 1695
 Why not live brutishly, obey brutes' law?
 But I, of body as of soul complete,
 A gymnast at the games, philosopher
 I' the schools, who painted, and made music, — all
 Glories that met upon the tragic stage 1700
 When the Third Poet's tread surprised the Two,² —
 Whose lot fell in a land where life was great
 And sense went free and beauty lay profuse,
 I, untouched by one adverse circumstance,
 Adopted virtue as my rule of life, 1705
 Waived all reward, loved but for loving's sake,
 And, what my heart taught me, I taught the world,
 And have been teaching now two thousand years.
 Witness my work, — plays that should please, forsooth!
 'They might please, they may displease, they shall teach, 1710
 For truth's sake,' so I said, and did, and do.
 Five hundred years ere Paul spoke, Felix heard,³ —
 How much of temperance and righteousness,
 Judgment to come, did I find reason for,
 Corroborate with my strong style that spared 1715
 No sin, nor swerved the more from branding brow
 Because the sinner was called Zeus and God?
 How nearly did I guess at that Paul knew?
 How closely come, in what I represent
 As duty, to his doctrine yet a blank? 1720
 And as that limner not untruly limns
 Who draws an object round or square, which square
 Or round seems to the unassisted eye,
 Though Galileo's⁴ tube display the same
 Oval or oblong, — so, who controverts 1725
 I rendered rightly what proves wrongly wrought
 Beside Paul's picture? Mine was true for me.
 I saw that there are, first and above all,

¹ Some "Know thyself" or "Take the golden mean": typical apophthegms of the ancient Greek sages (see Juvenal, "Satires," xi. 24; Horace, "Satires," i. 106).

³ Paul spoke, Felix heard: see Acts xxiii. 23; xxiv. 10, 25.

⁴ Galileo: the distinguished Italian astronomer (1564-1642).

² The Third Poet: Euripides. The Two: Æschylus and Sophocles.

The hidden forces, blind necessities,
 Named Nature, but the thing's self unconceived : 1730
 Then follow, — how dependent upon these,
 We know not, how imposed above ourselves,
 We well know, — what I name the gods, a power
 Various or one : for great and strong and good
 Is there, and little, weak and bad there too, 1735
 Wisdom and folly : say, these make no God, —
 What is it else that rules outside man's self?
 A fact then, — always, to the naked eye, —
 And so, the one revealment possible
 Of what were unimagined else by man. 1740
 Therefore, what gods do, man may criticise,
 Applaud, condemn, — how should he fear the truth? —
 But likewise have in awe because of power,
 Venerate for the main munificence,
 And give the doubtful deed its due excuse 1745
 From the acknowledged creature of a day
 To the Eternal and Divine. Thus, bold
 Yet self-mistrusting, should man bear himself,
 Most assured on what now concerns him most —
 The law of his own life, the path he prints, — 1750
 Which law is virtue and not vice, I say, —
 And least inquisitive where search least skills,
 I' the nature we best give the clouds to keep.
 What could I paint beyond a scheme like this
 Out of the fragmentary truths where light 1755
 Lay fitful in a tenebrific time?
 You have the sunrise now, joins truth to truth,
 Shoots life and substance into death and void ;
 Themselves compose the whole we made before :
 The forces and necessity grow God, — 1760
 The beings so contrarious that seemed gods,
 Prove just His operation manifold
 And multiform, translated, as must be,
 Into intelligible shape so far
 As suits our sense and sets us free to feel. 1765
 What if I let a child think, childhood-long,
 That lightning, I would have him spare his eye,
 Is a real arrow shot at naked orb?
 The man knows more, but shuts his lids the same :
 Lightning's cause comprehends nor man nor child. 1770
 Why then, my scheme, your better knowledge broke,
 Presently re-adjusts itself, the small
 Proportioned largelier, parts and whole named new :
 So much, no more two thousand years have done!
 Pope, dost thou dare pretend to punish me, 1775
 For not desecrating sunshine at midnight,

- Me who crept all-fours, found my way so far —
 While thou rewardest teachers of the truth,
 Who miss the plain way in the blaze of noon, —
 Though just a word from that strong style of mine, 1780
 Grasped honestly in hand as guiding-staff,
 Had pricked them a sure path across the bog,
 That mire of cowardice and slush of lies
 Wherein I find them wallow in wide day! "
- How should I answer this Euripides? 1785
 Paul. — 't is a legend, — answered Seneca,
 But that was in the day-spring; noon is now:
 We have got too familiar with the light.
 Shall I wish back once more that thrill of dawn?
 When the whole truth-touched man burned up, one fire? 1790
 — Assured the trial, fiery, fierce, but fleet,
 Would, from his little heap of ashes, lend
 Wings to that conflagration of the world
 Which Christ awaits ere He makes all things new:
 So should the frail become the perfect, rapt 1795
 From glory of pain to glory of joy; and so,
 Even in the end, — the act renouncing earth,
 Lands, houses, husbands, wives and children here, —
 Begin that other act which finds all, lost,
 Regained, in this time even, a hundredfold, 1800
 And, in the next time, feels the finite love
 Blent and embalmed with the eternal life.
 So does the sun ghastlily seem to sink
 In those north parts, lean all but out of life,
 Desist a dread mere breathing stop, then slow 1805
 Re-assert day, begin the endless rise.
 Was this too easy for our after-stage?
 Was such a lighting-up of faith, in life,
 Only allowed initiate, set man's step
 In the true way by help of the great glow? 1810
 A way wherein it is ordained he walk,
 Bearing to see the light from heaven still more
 And more encroached on by the light of earth,
 Tentatives earth puts forth to rival heaven.
 Earthly incitements that mankind serve God 1815
 For man's sole sake, not God's and therefore man's
 Till at last, who distinguishes the sun
 From a mere Druid fire on a far mount?
 More praise to him who with his subtle prism
 Shall decompose both beams and name the true. 1820
 In such sense, who is last proves first indeed;
 For how could saints and martyrs fail see truth
 Streak the night's blackness? Who is faithful now?

- Who untwists heaven's white from the yellow flare
 O' the world's gross torch, without night's foil that helped 1825
 Produce the Christian act so possible
 When in the way stood Nero's cross and stake,¹ —
 So hard now when the world smiles "Right and wise!
 Faith points the politic, the thrifty way,
 Will make who plods it in the end returns 1830
 Beyond mere fool's-sport and improvidence.
 We fools dance thro' the cornfield of this life,
 Pluck ears to left and right and swallow raw,
 — Nay, tread, at pleasure, a sheaf underfoot,
 To get the better at some poppy-flower, — 1835
 Well aware we shall have so much less wheat
 In the eventual harvest: you meantime
 Waste not a spike, — the richlier will you reap!
 What then? There will be always garnered meal
 Sufficient for our comfortable loaf, 1840
 While you enjoy the undiminished sack!"
 Is it not this ignoble confidence,
 Cowardly hardihood, that dulls and damps,
 Makes the old heroism impossible?
- Unless . . . what whispers me of times to come? 1845
 What if it be the mission of that age
 My death will usher into life, to shake
 This torpor of assurance from our creed,
 Re-introduce the doubt discarded, bring
 That formidable danger back, we drove 1850
 Long ago to the distance and the dark?
 No wild beast now prowls round the infant camp:
 We have built wall and sleep in city safe:
 But if some earthquake try the towers that laugh
 To think they once saw lions rule outside, 1855
 And man stand out again, pale, resolute,
 Prepared to die, — which means, alive at last?
 As we broke up that old faith of the world,
 Have we, next age, to break up this the new —
 Faith, in the thing, grown faith in the report — 1860
 Whence need to bravely disbelieve report
 Through increased faith i' the thing reports belie?
 Must we deny, — do they, these Molinists,
 At peril of their body and their soul, —
 Recognized truths, obedient to some truth 1865
 Unrecognized yet, but perceptible? —
 Correct the portrait by the living face,

¹ *Nero's cross and stake*: the Emperor Nero (37-68 A.D.) crucified and burned the Christians.

Man's God, by God's God in the mind of man?
 Then, for the few that rise to the new height,
 The many that must sink to the old depth, 1870
 The multitude found fall away! A few,
 E'en ere new law speak clear, may keep the old,
 Preserve the Christian level, call good good
 And evil evil. (even though razed and blank
 The old titles.) helped by custom, habitude, 1875
 And all else they mistake for finer sense
 O' the fact that reason warrants, — as before.
 They hope perhaps, fear not impossibly.
 At least some one Pompilia left the world
 Will say "I know the right place by foot's feel, 1880
 I took it and tread firm there; wherefore change?"
 But what a multitude will surely fall
 Quite through the crumbling truth, late subjacent,
 Sink to the next discoverable base.
 Rest upon human nature, settle there 1885
 On what is firm, the lust and pride of life!
 A mass of men, whose very souls even now
 Seem to need re-creating, — so they slink
 Worm-like into the mud, light now lays bare, —
 Whose future we dispose of with shut eyes 1890
 And whisper — "They are grafted, barren twigs,
 Into the living stock of Christ: may bear
 One day, till when they lie death-like, not dead," —
 Those who with all the aid of Christ succumb,
 How, without Christ, shall they, unaided, sink? 1895
 Whither but to this gulf before my eyes?
 Do not we end, the century and I?
 The impatient antimasque treads close on kibe
 O' the very masque's self it will mock, — on me,
 Last lingering personage, the impatient mime 1900
 Pushes already, — will I block the way?
 Will my slow trail of garments ne'er leave space
 For pantaloons, sock, plume and castanet?
 Here comes the first experimentalist
 In the new order of things, — he plays a priest; 1905
 Does he take inspiration from the Church,
 Directly make her rule his law of life?
 Not he: his own mere impulse guides the man —
 Happily sometimes, since ourselves allow
 He has danced, in gaiety of heart, i' the main 1910
 The right step through the maze we bade him foot.
 But if his heart had prompted him break loose
 And mar the measure? Why, we must submit,
 And thank the chance that brought him safe so far.
 Will he repeat the prodigy? Perhaps. 1915

What is the last word I must listen to?
 Perchance — " Spare yet a term this barren stock
 We pray thee dig about and dung and dress
 Till he repent and bring forth fruit even yet!"
 Perchance — " So poor and swift a punishment 1965
 Shall throw him out of life with all that sin:
 Let mercy rather pile up pain on pain
 Till the flesh expiate what the soul pays else!"
 Nowise! Remonstrants on each side commence
 Instructing, there 's a new tribunal now 1970
 Higher than God's — the educated man's!
 Nice sense of honor in the human breast
 Supersedes here the old coarse oracle —
 Confirming none the less a point or so
 Wherein blind predecessors worked aright 1975
 By rule of thumb: as when Christ said, — when, where?
 Enough, I find it pleaded in a place, —
 " All other wrongs done, patiently I take:
 But touch my honor and the case is changed!
 I feel the due resentment, — *nemini* 1980
*Honorem trado*¹ is my quick retort."
 Right of Him, just as if pronounced to-day!
 Still, should the old authority be mute
 Or doubtful or in speaking clash with new.
 The younger takes permission to decide. 1985
 At last we have the instinct of the world
 Ruling its household without tutelage:
 And while the two laws, human and divine,
 Have busied finger with this tangled case,
 In pushes the brisk junior, cuts the knot, 1990
 Pronounces for acquittal. How it trips
 Silverly o'er the tongue! " Remit the death!
 Forgive, . . . well, in the old way, if thou please,
 Decency and the relics of routine
 Respected, — let the Count go free as air! 1995
 Since he may plead a priest's immunity, —
 The minor orders help enough for that,
 With Farinacci's license, — who decides
 That the mere implication of such man,
 So privileged, in any cause, before 2000
 Whatever Court except the Spiritual,
 Straight quashes law-procedure, — quash it, then!
 Remains a pretty loophole of escape
 Moreover, that, beside the patent fact
 O' the law's allowance, there 's involved the weal 2005

¹ *Nemini honorem trado*: " I will not give mine honor to another." See Isaiah xlii. 8, xlviii. 11.

O' the Popedom: a son's privilege at stake,
 Thou wilt pretend the Church's interest,
 Ignore all finer reasons to forgive!
 But herein lies the crowning cogency —
 (Let thy friends teach thee while thou tellest beads) 2010
 That in this case the spirit of culture speaks,
 Civilization is imperative.
 To her shall we remand all delicate points
 Henceforth, nor take irregular advice
 O' the sly, as heretofore: she used to hint 2015
 Remonstrances, when law was out of sorts
 Because a saucy tongue was put to rest,
 An eye that roved was cured of arrogance:
 But why be forced to mumble under breath
 What soon shall be acknowledged as plain fact, 2020
 Outspoken, say, in thy successor's time?
 Methinks we see the golden age return!
 Civilization and the Emperor
 Succeed to Christianity and Pope.
 One Emperor then, as one Pope now: meanwhile, 2025
 Anticipate a little! We tell thee 'Take
 Guido's life, sapped society shall crash,
 Whereof the main prop was, is, and shall be
 — Supremacy of husband over wife!' 2030
 Does the man rule i' the house, and may his mate
 Because of any plea dispute the same?
 Oh, pleas of all sorts shall abound, be sure,
 One but allowed validity, — for, harsh
 And savage, for, inept and silly-sooth,
 For, this and that, will the ingenious sex 2035
 Demonstrate the best master e'er graced slave:
 And there 's but one short way to end the coil, —
 Acknowledge right and reason steadily
 I' the man and master: then the wife submits
 To plain truth broadly stated. Does the time 2040
 Advise we shift — a pillar? nay, a stake
 Out of its place i' the social tenement?
 One touch may send a shudder through the heap
 And bring it toppling on our children's heads!
 Moreover, if ours breed a qualm in thee, 2045
 Give thine own better feeling play for once!
 Thou, whose own life winks o'er the socket-edge,
 Wouldst thou it went out in such ugly snuff
 As dooming sons dead, e'en though justice prompt?
 Why, on a certain feast, Barabbas' self¹ 2050
 Was set free, not to cloud the general cheer:

¹ *Barabbas' self*: see Mark xxvii. 15.

Neither shalt thou pollute thy Sabbath close!
 Mercy is safe and graceful. How one hears
 The howl begin, scarce the three little taps ¹
 O' the silver mallet silent on thy brow, — 2055
 ' His last act was to sacrifice a Count
 And thereby screen a scandal of the Church!
 Guido condemned, the Canon justified
 Of course, — delinquents of his cloth go free!²
 And so the Luthers chuckle, Calvins scowl, 2060
 So thy hand helps Molinos to the chair
 Whence he may hold forth till doom's day on just
 These *petit-maitre* ² priestlings, — in the choir
Sanctus et Benedictus,³ with a brush
 Oft soft guitar-strings that obey the thumb, 2065
 Touched by the bedside, for accompaniment!
 Does this give umbrage to a husband? Death
 To the fool, and to the priest impunity!
 But no impunity to any friend
 So simply over-loyal as these four 2070
 Who made religion of their patron's cause.
 Believed in him and did his bidding straight,
 Asked not one question but laid down the lives
 This Pope took, — all four lives together make
 Just his own length of days, — so, dead they lie, 2075
 As these were times when loyalty 's a drug,
 And zeal in a subordinate too cheap
 And common to be saved when we spend life!
 Come, 't is too much good breath we waste in words :
 The pardon, Holy Father! Spare grimace, 2080
 Shrugs and reluctance! Are not we the world,
 Art not thou Priam?⁴ Let soft culture plead
 Hecuba-like,⁵ ' *non tali* ' ⁶ (Virgil serves)
 ' *Auxilio* ' and the rest! Enough, it works!
 The Pope relaxes, and the Prince is loth, 2085
 The father's bowels yearn, the man's will bends,
 Reply is apt. Our tears on tremble, hearts
 Big with a benediction, wait the word
 Shall circulate thro' the city in a trice,
 Set every window flaring, give each man 2090
 O' the mob his torch to wave for gratitude.
 Pronounce then, for our breath and patience fail! "

¹ *The three little taps* : when a pope dies, the Cardinal Camerlengo has to assure himself of his death by tapping thrice on his forehead with a silver mallet.

² *Petit-maitre* : coxcomb.

³ *Sanctus et Benedictus* : holy and blessed.

⁴ *Priam* : the last king of Troy.

⁵ *Hecuba* : wife of Priam.

⁶ *Non tali* : see Virgil's "Æneid," ii. 519. *Non tali auxilio, nec defensoribus istis tempus eget* : the crisis requires not such aid nor such defenders as thou art.

I will, Sirs : but a voice other than yours
 Quickens my spirit. "*Quis pro Domino?*
 Who is upon the Lord's side?" asked the Count. 2095
 I, who write —

“ On receipt of this command,
 Acquaint Count Guido and his fellows four
 They die to-morrow : could it be to-night,
 The better, but the work to do, takes time. 2100
 Set with all diligence a scaffold up,
 Not in the customary place, by Bridge
 Saint Angelo, where die the common sort ;
 But since the man is noble, and his peers
 By predilection haunt the People's Square,
 There let him be beheaded in the midst, 2105
 And his companions hanged on either side :
 So shall the quality see, fear and learn.
 All which work takes time : till to-morrow, then,
 Let there be prayer incessant for the five ! ”

For the main criminal I have no hope 2110
 Except in such a suddenness of fate.
 I stood at Naples once, a night so dark
 I could have scarce conjectured there was earth
 Anywhere, sky or sea or world at all :
 But the night's black was burst through by a blaze — 2115
 Thunder struck blow on blow, earth groaned and bore,
 Through her whole length of mountain visible :
 There lay the city thick and plain with spires,
 And, like a ghost disshrouded, white the sea.
 So may the truth be flashed out by one blow, 2020
 And Guido see, one instant, and be saved.
 Else I avert my face, nor follow him
 Into that sad obscure sequestered state
 Where God unmakes but to remake the soul
 He else made first in vain ; which must not be. 2125
 Enough, for I may die this very night :
 And how should I dare die, this man let live ?

Carry this forthwith to the Governor!

Copy
Complete
Revised
Double
copy

XI.

GUIDO.

[Guido's last words, as a condemned man facing death, are given in Book XI. While his confessors, who are sent to watch beside him, await the hour calling him to the scaffold, his baffled soul beats against his doom, and, growing more and more aware of its helplessness, reveals itself more and more nakedly. He strives successively to conciliate his confessors, to convict the Pope and Christianity of pretence, unprecedented rigor, and of oppression in extorting a confession from him as warrant for the wrong done him; to explain and justify his course; to charge on Pompilia's "nullity" the responsibility for his "mistake"; and to represent himself as a fiery soul capable of valuing a bolder wife. Frantic and defiant, he seeks, at last, to bribe and then to threaten and taunt his confessors. Finally, with the Brothers of Mercy at the door, in a panic of terror, he pleads for his life with all the powers he knows, the greatest of these being — Pompilia.]

YOU are the Cardinal Acciaiuoli, and you,
 Abate Panciatichi — two good Tuscan names :
 Acciaiuoli — ah, your ancestor it was
 Built the huge battlemented convent-block ¹
 Over the little forky flashing Greve 5
 That takes the quick turn at the foot o' the hill
 Just as one first sees Florence: oh those days!
 'T is Ema, though, the other rivulet,
 The one-arched brown brick bridge yawns over, — yes,
 Gallop and go five minutes, and you gain 10
 The Roman Gate from where the Ema's bridged:
 Kingfishers fly there: how I see the bend
 O'erturreted by Certosa which he built,
 That Seneschal (we styled him) of your House!
 I do adjure you, help me, Sirs! My blood 15
 Comes from as far a source: ought it to end
 This way, by leakage through their scaffold-planks
 Into Rome's sink where her red refuse runs?
 Sirs, I beseech you by blood-sympathy,
 If there be any vile experiment 20
 In the air, — if this your visit simply prove,
 When all 's done, just a well-intentioned trick,
 That tries for truth truer than truth itself,
 By startling up a man, ere break of day,
 To tell him he must die at sunset, — pshaw! 25

¹ *The huge battlemented convent-block . . . Certosa*: a Carthusian monastery in Val Emo, about four miles from Florence.

That man 's a Franceschini ; feel his pulse,
 Laugh at your folly, and let 's all go sleep!
 You have my last word, — innocent am I
 As Innocent my Pope and murderer,
 Innocent as a babe, as Mary's own, 30
 As Mary's self, — I said, say and repeat, —
 And why, then, should I die twelve hours hence? I —
 Whom, not twelve hours ago, the jailer bade
 Turn to my straw-truss, settle and sleep sound
 That I might wake the sooner, promptlier pay 35
 His due of meat-and-drink-indulgence, cross
 His palm with fee of the good-hand, beside,
 As gallants use who go at large again!
 For why? All honest Rome approved my part ;
 Whoever owned wife, sister, daughter, — nay, 40
 Mistress, — had any shadow of any right
 That looks like right, and, all the more resolved,
 Held it with tooth and nail, — these manly men
 Approved! I being for Rome, Rome was for me.
 Then, there 's the point reserved, the subterfuge 45
 My lawyers held by, kept for last resource,
 Firm should all else, — the impossible fancy! — fail,
 And sneaking burgess-spirit win the day.
 The knaves! One plea at least would hold, — they laughed, —
 One grappling-iron scratch the bottom-rock 50
 Even should the middle mud let anchor go!
 I hooked my cause on to the Clergy's, — plea
 Which, even if law tipped off my hat and plume,
 Revealed my priestly tonsure, saved me so.
 The Pope moreover, this old Innocent, 55
 Being so meek and mild and merciful,
 So fond o' the poor and so fatigued of earth,
 So . . . fifty thousand devils in deepest hell!
 Why must he cure us of our strange conceit
 Of the angel in man's likeness, that we loved 60
 And looked should help us at a pinch? He help?
 He pardon? Here 's his mind and message — death!
 Thank the good Pope! Now, is he good in this,
 Never mind, Christian, — no such stuff 's extant, —
 But will my death do credit to his reign, 65
 Show he both lived and let live, so was good?
 Cannot I live if he but like? "The law!"
 Why, just the law gives him the very chance,
 The precise leave to let my life alone,
 Which the archangelic soul of him (he says) 70
 Yearns after! Here they drop it in his palm,
 My lawyers, capital o' the cursed kind, —
 Drop life to take and hold and keep: but no!



COUNT GUIDO.

He sighs, shakes head, refuses to shut hand,
 Motions away the gift they bid him grasp, 75
 And of the coyness comes — that off I run
 And down I go, he best knows whither! mind,
 He knows, who sets me rolling all the same!
 Disinterested Vicar of our Lord,
 This way he abrogates and disallows, 80
 Nullifies and ignores, — reverts in fine
 To the good and right, in detriment of me!
 Talk away! Will you have the naked truth?
 He's sick of his life's supper, — swallowed lies :
 So, hobbling bedward, needs must ease his maw 85
 Just where I sit o' the door-sill. Sir Abate,
 Can you do nothing? Friends, we used to frisk :
 What of this sudden slash in a friend's face,
 This cut across our good companionship
 That showed its front so gay when both were young? 90
 Were not we put into a beaten path,
 Bid pace the world, we nobles born and bred,
 We body of friends with each his scutcheon full
 Of old achievement and impunity, —
 Taking the laugh of morn and Sol's salute 95
 As forth we fared, pricked on to breathe our steeds
 And take equestrian sport over the green
 Under the blue, across the crop. — what care?
 If we went prancing up hill and down dale,
 In and out of the level and the straight, 100
 By the bit of pleasant byeway, where was harm?
 Still Sol salutes me and the morning laughs :
 I see my grandsire's hoof-prints. — point the spot
 Where he drew rein, slipped saddle, and stabbed knave
 For daring throw gibe — much less, stone — from pale : 105
 Then back, and on, and up with the cavalcade.
 Just so wend we, now canter, now converse,
 Till, 'mid the jauncing pride and jaunty port,
 Something of a sudden jerks at somebody —
 A dagger is out, a flashing cut and thrust, 110
 Because I play some prank my grandsire played,
 And here I sprawl : where is the company? Gone!
 A trot and a trample! only I lie trapped,
 Writhe in a certain novel springe just set
 By the good old Pope : I'm first prize. Warn me? Why? 115
 Apprise me that the law o' the game is changed?
 Enough that I'm a warning, as I writhe,
 To all and each my fellows of the file,
 And make law plain henceforward past mistake,
 "For such a prank, death is the penalty!" 120
 Pope the Five Hundredth (what do I know or care?)

Deputes your Eminency and Abateship
 To announce that, twelve hours from this time, he needs
 I just essay upon my body and soul
 The virtue of his brand-new engine, prove 125
 Represser of the pranksome! I'm the first!
 Thanks. Do you know what teeth you mean to try
 The sharpness of, on this soft neck and throat?
 I know it, — I have seen and hate it, — ay,
 As you shall, while I tell you! Let me talk, 130
 Or leave me, at your pleasure! talk I must:
 What is your visit but my lure to talk?
 Nay, you have something to disclose? — a smile,
 At end of the forced sternness, means to mock
 The heart-beats here? I call your two hearts stone! 135
 Is your charge to stay with me till I die?
 Be tacit as your bench, then! Use your ears,
 I use my tongue: how glibly yours will run
 At pleasant supper-time . . . God's curse! . . . to-night
 When all the guests jump up, begin so brisk 140
 "Welcome, his Eminence who shrived the wretch!
 Now we shall have the Abate's story!"

Life!

How I could spill this overplus of mine
 Among those hoar-haired, shrunk-shanked odds and ends 145
 Of body and soul old age is chewing dry!
 Those windlestraws that stare while purblind death
 Mows here, mows there, makes hay of juicy me,
 And misses just the bunch of withered weed
 Would brighten hell and streak its smoke with flame!
 How the life I could shed yet never shrink, 150
 Would drench their stalks with sap like grass in May!
 Is it not terrible, I entreat you, Sirs? —
 With manifold and plenitudinous life,
 Prompt at death's menace to give blow for threat,
 Answer his "Be thou not!" by "Thus I am!" — 155
 Terrible so to be alive yet die?

How I live, how I see! so, — how I speak!
 Lucidity of soul unlocks the lips:
 I never had the words at will before.
 How I see all my folly at a glance! 160
 "A man requires a woman and a wife:"
 There was my folly; I believed the saw.
 I knew that just myself concerned myself,
 Yet needs must look for what I seemed to lack,
 In a woman, — why, the woman's in the man! 165
 Fools we are, how we learn things when too late!

Overmuch life turns round my woman-side :
 The male and female in me, mixed before,
 Settle of a sudden : I'm my wife outright
 In this unmanly appetite for truth, 170
 This careless courage as to consequence,
 This instantaneous sight through things and through,
 This voluble rhetoric, if you please. — 't is she!
 Here you have that Pompilia whom I slew,
 Also the folly for which I slew her!

Fool! 175

And, fool-like, what is it I wander from?
 What did I say of your sharp iron tooth?
 Ah, — that I know the hateful thing! this way.
 I chanced to stroll forth, many a good year gone,
 One warm Spring eve in Rome, and unaware 180
 Looking, mayhap, to count what stars were out,
 Came on your fine axe in a frame, that falls
 And so cuts off a man's head underneath.
 Mannaia. — thus we made acquaintance first :
 Out of the way, in a by-part o' the town, 185
 At the Mouth-of-Truth ¹ o' the river-side, you know :
 One goes by the Capitol : and wherefore coy,
 Retiring out of crowded noisy Rome?
 Because a very little time ago
 It had done service, chopped off head from trunk 190
 Belonging to a fellow whose poor house
 The thing must make a point to stand before —
 Felice Whatsoever-was-the-name
 Who stabled buffaloes and so gained bread,
 (Our clowns unyoke them in the ground hard by) 195
 And, after use of much improper speech,
 Had struck at Duke Some-title-or-other's face,
 Because he kidnapped, carried away and kept
 Felice's sister who would sit and sing
 I' the filthy doorway while she plaited fringe 200
 To deck the brutes with, — on their gear it goes, —
 The good girl with the velvet in her voice.
 So did the Duke, so did Felice, so
 Did Justice, intervening with her axe.
 There the man-mutilating engine stood 205
 At ease, both gay and grim, like a Swiss guard
 Off duty, — purified itself as well,
 Getting dry, sweet and proper for next week, —
 And doing incidental good, 't was hoped

¹ *Mouth-of-Truth* : Bocca della Verità, a huge mask of stone in the portico of the Church Sta. Maria in Cormedin. It was believed that should a doubtful witness put his hand in the mouth of this mask, if he were false, he could not draw it out again.

To the rough lesson-lacking populace 210
 Who now and then, forsooth, must right their wrongs!
 There stood the twelve-foot-square of scaffold, railed
 Considerately round to elbow-height,
 For fear an officer should tumble thence
 And sprain his ankle and be lame a month, 215
 Through starting when the axe fell and head too!
 Railed likewise were the steps whereby 't was reached.
 All of it painted red: red, in the midst,
 Ran up two narrow tall beams barred across,
 Since from the summit, some twelve feet to reach, 220
 The iron plate with the sharp shearing edge
 Had slammed, jerked, shot, slid, — I shall soon find which! —
 And so lay quiet, fast in its fit place.
 The wooden half-moon collar, now eclipsed
 By the blade which blocked its curvature: apart, 225
 The other half, — the under half-moon board
 Which, helped by this, completes a neck's embrace, —
 Joined to a sort of desk that wheels aside
 Out of the way when done with, — down you kneel,
 In you 're pushed, over you the other drops, 230
 Tight you 're clipped, whiz, there 's the blade cleaves its best,
 Out trundles body, down flops head on floor,
 And where 's your soul gone? That, too, I shall find!
 This kneeling place was red, red, never fear!
 But only slimy-like with paint, not blood, 235
 For why? a decent pitcher stood at hand,
 A broad dish to hold sawdust, and a broom
 By some unnamed utensil. — scraper-rake. —
 Each with a conscious air of duty done.
 Underneath, loungers. — boys and some few men, — 240
 Discoursed this platter, named the other tool,
 Just as, when grooms tie up and dress a steed,
 Boys lounge and look on, and elucubrate¹
 What the round brush is used for, what the square, —
 So was explained — to me the skill-less then — 245
 The manner of the grooming for next world
 Undergone by Felice What's-his-name.
 There 's no such lovely month in Rome as May —
 May's crescent is no half-moon of red plank,
 And came now tilting o'er the wave i' the west, 250
 One greenish-golden sea, right 'twixt those bars
 Of the engine — I began acquaintance with,
 Understood, hated, hurried from before,
 To have it out of sight and cleanse my soul!

¹ *Elucubrate*: literally, to study by lamplight, here meaning to study out elaborately.

Here it is all again, conserved for use :
Twelve hours hence, I may know more, not hate worse. 255

That young May-moon-month! Devils of the deep!
Was not a Pope then Pope as much as now?
Used not he chirrup o'er the Merry Tales,¹
Chuckle, — his nephew so exact the wag 260
To play a jealous cullion such a trick
As wins the wife i' the pleasant story! Well?
Why do things change? Wherefore is Rome un-Romed?
I tell you, ere Felice's corpse was cold,
The Duke, that night, threw wide his palace-doors, 265
Received the compliments o' the quality
For justice done him. — bowed and smirked his best,
And in return passed round a pretty thing,
A portrait of Felice's sister's self,
Florid old rogue Albano's² masterpiece. 270
As — better than virginity in rags —
Bouncing Europa³ on the back o' the bull :
They laughed and took their road the safelier home.
Ah, but times change, there 's quite another Pope,
I do the Duke's deed, take Felice's place. 275
And, being no Felice, lout and clout,
Stomach but ill the phrase "I lost my head!"
How euphemistic! Lose what? Lose your ring.
Your snuff-box, tablets, kerchief! — but, your head?
I learnt the process at an early age; 280
'T was useful knowledge, in those same old days.
To know the way a head is set on neck.
My fencing-master urged "Would you excel?
Rest not content with mere bold give-and-guard.
Nor pink the antagonist somehow-anyhow! 285
See me dissect a little, and know your game!
Only anatomy makes a thrust the thing."
Oh Cardinal, those lithe live necks of ours!
Here go the vertebræ, here 's *Atlas*,⁴ here
Axis,⁵ and here the symphyses⁶ stop short, 290
So wisely and well. — as, o'er a corpse, we cant. —
And here 's the silver cord which . . . what 's our word?

¹ *Merry Tales* : the "Novelle" of Franco Sacchetti, 1385-1400.

² *Albano* : Francesco Albano (1578-1660), an Italian painter born at Bologna, whose paintings of the assumption of St. Sebastian are in St. Sebastian church in Rome.

³ *Europa* : daughter of Agenor, King of Phœnicia. Jupiter became enamoured of her,

and appearing before her in the form of a bull carried her off to Crete.

⁴ *Atlas* : the name given the first cervical vertebra carrying the head.

⁵ *Axis* : the second cervical vertebra.

⁶ *Symphyses* : the cartilaginous union of the bones.

Depends from the gold bowl,¹ which loosed (not "lost")
 Lets us from heaven to hell,—one chop, we're loose!
 "And not much pain i' the process," quoth a sage: 295
 Who told him? Not Felice's ghost, I think!
 Such "losing" is scarce Mother Nature's mode.
 She fain would have cord ease itself away,
 Worn to a thread by threescore years and ten,
 Snap while we slumber: that seems bearable. 300
 I'm told one clot of blood extravasate²
 Ends one as certainly as Roland's sword,³—
 One drop of lymph suffused proves Oliver's mace,⁴—
 Intruding, either of the pleasant pair,
 On the arachnoid tunic of my brain. 305
 That's Nature's way of loosing cord!—but Art,
 How of Art's process with the engine here,
 When bowl and cord alike are crushed across,
 Bored between, bruised through? Why, if Fagon's self,
 The French Court's pride, that famed practitioner, 310
 Would pass his cold pale lightning of a knife,
 Pistoja-ware, adroit 'twixt joint and joint,
 With just a "See how facile, gentlefolk!"—
 The thing were not so bad to bear! Brute force
 Cuts as he comes, breaks in, breaks on, breaks out 315
 O' the hard and soft of you: is that the same?
 A lithe snake thrids the hedge, makes throb no leaf:
 A heavy ox sets chests to brier and branch,
 Bursts somehow through, and leaves one hideous hole
 Behind him!

And why, why must this needs be? 320
 Oh, if men were but good! They are not good,
 Nowise like Peter: people called him rough,
 But if, as I left Rome, I spoke the Saint,
 —"Petrus, quo vadis?"⁵ —doubtless, I should hear,
 "To free the prisoner and forgive his fault! 325
 I plucked the absolute dead from God's own bar,
 And raised up Dorcas,⁶—why not rescue thee?"

¹ *Silver cord . . . gold bowl*: Ecclesiastes xii. 6.

² *Extravasate*: let out of the proper vessels.

³ *Roland's sword*: Roland the hero of the "Song of Roland," who was a nephew and paladin of Charlemagne's, wielded a trusty sword called "Durandal."

⁴ *Oliver's mace*: Roland's companion at arms, who always competed with him in knightly prowess.

⁵ *Petrus, quo vadis*: "Peter, whither goest

thou?" an allusion to the legend that St. Peter was leaving Rome on the outbreak of the Neronian persecution, when he met Christ coming towards the city, and addressed Him with the words, "*Domine, quo vadis?*" "Lord, whither goest Thou?" The answer was, "*Venio iterum crucifigi*," "To Rome, to be crucified again"; whereupon Peter was ashamed and turned back and met his martyrdom.

⁶ *Dorcas*: Acts ix. 36-41.

What would cost one such nullifying word?
 If Innocent succeeds to Peter's place,
 Let him think Peter's thought, speak Peter's speech! 330
 I say, he is bound to it: friends, how say you?
 Concede I be all one bloodguiltiness
 And mystery of murder in the flesh,
 Why should that fact keep the Pope's mouth shut fast?
 He execrates my crime. — good! — sees hell yawn 335
 One inch from the red plank's end which I press, —
 Nothing is better! What's the consequence?
 How should a Pope proceed that knows his cue?
 Why, leave me linger out my minute here,
 Since close on death comes judgment and comes doom, 340
 Not crib at dawn its pittance from a sheep
 Destined ere dewfall to be butcher's-meat!
 Think, Sirs, if I have done you any harm,
 And you require the natural revenge,
 Suppose, and so intend to poison me. 345
 — Just as you take and slip into my draught
 The paperful of powder that clears scores,
 You notice on my brow a certain blue:
 How you both overset the wine at once!
 How you both smile! "Our enemy has the plague!" 350
 Twelve hours hence he'll be scraping his bones bare
 Of that intolerable flesh, and die,
 Frenzied with pain: no need for poison here!
 Step aside and enjoy the spectacle!"
 Tender for souls are you, Pope Innocent! 355
 Christ's maxim is — one soul outweighs the world:
 Respite me, save a soul, then, curse the world!
 "No," venerable sire, I hear you smirk,
 "No: for Christ's gospel changes names, not things,
 Renews the obsolete, does nothing more!" 360
 Our fire-new gospel is re-tinkered law,
 Our mercy, justice, — Jove's rechristened God, —
 Nay, whereas, in the popular conceit,
 'T is pity that old harsh Law somehow limps,
 Lingers on earth, although Law's day be done, 365
 Else would benignant Gospel interpose,
 Not furtively as now, but bold and frank
 O'erflutter us with healing in her wings,
 Law being harshness, Gospel only love —
 We tell the people, on the contrary, 370
 Gospel takes up the rod which Law lets fall;
 Mercy is vigilant when justice sleeps!
 Does Law permit a taste of Gospel-grace?
 The secular arm allow the spiritual power
 To act for once? — no compliment so fine 375

As that our Gospel handsomely turn harsh,
 Thrust victim back on Law the nice and coy !”
 Yes, you do say so, else you would forgive
 Me whom Law does not touch but tosses you!
 Don't think to put on the professional face! 380
 You know what I know : casuist as you are.
 Each nerve must creep, each hair start, sting and stand,
 At such illogical inconsequence!
 Dear my friends, do but see! A murder 's tried,
 There are two parties to the cause : I 'm one, 385
 — Defend myself, as somebody must do :
 I have the best o' the battle : that 's a fact,
 Simple fact, — fancies find no place just now.
 What though half Rome condemned me? Half approved :
 And, none disputes, the luck is mine at last, 390
 All Rome, i' the main, acquitting me : whereon,
 What has the Pope to ask but “How finds Law?”
 “I find,” replies Law, “I have erred this while :
 Guilty or guiltless, Guido proves a priest,
 No layman : he is therefore yours, not mine : 395
 I bound him : loose him, you whose will is Christ's!”
 And now what does this Vicar of our Lord,
 Shepherd o' the flock, — one of whose charge bleats sore
 For crook's help from the quag wherein it drowns?
 Law suffers him employ the crumpled end : 400
 His pleasure is to turn staff, use the point,
 And thrust the shuddering sheep, he calls a wolf.
 Back and back, down and down to where hell gapes!
 “Guiltless,” cries Law — “Guilty” corrects the Pope!
 “Guilty,” for the whim's sake! “Guilty,” he somehow thinks. 405
 And anyhow says : 't is truth ; he dares not lie!

Others should do the lying. That 's the cause
 Brings you both here : I ought in decency
 Confess to you that I deserve my fate,
 Am guilty, as the Pope thinks, — ay, to the end, 410
 Keep up the jest, lie on, lie ever, lie
 I' the latest gasp of me! What reason, Sirs?
 Because to-morrow will succeed to-day
 For you, though not for me : and if I stick
 Still to the truth, declare with my last breath, 415
 I die an innocent and murdered man, —
 Why, there 's the tongue of Rome will wag apace
 This time to-morrow : don't I hear the talk!
 “So, to the last he proved impenitent?
 Pagans have said as much of martyred saints! 420
 Law demurred, washed her hands of the whole case.
 Prince Somebody said this, Duke Something, that.

Doubtless the man 's dead, dead enough, don't fear!
 But, hang it, what if there have been a spice,
 A touch of . . . eh? You see, the Pope 's so old, 425
 Some of us add, obtuse: age never slips
 The chance of shoving youth to face death first!"
 And so on. Therefore to suppress such talk
 You two come here, entreat I tell you lies,
 And end, the edifying way. I end. 430
 Telling the truth! Your self-styled shepherd thieves!
 A thief — and how thieves hate the wolves we know:
 Damage to theft, damage to thrift, all 's one!
 The red hand is sworn foe of the black jaw.
 That 's only natural, that 's right enough: 435
 But why the wolf should compliment the thief
 With shepherd's title, bark out life in thanks,
 And, spiteless, lick the prong that spits him, — eh,
 Cardinal? My Abate, scarcely thus!
 There, let my sheepskin-garb, a curse on 't, go — 440
 Leave my teeth free if I must show my shag!
 Repent? What good shall follow? If I pass
 Twelve hours repenting, will that fact hold fast
 The thirteenth at the horrid dozen's end?
 If I fall forthwith at your feet, gnash, tear, 445
 Foam, rave, to give your story the due grace,
 Will that assist the engine half-way back
 Into its hiding-house? — boards, shaking now,
 Bone against bone, like some old skeleton bat
 That wants, at winter's end, to wake and prey! 450
 Will howling put the spectre back to sleep?
 Ah, but I misconceive your object, Sirs!
 Since I want new life like the creature, — life
 Being done with here, begins i' the world away:
 I shall next have "Come, mortals, and be judged!" 455
 There 's but a minute betwixt this and then:
 So, quick, be sorry since it saves my soul!
 Sirs, truth shall save it, since no lies assist!
 Hear the truth, you, whatever you style yourselves,
 Civilization and society! 460
 Come, one good grapple, I with all the world!
 Dying in cold blood is the desperate thing;
 The angry heart explodes, bears off in blaze
 The indignant soul, and I 'm combustion-ripe.
 Why, you intend to do your worst with me! 465
 That 's in your eyes! You dare no more than death,
 And mean no less. I must make up my mind.
 So Pietro, — when I chased him here and there,
 Morsel by morsel cut away the life
 I loathed, — cried for just respite to confess 470

And save his soul: much respite did I grant!
 Why grant me respite who deserve my doom?
 Me — who engaged to play a prize, fight you,
 Knowing your arms, and foil you, trick for trick,
 At rapier-fence, your match and, maybe, more. 475
 I knew that if I chose sin certain sins,
 Solace my lusts out of the regular way
 Prescribed me, I should find you in the path,
 Have to try skill with a redoubted foe;
 You would lunge, I would parry, and make end. 480
 At last, occasion of a murder comes:
 We cross blades, I, for all my brag, break guard,
 And in goes the cold iron at my breast,
 Out at my back, and end is made of me.
 You stand confessed the adroiter swordsman, — ay, 485
 But on your triumph you increase, it seems,
 Want more of me than lying flat on face:
 I ought to raise my ruined head, allege
 Not simply I pushed worse blade o' the pair,
 But my antagonist dispensed with steel! 490
 There was no passage of arms, you looked me low,
 With brow and eye abolished cut and thrust
 Nor used the vulgar weapon! This chance scratch,
 This incidental hurt, this sort of hole
 I' the heart of me? I stumbled, got it so! 495
 Fell on my own sword as a bungler may!
 Yourself proscribe such heathen tools, and trust
 To the naked virtue: it was virtue stood
 Unarmed and awed me, — on my brow there burned
 Crime out so plainly intolerably red, 500
 That I was fain to cry — “Down to the dust
 With me, and bury there brow, brand and all!”
 Law had essayed the adventure. — but what 's Law?
 Morality exposed the Gorgon shield!¹
 Morality and Religion conquer me. 505
 If Law sufficed would you come here, entreat
 I supplement law, and confess forsooth?
 Did not the Trial show things plain enough?
 “Ah, but a word of the man's very self
 Would somehow put the keystone in its place 510
 And crown the arch!” Then take the word you want!

I say that, long ago, when things began,
 All the world made agreement, such and such

¹ *Gorgon shield*: the shield worn by the chaste Minerva, on which was the snaky head of the Medusa, most deadly of the three Gorgons, and which had power to turn her foes to stone with one look upon it.

Were pleasure-giving profit-bearing acts,
 But henceforth extra-legal, nor to be: 515
 You must not kill the man whose death would please
 And profit you, unless his life stop yours
 Plainly, and need so be put aside:
 Get the thing by a public course, by law,
 Only no private bloodshed as of old! 520
 All of us, for the good of every one,
 Renounced such license and conformed to law:
 Who breaks law, breaks pact therefore, helps himself
 To pleasure and profit over and above the due.
 And must pay forfeit, — pain beyond his share: 525
 For, pleasure being the sole good in the world.
 Any one's pleasure turns to some one's pain.
 So, law must watch for every one, — say we,
 Who call things wicked that give too much joy.
 And nickname mere reprisal, envy makes, 530
 Punishment: quite right! thus the world goes round.
 I, being well aware such pact there was,
 I, in my time who found advantage come
 Of law's observance and crime's penalty, —
 Who, but for wholesome fear law bred in friends, 535
 Had doubtless given example long ago,
 Furnished forth some friend's pleasure with my pain,
 And, by my death, pieced out his scanty life. —
 I could not, for that foolish life of me,
 Help risking law's infringement. — I broke bond. 540
 And needs must pay price, — wherefore, here 's my head,
 Flung with a flourish! . But, repentance too?
 But pure and simple sorrow for law's breach
 Rather than blunderer's-ineptitude?
 Cardinal, no! Abate, scarcely thus! 545
 'T is the fault, not that I dared try a fall
 With Law and straightway am found undermost,
 But that I failed to see, above man's law,
 God's precept you, the Christians, recognize?
 Colly my cow! Don't fidget, Cardinal! 550
 Abate, cross your breast and count your beads
 And exorcize the devil, for here he stands
 And stiffens in the bristly nape of neck,
 Daring you drive him hence! You, Christians both?
 I say, if ever was such faith at all 555
 Born in the world, by your community
 Suffered to live its little tick of time,
 'T is dead of age, now, ludicrously dead;
 Honor its ashes, if you be discreet,
 In epitaph only! For, concede its death, 560
 Allow extinction, you may boast unchecked

What feats the thing did in a crazy land
 At a fabulous epoch, — treat your faith, that way,
 Just as you treat your relics: “Here ’s a shred
 Of saintly flesh, a scrap of blessed bone, 565
 Raised King Cophetua,¹ who was dead, to life
 In Mesopotamy twelve centuries since,
 Such was its virtue!” — twangs the Sacristan,
 Holding the shrine-box up, with hands like feet
 Because of gout in every finger joint: 570
 Does he bethink him to reduce one knob,
 Allay one twinge by touching what he vaunts?
 I think he half uncrooks fist to catch fee,
 But, for the grace, the quality of cure, —
 Cophetua was the man put that to proof! 575
 Not otherwise, your faith is shrined and shown
 And shamed at once: you banter while you bow!
 Do you dispute this? Come, a monster-laugh,
 A madman’s laugh, allowed his Carnival
 Later ten days than when all Rome, but he, 580
 Laughed at the candle-contest: mine’s alight,
 ’T is just it sputter till the puff o’ the Pope
 End it to-morrow and the world turn Ash.
 Come, thus I wave a wand and bring to pass
 In a moment, in the twinkle of an eye, 585
 What but that — feigning everywhere grows fact,
 Professors turn possessors, realize
 The faith they play with as a fancy now,
 And bid it operate, have full effect
 On every circumstance of life, to-day, 590
 In Rome, — faith’s flow set free at fountain-head!
 Now, you’ll own, at this present, when I speak,
 Before I work the wonder, there’s no man
 Woman or child in Rome, faith’s fountain-head,
 But might, if each were minded, realize 595
 Conversely unbelief, faith’s opposite —
 Set it to work on life unflinchingly,
 Yet give no symptom of an outward change:
 Why should things change because men disbelieve
 What’s incompatible, in the whited tomb, 600
 With bones and rottenness one inch below?
 What saintly act is done in Rome to-day
 But might be prompted by the devil, — “is”
 I say not, — “has been, and again may be, —”
 I do say, full i’ the face o’ the crucifix 605
 You try to stop my mouth with! Off with it!

¹ *King Cophetua*: evidently another Co- beggar-maid, and probably an original instance
 phetua than he of Africa who married the of Browning’s.

Look in your own heart, if your soul have eyes!
 You shall see reason why, though faith were fled,
 Unbelief still might work the wires and move
 Man, the machine, to play a faithful part. 610
 Preside your college, Cardinal, in your cape,
 Or, — having got above his head, grown Pope, —
 Abate, gird your loins and wash my feet!
 Do you suppose I am at loss at all
 Why you crook, why you cringe, why fast or feast? 615
 Praise, blame, sit, stand, lie or go! — all of it,
 In each of you, purest unbelief may prompt,
 And wit explain to who has eyes to see.
 But, lo, I wave wand, make the false the true!
 Here 's Rome believes in Christianity! 620
 What an explosion, how the fragments fly
 Of what was surface, mask and make-believe!
 Begin now, — look at this Pope's-halberdier
 In wasp-like black and yellow foolery!
 He, doing duty at the corridor, 625
 Wakes from a muse and stands convinced of sin!
 Down he flings halbert, leaps the passage-length,
 Pushes into the presence, pantingly
 Submits the extreme peril of the case
 To the Pope's self, — whom in the world beside? — 630
 And the Pope breaks talk with ambassador,
 Bids aside bishop, wills the whole world wait
 Till he secure that prize, outweighs the world,
 A soul, relieve the sentry of his qualm!
 His Altitude the Referendary. — 635
 Robed right, and ready for the usher's word
 To pay devoir, — is, of all times, just then
 'Ware of a master-stroke of argument
 Will cut the spinal cord . . . ugh, ugh! . . . I mean,
 Paralyze Molinism for evermore! 640
 Straight he leaves lobby, trundles, two and two,
 Down steps to reach home, write, if but a word
 Shall end the impudence: he leaves who likes
 Go pacify the Pope: there 's Christ to serve!
 How otherwise would men display their zeal? 645
 If the same sentry had the least surmise
 A powder-barrel 'neath the pavement lay
 In neighborhood with what might prove a match,
 Meant to blow sky-high Pope and presence both —
 Would he not break through courtiers, rank and file, 650
 Bundle up, bear off and save body so,
 The Pope, no matter for his priceless soul?
 There 's no fool's-freak here, naught to soundly swinge,
 Only a man in earnest, you 'll so praise

And pay and prate about, that earth shall ring! 655
 Had thought possessed the Referendary
 His jewel-case at home was left ajar,
 What would be wrong in running, robes awry,
 To be beforehand with the pilferer?
 What talk then of indecent haste? Which means, 660
 That both these, each in his degree, would do
 Just that, — for a comparative nothing's sake,
 And thereby gain approval and reward, —
 Which, done for what Christ says is worth the world,
 Procures the doer curses, cuffs and kicks. 665
 I call such difference 'twixt act and act,
 Sheer lunacy unless your truth on lip
 Be recognized a lie in heart of you!
 How do you all act, promptly or in doubt,
 When there's a guest poisoned at supper-time 670
 And he sits chatting on with spot on cheek?
 "Pluck him by the skirt, and round him in the ears,
 Have at him by the beard, warn anyhow!"
 Good, and this other friend that's cheat and thief
 And dissolute, — go stop the devil's feast, 675
 Withdraw him from the imminent hell-fire!
 Why, for your life, you dare not tell your friend
 "You lie, and I admonish you for Christ!"
 Who yet dare seek that same man at the Mass
 To warn him — on his knees, and tinkle¹ near. — 680
 He left a cask a-tilt, a tap unturned,
 The Trebbian² running: what a grateful jump
 Out of the Church rewards your vigilance!
 Perform that self-same service just a thought
 More maladroitly, — since a bishop sits 685
 At function! — and he budes not, bites lip. —
 "You see my case: how can I quit my post?
 He has an eye to any such default.
 See to it, neighbor. I beseech your love!"
 He and you know the relative worth of things, 690
 What is permissible or inopportune.
 Contort your brows! You know I speak the truth:
 Gold is called gold, and dross called dross, i' the Book:
 Gold you let lie and dross pick up and prize!
 — Despite your muster of some fifty monks 695
 And nuns a-maundering here and mumping there,
 Who could, and on occasion would, spurn dross,
 Clutch gold, and prove their faith a fact so far, —
 I grant you! Fifty times the number squeak

¹ *Tinkle*: the ringing of the bell which denotes the elevation of the Host.

² *Trebbian*: wine from Trevi.

And gibber in the madhouse — firm of faith, 700
 This fellow, that his nose supports the moon ;
 The other, that his straw hat crowns him Pope :
 Does that prove all the world outside insane ?
 Do fifty miracle-mongers match the mob
 That acts on the frank faithless principle, 705
 Born-baptized-and-bred Christian-atheists, each
 With just as much a right to judge as you. —
 As many senses in his soul, and nerves
 I' neck of him as I, — whom, soul and sense,
 Neck and nerve, you abolish presently, — 710
 I being the unit in creation now
 Who pay the Maker, in this speech of mine,
 A creature's duty, spend my last of breath
 In bearing witness, even by my worst fault,
 To the creature's obligation, absolute, 715
 Perpetual : my worst fault protests, " The faith
 Claims all of me : I would give all she claims,
 But for a spice of doubt : the risk 's too rash :
 Double or quits, I play, but, all or naught,
 Exceeds my courage : therefore, I descend 720
 To the next faith with no dubiety —
 Faith in the present life, made last as long
 And prove as full of pleasure as may hap,
 Whatever pain it cause the world." I'm wrong ?
 I've had my life, whate'er I lose : I'm right ? 725
 I've got the single good there was to gain.
 Entire faith, or else complete unbelief !
 Aught between has my loathing and contempt,
 Mine and God's also, doubtless : ask yourself,
 Cardinal, where and how you like a man ! 730
 Why, either with your feet upon his head,
 Confessed your caudatory,¹ or, at large,
 The stranger in the crowd who caps to you
 But keeps his distance. — why should he presume ?
 You want no hanger-on and dropper-off, 735
 Now yours, and now not yours but quite his own.
 According as the sky looks black or bright.
 Just so I capped to and kept off from faith —
 You promised trudge behind through fair and foul,
 Yet leave i' the lurch at the first spit of rain. 740
 Who holds to faith whenever rain begins ?
 What does the father when his son lies dead.
 The merchant when his money-bags take wing,
 The politician whom a rival ousts ?
 No case but has its conduct, faith prescribes : 745

¹ *Caudatory* : one of a train, a dependent.

Where's the obedience that shall edify?
 Why, they laugh frankly in the face of faith
 And take the natural course, — this rends his hair
 Because his child is taken to God's breast.
 That gnashes teeth and raves at loss of trash 750
 Which rust corrupts and thieves break through and steal,
 And this, enabled to inherit earth
 Through meekness, curses till your blood runs cold!
 Down they all drop to my low level, rest
 Heart upon dungy earth that 's warm and soft, 755
 And let who please attempt the altitudes.
 Each playing prodigal son of heavenly sire,
 Turning his nose up at the fatted calf,
 Fain to fill belly with the husks, we swine
 Did eat by born depravity of taste! 760

Enough of the hypocrites. But you, Sirs, you —
 Who never bugged from litter where I lay,
 And buried snout i' the draff-box while I fed,
 Cried amen to my creed's one article —
 "Get pleasure, 'scape pain, — give your preference 765
 To the immediate good, for time is brief,
 And death ends good and ill and everything!
 What 's got is gained, what 's gained soon is gained twice,
 And, — inasmuch as faith gains most, — feign faith!"
 So did we brother-like pass word about : 770
 — You, now, — like bloody drunkards but half-drunk,
 Who fool men yet perceive men find them fools, —
 Vexed that a titter gains the gravest mouth, —
 O' the sudden you must needs re-introduce
 Solemnity, straight sober undue mirth 775
 By a blow dealt me your boon companion here
 Who, using the old license, dreamed of harm
 No more than snow in harvest : yet it falls!
 You check the merriment effectually
 By pushing your abrupt machine i' the midst, 780
 Making me Rome's example : blood for wine!
 The general good needs that you chop and change!
 I may dislike the hocus-pocus, — Rome,
 The laughter-loving people, won't they stare
 Chap-fallen! — while serious natures sermonize 785
 "The magistrate, he beareth not the sword
 In vain ; who sins may taste its edge, we see!"
 Why my sin, drunkards? Where have I abused
 Liberty, scandalized you all so much?
 Who called me, who crooked finger till I came, 790
 Fool that I was, to join companionship?
 I knew my own mind, meant to live my life,

Elude your envy, or else make a stand,
 Take my own part and sell you my life dear.
 But it was "Fie! No prejudice in the world
 To the proper manly instinct! Cast your lot
 Into our lap, one genius ruled our births. 795
 We'll compass joy by concert; take with us
 The regular irregular way i' the wood;
 You'll miss no game through riding breast by breast,
 In this preserve, the Church's park and pale, 800
 Rather than outside where the world lies waste!"
 Come, if you said not that, did you say this?
 Give plain and terrible warning, "Live, enjoy?
 Such life begins in death and ends in hell! 805
 Dare you bid us assist your sins, us priests
 Who hurry sin and sinners from the earth?
 No such delight for us, why then for you?
 Leave earth, seek heaven or find its opposite!"
 Had you so warned me, not in lying words 810
 But veritable deeds with tongues of flame,
 That had been fair, that might have struck a man,
 Silenced the squabble between soul and sense.
 Compelled him to make mind up, take one course
 Or the other, peradventure! — wrong or right, 815
 Foolish or wise, you would have been at least
 Sincere, no question, — forced me choose, indulge
 Or else renounce my instincts, still play wolf
 Or find my way submissive to your fold,
 Be red-crossed on my fleece, one sheep the more. 820
 But you as good as bade me wear sheep's wool
 Over wolf's skin, suck blood and hide the noise
 By mimicry of something like a bleat, —
 Whence it comes that because, despite my care,
 Because I smack my tongue too loud for once, 825
 Drop baaing, here 's the village up in arms!
 Have at the wolf's throat, you who hate the breed!
 Oh, were it only open yet to choose —
 One little time more — whether I'd be free
 Your foe, or subsidized your friend forsooth! 830
 Should not you get a growl through the white fangs
 In answer to your beckoning! Cardinal,
 Abate, managers o' the multitude,
 I'd turn your gloved hands to account, be sure!
 You should manipulate the coarse rough mob : 835
 'T is you I'd deal directly with, not them. —
 Using your fears : why touch the thing myself
 When I could see you hunt, and then cry "Shares!
 Quarter the carcase or we quarrel; come,
 Here 's the world ready to see justice done!" 840

Oh, it had been a desperate game, but game
 Wherein the winner's chance were worth the pains!
 We 'd try conclusions! — at the worst, what worse
 Than this Mannaia-machine, each minute's talk
 Helps push an inch the nearer me? Fool, fool! 845

You understand me and forgive, sweet Sirs?
 I blame you, tear my hair and tell my woe —
 All 's but a flourish, figure of rhetoric!
 One must try each expedient to save life.
 One makes fools look foolisher fifty-fold 850
 By putting in their place men wise like you,
 To take the full force of an argument
 Would buffet their stolidity in vain.

If you should feel aggrieved by the mere wind
 O' the blow that means to miss you and maul them, 855
 That 's my success! Is it not folly, now,
 To say with folk, "A plausible defence —
 We see through notwithstanding, and reject"?
 Reject the plausible they do, these fools,
 Who never even made pretence to show 860
 One point beyond its plausibility

In favor of the best belief they hold!
 "Saint Somebody-or-other raised the dead:"
 Did he? How do you come to know as much?
 "Know it, what need? The story 's plausible, 865
 Avouched for by a martyrologist,

And why should good men sup on cheese and leeks
 On such a saint's day, if there were no saint?"
 I praise the wisdom of these fools, and straight
 Tell them my story — "plausible, but false!" 870
 False, to be sure! What else can story be

That runs — a young wife tired of an old spouse,
 Found a priest whom she fled away with, — both
 Took their full pleasure in the two-days' flight,
 Which a gray-headed grayer-hearted pair, 875
 (Whose best boast was, their life had been a lie)
 Helped for the love they bore all liars. Oh,
 Here incredulity begins! Indeed?

Allow then, were no one point strictly true,
 There 's that i' the tale might seem like truth at least 880
 To the unlucky husband. — jaundiced patch —
 Jealousy maddens people, why not him?
 Say, he was maddened, so forgivable!

Humanity pleads that though the wife were true,
 The priest true, and the pair of liars true, 885
 They might seem false to one man in the world!
 A thousand gnats make up a serpent's sting,

And many sly soft stimulants to wrath
 Compose a formidable wrong at last
 That gets called easily by some one name 890
 Not applicable to the single parts,
 And so draws down a general revenge,
 Excessive if you take crime, fault by fault.
 Jealousy! I have known a score of plays,
 Were listened to and laughed at in my time 895
 As like the everyday-life on all sides,
 Wherein the husband, mad as a March hare,
 Suspected all the world contrived his shame.
 What did the wife? The wife kissed both eyes blind,
 Explained away ambiguous circumstance. 900
 And while she held him captive by the hand,
 Crowned his head, — you know what 's the mockery, —
 By half her body behind the curtain. That 's
 Nature now! That 's the subject of a piece
 I saw in Vallombrosa Convent,¹ made 905
 Expressly to teach men what marriage was!
 But say "Just so did I misapprehend,
 Imagine she deceived me to my face,"
 And that 's pretence too easily seen through!
 All those eyes of all husbands in all plays, 910
 At stare like one expanded peacock-tail,
 Are laughed at for pretending to be keen
 While horn-blind: but the moment I step forth —
 Oh, I must needs o' the sudden prove a lynx
 And look the heart, that stone-wall, through and through! 915
 Such an eye, God's may be, — not yours nor mine.

Yes, presently . . . what hour is fleeting now?
 When you cut earth away from under me,
 I shall be left alone with, pushed beneath
 Some such an apparitional dread orb 920
 As the eye of God, since such an eye there glares:
 I fancy it go filling up the void
 Above my mote-self it devours, or what
 Proves — wrath, immensity wreaks on nothingness.
 Just how I felt once, couching through the dark, 925
 Hard by Vittiano; young I was, and gay,
 And wanting to trap fieldfares: first a spark
 Tipped a bent, as a mere dew-globule might
 Any stiff grass-stalk on the meadow, — this
 Grew fiercer, flamed out full, and proved the sun. 930

¹ *Vallombrosa Convent*: the famous monastery near Florence, founded about 1650 by a repentant profligate of high rank who would be likely to approve such a piece as Browning indicates.

What do I want with proverbs, precepts here?
 Away with man! What shall I say to God?
 This, if I find the tongue and keep the mind —
 “Do Thou wipe out the being of me, and smear
 This soul from off Thy white of things, I blot! 935
 I am one huge and sheer mistake, — whose fault?
 Not mine at least, who did not make myself!”
 Some one declares my wife excused me so!
 Perhaps she knew what argument to use.
 Grind your teeth, Cardinal: Abate, writhe! 940
 What else am I to cry out in my rage,
 Unable to repent one particle
 O’ the past? Oh, how I wish some cold wise man
 Would dig beneath the surface which you scrape.
 Deal with the depths, pronounce on my desert 945
 Groundedly! I want simple sober sense.
 That asks, before it finishes with a dog,
 Who taught the dog that trick you hang him for?
 You both persist to call that act a crime,
 Which sense would call . . . yes, I maintain it, Sirs, . . .
 A blunder! At the worst, I stood in doubt 951
 On cross-road, took one path of many paths:
 It leads to the red thing, we all see now,
 But nobody saw at first: one primrose-patch
 In bank, one singing-bird in bush, the less, 955
 Had warned me from such wayfare: let me prove!
 Put me back to the cross-road, start afresh!
 Advise me when I take the first false step!
 Give me my wife: how should I use my wife,
 Love her or hate her? Prompt my action now! 960
 There she is, there she stands alive and pale,
 The thirteen-years’-old child, with milk for blood,
 Pompilia Comparini, as at first.
 Which first is only four brief years ago!
 I stand too in the little ground-floor room 965
 O’ the father’s house at Via Vittoria: see!
 Her so-called mother, — one arm round the waist
 O’ the child to keep her from the toys, let fall
 At wonder I can live yet look so grim, —
 Ushers her in, with deprecating wave 970
 Of the other, — and she fronts me loose at last,
 Held only by the mother’s finger-tip.
 Struck dumb, — for she was white enough before!
 She eyes me with those frightened balls of black,
 As heifer — the old simile comes pat — 975
 Eyes tremblingly the altar and the priest.
 The amazed look, all one insuppressive prayer, —
 Might she but breathe, set free as heretofore,

Have this cup leave her lips unblistered, bear
 Any cross anywhither anyhow, 980
 So but alone, so but apart from me!
 You are touched? So am I, quite otherwise,
 If 't is with pity. I resent my wrong,
 Being a man: I only show man's soul
 Through man's flesh: she sees mine, it strikes her thus! 985
 Is that attractive? To a youth perhaps —
 Calf-creature, one-part boy to three-parts girl,
 To whom it is a flattering novelty
 That he, men use to motion from their path,
 Can thus impose, thus terrify in turn 990
 A chit whose terror shall be changed apace
 To bliss unbearable when grace and glow,
 Prowess and pride descend the throne and touch
 Esther in all that pretty tremble. cured
 By the dove o' the sceptre! But myself am old, 995
 O' the wane at least, in all things: what do you say
 To her who frankly thus confirms my doubt?
 I am past the prime, I scare the woman-world,
 Done-with that way: you like this piece of news?
 A little saucy rose-bud minx can strike 1000
 Death-damp into the breast of doughty king
 Though 't were French Louis,— soul I understand,—
 Saying, by gesture of repugnance, just
 "Sire, you are regal, puissant and so forth,
 But— young you have been, are not, nor will be!" 1005
 In vain the mother nods, winks, bustles up,
 "Count, girls incline to mature worth like you!
 As for Pompilia, what 's flesh, fish, or fowl
 To one who apprehends no difference,
 And would accept you even were you old 1010
 As you are . . . youngish by her father's side?
 Trim but your beard a little, thin your bush
 Of eyebrow; and for presence, portliness,
 And decent gravity, you beat a boy!"
 Deceive yourself one minute, if you may, 1015
 In presence of the child that so loves age,
 Whose neck writhes, cords itself against your kiss,
 Whose hand you wring stark, rigid with despair!
 Well, I resent this; I am young in soul,
 Nor old in body,— thews and sinews here,— 1020
 Though the vile surface be not smooth as once,—
 Far beyond that first wheelwork which went wrong
 Through the untempered iron ere 't was proof:
 I am the wrought man worth ten times the crude,
 Would woman see what this declines to see, 1025
 Declines to say "I see."— the officious word

That makes the thing, pricks on the soul to shoot
 New fire into the half-used cinder, flesh!
 Therefore 't is she begins with wronging me,
 Who cannot but begin with hating her. 1030
 Our marriage follows: there she stands again!
 Why do I laugh? Why, in the very gripe
 O' the jaws of death's gigantic skull, do I
 Grin back his grin, make sport of my own pangs?
 Why from each clashing of his molars, ground 1035
 To make the devil bread from out my grist,
 Leaps out a spark of mirth, a hellish toy?
 Take notice we are lovers in a church,
 Waiting the sacrament to make us one
 And happy! Just as bid, she bears herself, 1040
 Comes and kneels, rises, speaks, is silent, — goes:
 So have I brought my horse, by word and blow,
 To stand stock-still and front the fire he dreads.
 How can I other than remember this,
 Resent the very obedience? Gain thereby? 1045
 Yes, I do gain my end and have my will, —
 Thanks to whom? When the mother speaks the word,
 She obeys it — even to enduring me!
 There had been compensation in revolt —
 Revolt 's to quell: but martyrdom rehearsed, 1050
 But predetermined saintship for the sake
 O' the mother? — “Go!” thought I, “we meet again!”
 Pass the next weeks of dumb contented death,
 She lives, — wakes up, installed in house and home.
 Is mine, mine all day-long, all night-long mine. 1055
 Good folk begin at me with open mouth
 “Now, at least, reconcile the child to life!
 Study and make her love . . . that is, endure
 The . . . hem! the . . . all of you though somewhat old,
 Till it amount to something, in her eye, 1060
 As good as love, better a thousand times, —
 Since nature helps the woman in such strait,
 Makes passiveness her pleasure: failing which,
 What if you give up boy-and-girl-fools'-play
 And go on to wise friendship all at once? 1065
 Those boys and girls kiss themselves cold, you know,
 Toy themselves tired and slink aside full soon
 To friendship, as they name satiety:
 Thither go you and wait their coming!” Thanks,
 Considerate advisers, — but, fair play! 1070
 Had you and I, friends, started fair at first
 We, keeping fair, might reach it. neck by neck,
 This blessed goal, whenever fate so please:
 But why am I to miss the daisied mile

The course begins with, why obtain the dust 1075
 Of the end precisely at the starting-point?
 Why quaff life's cup blown free of all the beads,
 The bright red froth wherein our beard should steep
 Before our mouth essay the black o' the wine?
 Foolish, the love-fit? Let me prove it such 1080
 Like you, before like you I puff things clear!
 "The best 's to come, no rapture but content!
 Not love's first glory but a sober glow,
 Not a spontaneous outburst in pure boon,
 So much as, gained by patience, care and toil, 1085
 Proper appreciation and esteem!"
 Go preach that to your nephews, not to me
 Who, tired i' the midway of my life, would stop
 And take my first refreshment, pluck a rose:
 What 's this coarse woolly hip, worn smooth of leaf, 1090
 You counsel I go plant in garden-plot,
 Water with tears, manure with sweat and blood,
 In confidence the seed shall germinate
 And, for its very best, some far-off day,
 Grow big, and blow me out a dog-rose bell? 1095
 Why must your nephews begin breathing spice
 O' the hundred-petalled Provence prodigy?
 Nay, more and worse, — would such my root bear rose —
 Prove really flower and favorite, not the kind
 That 's queen, but those three leaves that make one cup 1100
 And hold the hedge-bird's breakfast, — then indeed
 The prize though poor would pay the care and toil!
 Respect we Nature that makes least as most,
 Marvellous in the minim! But this bud,
 Bit through and burned black by the tempter's tooth, 1105
 This bloom whose best grace was the slug outside
 And the wasp inside its bosom, — call you "rose"?
 Claim no immunity from a weed's fate
 For the horrible present! What you call my wife
 I call a nullity in female shape, 1110
 Vapid disgust, soon to be pungent plague.
 When mixed with, made confusion and a curse
 By two abominable nondescripts,
 That father and that mother: think you see
 The dreadful bronze our boast, we Aretines, 1115
 The Etruscan monster,¹ the three-headed thing,
 Bellerophon's foe! How name you the whole beast?
 You choose to name the body from one head,

¹ *Etruscan monster*: a relic of Etruscan art at Arezzo, representing the fabulous Chimæra, the three-headed brute which Bellerophon, mounted on Pegasus, the winged horse, destroyed.

That of the simple kid which droops the eye,
 Hangs the neck and dies tenderly enough : 1120
 I rather see the griesly lion belch
 Flame out i' the midst, the serpent writhe her rings,
 Grafted into the common stock for tail,
 And name the brute, Chimæra which I slew!
 How was there ever more to be — (concede 1125
 My wife's insipid harmless nullity) —
 Dissociation from that pair of plagues —
 That mother with her cunning and her cant —
 The eyes with first their twinkle of conceit,
 Then, dropped to earth in mock-demureness, — now, 1130
 The smile self-satisfied from ear to ear,
 Now, the prim pursed-up mouth's protruded lips,
 With deferential duck, slow swing of head,
 Tempting the sudden fist of man too much, —
 That owl-like screw of lid and rock of ruff ! 1135
 As for the father, — Cardinal, you know
 The kind of idiot! — such are rife in Rome,
 But they wear velvet commonly ; good fools,
 At the end of life, to furnish forth young folk
 Who grin and bear with imbecility : 1140
 Since the stalled ass, the joker, sheds from jaw
 Corn, in the joke, for those who laugh or starve.
 But what say we to the same solemn beast
 Wagging his ears and wishful of our pat,
 When turned, with holes in hide and bones laid bare, 1145
 To forage for himself i' the waste o' the world,
 Sir Dignity i' the dumps? Pat him? We drub
 Self-knowledge, rather, into frowzy pate,
 Teach Pietro to get trappings or go hang!
 Fancy this quondam oracle in vogue 1150
 At Via Vittoria, this personified
 Authority when time was, — Pantaloon
 Flaunting his tom-fool tawdry just the same
 As if Ash-Wednesday were mid-Carnival!
 That 's the extreme and unforgivable 1155
 Of sins, as I account such. Have you stooped
 For your own ends to bestialize yourself
 By flattery of a fellow of this stamp?
 The ends obtained or else shown out of reach,
 He goes on, takes the flattery for pure truth. — 1160
 "You love, and honor me, of course : what next?"
 What, but the trifle of the stabbing, friend? —
 Which taught you how one worships when the shrine
 Has lost the relic that we bent before.
 Angry! And how could I be otherwise? 1165
 'T is plain : this pair of old pretentious fools

Meant to fool me : it happens, I fooled them.
 Why could not these who sought to buy and sell
 Me, — when they found themselves were bought and sold,
 Make up their mind to the proved rule of right, 1170
 Be chattel and not chapman any more?
 Miscalculation has its consequence ;
 But when the shepherd crooks a sheep-like thing
 And meaning to get wool, dislodges fleece
 And finds the veritable wolf beneath, 1175
 (How that staunch image serves at every turn!)
 Does he, by way of being politic,
 Pluck the first whisker grimly visible?
 Or rather grow in a trice all gratitude,
 Protest this sort-of-what-one-might-name sheep 1180
 Beats the old other curly-coated kind,
 And shall share board and bed, if so it deign,
 With its discoverer, like a royal ram?
 Ay, thus, with chattering teeth and knocking knees,
 Would wisdom treat the adventure! these, forsooth, 1185
 Tried whisker-plucking, and so found what trap
 The whisker kept perdue, two rows of teeth —
 Sharp, as too late the prying fingers felt.
 What would you have? The fools transgress, the fools
 Forthwith receive appropriate punishment : 1190
 They first insult me, I return the blow,
 There follows noise enough : four hubbub months,
 Now hue and cry, now whimpering and wail —
 A perfect goose-yard cackle of complaint
 Because I do not gild the geese their oats, — 1195
 I have enough of noise, ope wicket wide,
 Sweep out the couple to go whine elsewhere.
 Frightened a little, hurt in no respect,
 And am just taking thought to breathe again,
 Taste the sweet sudden silence all about, 1200
 When, there they raise it, the old noise I know.
 At Rome i' the distance! "What, begun once more?
 Whine on, wail ever, 't is the loser's right!"
 But eh, what sort of voice grows on the wind?
 Triumph it sounds and no complaint at all! 1205
 And triumph it is. My boast was premature :
 The creatures, I turned forth, clapped wing and crew
 Fighting-cock-fashion, — they had filched a pearl
 From dung-heap, and might boast with cause enough!
 I was defrauded of all bargained for : 1210
 You know, the Pope knows, not a soul but knows
 My dowry was derision, my gain — muck,
 My wife, (the Church declared my flesh and blood)
 The nameless bastard of a common whore :

My old name turned henceforth to . . . shall I say 1215
 "He that received the ordure in his face?"
 And they who planned this wrong, performed this wrong,
 And then revealed this wrong to the wide world,
 Rounded myself in the ears with my own wrong, —
 Why, these were (note hell's lucky malice, now!) 1220
 These were just they who, they alone, could act
 And publish and proclaim their infamy,
 Secure that men would in a breath believe
 Compassionate and pardon them, — for why?
 They plainly were too stupid to invent, 1225
 Too simple to distinguish wrong from right, —
 Inconscious agents they, the silly-sooth,
 Of heaven's retributive justice on the strong
 Proud cunning violent oppressor — me!
 Follow them to their fate and help your best, 1230
 You Rome, Arezzo, foes called friends of me,
 They gave the good long laugh to, at my cost!
 Defray your share o' the cost, since you partook
 The entertainment! Do! — assured the while,
 That not one stab, I dealt to right and left, 1235
 But went the deeper for a fancy — this —
 That each might do me two-fold service, find
 A friend's face at the bottom of each wound,
 And scratch its smirk a little!

Panciatichi!

There's a report at Florence, — is it true? — 1240
 That when your relative the Cardinal
 Built, only the other day, that barrack-bulk,
 The palace in Via Larga, someone picked
 From out the street a saucy quip enough
 That fell there from its day's flight through the town, 1245
 About the flat front and the windows wide
 And bulging heap of cornice. — hitched the joke
 Into a sonnet, signed his name thereto,
 And forthwith pinned on post the pleasantry:
 For which he's at the galleys, rowing now 1250
 Up to his waist in water, — just because
Panciatich and *lymphatic* rhymed so pat!
 I hope, Sir, those who passed this joke on me
 Were not unduly punished? What say you,
 Prince of the Church, my patron? Nay, indeed, 1255
 I shall not dare insult your wits so much
 As think this problem difficult to solve.
 This Pietro and Violante then, I say,
 These two ambiguous insects, changing name
 And nature with the season's warmth or chill, — 1260
 Now, grovelled, grubbing toiling moiling ants.

A very synonym of thrift and peace, —
 Anon, with lusty June to prick their heart,
 Soared i' the air, winged flies for more offence,
 Circled me, buzzed me deaf and stung me blind, 1265
 And stunk me dead with fetor in the face
 Until I stopped the nuisance: there 's my crime!
 Pity I did not suffer them subside
 Into some further shape and final form
 Of execrable life? My masters, no! 1270
 I, by one blow, wisely cut short at once
 Them and their transformations of disgust.
 In the snug little Villa out of hand.
 "Grant me confession, give bare time for that!" —
 Shouted the sinner till his mouth was stopped. 1275
 His life confessed! — that was enough for me,
 Who came to see that he did penance. 'S death!
 Here 's a coil raised, a pothor and for what?
 Because strength, being provoked by weakness, fought
 And conquered, — the world never heard the like! 1280
 Pah, how I spend my breath on them, as if
 'T was their fate troubled me, too hard to range
 Among the right and fit and proper things!

Ay, but Pompilia, — I await your word, —
 She, unimpeached of crime, unimplicate 1285
 In folly, one of alien blood to these
 I punish, why extend my claim, exact
 Her portion of the penalty? Yes, friends,
 I go too fast: the orator 's at fault:
 Yes, ere I lay her, with your leave, by them 1290
 As she was laid at San Lorenzo late,
 I ought to step back, lead you by degrees,
 Recounting at each step some fresh offence,
 Up to the red bed, — never fear, I will!
 Gaze at her, where I place her, to begin. 1295
 Confound me with her gentleness and worth!
 The horrible pair have fled and left her now,
 She has her husband for her sole concern:
 His wife, the woman fashioned for his help,
 Flesh of his flesh, bone of his bone, the bride 1300
 To groom as is the Church and Spouse to Christ:
 There she stands in his presence: "Thy desire
 Shall be to the husband, o'er thee shall he rule!"
 — "Pompilia, who declare that you love God,
 You know who said that: then, desire my love, 1305
 Yield me contentment and be ruled aright!"
 She sits up, she lies down, she comes and goes,
 Kneels at the couch-side, overleans the sill

O' the window, cold and pale and mute as stone,
 Strong as stone also. "Well, are they not fled? 1310
 Am I not left, am I not one for all?
 Speak a word, drop a tear, detach a glance,
 Bless me or curse me of your own accord!
 Is it the ceiling only wants your soul,
 Is worth your eyes?" And then the eyes descend, 1315
 And do look at me. Is it at the meal?
 "Speak!" she obeys, "Be silent!" she obeys,
 Counting the minutes till I cry "Depart,"
 As brood-bird when you saunter past her eggs.
 Departs she? just the same through door and wall 1320
 I see the same stone strength of white despair.
 And all this will be never otherwise!
 Before, the parents' presence lent her life :
 She could play off her sex's armory,
 Entreat, reproach, be female to my male, 1325
 Try all the shrieking doubles of the hare,
 Go clamor to the Commissary, bid
 The Archbishop hold my hands and stop my tongue,
 And yield fair sport so : but the tactics change.
 The hare stands stock-still to enrage the hound! 1330
 Since that day when she learned she was no child
 Of those she thought her parents. — that their trick
 Had tricked me whom she thought sole trickster late, —
 Why, I suppose she said within herself
 "Then, no more struggle for my parents' sake! 1335
 And, for my own sake, why needs struggle be?"
 But is there no third party to the pact?
 What of her husband's relish or dislike
 For this new game of giving up the game,
 This worst offence of not offending more? 1340
 I'll not believe but instinct wrought in this,
 Set her on to conceive and execute
 The preferable plague : how sure they probe —
 These jades, the sensitivest soft of man!
 The long black hair was wound now in a wisp, 1345
 Crowned sorrow better than the wild web late :
 No more soiled dress, 't is trimness triumphs now,
 For how should malice go with negligence?
 The frayed silk looked the fresher for her spite!
 There was an end to springing out of bed, 1350
 Praying me, with face buried on my feet,
 Be hindered of my pastime, — so an end
 To my rejoinder, "What, on the ground at last?
 Vanquished in fight, a supplicant for life?
 What if I raise you? 'Ware the casting down 1355
 When next you fight me!" Then, she lay there, mine :

Now, mine she is if I please wring her neck, —
 A moment of disquiet, working eyes,
 Protruding tongue, a long sigh, then no more, —
 As if one killed the horse one could not ride! 1360
 Had I enjoined "Cut off the hair!" — why, snap
 The scissors, and at once a yard or so
 Had fluttered in black serpents to the floor:
 But till I did enjoin it, how she combs,
 Uncurls and draws out to the complete length, 1365
 Plaits, places the insulting rope on head
 To be an eyesore past dishevelment!
 Is all done? Then sit still again and stare!
 I advise — no one think to bear that look
 Of steady wrong, endured as steadily 1370
 — Through what sustainment of deluding hope?
 Who is the friend i' the background that notes all?
 Who may come presently and close accounts?
 This self-possession to the uttermost,
 How does it differ in aught, save degree, 1375
 From the terrible patience of God?

"All which just means,
 She did not love you!" Again the word is launched
 And the fact fronts me! What, you try the wards
 With the true key and the dead lock flies ope?
 No, it sticks fast and leaves you fumbling still! 1380
 You have some fifty servants, Cardinal, —
 Which of them loves you? Which subordinate
 But makes parade of such officiousness
 That, — if there's no love prompts it, — love, the sham,
 Does twice the service done by love, the true? 1385
 God bless us liars, where 's one touch of truth
 In what we tell the world, or world tells us,
 Of how we love each other? All the same,
 We calculate on word and deed, nor err, —
 Bid such a man do such a loving act, 1390
 Sure of effect and negligent of cause,
 Just as we bid a horse, with cluck of tongue,
 Stretch his legs arch-wise, crouch his saddled back
 To foot-reach of the stirrup — all for love,
 And some for memory of the smart of switch 1395
 On the inside of the foreleg — what care we?
 Yet where 's the bond obliges horse to man
 Like that which binds fast wife to husband? God
 Laid down the law: gave man the brawny arm
 And ball of fist — woman the beardless cheek 1400
 And proper place to suffer in the side:
 Since it is he can strike, let her obey!
 Can she feel no love? Let her show the more,

Sham the worse, damn herself praiseworthy!
 Who's that soprano, Rome went mad about 1405
 Last week while I lay rotting in my straw?
 The very jailer gossiped in his praise —
 How, — dressed up like Armida, though a man ;
 And painted to look pretty, though a fright, —
 He still made love so that the ladies swooned, 1410
 Being an eunuch. "Ah, Rinaldo¹ mine!
 But to breathe by thee while Jove slays us both!"
 All the poor bloodless creature never felt,
Si, do, re, mi, fa, squeak and squall — for what?
 Two gold zecchines² the evening. Here's my slave, 1415
 Whose body and soul depend upon my nod,
 Can't falter out the first note in the scale
 For her life! Why blame me if I take the life?
 All women cannot give men love, forsooth!
 No, nor all pullets lay the henwife eggs — 1420
 Whereat she bids them remedy the fault,
 Brood on a chalk-ball: soon the nest is stocked —
 Otherwise, to the plucking and the spit!
 This wife of mine was of another mood —
 Would not begin the lie that ends with truth, 1425
 Nor feign the love that brings real love about:
 Wherefore I judged, sentenced and punished her.
 But why particularize, defend the deed?
 Say that I hated her for no one cause
 Beyond my pleasure so to do, — what then? 1430
 Just on as much incitement acts the world,
 All of you! Look and like! You favor one,
 Browbeat another, leave alone a third, —
 Why should you master natural caprice?
 Pure nature! Try: plant elm by ash in file; 1435
 Both unexceptionable trees enough,
 They ought to overlean each other, pair
 At top, and arch across the avenue
 The whole path to the pleasaunce: do they so —
 Or loathe, lie off abhorrent each from each? 1440
 Lay the fault elsewhere: since we must have faults,
 Mine shall have been, — seeing there's ill in the end
 Come of my course, — that I fare somehow worse
 For the way I took: my fault . . . as God's my judge,
 I see not where my fault lies, that's the truth! 1445
 I ought . . . oh, ought in my own interest
 Have let the whole adventure go untried,
 This chance by marriage: or else, trying it,

¹ *Armida* . . . *Rinaldo*: the lovers in Tasso's "Jerusalem Delivered," on which operas have been founded. ² *Zecchines*: a gold coin worth about two dollars and a half.

Ought to have turned it to account, some one
 O' the hundred otherwises? Ay, my friend, 1450
 Easy to say, easy to do: step right
 Now you've stepped left and stumbled on the thing,
 — The red thing! Doubt I any more than you
 That practice makes man perfect? Give again
 The chance, — same marriage and no other wife, 1455
 Be sure I'll edify you! That's because
 I'm practised, grown fit guide for Guido's self.
 You proffered guidance. — I know, none so well, —
 You laid down law and rolled decorum out,
 From pulpit-corner on the gospel-side, — 1460
 Wanted to make your great experience mine,
 Save me the personal search and pains so: thanks!
 Take your word on life's use? When I take his —
 The muzzled ox that treadeth out the corn,
 Gone blind in padding round and round one path, — 1465
 As to the taste of green grass in the field!
 What do you know o' the world that's trodden flat
 And salted sterile with your daily dung,
 Leavened into a lump of loathsomeness?
 Take your opinion of the modes of life, 1470
 The aims of life, life's triumph or defeat,
 How to feel, how to scheme, and how to do
 Or else leave undone? You preached long and loud
 On high-days, "Take our doctrine upon trust!
 Into the mill-house with you! Grind our corn, 1475
 Relish our chaff, and let the green grass grow!"
 I tried chaff, found I famished on such fare,
 So made this mad rush at the mill-house-door,
 Buried my head up to the ears in dew,
 Browsed on the best: for which you brain me, Sirs! 1480
 Be it so. I conceived of life that way,
 And still declare — life, without absolute use
 Of the actual sweet therein, is death, not life.
 Give me, — pay down, — not promise, which is air, —
 Something that's out of life and better still, 1485
 Make sure reward, make certain punishment.
 Entice me, scare me, — I'll forgo this life;
 Otherwise, no! — the less that words, mere wind,
 Would cheat me of some minutes while they plague,
 Baulk fulness of revenge here, — blame yourselves 1490
 For this eruption of the pent-up soul
 You prisoned first and played with afterward!
 "Deny myself" meant simply pleasure you,
 The sacred and superior, save the mark!
 You, — whose stupidity and insolence 1495
 I must defer to, soothe at every turn, —

Whose swine-like snuffling greed and grunting lust
 I had to wink at or help gratify, —
 While the same passions, — dared they perk in me,
 Me, the immeasurably marked, by God, 1500
 Master of the whole world of such as you, —
 I, boast such passions? 'T was "Suppress them straight!
 Or stay, we'll pick and choose before destroy.
 Here's wrath in you, a serviceable sword, —
 Beat it into a ploughshare! What's this long 1505
 Lance-like ambition? Forge a pruning-hook,
 May be of service when our vines grow tall!
 But — sword use swordwise, spear thrust out as spear?
 Anathema! Suppression is the word!"
 My nature, when the outrage was too gross, 1510
 Widened itself an outlet over-wide
 By way of answer, sought its own relief
 With more of fire and brimstone than you wished.
 All your own doing: preachers, blame yourselves!

'T is I preach while the hour-glass runs and runs! 1515
 God keep me patient! All I say just means —
 My wife proved, whether by her fault or mine, —
 That's immaterial, — a true stumbling-block
 I' the way of me her husband. I but plied
 The hatchet yourselves use to clear a path, 1520
 Was politic, played the game you warrant wins,
 Plucked at law's robe a-rustle through the courts,
 Bowed down to kiss divinity's buckled shoe
 Cushioned i' the church: efforts all wide the aim!
 Procedures to no purpose! Then flashed truth. 1525
 The letter kills, the spirit keeps alive
 In law and gospel: there be nods and winks
 Instruct a wise man to assist himself
 In certain matters, nor seek aid at all.
 "Ask money of me," — quoth the clownish saw, — 1530
 "And take my purse! But, — speaking with respect, —
 Need you a solace for the troubled nose?
 Let everybody wipe his own himself!"
 Sirs, tell me free and fair! Had things gone well
 At the wayside inn: had I surprised asleep 1535
 The runaways, as was so probable,
 And pinned them each to other partridge-wise,
 Through back and breast to breast and back, then bade
 Bystanders witness if the spit, my sword,
 Were loaded with unlawful game for once — 1540
 Would you have interposed to damp the glow
 Applauding me on every husband's cheek?
 Would you have checked the cry "A judgment, see!

A warning, note! Be henceforth chaste, ye wives,
 Nor stray beyond your proper precinct, priests!" 1545
 If you had, then your house against itself
 Divides, nor stands your kingdom any more.
 Oh why, why was it not ordained just so?
 Why fell not things out so nor otherwise?
 Ask that particular devil whose task it is 1550
 To trip the all-but-at perfection. — slur
 The line of the painter just where paint leaves off
 And life begins. — put ice into the ode
 O' the poet while he cries "Next stanza — fire!"
 Inscribe all human effort with one word, 1555
 Artistry's haunting curse, the Incomplete!
 Being incomplete, my act escaped success.
 Easy to blame now! Every fool can swear
 To hole in net that held and slipped the fish.
 But, treat my act with fair unjaundiced eye, 1560
 What was there wanting to a masterpiece
 Except the luck that lies beyond a man?
 My way with the woman, now proved grossly wrong,
 Just missed of being gravely grandly right
 And making mouths laugh on the other side. 1565
 Do, for the poor obstructed artist's sake,
 Go with him over that spoiled work once more!
 Take only its first flower, the ended act
 Now in the dusty pod, dry and defunct!
 I march to the Villa, and my men with me, 1570
 That evening, and we reach the door and stand.
 I say . . . no, it shoots through me lightning-like
 While I pause, breathe, my hand upon the latch,
 "Let me forebode! Thus far, too much success:
 I want the natural failure — find it where? 1575
 Which thread will have to break and leave a loop
 I' the meshy combination, my brain's loom
 Wove this long while, and now next minute tests?
 Of three that are to catch, two should go free.
 One must: all three surprised. — impossible! 1580
 Beside, I seek three and may chance on six, —
 This neighbor, t' other gossip, — the babe's birth
 Brings such to fireside, and folks give them wine. —
 'T is late: but when I break in presently
 One will be found outlingering the rest 1585
 For promise of a posset, — one whose shout
 Would raise the dead down in the catacombs,
 Much more the city-watch that goes its round.
 When did I ever turn adroitly up
 To sun some brick embedded in the soil, 1590
 And with one blow crush all three scorpions there?

Or Pietro or Violante shambles off —
 It cannot be but I surprise my wife —
 If only she is stopped and stamped on, good!
 That shall suffice: more is improbable. 1595
 Now I may knock!" And this once for my sake
 The impossible was effected: I called king,
 Queen and knave in a sequence, and cards came,
 All three, three only! So, I had my way,
 Did my deed: so, unbrokenly lay bare 1600
 Each tænia¹ that had sucked me dry of juice,
 At last outside me, not an inch of ring
 Left now to writhe about and root itself
 I' the heart all powerless for revenge! Henceforth
 I might thrive: these were drawn and dead and damned 1605
 Oh Cardinal, the deep long sigh you heave
 When the load 's off you, ringing as it runs
 All the way down the serpent-stair to hell!
 No doubt the fine delirium flustered me,
 Turned my brain with the influx of success 1610
 As if the sole need now were to wave wand
 And find doors fly wide, — wish and have my will, —
 The rest o' the scheme would care for itself: escape
 Easy enough were that, and poor beside!
 It all but proved so, — ought to quite have proved, 1615
 Since, half the chances had sufficed, set free
 Anyone, with his senses at command,
 From thrice the danger of my flight. But, drunk,
 Redundantly triumphant, — some reverse
 Was sure to follow! There 's no other way 1620
 Accounts for such prompt perfect failure then
 And there on the instant. Any day o' the week,
 A ducat slid discreetly into palm
 O' the mute post-master, while you whisper him —
 How you the Count and certain four your knaves, 1625
 Have just been mauling who was malapert,
 Suspect the kindred may prove troublesome,
 Therefore, want horses in a hurry, — that
 And nothing more secures you any day
 The pick o' the stable! Yet I try the trick, 1630
 Double the bribe, call myself Duke for Count,
 And say the dead man only was a Jew,
 And for my pains find I am dealing just
 With the one scrupulous fellow in all Rome —
 Just this immaculate official stares, 1635
 Sees I want hat on head and sword in sheath,
 Am splashed with other sort of wet than wine,

¹ *Tænia*: a tape-worm.

Shrugs shoulder, puts my hand by, gold and all,
 Stands on the strictness of the rule o' the road!
 "Where 's the Permission?" Where 's the wretched rag 1640
 With the due seal and sign of Rome's Police,
 To be had for asking, half-an-hour ago?
 "Gone? Get another, or no horses hence!"
 He dares not stop me, we five glare too grim,
 But hinders, — backs and hamstrings sure enough. 1645
 Gives me some twenty miles of miry road
 More to march in the middle of that night
 Whereof the rough beginning taxed the strength
 O' the youngsters, much more mine, both soul and flesh,
 Who had to think as well as act: dead-beat, 1650
 We gave in ere we reached the boundary
 And safe spot out of this irrational Rome. —
 Where, on dismounting from our steeds next day,
 We had snapped our fingers at you, safe and sound,
 Tuscans once more in blessed Tuscany, 1655
 Where laws make wise allowance. understand
 Civilized life and do its champions right!
 Witness the sentence of the Rota there,
 Arezzo uttered, the Granduke confirmed,
 One week before I acted on its hint, — 1660
 Giving friend Guillichini, for his love,
 The galleys, and my wife your saint, Rome's saint, —
 Rome manufactures saints enough to know, —
 Seclusion at the *Stinche*¹ for her life.
 All this, that all but was, might all have been, 1665
 Yet was not! baulked by just a scrupulous knave
 Whose palm was horn through handling horses' hoofs
 And could not close upon my proffered gold!
 What say you to the spite of fortune? Well.
 The worst 's in store: thus hindered, haled this way 1670
 To Rome again by hangdogs, whom find I
 Here, still to fight with, but my pale frail wife?
 — Riddled with wounds by one not like to waste
 The blows he dealt, — knowing anatomy, —
 (I think I told you) bound to pick and choose 1675
 The vital parts! 'T was learning all in vain!
 She too must shimmer through the gloom o' the grave,
 Come and confront me — not at judgment-seat
 Where I could twist her soul, as erst her flesh,
 And turn her truth into a lie, — but there. 1680
 O' the death-bed, with God's hand between us both,
 Striking me dumb, and helping her to speak,
 Tell her own story her own way, and turn

¹ *Stinche*: the prison.

- My plausibility to nothingness!
 Four whole days did Pompilia keep alive, 1685
 With the best surgery of Rome agape
 At the miracle, — this cut, the other slash,
 And yet the life refusing to dislodge,
 Four whole extravagant impossible days.
 Till she had time to finish and persuade 1690
 Every man, every woman, every child
 In Rome, of what she would: the selfsame she
 Who, but a year ago, had wrung her hands.
 Reddened her eyes and beat her breasts, rehearsed
 The whole game at Arezzo, nor availed 1695
 Thereby to move one heart or raise one hand
 When destiny intends you cards like these,
 What good of skill and preconcerted play?
 Had she been found dead, as I left her dead,
 I should have told a tale brooked no reply: 1700
 You scarcely will suppose me found at fault
 With that advantage! “What brings me to Rome?
 Necessity to claim and take my wife:
 Better, to claim and take my new-born babe, —
 Strong in paternity a fortnight old, 1705
 When ’t is at strongest: warily I work,
 Knowing the machinations of my foe;
 I have companionship and use the night:
 I seek my wife and child. — I find — no child
 But wife, in the embraces of that priest 1710
 Who caused her to elope from me. These two,
 Backed by the pander-pair who watch the while,
 Spring on me like so many tiger-cats.
 Glad of the chance to end the intruder. I —
 What should I do but stand on my defence. 1715
 Strike right, strike left, strike thick and threefold. slay,
 Not all — because the coward priest escapes.
 Last, I escape, in fear of evil tongues,
 And having had my taste of Roman law.”
 What’s disputable, refutable here? — 1720
 Save by just this one ghost-thing half on earth,
 Half out of it, — as if she held God’s hand
 While she leant back and looked her last at me,
 Forgiving me (here monks begin to weep)
 Oh, from her very soul, commending mine 1725
 To heavenly mercies which are infinite. —
 While fixing fast my head beneath your knife!
 ’T is fate not fortune. All is of a piece!
 When was it chance informed me of my youths?
 My rustic four o’ the family, soft swains. 1730
 What sweet surprise had they in store for me,

Those of my very household, — what did Law
 Twist with her rack-and-cord-contrivance late
 From out their bones and marrow? What but this —
 Had no one of these several stumbling-blocks
 Stopped me, they yet were cherishing a scheme, 1735
 All of their honest country homespun wit,
 To quietly next day at crow of cock
 Cut my own throat too, for their own behoof.
 Seeing I had forgot to clear accounts 1740
 O' the instant, nowise slackened speed for that, —
 And somehow never might find memory,
 Once safe back in Arezzo, where things change,
 And a court-lord needs mind no country lout.
 Well, being the arch-offender, I die last, — 1745
 May, ere my head falls, have my eyesight free,
 Nor miss them dangling high on either hand.
 Like scarecrows in a hemp-field, for their pains!

And then my Trial, — 't is my Trial that bites
 Like a corrosive, so the cards are packed, 1750
 Dice loaded, and my life-stake tricked away!
 Look at my lawyers, lacked they grace of law,
 Latin or logic? Were not they fools to the height,
 Fools to the depth, fools to the level between,
 O' the foolishness set to decide the case? 1755
 They feign, they flatter; nowise does it skill,
 Everything goes against me: deal each judge
 His dole of flattery and feigning, — why.
 He turns and tries and snuffs and savors it,
 As some old fly the sugar-grain, your gift; 1760
 Then eyes your thumb and finger, brushes clean
 The absurd old head of him, and whisks away,
 Leaving your thumb and finger dirty. Faugh!

And finally, after this long-drawn range
 Of affront and failure, failure and affront. — 1765
 This path, 'twixt crosses leading to a skull,
 Paced by me barefoot, bloodied by my palms
 From the entry to the end. — there 's light at length,
 A cranny of escape: appeal may be
 To the old man, to the father, to the Pope. 1770
 For a little life — from one whose life is spent,
 A little pity — from pity's source and seat.
 A little indulgence to rank, privilege.
 From one who is the thing personified.
 Rank, privilege, indulgence, grown beyond 1775

Earth's bearing, even, ask Jansenius¹ else!
 Still the same answer, still no other tune
 From the cicala perched at the tree-top
 Than crickets noisy round the root: 't is "Die!"
 Bids Law — "Be damned!" adds Gospel, — nay, 1780
 No word so frank, — 't is rather, "Save yourself!"
 The Pope subjoins — "Confess and be absolved!"
 So shall my credit countervail your shame,
 And the world see I have not lost the knack
 Of trying all the spirits: yours, my son, 1785
 Wants but a fiery washing to emerge
 In clarity! Come, cleanse you, ease the ache
 Of these old bones, refresh our bowels, boy!"
 Do I mistake your mission from the Pope?
 Then, bear his Holiness the mind of me! 1790
 I do get strength from being thrust to wall,
 Successively wrenched from pillar and from post
 By this tenacious hate of fortune, hate
 Of all things in, under, and above earth.
 Warfare, begun this mean unmanly mode, 1795
 Does best to end so, — gives earth spectacle
 Of a brave fighter who succumbs to odds
 That turn defeat to victory. Stab, I fold
 My mantle round me! Rome approves my act:
 Applauds the blow which costs me life but keeps 1800
 My honor spotless: Rome would praise no more
 Had I fallen, say, some fifteen years ago,
 Helping Vienna when our Aretines
 Flocked to Duke Charles and fought Turk Mustafa;²
 Nor would you two be trembling o'er my corpse 1805
 With all this exquisite solicitude.
 Why is it that I make such suit to live?
 The popular sympathy that 's round me now
 Would break like bubble that o'er-domes a fly:
 Solid enough while he lies quiet there, 1810
 But let him want the air and ply the wing,
 Why, it breaks and bespatters him, what else?
 Cardinal, if the Pope had pardoned me,
 And I walked out of prison through the crowd,
 It would not be your arm I should dare press! 1815
 Then, if I got safe to my place again,

¹ *Jansenius*: Cornelius Jansenius (1585-1638), from whom the Jansenists took their name; author of the work called "Augustinus," condemned by several popes in succession.

² *Helping Vienna . . . Mustafa*: when

John Sobieski relieved Vienna, in 1683, from its second siege by the Turks under Kara Mustafa, Grand Vizier and General of Mahomet IV. Duke Charles of Lorraine led a part of the relieving force against the Turks, who were routed.

How sad and sapless were the years to come!
 I go my old ways and find things grown gray ;
 You priests leer at me, old friends look askance
 The mob 's in love, I 'll wager to a man. 1820
 With my poor young good beauteous murdered wife :
 For hearts require instruction how to beat,
 And eyes, on warrant of the story, wax
 Wanton at portraiture in white and black
 Of dead Pompilia gracing ballad-sheet, 1825
 Which eyes, lived she unmurdered and unsung,
 Would never turn though she paced street as bare
 As the mad penitent ladies do in France.
 My brothers quietly would edge me out
 Of use and management of things called mine ; 1830
 Do I command? " You stretched command before !"
 Show anger? " Anger little helped you once!"
 Advise? " How manage you affairs of old?"
 My very mother, all the while they gird,
 Turns eye up, gives confirmatory groan ; 1835
 For unsuccess, explain it how you will,
 Disqualifies you, makes you doubt yourself,
 — Much more, is found decisive by your friends.
 Beside, am I not fifty years of age?
 What new leap would a life take, checked like mine 1840
 I' the spring at outset? Where 's my second chance?
 Ay, but the babe . . . I had forgot my son,
 My heir! Now for a burst of gratitude!
 There 's some appropriate service to intone,
 Some *gaudeamus*¹ and thanksgiving-psalm! 1845
 Old, I renew my youth in him, and poor
 Possess a treasure, — is not that the phrase?
 Only I must wait patient twenty years —
 Nourishing all the while, as father ought,
 The excrescence with my daily blood of life. 1850
 Does it respond to hope, such sacrifice, —
 Grows the wen plump while I myself grow lean?
 Why, here 's my son and heir in evidence,
 Who stronger, wiser, handsomer than I
 By fifty years, relieves me of each load, — 1855
 Tames my hot horse, carries my heavy gun,
 Courts my coy mistress, — has his apt advice
 On house-economy, expenditure.
 And what not. All which good gifts and great growth
 Because of my decline, he brings to bear 1860
 On Guido, but half apprehensive how
 He cumbers earth, crosses the brisk young Count,

¹ *Gaudeamus* : let us rejoice.

- Who civilly would thrust him from the scene.
 Contrariwise, does the blood-offering fail?
 There 's an ineptitude, one blank the more 1865
 Added to earth in semblance of my child?
 Then, this has been a costly piece of work,
 My life exchanged for his! — why he, not I,
 Enjoy the world, if no more grace accrue?
 Dwarf me, what giant have you made of him? 1870
 I do not dread the disobedient son :
 I know how to suppress rebellion there,
 Being not quite the fool my father was.
 But grant the medium measure of a man,
 The usual compromise 'twixt fool and sage, 1875
 — You know — the tolerably-obstinate,
 The not-so-much-perverse but you may train,
 The true son-servant that, when parent bids
 "Go work, son, in my vineyard!" makes reply
 "I go, Sir!" — Why, what profit in your son 1880
 Beyond the drudges you might subsidize,
 Have the same work from, at a paul the head?
 Look at those four young precious olive-plants
 Reared at Vittiano, — not on flesh and blood,
 These twenty years, but black bread and sour wine! 1885
 I bade them put forth tender branch, hook, hold,
 And hurt three enemies I had in Rome :
 They did my hest as unreluctantly,
 At promise of a dollar, as a son
 Adjured by mumping memories of the past. 1890
 No, nothing repays youth expended so —
 Youth, I say, who am young still : grant but leave
 To live my life out, to the last I 'd live
 And die conceding age no right of youth!
 It is the will runs the renewing nerve 1895
 Through flaccid flesh that faints before the time.
 Therefore no sort of use for son have I —
 Sick, not of life's feast but of steps to climb
 To the house where life prepares her feast, — of means
 To the end : for make the end attainable 1900
 Without the means, — my relish were like yours.
 A man may have an appetite enough
 For a whole dish of robins ready cooked,
 And yet lack courage to face sleet, pad snow,
 And snare sufficiently for supper.
- Thus 1905
- The time 's arrived when, ancient Roman-like,
 I am bound to fall on my own sword : why not
 Say — Tuscan-like, more ancient, better still?

Will you hear truth can do no harm nor good?
 I think I never was at any time 1910
 A Christian, as you nickname all the world,
 Me among others: truce to nonsense now!
 Name me, a primitive religionist —
 As should the aboriginary be
 I boast myself, Etruscan, Aretine, 1915
 One sprung, — your frigid Virgil's fieriest word,¹ —
 From fauns and nymphs, trunks and the heart of oak,
 With, — for a visible divinity, —
 The portent of a Jove Ægiochus²
 Descried 'mid clouds, lightning and thunder, couched 1920
 On topmost crag of your Capitoline:
 'T is in the Seventh Æneid, — what, the Eighth?
 Right, — thanks, Abate, — though the Christian's dumb,
 The Latinist's vivacious in you yet!
 I know my grandsire had our tapestry 1925
 Marked with the motto, 'neath a certain shield,
 Whereto his grandson presently will give gules
 To vary azure. First we fight for faiths,
 But get to shake hands at the last of all:
 Mine's your faith too, — in Jove Ægiochus! 1930
 Nor do Greek gods, that serve as supplement,
 Jar with the simpler scheme, if understood.
 We want such intermediary race
 To make communication possible;
 The real thing were too lofty, we too low,
 Midway hang these: we feel their use so plain 1935
 In linking height to depth, that we doff hat
 And put no question nor pry narrowly
 Into the nature hid behind the names.
 We grudge no rite the fancy may demand; 1940
 But never, more than needs, invent, refine,
 Improve upon requirement, idly wise
 Beyond the letter, teaching gods their trade,
 Which is to teach us: we'll obey when taught.
 Why should we do our duty past the need? 1945
 When the sky darkens, Jove is wroth, — say prayer!
 When the sun shines and Jove is glad, — sing psalm!
 But wherefore pass prescription and devise
 Blood-offering for sweat-service, lend the rod
 A pungency through pickle of our own? 1950

¹ *Virgil's fieriest word*: "Æneid," VIII.
 314, 315 —
 "Hæc nemora indigenæ Fauni Nymphæque
 tenebant,
 Gensque virum truncis et duro robore nata."

The reference which follows is to ll. 351-
 353 of the same book.

² *Jove Ægiochus*: Ægis bearing Jove.

Learned Abate, — no one teaches you
 What Venus means and who's Apollo here!
 I spare you, Cardinal, — but, though you wince,
 You know me, I know you, and both know that!
 So, if Apollo bids us fast, we fast : 1955
 But where does Venus order we stop sense
 When Master Pietro¹ rhymes a pleasantry?
 Give alms prescribed on Friday : but, hold hand
 Because your foe lies prostrate, — where's the word
 Explicit in the book debars revenge? 1960
 The rationale of your scheme is just
 " Pay toll here, there pursue your pleasure free!"
 So do you turn to use the medium-powers,
 Mars and Minerva, Bacchus and the rest,
 And so are saved propitiating — whom? 1965
 What all-good, all-wise and all-potent Jove
 Vexed by the very sins in man, himself
 Made life's necessity when man he made?
 Irrational bunglers! So, the living truth
 Revealed to strike Pan dead,² ducks low at last, 1970
 Prays leave to hold its own and live good days
 Provided it go masque grotesquely, called
 Christian not Pagan. Oh, you purged the sky
 Of all gods save the One, the great and good,
 Clapped hands and triumphed! But the change came fast : 1975
 The inexorable need in man for life —
 (Life, you may mulct and minish to a grain
 Out of the lump, so that the grain but live)
 Laughed at your substituting death for life,
 And bade you do your worst : which worst was done 1980
 In just that age styled primitive and pure
 When Saint this, Saint that, dutifully starved,
 Froze, fought with beasts, was beaten and abused
 And finally ridged of his flesh by fire,
 He kept life-long unspotted from the world! 1985
 Next age, how goes the game, what mortal gives
 His life and emulates Saint that, Saint this?
 Men mutter, make excuse or mutiny,
 In fine are minded all to leave the new,
 Stick to the old, — enjoy old liberty. 1990
 No prejudice in enjoyment, if you please,
 To the new profession : sin o' the sly, henceforth!
 The law stands though the letter kills : what then?
 The spirit saves as unmistakably.

¹ *Master Pietro* : Pietro Aretino. See note on X. 652. sion to the legend that, at the hour of the Crucifixion, certain Greek sailors heard a

² *Revealed to strike Pan dead* : an allu- voice proclaiming " Pan is dead."

Omniscience sees, Omnipotence could stop, 1995
 Omnibenevolence pardons : it must be,
 Frown law its fiercest, there 's a wink somewhere!

Such was the logic in this head of mine :
 I, like the rest, wrote "poison" on my bread,
 But broke and ate : — said "Those that use the sword 2000
 Shall perish by the same ;" then stabbed my foe.
 I stand on solid earth, not empty air :
 Dislodge me, let your Pope's crook hale me hence!
 Not he, nor you! And I so pity both,
 I'll make the true charge you want wit to make : 2005
 "Count Guido, who reveal our mystery,
 And trace all issues to the love of life :
 We having life to love and guard, like you,
 Why did you put us upon self-defence?
 You well knew what prompt pass-word would appease 2010
 The sentry's ire when folk infringed his bounds.
 And yet kept mouth shut : do you wonder then
 If, in mere decency, he shot you dead?
 He can't have people play such pranks as yours
 Beneath his nose at noonday : you disdained 2015
 To give him an excuse before the world
 By crying 'I break rule to save our camp!'
 Under the old rule, such offence were death ;
 And you had heard the Pontifex pronounce
 'Since you slay foe and violate the form, 2020
 Slaying turns murder, which were sacrifice
 Had you, while, say, law-suiting foe to death,
 But raised an altar to the Unknown God
 Or else the Genius of the Vatican.'
 Why then this pother? — all because the Pope, 2025
 Doing his duty, cried 'A foreigner,
 You scandalize the natives : here at Rome
Romano vivitur more :¹ wise men, here,
 Put the Church forward and efface themselves.
 The fit defence had been, — you stamped on wheat, 2030
 Intending all the time to trample tares, —
 Were fain extirpate, then, the heretic,
 You now find, in your haste was slain a fool :
 Nor Pietro, nor Violante, nor your wife
 Meant to breed you a babe a Molinist! 2035
 Whence you are duly contrite. Not one word
 Of all this wisdom did you urge : which slip
 Death must atone for.' "

So, let death atone!

¹ *Romano vivitur more* : "one does as Rome does."

So ends mistake, so end mistakers! — end
 Perhaps to recommence, — how should I know? 2040
 Only, be sure, no punishment, no pain
 Childish, preposterous, impossible,
 But some such fate as Ovid could foresee, —
Byblis in fluvium, let the weak soul end
 In water, *sed Lycaon in lupum*,¹ but 2045
 The strong become a wolf for evermore!
 Change that Pompilia to a puny stream
 Fit to reflect the daisies on its bank!
 Let me turn wolf, be whole, and sate, for once, —
 Wallow in what is now a wolfishness 2050
 Coerced too much by the humanity
 That 's half of me as well! Grow out of man,
 Glut the wolf-nature, — what remains but grow
 Into the man again, be man indeed
 And all man? Do I ring the changes right? 2055
 Deformed, transformed, reformed, informed, conformed!
 The honest instinct, pent and crossed through life,
 Let surge by death into a visible flow
 Of rapture: as the strangled thread of flame
 Painfully winds, annoying and annoyed, 2060
 Malignant and maligned, thro' stone and ore,
 Till earth exclude the stranger: vented once,
 It finds full play, is recognized a-top
 Some mountain as no such abnormal birth
 Fire for the mount, not streamlet for the vale! 2065
 Ay, of the water was that wife of mine —
 Be it for good, be it for ill, no run
 O' the red thread through that insignificance!
 Again, how she is at me with those eyes!
 Away with the empty stare! Be holy still, 2070
 And stupid ever! Occupy your patch
 Of private snow that 's somewhere in what world
 May now be growing icy round your head,
 And aguish at your foot-print, — freeze not me,
 Dare follow not another step I take, 2075
 Not with so much as those detested eyes,
 No, though they follow but to pray me pause
 On the incline, earth's edge that 's next to hell!
 None of your abnegation of revenge!
 Fly at me frank, tug while I tear again! 2080
 There 's God, go tell Him, testify your worst!
 Not she! There was no touch in her of hate:
 And it would prove her hell, if I reached mine!

¹ *Byblis in fluvium* . . . *Lycaon in lupum*: Byblis into a river . . . Lycaon into a wolf, titles of transformations recorded in Ovid's "Metamorphoses."

To know I suffered, would still sadden her,
 Do what the angels might to make amends! 2085
 Therefore there 's either no such place as hell,
 Or thence shall I be thrust forth, for her sake,
 And thereby undergo three hells, not one —
 I who, with outlet for escape to heaven,
 Would tarry if such flight allowed my foe 2090
 To raise his head, relieved of that firm foot
 Had pinned him to the fiery pavement else!
 So am I made, "who did not make myself:"
 (How dared she rob my own lip of the word?)
 Beware me in what other world may be! — 2095
 Pompilia, who have brought me to this pass!
 All I know here, will I say there, and go
 Beyond the saying with the deed. Some use
 There cannot but be for a mood like mine.
 Implacable, persistent in revenge. 2100
 She maundered "All is over and at end:
 I go my own road, go you where God will!
 Forgive you? I forget you!" There 's the saint
 That takes your taste, you other kind of men!
 How you had loved her! Guido wanted skill 2105
 To value such a woman at her worth!
 Properly the instructed criticize
 "What 's here, you simpleton have tossed to take
 Its chance i' the gutter? This a daub, indeed?
 Why, 't is a Rafael that you kicked to rags!" 2110
 Perhaps so: some prefer the pure design:
 Give me my gorge of color, glut of gold
 In a glory round the Virgin made for me!
 Titian 's the man, not Monk Angelico
 Who traces you some timid chalky ghost 2115
 That turns the church into a charnel: ay,
 Just such a pencil might depict my wife!
 She, — since she, also, would not change herself, —
 Why could not she come in some heart-shaped cloud,
 Rainbow'd about with riches, royalty 2120
 Rimming her round, as round the tintless lawn
 Guardingly runs the selvage cloth of gold?
 I would have left the faint fine gauze untouched,
 Needle-worked over with its lily and rose,
 Let her bleach unmolested in the midst, 2125
 Chill that selected solitary spot
 Of quietude she pleased to think was life.
 Purity, pallor grace the lawn no doubt
 When there 's the costly bordure to unthread
 And make again an ingot: but what 's grace 2130
 When you want meat and drink and clothes and fire?

A tale comes to my mind that 's apposite —
 Possibly true, probably false, a truth
 Such as all truths we live by, Cardinal!
 'T is said, a certain ancestor of mine 2135
 Followed — whoever was the potentate,
 To Paynimrie,¹ and in some battle, broke
 Through more than due allowance of the foe.
 And, risking much his own life, saved the lord's.
 Battered and bruised, the Emperor scrambles up, 2140
 Rubs his eyes and looks round and sees my sire,
 Picks a furze-sprig from out his hauberk-joint,
 (Token how near the ground went majesty)
 And says "Take this, and if thou get safe home,
 Plant the same in thy garden-ground to grow : 2145
 Run thence an hour in a straight line, and stop :
 Describe a circle round (for central point)
 The furze aforesaid, reaching every way
 The length of that hour's run : I give it thee, —
 The central point, to build a castle there, 2150
 The space circumjacent, for fit demesne,
 The whole to be thy children's heritage, —
 Whom, for thy sake, bid thou wear furze on cap!"
 Those are my arms : we turned the furze a tree
 To show more, and the greyhound tied thereto, 2155
 Straining to start, means swift and greedy both ;
 He stands upon a triple mount of gold —
 By Jove, then, he 's escaping from true gold
 And trying to arrive at empty air!
 Aha! the fancy never crossed my mind! 2160
 My father used to tell me, and subjoin
 "As for the castle, that took wings and flew :
 The broad lands, — why, to traverse them to-day
 Scarce tasks my gouty feet, and in my prime
 I doubt not I could stand and spit so far : 2165
 But for the furze, boy, fear no lack of that.
 So long as fortune leaves one field to grub!
 Wherefore, hurra for furze and loyalty!"
 What may I mean, where may the lesson lurk?
 "Do not bestow on man, by way of gift, 2170
 Furze without land for framework, — vaunt no grace
 Of purity, no furze-sprig of a wife,
 To me, i' the thick of battle for my bread,
 Without some better dowry. — gold will do!"
 No better gift than sordid muck? Yes, Sirs! 2175
 Many more gifts much better. Give them me!
 O those Olimpias bold, those Biancas² brave.

¹ *Paynimrie* : heathendom.

women not above lending themselves to their

² *Olimpias* . . . *Biancas* : fierce and fond husbands' schemes. For *Olimpia*, see IV. 232.

That brought a husband power worth Ormuz' wealth!¹
 Cried "Thou being mine, why, what but thine am I?
 Be thou to me law, right, wrong, heaven and hell! 2180
 Let us blend souls, blent, thou in me, to bid
 Two bodies work one pleasure! What are these
 Called king, priest, father, mother, stranger, friend?
 They fret thee or they frustrate? Give the word —
 Be certain they shall frustrate nothing more! 2185
 And who is this young florid foolishness
 That holds thy fortune in his pigmy clutch,
 — Being a prince and potency, forsooth! —
 He hesitates to let the trifle go?
 Let me but seal up eye, sing ear to sleep 2190
 Sounder than Samson, — pounce thou on the prize
 Shall slip from off my breast, and down couch-side.
 And on to floor, as far as my lord's feet —
 Where he stands in the shadow with the knife,
 Waiting to see what Delilah² dares do! 2195
 Is the youth fair? What is a man to me
 Who am thy call-bird? Twist his neck — my dupe's, —
 Then take the breast shall turn a breast indeed!"
 Such women are there; and they marry whom?
 Why, when a man has gone and hanged himself 2200
 Because of what he calls a wicked wife, —
 See, if the very turpitude bemoaned
 Prove not mere excellence the fool ignores!
 His monster is perfection. — Circe,³ sent
 Straight from the sun, with wand the idiot blames 2205
 As not an honest distaff to spin wool!
 O thou Lucrezia,⁴ is it long to wait
 Yonder where all the gloom is in a glow
 With thy suspected presence? — virgin yet.
 Virtuous again, in face of what 's to teach — 2210
 Sin unimagined, unimaginable, —
 I come to claim my bride, — thy Borgia's self
 Not half the burning bridegroom I shall be!
 Cardinal, take away your crucifix!
 Abate, leave my lips alone, — they bite! 2215
 Vainly you try to change what should not change,
 And shall not. I have bared, you bathe my heart —

Bianca is the heroine of the old Italian story on which Milman founded his tragedy of "Fazio, or the Italian Wife."

¹ *Ormuz*: an island in the Persian Gulf, which is a diamond market. See "Paradise Lost," i. 2.

² *Delilah*: Judges xvi. 9.

³ *Circe*: the sorceress of the "Odyssey," daughter of the sun, who changed the companions of Ulysses with a touch of her wand into swine.

⁴ *Lucrezia*: Lucrezia Borgia (died 1523), daughter of Pope Alexander Borgia, instrument of the crimes of the Borgias.

It grows the stonier for your saving dew!
 You steep the substance, you would lubricate,
 In waters that but touch to petrify! 2220

You too are petrifications of a kind :
 Move not a muscle that shows mercy. Rave
 Another twelve hours, every word were waste!
 I thought you would not slay impenitence,
 But teased, from men you slew, contrition first, — 2225

I thought you had a conscience. Cardinal,
 You know I am wronged! — wronged, say, and wronged, maintain.
 Was this strict inquisition made for blood
 When first you showed us scarlet on your back,
 Called to the College? Your straightforward way 2230

To your legitimate end, — I think it passed
 Over a scantling of heads brained, hearts broke,
 Lives trodden into dust! How otherwise?
 Such was the way o' the world, and so you walked.
 Does memory haunt your pillow? Not a whit. 2235

God wills you never pace your garden-path,
 One appetizing hour ere dinner-time,
 But your intrusion there treads out of life
 A universe of happy innocent things :
 Feel you remorse about that damsel-fly 2240

Which buzzed so near your mouth and flapped your face?
 You blotted it from being at a blow :
 It was a fly, you were a man, and more,
 Lord of created things, so took your course.
 Manliness, mind, — these are things fit to save, 2245

Fit to brush fly from : why, because I take
 My course, must needs the Pope kill me? — kill you!
 You ! for this instrument, he throws away,
 Is strong to serve a master, and were yours
 To have and hold and get much good from out ! 2250

The Pope who dooms me needs must die next year ;
 I'll tell you how the chances are supposed
 For his successor : first the Chamberlain,
 Old San Cesario, — Colloredo, next, —
 Then, one, two, three, four, I refuse to name ; 2255

After these, comes Altieri ; then come you —
 Seventh on the list you come, unless . . . ha, ha,
 How can a dead hand give a friend a lift?
 Are you the person to despise the help
 O' the head shall drop in pannier presently? 2260

So a child seesaws on or kicks away
 The fulcrum-stone that 's all the sage requires
 To fit his lever to and move the world.
 Cardinal, I adjure you in God's name,

- Save my life, fall at the Pope's feet, set forth 2265
 Things your own fashion, not in words like these
 Made for a sense like yours who apprehend!
 Translate into the Court-conventional
 "Count Guido must not die, is innocent!
 Fair, be assured! But what an he were foul, 2270
 Blood-drenched and murder-crusted head to foot?
 Spare one whose death insults the Emperor,
 Nay, outrages the Louis you so love!
 He has friends who will avenge him; enemies
 Who will hate God now with impunity, 2275
 Missing the old coercive: would you send
 A soul straight to perdition, dying frank
 An atheist?" Go and say this, for God's sake!
 — Why, you don't think I hope you'll say one word?
 Neither shall I persuade you from your stand 2280
 Nor you persuade me from my station: take
 Your crucifix away, I tell you twice!
- Come, I am tired of silence! Pause enough!
 You have prayed: I have gone inside my soul
 And shut its door behind me: 't is your torch 2285
 Makes the place dark: the darkness let alone
 Grows tolerable twilight: one may grope
 And get to guess at length and breadth and depth.
 What is this fact I feel persuaded of —
 This something like a foothold in the sea, 2290
 Although Saint Peter's bark scuds, billow-borne,
 Leaves me to founder where it flung me first?
 Spite of your splashing, I am high and dry!
 God takes his own part in each thing He made;
 Made for a reason, He conserves his work, 2295
 Gives each its proper instinct of defence.
 My lamblike wife could neither bark nor bite,
 She bleated, bleated, till for pity pure
 The village roused up, ran with pole and prong
 To the rescue, and behold the wolf's at bay!
 Shall he try bleating? — or take turn or two, 2300
 Since the wolf owns some kinship with the fox,
 And, failing to escape the foe by craft,
 Give up attempt, die fighting quietly?
 The last bad blow that strikes fire in at eye 2305
 And on to brain, and so out, life and all,
 How can it but be cheated of a pang
 If, fighting quietly, the jaws enjoy
 One re-embrace in mid back-bone they break,
 After their weary work thro' the foe's flesh? 2310
 That 's the wolf-nature. Don't mistake my trope!

A Cardinal so qualmish? Eminence,
 My fight is figurative, blows i' the air,
 Brain-war with powers and principalities,
 Spirit-bravado, no real fisticuffs! 2315
 I shall not presently, when the knock comes,
 Cling to this bench nor claw the hangman's face,
 No, trust me! I conceive worse lots than mine.
 Whether it be, the old contagious fit
 And plague o' the prison have surprised me too. 2320
 The appropriate drunkenness of the death-hour
 Crept on my sense, kind work o' the wine and myrrh,—
 I know not,— I begin to taste my strength,
 Careless, gay even. What 's the worth of life?
 The Pope 's dead now, my murderous old man, 2325
 For Tozzi told me so: and you, forsooth—
 Why, you don't think, Abate, do your best,
 You 'll live a year more with that hacking cough
 And blotch of crimson where the cheek's a pit?
 Tozzi has got you also down in book! 2330
 Cardinal, only seventh of seventy near,
 Is not one called Albano¹ in the lot?
 Go eat your heart, you 'll never be a Pope!
 Inform me, is it true you left your love,
 A Pucci, for promotion in the church? 2335
 She 's more than in the church,—in the churchyard!
 Plautilla Pucci, your affianced bride,
 Has dust now in the eyes that held the love,—
 And Martinez, suppose they make you Pope,
 Stops that with *veto*,— so, enjoy yourself! 2340
 I see you all reel to the rock, you waves—
 Some forthright, some describe a sinuous track,
 Some, crested brilliantly, with heads above.
 Some in a strangled swirl sunk who knows how,
 But all bound whither the main-current sets, 2345
 Rockward, an end in foam for all of you!
 What if I be o'ertaken, pushed to the front
 By all you crowding smoother souls behind,
 And reach, a minute sooner than was meant,
 The boundary whereon I break to mist? 2350
 Go to! the smoothest safest of you all,
 Most perfect and compact wave in my train,
 Spite of the blue tranquillity above,
 Spite of the breadth before of lapsing peace,
 Where broods the halcyon and the fish leaps free, 2355
 Will presently begin to feel the prick
 At lazy heart, the push at torpid brain,

¹ One called *Albano*: the next pope was Giovanni Francisco Albani.

Will rock vertiginously in turn, and reel,
 And, emulative, rush to death like me.
 Later or sooner by a minute then, 2360
 So much for the untimeliness of death!
 And, as regards the manner that offends,
 The rude and rough, I count the same for gain.
 Be the act harsh and quick! Undoubtedly
 The soul's condensed and, twice itself, expands 2365
 To burst thro' life, by alternation due,
 Into the other state whate'er it prove.
 You never know what life means till you die :
 Even throughout life, 't is death that makes life live,
 Gives it whatever the significance. 2370
 For see, on your own ground and argument,
 Suppose life had no death to fear, how find
 A possibility of nobleness
 In man, prevented daring any more?
 What 's love, what 's faith without a worst to dread? 2375
 Lack-lustre jewelry! but faith and love
 With death behind them bidding do or die —
 Put such a foil at back, the sparkle 's born!
 From out myself how the strange colors come!
 Is there a new rule in another world? 2380
 Be sure I shall resign myself: as here
 I recognized no law I could not see.
 There, what I see, I shall acknowledge too :
 On earth I never took the Pope for God,
 In heaven I shall scarce take God for the Pope. 2385
 Unmanned, remanned: I hold it probable —
 With something changeless at the heart of me
 To know me by, some nucleus that 's myself:
 Accretions did it wrong? Away with them —
 You soon shall see the use of fire!
 Till when. 2390
 All that was, is; and must forever be.
 Nor is it in me to unhate my hates, —
 I use up my last strength to strike once more
 Old Pietro in the wine-house-gossip-face,
 To trample underfoot the whine and wile 2395
 Of beast Violante, — and I grow one gorge
 To loathingly reject Pompilia's pale
 Poison my hasty hunger took for food.
 A strong tree wants no wreaths about its trunk,
 No cloying cups, no sickly sweet of scent, 2400
 But sustenance at root, a bucketful.
 How else lived that Athenian¹ who died so,

¹ *That Athenian*: Themistocles, said to have killed himself by drinking bull's blood, which the ancients considered was poisonous.

Drinking hot bull's blood, fit for men like me?
 I lived and died a man, and take man's chance,
 Honest and bold: right will be done to such. 2405

Who are these you have let descend my stair?
 Ha, their accursed psalm!¹ Lights at the sill!
 Is it "Open" they dare bid you? Treachery!
 Sirs, have I spoken one word all this while
 Out of the world of words I had to say? 2410
 Not one word! All was folly — I laughed and mocked!
 Sirs, my first true word, all truth and no lie,
 Is — save me notwithstanding! Life is all!
 I was just stark mad, — let the madman live
 Pressed by as many chains as you please pile! 2415
 Don't open! Hold me from them! I am yours,
 I am the Granduke's — no. I am the Pope's!
 Abate, — Cardinal, — Christ, — Maria, — God, . . .
 Pompilia, will you let them murder me?

¹ *Accursed psalm*: the psalm chanted in the Office for the Dying by the Brothers of Mercy who attend criminals to the scaffold.

XII.

THE BOOK AND THE RING.

[In the concluding Book the last glimmerings of that vivid event — the Franceschini case — are traced as they pale out into the black oblivion of the centuries. First a letter is given from a Venetian traveller of rank, whose disposition is much the same as that of "Half-Rome." He relates the news in Rome and incidentally describes Guido's execution. Two letters follow from the lawyers, each of whom comments characteristically on the final steps and outcome of the case, while discreetly shifting sides a little, Guido's lawyer insinuating his clever policy in suffering the Pope to have his way, and Pompilia's lawyer, after indignantly quoting from a sermon by Pompilia's confessor, maintaining that he will soon show, when he undertakes the case for the convertite nuns against Pompilia's Will, how he proved Guido's guilt, but not Pompilia's innocence. In this sermon extract, which so excites Bottini's ire, Pompilia's purity and moral triumph over the equivocations of public opinion and legal pleading are represented. Finally the verdict appears, vindicating Pompilia, by warranting her son the enjoyment of his property; and the story closes as it began, with the Poet's word upon the relative falsity of fact and truth of art, and with the dedication of this work to companionship with that of his "Lyric Love."]

HERE were the end, had anything an end :
 Thus, lit and launched, up and up roared and soared
 A rocket, till the key o' the vault was reached,
 And wide heaven held, a breathless minute-space,
 In brilliant usurpature : thus caught spark, 5
 Rushed to the height, and hung at full of fame
 Over men's upturned faces, ghastly thence,
 Our glaring Guido : now decline must be.
 In its explosion, you have seen his act,
 By my power — may-be, judged it by your own, — 10
 Or composite as good orbs prove, or crammed
 With worse ingredients than the Wormwood Star.¹
 The act, over and ended, falls and fades :
 What was once seen, grows what is now described,
 Then talked of, told about, a tinge the less 15
 In every fresh transmission ; till it melts.
 Trickles in silent orange or wan gray
 Across our memory, dies and leaves all dark.

¹ *The Wormwood Star* : Revelation viii. according to a superstition of the Middle Ages. A star believed to be a portent of death.

And presently we find the stars again.
Follow the main streaks, meditate the mode 20
Of brightness, how it hastes to blend with black!

After that February Twenty-Two,
Since our salvation, Sixteen-Ninety-Eight,
Of all reports that were, or may have been,
Concerning those the day killed or let live, 25
Four I count only. Take the first that comes.
A letter from a stranger, man of rank,
Venetian visitor at Rome, — who knows,
On what pretence of busy idleness?
Thus he begins on evening of that day. 30

“Here are we at our end of Carnival;
Prodigious gaiety and monstrous mirth,
And constant shift of entertaining show:
With influx, from each quarter of the globe,
Of strangers nowise wishful to be last 35
I’ the struggle for a good place presently
When that befalls fate cannot long defer.
The old Pope totters on the verge o’ the grave:
You see, Malpichi understood far more
Than Tozzi how to treat the ailments: age, 40
No question, renders these inveterate.
Cardinal Spada, actual Minister,
Is possible Pope; I wager on his head,
Since those four entertainments of his niece
Which set all Rome a-stare: Pope probably — 45
Though Colloredo has his backers foo,
And San Cesario makes one doubt at times:
Altieri will be Chamberlain at most.

“A week ago the sun was warm like May,
And the old man took daily exercise 50
Along the river-side; he loves to see
That Custom-house he built upon the bank,
For, Naples born, his tastes are maritime:
But yesterday he had to keep in-doors
Because of the outrageous rain that fell. 55
On such days the good soul has fainting-fits,
Or lies in stupor, scarcely makes believe
Of minding business, fumbles at his beads.
They say, the trust that keeps his heart alive
Is that, by lasting till December next, 60

He may hold Jubilee a second time,
 And, twice in one reign, ope the Holy Doors.¹
 By the way, somebody responsible
 Assures me that the King of France has writ
 Fresh orders: Fénelon will be condemned: ² 65
 The Cardinal makes a wry face enough,
 Having a love for the delinquent: still,
 He 's the ambassador, must press the point.
 Have you a wager too, dependent here?

" Now, from such matters to divert awhile, 70
 Hear of to-day's event which crowns the week,
 Casts all the other wagers into shade.
 Tell Dandolo I owe him fifty drops
 Of heart's blood in the shape of gold zecchines!
 The Pope has done his worst: I have to pay 75
 For the execution of the Count, by Jove!
 Two days since, I reported him as safe,
 Re-echoing the conviction of all Rome:
 Who could suspect its one deaf ear — the Pope's?
 But prejudices grow insuperable, 80
 And that old enmity to Austria, that
 Passion for France and France's pageant-king
 (Of which, why pause to multiply the proofs
 Now scandalously rife in Europe's mouth?)
 These fairly got the better in our man 85
 Of justice, prudence, and *esprit de corps*,
 And he persisted in the butchery.
 Also, 't is said that in his latest walk
 To that Dogana-by-the-Bank³ he built,
 The crowd, — he suffers question, unrebuked, — 90
 Asked, 'Whether murder was a privilege
 Only reserved for nobles like the Count?'
 And he was ever mindful of the mob.
 Martinez, the Cæsarian Minister,
 — Who used his best endeavors to spare blood, 95
 And strongly pleaded for the life 'of one,'
 Urged he, 'I may have dined at table with!' —
 He will not soon forget the Pope's rebuff.
 — Feels the slight sensibly, I promise you!
 And but for the dissuasion of two eyes 100
 That make with him foul weather or fine day,
 He had abstained, nor graced the spectacle:
 As it was, barely would he condescend

¹ *Holy Doors*: see III, 567.

² *Fénelon will be condemned*: Fénelon's
 "Explication des Maximes des Saints" was

condemned by Pope Innocent in 1699 for its
 advocacy of Quietism.

³ *Dogana*: custom-house.

Look forth from the *palchetto*¹ where he sat
 Under the Pincian: we shall hear of this. 105
 The substituting, too, the People's Square
 For the out-o'-the-way old quarter by the Bridge,
 Was meant as a conciliatory sop
 To the mob; it gave one holiday the more.
 But the French Embassy might unfurl flag, — 110
 Still the good luck of France to fling a foe!
 Cardinal Bouillon triumphs properly.
Palchetti were erected in the Place.
 And houses, at the edge of the Three Streets,²
 Let their front windows at six dollars each: 115
 Anguisciola, that patron of the arts,
 Hired one; our Envoy Contarini too.

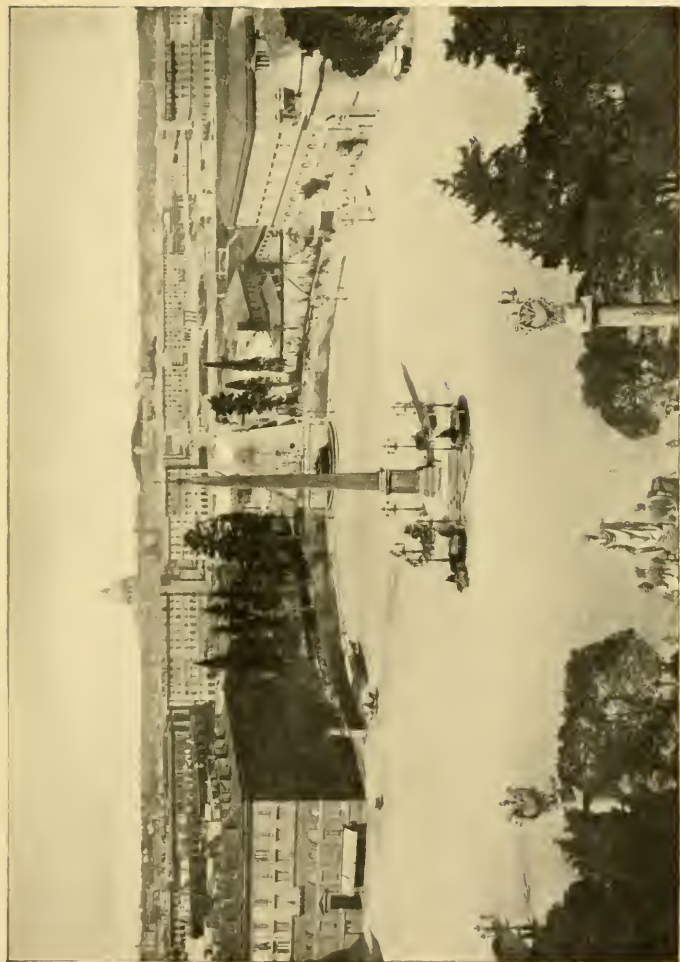
 "Now for the thing; no sooner the decree
 Gone forth, — 't is four-and-twenty hours ago, —
 Than Acciaiuoli and Panciatichi, 120
 Old friends, indeed compatriots of the man,
 Being pitched on as the couple properest
 To intimate the sentence yesternight,
 Were closeted ere cock-crow with the Count.
 They both report their efforts to dispose 125
 The unhappy nobleman for ending well,
 Despite the natural sense of injury,
 Were crowned at last with a complete success.
 And when the Company of Death arrived
 At twenty-hours, — the way they reckon here, — 130
 We say, at sunset, after dinner-time, —
 The Count was led down, hoisted up on car,
 Last of the five, as heinous, you know:
 Yet they allowed one whole car to each man.
 His intrepidity, nay, nonchalance, 135
 As up he stood and down he sat himself,
 Struck admiration into those who saw.
 Then the procession started, took the way
 From the New Prisons by the Pilgrim's Street,
 The street of the Governo, Pasquin's Street,³ 140
 (Where was stuck up, mid other epigrams,
 A quatrain . . . but of all that, presently!)

¹ *Palchetto*: stage or scaffold.

² *The Three Streets*: Via di Ripetta, Via del Babuino, and the Corso, diverging southward from the Piazza del Popolo.

³ *Pasquin's Street*: Pasquin, which names the street, was a broken stump of an antique statue probably of Ajax supporting Menelaus, near Pasquin's tailor-shop, the rendezvous of

the city wits. After Pasquin's death in the sixteenth century, this statue was dug up near his shop, and set up there and named in his honor, and the sharp sayings and *bon-mots* of the city were pasted up on Pasquin, and hence called Pasquinades. A similar statue, Marforio, in another quarter, was used on which to post replies to Pasquin.



PIAZZA DEL POPOLO, ROME.

The Place Navona, the Pantheon's Place,
 Place of the Column, last the Corso's length,
 And so debouched thence at Mannaia's foot 145
 I' the Place o' the People. As is evident,
 (Despite the malice. — plainly meant, I fear,
 By this abrupt change of locality, —
 The Square's no such bad place to head and hang)
 We had the titillation as we sat 150
 Assembled, (quality in conclave, ha?)
 Of, minute after minute, some report
 How the slow show was winding on its way.
 Now did a car run over, kill a man,
 Just opposite a pork-shop numbered Twelve: 155
 And bitter were the outcries of the mob
 Against the Pope: for, but that he forbids
 The Lottery, why, Twelve were Tern Quatern!¹
 Now did a beggar by Saint Agnes, lame
 From his youth up, recover use of leg, 160
 Through prayer of Guido as he glanced that way:
 So that the crowd near crammed his hat with coin.
 Thus was kept up excitement to the last,
 — Not an abrupt out-bolting, as of yore,
 From Castle, over Bridge and on to block, 165
 And so all ended ere you well could wink!

"To mount the scaffold-steps, Guido was last
 Here also, as atrociouslest in crime.
 We hardly noticed how the peasants died,
 They dangled somehow soon to right and left, 170
 And we remained all ears and eyes, could give
 Ourselves to Guido undividedly,
 As he harangued the multitude beneath.
 He begged forgiveness on the part of God,
 And fair construction of his act from men, 175
 Whose suffrage he entreated for his soul,
 Suggesting that we should forthwith repeat
 A *Pater*² and an *Ave*,³ with the hymn
Salve Regina Cæli,⁴ for his sake.
 Which said, he turned to the confessor, crossed 180
 And reconciled himself, with decency,
 Oft glancing at Saint Mary's opposite,
 Where they possess, and showed in shrine to-day,
 The blessed *Umbilicus*⁵ of our Lord,
 (A relic 't is believed no other church 185

¹ *Tern Quatern*: a lottery prize resulting from a combination of threes and fours.

² *Pater*: "Our Father."

³ *Ave*: "Hail, Mary."

⁴ *Salve Regina*: "Hail, Queen of Heaven."

⁵ *Umbilicus*: navel.

In Rome can boast of) — then rose up, as brisk
 Knelt down again, bent head, adapted neck,
 And, with the name of Jesus on his lips,
 Received the fatal blow.

“ The headsman showed
 The head to the populace. Must I avouch 190
 We strangers own to disappointment here?
 Report pronounced him fully six feet high,
 Youngish, considering his fifty years,
 And, if not handsome, dignified at least.
 Indeed, it was no face to please a wife! 195
 His friends say, this was caused by the costume :
 He wore the dress he did the murder in,
 That is, a *just-a-corps*,¹ of russet serge,
 Black camisole, coarse cloak of baracan
 (So they style here the garb of goat's-hair cloth) 200
 White hat and cotton cap beneath, poor Count
 Preservative against the evening dews
 During the journey from Arezzo. Well,
 So died the man, and so his end was peace ;
 Whence many a moral were to meditate. 205
 Spada, — you may bet Dandolo, — is Pope!
 Now for the quatrain! ”

No, friend, this will do!
 You've sputtered into sparks. What streak comes next?
 A letter: Don Giacinto Arcangeli.
 Doctor and Proctor, him I made you mark 210
 Buckle to business in his study late,
 The virtuous sire, the valiant for the truth,
 Acquaints his correspondent, — Florentine,
 By name Cencini, advocate as well,
*Socius*² and brother-in-the-devil to match. — 215
 A friend of Franceschini, anyhow,
 And knit up with the bowels of the case, —
 Acquaints him, (in this paper that I touch)
 How their joint effort to obtain reprieve
 For Guido had so nearly nicked the nine 220
 And ninety and one over, — folk would say
 At Tarocs,³ — or succeeded, — in our phrase.
 To this Cencini's care I owe the Book,
 The yellow thing I take and toss once more, —
 How will it be, my four-years'-intimate, 225

¹ *Just-a-corps*: close to the body, a tightly fitting coat.

² *Socius*: an ally.

³ *Tarocs*: a game of cards.

When thou and I part company anon? —
 'T was he, the "whole position of the case,"
 Pleading and summary, were put before;
 Discreetly in my Book he bound them all,
 Adding some three epistles to the point. 230
 Here is the first of these, part fresh as penned,
 The sand, that dried the ink, not rubbed away,
 Though penned the day whereof it tells the deed:
 Part — extant just as plainly, you know where,
 Whence came the other stuff, went, you know how, 235
 To make the Ring that's all but round and done.

"Late they arrived, too late, egregious Sir,
 Those same justificative points you urge
 Might benefit His Blessed Memory
 Count Guido Franceschini now with God: 240
 Since the Court, — to state things succinctly, — styled
 The Congregation of the Governor,
 Having resolved on Tuesday last our cause
 I' the guilty sense, with death for punishment,
 Spite of all pleas by me deducible 245
 In favor of said Blessed Memory, —
 I, with expenditure of pains enough,
 Obtained a respite, leave to claim and prove
 Exemption from the law's award. — alleged
 The power and privilege o' the Clericate: 250
 To which effect a courier was despatched.
 But ere an answer from Arezzo came,
 The Holiness of our Lord the Pope (prepare!)
 Judging it inexpedient to postpone
 The execution of such sentence passed, 255
 Saw fit, by his particular cheirograph,
 To derogate, dispense with privilege,
 And wink at any hurt accruing thence
 To Mother Church through damage of her son:
 Also, to overpass and set aside 260
 That other plea on score of tender age,
 Put forth by me to do Pasquini good,
 One of the four in trouble with our friend.
 So that all five, to-day, have suffered death
 With no distinction save in dying, — he, 265
 Decollate by mere due of privilege,
 The rest hanged decently and in order. Thus
 Came the Count to his end of gallant man,
 Defunct in faith and exemplarity:
 Nor shall the shield of his great House lose shine 270
 Thereby, nor its blue banner blush to red.

This, too, should yield sustainment to our hearts —
 He had commiseration and respect
 In his decease from universal Rome,
*Quantum est hominum venustiorum.*¹ 275
 The nice and cultivated everywhere :
 Though, in respect of me his advocate,
 Needs must I groan o'er my debility,
 Attribute the untoward event o' the strife
 To nothing but my own crass ignorance 280
 Which failed to set the valid reasons forth,
 Find fit excuse: such is the fate of war!
 May God compensate us the direful blow
 By future blessings on his family,
 Whereof I lowly beg the next commands ; 285
 — Whereeto, as humbly, I confirm myself . . .”

And so forth, — follow name and place and date.
 On next leaf —

“ *Hactenus senioribus!*²

There, old fox, show the clients t' other side
 And keep this corner sacred, I beseech! 290
 You and your pleas and proofs were what folk call
 Pisan assistance, aid that comes too late,
 Saves a man dead as nail in post of door.
 Had I but time and space for narrative!
 What was the good of twenty Clericates 295
 When Somebody's thick headpiece once was bent
 On seeing Guido's drop into the bag?
 How these old men like giving youth a push!
 So much the better: next push goes to him,
 And a new Pope begins the century. 300
 Much good I get by my superb defence!
 But argument is solid and subsists,
 While obstinacy and ineptitude
 Accompany the owner to his tomb —
 What do I care how soon? Beside, folk see! 305
 Rome will have relished heartily the show,
 Yet understood the motives, never fear.
 Which caused the indecent change o' the People's Place
 To the People's Playground, — stigmatize the spite
 Which in a trice precipitated things! 310
 As oft the moribund will give a kick
 To show they are not absolutely dead,
 So feebleness i' the socket shoots its last,

¹ *Quantum est*, etc.: “all the world of elders, meaning the general public, what follows being confidential.” — from Catullus, 3, 2.

² *Hactenus senioribus*: thus far for our

A spirt of violence for energy!
 But thou, Cencini, brother of my breast, 315
 O fox whose home is 'mid the tender grape,
 Whose couch in Tuscany by Themis'¹ throne,
 Subject to no such . . . best I shut my mouth
 Or only open it again to say,
 This pother and confusion fairly laid, 320
 My hands are empty and my satchel lank.
 Now then for both the Matrimonial Cause
 And the Case of Gomez!² Serve them hot and hot!

*.. Reliqua differamus in crastinum!*³
 The impatient estafette⁴ cracks whip outside : 325
 Still, though the earth should swallow him who swears
 And me who make the mischief, in must slip—
 My boy, your godson, fat-chaps Hyacinth,
 Enjoyed the sight while Papa plodded here.
 I promised him, the rogue, a month ago, 330
 The day his birthday was, of all the days,
 That if I failed to save Count Guido's head,
 Cinuccio should at least go see it chopped
 From trunk—'So, latinize your thanks!' quoth I.
 'That I prefer, *hoc malim*,' raps me out 335
 The rogue: you notice the subjunctive? Ah!
 Accordingly he sat there, bold in box,
 Proud as the Pope behind the peacock-fans:
 Whereon a certain lady-patroness
 For whom I manage things (my boy in front, 340
 Her Marquis sat the third in evidence;
 Boys have no eyes nor ears save for the show)
 'This time, Cintino,' was her sportive word,
 When whiz and thump went axe and mowed lay man,
 And folk could fall to the suspended chat, 345
 'This time, you see, Bottini rules the roast,
 Nor can Papa with all his eloquence
 Be reckoned on to help as heretofore!'
 Whereat Cinone pouts; then, sparkishly—
 'Papa knew better than aggrieve his Pope, 350
 And baulk him of his grudge against our Count,
 Else he 'd have argued-off Bottini's' . . . what?
 'His nose,'—the rogue! well parried of the boy!
 He 's long since out of Cæsar (eight years old)

¹ *Themis*: Goddess of Justice, Daughter of Heaven and Earth. "Themis' throne," the law court in Tuscany, Archangeli supposes to be better than that in Rome.

² *Case of Gomez*: a veritable case, referred

to in one of Browning's MS. sources for this poem.

³ *Reliqua*, etc.: "the rest let us put off till to-morrow."

⁴ *Estafette*: news carrier.

And as for tripping in Eutropius . . . well, 355
 Reason the more that we strain every nerve
 To do him justice, mould a model-mouth,
 A Bartolus-cum-Baldo¹ for next age :
 For that I purse the pieces, work the brain,
 And want both Gomez and the marriage-case, 360
 Success with which shall plaster aught of pate
 That 's broken in me by Bottini's flail,
 And bruise his own, belike, that wags and brags.
*Adverti supplico humiliter*²
Quod don't the fungus see, the fop divine 365
 That one hand drives two horses, left and right?
 With this rein did I rescue from the ditch
 The fortune of our Franceschini, keep
 Unsplashed the credit of a noble House,
 And set the fashionable cause at Rome 370
 A-prancing till bystanders shouted 'ware!
 The other rein's judicious management
 Suffered old Somebody to keep the pace,
 Hobblingly play the roadster : who but he
 Had his opinion, was not led by the nose 375
 In leash of quibbles strung to look like law!
 You'll soon see, — when I go to pay devoir
 And compliment him on confuting me. —
 If, by a back-swing of the pendulum,
 Grace be not, thick and threefold, consequent. 380
 'I must decide as I see proper. Don!
 I'm Pope, I have my inward lights for guide.
 Had learning been the matter in dispute,
 Could eloquence avail to gainsay fact,
 Yours were the victory, be comforted!' 385
 Cinuzzo will be gainer by it all.
 Quick then with Gomez, hot and hot next case!"

Follows, a letter, takes the other side.
 Tall blue-eyed Fisc whose head is capped with cloud,
 Doctor Bottini, — to no matter who, 390
 Writes on the Monday two days afterward.
 Now shall the honest championship of right,
 Crowned with success, enjoy at last, unblamed,
 Moderate triumph! Now shall eloquence
 Poured forth in fancied floods for virtue's sake, 395
 (The print is sorrowfully dyked and dammed,

¹ *Bartolus-cum-Baldo*: see notes on Bartolus and Baldo, I. Both rolled into one would but equal Cinone. ² *Adverti*, etc.: I humbly beg that it may be noticed.

But shows where fain the unbridled force would flow,
 Finding a channel) — now shall this refresh
 The thirsty donor with a drop or two!
 Here has been truth at issue with a lie : 400
 Let who gained truth the day have handsome pride
 In his own prowess! Eh! What ails the man?

“ Well, it is over, ends as I foresaw :
 Easily proved, Pompilia’s innocence!
 Catch them entrusting Guido’s guilt to me 405
 Who had, as usual, the plain truth to plead.
 I always knew the clearness of the stream
 Would show the fish so thoroughly, child might prong
 The clumsy monster : with no mud to splash.
 Small credit to lynx-eye and lightning-spear! 410
 This Guido. — (much sport he contrived to make,
 Who at first twist, preamble of the cord,
 Turned white, told all, like the poltroon he was!) —
 Finished, as you expect, a penitent,
 Fully confessed his crime, and made amends. 415
 And, edifying Rome last Saturday,
 Died like a saint, poor devil! That’s the man
 The gods still give to my antagonist :
 Imagine how Arcangeli claps wing
 And crows! ‘Such formidable facts to face, 420
 So naked to attack, my client here,
 And yet I kept a month the Fisc at bay.
 And in the end had foiled him of the prize
 By this arch-stroke, this plea of privilege,
 But that the Pope must gratify his whim, 425
 Put in his word, poor old man, — let it pass!’
 — Such is the cue to which all Rome responds.
 What with the plain truth given me to uphold,
 And, should I let truth slip, the Pope at hand
 To pick up, steady her on legs again, 430
 My office turns a pleasantry indeed!
 Not that the burly boaster did one jot
 O’ the little was to do — young Spreti’s work!
 But for him, — mannikin and dandiprat,
 Mere candle-end and inch of cleverness 435
 Stuck on Arcangeli’s save-all. — but for him
 The spruce young Spreti, what is bad were worse!

“ I looked that Rome should have the natural gird
 At advocate with case that proves itself :
 I knew Arcangeli would grin and brag : 440
 But what say you to one impertinence

Might move a stone? That monk, you are to know,
 That barefoot Augustinian whose report
 O' the dying woman's words did detriment
 To my best points it took the freshness from, 445
 — That meddler preached to purpose yesterday
 At San Lorenzo as a winding-up
 O' the show which proved a treasure to the church.
 Out comes his sermon smoking from the press :
 Its text — ' Let God be true, and every man 450
 A liar ' — and its application, this
 The longest-winded of the paragraphs,
 I straight unstitch, tear out and treat you with :
 'T is piping hot and posts through Rome to-day.
 Remember it, as I engage to do! 455

" But if you rather be disposed to see
 In the result of the long trial here, —
 This dealing doom to guilt and doling praise
 To innocency, — any proof that truth 460
 May look for vindication from the world,
 Much will you have misread the signs, I say.
 God, who seems acquiescent in the main
 With those who add ' So will he ever sleep ' —
 Flutters their foolishness from time to time,
 Puts forth His right-hand recognizably ; 465
 Even as, to fools who deem He needs must right
 Wrong on the instant, as if earth were heaven,
 He wakes remonstrance — ' Passive, Lord, how long ? '
 Because Pompilia's purity prevails,
 Conclude you, all truth triumphs in the end? 470
 So might those old inhabitants of the ark,
 Witnessing haply their dove's safe return,
 Pronounce there was no danger, all the while
 O' the deluge, to the creature's counterparts,
 Aught that beat wing i' the world, was white or soft, — 475
 And that the lark, the thrush, the culver¹ too,
 Might easily have traversed air, found earth,
 And brought back olive-branch in unharmed bill.
 Methinks I hear the Patriarch's warning voice —
 ' Though this one breast, by miracle, return, 480
 No wave rolls by, in all the waste, but bears
 Within it some dead dove-like thing as dear,
 Beauty made blank and harmlessness destroyed ! '
 How many chaste and noble sister-fames
 Wanted the extricating hand, so lie 485

¹ *Culver* : wood-pigeon.

Strangled, for one Pompilia proud above
The welter, plucked from the world's calumny,
Stupidity, simplicity, — who cares?

“ Romans! An elder race possessed your land
Long ago, and a false faith lingered still, 490
As shades do though the morning-star be out.
Doubtless some pagan of the twilight-day
Has often pointed to a cavern-mouth
Obnoxious to beholders, hard by Rome,
And said, — nor he a bad man, no, nor fool, 495
Only a man born blind like all his mates, —
Here skulk in safety, lurk, defying law,
The devotees to execrable creed.
Adoring — with what culture . . . Jove, avert
Thy vengeance from us worshippers of thee! . . . 500
What rites obscene — their idol-god, an Ass!’¹
So went the word forth, so acceptance found,
So century re-echoed century,
Cursed the accursed, — and so, from sire to son,
You Romans cried ‘The offscourings of our race 505
Corrupt within the depths there: fitly fiends
Perform a temple-service o’er the dead:
Child, gather garment round thee, pass nor pry!’
Thus groaned your generations: till the time
Grew ripe, and lightning had revealed, belike, — 510
Thro’ crevice peeped into by curious fear, —
Some object even fear could recognize
I’ the place of spectres; on the illumined wall,
To-wit, some nook, tradition talks about.
Narrow and short, a corpse’s length, no more: 515
And by it, in the due receptacle,
The little rude brown lamp of earthenware.
The cruse, was meant for flowers but now held blood,
The rough-scratched palm-branch,² and the legend left
Pro Christo.³ Then the mystery lay clear: 520
The abhorred one was a martyr all the time,
Heaven’s saint whereof earth was not worthy. What?
Do you continue in the old belief?
Where blackness bides unbroke, must devils brood?
Is it so certain not another cell . . . 525
O’ the myriad that make up the catacomb
Contains some saint a second flash would show?
Will you ascend into the light of day

¹ *Idol-god, an Ass*: an accusation common against the early Christians.

² *Palm-branch*: one of the Christian em-

blems found graven in the catacombs, in token of moral victory.

³ *Pro Christo*: for Christ.

And, having recognized a martyr's shrine,
 Go join the votaries that gape around 530
 Each vulgar god that awes the market-place?
 Are these the objects of your praising? See!
 In the outstretched right hand of Apollo, there.
 Lies screened a scorpion: housed amid the folds
 Of Juno's mantle lurks a centipede! 535
 Each statue of a god were fittier styled
 Demon and devil. Glorify no brass
 That shines like burnished gold in noonday glare,
 For fools! Be otherwise instructed, you!
 And preferably ponder, ere ye judge, 540
 Each incident of this strange human play
 Privily acted on a theatre
 That seemed secure from every gaze but God's, —
 Till, of a sudden, earthquake laid wall low
 And let the world perceive wild work inside 545
 And how, in petrification of surprise,
 The actors stood, — raised arm and planted foot, —
 Mouth as it made, eye as it evidenced,
 Despairing shriek, triumphant hate, — transfixed,
 Both he who takes and she who yields the life. 550

" As ye become spectators of this scene,
 Watch obscuration of a pearl-pure fame
 By vapory films, enwoven circumstance,
 — A soul made weak by its pathetic want
 Of just the first apprenticeship to sin 555
 Which thenceforth makes the sinning soul secure
 From all foes save itself, souls' truest foe, —
 Since egg turned snake needs fear no serpentry, —
 As ye behold this web of circumstance
 Deepen the more for every thrill and throe, 560
 Convulsive effort to disperse the films
 And disenmesh the fame o' the martyr, — mark
 How all those means, the unfriended one pursues,
 To keep the treasure trusted to her breast,
 Each struggle in the flight from death to life, 565
 How all, by procreation of the powers
 Of darkness, are transformed, — no single ray,
 Shot forth to show and save the inmost star,
 But, passed as through hell's prism, proceeding black
 To the world that hates white: as ye watch, I say, 570
 Till dusk and such defacement grow eclipse
 By, — marvellous perversity of man! —
 The inadequacy and inaptitude
 Of that self-same machine, that very law
 Man vaunts, devised to dissipate the gloom, 575

Rescue the drowning orb from calumny,
 — Hear law, appointed to defend the just,
 Submit, for best defence, that wickedness
 Was bred of flesh and innate with the bone
 Borne by Pompilia's spirit for a space, 580
 And no mere chance fault, passionate and brief :
 Finally, when ye find, — after this touch
 Of man's protection which intends to mar
 The last pin-point of light and damn the disc. —
 One wave of the hand of God amid the worlds 585
 Bid vapor vanish, darkness flee away,
 And let the vexed star culminate in peace
 Approachable no more by earthly mist —
 What I call God's hand, — you, perhaps, — mere chance
 Of the true instinct of an old good man 590
 Who happens to hate darkness and love light, —
 In whom too was the eye that saw, not dim,
 The natural force to do the thing he saw.
 Nowise abated, — both by miracle, —
 All this well pondered, — I demand assent 595
 To the enunciation of my text
 In face of one proof more that 'God is true
 And every man a liar' — that who trusts —
 To human testimony for a fact
 Gets this sole fact — himself is proved a fool ; 600
 Man's speech being false, if but by consequence
 That only strength is true : while man is weak,
 And, since truth seems reserved for heaven not earth,
 Plagued here by earth's prerogative of lies,
 Should learn to love and long for what, one day, 605
 Approved by life's probation, he may speak.

" For me, the weary and worn, who haply prompt
 To mirth or pity, as I move the mood, —
 A friar who glides unnoticed to the grave,
 With these bare feet, coarse robe and rope-girt waist, — 610
 I have long since renounced your world, ye know :
 Yet what forbids I weigh the prize forgone,
 The worldly worth? I dare, as I were dead,
 Disinterestedly judge this and that
 Good ye account good : but God tries the heart. 615
 Still, if you question me of my content
 At having put each human pleasure by,
 I answer, at the urgency of truth :
 As this world seems, I dare not say I know
 — Apart from Christ's assurance which decides — 620
 Whether I have not failed to taste much joy.
 For many a doubt will fain perturb my choice —

Many a dream of life spent otherwise —
 How human love, in varied shapes, might work
 As glory, or as rapture, or as grace : 625
 How conversancy with the books that teach,
 The arts that help, — how, to grow good and great,
 Rather than simply good, and bring thereby
 Goodness to breathe and live, nor, born i' the brain,
 Die there, — how these and many another gift 630
 Of life are precious though abjured by me.
 But, for one prize, best meed of mightiest man,
 Arch-object of ambition, — earthly praise,
 Repute o' the world, the flourish of loud trump,
 The softer social fluting, — Oh, for these, 635
 — No, my friends! Fame, — that bubble which, world-wide
 Each blows and bids his neighbor lend a breath,
 That so he haply may behold thereon
 One more enlarged distorted false fool's-face,
 Until some glassy nothing grown as big 640
 Send by a touch the imperishable to suds, —
 No, in renouncing fame, my loss was light.
 Choosing obscurity, my chance was well!"

Didst ever touch such ampollosity¹
 As the monk's own bubble, let alone its spite? 645
 What's his speech for, but just the fame he flouts?
 How he dares reprehend both high and low,
 Nor stoops to turn the sentence "God is true
 And every man a liar — save the Pope
 Happily reigning — my respects to him!" 650
 And so round off the period. Molinism
 Simple and pure! To what pitch get we next?
 I find that, for first pleasant consequence,
 Gomez, who had intended to appeal
 From the absurd decision of the Court, 655
 Declines, though plain enough his privilege,
 To call on help from lawyers any more —
 Resolves earth's liars may possess the world,
 Till God have had sufficiency of both :
 So may I whistle for my job and fee! 660

But, for this virulent and rabid monk, —
 If law be an inadequate machine,
 And advocacy, froth and impotence,
 We shall soon see, my blatant brother! That's
 Exactly what I hope to show your sort! 665

¹ *Ampollosity*: wind-bag quality.

For, by a veritable piece of luck,
 The providence, you monks round period with,
 All may be gloriously retrieved. Perpend!
 That Monastery of the Convertites
 Whereto the Court consigned Pompilia first, 670
 — Observe, if convertite, why, sinner then,
 Or what's the pertinency of award? —
 And whither she was late returned to die,
 — Still in their jurisdiction, mark again! —
 That thrifty Sisterhood, for perquisite, 675
 Claims every piece whereof may die possessed
 Each sinner in the circuit of its walls.
 Now, this Pompilia seeing that, by death
 O' the couple, all their wealth devolved on her,
 Straight utilized the respite ere decease, 680
 By regular conveyance of the goods
 She thought her own, to will and to devise, —
 Gave all to friends, Tighetti and the like,
 In trust for him she held her son and heir,
 Gaetano, — trust which ends with infancy : 685
 So willing and devising, since assured
 The justice of the Court would presently
 Confirm her in her rights and exculpate,
 Re-integrate and rehabilitate —
 Place her as, through my pleading, now she stands. 690
 But here's the capital mistake : the Court
 Found Guido guilty, — but pronounced no word
 About the innocency of his wife :
 I grounded charge on broader base, I hope!
 No matter whether wife be true or false, 695
 The husband must not push aside the law,
 And punish of a sudden : that's the point :
 Gather from out my speech the contrary!
 It follows that Pompilia, unrelieved
 By formal sentence from imputed fault, 700
 Remains unfit to have and to dispose
 Of property which law provides shall lapse.
 Wherefore the Monastery claims its due :
 And whose, pray, whose the office, but the Fisc's?
 Who but I institute procedure next 705
 Against the person of dishonest life,
 Pompilia whom last week I sainted so?
 I it is teach the monk what scripture means,
 And that the tongue should prove a two-edged sword,
 No axe sharp one side, blunt the other way. 710
 Like what amused the town at Guido's cost!
*Astræa redux!*¹ I've a second chance

¹ *Astræa redux* : justice brought back.

Before the self-same Court o' the Governor
 Who soon shall see volte-face and chop, change sides.
 Accordingly, I charge you on your life, 715
 Send me with all despatch the judgment late
 O' the Florence Rota Court, confirmative
 O' the prior judgment at Arezzo, clenched
 Again by the Granducal signature,
 Wherein Pompilia is convicted, doomed, 720
 And only destined to escape through flight
 The proper punishment. Send me the piece, —
 I'll work it! And this foul-mouthed friar shall find
 His Noah's-dove that brought the olive back
 Turn into quite the other sooty scout, 725
 The raven, Noah first put forth the ark,
 Which never came back but ate carcasses!
 No adequate machinery in law?
 No power of life and death i' the learned tongue?
 Methinks I am already at my speech, 730
 Startle the world with "Thou, Pompilia, thus?
 How is the fine gold of the Temple dim!"
 And so forth. But the courier bids me close,
 And clip away one joke that runs through Rome,
 Side by side with the sermon which I send. 735
 How like the heartlessness of the old hunks
 Arcangeli! His Count is hardly cold,
 The client whom his blunders sacrificed,
 When somebody must needs describe the scene —
 How the procession ended at the church 740
 That boasts the famous relic: quoth our brute,
 "Why, that 's just Martial's phrase¹ for 'make an end'—
Ad umbilicum sic perventum est!"
 The callous dog, — let who will cut off head,
 He cuts a joke and cares no more than so! 745
 I think my speech shall modify his mirth.
 "How is the fine gold dim!" — but send the piece!

Alack, Bottini, what is my next word
 But death to all that hope? The Instrument
 Is plain before me, print that ends my Book 750
 With the definitive verdict of the Court,
 Dated September, six months afterward,
 (Such trouble and so long the old Pope gave!)

¹ *The famous relic . . . Martial's phrase*: used to be rolled; hence the phrase *ad umbilicum pervenire* (Martial, iv. 89) meant "to reach the end" of a book. see line 184. *Umbilicus* also means an ornamental knob at the end of the stick round which books, in Greek and Roman times,

“In restitution of the perfect fame
Of dead Pompilia, *quondam* Guido’s wife, 755
And warrant to her representative
Domenico Tighetti, barred hereby,
While doing duty in his guardianship,
From all molesting, all disquietude,
Each perturbation and vexation brought 760
Or threatened to be brought against the heir
By the Most Venerable Convent called
Saint Mary Magdalen o’ the Convertites
I’ the Corso.”

Justice done a second time!
Well judged, Mark Antony, *Locum-tenens*¹ 765
O’ the Governor, a Venturini too!
For which I save thy name,—last of the list!

Next year but one, completing his nine years
Of rule in Rome, died Innocent my Pope
— By some account, on his accession-day. 770
If he thought doubt would do the next age good,
’T is pity he died unapprised what birth
His reign may boast of, be remembered by —
Terrible Pope, too, of a kind, — Voltaire.

And so an end of all i’ the story. Strain 775
Never so much my eyes, I miss the mark
If lived or died that Gaetano, child
Of Guido and Pompilia: only find,
Immediately upon his father’s death,
A record, in the annals of the town — 780
That Porzia, sister of our Guido, moved
The Priors of Arezzo and their head
Its Gonfalonier² to give loyally
A public attestation of the right
O’ the Franceschini to all reverence — 785
Apparently because of the incident
O’ the murder, — there ’s no mention made o’ the crime,
But what else could have caused such urgency
To cure the mob, just then, of greediness
For scandal, love of lying vanity, 790
And appetite to swallow crude reports
That bring annoyance to their betters? — bane
Which, here, was promptly met by antidote.
I like and shall translate the eloquence
Of nearly the worst Latin ever writ: 795

¹ *Locum-tenens*: a proxy, holding the place of the governor.

² *Gonfalonier*: bearer of the gonfalon or banner of the town, the mayor.

"Since antique time whereof the memory
 Holds the beginning, to this present hour,
 The Franceschini ever shone, and shine
 Still i' the primary rank, supreme amid
 The lustres of Arezzo, proud to own 800
 In this great family, the flag-bearer,
 Guide of her steps and guardian against foe. —
 As in the first beginning, so to-day!"
 There, would you disbelieve the annalist,
 Go rather by the babble of a bard? 805
 I thought, Arezzo, thou hadst fitter souls,
 Petrarch,¹ — nay, Buonarroti at a pinch,
 To do thee credit as *vexillifer!*²
 Was it mere mirth the Patavinian³ meant.
 Making thee out, in his veracious page, 810
 Founded by Janus of the Double Face?

Well, proving of such perfect parentage,
 Our Gaetano, born of love and hate,
 Did the babe live or die? I fain would find!
 What were his fancies if he grew a man? 815
 Was he proud, — a true scion of the stock
 Which bore the blazon, shall make bright my page —
 Shield, Azure, on a Triple Mountain, Or,
 A Palm-tree, Proper, whereunto is tied
 A Greyhound, Rampant, striving in the slips? 820
 Or did he love his mother, the base-born,
 And fight i' the ranks, unnoticed by the world?

Such, then, the final state o' the story. So
 Did the Star Wormwood in a blazing fall
 Frighten awhile the waters and lie lost. 825
 So did this old woe fade from memory:
 Till after, in the fulness of the days,
 I needs must find an ember yet unquenched.
 And, breathing, blow the spark to flame. It lives,
 If precious be the soul of man to man. 830

So, British Public, who may like me yet,
 (Marry and amen!) learn one lesson hence
 Of many which whatever lives should teach:
 This lesson, that our human speech is naught,
 Our human testimony false, our fame 835
 And human estimation words and wind.

¹ Petrarch was born in the town of Arezzo, and Buonarroti (Michel Angelo) in the territory, though not in the town itself.

² *Vexillifer*: standard-bearer.

³ *The Patavinian*: Livy, born in Padua, or Patavium, which is its ancient name.

Why take the artistic way to prove so much?
 Because, it is the glory and good of Art,
 That Art remains the one way possible
 Of speaking truth, to mouths like mine at least. 840
 How look a brother in the face and say
 "Thy right is wrong, eyes hast thou yet art blind,
 Thine ears are stuffed and stopped, despite their length:
 And, oh, the foolishness thou countest faith!"
 Say this as silverly as tongue can troll — 845
 The anger of the man may be endured,
 The shrug, the disappointed eyes of him
 Are not so bad to bear — but here 's the plague
 That all this trouble comes of telling truth,
 Which truth, by when it reaches him, looks false, 850
 Seems to be just the thing it would supplant,
 Nor recognizable by whom it left:
 While falsehood would have done the work of truth.
 But Art, — wherein man nowise speaks to men,
 Only to mankind. — Art may tell a truth 855
 Obliquely, do the thing shall breed the thought,
 Nor wrong the thought, missing the mediate word.
 So may you paint your picture, twice show truth,
 Beyond mere imagery on the wall, —
 So, note by note, bring music from your mind, 860
 Deeper than ever e'en Beethoven dived, —
 So write a book shall mean beyond the facts.
 Suffice the eye and save the soul beside.

And save the soul! If this intent save mine. —
 If the rough ore be rounded to a ring, 865
 Render all duty which good ring should do.
 And, failing grace, succeed in guardianship,
 Might mine but lie outside thine, Lyric Love.
 Thy rare gold ring of verse (the poet praised)¹
 Linking our England to his Italy! 870

¹ *The poet*: the Italian critic, poet, and patriot, Tommasco (1803-1874), who wrote . . . fece del suo verso aureo anello fra Italia e Inghilterra." [Here wrote and died E. B. Browning, who . . . made with her golden verse a ring linking Italy to England.]

APPENDIX.

THE RAW MATERIAL OF THE RING AND THE BOOK.

ALMOST every incident contained in the "Old Square Yellow Book" is said to have been worked into the poem. The bare facts of the antique chronicle, together with an outline of the story it tells, are given by Mrs. Orr as follows:—

There lived in Rome in 1679 Pietro and Violante Comparini, an elderly couple of the middle class, fond of show and good living, and who in spite of a fair income had run considerably into debt. They were, indeed, at the period in question, in receipt of a papal bounty, employed in the relief of the needy who did not like to beg. Creditors were pressing, and only one expedient suggested itself: they must have a child; and thus enable themselves to draw on their capital, now tied up for the benefit of an unknown heir-at-law. The wife conceived this plan, and also carried it out, without taking her husband into her confidence. She secured beforehand the infant of a poor and not very reputable woman, announced her expectation, half miraculous at her past fifty years, and became, to all appearance, the mother of a girl, the Francesca Pompilia of the story.

When Pompilia had reached the age of thirteen, there was also in Rome Count Guido Franceschini, an impoverished nobleman of Arezzo, and the elder of three brothers, of whom the second, Abate Paolo, and the third, Canon Girolamo, also play some part in the story. Count Guido himself belonged to the minor ranks of the priesthood, and had spent his best years in seeking preferment in it. Preferment had not come, and the only means of building up the family fortunes in his own person, was now a moneyed wife. He was poor, fifty years old, and personally unattractive. A contemporary chronicle describes him as short, thin, and pale, and with a projecting nose. He had nothing to offer but his rank; but in the case of a very obscure heiress, this might suffice, and such a one seemed to present herself in Pompilia Comparini. He heard of her at the local centre of gossip, the barber's shop; re-

ceived an exaggerated estimate of her dowry; and made proposals for her hand; being supported in his suit by the Abate Paul. They did not, on their side, understate the advantages of the connection. They are, indeed, said to have given as their yearly income a sum exceeding their capital, and Violante was soon dazzled into consenting to it. Old Pietro was more wary. He made inquiries as to the state of the Count's fortune, and declined, under plea of his daughter's extreme youth, to think of him as a son-in-law.

Violante pretended submission, secretly led Pompilia to a church, the very church of San Lorenzo in Lucina, where four years later the murdered bodies of all three were to be displayed, and brought her back as Count Guido's wife. Pietro could only accept the accomplished fact; and he so far resigned himself to it, that he paid down an instalment of his daughter's dowry, and made up the deficiency by transferring to the newly married couple all that he actually possessed. This left him no choice but to live under their roof, and the four removed together to the Franceschini abode at Arezzo. The arrangement proved disastrous; and at the end of a few months Pietro and Violante were glad to return to Rome, though with empty pockets, and on money lent them for the journey by their son-in-law.

We have conflicting testimony as to the cause of this rupture. The Governor of Arezzo, writing to the Abate Paul in Rome, lays all the blame of it on the Comparini, whom he taxes with vulgar and aggressive behavior; and Mr. Browning readily admits that at the beginning there may have been faults on their side. But popular judgment, as well as the balance of evidence, were in favor of the opposite view; and curious details are given by Pompilia and by a servant of the family, a sworn witness on Pompilia's trial, of the petty cruelties and privations to which both parents and child were subjected.

So much, at all events, was clear; Violante's sin had overtaken her; and it now occurred to her, apparently for the first time, to cast off its burden by confession. The moment was propitious, for the Pope had proclaimed a jubilee in honor of his eightieth year, and absolution was to be had for the asking. But the Church in this case made conditions. Absolution must be preceded by atonement. Violante must restore to her legal heirs that of which her pretended motherhood had defrauded them. The first step toward this was to reveal the fraud to her husband; and Pietro lost no time in making use of the revelation. He repudiated Pompilia, and with her all claims on her husband's part. The case was carried into court. The Court decreed a compromise. Pietro appealed from the decree, and the question remained unsettled.

The chief sufferer by these proceedings was Pompilia herself. She

already had reason to dread her husband as a tyrant — He to dislike her as a victim; and his discovery of her base faith, with the threatened loss of the greater part of her dowry, could only result, with such a man, in increased aversion towards her. From this moment his one aim seems to have been to get rid of his wife, but in such a manner as not to forfeit any pecuniary advantage he might still derive from their union. This could only be done by convicting her of infidelity; and he attacked her so furiously, and so persistently, on the subject of a certain Canon Giuseppe Caponsacchi, whom she barely knew, but whose attentions he declared her to have challenged, that at last she fled from Arezzo with this very man.

She had appealed for protection against her husband's violence to the Archbishop and to the Governor. She had striven to enlist the aid of his brother-in-law, Conti. She had implored a priest in confession to write for her to her parents, and induce them to fetch her away. But the whole town was in the interest of the Franceschini, or in dread of them. Her prayers were useless, and Caponsacchi, whom she had heard of as a 'resolute man,' appeared her last resource. He was, as she knew, contemplating a journey to Rome; an opportunity presented itself for speaking to him from her window, or her balcony; and she persuaded him, though not without difficulty, to assist her escape, and conduct her to her old home. On a given night she slipped away from her husband's side, and joined the Canon where he awaited her with a carriage. They travelled day and night till they reached Castelnuovo, a village within four hours of the journey's end. There they were compelled to rest, and there also the husband overtook them. They were not together at the moment; but the fact of the elopement was patent; and if Franceschini had killed his wife there in the supposed excitement of the discovery, the law might have dealt leniently with him. But it suited him best for the time being to let her live. He procured the arrest of the fugitive, and after a short confinement on the spot, they were conveyed to the New Prisons in Rome (Carceri Nuove) and tried on the charge of adultery.

It is impossible not to believe that Count Guido had been working toward this end. Pompilia's verbal communications with Caponsacchi had been supplemented by letters, now brought to him in her name, now thrown or let down from her window as he passed the house. They were written, as he said, on the subject of the flight, and, as he also said, he turned them as soon as read, not doubting their authenticity. But Pompilia declared, on examination, that she could neither write nor read; and setting aside all presumption of her veracity, this was more than probable. The writer of the letters must, therefore, have

been the Count, or some one employed by him for the purpose. He now completed the intrigue by producing eighteen or twenty more of a very incriminating character, which he declared to have been left by the prisoners at Castelnuovo: and these were not only disclaimed with every appearance of sincerity by both the persons accused, but bore the marks of forgery within themselves.

Pompilia and Caponsacchi answered all the questions addressed to them simply and firmly; and though their statements did not always coincide, these were calculated on the whole to create a moral conviction of their innocence, the facts on which they disagreed being of little weight. But moral conviction was not legal proof; the question of false testimony does not seem to have been even raised; and the Court found itself in a dilemma, which it acknowledged in the following way: it was decreed that for his complicity in "the flight and deviation of Francesca Comparini," and too great intimacy with her, Caponsacchi should be banished for three years to Civita Vecchia; and that Pompilia, on her side, should be relegated, for the time being, to a convent. That is to say: the prisoners were pronounced guilty; and a merely nominal punishment was inflicted upon them.

The records of this trial contain almost everything of biographical or even dramatic interest in the original book. They are, so far as they go, the complete history of the case; and the result of the trial, ambiguous as it was, supplied the only argument on which an even formal defence of the subsequent murder could be based. The substance of these records appears in full in Mr. Browning's work; and his readers can judge for themselves whether the letters which were intended to substantiate Pompilia's guilt, could, even if she had possessed the power of writing, have been written by a woman so young and so uncultured as herself. They will also see that the Count's plot against his wife was still more deeply laid than the above-mentioned circumstances attest.

Count Guido was of course not satisfied. He wanted a divorce; and he continued to sue for it by means of his brother, the Abate Paul, then residing in Rome; but before long he received news which was destined to change his plans. Pompilia was about to become a mother; and in consideration of her state, she had been removed from the convent to her paternal home, where she was still to be ostensibly a prisoner. The Comparini then occupied a small villa outside one of the city gates. A few months later, in this secluded spot, the Countess Franceschini gave birth to a son, whom her parents lost no time in conveying to a place of concealment and safety. The murder took place a fortnight after this event. I give the rest of the story in an almost literal translation

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