

FLORENCE IN THE POETRY
OF THE BROWNINGS



McMAHAN

**Florence in the Poetry of
the Brownings**



CASA GUIDI. Home of
Robert and Elizabeth Bar-
rett Browning from 1847
to 1861. Corner of Via
Maggio and Via Mazzetta.



*“I heard last night a little child go singing
'Neath Casa Guidi windows, by the church.”*

— Casa Guidi Windows, p. 22.

*“I stepped out on the narrow terrace, built
Over the street and opposite the church,
And paced its lozenge-brickwork sprinkled cool.”*

— The Ring and the Book, p. 181.

Florence
in the
Poetry of the Brownings

Being a Selection of the Poems of
ROBERT AND ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

Which have to do with the History, the Scenery
and the Art of Florence

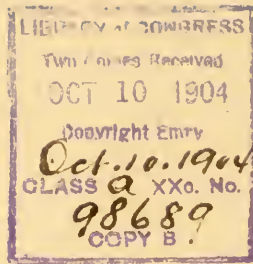
Edited by
Anna Benneson McMahan

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TO
ANNIE HOWELL ANNIS
LOVER OF FLORENCE
AND OF
BROWNING

CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	13

BY ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS	21
THE DANCE	99

BY ROBERT BROWNING

OLD PICTURES IN FLORENCE	105
FRA LIPPO LIPPI	121
ANDREA DEL SARTO	137
THE STATUE AND THE BUST	149
THE RING AND THE BOOK. BOOK I	163
ONE WORD MORE	217



ILLUSTRATIONS

Casa Guidi Windows	<i>Frontispiece</i>
Bridges of the Arno	<i>To face page 24</i>
Monument to Giuliano de' Medici New Sacristy of San Lorenzo	" " 26
Monument to Lorenzo de' Medici New Sacristy of San Lorenzo	" " 28
Martyrdom of Savonarola Museum of San Marco	" " 30
Statue of Savonarola Palazzo Vecchio	" " 32
Cell of Savonarola Museum of San Marco	" " 34
Church of Santa Maria Novella	" " 36
Fresco of Inferno, by Andrea Orcagna Strozzi Chapel of Santa Maria Novella	" " 38
Madonna Rucellai Chapel of Santa Maria Novella	" " 40
Crucifixion, by Margheritone Church of Santa Croce	" " 42
Portrait of Fra Angelico Academy of Fine Arts	" " 44
The Pitti Palace	" " 46
Loggia dei Lanzi	" " 48
Monument to Dante Church of Santa Croce	" " 50

ILLUSTRATIONS

Fresco of Dante	<i>To face page</i> 52
Bargello Chapel	
Gate of San Niccolò	" " 54
Gate of San Gallo	" " 56
Bust of Brutus	" " 58
Bargello	
Piazza in the Cascine	" " 60
View of Florence	" " 62
Campanile, with Cathedral and Baptistry	" " 66
Portrait of Michel Angelo	" " 68
Uffizi Gallery	
Portrait of Raphael Sanzio	" " 72
Uffizi Gallery	
Portrait of Leonardo da Vinci	" " 74
Uffizi Gallery	
Statue of Niobe	" " 80
Uffizi Gallery	
The Dying Alexander	" " 84
Uffizi Gallery	
Portraits of Cimabue, Giotto, and Taddeo Gaddi	" " 88
Spanish Chapel of Santa Maria Novella	
Statue of Niccola Pisano	" " 92
Portico of Uffizi	
Portrait of Ghiberti	" " 94
Palazzo Vecchio	
Portrait of Ghirlandajo	" " 100
Santa Maria Novella	
Portrait of Botticelli	" " 102
Uffizi Gallery	
Portrait of Filippino Lippi	" " 106
Uffizi Gallery	
Coronation of the Virgin, by Lorenzo Monaco	" " 108
Uffizi Gallery	

ILLUSTRATIONS

Madonna and Saints, by Baldovinetti	<i>To face page</i> 112
Uffizi Gallery	
Church of San Spirito	,, 114
The Cloisters of the Carmine	,, 116
Portrait of Cosimo the Elder, by Pontormo	,, 122
Uffizi Gallery	
St. Jerome, by Fra Filippo Lippi	,, 124
Academy of Fine Arts	
Church of the Carmine	,, 126
Group of Angels, by Giotto	,, 130
Medici Chapel in Santa Croce	
Portrait of Masaccio	,, 132
Brancacci Chapel in Church of the Carmine	
The Tribute Money, by Masaccio	,, 134
Brancacci Chapel in Church of the Carmine	
Coronation of the Virgin, by Filippo Lippi	,, 138
Academy of Fine Arts	
Portrait of Filippo Lippi	,, 142
Academy of Fine Arts	
Portrait of Andrea del Sarto and his Wife	,, 144
Pitti Gallery	
View of Fiesole	,, 150
Madonna, by Andrea del Sarto	,, 152
Pitti Gallery	
Palace Riccardi-Mannelli	,, 156
Piazza dell' Annunziata	
Villa Petraja	,, 158
Statue of Ferdinand I. de' Medici	,, 164
Piazza dell' Annunziata	
Piazza and Church of San Lorenzo	,, 166
Book-stall in Piazza San Lorenzo	,, 170
Riccardi Palace	,, 172

ILLUSTRATIONS

Interior of San Lorenzo	<i>To face page</i> 176
Strozzi Palace	„ „ 180
Piazza Santa Trinità	„ „ 184
Bridge of Santa Trinità	„ „ 188
Porta Romana	„ „ 194
Mrs. Browning's Tomb	„ „ 200
Protestant Cemetery	
Donna Velata	„ „ 206
Pitti Gallery	
Madonna del Granduca	„ „ 210
Pitti Gallery	
San Miniato	„ „ 212
Galileo's Tower	„ „ 218
The Protestant Cemetery	„ „ 224
Piazza Donatello	

Introduction

ALTHOUGH English poets by birth, the city of Florence, in Italy, was the home of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning during the fifteen years of their wedded life. For both, this was a period not only of supreme happiness but of continual literary production, most of which was profoundly and essentially influenced by Italian conditions and Italian atmosphere. The most distinctively lyrical poetry of Robert Browning belongs almost entirely to these years; whoever would see him as a singer, in distinction from the dramatist of his earlier period or the philosophical and religious poet of his later life, must turn to the poems written during this time of "life, love, and Italy." To both poets the history, the scenery, the art of Florence, was a continual inspiration; poems and correspondence alike show the supreme place it held in their affections. "The most beautiful of the cities devised by man," says Mrs. Browning, in one of her letters; "completing Florence as Florence Italy," says Robert Browning, speaking of the campanile of the cathedral.

Mrs. Browning's life-long interest in Italian politics and in popular liberty are too well known to need further

INTRODUCTION

exposition; but the large part played by the local color of the city, the multitude of allusions to the churches, the piazzas, the pictures, the statues, the traditions of Florence can be understood fully only by a somewhat intimate knowledge of the city.

The same is true of many of Robert Browning's poems. For example, his "Old Pictures in Florence" is counted among the most obscure of his shorter poems; but it is obscure only because it assumes a larger amount of information in the history of art than most readers possess. It is true that nearly every line has some allusion to an artist or an art-principle more or less unknown; but there is no obscurity either of thought or expression when we are once as well informed as Browning presupposes us all to be. Doubtless it was a mistake on his part. Himself living among these things, which were a part of his daily walk and thought, it was unwise to assume an equal amount of interest and knowledge on the part of his reader. But the error is both complimentary and inspiring. Visiting Florence, one of the first ambitions of a lover of Browning is to go about with "Old Pictures in Florence," and other poems, as a guide-book to some of the things best worth seeing. But even such a person finds no small difficulty in locating the special picture, or statue, or scene. This book is an attempt to aid him and also the still larger number of persons who may never see the city itself. The poems of the Brownings already have been annotated ably and sufficiently as far as words can serve; the present work aims to set before the eye pictures of the places

INTRODUCTION

or persons mentioned, so that each reader may see Florence for himself as nearly as possible as the two poets saw it, may approach, as closely as ever is possible to an outsider, the sources of poetical inspiration.

Indeed, both poets at times seem to have invited us into the inner sanctuary of their minds, by stating distinctly the circumstances which led to poetical creation. Mrs. Browning tells how she heard a little child go singing underneath her windows, and how with it came the thought how

“the heart of Italy must beat
While such a voice had leave to rise serene
’Twixt church and palace of a Florence street.”

Hence the poem, “Casa Guidi Windows.”

Nor is there in all literature so painstaking an effort on the part of any writer to reveal precisely all the stages of the birth and growth of a poem, as that made by Browning in the first book of “The Ring and the Book.” He tells the time and the place where he found, and the price that he paid for, a certain square old yellow book picked out from amid the promiscuous rubbish of an old book-stall; how the story of it appealed to him from the very moment he laid hands upon it, and how, absorbed in the reading, he took his unconscious way through the familiar streets, finishing it just as he reached the doorway, “where the black begins with the first stone-slab of the staircase cold” — an unmistakable description of the dreary entrance to Casa Guidi. It was the night after, he goes on to tell us, “as I trod the terrace and breathed the beauty

INTRODUCTION

and the fearfulness of night," that the tragic piece acted itself over again, and he saw with his own eyes and heard as if speaking with their own voices all the long-dead personages of the story, listened to their mutual accusations and to the defences of each for his own share in it. How such revelations come to the poetic soul no man will ever be able really to communicate to another; but along all the list of writers who have attempted it, from Aristotle to Matthew Arnold, is there anywhere a better description of the nature of poetic inspiration than these passages from "The Ring and the Book"? —

" I fused my live soul and that inert stuff
Before attempting smithcraft."

"The life in me abolished the death of things,
Deep calling unto deep."

Or this, of the rapture felt by the poet in the act of creation: —

"The Book! I turn its medicinale 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.
— How title I the dead, alive once more?"

It was four years before the poem was fully wrought out and published in London; but the whole conception of "The Ring and the Book" was practically complete at the close of those twenty-four hours which the author has described so minutely. The scene of the story itself lies chiefly in Rome and Arezzo, but the vivid picture of the

INTRODUCTION

surroundings and atmosphere on that memorable June day, the matchless description of the kindling of the poetic fire belong solely to Florence. Shortly after occurred the death of Mrs. Browning, the breaking up of the home, and Mr. Browning's departure from the city, to which he never afterwards returned.

No effort has been made to correct what many will regard as misapprehensions on the part of the poets. What is known as the "new criticism" denies that Cimabue painted the "Madonna in Santa Maria Novella," and gives it to Duccio; the picture called "Andrea del Sarto and his Wife, Painted by himself," is taken away from Andrea and ascribed to an unknown artist of the Venetian school, and the portraits are considered to be two unknown persons. Whether right or wrong, no critical conclusion can ever destroy the charm of the poem called "Andrea del Sarto." By whatever name we call the picture, to whatever artist we assign it, the story which Browning read between the lines of the two faces looking out from the canvas is no less eloquent, the monologue no less dramatically expressive of that type of artist who just misses his place among the very greatest by reason of his lack of spiritual power and grace. For years, hundreds of persons daily had passed unmoved before this picture in the Pitti Gallery; one day the man of supreme dramatic imagination, the poet, paused, and to him the lips seemed to move and the heart to throb with a tale of love and woe and resigned despair. Since that time there are none who read the poem who do not wish to see the picture itself, or, fail-

INTRODUCTION

ing in that, some reproduction of it. With "Fra Lippo Lippi" and other poems the case is the same.

To such persons is offered this book—a selection of those poems of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning which have to do with Florence,—in the belief that with these two great poets as guides they will see with a new vision some of the old glories of the fair city of the Arno.

A. B. McM.

FLORENCE, ITALY, 1904.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

*FLORENCE in the POETRY ^{OF} THE BROWNING*S

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

A POEM, IN TWO PARTS

THIS poem contains the impressions of the writer upon events in Tuscany of which she was a witness. "From a window," the critic may demur. She bows to the objection in the very title of her work. No continuous narrative nor exposition of political philosophy is attempted by her. It is a simple story of personal impressions, whose only value is in the intensity with which they were received, as proving her warm affection for a beautiful and unfortunate country, and the sincerity with which they are related, as indicating her own good faith and freedom from partisanship.

Of the two parts of this poem, the first was written nearly three years ago; while the second resumes the actual situation of 1851. The discrepancy between the two parts is a sufficient guaranty to the public of the truthfulness of the writer, who, though she certainly escaped the epidemic "falling sickness" of enthusiasm for Pio Nono, takes shame upon herself that she believed, like a woman, some royal oaths, and lost sight of the

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

probable consequences of some obvious popular defects. If the discrepancy should be painful to the reader, let him understand that to the writer it has been more so. But such discrepancies we are called upon to accept at every hour by the conditions of our nature, implying the interval between aspiration and performance, between faith and disillusion, between hope and fact.

*“ O trusted broken prophecy,
O richest fortune sourly crosst,
Born for the future, to the future lost ! ”*

Nay, not lost to the future in this case. The future of Italy shall not be disinherited.

Florence, 1851.

Part One

I HEARD last night a little child go singing
’Neath Casa Guidi windows, by the church,
“ *O bella libertà, O bella!* ” stringing
The same words still on notes, he went in search
So high for, you concluded the up-springing
Of such a nimble bird to sky from perch
Must leave the whole bush in a tremble green,
And that the heart of Italy must beat,
While such a voice had leave to rise serene
’Twixt church and palace of a Florence street :
A little child, too, who not long had been
By mother’s finger steadied on his feet,
And still “ *O bella libertà* ” he sang.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

Then I thought, musing, of the innumerable
Sweet songs which still for Italy outrang
From older singers' lips, who sang not thus
Exultingly and purely, yet, with pang
Fast sheathed in music, touched the heart of us
So finely, that the pity scarcely pained.
I thought how Filicaja led on others,
Bewailers for their Italy enchained,
And how they call her childless among mothers,
Widow of empires, ay, and scarce refrained
Cursing her beauty to her face, as brothers
Might a shamed sister's, — "Had she been less fair,
She were less wretched," — how, evoking so
From congregated wrong and heaped despair
Of men and women writhing under blow,
Harrowed and hideous in a filthy lair,
Some personating image wherein woe
Was wrapt in beauty from offending much,
They called it Cybele, or Niobe,
Or laid it corpse-like on a bier for such,
Where all the world might drop for Italy
Those cadenced tears which burn not where they
touch, —
"Juliet of nations, canst thou die as we?
And was the violet crown that crowned thy head
So over-large, though new buds made it rough,
It slipped down, and across thine eyelids dead,
O sweet, fair Juliet?" Of such songs enough,
Too many of such complaints! Behold, instead,

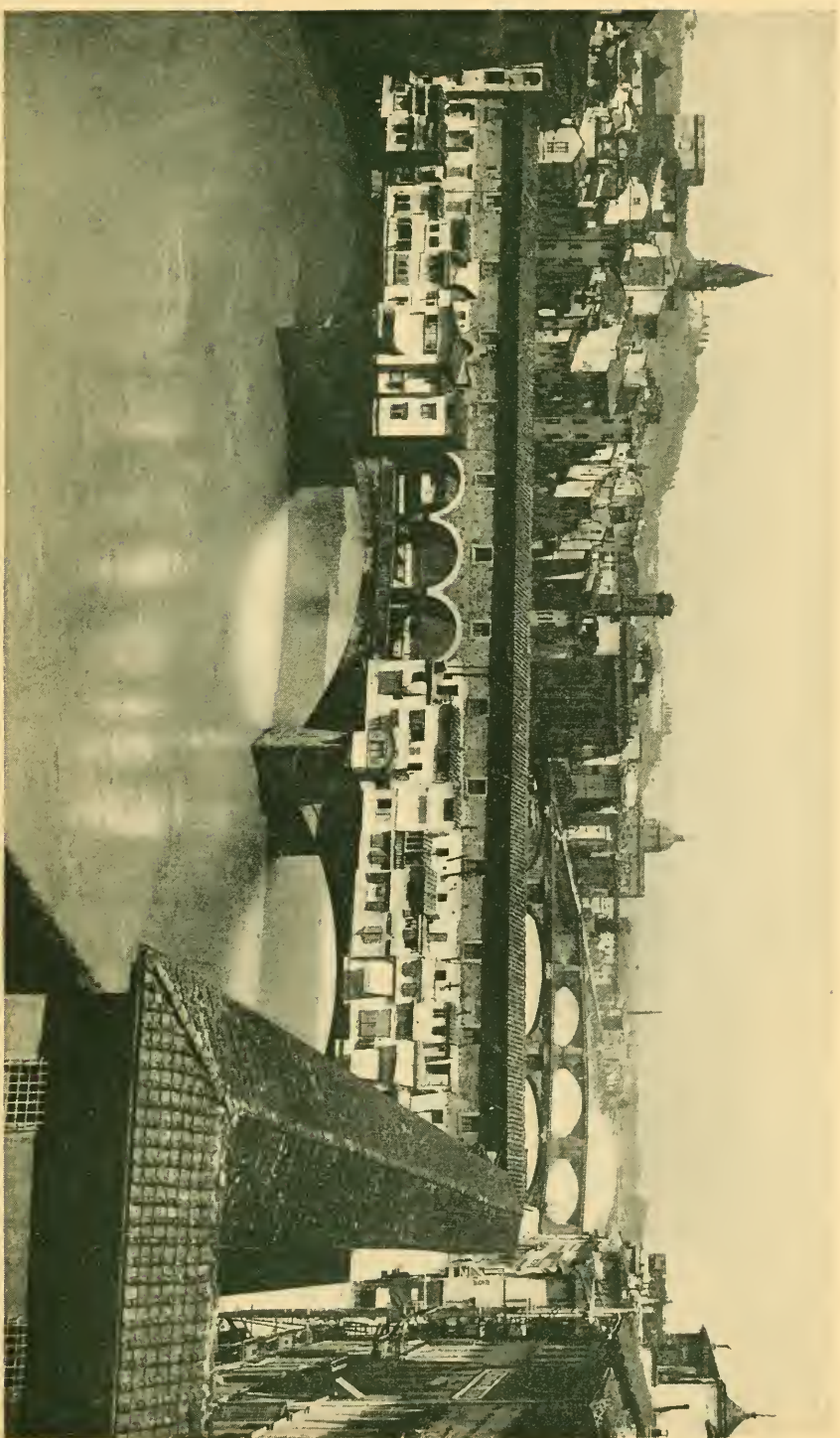
CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

Void at Verona, Juliet's marble trough ;¹
As void as that is, are all images
Men set between themselves and actual wrong
To catch the weight of pity, meet the stress
Of conscience ; since 't is easier to gaze long
On mournful masks and sad effigies
Than on real, live, weak creatures crushed by strong.

For me, who stand in Italy to-day
Where worthier poets stood and sang before,
I kiss their footsteps, yet their words gainsay.
I can but muse in hope upon this shore
Of golden Arno as it shoots away
Through Florence' heart beneath her bridges four, —
Bent bridges seeming to strain off like bows,
And tremble while the arrowy undertide
Shoots on, and cleaves the marble as it goes,
And strikes up palace-walls on either side,
And froths the cornice out in glittering rows,
With doors and windows quaintly multiplied,
And terrace-sweeps, and gazers upon all,
By whom if flower or kerchief were thrown out
From any lattice there, the same would fall
Into the river underneath, no doubt,
It runs so close and fast 'twixt wall and wall.
How beautiful ! The mountains from without
In silence listen for the word said next.
What word will men say, — here where Giotto planted

¹ They show at Verona, as the tomb of Juliet, an empty trough of stone.

PONTE VECCHIO and
other bridges across the
Arno.



*“Golden Arno as it shoots away
Through Florence’ heart beneath her bridges four.”*

—Casa Guidi Windows, p. 24.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

His campanile like an unperplexed
Fine question heavenward, touching the things granted
A noble people, who, being greatly vexed
In act, in aspiration keep undaunted ?
What word will God say ? Michel's Night and Day
And Dawn and Twilight wait in marble scorn,
Like dogs upon a dunghill, couched on clay
From whence the Medicean stamp's outworn,
The final putting-off of all such sway
By all such hands, and freeing of the unborn
In Florence and the great world outside Florence.
Three hundred years his patient statues wait
In that small chapel of the dim St. Lawrence :
Day's eyes are breaking bold and passionate
Over his shoulder, and will flash abhorrence
On darkness, and with level looks meet fate,
When once loose from that marble film of theirs ;
The Night has wild dreams in her sleep, the Dawn
Is haggard as the sleepless, Twilight wears
A sort of horror ; as the veil withdrawn
'Twixt the artist's soul and works had left them heirs
Of speechless thoughts which would not quail nor fawn,
Of angers and contempts, of hope and love :
For not without a meaning did he place
The princely Urbino on the seat above
With everlasting shadow on his face,
While the slow dawns and twilights disapprove
The ashes of his long-extinguished race
Which never more shall clog the feet of men.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

I do believe, divinest Angelo,
That winter-hour in Via Larga, when
They bade thee build a statue up in snow,¹
And straight that marvel of thine art again
Dissolved beneath the sun's Italian glow,
Thine eyes, dilated with the plastic passion,
Thawing, too, in drops of wounded manhood, since,
To mock alike thine art and indignation,
Laughed at the palace-window the new prince, —
("Aha! this genius needs for exaltation,
When all's said, and how'er the proud may wince,
A little marble from our princely mines!")
I do believe that hour thou laughedst too
For the whole sad world, and for thy Florentines,
After those few tears, which were only few!
That as, beneath the sun, the grand white lines
Of thy snow-statue trembled and withdrew, —
The head, erect as Jove's, being palsied first,
The eyelids flattened, the full brow turned blank,
The right hand, raised but now as if it curst,
Dropt, a mere snowball (till the people sank
Their voices, though a louder laughter burst
From the royal window) — thou couldst proudly thank
God and the prince for promise and presage,
And laugh the laugh back, I think verily,
Thine eyes being purged by tears of righteous rage
To read a wrong into a prophecy,

¹ This mocking task was set by Pietro, the unworthy successor of Lorenzo the Magnificent.

MICHEL ANGELO'S monument to Giuliano de' Medici in the New Sacristy of Church of San Lorenzo, with statues of Day and Night.



*“ Michel's Night and Day
And Dawn and Twilight wait in marble scorn.”*

— Casa Guidi Windows, p. 25.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

And measure a true great man's heritage
Against a mere great duke's posterity.

I think thy soul said then, "I do not need
A princedom and its quarries, after all ;

For if I write, paint, carve a word, indeed,
On book, or board, or dust, on floor or wall,

The same is kept of God, who taketh heed
That not a letter of the meaning fall

Or ere it touch and teach his world's deep heart,
Outlasting, therefore, all your lordships, sir !

So keep your stone, beseech you, for your part,
To cover up your grave-place, and refer

The proper titles : *I live by my art.*
The thought I threw into this snow shall stir

This gazing people when their gaze is done ;
And the tradition of your act and mine,

When all the snow is melted in the sun,
Shall gather up for unborn men a sign

Of what is the true princedom ; ay, and none
Shall laugh that day, except the drunk with wine.

Amen, great Angelo ! the day's at hand.
If many laugh not on it, shall we weep ?

Much more we must not, let us understand.
Through rhymers sonnetting in their sleep,

And archaists mumbling dry bones up the land,
And sketches lauding ruined towns a-heap, —

Through all that drowsy hum of voices smooth,
The hopeful bird mounts carolling from brake,

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

The hopeful child, with leaps to catch his growth,
Sings open-eyed for liberty's sweet sake ;
And I, a singer also from my youth,
Prefer to sing with these who are awake,
With birds, with babes, with men who will not fear
The baptism of the holy morning dew
(And many of such wakers now are here,
Complete in their anointed manhood, who
Will greatly dare, and greatlier persevere),
Than join those old thin voices with my new,
And sigh for Italy with some safe sigh
Cooped up in music 'twixt an oh and ah :
Nay, hand in hand with that young child will I
Go singing rather, "*Bella libertà,*"
Than, with those poets, croon the dead, or cry
"*Se tu men bella fossi, Italia !*"

"Less wretched if less fair." Perhaps a truth
Is so far plain in this, that Italy,
Long trammelled with the purple of her youth
Against her age's ripe activity,
Sits still upon her tombs, without death's ruth,
But also without life's brave energy.
"Now tell us what is Italy?" men ask ;
And others answer, "Virgil, Cicero,
Catullus, Cæsar." What beside, to task
The memory closer? — "Why, Boccaccio,
Dante, Petrarca," — and if still the flask
Appears to yield its wine by drops too slow, —

MICHEL ANGELO'S monument
to Lorenzo de' Medici in the New
Sacristy of Church of San Lorenzo,
with statues of Evening and Dawn.



*“ Three hundred years his patient statues wait
In that small chapel of the dim St. Lawrence.”*

— Casa Guidi Windows, p. 25.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

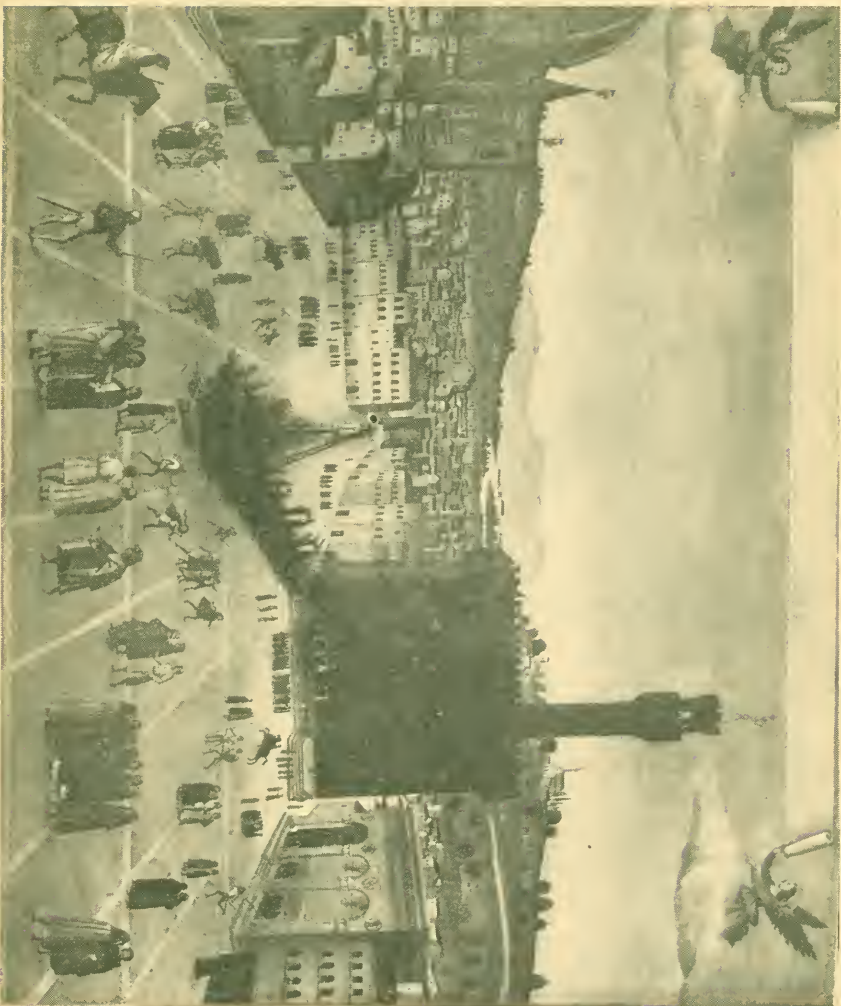
“ Angelo, Raffael, Pergolese,” — all
Whose strong hearts beat through stone, or charged again
The paints with fire of souls electrical,
Or broke up heaven for music. What more then ?
Why, then, no more. The chaplet’s last beads fall
In naming the last saintship within ken,
And, after that, none prayeth in the land.
Alas ! this Italy has too long swept
Heroic ashes up for hour-glass sand ;
Of her own past, impassioned nympholept !
Consenting to be nailed here by the hand
To the very bay-tree under which she stept
A queen of old, and plucked a leafy branch ;
And, licensing the world too long indeed
To use her broad phylacteries to stanch
And stop her bloody lips, she takes no heed
How one clear word would draw an avalanche
Of living sons around her to succeed
The vanished generations. Can she count
These oil-eaters with large, live, mobile mouths
Agape for macaroni, in the amount
Of consecrated heroes of her south’s
Bright rosary ? The pitcher at the fount,
The gift of gods, being broken, she much loathes
To let the ground-leaves of the place confer
A natural bowl. So henceforth she would seem
No nation, but the poet’s pensioner,
With alms from every land of song and dream,
While aye her pipers sadly pipe of her

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

Until their proper breaths, in that extreme
Of sighing, split the reed on which they played ;
Of which, no more. But never say "No more"
To Italy's life ! Her memories undismayed
Still argue "evermore" ; her graves implore
Her future to be strong, and not afraid ;
Her very statues send their looks before. —

We do not serve the dead : the past is past.
God lives, and lifts his glorious mornings up
Before the eyes of men awake at last,
Who put away the meats they used to sup,
And down upon the dust of earth outcast
The dregs remaining of the ancient cup,
Then turned to wakeful prayer and worthy act.
The dead, upon their awful vantage ground,
The sun not in their faces, shall abstract
No more our strength : we will not be discrowned
As guardians of their crowns, nor deign transact
A barter of the present, for a sound
Of good so counted in the foregone days.
O dead ! ye shall no longer cling to us
With rigid hands of desiccating praise,
And drag us backward by the garment thus,
To stand and laud you in long-drawn virelays.
We will not henceforth be oblivious
Of our own lives, because ye lived before,
Nor of our acts, because ye acted well.
We thank you that ye first unlatched the door,

PICTURE of Martyrdom of
Savonarola by an unknown
but nearly contemporary
painter; now in Palazzo
Corsini.



“ Savonarola's soul went out in fire
Upon our Grand-duke's piazza.”

— Casa Guidi Windows, p. 31.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

But will not make it inaccessible

By thankings on the threshold any more.

We hurry onward to extinguish hell

With our fresh souls, our younger hope, and God's
Maturity of purpose. Soon shall we

Die also, and, that then our periods
Of life may round themselves to memory

As smoothly as on our graves the burial-sods,
We now must look to it to excel as ye,

And bear our age as far, unlimited
By the last mind-mark ; so, to be invoked

By future generations, as their dead.

'Tis true, that, when the dust of death has choked

A great man's voice, the common words he said
Turn oracles, the common thoughts he yoked

Like horses, draw like griffins : this is true
And acceptable. I, too, should desire,

When men make record with the flowers they strew,
"Savonarola's soul went out in fire

Upon our Grand-duke's piazza, and burned through
A moment first, or ere he did expire,

The veil betwixt the right and wrong, and showed
How near God sate and judged the judges there," —

Upon the self-same pavement over-strewed
To cast my violets with as reverent care,

And prove that all the winters which have snowed
Cannot snow out the scent from stones and air,

Of a sincere man's virtues. This was he,

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

Savonarola, who, while Peter sank

With his whole boat-load, called courageously,
“Wake Christ, wake Christ!” who, having tried the
tank

Of old church-waters used for baptistry
Ere Luther came to spill them, swore they stank ;
Who also by a princely death-bed cried,
“Loose Florence, or God will not loose thy soul !”

Then fell back the Magnificent, and died
Beneath the star-look shooting from the cowl,
Which turned to wormwood-bitterness the wide
Deep sea of his ambitions. It were foul —

To grudge Savonarola and the rest
Their violets : rather pay them quick and fresh.

The emphasis of death makes manifest
The eloquence of action in our flesh ;

And men who living were but dimly guessed,
When once free from their life's entangled mesh,
Show their full length in graves, or oft indeed
Exaggerate their stature, in the flat,

To noble admirations which exceed
Most nobly, yet will calculate in that
But accurately. We who are the seed
Of buried creatures, if we turned and spat
Upon our antecedents, we were vile.

Bring violets rather. If these had not walked
Their furlong, could we hope to walk our mile?
Therefore bring violets. Yet if we, self-balked,
Stand still a-strewing violets all the while,

STATUE of Savonarola
in the Great Hall of
the Palazzo Vecchio.



*“ This was he,
Saronarola . . . the star-look shooting from the cowl.”*

— Casa Guidi Windows, pp. 31, 32.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

These moved in vain, of whom we have vainly talked.

So rise up henceforth with a cheerful smile,
And, having strewn the violets, reap the corn,
And, having reaped and garnered, bring the plough
And draw new furrows 'neath the healthy morn,
And plant the great Hereafter in this Now.

Of old 't was so. How step by step was worn,
As each man gained on each securely! how
Each by his own strength sought his own Ideal, —
The ultimate Perfection leaning bright
From out the sun and stars to bless the leal
And earnest search of all for Fair and Right
Through doubtful forms by earth accounted real!
Because old Jubal blew into delight
The souls of men with clear-piped melodies,
If youthful Asaph were content at most
To draw from Jubal's grave, with listening eyes,
Traditionary music's floating ghost
Into the grass-grown silence, were it wise?
And was 't not wiser, Jubal's breath being lost,
That Miriam clashed her cymbals to surprise
The sun between her white arms flung apart,
With new glad golden sounds? that David's strings
O'erflowed his hand with music from his heart?
So harmony grows full from many springs,
And happy accident turns holy art.

You enter, in your Florence wanderings, —
The Church of St. Maria Novella. Pass

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

The left stair, where at plague-time Machiavel
Saw one with set fair face as in a glass,
Dressed out against the fear of death and hell,
Rustling her silks in pauses of the mass
To keep the thought off how her husband fell,
When she left home, stark dead across her feet,—
The stair leads up to what the Orgagnas save
Of Dante's demons ; you in passing it
Ascend the right stair from the farther nave
To muse in a small chapel scarcely lit
By Cimabue's Virgin. Bright and brave,
That picture was accounted, mark, of old :
A king stood bare before its sovran grace,
A reverent people shouted to behold
The picture, not the king ; and even the place
Containing such a miracle grew bold,
Named the Glad Borgo from that beauteous face
Which thrilled the artist after work to think
His own ideal Mary-smile should stand
So very near him, — he, within the brink
Of all that glory, let in by his hand
With too divine a rashness !—Yet none shrink
Who come to gaze here now ; albeit 't was planned
Sublimely in the thought's simplicity.
The Lady, throned in empyreal state,
Minds only the young Babe upon her knee,
While sidelong angels bear the royal weight,
Prostrated meekly, smiling tenderly
Oblivion of their wings ; the child thereat

CELL of Savonarola in San Marco.



*“ The emphasis of death makes manifest
The eloquence of action in our flesh.”*

— Casa Guidi Windows, p. 32.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

Stretching its hand like God. If any should,
Because of some stiff draperies and loose joints,
Gaze scorn down from the heights of Raffaelhood
On Cimabue's picture, Heaven anoints
The head of no such critic, and his blood
The poet's curse strikes full on, and appoints
To ague and cold spasms forevermore. ———
A noble picture! worthy of the shout
Wherewith along the streets the people bore
Its cherub-faces which the sun threw out
Until they stooped, and entered the church-door.
Yet rightly was young Giotto talked about,
Whom Cimabue found among the sheep,¹
And knew, as gods know gods, and carried home
To paint the things he had painted, with a deep
And fuller insight, and so overcome
His Chapel-Lady with a heavenlier sweep
Of light; for thus we mount into the sum
Of great things known or acted. I hold, too,
That Cimabue smiled upon the lad
At the first stroke which passed what he could do,
Or else his Virgin's smile had never had
Such sweetness in 't. All great men who foreknew
Their heirs in art, for art's sake have been glad,
And bent their old white heads as if uncrowned,

¹ How Cimabue found Giotto, the shepherd-boy, sketching a ram of his flock upon a stone, is prettily told by Vasari, who also relates that the elder artist Margheritone died "infastidito" of the successes of the new school.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

Fanatics of their pure ideals still

Far more than of their triumphs, which were found
With some less vehement struggle of the will.

If old Margheritone trembled, swooned,
And died despairing at the open sill

Of other men's achievements (who achieved
By loving art beyond the master) he

Was old Margheritone, and conceived
Never, at first youth and most ecstasy,

A Virgin like that dream of one, which heaved
The death-sigh from his heart. If wistfully

Margheritone sickened at the smell
Of Cimabue's laurel, let him go!

For Cimabue stood up very well
In spite of Giotto's, and Angelico

The artist-saint kept smiling in his cell
The smile with which he welcomed the sweet slow
Inbreak of angels (whitening through the dim
That he might paint them) while the sudden sense

Of Raffael's future was revealed to him
By force of his own fair work's competence.

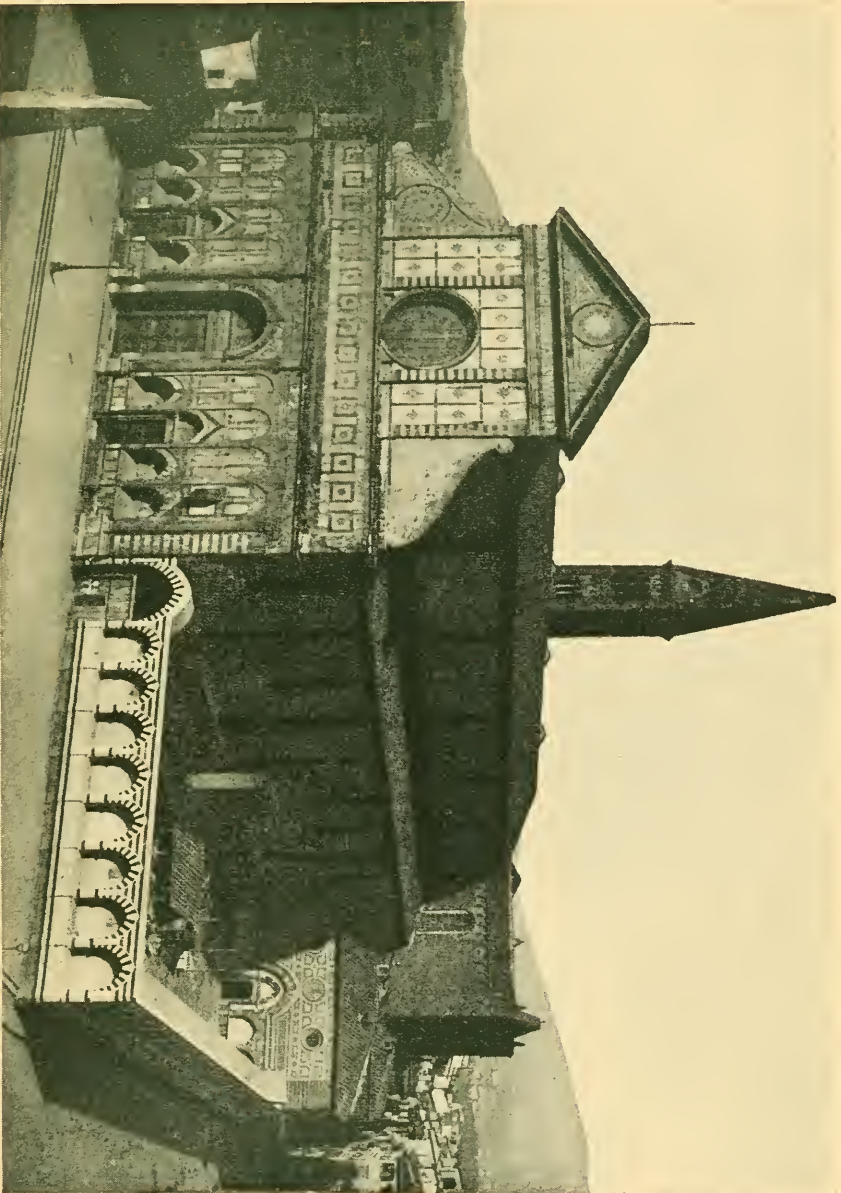
The same blue waters where the dolphins swim
Suggest the tritons. Through the blue immense

Strike out, all swimmers! cling not in the way
Of one another, so to sink, but learn

The strong man's impulse, catch the freshening spray
He throws up in his motions, and discern

By his clear westering eye, the time of day.
Thou, God, hast set us worthy gifts to earn

CHURCH of Santa Maria
Novella — architecture of
13th and 15th centuries.



“ You enter, in your Florence wanderings,
The Church of St. Maria Novella.”

— Casa Guidi Windows, p. 33.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

Besides thy heaven and thee! and when I say
There's room here for the weakest man alive
To live and die, there's room, too, I repeat,
For all the strongest to live well, and strive
Their own way by their individual heat,
Like some new bee-swarm leaving the old hive,
Despite the wax which tempts so violet-sweet.
Then let the living live, the dead retain
Their grave-cold flowers! though honor's best supplied
By bringing actions to prove theirs not vain.

Cold graves, we say? it shall be testified
That living men who burn in heart and brain,
Without the dead were colder. If we tried
To sink the past beneath our feet, be sure
The future would not stand. Precipitate
This old roof from the shrine, and, insecure,
The nesting swallows fly off, mate from mate.
How scant the gardens, if the graves were fewer!
The tall green poplars grew no longer straight
Whose tops not looked to Troy. Would any fight
For Athens, and not swear by Marathon?
Who dared build temples, without tombs in sight?
Or live, without some dead man's benison?
Or seek truth, hope for good, and strive for right,
If, looking up, he saw not in the sun
Some angel of the martyrs all day long
Standing and waiting? Your last rhythm will need
Your earliest keynote. Could I sing this song,

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

If my dead masters had not taken heed
To help the heavens and earth to make me strong,
As the wind ever will find out some reed,
And touch it to such issues as belong
To such a frail thing? None may grudge the dead
Libations from full cups. Unless we choose
To look back to the hills behind us spread,
The plains before us sadden and confuse :
If orphaned, we are disinherited.

I would but turn these lachrymals to use,
And pour fresh oil in from the olive-grove,
To furnish them as new lamps. Shall I say
What made my heart beat with exulting love
A few days back? —

The day was such a day
As Florence owes the sun. The sky above,
Its weight upon the mountains seemed to lay,
And palpitate in glory, like a dove
Who has flown too fast, full-hearted — take away
The image! for the heart of man beat higher
That day in Florence, flooding all her streets
And piazzas with a tumult and desire.
The people, with accumulated heats,
And faces turned one way, as if one fire
Both drew and flushed them, left their ancient beats,
And went up toward the palace-Pitti wall
To thank their Grand-duke, who, not quite of course,
Had graciously permitted, at their call,

ANDREA ORCAGNA'S fresco of
Dante's Inferno in the Strozzi
Chapel of Santa Maria Novella.



*“The stair leads up to what the Orgagnas save
Of Dante's demons.”*

— Casa Guidi Windows, p. 34.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

The citizens to use their civic force
To guard their civic homes. So, one and all,
The Tuscan cities streamed up to the source
Of this new good at Florence, taking it
As good so far, presageful of more good, —
The first torch of Italian freedom, lit
To toss in the next tiger's face who should
Approach too near them in a greedy fit, —
The first pulse of an even flow of blood
To prove the level of Italian veins
Towards rights perceived and granted. How we gazed
From Casa Guidi windows, while, in trains
Of orderly procession — banners raised,
And intermittent bursts of martial strains
Which died upon the shout, as if amazed
By gladness beyond music — they passed on!
The Magistracy, with insignia, passed,
And all the people shouted in the sun,
And all the thousand windows which had cast
A ripple of silks in blue and scarlet down,
(As if the houses overflowed at last,)
Seemed growing larger with fair heads and eyes.
The Lawyers passed, and still arose the shout,
And hands broke from the windows to surprise
Those grave, calm brows with bay-tree leaves thrown out.
The Priesthood passed, the friars with worldly-wise
Keen, sidelong glances from their beards about
The street to see who shouted; many a monk
Who takes a long rope in the waist was there:

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

Whereat the popular exultation drunk
With indrawn "vivas" the whole sunny air,
While through the murmuring windows rose and sunk
A cloud of kerchiefed hands, — "The Church makes fair
Her welcome in the new Pope's name." Ensued
The black sign of the "Martyrs" — (name no name,
But count the graves in silence). Next were viewed
The Artists; next the Trades; and after came
The People, — flag and sign, and rights as good, —
And very loud the shout was for that same
Motto, "Il popolo." IL POPOLO,—
The word means dukedom, empire, majesty,
And kings in such an hour might read it so.
And next, with banners, each in his degree,
Deputed representatives a-row
Of every separate state of Tuscany:
Siena's she-wolf, bristling on the fold
Of the first flag, preceded Pisa's hare;
And Massa's lion floated calm in gold,
Pienza's following with his silver stare;
Arezzo's steed pranced clear from bridle-hold, —
And well might shout our Florence, greeting there .
These, and more brethren. Last, the world had sent
The various children of her teeming flanks —
Greeks, English, French — as if to a parliament
Of lovers of her Italy in ranks,
Each bearing its land's symbol reverent;
At which the stones seemed breaking into thanks,
And rattling up the sky, such sounds in proof

MADONNA in Rucellai Chapel
of Santa Maria Novella.



*“ Ascend the right stair from the farther nave
To muse in a small chapel scarcely lit
By Cimabue’s Virgin.”*

— Casa Guidi Windows, p. 34.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

Arose, the very house-walls seemed to bend ;

The very windows, up from door to roof,
Flashed out a rapture of bright heads, to mend

With passionate looks the gesture's whirling off
A hurricane of leaves. Three hours did end

While all these passed ; and ever, in the crowd,
Rude men, unconscious of the tears that kept

Their beards moist, shouted ; some few laughed aloud,
And none asked any why they laughed and wept :

Friends kissed each other's cheeks, and foes long
vowed

More warmly did it ; two-months babies leapt

Right upward in their mother's arms, whose black,
Wide, glittering eyes looked elsewhere ; lovers pressed

Each before either, neither glancing back ;
And peasant maidens smoothly 'tired and tressed

Forgot to finger on their throats the slack
Great pearl-strings ; while old blind men would not
rest,

But pattered with their staves, and slid their shoes
Along the stones, and smiled as if they saw.

O Heaven, I think that day had noble use
Among God's days ! So near stood Right and Law,

Both mutually forborne ! Law would not bruise,
Nor Right deny ; and each in reverent awe

Honored the other. And if, ne'ertheless,
That good day's sun delivered to the vines

No charta, and the liberal Duke's excess
Did scarce exceed a Guelf's or Ghibelline's

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

In any special actual righteousness
Of what that day he granted, still the signs
Are good and full of promise, we must say,
When multitudes approach their kings with prayers,
And kings concede their people's right to pray,
Both in one sunshine. Griefs are not despairs,
So uttered ; nor can royal claims dismay
When men from humble homes and ducal chairs,
Hate wrong together. It was well to view
Those banners ruffled in a ruler's face
Inscribed, " Live, freedom, union, and all true
Brave patriots who are aided by God's grace !"
Nor was it ill when Leopoldo drew
His little children to the window-place
He stood in at the Pitti to suggest
They, too, should govern as the people willed.
What a cry rose then ! Some, who saw the best,
Declared his eyes filled up and overfilled
With good, warm human tears, which unrepressed
Ran down. I like his face : the forehead's build
Has no capacious genius, yet perhaps
Sufficient comprehension ; mild and sad,
And careful nobly, not with care that wraps
Self-loving hearts, to stifle and make mad,
But careful with the care that shuns a lapse
Of faith and duty ; studious not to add
A burden in the gathering of a gain.
And so, God save the Duke, I say with those
Who that day shouted it ; and, while dukes reign,

MARGHERITONE'S Crucifixion
with Madonna and St. John. In
Church of Santa Croce.



“ He
Was old Margheritone, and conceived
Never, at first youth and most ecstasy,
A Virgin like that dream of one, which heaved
The death-sigh from his heart.”

— Casa Guidi Windows, p. 36.

“ Margheritone of Arezzo,
. . . a poor glimmering Crucifixion.”

— Old Pictures in Florence, pp. 114, 115.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

May all wear in the visible overflows
Of spirit such a look of careful pain !
For God must love it better than repose.

And all the people who went up to let
Their hearts out to that Duke, as has been told —
Where guess ye that the living people met,
Kept tryst, formed ranks, chose leaders, first unrolled
Their banners ?

In the Loggia ? where is set
Cellini's godlike Perseus, bronze or gold,
(How name the metal, when the statue flings
Its soul so in your eyes ?) with brow and sword
Superbly calm, as all opposing things,
Slain with the Gorgon, were no more abhorred
Since ended ?

No, the people sought no wings
From Perseus in the Loggia, nor implored
An inspiration in the place beside
From that dim bust of Brutus, jagged and grand,
Where Buonarroti passionately tried
From out the close-cleuched marble to demand
The head of Rome's sublimest homicide,
Then dropt the quivering mallet from his hand,
Despairing he could find no model-stuff
Of Brutus in all Florence, where he found
The gods and gladiators thick enough.
Nor there ! the people chose still holier ground :
The people, who are simple, blind, and rough,

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

Know their own angels, after looking round.
Whom chose they then? where met they?

On the stone
Called Dante's, — a plain flat stone scarce discerned
From others in the pavement, — whereupon
He used to bring his quiet chair out, turned
To Brunelleschi's church, and pour alone
The lava of his spirit when it burned:
It is not cold to-day. O passionate
Poor Dante, who, a banished Florentine,
Didst sit austere at banquets of the great,
And muse upon this far-off stone of thine,
And think how oft some passer used to wait
A moment, in the golden day's decline,
With "Good-night, dearest Dante!" — well, good-night!
I muse now, Dante, and think verily,
Though chapelled in the by-way, out of sight,
Ravenna's bones would thrill with ecstasy,
Couldst know thy favorite stone's elected right
As tryst-place for thy Tuscans to foresee
Their earliest chartas from. Good-night, good-morn,
Henceforward, Dante! now my soul is sure
That thine is better comforted of scorn,
And looks down earthward in completer cure
Than when, in Santa Croce Church forlorn
Of any corpse, the architect and hewer
Did pile the empty marbles as thy tomb.
For now thou art no longer exiled, now

CARLO DOLCI'S portrait of
Fra Angelico in the Academy
of Fine Arts.



*“ Angelico
The artist saint kept smiling in his cell.”*

— Casa Guidi Windows, p. 36.

“ A scrap of Fra Angelico's.”

— Old Pictures in Florence, p. 114.

“ Brother Angelico 's the man, you 'll find.”

— Fra Lippo Lippi, p. 129.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

Best honored : we salute thee who art come
Back to the old stone with a softer brow
Than Giotto drew upon the wall, for some
Good lovers of our age to track and plough
Their way to, through time's ordures stratified,
And startle broad awake into the dull
Bargello chamber : now thou 'rt milder-eyed, —
Now Beatrix may leap up glad to cull
Thy first smile, even in heaven and at her side,
Like that which, nine years old, looked beautiful
At May-game. What do I say ? I only meant
That tender Dante loved his Florence well,
While Florence, now, to love him is content ;
And mark ye, that the piercingest sweet smell
Of love's dear incense by the living sent
To find the dead is not accessible
To lazy livers, no narcotic, not
Swung in a censer to a sleepy tune,
But trod out in the morning air by hot,
Quick spirits who tread firm to ends foreshown,
And use the name of greatness unforgot,
To meditate what greatness may be done.
For Dante sits in heaven, and ye stand here,
And more remains for doing, all must feel,
Than trysting on his stone from year to year
To shift processions, civic toe to heel,
The town's thanks to the Pitti. Are ye freer
For what was felt that day ? A chariot-wheel
May spin fast, yet the chariot never roll ;

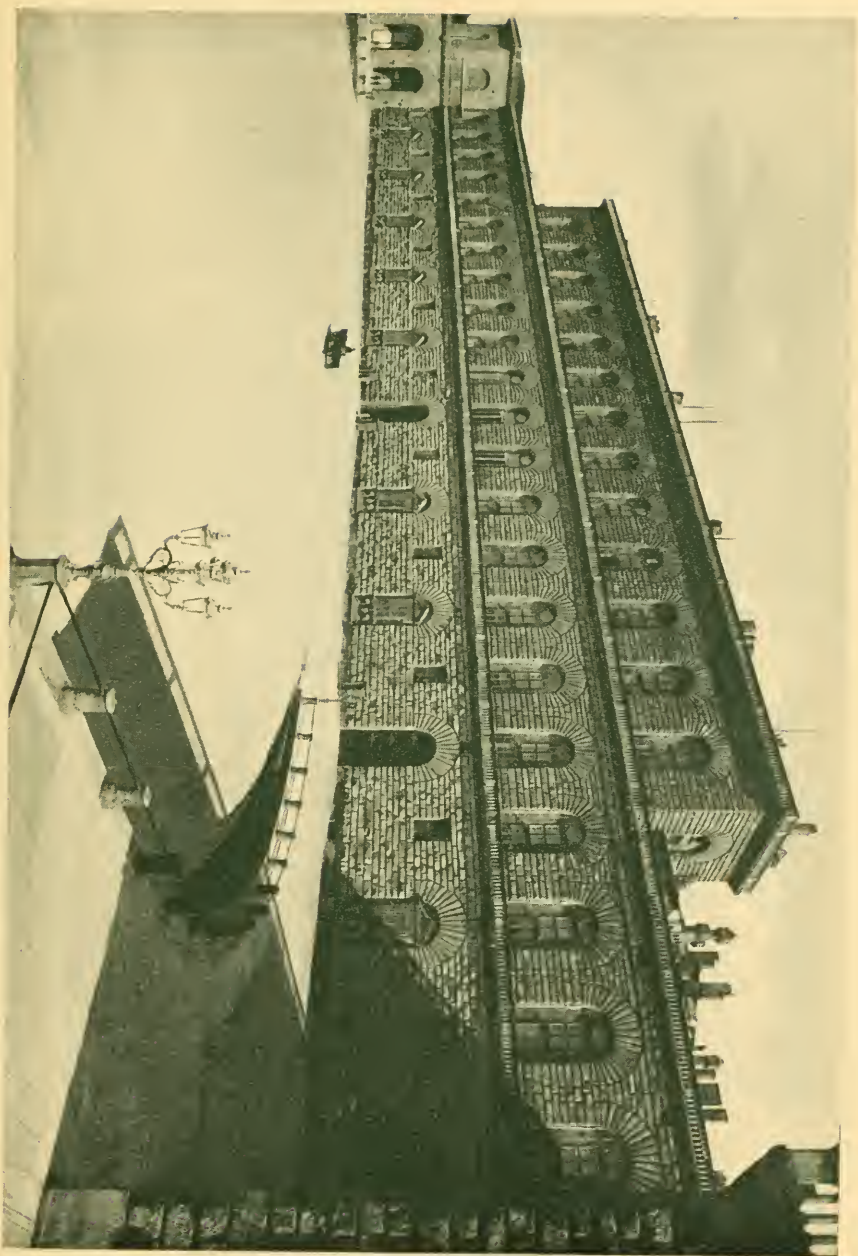
CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

But if that day suggested something good,
And bettered, with one purpose, soul by soul —
 Better means freer. A land's brotherhood
Is most puissant : men, upon the whole,
Are what they can be ; nations, what they would.

Will, therefore, to be strong, thou Italy !
 Will to be noble ! Austrian Metternich
Can fix no yoke, unless the neck agree ;
 And thine is like the lion's when the thick
Dews shudder from it, and no man would be
 The stroker of his mane, much less would prick
His nostril with a reed. When nations roar
 Like lions, who shall tame them, and defraud
Of the due pasture by the river-shore ?
 Roar, therefore ! shake your dew-laps dry abroad :
The amphitheatre with open door
 Leads back upon the benches who applaud
The last spear-thruster.

 Yet the heavens forbid
That we should call on passion to confront
The brutal with the brutal, and, amid
 This ripening world, suggest a lion-hunt
And lion's vengeance for the wrongs men did
 And do now, though the spears are getting blunt.
We only call, because the sight and proof
 Of lion-strength hurts nothing ; and to show
A lion-heart, and measure paw with hoof,

**Pitti Palace, now the Royal
Residence at Florence.**



*“The people went up toward the palace—Pitti well
To thank their Grand-duke.”*

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

Helps something, even, and will instruct a foe,
As well as the onslaught, how to stand aloof :
Or else the world gets past the mere brute blow,
Or given or taken. Children use the fist
Until they are of age to use the brain ;
And so we needed Cæsars to assist
Man's justice, and Napoleons to explain
God's counsel, when a point was nearly missed,
Until our generations should attain
Christ's stature nearer. Not that we, alas !
Attain already ; but a single inch
Will raise to look down on the swordsman's pass,
As knightly Roland on the coward's flinch :
And, after chloroform and ether-gas,
We find out slowly what the bee and finch
Have ready found, through Nature's lamp in each, —
How to our races we may justify
Our individual claims, and, as we reach
Our own grapes, bend the top vines to supply
The children's uses, — how to fill a breach
With olive-branches, — how to quench a lie
With truth, and smite a foe upon the cheek
With Christ's most conquering kiss. Why, these are
things
Worth a great nation's finding, to prove weak
The "glorious arms" of military kings.
And so, with wide embrace, my England, seek
To stifle the bad heat and flickerings
Of this world's false and nearly expended fire.

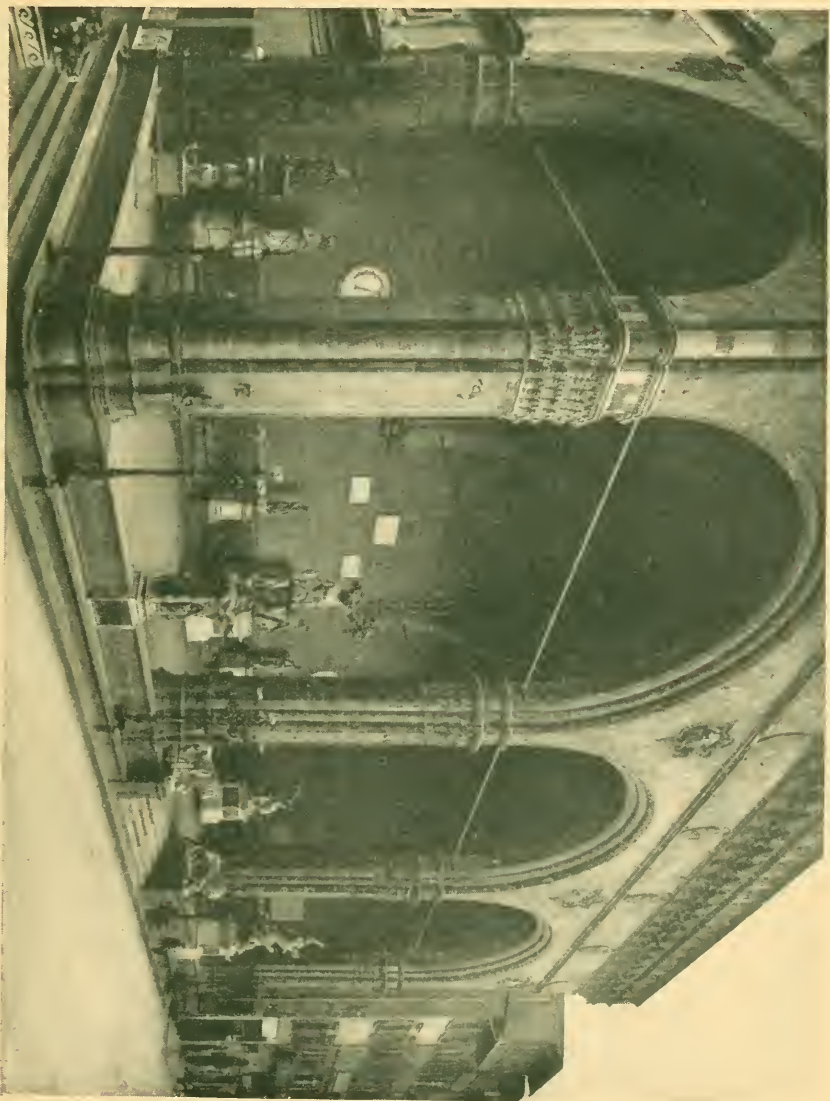
CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

Draw palpitating arrows to the wood,
And twang abroad thy high hopes and thy higher
Resolves from that most virtuous altitude,
Till nations shall unconsciously aspire
By looking up to thee, and learn that good
And glory are not different. Announce law
By freedom ; exalt chivalry by peace ;
Instruct how clear, calm eyes can overawe,
And how pure hands, stretched simply to release
A bond-slave, will not need a sword to draw
To be held dreadful. O my England, cease
Thy purple with no alien agonies,
No struggles toward encroachment, no vile war !
Disband thy captains, change thy victories ;
Be henceforth prosperous, as the angels are,
Helping, not humbling.

Drums and battle-cries

Go out in music of the morning-star ;
And soon we shall have thinkers in the place
Of fighters, each found able as a man
To strike electric influence through a race,
Unstayed by city-wall and barbican.
The poet shall look grander in the face
Than even of old (when he of Greece began
To sing "that Achillean wrath which slew
So many heroes"), seeing he shall treat
The deeds of souls heroic toward the true,
The oracles of life, previsions sweet

LOGGIA dei Lanzi in
the Piazza Signoria.



*“The people sought no wings
From Persius in the Loggia.”*

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

And awful, like divine swans gliding through
White arms of Ledas, which will leave the heat
Of their escaping godship to endure
The human medium with a heavenly flush.
Meanwhile, in this same Italy we want
Not popular passion, to arise and crush,
But popular conscience, which may covenant
For what it knows. Concede without a blush,
To grant the "civic guard" is not to grant
The civic spirit, living and awake :
Those lappets on your shoulders, citizens,
Your eyes strain after sideways till they ache
(While still, in admirations and amens,
The crowd comes up on festa-days to take
The great sight in) are not intelligence,
Not courage even : alas ! if not the sign
Of something very noble, they are nought ;
For every day ye dress your sallow kine
With fringes down their cheeks, though unbesought
They loll their heavy heads, and drag the wine,
And bear the wooden yoke as they were taught
The first day. What ye want is light ; indeed
Not sunlight (ye may well look up surprised
To those unfathomable heavens that feed
Your purple hills), but God's light organized
In some high soul crowned capable to lead
The conscious people, conscious and advised ;
For, if we lift a people like mere clay,
It falls the same. We want thee, O unfound

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

And sovran teacher ! if thy beard be gray
Or black, we bid thee rise up from the ground,
And speak the word God giveth thee to say,
Inspiring into all this people round,
Instead of passion, thought, which pioneers
All generous passion, purifies from sin,
And strikes the hour for. Rise up, teacher ! here 's
A crowd to make a nation ! best begin
By making each a man, till all be peers
Of earth's true patriots and pure martyrs in
Knowing and daring. Best unbar the doors
Which Peter's heirs kept locked so overclose
They only let the mice across the floors,
While every churchman dangles, as he goes,
The great key at his girdle, and abhors
In Christ's name meekly. Open wide the house,
Concede the entrance with Christ's liberal mind,
And set the tables with his wine and bread.
What ! "Commune in both kinds ?" In every kind —
Wine, wafer, love, hope, truth, unlimited,
Nothing kept back. For, when a man is blind
To starlight, will he see the rose is red ?
A bondsman shivering at a Jesuit's foot —
"Væ ! meâ culpâ !" — is not like to stand
A freedman at a despot's, and dispute
His titles by the balance in his hand,
Weighing them "suo jure." Tend the root,
If careful of the branches, and expand
The inner souls of men before you strive
For civic heroes.

MONUMENT to Dante (buried
at Ravenna) in Church of
Santa Croce.



*“The architect and hewer
Did pile the empty marbles as thy tomb.”*

— Casa Guidi Windows, p. 44.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

But the teacher, where?

From all these crowded faces, all alive,
Eyes, of their own lids flashing themselves bare,
And brows that with a mobile life contrive
A deeper shadow, — may we in no wise dare
To put a finger out, and touch a man,
And cry, “This is the leader”? What, all these!
Broad heads, black eyes, yet not a soul that ran
From God down with a message? all, to please
The donna waving measures with her fan,
And not the judgment-angel on his knees,
(The trumpet just an inch off from his lips,)
Who, when he breathes next, will put out the sun?

Yet mankind’s self were foundered in eclipse,
If lacking doers, with great works to be done;
And lo, the startled earth already dips
Back into light; a better day’s begun;
And soon this leader, teacher, will stand plain,
And build the golden pipes and synthesize
This people-organ for a holy strain.
We hold this hope, and still in all these eyes
Go sounding for the deep look which shall drain
Suffused thought into channelled enterprise.
Where is the teacher? What now may he do
Who shall do greatly? Doth he gird his waist
With a monk’s rope, like Luther? or pursue
The goat, like Tell? or dry his nets in haste,
Like Masaniello when the sky was blue?

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

Keep house, like other peasants, with inlaced
Bare brawny arms about a favorite child,
And meditative looks beyond the door
(But not to mark the kidling's teeth have filed
The green shoots of his vine which last year bore
Full twenty bunches), or on triple-piled.
Throne-velvets sit at ease to bless the poor,
Like other pontiffs, in the Poorest's name?
The old tiara keeps itself aslope
Upon his steady brows, which, all the same,
Bend mildly to permit the people's hope?

Whatever hand shall grasp this oriflamme
Whatever man (last peasant or first pope
Seeking to free his country) shall appear,
Teach, lead, strike fire into the masses, fill
These empty bladders with fine air, insphere
These wills into a unity of will,
And make of Italy a nation — dear
And blessed be that man! the heavens shall kill
No leaf the earth lets grow for him, and Death
Shall cast him back upon the lap of Life
To live more surely in a clarion-breath
Of hero-music. Brutus with the knife,
Rienzi with the fasces, throb beneath
Rome's stones, — and more who threw away joy's life
Like Pallas, that the beauty of their souls
Might ever shine untroubled and entire:
But if it can be true that he who rolls

GIOTTO'S Portrait of Dante in Chapel of the Bargello. Disclosed in 1850 by removal of whitewash which had covered it for centuries.



*“ We salute thee who art come
Back to the old stone with a softer brow
Than Giotto drew upon the wall.”*

— Casa Guidi Windows, p. 45.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

The Church's thunders will reserve her fire
For only light, — from eucharistic bowls
Will pour new life for nations that expire,
And rend the scarlet of his papal vest
To gird the weak loins of his countrymen, —
I hold that he surpasses all the rest
Of Romans, heroes, patriots ; and that when
He sat down on the throne, he dispossessed
The first graves of some glory. See again,
This country-saving is a glorious thing !
And if a common man achieved it? Well.
Say, a rich man did? Excellent. A king?
That grows sublime? A priest? Improbable.
A pope? Ah, there we stop, and cannot bring
Our faith up to the leap, with history's bell
So heavy round the neck of it, albeit
We fain would grant the possibility
For *thy* sake, Pio Nono !

Stretch thy feet
In that case : I will kiss them reverently
As any pilgrim to the papal seat :
And, such proved possible, thy throne to me
Shall seem as holy a place as Pellico's
Venetian dungeon, or as Spielberg's grate,
At which the Lombard woman hung the rose
Of her sweet soul by its own dewy weight,
To feel the dungeon round her sunshine close,
And, pining so, died early, yet too late

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

For what she suffered. Yea, I will not choose
Betwixt thy throne, Pope Pius, and the spot
Marked red forever, spite of rains and dews,
Where two fell riddled by the Austrian's shot,—
The brothers Bandiera, who accuse,
With one same mother-voice and face (that what
They speak may be invincible) the sins
Of earth's tormentors before God the just,
Until the unconscious thunder-bolt begins
To loosen in his grasp.

And yet we must
Beware, and mark the natural kiths and kins
Of circumstance and office, and distrust
The rich man reasoning in a poor man's hut,
The poet who neglects pure truth to prove
Statistic fact, the child who leaves a rut
For a smoother road, the priest who vows his glove
Exhales no grace, the prince who walks afoot,
The woman who has sworn she will not love,
And this Ninth Pius in Seventh Gregory's chair,
With Andrea Doria's forehead.

Count what goes
To making up a pope, before he wear
That triple crown. We pass the world-wide throes
Which went to make the popedom, — the despair
Of free men, good men, wise men; the dread shows
Of women's faces, by the fagot's flash
Tossed out, to the minutest stir and throb

GATE of San Niccolò
(14th century).



*“ And Petrarch looks no more from Niccolò
Toward dear Arezzo, ’twixt the acacia trees.”*

— Casa Guidi Windows, p. 60.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

O' the white lips ; the least tremble of a lash,
To glut the red stare of a licensed mob ;
The short mad cries down oubliettes, and plash
So horribly far off ; priests trained to rob,
And kings, that, like encouraged nightmares, sate
On nations' hearts most heavily distressed
With monstrous sights and apothegms of fate —
We pass these things, because "the times" are prest
With necessary charges of the weight
Of all this sin, and "Calvin, for the rest,
Made bold to burn Servetus. Ah, men err!" —
And so do *churches* ! which is all we mean
To bring to proof in any register
Of theological fat kine and lean :
So drive them back into the pens ! refer
Old sins (with pourpoint, "quotha" and "I ween")
Entirely to the old times, the old times ;
Nor ever ask why this preponderant
Infallible pure Church could set her chimes
Most loudly then, just then, — most jubilant,
Precisely then, when mankind stood in crimes
Full heart-deep, and Heaven's judgments were not scant.
Inquire still less what signifies a church
Of perfect inspiration and pure laws
Who burns the first man with a brimstone-torch,
And grinds the second, bone by bone, because
The times, forsooth, are used to rack and scorch !
What *is* a holy Church unless she awes
The times down from their sins ? Did Christ select

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

Such amiable times to come and teach

Love to, and mercy? The whole world were wrecked
If every mere great man, who lives to reach

A little leaf of popular respect,
Attained not simply by some special breach

In the age's customs, by some precedence
In thought and act, which, having proved him higher

Than those he lived with, proved his competence
In helping them to wonder and aspire.

My words are guiltless of the bigot's sense.
My soul has fire to mingle with the fire

Of all these souls, within or out of doors
Of Rome's church or another. I believe

In one Priest, and one temple, with its floors
Of shining jasper gloomed at morn and eve

By countless knees of earnest auditors,
And crystal walls too lucid to perceive,

That none may take the measure of the place
And say, "So far the porphyry, then the flint;

To this mark mercy goes, and there ends grace,"
Though still the permeable crystals hint

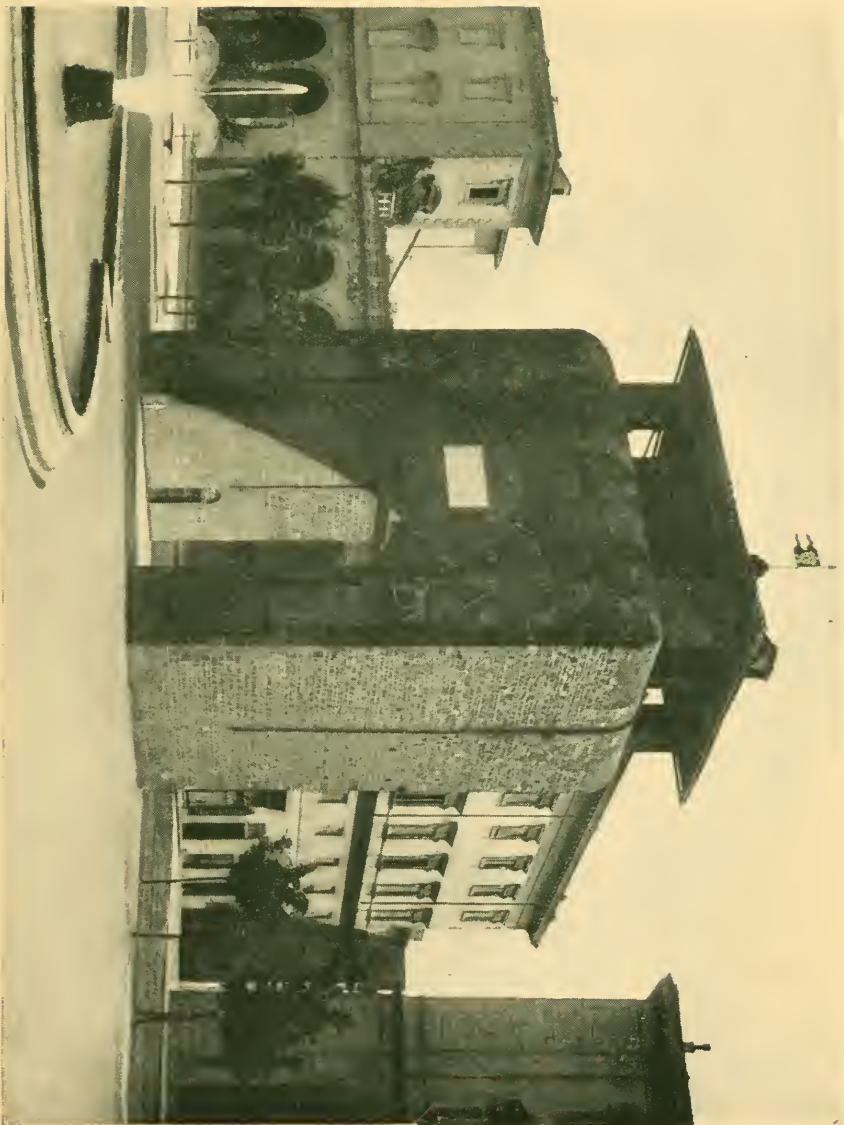
At some white starry distance, bathed in space.
I feel how Nature's ice-crusts keep the dint

Of undersprings of silent Deity.
I hold the articulated gospels which

Show Christ among us crucified on tree.
I love all who love truth, if poor or rich

In what they have won of truth possessively.

PALE of San Vito, built in 1550,
and adorned with frescoes by
Ghirlandajo. Dante's property
lay beyond.



“Nor Dante from Gate Gallo looks.”

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

No altars, and no hands defiled with pitch,
Shall scare me off; but I will pray and eat
With all these, taking leave to choose my ewers,
And say at last, "Your visible churches cheat
Their inward types; and, if a church assures
Of standing without failure and defeat,
The same both fails and lies."

To leave which lures
Of wider subject through past years, — behold,
We come back from the popedom to the pope,
To ponder what he *must* be, ere we are bold
For what he *may* be, with our heavy hope
To trust upon his soul. So, fold by fold,
Explore this mummy in the priestly cope,
Transmitted through the darks of time, to catch
The man within the wrappage, and discern
How he, an honest man, upon the watch
Full fifty years for what a man may learn,
Contrived to get just there; with what a snatch
Of old-world oboli he had to earn
The passage through; with what a drowsy sop,
To drench the busy barkings of his brain;
What ghosts of pale tradition, wreathed with hop
'Gainst wakeful thought, he had to entertain
For heavenly visions; and consent to stop
The clock at noon, and let the hour remain
(Without vain windings-up) inviolate
Against all chimings from the belfry. Lo,

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

From every given pope you must abate,
Albeit you love him, some things — good, you know —
Which every given heretic you hate,
Assumes for his, as being plainly so.

A pope must hold by popes a little, — yes,
By councils, from Nicæa up to Trent, —
By hierocratic empire, more or less
Irresponsible to men, — he must resent
Each man's particular conscience, and repress
Inquiry, meditation, argument,

As tyrants faction. Also, he must not
Love truth too dangerously, but prefer
“The interests of the Church” (because a blot
Is better than a rent, in miniver);

Submit to see the people swallow hot
Husk-porridge, which his chartered churchmen stir
Quoting the only true God's epigraph,
“Feed my lambs, Peter!” must consent to sit

Attesting with his pastoral ring and staff
To such a picture of our Lady, hit

Off well by artist-angels (though not half
As fair as Giotto would have painted it);

To such a vial, where a dead man's blood
Runs yearly warm beneath a churchman's finger;

To such a holy house of stone and wood,
Whereof a cloud of angels was the bringer

From Bethlehem to Loreto. Were it good
For any pope on earth to be a flinger

Of stones against these high-niched counterfeits?

UNFINISHED bust of
Brutus by Michel Angelo
in Bargello.



*“ Where Buonarroti passionately tried
From out the close-clenched marble to demand
The head of Rome’s sublimest homicide.”*

— Casa Guidi Windows, p. 43.

*“ Straight his plastic hand
Fell back before his prophet-soul, and left
A fragment, a maimed Brutus.”*

— Casa Guidi Windows, p. 87.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

Apostates only are iconoclasts.

He dares not say, while this false thing abets
That true thing, "This is false." He keeps his fasts
And prayers, as prayer and fast were silver frets
To change a note upon a string that lasts,
And make a lie a virtue. Now, if he
Did more than this, higher hoped, and braver dared,
I think he were a pope in jeopardy,
Or no pope rather, for his truth had barred
The vaulting of his life ; and certainly,
If he do only this, mankind's regard
Moves on from him at once to seek some new
Teacher and leader. He is good and great
According to the deeds a pope can do ;
Most liberal, save those bonds ; affectionate,
As princes may be, and, as priests are, true,
But only the Ninth Pius after eight,
When all 's praised most. At best and hopefullest,
He 's pope : we want a man ! His heart beats warm ;
But, like the prince enchanted to the waist,
He sits in stone, and hardens by a charm
Into the marble of his throne high-placed.
Mild benediction waves his saintly arm —
So, good ! But what we want 's a perfect man,
Complete and all alive : half travertine
Half suits our need, and ill subserves our plan.
Feet, knees, nerves, sinews, energies divine,
Were never yet too much for men who ran
In such hard ways as must be this of thine,

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

Deliverer whom we seek, whoe'er thou art,
Pope, prince, or peasant ! If, indeed, the first,
The noblest, therefore ! since the heroic heart
Within thee must be great enough to burst
Those trammels buckling to the baser part
Thy saintly peers in Rome, who crossed and cursed
With the same finger.

Come, appear, be found,
If pope or peasant, come ! we hear the cock,
The courtier of the mountains when first crowned
With golden dawn ; and orient glories flock
To meet the sun upon the highest ground.
Take voice, and work ! we wait to hear thee knock
At some one of our Florentine nine gates,
On each of which was imaged a sublime
Face of a Tuscan genius, which, for hate's
And love's sake both, our Florence in her prime
Turned boldly on all comers to her states,
As heroes turned their shields in antique time
Emblazoned with honorable acts. And though
The gates are blank now of such images,
And Petrarch looks no more from Niccolò
Toward dear Arezzo, 'twixt the acacia-trees,
Nor Dante, from gate Gallo — still we know,
Despite the razing of the blazonries,
Remains the consecration of the shield :
The dead heroic faces will start out
On all these gates, if foes should take the field,

— between the Arno and the Mug-
none, west of Florence.



“ Our Cascine,
Where the people on the fast-days walk and drive.”

— The Dance, p. 99.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

And blend sublimely, at the earliest shout,
With living heroes who will scorn to yield
A hair's-breadth even, when, gazing round about,
They find in what a glorious company,
They fight the foes of Florence. Who will grudge
His one poor life, when that great man we see
Has given five hundred years, the world being judge,
To help the glory of his Italy?
Who, born the fair side of the Alps, will budge,
When Dante stays, when Ariosto stays,
When Petrarch stays for ever? Ye bring swords,
My Tuscans? Ay, if wanted in this haze,
Bring swords, but first bring souls, — bring thoughts and
words,
Unruled by a tear of yesterday's,
Yet awful by its wrong, — and cut these cords,
And mow this green, lush falseness to the roots,
And shut the mouth of hell below the swathe!
And, if ye can bring songs too, let the lute's
Recoverable music softly bathe
Some poet's hand, that, through all bursts and bruits
Of popular passion, all unripe and rathe
Convictions of the popular intellect,
Ye may not lack a finger up the air,
Annunciative, reproving, pure, erect,
To show which way your first ideal bare
The whiteness of its wings when (sorely pecked
By falcons on your wrists) it unaware
Arose up overhead and out of sight.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

Meanwhile, let all the far ends of the world
 Breathe back the deep breath of their old delight,
To swell the Italian banner just unfurled.
 Help, lands of Europe! for, if Austria fight,
The drums will bar your slumber. Had ye curled
 The laurel for your thousand artists' brows,
If these Italian hands had planted none?
 Can any sit down idle in the house,
Nor hear appeals from Buonarroti's stone
 And Raffael's canvas, rousing and to rouse?
Where's Poussin's master? Gallic Avignon
 Bred Laura, and Vaucluse's fount has stirred
The heart of France too strongly, as it lets
 Its little stream out (like a wizard's bird
Which bounds upon its emerald wing, and wets
 The rocks on each side), that she should not gird
Her loins with Charlemagne's sword when foes beset
 The country of her Petrarch. Spain may well
Be minded how from Italy she caught,
 To mingle with her tinkling Moorish bell,
A fuller cadence and a subtler thought.
 And even the New World, the receptacle
Of freemen, may send glad men, as it ought,
 To greet Vespucci Amerigo's door.
While England claims, by trump of poetry,
 Verona, Venice, the Ravenna-shore,
And dearer holds John Milton's Fiesole
 Than Langlande's Malvern with the stars in flower.



*“ Washed by the morning water-gold,
Florence lay out on the mountain-side.”*

CASA GUIDI, WINDOWS

And Vallombrosa, we two went to see

Last June, beloved companion, where sublime
The mountains live in holy families,

And the slow pine-woods ever climb and climb
Half up their breasts, just stagger as they seize

Some gray crag, drop back with it many a time,
And straggle blindly down the precipice.

The Vallombrosan brooks were strewn as thick
That June day, knee-deep with dead beechen leaves,

As Milton saw them ere his heart grew sick,
And his eyes blind. I think the monks and bees

Are all the same too : scarce have they changed the wick
On good St. Gualbert's altar which receives

The convent's pilgrims ; and the pool in front
(Wherein the hill-stream trout are cast, to wait

The beatific vision and the grunt
Used at refectory) keeps its weedy state,

To baffle saintly abbots who would count
The fish across their breviary, nor 'bate

The measure of their steps. O waterfalls
And forests ! sound and silence ! mountains bare,

That leap up peak by peak, and catch the palls
Of purple and silver mist to rend and share

With one another, at electric calls
Of life in the sunbeams, — till we cannot dare

Fix your shapes, count your number ! we must think
Your beauty and your glory helped to fill

The cup of Milton's soul so to the brink,
He nevermore was thirsty when God's will

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

Had shattered to his sense the last chain-link
By which he had drawn from Nature's visible
The fresh well-water. Satisfied by this,
He sang of Adam's paradise, and smiled,
Remembering Vallombrosa. Therefore is
The place divine to English man and child,
And pilgrims leave their souls here in a kiss.

For Italy's the whole earth's treasury, piled
With reveries of gentle ladies, flung
Aside, like ravelled silk, from life's worn stuff ;
With coins of scholars' fancy, which, being rung
On workday counter, still sound silver-proof :
In short, with all the dreams of dreamers young,
Before their heads have time for slipping off
Hope's pillow to the ground. How oft, indeed,
We've sent our souls out from the rigid north,
On bare white feet which would not print nor bleed,
To climb the Alpine passes, and look forth,
Where booming low the Lombard rivers lead
To gardens, vineyards, all a dream is worth, —
Sights thou and I, love, have seen afterward
From Tuscan Bellosguardo, wide awake,¹
When, standing on the actual blessed sward
Where Galileo stood at nights to take
The vision of the stars, we have found it hard,
Gazing upon the earth and heaven, to make
A choice of beauty.

¹ Galileo's villa, close to Florence, is built on an eminence called Bellosguardo.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

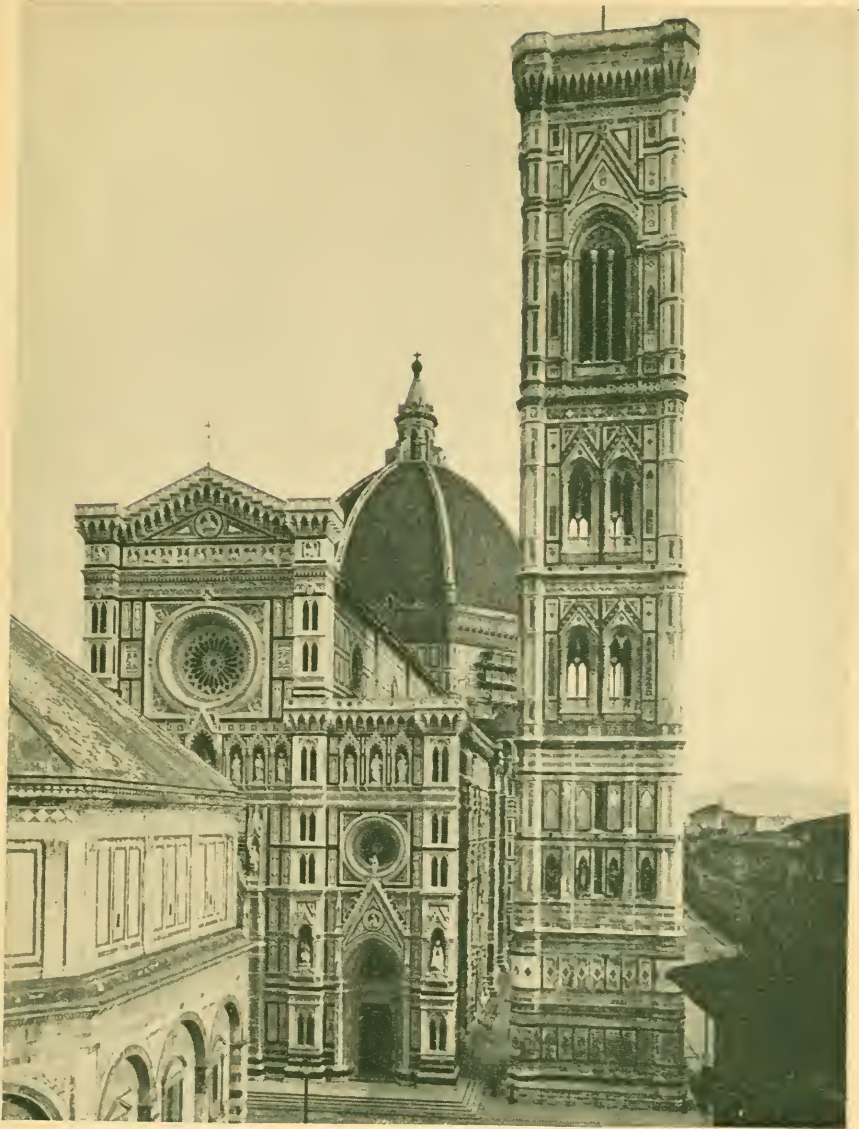
Therefore let us all
Refreshed in England or in other land,
By visions, with their fountain rise and fall,
Of this earth's darling, — we, who understand
A little how the Tuscan musical
Vowels do round themselves as if they planned
Eternities of separate sweetness, — we,
Who loved Sorrento vines in picture-book,
Or ere in winecup we pledged faith or glee, —
Who loved Rome's wolf with demigods at suck,
Or ere we loved truth's own divinity, —
Who loved, in brief, the classic hill and brook,
And Ovid's dreaming tales and Petrarch's song,
Or ere we loved Love's self even, — let us give
The blessing of our souls (and wish them strong
To bear it to the height where prayers arrive,
When faithful spirits pray against a wrong,)
To this great cause of southern men who strive
In God's name for man's rights, and shall not fail!

Behold, they shall not fail. The shouts ascend
Above the shrieks, in Naples, and prevail.
Rows of shot corpses, waiting for the end
Of burial, seem to smile up straight and pale
Into the azure air, and apprehend
That final gun-flash from Palermo's coast
Which lightens their apocalypse of death.
So let them die! The world shows nothing lost;
Therefore not blood. Above or underneath,

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

What matter, brothers, if ye keep your post
On duty's side? As sword returns to sheath,
So dust to grave ; but souls find place in heaven.
Heroic daring is the true success,
The eucharistic bread requires no leaven ;
And, though your ends were hopeless, we should bless
Your cause as holy. Strive — and, having striven,
Take for God's recompense that righteousness !

CAMPANILE, with Cathedral
and Baptistry.



“The startling bell-tower Giotto raised.”

— Old Pictures in Florence, p. 105.

“Thy great campanile is still to finish.”

— Old Pictures in Florence, p. 111.

*“Here where Giotto planted
His campanile like an unperplex
Fine question heavenward.”*

— Casa Guidi Windows, pp. 24, 25.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

Part Two

I WROTE a meditation and a dream,
Hearing a little child sing in the street :
I leant upon his music as a theme,
Till it gave way beneath my heart's full beat
Which tried at an exultant prophecy,
But dropped before the measure was complete —
Alas for songs and hearts ! O Tuscany,
O Dante's Florence, is the type too plain ?
Didst thou, too, only sing of liberty,
As little children take up a high strain
With unintentioned voices, and break off
To sleep upon their mothers' knees again ?
Couldst thou not watch one hour ? then sleep enough,
That sleep may hasten manhood, and sustain
The faint, pale spirit with some muscular stuff.

But we who cannot slumber as thou dost ;
We thinkers, who have thought for thee, and failed ;
We hoppers, who have hoped for thee, and lost ;
We poets, wandered round by dreams,¹ who hailed
From this Atrides' roof (with lintel-post
Which still drips blood, — the worse part hath prevailed)
The fire-voice of the beacons to declare

¹ See the opening passage of the Agamemnon of Æschylus.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

Troy taken, sorrow ended, — cozened through
A crimson sunset in a misty air,
What now remains for such as we to do?
God's judgments, peradventure, will he bare
To the roots of thunder, if we kneel and sue?

From Casa Guidi windows I looked forth,
And saw ten thousand eyes of Florentines
Flash back the triumph of the Lombard north, —
Saw fifty banners, freighted with the signs
And exultations of the awakened earth,
Float on above the multitude in lines,
Straight to the Pitti. So, the vision went.
And so, between those populous rough hands
Raised in the sun, Duke Leopold outleant,
And took the patriot's oath which henceforth stands
Among the oaths of perjurers, eminent
To catch the lightnings ripened for these lands.

Why swear at all, thou false Duke Leopold?
What need to swear? What need to boast thy blood
Unspoilt of Austria, and thy heart unsold
Away from Florence? It was understood
God made thee not too vigorous or too bold;
And men had patience with thy quiet mood,
And women pity, as they saw thee pace
Their festive streets with premature gray hairs.
We turned the mild dejection of thy face
To princely meanings, took thy wrinkling cares

PORTRAIT of Michel Angelo
Buonarroti, painted by him-
self. Uffizi Gallery.



*“They are safe in heaven
The Michaels and Rafaels, you hum and buzz
Round the works of, you of the little wit.”*

— Old Pictures in Florence, p. 107.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

For ruffling hopes, and called thee weak, not base.
Nay, better light the torches for more prayers,
And smoke the pale Madonnas at the shrine, —
Being still “ our poor Grand-duke, our good Grand-duke,
Who cannot help the Austrian in his line,” —
Than write an oath upon a nation’s book
For men to spit at with scorn’s blurring brine !
Who dares forgive what none can overlook ?

For me, I do repent me in this dust
Of towns and temples which makes Italy ;
I sigh amid the sighs which breathe a gust
Of dying century to century
Around us on the uneven crater-crust
Of these old worlds ; I bow my soul and knee.
Absolve me, patriots, of my woman’s fault
That ever I believed the man was true !
These sceptred strangers shun the common salt,
And therefore, when the general board’s in view,
And they stand up to carve for blind and halt,
The wise suspect the viands which ensue.
I much repent, that in this time and place,
Where many corpse-lights of experience burn
From Cæsar’s and Lorenzo’s festering race,
To enlighten groping reasoners, I could learn
No better counsel for a simple case
Than to put faith in princes, in my turn.
Had all the death-piles of the ancient years
Flared up in vain before me ? knew I not

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

What stench arises from some purple gears?
And how the sceptres witness whence they got
Their brier-wood, crackling through the atmosphere's
Foul smoke, by princely perjuries kept hot?
Forgive me, ghosts of patriots, — Brutus, thou
Who trailest down hill into life again
Thy blood-weighted cloak, to indict me with thy slow,
Reproachful eyes! — for being taught in vain,
That, while the illegitimate Cæsars show
Of meaner stature than the first full strain
(Confessed incompetent to conquer Gaul,)
They swoon as feebly, and cross Rubicons
As rashly, as any Julius of them all!
Forgive, that I forgot the mind which runs
Through absolute races, too unseptical!
I saw the man among his little sons,
His lips were warm with kisses while he swore;
And I, because I am a woman, I,
Who felt my own child's coming life before
The prescience of my soul, and held faith high, —
I could not bear to think, whoever bore,
That lips so warmed could shape so cold a lie.

From Casa Guidi windows I looked out,
Again looked, and beheld a different sight.
The Duke had fled before the people's shout
“Long live the Duke!” A people, to speak right,
Must speak as soft as courtiers, lest a doubt
Should curdle brows of gracious sovereigns white.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

Moreover, that same dangerous shouting meant
Some gratitude for future favors which

Were only promised, the Constituent
Implied; the whole being subject to the hitch

In "motu proprios," very incident
To all these Czars, from Paul to Paulovitch.

Whereat the people rose up in the dust
Of the ruler's flying feet, and shouted still

And loudly; only, this time, as was just,
Not "Live the Duke!" who had fled for good or ill,

But "Live the People!" who remained and must,
The unrenounced and unrenounceable.

Long live the people! How they lived! and boiled
And bubbled in the caldron of the street!

How the young blustered, nor the old recoiled!
And what a thunderous stir of tongues and feet

Trod flat the palpitating bells, and foiled
The joy-guns of their echo, shattering it!

How down they pulled the Duke's arms everywhere!
How up they set new café-signs, to show

Where patriots might sip ices in pure air —
(The fresh paint smelling somewhat)! To and fro

How marched the civic guard, and stopped to stare
When boys broke windows in a civic glow!

How rebel songs were sung to loyal tunes,
And bishops cursed in ecclesiastic metres!

How all the Circoli grew large as moons,
And all the speakers, moonstruck, — thankful greeters

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

Of prospects which struck poor the ducal boons,
A mere free Press and Chambers! frank repeaters
Of great Guerazzi's praises — "There's a man,
The father of the land, who, truly great,
Takes off that national disgrace and ban,
The farthing-tax upon our Florence-gate,
And saves Italia as he only can!"
How all the nobles fled, and would not wait,
Because they were most noble! which being so,
How Liberals vowed to burn their palaces,
Because free Tuscans were not free to go!
How grown men raged at Austria's wickedness,
And smoked, while fifty striplings in a row
Marched straight to Piedmont for the wrong's redress!
You say we failed in duty, — we who wore
Black velvet like Italian democrats,
Who slashed our sleeves like patriots, nor forswore
The true republic in the form of hats?
We chased the archbishop from the Duomo door,
We chalked the walls with bloody caveats
Against all tyrants. If we did not fight
Exactly, we fired muskets up the air
To show that victory was ours of right.
We met, had free discussion everywhere
(Except, perhaps, i' the Chambers) day and night.
We proved the poor should be employed . . . that's fair, —
And yet the rich not worked for anywise, —
Pay certified, yet payers abrogated,
Full work secured, yet liabilities

PORTRAIT of Raphael Sanzio,
painted by himself. In Uffizi
Gallery.



*“ Do their eyes contract to the earth's old scope,
Now that they see God face to face ? ”*

— Old Pictures in Florence, p. 107.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

To overwork excluded, — not one bated
Of all our holidays, that still, at twice
Or thrice a week, are moderately rated.

We proved that Austria was dislodged, or would
Or should be, and that Tuscany in arms
Should, would, dislodge her, ending the old feud ;
And yet to leave our piazzas, shops, and farms,

For the simple sake of fighting, was not good —
We proved that also. “Did we carry charms
Against being killed ourselves, that we should rush
On killing others? what, desert herewith

Our wives and mothers? — was that duty? ‘Tush!’
At which we shook the sword within the sheath

Like heroes, only louder ; and the flush
Ran up the cheek to meet the future wreath.

Nay, what we proved, we shouted — how we shouted !
(Especially the boys did), boldly planting

That tree of liberty, whose fruit is doubted,
Because the roots are not of Nature’s granting.

A tree of good and evil : none, without it,
Grow gods ; alas ! and, with it, men are wanting.

O holy knowledge, holy liberty !
O holy rights of nations ! If I speak
These bitter things against the jugglery
Of days that in your names proved blind and weak,
It is that tears are bitter. When we see
The brown skulls grin at death in churchyards bleak,
We do not cry, “This Yorick is too light,”

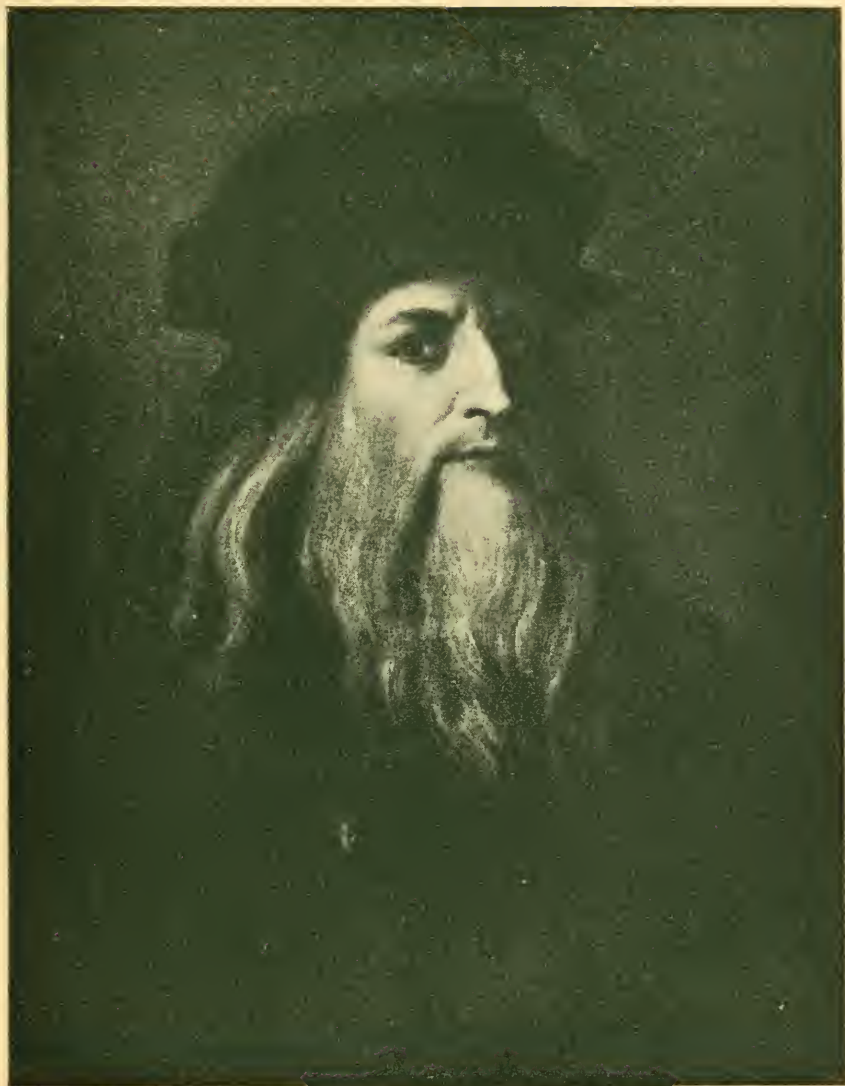
CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

For death grows deathlier with that mouth he makes.
So with my mocking. Bitter things I write
Because my soul is bitter for your sakes,
O freedom ! O my Florence !

Men who might

Do greatly in a universe that breaks
And burns, must ever *know* before they do.
Courage and patience are but sacrifice ;
And sacrifice is offered for and to
Something conceived of. Each man pays a price
For what himself counts precious, whether true
Or false the appreciation it implies.
But here, — no knowledge, no conception, nought !
Desire was absent, that provides great deeds
From out the greatness of prevenient thought ;
And action, action, like a flame that needs
A steady breath and fuel, being caught
Up, like a burning reed from other reeds,
Flashed in the empty and uncertain air,
Then wavered, then went out. Behold, who blames
A crooked course, when not a goal is there
To round the fervid striving of the games ?
An ignorance of means may minister
To greatness ; but an ignorance of aims
Makes it impossible to be great at all.
So with our Tuscans. Let none dare to say,
“ Here virtue never can be national ;
Here fortitude can never cut a way

PORTRAIT of Leonardo da
Vinci, painted by himself.
In Uffizi Gallery.



*“ A younger succeeds to an elder brother,
Da Vincis derive in good time from Dellos.”*

— Old Pictures in Florence, p. 108.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

Between the Austrian muskets, out of thrall :
I tell you rather, that whoever may
Discern true ends here shall grow pure enough
To love them, brave enough to strive for them,
And strong to reach them, though the roads be rough ;
That, having learnt — by no mere apothegm —
Not just the draping of a graceful stuff
About a statue, broidered at the hem, —
Not just the trilling on an opera-stage,
Of “libertà” to bravos — (a fair word,
Yet too allied to inarticulate rage
And breathless sobs, for singing, though the chord
Were deeper than they struck it) but the gauge
Of civil wants sustained, and wrongs abhorred,
The serious, sacred meaning and full use
Of freedom for a nation, — then, indeed,
Our Tuscans, underneath the bloody dew
Of some new morning, rising up agreed
And bold, will want no Saxon souls or thews
To sweep their piazzas clear of Austria’s breed.

Alas, alas ! it was not so this time.
Conviction was not, courage failed, and truth
Was something to be doubted of. The mime
Changed masks, because a mime. The tide as smooth
In running in as out, no sense of crime
Because no sense of virtue. Sudden ruth
Seized on the people : they would have again
Their good Grand-duke, and leave Guerazzi, though

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

He took that tax from Florence. "Much in vain
He takes it from the market-carts, we trow,

While urgent that no market-men remain,
But all march off, and leave the spade and plough
To die among the Lombards. Was it thus
The dear paternal Duke did? Live the Duke!"

At which the joy-bells multitudinous,
Swept by an opposite wind, as loudly shook.

Call back the mild archbishop to his house,
To bless the people with his frightened look, —

He shall not yet be hanged, you comprehend!
Seize on Guerazzi; guard him in full view,

Or else we stab him in the back to end!
Rub out those chalked devices, set up new

The Duke's arms, doff your Phrygian caps, and mend
The pavement of the piazzas broke into

By barren poles of freedom: smooth the way
For the ducal carriage, lest his Highness sigh,

"Here trees of liberty grew yesterday!"
"Long live the Duke!" How roared the cannonry!

How rocked the bell-towers! and through thickening
spray

Of nosegays, wreaths, and kerchiefs tossed on high,

How marched the civic guard, the people still
Being good at shouts, especially the boys!

Alas, poor people, of an unfledged will
Most fitly expressed by such a callow voice!

Alas, still poorer Duke, incapable
Of being worthy even of so much noise!

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

You think he came back instantly, with thanks,
And tears in his faint eyes, and hands extended
To stretch the franchise through their utmost ranks?
That having, like a father apprehended,
He came to pardon fatherly those pranks
Played out, and now in filial service ended?
That some love-token, like a prince, he threw
To meet the people's love-call in return?
Well, how he came I will relate to you;
And if your hearts should burn — why, hearts *must* burn,
To make the ashes which things old and new
Shall be washed clean in — as this Duke will learn.

From Casa Guidi windows gazing then,
I saw and witness how the Duke came back.
The regular tramp of horse, and tread of men,
Did smite the silence like an anvil black
And sparkless. With her wide eyes at full strain,
Our Tuscan nurse exclaimed, “Alack, alack,
Signora! these shall be the Austrians.” — “Nay,
Be still,” I answered; “do not wake the child!”
— For so, my two-months' baby sleeping lay
In milky dreams upon the bed, and smiled,
And I thought, “He shall sleep on, while he may,
Through the world's baseness: not being yet defiled,
Why should he be disturbed by what is done?”
Then, gazing, I beheld the long-drawn street
Live out, from end to end, full in the sun,
With Austria's thousand; sword and bayonet,

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

Horse, foot, artillery, cannons rolling on
Like blind, slow storm-clouds gestant with the heat
Of undeveloped lightnings, each bestrode
By a single man, dust-white from head to heel,
Indifferent as the dreadful thing he rode,
Like a sculptured Fate serene and terrible.

As some smooth river which has overflowed,
Will slow and silent down its current wheel

A loosened forest, all the pines erect,
So swept, in mute significance of storm,
The marshalled thousands ; not an eye deflect
To left or right, to catch a novel form

Of Florence city adorned by architect
And carver, or of beauties live and warm

Scared at the casements, — all, straightforward eyes
And faces, held as steadfast as their swords,

And cognizant of acts, not imageries.

The key, O Tuscans, too well fits the wards !

Ye asked for mimes, — these bring you tragedies ;
For purple, — these shall wear it as your lords.

Ye played like children, — die like innocents.
Ye mimicked lightnings with a torch, — the crack

Of the actual bolt, your pastime circumvents.

Ye called up ghosts, believing they were slack

To follow any voice from Gilboa's tents . . .

Here 's Samuel ! — and so, Grand-dukes come back !

And yet they are no prophets, though they come :
That awful mantle they are drawing close

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

Shall be searched one day by the shafts of doom
Through double folds now hoodwinking the brows.

Resuscitated monarchs disentomb
Grave-reptiles with them in their new life-throes.

Let such beware. Behold, the people waits,
Like God : as he, in his serene of might,

So they, in their endurance of long straits.
Ye stamp no nation out, though day and night

Ye tread them with that absolute heel which grates
And grinds them flat from all attempted height.

You kill worms sooner with a garden spade
Than you kill peoples ; peoples will not die ;

The tail curls stronger when you lop the head :
They writhe at every wound, and multiply

And shudder into a heap of life that's made
Thus vital from God's own vitality.

'T is hard to shrivel back a day of God's
Once fixed for judgment ; 't is as hard to change

The peoples when they rise beneath their loads,
And heave them from their backs with violent wrench

To crush the oppressor : for that judgment rod's
The measure of this popular revenge.

Meanwhile, from Casa Guidi windows, we
Beheld the armament of Austria flow

Into the drowning heart of Tuscany ;
And yet none wept, none cursed, or, if 't was so,

They wept and cursed in silence. Silently
Our noisy Tuscans watched the invading foe ;

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

They had learnt silence. Pressed against the wall,
And grouped upon the church-steps opposite,
A few pale men and women stared at all.
God knows what they were feeling, with their white
Constrained faces, — they so prodigal
Of cry and gesture when the world goes right,
Or wrong indeed. But here was depth of wrong,
And here, still water : they were silent here ;
And through that sentient silence struck along
That measured tramp from which it stood out clear,
Distinct the sound and silence, like a gong
At midnight, each by the other awfuller, —
While every soldier in his cap displayed
A leaf of olive. Dusty, bitter thing !
Was such plucked at Novara, is it said ?

A cry is up in England, which doth ring
The hollow world through, that for ends of trade
And virtue, and God's better worshipping,
We henceforth should exalt the name of Peace,
And leave those rusty wars that eat the soul, —
Besides their clippings at our golden fleece.
I, too, have loved peace, and from bole to bole
Of immemorial undeciduous trees
Would write, as lovers use upon a scroll,
The holy name of Peace, and set it high
Where none could pluck it down. On trees, I say,
Not upon gibbets ! — With the greenery
Of dewy branches and the flowery May,

NIOBE and her Daughter.
Statue in Uffizi Gallery.



“ You’re grieved — still Niobe’s the grander ! ”

— Old Pictures in Florence, p. 109.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

Sweet mediation betwixt earth and sky
Providing, for the shepherd's holiday.

Not upon gibbets! though the vulture leaves
The bones to quiet, which he first picked bare.

Not upon dungeons! though the wretch who grieves
And groans within, less stirs the outer air

Than any little field-mouse stirs the sheaves.
Not upon chain-bolts! though the slave's despair

Has dulled his helpless miserable brain,
And left him blank beneath the freeman's whip
To sing and laugh out idiocies of pain.

Nor yet on starving homes! where many a lip
Has sobbed itself asleep through curses vain.

I love no peace which is not fellowship,

And which includes not mercy. I would have
Rather the raking of the guns across

The world, and shrieks against heaven's architrave;
Rather the struggle in the slippery fosse

Of dying men and horses, and the wave
Blood-bubbling. . . . Enough said! — by Christ's own
cross,

And by this faint heart of my womanhood,
Such things are better than a Peace that sits

Beside a hearth in self-commended mood,
And takes no thought how wind and rain by fits

Are howling out of doors against the good
Of the poor wanderer. What! your peace admits

Of outside anguish while it keeps at home?
I loathe to take its name upon my tongue.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

'T is nowise peace : 't is treason, stiff with doom ;
'T is gagged despair, and inarticulate wrong,
Annihilated Poland, stifled Rome,
Dazed Naples, Hungary fainting 'neath the thong,
And Austria wearing a smooth olive-leaf
On her brute forehead, while her hoofs outpress
The life from these Italian souls in brief.
O Lord of peace, who art Lord of righteousness,
Constrain the anguished worlds from sin and grief,
Pierce them with conscience, purge them with redress,
And give us peace which is no counterfeit !
But wherefore should we look out any more
From Casa Guidi windows? Shut them straight,
And let us sit down by the folded door,
And veil our saddened faces, and so wait
What next the judgment-heavens make ready for.
I have grown too weary of these windows. Sights
Come thick enough and clear enough in thought,
Without the sunshine : souls have inner lights.
And since the Grand-duke has come back, and brought
This army of the North which thus requites
His filial South, we leave him to be taught.
His South, too, has learnt something certainly,
Whereof the practice will bring profit soon ;
And peradventure other eyes may see,
From Casa Guidi windows, what is done
Or undone. Whatsoever deeds they be,
Pope Pius will be glorified in none.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

Record that gain, Mazzini! It shall top
Some heights of sorrow. Peter's rock, so named,
Shall lure no vessel any more to drop
Among the breakers. Peter's chair is shamed,
Like any vulgar throne the nations lop
To pieces for their firewood unreclaimed;
And when it burns, too, we shall see as well
In Italy as elsewhere. Let it burn.
The cross accounted still adorable
Is Christ's cross only! If the thief's would earn
Some stealthy genuflexions, we rebel;
And here the impenitent thief's has had its turn,
As God knows; and the people on their knees
Scoff, and toss back the crosiers stretched like yokes
To press their heads down lower by degrees.
So Italy, by means of these last strokes,
Escapes the danger which preceded these,
Of leaving captured hands in cloven oaks, —
Of leaving very souls within the buckle
Whence bodies struggled outward, — of supposing
That free men may like bondsmen kneel and truckle,
And then stand up as usual, without losing
An inch of stature.

Those whom she-wolves suckle
Will bite as wolves do in the grapple-closing
Of adverse interests. This at last is known
(Thank Pius for the lesson), that albeit
Among the Popedom's hundred heads of stone
Which blink down on you from the roof's retreat

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

In Siena's tiger-striped cathedral, Joan
And Borgia 'mid their fellows you may greet,
A harlot and a devil, — you will see
Not a man, still less angel, grandly set
With open soul to render man more free.
The fishers are still thinking of the net,
And, if not thinking of the hook too, we
Are counted somewhat deeply in their debt ;
But that's a rare case — so, by hook and crook,
They take the advantage, agonizing Christ
By rustier nails than those of Cedron's brook,
I' the people's body very cheaply priced, —
And quote high priesthood out of Holy book,
While buying death-fields with the sacrificed.

Priests, priests, — there's no such name ! — God's own,
except
Ye take most vainly. Through heaven's lifted gate
The priestly ephod in sole glory swept
When Christ ascended, entered in, and sate
(With victor face sublimely overwept)
At Deity's right hand to mediate,
He alone, he forever. On his breast
The Urim and the Thummim, fed with fire
From the full Godhead, flicker with the unrest
Of human pitiful heart beats. Come up higher,
All Christians. Levi's tribe is dispossessed.
That solitary alb ye shall admire,
But not cast lots for. The last chrism, poured right,

THE Dying Alexander, in
the Uffizi Gallery.



“ *There’s the dying Alexander.* ”

— Old Pictures in Florence, p. 109.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

Was on that Head, and poured for burial,
And not for domination in men's sight.
What *are* these churches? The old temple wall
Doth overlook them juggling with the sleight
Of surplice, candlestick, and altar-pall;
East church and west church, ay, north church and
south,
Rome's church and England's — let them all repent,
And make concordats 'twixt their soul and mouth,
Succeed St. Paul by working at the tent,
Become infallible guides by speaking truth,
And excommunicate their pride that bent
And cramped the souls of men.

Why, even here,
Priestcraft burns out, the twinèd linen blazes;
Not, like asbestos, to grow white and clear,
But all to perish! while the fire-smell raises
To life some swooning spirits, who last year
Lost breath and heart in these church-stifled places.
Why, almost through this Pius, we believed
The priesthood could be an honest thing, he smiled
So saintly while our corn was being sheaved
For his own granaries! Showing now defiled
His hireling hands, a better help's achieved
Than if they blessed us shepherd-like and mild.
False doctrine, strangled by its own amen,
Dies in the throat of all this nation. Who
Will speak a pope's name as they rise again?
What woman or what child will count him true?

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

What dreamer praise him with the voice or pen?
What man fight for him? — Pius takes his due.

Record that gain, Mazzini! — Yes, but first
Set down thy people's faults; set down the want
Of soul-conviction; set down aims dispersed,
And incoherent means, and valor scant

Because of scanty faith, and schisms accursed
That wrench these brother-hearts from covenant
With freedom and each other. Set down this,
And this, and see to overcome it when

The seasons bring the fruits thou wilt not miss
If wary. Let no cry of patriot men

Distract thee from the stern analysis
Of masses who cry only! keep thy ken

Clear as thy soul is virtuous. Heroes' blood
Splashed up against thy noble brow in Rome;

Let such not blind thee to an interlude
Which was not also holy, yet did come

'Twixt sacramental actions, — brotherhood
Despised even there, and something of the doom

Of Remus in the trenches. Listen now —
Rossi died silent near where Cæsar died.

He did not say, "My Brutus, is it thou?"
But Italy unquestioned testified,

"*I killed him! I am Brutus. — I avow.*"
At which the whole world's laugh of scorn replied,

"A poor maimed copy of Brutus!" Too much like,
Indeed, to be so unlike! too unskilled

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

At Philippi and the honest battle-pike,
To be so skilful where a man is killed
Near Pompey's statue, and the daggers strike
At unawares i' the throat. Was thus fulfilled
An omen once of Michel Angelo? —
When Marcus Brutus he conceived complete,
And strove to hurl him out by blow on blow
Upon the marble, at Art's thunder-heat,
Till haply (some pre-shadow rising slow
Of what his Italy would fancy meet
To be called BRUTUS) straight his plastic hand
Fell back before his prophet-soul, and left
A fragment, a maimed Brutus, — but more grand
Than this, so named at Rome, was!

Let thy weft

Present one woof and warp, Mazzini! Stand
With no man hankering for a dagger's heft,
No, not for Italy! — nor stand apart,
No, not for the Republic! — from those pure
Brave men who hold the level of thy heart
In patriot truth, as lover and as doer,
Albeit they will not follow where thou art
As extreme theorist. Trust and distrust fewer,
And so bind strong, and keep unstained the cause
Which (God's sign granted) war-trumps newly blown
Shall yet annunciate to the world's applause.

But now, the world is busy: it has grown
A Fair-going world. Imperial England draws

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

The flowing ends of the earth from Fez, Canton,
Delhi, and Stockholm, Athens and Madrid,
The Russias and the vast Americas,
As if a queen drew in her robes amid
Her golden cincture, — isles, peninsulas,
Capes, continents, far inland countries hid
By jasper-sands and hills of chrysopras,
All trailing in their splendors through the door
Of the gorgeous Crystal Palace. Every nation,
To every other nation strange of yore,
Gives face to face the civic salutation,
And holds up in a proud right hand before
That congress the best work which she can fashion
By her best means. “These corals, will you please
To match against your oaks? They grow as fast
Within my wilderness of purple seas.” —
“This diamond stared upon me as I passed
(As a live god’s eye from a marble frieze)
Along a dark of diamonds. Is it classed?” —
“I wove these stuffs so subtly that the gold
Swims to the surface of the silk like cream
And curdles to fair patterns. Ye behold!” —
“These delicatest muslins rather seem
Than be, you think? Nay, touch them and be bold,
Though such veiled Chakhi’s face in Hafiz’ dream.” —
“These carpets — you walk slow on them like kings,
Inaudible like spirits, while your foot
Dips deep in velvet roses and such things.” —
“Even Apollonius might commend this flute :

PORTRAITS of Taddeo Gaddi,

Giotto, and Cimabue, from
fresco by Simone Martini, in
Spanish Chapel of Santa Maria
Novella.



“ *My painter — who but Cimabue !* ”

— Old Pictures in Florence, p. 113.

“ *Are you too fine, Taddeo Gaddi,*

To grant me a taste of your intonaco ? ”

“ *Thyself shalt afford the example, Giotto !* ”

— Old Pictures in Florence, p. 111.

— Old Pictures in Florence, p. 114.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

The music, winding through the stops, upsprings
To make the player very rich : compute ! ”

“ Here ’s goblet-glass, to take in with your wine
The very sun its grapes were ripened under :

Drink light and juice together, and each fine.” —

“ This model of a steam-ship moves your wonder ?

You should behold it crushing down the brine
Like a blind Jove, who feels his way with thunder.” —

“ Here ’s sculpture ! Ah, *we* live too ! why not throw
Our life into our marbles ? Art has place

For other artists after Angelo.” —

“ I tried to paint out here a natural face ;

For nature includes Raffael, as we know,
Not Raffael nature. Will it help my case ? ” —

“ Methinks you will not match this steel of ours ! ” —

“ Nor you this porcelain ! One might dream the clay
Retained in it the larvæ of the flowers,

They bud so round the cup, the old spring-way.” —

“ Nor you these carven woods, where birds in bowers
With twisting snakes and climbing cupids play.”

O Magi of the east and of the west,
Your incense, gold, and myrrh are excellent ! —

What gifts for Christ, then, bring ye with the rest ?
Your hands have worked well : is your courage spent

In handwork only ? Have you nothing best,
Which generous souls may perfect and present,

And He shall thank the givers for ? no light
Of teaching, liberal nations, for the poor

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

Who sit in darkness when it is not night?
No cure for wicked children? Christ — no cure!
No help for women sobbing out of sight
Because men made the laws? no brothel-lure
Burnt out by popular lightnings? Hast thou found
No remedy, my England, for such woes?
No outlet, Austria, for the scourged and bound,
No entrance for the exiled? no repose,
Russia, for knouted Poles worked underground,
And gentle ladies bleached among the snows?
No mercy for the slave, America?
No hope for Rome, free France, chivalric France?
Alas, great nations have great shames, I say.
No pity, O world, no tender utterance
Of benediction, and prayers stretched this way
For poor Italia, baffled by mischance?
O gracious nations, give some ear to me!
You all go to your Fair, and I am one
Who at the roadside of humanity
Beseech your alms, — God's justice to be done.
So, prosper!

In the name of Italy,
Meantime her patriot dead have benison.
They only have done well; and, what they did
Being perfect, it shall triumph. Let them slumber:
No king of Egypt in a pyramid
Is safer from oblivion, though he number
Full seventy cerements for a coverlid.
These dead be seeds of life, and shall encumber

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

The sad heart of the land until it loose
The clammy clods, and let out the spring-growth
In beatific green through every bruise.
The tyrant should take heed to what he doth,
Since every victim-carrion turns to use,
And drives a chariot, like a god made wroth,
Against each piled injustice. Ay, the least,
Dead for Italia, not in vain has died ;
Though many vainly, ere life's struggle ceased,
To mad dissimilar ends have swerved aside ;
Each grave her nationality has pieced
By its own majestic breadth, and fortified,
And pinned it deeper to the soil. Forlorn
Of thanks be, therefore, no one of these graves!
Not hers, — who, at her husband's side, in scorn,
Outfaced the whistling shot and hissing waves,
Until she felt her little babe unborn
Recoil, within her, from the violent staves
And bloodhounds of the world : at which her life
Dropt inwards from her eyes, and followed it
Beyond the hunters. Garibaldi's wife
And child died so. And now the seaweeds fit
Her body, like a proper shroud and coif,
And murmuringly the ebbing waters grit
The little pebbles while she lies interred
In the sea-sand. Perhaps, ere dying thus,
She looked up in his face (which never stirred
From its clinched anguish) as to make excuse
For leaving him for his, if so she erred.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

He well remembers that she could not choose.

A memorable grave! Another is
At Genoa. There a king may fitly lie,
Who, bursting that heroic heart of his
At lost Novara, that he could not die,

(Though thrice into the cannon's eyes for this
He plunged his shuddering steed, and felt the sky
Reel back between the fire-shocks) stripped away
The ancestral ermine ere the smoke had cleared,
And, naked to the soul, that none might say
His kingship covered what was base and bleared
With treason, went out straight an exile, yea,
An exiled patriot. Let him be revered.

Yea, verily, Charles Albert has died well;
And if he lived not all so, as one spoke,
The sin pass softly with the passing-bell:
For he was shriven, I think, in cannon-smoke,
And, taking off his crown, made visible
A hero's forehead. Shaking Austria's yoke,
He shattered his own hand and heart. "So best,"
His last words were upon his lonely bed,
"I do not end like popes and dukes at least —
Thank God for it." And now that he is dead,
Admitting it is proved and manifest
That he was worthy, with a discrowned head,
To measure heights with patriots, let them stand
Beside the man in his Oporto shroud,
And each vouchsafe to take him by the hand,

STATUE of Niccola Pisano,
in Portico of the Uffizi.



“ *My sculptor is Nicolo the Pisan.*”

— Old Pictures in Florence, p. 113.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

And kiss him on the cheek, and say aloud,
“Thou, too, hast suffered for our native land!
My brother, thou art one of us! be proud.”

Still, graves, when Italy is talked upon.
Still, still, the patriot's tomb, the stranger's hate.
Still Niobe! still fainting in the sun,
By whose most dazzling arrows violate
Her beauteous offspring perished! has she won
Nothing but garlands for the graves, from Fate?
Nothing but death-songs? Yes, be it understood
Life throbs in noble Piedmont! while the feet
Of Rome's clay image, dabbled soft in blood,
Grow flat with dissolution, and, as meet,
Will soon be shovelled off like other mud,
To leave the passage free in church and street.
And I, who first took hope up in this song,
Because a child was singing one . . . behold,
The hope and omen were not, haply, wrong!
Poets are soothsayers still, like those of old
Who studied flights of doves; and creatures young
And tender, mighty meanings may unfold.

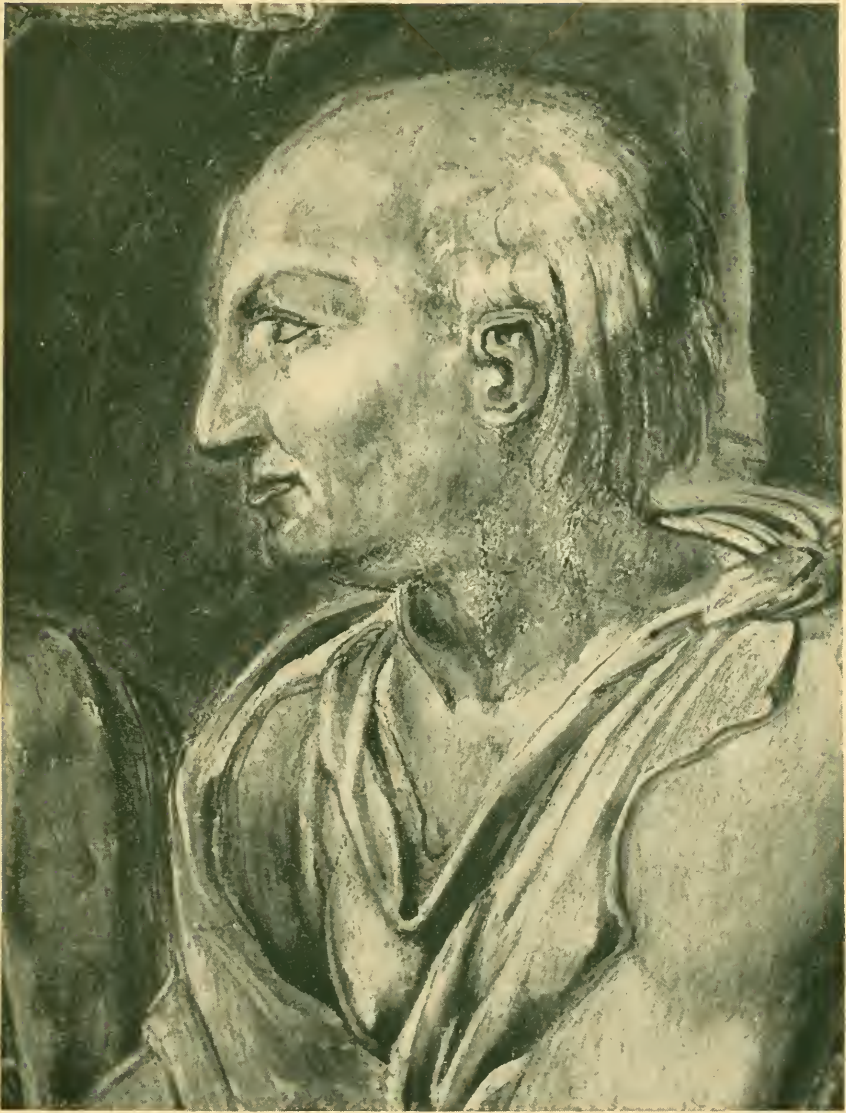
The sun strikes through the windows, up the floor;
Stand out in it, my own young Florentine,
Not two years old, and let me see thee more!
It grows along thy amber curls, to shine
Brighter than elsewhere. Now, look straight before,
And fix thy brave blue English eyes on mine,

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

And from my soul, which fronts the future so,
With unabashed and unabated gaze,
Teach me to hope for, what the angels know
When they smile clear as thou dost. Down God's ways
With just alighted feet, between the snow
And snowdrops, where a little lamb may graze,
Thou hast no fear, my lamb, about the road,
Albeit in our vain-glory we assume
That, less than we have, thou hast learnt of God.
Stand out, my blue-eyed prophet! — thou to whom
The earliest world-day light that ever flowed,
Through Casa Guidi windows chanced to come!
Now shake the glittering nimbus of thy hair,
And be God's witness that the elemental
New springs of life are gushing everywhere
To cleanse the water-courses, and prevent all
Concrete obstructions which infest the air!
That earth's alive, and gentle or ungentle
Motions within her signify but growth! —
The ground swells greenest o'er the laboring moles.

Howe'er the uneasy world is vexed and wroth,
Young children, lifted high on parent souls,
Look round them with a smile upon the mouth,
And take for music every bell that tolls ;
(Who said we should be better if like these?)
But *we* sit murmuring for the future, though
Posterity is smiling on our knees,
Convicting us of folly. Let us go —

VASARI'S portrait of Ghiberti, in
Hall of Cosimo I., in Palazzo
Vecchio.



*“ Nor ever was man of them all indeed,
From these to Ghiberti and Ghirlandajo,
Could say that he missed my critic-meed.”*

— Old Pictures in Florence, p. 113

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

We will trust God. The blank interstices
Men take for ruins, He will build into
With pillared marbles rare, or knit across
With generous arches, till the fane's complete.
This world has no perdition, if some loss.

Such cheer I gather from thy smiling, sweet !
The self-same cherub-faces which emboss
The Veil, lean inward to the Mercy-seat.

THE DANCE

THE DANCE

I

YOU remember down at Florence our Cascine
Where the people on the feast-days walk and drive,
And through the trees, long-drawn in many a green way,
O'er-roofing hum and murmur like a hive,
The river and the mountains look alive?

II

You remember the piazzone there, the stand-place
Of carriages a-brim with Florence beauties,
Who lean and melt to music as the band plays,
Or smile and chat with some one who afoot is,
Or on horseback, in observance of male duties?

III

'T is so pretty, in the afternoons of summer,
So many gracious faces brought together!
Call it rout, or call it concert, they have come here,
In the floating of the fan and of the feather,
To reciprocate with beauty the fine weather.

THE DANCE

IV

While the flower-girls offer nosegays (because *they* too
Go with other sweets) at every carriage-door ;
Here, by shake of a white finger, signed away to
Some next buyer, who sits buying score on score,
Piling roses upon roses evermore.

V

And last season, when the French camp had its station
In the meadow-ground, things quickened and grew gayer
Through the mingling of the liberating nation
With this people ; groups of Frenchmen everywhere,
Strolling, gazing, judging lightly — “ who was fair.”

VI

Then the noblest lady present took upon her
To speak nobly from her carriage for the rest :
“ Pray these officers from France to do us honor
By dancing with us straightway.” The request
Was gravely apprehended as address.

VII

And the men of France, bareheaded, bowing lowly,
Led out each a proud signora to the space
Which the startled crowd had rounded for them — slowly,
Just a touch of still emotion in his face,
Not presuming, through the symbol, on the grace.

PORTRAIT of Ghirlandajo
(Domenico Bigordi), from his
fresco of Joachim's Expulsion
from the Temple, in Santa
Maria Novella.



*“Not that I expect the great Bigordi
. . . . to hear me.”*

— Old Pictures in Florence, p. 114

THE DANCE

VIII

There was silence in the people : some lips trembled,
But none jested. Broke the music at a glance ;
And the daughters of our princes, thus assembled,
Stepped the measure with the gallant sons of France,
Hush ! it might have been a Mass, and not a dance.

IX

And they danced there till the blue that overskied us
Swooned with passion, though the footing seemed sedate ;
And the mountains, heaving mighty hearts beside us,
Sighed a rapture in a shadow, to dilate,
And touch the holy stone where Dante sate.

X

Then the sons of France, bareheaded, lowly bowing,
Led the ladies back where kinsmen of the south
Stood, received them ; till, with burst of overflowing
Feeling, husbands, brothers, Florence's male youth,
Turned and kissed the martial strangers mouth to mouth.

XI

And a cry went up, — a cry from all that people !
— You have heard a people cheering, you suppose,
For the member, mayor . . . with chorus from the steeple ?
This was different, scarce as loud perhaps (who knows ?),
For we saw wet eyes around us ere the close.

THE DANCE

XII

Amd we felt as if a nation, too long borne in
By hard wrongers, — comprehending in such attitude
That God had spoken somewhere since the morning,
That men were somehow brothers, by no platitude,
Cried exultant in great wonder and free gratitude.

PORTRAIT of Alessandro Botticelli,
in his picture of The Adoration of
the Magi. Uffizi Gallery.



“ Sandro chivalric, bellicose.”

— Old Pictures in Florence, p. 114

OLD PICTURES IN FLORENCE

OLD PICTURES IN FLORENCE

I

THE morn when first it thunders in March,
The eel in the pond gives a leap, they say :
As I leaned and looked over the aloed arch
Of the villa-gate this warm March day,
No flash snapped, no dumb thunder rolled
In the valley beneath where, white and wide
And washed by the morning water-gold,
Florence lay out on the mountain-side.

II

River and bridge and street and square
Lay mine, as much at my beck and call,
Through the live translucent bath of air,
As the sights in a magic crystal ball.
And of all I saw and of all I praised,
The most to praise and the best to see
Was the startling bell-tower Giotto raised:
But why did it more than startle me?

OLD PICTURES IN FLORENCE

III

Giotto, how, with that soul of yours,
 Could you play me false who loved you so?
Some slights if a certain heart endures
 Yet it feels, I would have your fellows know !
I' faith, I perceive not why I should care
 To break a silence that suits them best,
But the thing grows somewhat hard to bear
 When I find a Giotto join the rest.

IV

On the arch where olives overhead
 Print the blue sky with twig and leaf,
(That sharp-curved leaf which they never shed)
 'Twixt the aloes, I used to lean in chief,
And mark through the winter afternoons,
 By a gift God grants me now and then,
In the mild decline of those suns like moons,
 Who walked in Florence, besides her men.

V

They might chirp and chaffer, come and go
 For pleasure or profit, her men alive —
My business was hardly with them, I trow,
 But with empty cells of the human hive ;
— With the chapter-room, the cloister-porch,
 The church's apsis, aisle or nave,
Its crypt, one fingers along with a torch,
 Its face set full for the sun to shave.

PORTRAIT of Filippino Lippi,
in Uffizi Gallery. Painted by
himself.



“*The wronged Lippino.*”

— Old Pictures in Florence, p. 114

OLD PICTURES IN FLORENCE

VI

Wherever a fresco peels and drops,
Wherever an outline weakens and wanes
Till the latest life in the painting stops,
Stands One whom each fainter pulse-tick pains :
One, wishful each scrap should clutch the brick,
Each tinge not wholly escape the plaster,
— A lion who dies of an ass's kick,
The wronged great soul of an ancient Master.

VII

For oh, this world and the wrong it does !
They are safe in heaven with their backs to it,
The Michaels and Rafaels, you hum and buzz
Round the works of, you of the little wit !
Do their eyes contract to the earth's old scope,
Now that they see God face to face,
And have all attained to be poets, I hope ?
'T is their holiday now, in any case.

VIII

Much they reckon of your praise and you !
But the wronged great souls — can they be quit
Of a world where their work is all to do,
Where you style them, you of the little wit,
Old Master This and Early the Other,
Not dreaming that Old and New are fellows :

OLD PICTURES IN FLORENCE

A younger succeeds to an elder brother,
Da Vincis derive in good time from Dellos.¹

IX

And here where your praise might yield returns,
And a handsome word or two give help,
Here, after your kind, the mastiff girms
And the puppy pack of poodles yelp.
What, not a word for Stefano² there,
Of brow once prominent and starry,
Called Nature's Ape and the world's despair
For his peerless painting? (see Vasari.)

X

There stands the Master. Study, my friends,
What a man's work comes to! So he plans it,
Performs it, perfects it, makes amends
For the toiling and moiling, and then, *sic transit!*
Happier the thrifty blind-folk labor,
With upturned eye while the hand is busy,
Not sidling a glance at the coin of their neighbor!
'Tis looking downward that makes one dizzy.)

¹ Dello Delli, whose reputation was founded on his skill in painting small figures on "cassoni" for wedding garments and the like. No existing work can be attributed to him with certainty.

² Although extravagantly praised by Vasari, no authenticated picture by Stefano (1301-1350) exists in Florence.

CORONATION of the Virgin,
by Lorenzo Monaco. In Uffizi
Gallery.



“Not a churlish saint, Lorenzo Monaco?”

— Old Pictures in Florence, p. 114

“Brother Lorenzo stands his single peer.”

— Fra Lippo Lippi, p. 129

OLD PICTURES IN FLORENCE

XI

“ If you knew their work you would deal your dole.”

May I take upon me to instruct you ?

When Greek Art ran and reached the goal,

Thus much had the world to boast *in fructu* —

The Truth of Man, as by God first spoken,

Which the actual generations garble,

Was re-uttered, and Soul (which Limbs betoken)

And Limbs (Soul informs) made new in marble.

XII

So, you saw yourself as you wished you were,

As you might have been, as you cannot be ;

Earth here, rebuked by Olympus there ;

And grew content in your poor degree

With your little power, by those statues' godhead,

And your little scope, by their eyes' full sway,

And your little grace, by their grace embodied,

And your little date, by their forms that stay.

XIII

You would fain be kinglier, say, than I am ?

Even so, you will not sit like Theseus.

You would prove a model ? The Son of Priam

Has yet the advantage in arms' and knees' use.

You're wroth — can you slay your snake like Apollo ?

You're grieved — still Niobe's the grander !

You live — there's the Racers' frieze to follow :

You die — there's the dying Alexander.

OLD PICTURES IN FLORENCE

XIV

So, testing your weakness by their strength,
Your meagre charms by their rounded beauty,
Measured by Art in your breadth and length,
You learned — to submit is a mortal's duty.
— When I say "you" 't is the common soul,
The collective, I mean : the race of Man
That receives life in parts to live in a whole,
And grow here according to God's clear plan.

XV

Growth came when, looking your last on them all,
You turned your eyes inwardly one fine day
And cried with a start — What if we so small
Be greater and grander the while than they !
Are they perfect of lineament, perfect of stature ?
In both, of such lower types are we
Precisely because of our wider nature ;
For time, theirs — ours, for eternity.

XVI

To-day's brief passion limits their range ;
It seethes with the morrow for us and more.
They are perfect — how else ? they shall never change :
We are faulty — why not ? we have time in store.
The Artificer's hand is not arrested
With us ; we are rough-hewn, no-wise polished :
They stand for our copy, and, once invested
With all they can teach, we shall see them abolished.

OLD PICTURES IN FLORENCE

XVII

'T is a life-long toil till our lump be leaven —
The better! What's come to perfection perishes.
Things learned on earth, we shall practise in heaven:
Works done least rapidly, Art most cherishes.
Thyself shalt afford the example, Giotto!
Thy one work, not to decrease or diminish,
Done at a stroke, was just (was it not?) "O!"
Thy great Campanile is still to finish.

XVIII

Is it true that we are now, and shall be hereafter,
But what and where depend on life's minute?
Hails heavenly cheer or infernal laughter
Our first step out of the gulf or in it?
Shall Man, such step within his endeavor,
Man's face, have no more play and action
Than joy which is crystallized forever,
Or grief, an eternal petrification?

XIX

On which I conclude, that the early painters,
To cries of "Greek Art and what more wish you?" —
Replied, "To become now self-acquainters,
And paint man, man, whatever the issue!
Make new hopes shine through the flesh they fray,
New fears aggrandize the rags and tatters:
To bring the invisible full into play!
Let the visible go to the dogs — what matters?"

OLD PICTURES IN FLORENCE

XX

Give these, I exhort you, their guerdon and glory
For daring so much, before they well did it.
The first of the new, in our race's story,
Beats the last of the old ; 't is no idle quiddit.
The worthies began a revolution,
Which if on earth you intend to acknowledge,
Why, honor them now ! (ends my allocution)
Nor confer your degree when the folks leave college.

XXI

There's a fancy some lean to and others hate —
That, when this life is ended, begins
New work for the soul in another state,
Where it strives and gets weary, loses and wins :
Where the strong and the weak, this world's congeries,
Repeat in large what they practised in small,
Through life after life in unlimited series ;
Only the scale's to be changed, that's all.

XXII

Yet I hardly know. When a soul has seen
By the means of Evil that Good is best,
And, through earth and its noise, what is heaven's
serene, —
When our faith in the same has stood the test —
Why, the child grown man, you burn the rod,
The uses of labor are surely done ;
There remaineth a rest for the people of God :
And I have had troubles enough, for one.)

ALESSIO BALDOVINETTI'S
Madonna and Saints, in Uffizi
Gallery.



*“ the somewhat petty,
Of finical touch and tempera crumbly —
. . . . Alessio Baldorinetti.”*

— Old Pictures in Florence, p. 114

OLD PICTURES IN FLORENCE

XXIII

But at any rate I have loved the season
Of Art's spring-birth so dim and dewy ;
My sculptor is Nicolo, the Pisan,
My painter — who but Cimabue ?
Nor ever was man of them all indeed,
From these to Ghiberti and Ghirlandajo,
Could say that he missed my critic-meed.
So, now to my special grievance — heigh ho !

XXIV

Their ghosts still stand, as I said before,
Watching each fresco flaked and rasped,
Blocked up, knocked out, or whitewashed o'er :
— No getting again what the church has grasped !
The works on the wall must take their chance ;
“ Works never conceded to England's thick clime ! ”
(I hope they prefer their inheritance
Of a bucketful of Italian quick-lime.)

XXV

When they go at length, with such a shaking
Of heads o'er the old delusion, sadly
Each master his way through the black streets taking,
Where many a lost work breathes though badly —
Why don't they bethink them of who has merited ?
Why not reveal, while their pictures dree
Such doom, how a captive might be out-ferreted ?
Why is it they never remember me ?

OLD PICTURES IN FLORENCE

XXVI

Not that I expect the great Bigordi,
Nor Sandro to hear me, chivalric, bellicose ;
Nor the wronged Lippino ; and not a word I
Say of a scrap of Frà Angelico's :
But are you too fine, Taddeo Gaddi,
To grant me a taste of your intonaco,
Some Jerome that seeks the heaven with a sad eye ?
Not a churlish saint, Lorenzo Monaco ?

XXVII¹

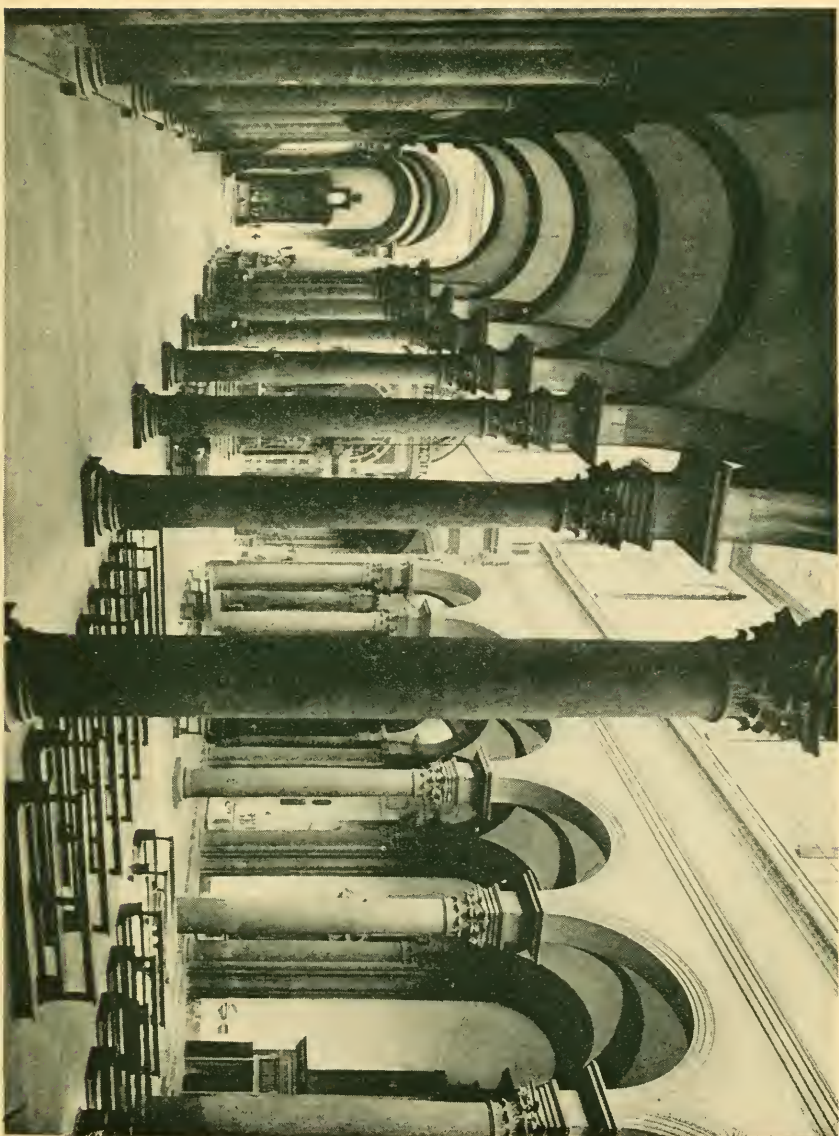
Could not the ghost with the close red cap,
My Pollajolo, the twice a craftsman,
Save me a sample, give me the hap
Of a muscular Christ that shows the draughtsman ?
No Virgin by him the somewhat petty,
Of finical touch and tempera crumbly —
Could not Alesso Baldovinetti
Contribute so much, I ask him humbly ?

XXVIII

Margheritone of Arezzo,
With the grave-clothes garb and swaddling barret
(Why purse up mouth and beak in a pet so,
You bald old saturnine poll-clawed parrot ?)

¹ The pictures alluded to in this and the following stanza are said to have been Browning's own property.

CHURCH of San Spirito,
Architecture of Filippo
Brunelleschi.



"I, that have haunted the dim San Spirito."



OLD PICTURES IN FLORENCE

Not a poor glimmering Crucifixion,
Where in the foreground kneels the donor?
If such remain, as is my conviction,
The hoarding it does you but little honor.

XXIX

They pass; for them the panels may thrill,
The tempera grow alive and tinglish;
Their pictures are left to the mercies still
Of dealers and stealers, Jews and the English,
Who, seeing mere money's worth in their prize,
Will sell it to somebody calm as Zeno
At naked High Art, and in ecstasies
Before some clay-cold vile Carlino!¹

XXX

No matter for these! But Giotto, you,
Have you allowed, as the town-tongues babble it, —
Oh, never! it shall not be counted true —
That a certain precious little tablet²
Which Buonarroti eyed like a lover, —
Was buried so long in oblivion's womb
And, left for another than I to discover,
Turns up at last! and to whom? — to whom?

¹ Carlo Dolci, a painter of the seventeenth century, when art had begun to decline.

² A famous "Last Supper" mentioned by Vasari, which went astray from San Spirito and was afterwards found in some obscure corner, and purchased by a stranger.

OLD PICTURES IN FLORENCE

XXXI

I, that have haunted the dim San Spirito,
 (Or was it rather the Ognissanti?)
Patient on altar-step planting a weary toe!
 Nay, I shall have it yet! *Detur amanti!*
My Koh-i-noor — or (if that's a platitude)
 Jewel of Giamschid, the Persian Sofi's eye;
So, in anticipative gratitude,
 What if I take up my hope and prophesy?

XXXII

When the hour grows ripe, and a certain dotard
 Is pitched, no parcel that needs invoicing,
To the worse side of the Mont St. Gothard,
 We shall begin by way of rejoicing;
None of that shooting the sky (blank cartridge),
 Nor a civic guard, all plumes and lacquer,
Hunting Radetzky's soul like a partridge
 Over Morello with squib and cracker.

XXXIII

This time we'll shoot better game and bag 'em hot —
 No mere display at the stone of Dante,
But a kind of sober Witanagemot
 (Ex: "Casa Guidi," *quod videas ante*)
Shall ponder, once Freedom restored to Florence,
 How Art may return that departed with her.
Go, hated house, go each trace of the Loraine's,
 And bring us the days of Orgagna hither!

cloister of the Church
of the Carmine.



“The Carmine’s my cloister, hunt it up.”

OLD PICTURES IN FLORENCE

XXXIV

How we shall prologize, how we shall perorate,
Utter fit things upon art and history,
Feel truth at blood-heat and falsehood at zero rate
Make of the want of the age no mystery;
Contrast the fructuous and sterile eras,
Show — monarchy ever its uncouth cub licks
Out of the bear's shape into Chimæra's,
While Pure Art's birth is still the republic's.

XXXV

Then one shall propose in a speech (curt Tuscan,
Expurgate and sober, with scarcely an “*issimo*,”)
To end now our half-told tale of Cambuscan,
And turn the bell-towers' *alt* to *altissimo*:
And fine as the beak of a young beccaccia
The Campanile, the Duomo's fit ally,
Shall soar up in gold full fifty braccia,
Completing Florence, as Florence, Italy.

XXXVI

Shall I be alive that morning the scaffold
Is broken away, and the long-pent fire,
Like the golden hope of the world, unbaffled
Springs from its sleep, and up goes the spire
While “God and the People” plain for its motto,
Thence the new tricolor flaps at the sky?
At least to foresee that glory of Giotto
And Florence together, the first am I!

FRA LIPPO LIPPI

FRA LIPPO LIPPI

1855

I AM poor brother Lippo, by your leave !
You need not clap your torches to my face.
Zooks, what's to blame? you think you see a monk !
What, 't is past midnight, and you go the rounds,
And here you catch me at an alley's end
Where sportive ladies leave their doors ajar?
The Carmine's my cloister : hunt it up,
Do, — harry out, if you must show your zeal,
Whatever rat, there, haps on his wrong hole,
And nip each softling of a wee white mouse,
Weke, Weke, that's crept to keep him company !
Aha, you know your betters? Then you'll take
Your hand away that's fiddling on my throat,
And please to know me likewise. Who am I?
Why, one, sir, who is lodging with a friend
Three streets off — he's a certain . . . how d'ye call?
Master — a . . . Cosimo of the Medici,
I' the house that caps the corner. Boh ! you were best !
Remember and tell me, the day you're hanged,
How you affected such a gullet's-gripe!
But you, sir, it concerns you that your knaves
Pick up a manner nor discredit you :

FRA LIPPO LIPPI

Zooks, are we pilchards, that they sweep the streets
And count fair prize what comes into their net?
He's Judas to a tittle, that man is!
Just such a face! Why, sir, you make amends.
Lord, I'm not angry! Bid your hangdogs go
Drink out this quarter-florin to the health
Of the munificent House that harbors me
(And many more beside, lads! more beside!)
And all's come square again. I'd like his face —
His, elbowing on his comrade in the door
With the pike and lantern, — for the slave that holds
John Baptist's head a-dangle by the hair
With one hand (“Look you, now,” as who should say)
And his weapon in the other, yet unwiped!
It's not your chance to have a bit of chalk,
A wood-coal or the like? or you should see!
Yes, I'm the painter, since you style me so.
What, brother Lippo's doings, up and down,
You know them and they take you? like enough!
I saw the proper twinkle in your eye —
'Tell you, I liked your looks at very first.
Let's sit and set things straight now, hip to haunch.
Here's spring come, and the nights one makes up bands
To roam the town and sing out carnival,
And I've been three weeks shut within my mew,
A-painting for the great man, saints and saints
And saints again. I could not paint all night —
Ouf! I leaned out of window for fresh air.
There came a hurry of feet and little feet,



PORTRAIT of Cosimo de' Medici
(called Pater Patriae), by Pon-
tormo. In Uffizi Gallery.

“ Who am I ?

*Why, one, sir, who is lodging with a friend
Three streets off Cosimo of the Medici.”*

— Fra Lippo Lippi, p. 121

*“ I'm my own master, paint now as I please —
Having a friend, you see, in the Corner-house.”*

— Fra Lippo Lippi, p. 129

FRA LIPPO LIPPI

A sweep of lute-strings, laughs, and whiffs of song, —
Flower o' the broom,
Take away love, and our earth is a tomb!
Flower o' the quince,
I let Lisa go, and what good in life since?
Flower o' the thyme — and so on. Round they went.
Scarce had they turned the corner when a titter
Like the skipping of rabbits by moonlight, — three slim
 shapes,
And a face that looked up . . . zooks, sir, flesh and
 blood,
That's all I'm made of! Into shreds it went,
Curtain and counterpane and coverlet,
All the bed-furniture — a dozen knots,
There was a ladder! Down I let myself,
Hands and feet, scrambling somehow, and so dropped,
And after them. I came up with the fun
Hard by Saint Laurence, hail fellow, well met, —
Flower o' the rose,
If I've been merry, what matter who knows?
And so as I was stealing back again
To get to bed and have a bit of sleep
Ere I rise up to-morrow and go work
On Jerome knocking at his poor old breast
With his great round stone to subdue the flesh,
You snap me of the sudden. Ah, I see!
Though your eye twinkles still, you shake your head —
Mine's shaved — a monk, you say — the sting's in that!
If Master Cosimo announced himself,

FRA LIPPO LIPPI

Mum 's the word naturally ; but a monk !
Come, what am I a beast for ? tell us, now !
I was a baby when my mother died
And father died and left me in the street.
I starved there, God knows how, a year or two
On fig-skins, melon-parings, rinds and shucks,
Refuse and rubbish. One fine frosty day,
My stomach being empty as your hat,
The wind doubled me up and down I went.
Old Aunt Lapaccia trussed me with one hand,
(Its fellow was a stinger as I knew)
And so along the wall, over the bridge,
By the straight cut to the convent. Six words there,
While I stood munching my first bread that month :
“ So, boy, you 're minded,” quoth the good fat father,
Wiping his own mouth, 't was refection-time, —
“ To quit this very miserable world ?
Will you renounce” . . . “ the mouthful of bread ?”
thought I ;
By no means ! Brief, they made a monk of me ;
I did renounce the world, its pride and greed,
Palace, farm, villa, shop, and banking-house,
Trash, such as these poor devils of Medici
Have given their hearts to — all at eight years old.
Well, sir, I found in time, you may be sure,
'T was not for nothing — the good bellyful,
The warm serge and the rope that goes all round,
And day-long blessed idleness beside !
“ Let 's see what the urchin 's fit for” — that came next.

ST. JEROME, by Fra Lippo
Lippi. In Academy.



*“ I rise up to-morrow and go to work
On Jerome knocking at his poor old breast
With his great round stone to subdue the flesh.”*

— Fra Lippo Lippi, p. 123

FRA LIPPO LIPPI

Not overmuch their way, I must confess.
Such a to-do ! They tried me with their books :
Lord, they'd have taught me Latin in pure waste !
Flower o' the clove,
All the Latin I construe is, " amo " I love !
But, mind you, when a boy starves in the streets
Eight years together as my fortune was,
Watching folk's faces to know who will fling
The bit of half-stripped grape-bunch he desires,
And who will curse or kick him for his pains, —
Which gentleman processional and fine,
Holding a candle to the Sacrament
Will wink and let him lift a plate and catch
The droppings of the wax to sell again,
Or holla for the Eight and have him whipped, —
How say I ? — nay, which dog bites, which lets drop
His bone from the heap of offal in the street, —
Why, soul and sense of him grow sharp alike,
He learns the look of things, and none the less
For admonition from the hunger-pinch.
I had a store of such remarks, be sure,
Which, after I found leisure, turned to use :
I drew men's faces on my copy-books,
Scrawled them within the antiphonary's marge,
Joined legs and arms to the long music-notes,
Found eyes and nose and chin for A.s and B.s,
And made a string of pictures of the world
Betwixt the ins and outs of verb and noun,
On the wall, the bench, the door. The monks looked black.

FRA LIPPO LIPPI

“Nay,” quoth the Prior, “turn him out, d’ ye say?
In no wise. Lose a crow and catch a lark.
What if at last we get our man of parts,
We Carmelites, like those Camaldolese
And Preaching Friars, to do our church up fine
And put the front on it that ought to be!”
And hereupon he bade me daub away.
Thank you! my head being crammed, the walls a blank,
Never was such prompt disemburdening.
First, every sort of monk, the black and white,
I drew them, fat and lean: then, folk at church,
From good old gossips waiting to confess
Their cribs of barrel-droppings, candle-ends, —
To the breathless fellow at the altar-foot,
Fresh from his murder, safe and sitting there
With the little children round him in a row
Of admiration, half for his beard and half
For that white anger of his victim’s son
Shaking a fist at him with one fierce arm,
Signing himself with the other because of Christ
(Whose sad face on the cross sees only this
After the passion of a thousand years)
Till some poor girl, her apron o’er her head,
(Which the intense eyes looked through) came at eve
On tiptoe, said a word, dropped in a loaf,
Her pair of ear-rings and a bunch of flowers
(The brute took growling), prayed, and so was gone,
I painted all, then cried “’Tis ask and have;
Choose, for more’s ready!” — laid the ladder flat,

UNFINISHED façade of the
Church of the Carmine;
13th to 15th century.



*“What if at last we get our man of parts
. . . . to do our church up fine
And put the front on it that ought to be.”*

— Fra Lippo Lippi, p. 126

FRA LIPPO LIPPI

And showed my covered bit of cloister-wall.
The monks closed in a circle and praised loud
Till checked, taught what to see and not to see,
Being simple bodies, — “That’s the very man!
Look at the boy who stoops to pat the dog!
That woman’s like the Prior’s niece who comes
To care about his asthma: it’s the life!”
But there my triumph’s straw-fire flared and funk’d;
Their betters took their turn to see and say:
The Prior and the learned pulled a face
And stopped all that in no time. “How? what’s here?
Quite from the mark of painting, bless us all!
Faces, arms, legs, and bodies like the true
As much as pea and pea! it’s devil’s game!
Your business is not to catch men with show,
With homage to the perishable clay,
But lift them over it, ignore it all,
Make them forget there’s such a thing as flesh.
Your business is to paint the souls of men —
Man’s soul, and it’s a fire, smoke . . . no, it’s not.
It’s vapor done up like a new-born babe —
(In that shape when you die it leaves your mouth)
It’s . . . well, what matters talking, it’s the soul!
Give us no more of body than shows soul!
Here’s Giotto, with his Saint a-praising God,
That sets us praising, — why not stop with him?
Why put all thoughts of praise out of our head
With wonder at lines, colors, and what not?
Paint the soul, never mind the legs and arms!

FRA LIPPO LIPPI

Rub all out, try at it a second time.

Oh, that white smallish female with the breasts,
She's just my niece . . . Herodias, I would say, —
Who went and danced and got men's heads cut off!
Have it all out!" Now, is this sense, I ask?
A fine way to paint soul, by painting body
So ill, the eye can't stop there, must go further
And can't fare worse! Thus, yellow does for white
When what you put for yellow's simply black,
And any sort of meaning looks intense
When all beside itself means and looks naught.
Why can't a painter lift each foot in turn,
Left foot and right foot, go a double step,
Make his flesh liker and his soul more like,
Both in their order? Take the prettiest face,
The Prior's niece . . . patron-saint — is it so pretty
You can't discover if it means hope, fear,
Sorrow or joy? won't beauty go with these?
Suppose I've made her eyes all right and blue,
Can't I take breath and try to add life's flash,
And then add soul and heighten them threefold?
Or say there's beauty with no soul at all —
(I never saw it — put the case the same —)
If you get simple beauty and naught else,
You get about the best thing God invents:
That's somewhat: and you'll find the soul you have missed,
Within yourself, when you return him thanks.
"Rub all out!" Well, well, there's my life, in short,
And so the thing has gone on ever since.

FRA LIPPO LIPPI

I'm grown a man no doubt, I've broken bounds :
You should not take a fellow eight years old
And make him swear to never kiss the girls.
I'm my own master, paint now as I please —
Having a friend, you see, in the Corner-house !
Lord, it's fast holding by the rings in front —
Those great rings serve more purposes than just
To plant a flag in, or tie up a horse !
And yet the old schooling sticks, the old grave eyes
Are peeping o'er my shoulder as I work,
The heads shake still — “ It's art's decline, my son !
You're not of the true painters, great and old ;
Brother Angelico's the man, you'll find ;
Brother Lorenzo stands his single peer :
Fag on at flesh, you'll never make the third ! ”

Flower o' the pine,

You keep your mistr . . . manners, and I'll stick to mine !

I'm not the third, then : bless us, they must know !
Don't you think they're the likeliest to know,
They with their Latin ? So, I swallow my rage,
Clench my teeth, suck my lips in tight, and paint
To please them — sometimes do, and sometimes don't,
For, doing most, there's pretty sure to come
A turn, some warm eve finds me at my saints —
A laugh, a cry, the business of the world —

(Flower o' the peach,

Death for us all, and his own life for each !)

And my whole soul revolves, the cup runs over,
The world and life's too big to pass for a dream,

FRA LIPPO LIPPI

And I do these wild things in sheer despite,
And play the fooleries you catch me at,
In pure rage! The old mill-horse, out at grass
After hard years, throws up his stiff heels so,
Although the miller does not preach to him
The only good of grass is to make chaff.
What would men have? Do they like grass or no —
May they or may n't they? all I want's the thing
Settled for ever one way. As it is,
You tell too many lies and hurt yourself:
You don't like what you only like too much,
You do like what, if given you at your word,
You find abundantly detestable.
For me, I think I speak as I was taught;
I always see the garden and God there
A-making man's wife: and, my lesson learned,
The value and significance of flesh,
I can't unlearn ten minutes afterwards.

You understand me: I'm a beast, I know.
But see, now — why, I see as certainly
As that the morning-star's about to shine,
What will hap some day. We've a youngster here
Comes to our convent, studies what I do,
Slouches and stares and lets no atom drop:
His name is Guidi — he'll not mind the monks —
They call him Hulking Tom, he lets them talk —
He picks my practice up — he'll paint apace,
I hope so — though I never live so long,

GROUP of angels from Giotto's
Coronation of the Virgin, in
Medici Chapel of Santa Croce.



“Here’s Giotto, with his Saint a-praising God.”

— Fra Lippo Lippi, p. 127

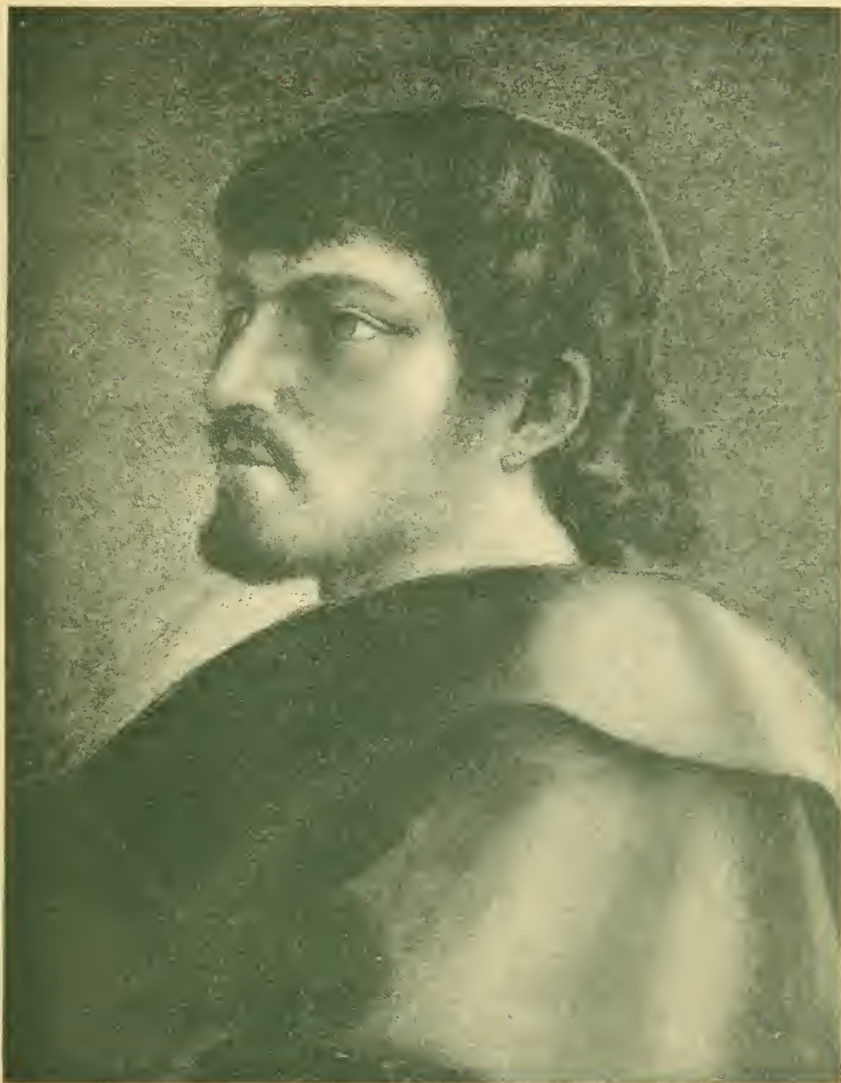
FRA LIPPO LIPPI

I know what's sure to follow. You be judge!
You speak no Latin more than I, belike;
However, you're my man, you've seen the world
— The beauty and the wonder and the power,
The shapes of things, their colors, lights and shades,
Changes, surprises, — and God made it all!
— For what? Do you feel thankful, ay or no,
For this fair town's face, yonder river's line,
The mountain round it and the sky above,
Much more the figures of man, woman, child,
These are the frame to? What's it all about?
To be passed over, despised? or dwelt upon,
Wondered at? oh, this last of course! — you say.
But why not do as well as say, — paint these
Just as they are, careless what comes of it?
God's works — paint anyone, and count it crime
To let a truth slip. Don't object, "His works
Are here already; nature is complete:
Suppose you reproduce her — (which you can't)
There's no advantage! you must beat her, then."
For, don't you mark? we're made so that we love
First when we see them painted, things we have passed
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see;
And so they are better, painted — better to us,
Which is the same thing. Art was given for that;
God uses us to help each other so,
Lending our minds out. Have you noticed, now,
Your cullion's hanging face? A bit of chalk,
And trust me but you should, though! How much more,

FRA LIPPO LIPPI

If I drew higher things with the same truth !
That were to take the Prior's pulpit-place,
Interpret God to all of you ! Oh, oh,
It makes me mad to see what men shall do
And we in our graves ! This world's no blot for us,
Nor blank ; it means intensely, and means good :
To find its meaning is my meat and drink.
" Ay, but you don't so instigate to prayer !"
Strikes in the Prior : " when your meaning's plain
It does not say to folks — remember matins,
Or, mind you fast next Friday ! " Why, for this
What need of art at all ? A skull and bones,
Two bits of stick nailed cross-wise, or, what's best,
A bell to chime the hour with, does as well.
I painted a Saint Laurence six months since
At Prato, splashed the fresco in fine style :
" How looks my painting, now the scaffold's down ? "
I ask a brother : " Hugely," he returns —
" Already not one phiz of your three slaves
Who turn the Deacon off his toasted side,
But's scratched and prodded to our heart's content,
The pious people have so eased their own
With coming to say prayers there in a rage :
We get on fast to see the bricks beneath.
Expect another job this time next year,
For pity and religion grow i' the crowd —
Your painting serves its purpose ! " Hang the fools !
— That is — you'll not mistake an idle word
Spoke in a huff by a poor monk, God wot,

PORTRAIT of Tommaso Guidi,
called Masaccio, from his fresco
The Tribute Money.



*“We’ve a youngster here
His name is Guidi — he’ll not mind the monks —
They call him Hulkling Tom.”*

— Fra Lippo Lippi, p. 130



FRA LIPPO LIPPI

Tasting the air this spicy night which turns
The unaccustomed head like Chianti wine !
Oh, the church knows ! don't misreport me, now !
It's natural a poor monk out of bounds
Should have his apt word to excuse himself :
And hearken how I plot to make amends.
I have bethought me : I shall paint a piece
. . . There's for you ! Give me six months, then go, see
Something in Sant' Ambrogio's ! Bless the nuns !
They want a cast o' my office. I shall paint
God in the midst, Madonna and her babe,
Ringed by a bowery, flowery angel-brood,
Lilies and vestments and white faces, sweet
As puff on puff of grated orris-root
When ladies crowd to church at midsummer.
And then i' the front, of course a saint or two —
Saint John, because he saves the Florentines,
Saint Ambrose, who puts down in black and white
The convent's friends and gives them a long day,
And Job, I must have him there past mistake,
The man of Uz, (and Us without the z,
Painters who need his patience.) Well, all these
Secured at their devotion, up shall come
Out of a corner when you least expect,
As one by a dark stair into a great light,
Music and talking, who but Lippo ! I ! —
Mazed, motionless and moon-struck — I'm the man !
Back I shrink — what is this I see and hear ?
I, caught up with my monk's things by mistake,

FRA LIPPO LIPPI

My old serge gown and rope that goes all round,
I, in this presence, this pure company!
Where 's a hole, where 's a corner for escape?
Then steps a sweet angelic slip of a thing
Forward, puts out a soft palm — “Not so fast!”
— Addresses the celestial presence, “nay —
He made you and devised you, after all,
Though he's none of you! Could Saint John there,
draw —
His camel-hair make up a painting-brush?
We come to brother Lippo for all that,
Iste perfecit opus!” So, all smile —
I shuffle sideways with my blushing face
Under the cover of a hundred wings
Thrown like a spread of kirtles when you 're gay
And play hot cockles, all the doors being shut,
Till, wholly unexpected, in there pops
The hothead husband! Thus I scuttle off
To some safe bench behind, not letting go
The palm of her, the little lily thing
That spoke the good word for me in the nick,
Like the Prior's niece . . . Saint Lucy, I would say.
And so all 's saved for me, and for the church
A pretty picture gained. Go, six months hence!
Your hand, sir, and good-bye: no lights, no lights!
The street 's hushed, and I know my own way back,
Don't fear me! There 's the gray beginning. Zooks!

MASACCIO'S Tribute Money,
in the Brancacci Chapel of the
Church of the Carmine.



“ He'll paint apiece,
I hope so — though I never live so long,
I know what's sure to follow.”

ANDREA DEL SARTO

ANDREA DEL SARTO

(Called "THE FAULTLESS PAINTER.")

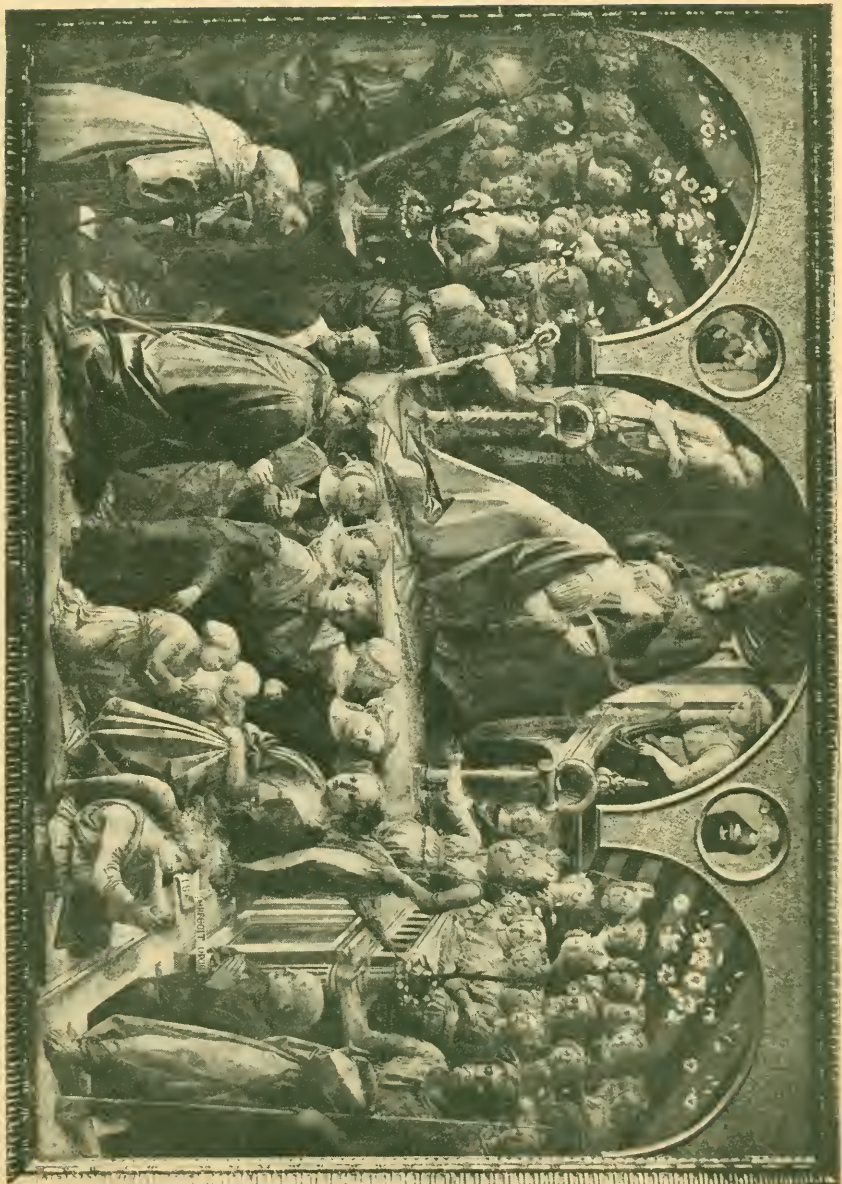
1855

BUT do not let us quarrel any more,
No, my Lucrezia ; bear with me for once :
Sit down and all shall happen as you wish.
You turn your face, but does it bring your heart ?
I 'll work then for your friend's friend, never fear,
Treat his own subject after his own way,
Fix his own time, accept too his own price,
And shut the money into this small hand
When next it takes mine. Will it ? tenderly ?
Oh, I 'll content him, — but to-morrow, Love !
I often am much wearier than you think,
This evening more than usual, and it seems
As if — forgive now — should you let me sit
Here by the window with your hand in mine
And look a half hour forth on Fiesole,
Both of one mind, as married people use,
Quietly, quietly the evening through,
I might get up to-morrow to my work
Cheerful and fresh as ever. Let us try.
To-morrow, how you shall be glad for this !

ANDREA DEL SARTO

Your soft hand is a woman of itself,
And mine the man's bared breast she curls inside.
Don't count the time lost, neither; you must serve
For each of the five pictures we require:
It saves a model. So! keep looking so —
My serpentine beauty, rounds on rounds!
— How could you ever prick those perfect ears,
Even to put the pearl there! oh, so sweet —
My face, my moon, my everybody's moon,
Which everybody looks on and calls his,
And, I suppose, is looked on by in turn,
While she looks — no one's: very dear, no less:
You smile? why there's my picture ready made,
There's what we painters call our harmony!
A common grayness silvers everything, —
All in a twilight, you and I alike
— You at the point of your first pride in me
(That's gone you know), — but I, at every point;
My youth, my hope, my art, being all toned down
To yonder sober pleasant Fiesole.
There's the bell clinking from the chapel-top;
That length of convent-wall across the way
Holds the trees safer, huddled more inside;
The last monk leaves the garden; days decrease,
And autumn grows, autumn in everything.
Eh? the whole seems to fall into a shape
As if I saw alike my work and self
And all that I was born to be and do,
A twilight-piece. Love, we are in God's hand.

FRA LIPPO LIPPI'S Coronation
of the Virgin in the Academy.
Originally painted for Church of
Sant' Ambrogio.



“I shall paint

God in the midst, Madonna
Ringed by a bonery, flowery angel-brood,

.
And then i' the front, of course a saint or two.”

ANDREA DEL SARTO

How strange now, looks the life he makes us lead ;
So free we seem, so fettered fast we are !
I feel he laid the fetter : let it lie !
This chamber for example — turn your head —
All that's behind us ! You don't understand
Nor care to understand about my art,
But you can hear at least when people speak :
And that cartoon, the second from the door
— It is the thing, Love ! so such things should be —
Behold Madonna ! — I am bold to say.
I can do with my pencil what I know,
What I see, what at bottom of my heart
I wish for, if I ever wish so deep —
Do easily, too — when I say, perfectly,
I do not boast, perhaps : yourself are judge
Who listened to the Legate's talk last week,
And just as much they used to say in France.
At any rate 't is easy, all of it !
No sketches first, no studies, that's long past :
I do what many dream of all their lives
— Dream ? strive to do, and agonize to do,
And fail in doing. I could count twenty such
On twice your fingers, and not leave this town,
Who strive — you don't know how the others strive
To paint a little thing like that you smeared
Carelessly passing with your robes afloat, —
Yet do much less, so much less, Someone says,
(I know his name, no matter) — so much less !
Well, less is more, Lucrezia : I am judged.

ANDREA DEL SARTO

There burns a truer light of God in them,
In their vexed beating stuffed and stopped-up brain,
Heart, or whate'er else, than goes on to prompt
This low-pulsed forthright craftsman's hand of mine.
Their works drop groundward, but themselves, I know,
Reach many a time a heaven that's shut to me,
Enter and take their place there sure enough,
Though they come back and cannot tell the world.
My works are nearer heaven, but I sit here.
The sudden blood of these men! at a word —
Praise them, it boils, or blame them, it boils too.
I, painting from myself and to myself,
Know what I do, am unmoved by men's blame
Or their praise either. Somebody remarks
Morello's outline there is wrongly traced,
His hue mistaken; what of that? or else,
Rightly traced and well ordered; what of that?
Speak as they please, what does the mountain care?
Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what's a heaven for? All is silver-gray
Placid and perfect with my art: the worse!
I know both what I want and what might gain;
And yet how profitless to know, to sigh
"Had I been two, another and myself,
Our head would have o'erlooked the world!" No doubt.
Yonder's a work now, of that famous youth
The Urbinate who died five years ago.
(T is copied, George Vasari sent it me.)
Well, I can fancy how he did it all,

ANDREA DEL SARTO

Pouring his soul, with kings and popes to see,
Reaching, that heaven might so replenish him,
Above and through his art — for it gives way ;
That arm is wrongly put — and there again —
A fault to pardon in the drawing's lines,
Its body, so to speak : its soul is right,
He means right — that, a child may understand.
Still, what an arm ! and I could alter it :
But all the play, the insight and the stretch —
Out of me, out of me ! And wherefore out ?
Had you enjoined them on me, given me soul,
We might have risen to Rafael, I and you,
Nay, Love, you did give all I asked, I think —
More than I merit, yes, by many times.
But had you — oh, with the same perfect brow,
And perfect eyes, and more than perfect mouth,
And the low voice my soul hears, as a bird
The fowler's pipe, and follows to the snare —
Had you, with these the same, but brought a mind !
Some women do so. Had the mouth there urged
“ God and the glory ! never care for gain.
The present by the future, what is that ?
Live for fame, side by side with Agnolo !
Rafael is waiting : up to God, all three ! ”
I might have done it for you. So it seems :
Perhaps not. All is as God overrules.
Beside, incentives come from the soul's self ;
The rest avail not. Why do I need you ?
What wife had Rafael, or has Agnolo ?

ANDREA DEL SARTO

In this world, who can do a thing, will not ;
And who would do it, cannot, I perceive :
Yet the will 's somewhat — somewhat, too, the power —
And thus we half-men struggle. / At the end,
God, I conclude, compensates, punishes.
'T is safer for me, if the award be strict,
That I am something underrated here,
Poor this long while, despised, to speak the truth.
I dared not, do you know, leave home all day,
For fear of chancing on the Paris lords.
The best is when they pass and look aside ;
But they speak sometimes ; I must bear it all.
Well may they speak ! That Francis, that first time,
And that long festal year at Fontainebleau !
I surely then could sometimes leave the ground,
Put on the glory, Rafael's daily wear,
In that humane great monarch's golden look, —
One finger in his beard or twisted curl
Over his mouth's good mark that made the smile,
One arm about my shoulder, round my neck,
The jingle of his gold chain in my ear,
I painting proudly with his breath on me,
All his court round him, seeing with his eyes,
Such frank French eyes, and such a fire of souls
Profuse, my hand kept plying by those hearts, —
And, best of all, this, this, this face beyond,
This in the background, waiting on my work,
To crown the issue with a last reward !
A good time, was it not, my kingly days ?

PORTRAIT of Fra Lippo Lippi, in
his Coronation of the Virgin.



*“Up shall come
Out of a corner when you least expect,
. . . . who but Lippo! I!”*

—Fra Lippo Lippi, p. 133

ANDREA DEL SARTO

And had you not grown restless . . . but I know —
'T is done and past; 't was right, my instinct said;
Too live the life grew, golden and not gray,
And I 'm the weak-eyed bat no sun should tempt
Out of the grange whose four walls make his world.
How could it end in any other way?
You called me, and I came home to your heart.
The triumph was, to have ended there; then, if
I reached it ere the triumph, what is lost?
Let my hands frame your face in your hair's gold,
You beautiful Lucrezia that are mine!
"Rafael did this, Andrea painted that;
The Roman's is the better when you pray,
But still the other's Virgin was his wife —"
Men will excuse me. I am glad to judge
Both pictures in your presence; clearer grows
My better fortune, I resolve to think.
For, do you know, Lucrezia, as God lives,
Said one day Agnolo, his very self,
To Rafael . . . I have known it all these years . . .
(When the young man was flaming out his thoughts
Upon a palace-wall for Rome to see,
Too lifted up in heart because of it)
"Friend, there 's a certain sorry little scrub
Goes up and down our Florence, none cares how,
Who, were he set to plan and execute
As you are, pricked on by your popes and kings,
Would bring the sweat into that brow of yours!"
To Rafael's! — And indeed the arm is wrong.

ANDREA DEL SARTO

I hardly dare . . . yet, only you to see,
Give the chalk here — quick, thus the line should go!
Ay, but the soul! he's Rafael! rub it out!
Still, all I care for, if he spoke the truth,
(What he? why, who but Michel Agnolo?
Do you forget already words like those?)
If really there was such a chance, so lost, —
Is, whether you're — not grateful — but more pleased.
Well, let me think so. And you smile indeed!
This hour has been an hour! Another smile?
If you would sit thus by me every night
I should work better, do you comprehend?
I mean that I should earn more, give you more.
See, it is settled dusk now; there's a star;
Morello's gone, the watch-lights show the wall,
The cue-owls speak the name we call them by.
Come from the window, love, — come in, at last,
Inside the melancholy little house
We built to be so gay with. God is just.
King Francis may forgive me: oft at nights
When I look up from painting, eyes tired out,
The walls become illumined, brick from brick
Distinct, instead of mortar, fierce bright gold,
That gold of his I did cement them with!
Let us but love each other. Must you go?
That Cousin here again? he waits outside?
Must see you — you, and not with me? Those loans?
More gaming debts to pay? you smiled for that?
Well, let smiles buy me! have you more to spend?

PORTRAIT of Andrea del
Sarto and his wife; painted
by himself. In the Pitti
Gallery.



*“ You turn your face, but does it bring your heart ?
. . . . You don't understand
Nor care to understand about my art. ”*

ANDREA DEL SARTO

While hand and eye and something of a heart
Are left me, work 's my ware, and what 's it worth?
I'll pay my fancy. Only let me sit
The gray remainder of the evening out,
Idle, you call it, and muse perfectly
How I could paint, were I but back in France,
One picture, just one more — the Virgin's face,
Not yours this time! I want you at my side
To hear them — that is, Michel Agnolo —
Judge all I do and tell you of its worth.
Will you? To-morrow, satisfy your friend.
I take the subjects for his corridor,
Finish the portrait out of hand — there, there,
And throw him in another thing or two
If he demurs; the whole should prove enough
To pay for this same Cousin's freak. Beside,
What 's better and what 's all I care about,
Get you the thirteen scudi for the ruff!
Love, does that please you? Ah, but what does he,
The Cousin! what does he to please you more?

I am grown peaceful as old age to-night.
I regret little, I would change still less.
Since there my past life lies, why alter it?
The very wrong to Francis! — it is true
I took his coin, was tempted and complied,
And built this house and sinned, and all is said.
My father and my mother died of want.
Well, had I riches of my own? you see

ANDREA DEL SARTO

How one gets rich ! Let each one bear his lot.
They were born poor, lived poor, and poor they died :
And I have labored somewhat in my time
And not been paid profusely. Some good son
Paint my two hundred pictures — let him try !
No doubt, there 's something strikes a balance. Yes,
You loved me quite enough, it seems to-night.
This must suffice me here. What would one have ?
In heaven, perhaps, new chances, one more chance —
Four great walls in the New Jerusalem
Meted on each side by the angel's reed,
For Leonard, Rafael, Agnolo and me
To cover — the three first without a wife,
While I have mine ! So — still they overcome
Because there 's still Lucrezia, — as I choose.

Again the Cousin's whistle ! Go, my Love.

THE STATUE AND THE BUST

THE STATUE AND THE BUST

THERE'S a palace in Florence, the world knows well,
And a statue watches it from the square,
And this story of both do our townsmen tell.

Ages ago, a lady there,
At the farthest window facing the East
Asked, "Who rides by with the royal air?"

The bridesmaids' prattle around her ceased;
She leaned forth, one on either hand;
They saw how the blush of the bride increased—

They felt by its beats her heart expand—
As one at each ear and both in a breath
Whispered, "The Great-Duke Ferdinand."

That selfsame instant, underneath,
The Duke rode past in his idle way,
Empty and fine like a swordless sheath.

Gay he rode, with a friend as gay,
Till he threw his head back—"Who is she?"
—"A bride the Riccardi brings home to-day."

THE STATUE AND THE BUST

Hair in heaps lay heavily
Over a pale brow spirit-pure —
Carved like the heart of the coal-black tree,

Crisped like a war-steed's encolure —
And vainly sought to dissemble her eyes
Of the blackest black our eyes endure.

And lo, a blade for a knight's emprise
Filled the fine empty sheath of a man, —
The Duke grew straightway brave and wise.

He looked at her, as a lover can ;
She looked at him, as one who awakes :
The past was a sleep, and her life began.

Now, love so ordered for both their sakes,
A feast was held that selfsame night
In the pile which the mighty shadow makes.

(For Via Larga is three-parts light,
But the palace overshadows one,
Because of a crime which may God requite !

To Florence and God the wrong was done,
Through the first republic's murder there
By Cosimo and his cursed son.)

The Duke (with the statue's face in the square)
Turned in the midst of his multitude
At the bright approach of the bridal pair.

FIESOLE, three miles north of
Florence, on the hillside.



*"My youth, my hope, my art, being all toned down
To yonder sober pleasant Fiesole."*

"John Milton's Fiesole."

— Andrea del Sarto, p. 138

— Casa Guidi Windows, p. 62

THE STATUE AND THE BUST

Face to face the lovers stood
A single minute and no more,
While the bridegroom bent, as a man subdued —

Bowed till his bonnet brushed the floor —
For the Duke on the lady a kiss conferred,
As the courtly custom was of yore.

In a minute can lovers exchange a word?
If a word did pass, which I do not think,
Only one out of the thousand heard.

That was the bridegroom. At day's brink
He and his bride were alone at last
In a bed-chamber by a taper's blink.

Calmly he said that her lot was cast,
That the door she had passed was shut on her
Till the final catafalk repassed.

The world meanwhile, its noise and stir,
Through a certain window facing the East
She could watch like a convent's chronicler.

Since passing the door might lead to a feast,
And a feast might lead to so much beside,
He, of many evils, chose the least.

“Freely I choose too,” said the bride:
“Your window and its world suffice,”
Replied the tongue, while the heart replied —

THE STATUE AND THE BUST

“If I spend the night with that devil twice,
May his window serve as my loop of hell
Whence a damned soul looks on paradise !

“I fly to the Duke who loves me well,
Sit by his side and laugh at sorrow
Ere I count another ave-bell.

“’T is only the coat of a page to borrow,
And tie my hair in a horse-boy’s trim,
And I save my soul — but not to-morrow.” —

(She checked herself and her eye grew dim)

“My father tarries to bless my state :
I must keep it one day more for him.

“Is one day more so long to wait ?
Moreover the Duke rides past, I know ;
We shall see each other, sure as fate.”

She turned on her side and slept. Just so !
So we resolve on a thing and sleep :
So did the lady, ages ago.

That night the Duke said, “Dear or cheap
As the cost of this cup of bliss may prove
To body or soul, I will drain it deep.”

And on the morrow, bold with love,
He beckoned the bridegroom (close on call,
As his duty bade, by the Duke’s alcove)

MADONNA and Child, from
Andrea del Sarto's Holy
Family, in Pitti Gallery.



*“Raphael did this, Andrea painted that :
The Roman’s is the better when you pray,
But still the other’s Virgin was his wife.”*

— Andrea del Sarto, p. 143

THE STATUE AND THE BUST

And smiled “ ’T was a very funeral,
Your lady will think, this feast of ours, —
A shame to efface, whate’er befall!

“ What if we break from the Arno bowers,
And try if Petraja, cool and green,
Cure last night’s fault with this morning’s flowers? ”

The bridegroom, not a thought to be seen
On his steady brow and quiet mouth,
Said, “ Too much favor for me so mean!

“ But, alas ! my lady leaves the South ;
Each wind that comes from the Apennine
Is a menace to her tender youth :

“ Nor a way exists, the wise opine,
If she quits her palace twice this year,
To avert the flower of life’s decline.”

Quoth the Duke, “ A sage and a kindly fear.
Moreover Petraja is cold this spring :
Be our feast to-night as usual here ! ”

And then to himself — “ Which night shall bring
Thy bride to her lover’s embraces, fool —
Or I am the fool, and thou art the king !

“ Yet my passion must wait a night, nor cool —
For to-night the Envoy arrives from France
Whose heart I unlock with thyself, my tool.

THE STATUE AND THE BUST

“I need thee still and might miss perchance.
To-day is not wholly lost, beside,
With its hope of my lady’s countenance :

“For I ride — what should I do but ride ?
And passing the palace, if I list,
May glance at its window — well betide !”

So said, so done : nor the lady missed
One ray that broke from the ardent brow,
Nor a curl of the lips where the spirit kissed.

Be sure that each renewed the vow,
No morrow’s sun should arise and set
And leave them then as it left them now.

But next day passed, and next day yet,
With still fresh cause to wait one day more
Ere each leaped over the parapet.

And still, as love’s brief morning wore,
With a gentle start, half smile, half sigh,
They found love not as it seemed before.

They thought it would work infallibly,
But not in despite of heaven and earth :
The rose would blow when the storm passed by.

Meantime they could profit in winter’s dearth
By store of fruits that supplant the rose :
The world and its ways have a certain worth :

THE STATUE AND THE BUST

And to press a point while these oppose
Were simple policy ; better wait :
We lose no friends and we gain no foes.

Meantime, worse fates than a lover's fate,
Who daily may ride and pass and look
Where his lady watches behind the grate !

And she — she watched the square like a book
Holding one picture and only one,
Which daily to find she undertook :

When the picture was reached the book was done,
And she turned from the picture at night to scheme
Of tearing it out for herself next sun.

So weeks grew months, years ; gleam by gleam
The glory dropped from their youth and love,
And both perceived they had dreamed a dream ;

Which hovered as dreams do, still above :
But who can take a dream for a truth ?
Oh, hide our eyes from the next remove !

One day as the lady saw her youth
Depart, and the silver thread that streaked
Her hair, and, worn by the serpent's tooth,

The brow so puckered, the chin so peaked, —
And wondered who the woman was,
Hollow-eyed and haggard-checked,

THE STATUE AND THE BUST

Fronting her silent in the glass —

“Summon here,” she suddenly said,
“Before the rest of my old self pass,

“Him, the Carver, a hand to aid,
Who fashions the clay no love will change,
And fixes a beauty never to fade.

“Let Robbia’s craft so apt and strange
Arrest the remains of young and fair,
And rivet them while the seasons range.

“Make me a face on the window there,
Waiting as ever, mute the while,
My love to pass below in the square!

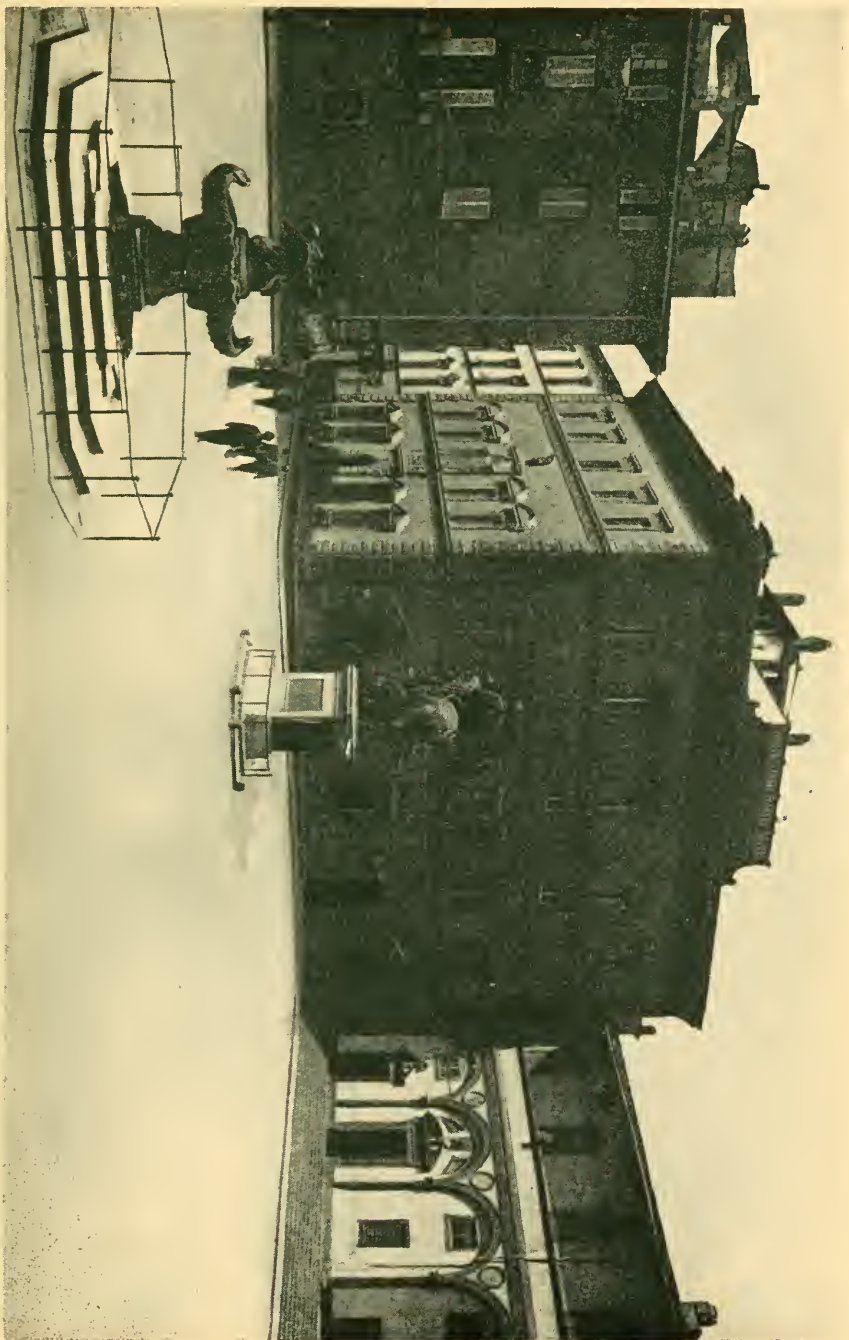
“And let me think that it may beguile
Dreary days which the dead must spend
Down in their darkness under the aisle,

“To say, ‘What matters it at the end?
I did no more while my heart was warm
Than does that image, my pale-faced friend.’

“Where is the use of the lip’s red charm,
The heaven of hair, the pride of the brow,
And the blood that blues the inside arm —

“Unless we turn, as the soul knows how,
The earthly gift to an end divine?
A lady of clay is as good, I trow.”

PALAZZO RICCARDI-
MANNELLI, in Piazza
dell' Annunziata.



*“There’s a palace in Florence, the world knows well,
And a statue watches it from the square.”*

THE STATUE AND THE BUST

But long ere Robbia's cornice, fine
With flowers and fruits which leaves enlace,
Was set where now is the empty shrine —

(And, leaning out of a bright blue space,
As a ghost might lean from a chink of sky,
The passionate pale lady's face —

Eyeing ever, with earnest eye
And quick-turned neck at its breathless stretch,
Some one who ever is passing by —)

The Duke had sighed like the simplest wretch
In Florence, "Youth — my dream escapes!
Will its record stay?" And he bade them fetch

Some subtle moulder of brazen shapes —
"Can the soul, the will, die out of a man
Ere his body find the grave that gapes?

"John of Douay shall effect my plan,
Set me on horseback here aloft,
Alive, as the crafty sculptor can,

"In the very square I have crossed so oft:
That men may admire, when future suns
Shall touch the eyes to a purpose soft,

"While the mouth and the brow stay brave in bronze —
Admire and say, 'When he was alive
How he would take his pleasure once!'

THE STATUE AND THE BUST

“ And it shall go hard but I contrive
To listen the while, and laugh in my tomb
At idleness which aspires to strive.”

So! While these wait the trump of doom,
How do their spirits pass, I wonder,
Nights and days in the narrow room?

Still, I suppose, they sit and ponder
What a gift life was, ages ago,
Six steps out of the chapel yonder.

Only they see not God, I know,
Nor all that chivalry of his,
The soldier-saints who, row on row,

Burn upward each to his point of bliss —
Since, the end of life being manifest,
He had burned his way thro' the world to this.

I hear you reproach, “ But delay was best,
For their end was a crime.” — Oh, a crime will do
As well, I reply, to serve for a test,

As a virtue golden through and through,
Sufficient to vindicate itself
And prove its worth at a moment's view!

Must a game be played for the sake of pelf?
Where a button goes, 't were an epigram
To offer the stamp of the very Guelph.

VILLA PERRAIA, formerly the residence
of Cardinal Ferdinand de' Medici, three
miles north of Florence.



“What if we break from the Arno bowers,
And try if Petraja, cool and green,
Cure last night's fault with this morning's flowers?”

—The Statute and the Bust, p. 153

THE STATUE AND THE BUST

The true has no value beyond the sham :
As well the counter as coin, I submit,
When your table 's a hat, and your prize, a dram.

Stake your counter as boldly every whit,
Venture as warily, use the same skill,
Do your best, whether winning or losing it,

If you choose to play ! — is my principle.
Let a man contend to the uttermost
For his life's set prize, be it what it will !

The counter our lovers staked was lost
As surely as if it were lawful coin :
And the sin I impute to each frustrate ghost

Is, the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin,
Though the end in sight was a vice, I say.
You of the virtue (we issue join)
How strive you? *De te, fabula !*

THE RING AND THE BOOK

BOOK I

THE RING AND THE BOOK

I

THE RING AND THE BOOK

DO you see this Ring?
'Tis Rome-work, made to match
(By Castellani's imitative craft)
Etrurian circlets found, some happy morn,
After a dropping April; found alive
Spark-like 'mid unearthed slope-side figtree-roots
That roof old tombs at Chiusi: soft, you see,
Yet crisp as jewel-cutting. There's one trick,
(Craftsmen instruct me) one approved device
And but one, fits such slivers of pure gold
As this was, — such mere oozings from the mine,
Virgin as oval tawny pendent tear
At beehive-edge when ripened combs o'erflow, —
To bear the file's tooth and the hammer's tap:
Since hammer needs must widen out the round,
And file emboss it fine with lily-flowers,
Ere the stuff grow a ring-thing right to wear.
That trick is, the artificer melts up wax
With honey, so to speak; he mingles gold

THE RING AND THE BOOK

With gold's alloy, and, duly tempering both,
Effects a manageable mass, then works :
But his work ended, once the thing a ring,
Oh, there's re-creation ! 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,
The rondure brave, the lily-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 ;
A thing's sign : now for the thing signified.

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

STATUE of Ferdinand I. de' Medici,
by John of Bologna (Jean Boul-
logne, from Douai), in Piazza dell'
Annunziata.



*“ John of Douay shall effect my plan,
Set me on horseback here aloft,
Alive, as the crafty sculptor can,
In the very square I have crossed so oft.”*

— The Statue and the Bust, p. 157

THE RING AND THE BOOK

'T wixt palace and church, — Riccardi where they lived,
His race, and San Lorenzo where they lie.
This book, — precisely on that palace-step
Which, meant for lounging knaves o' the Medici,
Now serves re-venders to display their ware, —
'Mongst odds and ends of ravage, picture-frames
White through the worn gilt, mirror-sconces chipped,
Bronze angel-heads once knobs attached to chests
(Handled when ancient dames chose forth brocade),
Modern chalk drawings, studies from the nude,
Samples of stone, jet, breccia, porphyry
Polished and rough, sundry amazing busts
In baked earth, (broken, Providence be praised!)
A wreck of tapestry, proudly-purposed web
When reds and blues were indeed red and blue,
Now offered as a mat to save bare feet
(Since carpets constitute a cruel cost)
Treading the chill scagliola bedward: then
A pile of brown-etched prints, two *crazie* each,
Stopped by a conch a-top from fluttering forth
— Sowing the Square with works of one and the same
Master, the imaginative Sienese
Great in the scenic backgrounds — (name and fame
None of you know, nor does he fare the worse :)
From these . . . Oh, with a Lionard going cheap
If it should prove, as promised, that Joconde
Whereof a copy contents the Louvre! — these
I picked this book from. Five compeers in flank
Stood left and right of it as tempting more —

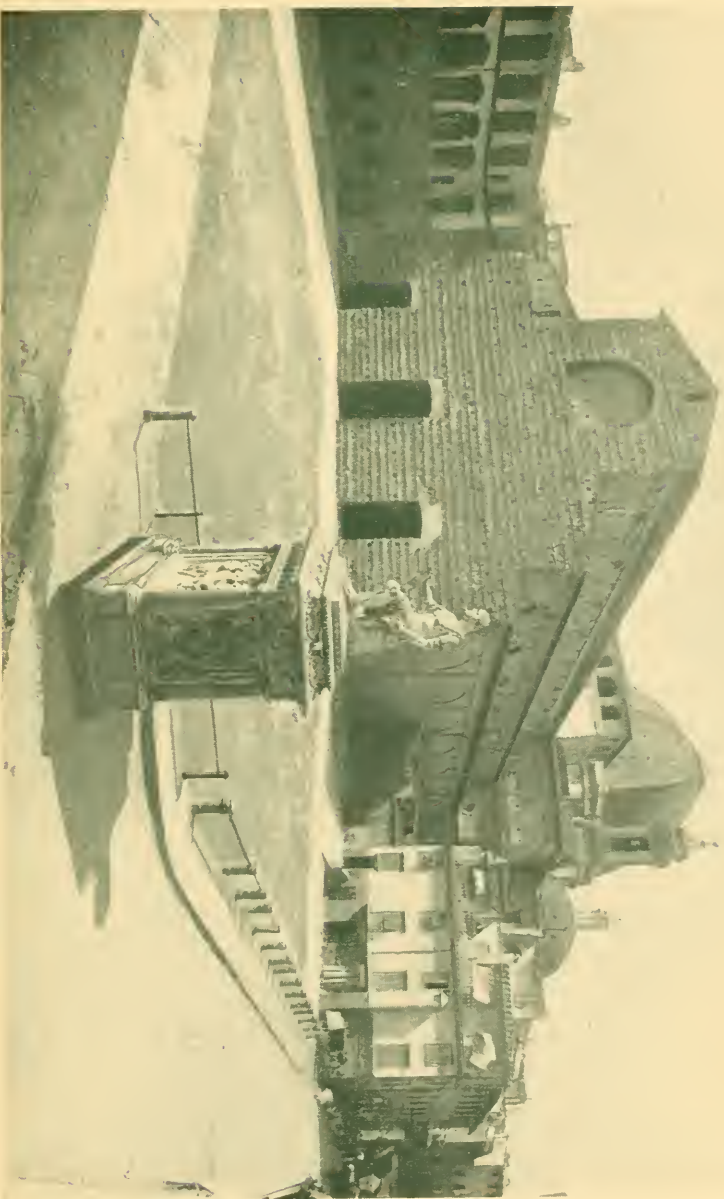
THE RING AND THE BOOK

A dogseared Spicilegium, the fond tale
O' the Frail One of the Flower, by young Dumas,
Vulgarized Horace for the use of schools,
The Life, Death, Miracles of Saint Somebody,
Saint Somebody Else, his Miracles, Death and Life, —
With this, one glance at the lettered back of which,
And "Stall!" cried I: a *lira* made it mine.

Here it is, this I toss and take again ;
Small-quarto size, part print part manuscript :
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.

That memorable day,
(June was the month, Lorenzo named the Square)
I leaned a little and overlooked my prize
By the low railing round the fountain-source
Close to the statue, where a step descends :
While clinked the cans of copper, as stooped and rose
Thick-ankled girls who brimmed them, and made place
For marketmen glad to pitch basket down,
Dip a broad melon-leaf that holds the wet,
And whisk their faded fresh. And on I read
Presently, though my path grew perilous
Between the outspread straw-work, piles of plait
Soon to be flapping, each o'er two black eyes

CHURCH and Square
of San Lorenzo.



“That memorable day

(June was the month, Lorenzo named the Square).”

— The King and the Book, p. 166

Hard by St. Lawrence.”

“I came up with the fan

— Fra Lippo Lippi, p. 123

THE RING AND THE BOOK

And swathe of Tuscan hair, on festas fine :
Through fire-irons, tribes of tongs, shovels in sheaves,
Skeleton bedsteads, wardrobe-drawers agape,
Rows of tall slim brass lamps with dangling gear,—
And worse, cast clothes a-sweetening in the sun :
None of them took my eye from off my prize.
Still read I on, from written title-page
To written index, on, through street and street,
At the Strozzi, at the Pillar, at the Bridge ;
Till, by the time I stood at home again
In Casa Guidi by Felice Church,
Under the doorway where the black begins
With the first stone-slab of the staircase cold,
I had mastered the contents, knew the whole truth
Gathered together, bound up in this book,
Print three-fifths, written supplement the rest.
“ *Romana Homicidiorum* ” — nay,
Better translate — “ A Roman murder-case :
Position of the entire criminal cause
Of Guido Franceschini, nobleman,
With certain Four the cutthroats in his pay,
Tried, all five, and found guilty and put to death
By heading or hanging as befitted ranks,
At Rome on February Twenty Two,
Since our salvation Sixteen Ninety Eight :
Wherein it is disputed if, and when,
Husbands may kill adulterous wives, yet ’scape
The customary forfeit.”

THE RING AND THE BOOK

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 Forca
Romana Homicidiorum
Disputatur an et quando Maritus
possit occidere Vxorem
Adulteram
absque incursu pene Ord: 1690

(Reduced facsimile of Title-page of Report of the Trial of Guido Franceschini.)

THE RING AND THE BOOK

Word for word,

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

Now, as the ingot, ere the ring was forged,
Lay gold, (beseech you, hold that figure fast !)
So, in this book lay absolutely truth,
Fanciless fact, the documents indeed,
Primary lawyer-pleadings for, against,
The aforesaid Five ; real summed-up circumstance
Adduced in proof of these on either side,
Put forth and printed, as the practice was,
At Rome, in the Apostolic Chamber's type,
And so submitted to the eye o' the Court
Presided over by His Reverence
Rome's Governor and Criminal Judge, — the trial
Itself, to all intents, being then as now
Here in the book and nowise out of it ;
Seeing, there properly was no judgment-bar,
No bringing of accuser and accused,
And whoso judged both parties, face to face
Before some court, as we conceive of courts.
There was a Hall of Justice ; that came last :

THE RING AND THE BOOK

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,
To weigh its worth, thereby arrange, array
The battle. 'T was the so-styled Fise began,
Pleaded (and since he only spoke in print
The printed voice of him lives now as then)
The public Prosecutor — “ Murder ’s proved ;
With five . . . what we call qualities of bad,
Worse, worst, and yet worse still, and still worse yet ;
Crest over crest crowning the cockatrice,
That beggar hell’s regalia to enrich
Count Guido Franceschini: punish him ! ”
Thus was the paper put before the court
In the next stage, (no noisy work at all,)
To study at ease. In due time like reply
Came from the so-styled Patron of the Poor,
Official mouthpiece of the five accused
Too poor to fee a better, — Guido’s luck
Or else his fellows,’ — which, I hardly know, —
An outbreak as of wonder at the world,
A fury-fit of outraged innocence,
A passion of betrayed simplicity :
“ Punish Count Guido ? For what crime, what hint
O’ the colour of a crime, inform us first !
Reward him rather ! Recognize, we say,
In the deed done, a righteous judgment dealt !
All conscience and all courage, — there ’s our Count

OLD book-stall at base of Statue
of Giovanni de' Medici, by
Baccio Bandinelli.



*“ Baccio’s marble, — ay, the basement ledge
O’ the pedestal where sits and menaces
John of the Black Bands with the upright spear.”*

— The Ring and the Book, p. 164

THE RING AND THE BOOK

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
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,
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 ease postponed.
“ Thus it happed not, since thus he did the deed,
And proved himself thereby portentousest
Of cutthroats and a prodigy of erime,
As the woman that he slaughtered was a saint,
Martyr and miracle !” quoth the other to match :
Again, more witness, and the ease 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 !”
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

THE RING AND THE BOOK

From earth's four corners, all authority
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? Quote the code
Of Romulus and Rome! Justinian speak!
Nor modern Baldo, Bartolo be dumb!
The Roman voice was potent, plentiful;
Cornelia de Sicariis hurried to help
Pompeia de Parricidiis; *Julia de*
Something-or-other jostled *Lex* this-and-that;
King Solomon confirmed Apostle Paul:
That nice decision of Dolabella, eh?
That pregnant instance of Theodoric, oh!
Down to that choice example Ælian gives
(An instance I find much insisted on)
Of the elephant who, brute-beast though he were,
Yet understood and punished on the spot
His master's naughty spouse and faithless friend;
A true tale which has edified each child,
Much more shall flourish favoured by our court!
Pages of proof this way, and that way proof,
And always — once again the case postponed.
Thus wrangled, brangled, jangled they a month,
— Only on paper, pleadings all in print,
Nor ever was, except i' the brains of men,
More noise by word of mouth than you hear now —
Till the court cut all short with “Judged, your cause.
Receive our sentence! Praise God! We pronounce

RICCARDI PALACE in Via
Larga, now Via Cavour;
architecture of Michelozzi,
15th century.



“ Riccardi where they lived, his race.”

— The Ring and the Book, p. 165

*“A feast was held that selfsame night
In the pile which the mighty shadow makes.”*

— The Statue and the Bust, p. 150

*“ Those great rings serve more purposes than just
To plant a flag in, or tie up a horse ! ”*

— Fra Lippo Lippi, p. 129

THE RING AND THE BOOK

Count Guido devilish and damnable :
His wife Pompilia in thought, word and deed,
Was perfect pure, he murdered her for that :
As for the Four who helped the One, all Five —
Why, let employer and hirelings share alike
In guilt and guilt's reward, the death their due ! ”

So was the trial at end, do you suppose ?
“ Guilty you find him, death you doom him to ?
Ay, were not Guido, more than needs, a priest,
Priest and to spare ! ” — this was a shot reserved ;
I learn this from epistles which begin
Here where the print ends, — see the pen and ink
Of the advocate, the ready at a pinch ! —
“ My client boasts the clerkly privilege,
Has taken minor orders many enough,
Shows still sufficient chrism upon his pate
To neutralize a blood-stain : *presbyter*,
Primæ tonsuræ, *subdiaconus*,
Sacerdos, so he slips from underneath
Your power, the temporal, slides inside the robe
Of mother Church : to her we make appeal
By the Pope, the Church's head ! ”

A parlous plea,
Put in with noticeable effect, it seems ;
“ 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

THE RING AND THE BOOK

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,
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. Nay, it seems,
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,
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.

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

THE RING AND THE BOOK

Who had trod many lands, known many deeds,
Probed many hearts, beginning with his own,
And now was far in readiness for God, —
'T was he who first bade leave those souls in peace,
Those Jansenists, re-nicknamed Molinists,
('Gainst whom the cry went, like a frowsy tune,
Tickling men's ears — the sect for a quarter of an hour
I' the teeth of the world which, clown-like, loves to chew
Be it but a straw 'twixt work and whistling-while,
Taste some vituperation, bite away,
Whether at marjoram-sprig or garlic-clove,
Aught it may sport with, spoil, and then spit forth)
“ Leave them alone,” bade he, “ those Molinists !
Who may have other light than we perceive,
Or why is it the whole world hates them thus ? ”
Also he peeled off that last scandal-rag
Of Nepotism ; and so observed the poor
That men would merrily say, “ Halt, deaf and blind,
Who feed on fat things, leave the master's self
To gather up the fragments of his feast,
These be the nephews of Pope Innocent ! —
His own meal costs but five carlines a day,
Poor-priest's allowance, for he claims no more.”
— He cried of a sudden, this great good old Pope,
When they appealed in last resort to him,
“ I have mastered the whole matter : I nothing doubt
Though Guido stood forth priest from head to heel,
Instead of, as alleged, a piece of one, —
And further, were he, from the tonsured scalp

THE RING AND THE BOOK

To the sandaled sole of him, my son and Christ's,
Instead of touching us by finger-tip
As you assert, and pressing up so close
Only to set a blood-smutch on our robe, —
I and Christ would renounce all right in him.
Am I not Pope, and presently to die,
And busied how to render my account,
And shall I wait a day ere I decide
On doing or not doing justice here?
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,
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
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, —
The cavalcading promenading place
Beside the gate and opposite the church
Under the Pincian gardens green with Spring,
’Neath the obelisk ’twixt the fountains in the Square,

CHURCH of San Lorenzo,
architecture of Bramelleschi.



“San Lorenzo, where they lie.”

—The Ring and the Book, p. 165

THE RING AND THE BOOK

Did Guido and his fellows find their fate,
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,
The mere ring-metal ere the ring be made !
And what has hitherto come of it ? Who preserves
The memory of this Guido, and his wife
Pompilia, more than Ademollo's name,
The etcher of those prints, two *crazie* each,
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,
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,
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,
For certain bring the tragedy about,
Giuseppe Caponsacchi ; — his strange course

THE RING AND THE BOOK

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,
Those Comparini, Pietro and his spouse, —
What say you to the right or wrong of that,
When, at a known name whispered through the door
Of a lone villa on a Christmas night,
It opened that the joyous hearts inside
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
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,
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,
(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

THE RING AND THE BOOK

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,
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?
Your law-courts stand, your records frown a-row:
What if I rove and rummage?" "— Why, you 'll waste
Your pains and end as wise as you began!"
Everyone snickered: "names and facts thus old
Are newer much than Europe news we find
Down in to-day's *Diario*. Records, quotha?
Why, the French burned them, what else do the French?
The rap-and-rending nation! And it tells
Against the Church, no doubt,— another gird
At the Temporality, your Trial, of course?"
"— 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,
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

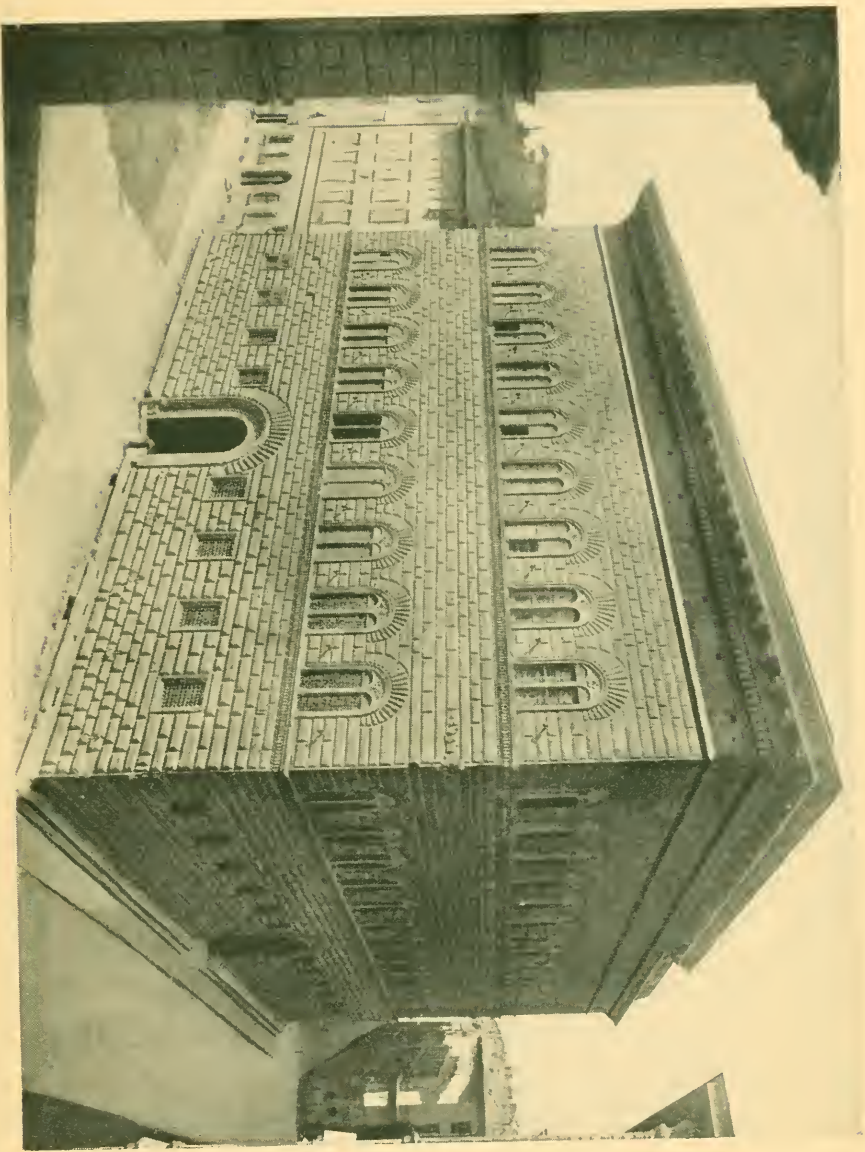
THE RING AND THE BOOK

By Newman and, mayhap, wise-manned to boot
By Wiseman, and we'll see or else we won't!
Thanks meantime for the story, long and strong,
A pretty piece of narrative enough,
Which scarce ought so to drop out, one would think,
From the more curious annals of our kind.
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,
And the white lies it sounds like?"

Yes and no!

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

STROZZI PALACE, architecture of
Benedetto da Majano and Cronaca.



“At the Strozzi.”
—The Ring and the Book, p. 167

THE RING AND THE BOOK

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
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 ;
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,
It always came and went with June. Beneath
I' the street, quick shown by openings of the sky
When flame fell silently from cloud to cloud,
Richer than that gold snow Jove rained on Rhodes,
The townsmen walked by twos and threes, and talked,
Drinking the blackness in default of air —
A busy human sense beneath my feet :
While in and out the terrace-plants, and round
One branch of tall datura, waxed and waned
The lamp-fly lured there, wanting the white flower.
Over the roof o' the lighted church I looked
A bowshot to the street's end, north away
Out of the Roman gate to the Roman road
By the river, till I felt the Apennine.
And there would lie Arezzo, the man's town,

THE RING AND THE BOOK

The woman's trap and cage and torture-place,
Also the stage where the priest played his part,
A spectacle for angels, — ay, indeed,
There lay Arezzo! Farther then I fared,
Feeling my way on through the hot and dense,
Romeward, until I found the wayside inn
By Castelnuovo's few mean hut-like homes
Huddled together on the hill-foot bleak,
Bare, broken only by that tree or two
Against the sudden bloody splendor poured
Cursewise in day's departure by the sun
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,
Step by step, missing none and marking all,
Till Rome itself, the ghastly goal, I reached.
Why, all the while, — how could it otherwise? —
The life in me abolished the death of things,
Deep calling unto deep: as then and there
Acted itself over again once more
The tragic piece. I saw with my own eyes
In Florence as I trod the terrace, breathed
The beauty and the fearfulness of night,
How it had run, this round from Rome to Rome —
Because, you are to know, they lived at Rome,
Pompilia's parents, as they thought themselves,
Two poor ignoble hearts who did their best
Part God's way, part the other way than God's,

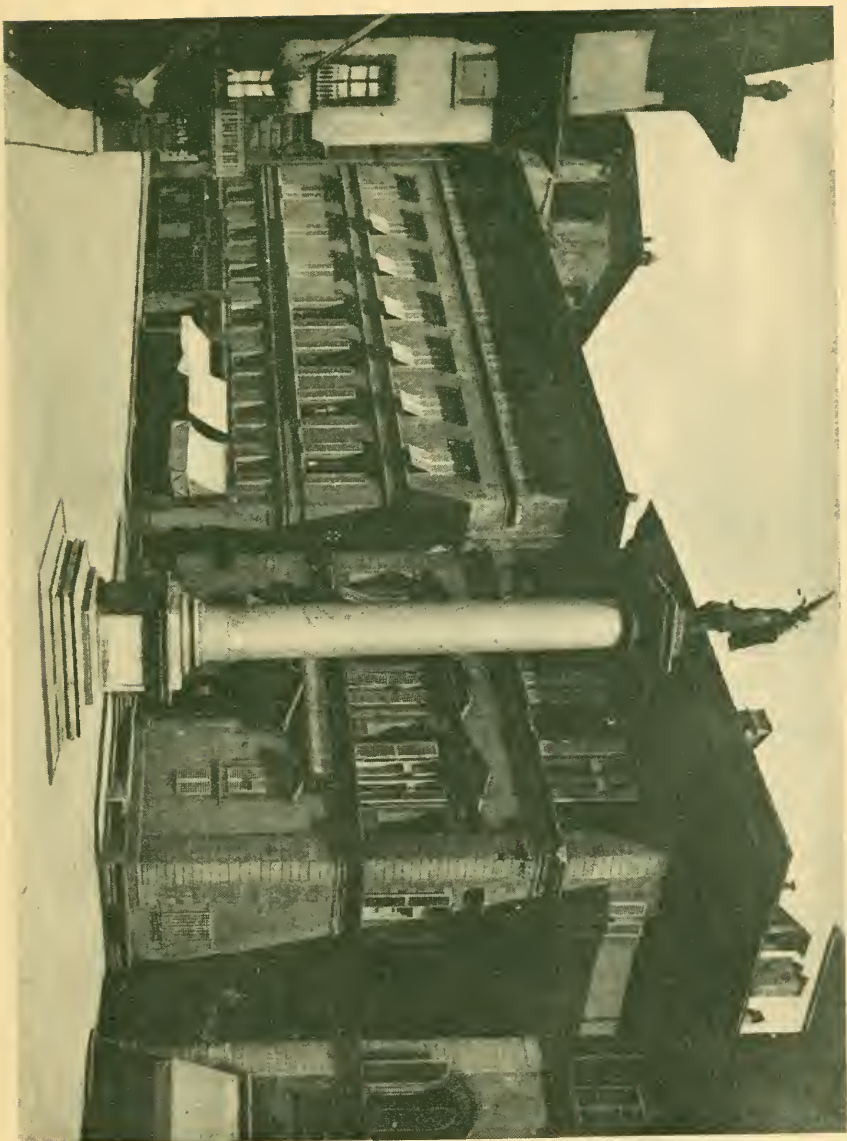
THE RING AND THE BOOK

To somehow make a shift and scramble through
The world's mud, careless if it splashed and spoiled,
Provided they might so hold high, keep clean
Their child's soul, one soul white enough for three,
And lift it to whatever star should stoop,
What possible sphere of purer life than theirs
Should come in aid of whiteness hard to save.
I saw the star stoop, that they strained to touch,
And did touch and depose their treasure on,
As Guido Franceschini took away
Pompilia to be his for evermore,
While they sang "Now let us depart in peace,
Having beheld thy glory, Guido's wife!"
I saw the star supposed, but fog o' the fen,
Gilded star-fashion by a glint from hell;
Having been heaved up, haled on its gross way,
By hands unguessed before, invisible help
From a dark brotherhood, and specially
Two obscure goblin creatures, fox-faced this,
Cat-clawed the other, called his next of kin
By Guido the main monster, — cloaked and caped,
Making as they were priests, to mock God more, —
Abate Paul, Canon Girolamo.
These who had rolled the starlike pest to Rome
And stationed it to suck up and absorb
The sweetness of Pompilia, rolled again
That bloated bubble, with her soul inside,
Back to Arezzo and a palace there —
Or say, a fissure in the honest earth

THE RING AND THE BOOK

Whence long ago had curled the vapor first,
Blown big by nether fires to appal day :
It touched home, broke, and blasted far and wide.
I saw the cheated couple find the cheat
And guess what foul rite they were captured for, —
Too fain to follow over hill and dale
That child of theirs caught up thus in the cloud
And carried by the Prince o' the Power of the Air
Whither he would, to wilderness or sea.
I saw them, in the potency of fear,
Break somehow through the satyr-family
(For a gray mother with a monkey-mien,
Mopping and mowing, was apparent too,
As, confident of capture, all took hands
And danced about the captives in a ring)
— Saw them break through, breathe safe, at Rome again,
Saved by the selfish instinct, losing so
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 caldron set, the obscene ring traced,
The victim stripped and prostrate : what of God ?
The cleaving of a cloud, a cry, a crash,
Quenched lay their caldron, cowered i' the dust the crew,
As, in a glory of armor like Saint George,
Out again sprang the young good beauteous priest
Bearing away the lady in his arms,
Saved for a splendid minute and no more

GRANITE Column with Statue of
Justice, in Piazza Santa Trinita.



“At the Pillar.”

—The Ring and the Book, p. 167

THE RING AND THE BOOK

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
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,
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,
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 !
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
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,
And black lips wrinkling o'er the flash of teeth,

THE RING AND THE BOOK

And tongues that lolled — O 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 —
“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
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,
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.
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,
Those world’s-bystanders grouped on Rome’s cross-road
At prick and summons of the primal curse
Which bids man love as well as make a lie.
There prattled they, discoursed the right and wrong,

THE RING AND THE BOOK

Turned wrong to right, proved wolves sheep and sheep
wolves,

So that you scarce distinguished fell from fleece ;
Till out spoke a great guardian of the fold,
Stood up, put forth his hand that held the crook,
And motioned that the arrested point decline :
Horribly off, the wriggling dead-weight reeled,
Rushed to the bottom and lay ruined there.
Though still at the pit's mouth, despite the smoke
O' the burning, tarrriers turned again to talk
And trim the balance, and detect at least
A touch of wolf in what showed whitest sheep,
A cross of sheep redeeming the whole wolf, —
Vex truth a little longer : — less and less,
Because years came and went, and more and more
Brought new lies with them to be loved in turn.
Till all at once the memory of the thing, —
The fact that, wolves or sheep, such creatures were, —
Which hitherto, however men supposed,
Had somehow plain and pillar-like prevailed
I' the midst of them, indisputably fact,
Granite, time's tooth should grate against, not graze, —
Why, this proved sandstone, friable, fast to fly
And give its grain away at wish o' the wind.
Ever and ever more diminutive,
Base gone, shaft lost, only entablature,
Dwindled into no bigger than a book,
Lay of the column ; and that little, left
By the roadside 'mid the ordure, shards and weeds.

THE RING AND THE BOOK

Until I haply, wandering that lone way,
Kicked it up, turned it over, and recognized,
For all the crumblement, this abacus,
This square old yellow book, could calculate
By this the lost proportions of the style.

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

Well, now ; there 's nothing in nor out o' the world
Good except truth : yet this, the something else,
What 's this then, which proves good yet seems untrue ?

BRIDGE of Santa Trinità, designed
by B. Ammannati, 16th century.



“At the Bridge.”

—The Ring and the Book, p. 167

THE RING AND THE BOOK

This that I mixed with truth, motions of mine
That quickened, made the inertness malleable
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.

I find first

Writ down for very A B C of fact,
“In the beginning God made heaven and earth”;
From which, no matter with what lisp, I spell
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,

THE RING AND THE BOOK

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”?
“Because,” he taught adepts, “man makes not man.
Yet by a special gift, an art of arts,
More insight and more out-sight and much more
Will to use both of these than boast my mates,
I can detach from me, commission forth
Half of my soul; which in its pilgrimage
O'er old unwandered waste ways of the world,
May chance upon some fragment of a whole,
Rag of flesh, scrap of bone in dim disuse,
Smoking flax that fed fire once: prompt therein
I enter, spark-like, put old powers to play,
Push lines out to the limit, lead forth last
(By a moonrise through a ruin of a crypt)
What shall be mistily seen, murmuringly heard,

THE RING AND THE BOOK

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
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,
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 !

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
— 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,
Fifty years old, — having four years ago
Married Pompilia Comparini, young,
Good, beautiful, at Rome, where she was born,

THE RING AND THE BOOK

And brought her to Arezzo, where they lived
Unhappy lives, whatever curse the cause, —
This husband, taking four accomplices,
Followed this wife to Rome, where she was fled
From their Arezzo to find peace again,
In convoy, eight months earlier, of a priest,
Aretine also, of still nobler birth,
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,
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,
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,)
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 ;
True was Pompilia, loyal too the pair ;
Out of the man's own heart a monster curled

THE RING AND THE BOOK

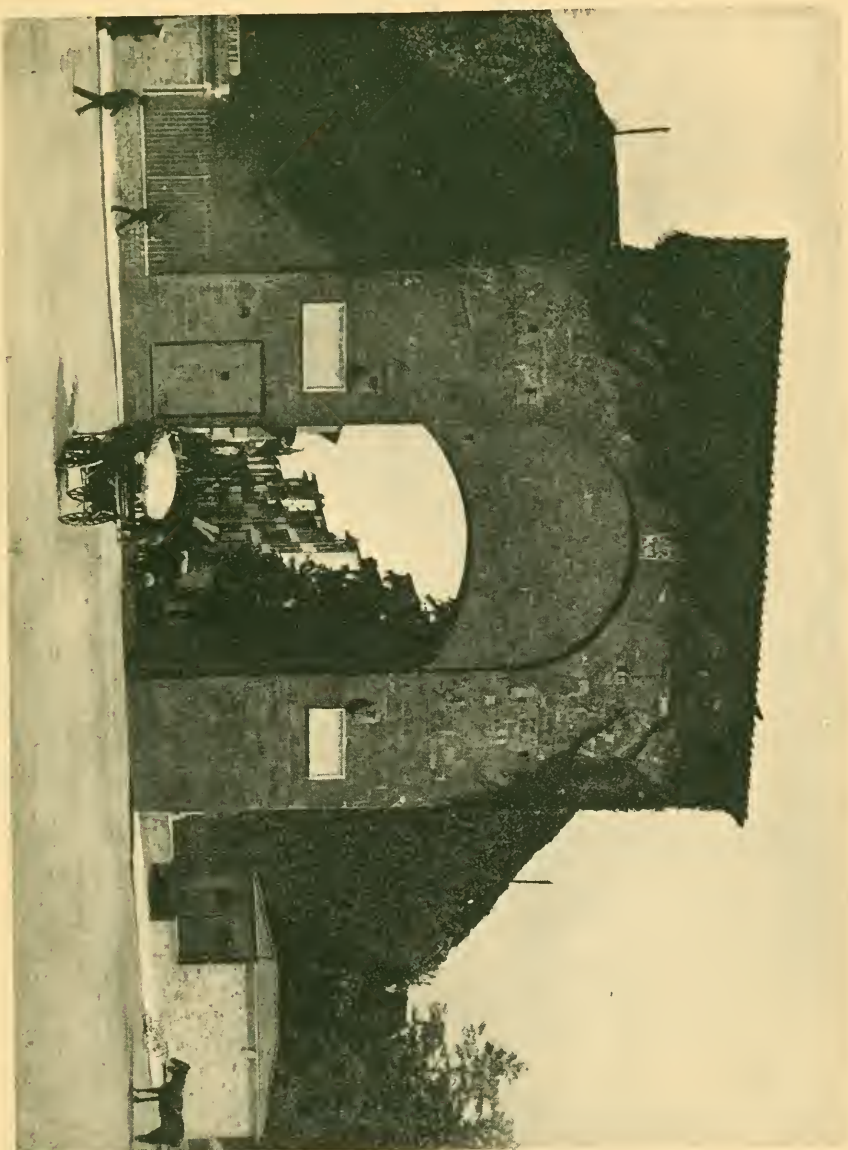
Which — crime coiled with connivancy at crime —
His victim's breast, he tells you, hatched and reared ;
Uncoil we and stretch stark the worm of hell !”
A month the trial swayed this way and that
Ere judgment settled down on Guido's guilt ;
Then was the Pope, that good Twelfth Innocent,
Appealed to : who well weighed what went before,
Affirmed the guilt and gave the guilty doom.

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,
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,
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
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.

THE RING AND THE BOOK

At what were figure and substance, by their splash :
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,
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,
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.
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? 'T is there —
The instinctive theorizing whence a fact
Looks to the eye as the eye likes the look.
Gossip in a public place, a sample-speech.
Some worthy, with his previous hint to find
A husband's side the safer, and no whit
Aware he is not Æacus the while, —
How such an one supposes and states fact
To whosoever of a multitude
Will listen, and perhaps prolong thereby



“I looked

A bowshot to the street's end, north away

Out of the Roman gate to the Roman road.”

THE RING AND THE BOOK

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

Next, from Rome's other half, the opposite feel
For truth with a like swerve, like unsuccess, —
Or if success, by no 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 ;
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
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, at his fountain-sport,
Bernini's creature plated to the paps,

THE RING AND THE BOOK

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.
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,
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 :
One and one breed the inevitable three.
Such is the personage harangues you next ;
The elaborated product, *tertium quid* :
Rome's first commotion in subsidence gives
The curd o' the cream, flower o' the wheat, as it were,
And finer sense o' the city. Is this plain ?
You get a reasoned statement of the case,
Eventual verdict of the curious few
Who care to sift a business to the bran
Nor coarsely bolt it like the simpler sort.
Here, after ignorance, instruction speaks ;
Here, clarity of candor, history's soul,
The critical mind, in short : no gossip-guess.
What the superior social section thinks,

THE RING AND THE BOOK

In person of some man of quality
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
'Neath waxlight in a glorified saloon
Where mirrors multiply the girandole :
Courting the approbation of no mob,
But Eminence This and All-Illustrious That
Who take snuff softly, range in well-bred ring,
Card-table-quitters for observance' sake,
Around the argument, the rational word —
Still, spite its weight and worth, a sample-speech.
How Quality dissertated on the case.

So much for Rome and rumor ; smoke comes first :
Once let smoke rise untroubled, we desery
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,
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.
Soft-cushioned sits he ; yet shifts seat, shirks touch,

THE RING AND THE BOOK

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
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.
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 !
— Eruption momentary at the most,
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
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, —
His limbs' late taste of what was called the Cord,
Or Vigil-torture 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,

THE RING AND THE BOOK

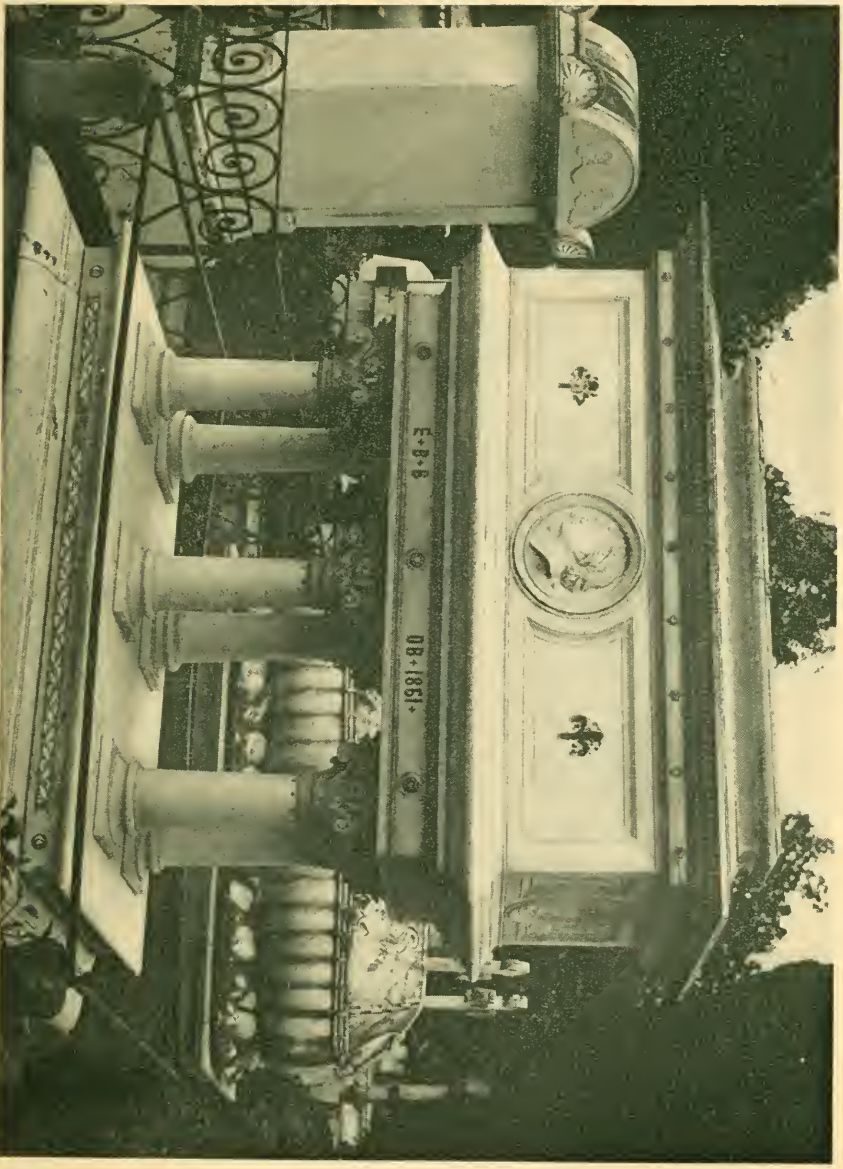
Here, there and everywhere, what would you have?
Religion used to tell Humanity
She gave him warrant or denied him course.
And since the course was much to his own mind,
Of pinching flesh and pulling bone from bone
To unhusk truth a-hiding in its hulls,
Nor whisper of a warning stopped the way,
He, in their joint behalf, the burly slave,
Bestirred him, mauled and maimed all recusants,
While, prim in place, Religion overlooked;
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 " 'Tis a vile trick, foolish more than vile,
Should have been counted sin; I make it so:
At any rate no more of it for me —
Nay, for I break the torture-engine thus!"
Then did Religion start up, stare amain,
Look round for help and see none, smile and say
"What, broken is the rack? Well done of thee!
Did I forget to abrogate its use?
Be the mistake in common with us both!
— One more fault our blind age shall answer for,
Down in my book denounced though it must be
Somewhere. Henceforth find truth by milder means!"
Ah but, Religion, did we wait for thee
To ope the book, that serves to sit upon,
And pick such place out, we should wait indeed!

THE RING AND THE BOOK

That is all history : and what is not now,
Was then, defendants found it to their cost.
How Guido, after being tortured, spoke.

Also hear Caponsacchi who comes next,
Man and priest — could you comprehend the coil ! —
In days when that was rife which now is rare.
How, mingling each its multifarious wires,
Now heaven, now earth, now heaven and earth at once,
Had plucked at and perplexed their puppet here,
Played off the young frank personable priest ;
Sworn fast and tonsured plain heaven's celibate,
And yet earth's clear-accepted servitor,
A courtly spiritual Cupid, squire of dames
By law of love and mandate of the mode.
The Church's own, or why parade her seal,
Wherefore that chrism and consecrative work ?
Yet verily the world's, or why go badged
A prince of sonneteers and lutanists,
Show color of each vanity in vogue
Borne with decorum due on blameless breast ?
All that is changed now, as he tells the court
How he had played the part excepted at ;
Tells it, moreover, now the second time :
Since, for his cause of scandal, his own share
I' the flight from home and husband of the wife,
He has been censured, punished in a sort
By relegation, — exile, we should say,
To a short distance for a little time, —

MONUMENT to Elizabeth Barrett
Browning in Protestant Cemetery,
Rome. Designed by Sir Frederick
Leighton.



THE RING AND THE BOOK

Whence he is summoned on a sudden now,
Informed that she, he thought to save, is lost,
And, in a breath, bidden re-tell his tale,
Since the first telling somehow missed effect,
And then advise in the matter. There stands he,
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
Against which sets a sea of wickedness.
There, where you yesterday heard Guido speak,
Speaks Caponsacchi; and there face him too
Tommati, Venturini and the rest
Who, eight months earlier, scarce repressed the smile,
Forewent the wink; waived recognition so
Of peccadillos incident to youth,
Especially youth high-born; for youth means love,
Vows can't change nature, priests are only men,
And love likes stratagem and subterfuge:
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
Of reverend carriage, magisterial port.
For why? The accused of eight months since, — the same
Who cut the conscious figure of a fool,
Changed countenance, dropped bashful gaze to ground,
While hesitating for an answer then, —
Now is grown judge himself, terrifies now
This, now the other culprit called a judge,
Whose turn it is to stammer and look strange,

THE RING AND THE BOOK

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,
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
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,
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
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,
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

THE RING AND THE BOOK

Fit to die looking on and praying with,
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.
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,
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?
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
— 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.
One lawyer shall admit us to behold
The manner of the making out a case,

THE RING AND THE BOOK

First fashion of a speech ; the chick in egg,
The masterpiece law's bosom incubates.
How Don Giacinto of the Arcangeli,
Called Procurator of the Poor at Rome,
Now advocate for Guido and his mates, —
The jolly learned man of middle age,
Cheek and jowl all in laps with fat and law,
Mirthful as mighty, yet, as great hearts use,
Despite the name and fame that tempt our flesh,
Constant to that devotion of the hearth,
Still captive in those dear domestic ties ! —
How he, — having a cause to triumph with,
All kind of interests to keep intact,
More than one efficacious personage
To tranquillize, conciliate and secure,
And above all, public anxiety
To quiet, show its Guido in good hands, —
Also, as if such burdens were too light,
A certain family-feast to claim his care,
The birthday-banquet for the only son —
Paternity at smiling strife with law —
How he brings both to buckle in one bond ;
 And, thick at throat, with waterish under-eye,
Turns to his task and settles in his seat
And puts his utmost means in practice now :
Wheezes out law-phrase, whiffles Latin forth,
And, just as though roast lamb would never be,
Makes logic levigate the big crime small :
Rubs palm on palm, rakes foot with itchy foot,

THE RING AND THE BOOK

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,
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
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,
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,
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,
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,

THE RING AND THE BOOK

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
Beaconing to the breaker, death and hell.
“ Well done, thou good and faithful ! ” she approves :
“ Hadst thou let slip a faggot to the beach,
The crew might surely spy thy precipice
And save their boat ; the simple and the slow
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
With sudden age, bright devastated hair.
Ah, but you miss the very tones o' the voice,
The scranrel pipe that screams in heights of head,
As, in his modest studio, all alone,
The tall wight stands a-tiptoe, strives and strains,
Both eyes shut, like the cockerel that would crow,
Tries to his own self amorously o'er
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.
Clavecinist debarred his instrument,
He yet thrums — shirking neither turn nor trill,
With desperate finger on dumb table-edge —
The sovereign rondo, shall conclude his *Suite*,

PORTRAIT by Raphael, known as
"The Veiled Lady," in the Pitti
Gallery. Supposed to represent
the Fornarina, whom Raphael loved.



"His lady of the sonnets."
—One Word More, p. 217

THE RING AND THE BOOK

Charm an imaginary audience there,
From old Corelli to young Haendel, 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.
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
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,
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,
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,
One table and one lathen crucifix.
There sits the Pope, his thoughts for company ;

THE RING AND THE BOOK

Grave but not sad, — nay, something like a cheer
Leaves the lips free to be benevolent,
Which, all day long, did duty firm and fast.
A cherishing there is of foot and knee,
A chafing loose-skinned large-veined hand with hand, —
What steward but knows when stewardship earns its wage,
May levy praise, anticipate the lord ?
He reads, notes, lays the papers down at last,
Muses, then takes a turn about the room ;
Unclasps a huge tome in an antique guise,
Primitive print and tongue half obsolete,
That stands him in diurnal stead ; opes page,
Finds place where falls the passage to be conned
According to an order long in use :
And, as he comes upon the evening's chance,
Starts somewhat, solemnizes straight his smile,
Then reads aloud that portion first to last,
And at the end lets flow his own thoughts forth
Likewise aloud, for respite and relief,
Till by the dreary relics of the west
Wan through the half-moon window, all his light,
He bows the head while the lips move in prayer,
Writes some three brief lines, signs and seals the same,
Tinkles a hand-bell, bids the obsequious Sir
Who puts foot presently o' the closet-sill
He watched outside of, bear as superscribed
That mandate to the Governor forthwith :
Then heaves abroad his cares in one good sigh,
Traverses corridor with no arm's help,

THE RING AND THE BOOK

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,
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
And death came, death's breath rivelled 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,
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,
Where the hot vapor of an agony,
Struck into drops on the cold wall, runs down —
Horrible worms made out of sweat and tears —
There crouch, well-nigh to the knees in dungeon-straw,
Lit by the sole lamp suffered for their sake,
Two awe-struck figures, this a Cardinal,
That an Abate, both of old styled friends
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,

THE RING AND THE BOOK

Till in its silkiness the trap-teeth joined ;
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
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,
Thither, from this side and from that, slow sweep
And settle down in silence solidly,
Crow-wise, the frightful Brotherhood of Death.
Black-hatted and black-hooded huddle they,
Black rosaries a-dangling from each waist ;
So take they their grim station at the door,
Torches 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,
“ 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.
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 :

RAPHAEL'S Madonna del
Granduca, in the Pitti
Gallery.



“*Madonna*
. . . . *that visits Florence in a vision.*”

— One Word More, p. 218

THE RING AND THE BOOK

A mob to cleave, a scaffolding to reach,
Two gallows and Mannaia crowning all.
How Guido made defence a second time.

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

A novel country: I might make it mine
By choosing which one aspect of the year
Suited mood best, and putting solely that
On panel somewhere in the House of Fame,
Landscaping what I saved, not what I saw:
— Might fix you, whether frost in goblin-time

THE RING AND THE BOOK

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,
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,
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,
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.
Once set such orbs, — white styled, black stigmatized, —
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.

Such, British Public, ye who like me not,
(God love you!) — whom I yet have labored for,
Perchance more careful whoso runs may read



“Lo, the moon's self!

..... lamping Samminiato,

Rouder 'twixt the cypresses and rounder,

Perfect till the nightingales unplanted.”

—One Word More, p. 223



THE RING AND THE BOOK

Than erst when all, it seemed, could read who ran, —
Perchance more careless whoso reads may praise
Than late when he who praised and read and wrote
Was apt to find himself the selfsame 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
Till, justifiably golden, rounds my ring.

A ring without a posy, 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,
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,
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
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,

THE RING AND THE BOOK

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
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 !

ONE WORD MORE

ONE WORD MORE¹

To E. B. B.

London, September, 1855.

I

THERE they are, my fifty men and women
Naming me the fifty poems finished !
Take them, Love, the book and me together :
Where the heart lies, let the brain lie also.

II

Rafael made a century of sonnets,
Made and wrote them in a certain volume
Dinted with the silver-pointed pencil
Else he only used to draw Madonnas :
These, the world might view — but one, the volume.
Who that one, you ask ? Your heart instructs you.
Did she live and love it all her lifetime ?
Did she drop, his lady of the sonnets,
Die, and let it drop beside her pillow
Where it lay in place of Rafael's glory,

¹ Originally appended to the collection of fifty poems called "Men and Women."

ONE WORD MORE

Rafael's cheek so duteous and so loving —
Cheek, the world was wont to hail a painter's,
Rafael's cheek, her love had turned a poet's ?

III

You and I would rather read that volume,
(Taken to his beating bosom by it)
Lean and list the bosom-beats of Rafael,
Would we not ? than wonder at Madonnas —
Her, San Sisto names, and Her, Foligno,
Her, that visits Florence in a vision,
Her, that 's left with lilies in the Louvre —
Seen by us and all the world in circle.

IV

You and I will never read that volume.
Guido Reni, like his own eye's apple
Guarded long the treasure-book and loved it.
Guido Reni dying, all Bologna
Cried, and the world cried too, " Ours, the treasure ! "
Suddenly, as rare things will, it vanished.

V

Dante once prepared to paint an angel :
Whom to please ? You whisper " Beatrice. "
While he mused and traced it and retraced it,
(Peradventure with a pen corroded
Still by drops of that hot ink he dipped for,
When, his left-hand in' the hair o' the wicked,

TORRE AL GALLO, from which
many of Galileo's astronomical
observations were made.



“Galileo, on his turret.”

— One Word More, p. 224

ONE WORD MORE

Back he held the brow and pricked its stigma,
Bit into the live man's flesh for parchment,
Loosed him, laughed to see the writing rankle,
Let the wretch go festering through Florence) —
Dante, who loved well because he hated,
Hated wickedness that hinders loving,
Dante standing, studying his angel, —
In there broke the folk of his Inferno.
Says he — “ Certain people of importance ”
(Such he gave his daily dreadful line to)
“ Entered and would seize, forsooth, the poet.”
Says the poet — “ Then I stopped my painting.”

VI

You and I would rather see that angel,
Painted by the tenderness of Dante,
Would we not? — than read a fresh Inferno.

VII

You and I will never see that picture.
While he mused on love and Beatrice,
While he softened o'er his outlined angel,
In they broke, those “ people of importance ” :
We and Bice bear the loss for ever.

VIII

What of Rafael's sonnets, Dante's picture?
This : no artist lives and loves, that longs not
Once, and only once, and for one only,

ONE WORD MORE

(Ah, the prize!) to find his love a language
Fit and fair and simple and sufficient —
Using nature that 's an art to others,
Not, this one time, art that 's turned his nature.
Ay, of all the artists living, loving,
None but would forego his proper dowry, —
Does he paint? he fain would write a poem, —
Does he write? he fain would paint a picture,
Put to proof art alien to the artist's,
Once, and only once, and for one only,
So to be the man and leave the artist,
Gain the man's joy, miss the artist's sorrow.

IX

Wherefore? Heaven's gift takes earth's abatement!
He who smites the rock and spreads the water,
Bidding drink and live a crowd beneath him,
Even he, the minute makes immortal,
Proves, perchance, but mortal in the minute,
Desecrates, belike, the deed in doing.
While he smites, how can he but remember,
So he smote before, in such a peril,
When they stood and mocked — " Shall smiting help us? "
When they drank and sneered — " A stroke is easy! "
When they wiped their mouths and went their journey,
Throwing him for thanks — " But drought was pleasant. "
Thus old memories mar the actual triumph;
Thus the doing savors of disrelish;
Thus achievement lacks a gracious somewhat;

ONE WORD MORE

O'er-importuned brows becloud the mandate,
Carelessness or consciousness — the gesture.
For he bears an ancient wrong about him,
Sees and knows again those phalanxed faces,
Hears, yet one time more, the 'customed prelude —
“ How shouldst thou, of all men, smite, and save us ? ”
Guesses what is like to prove the sequel —
“ Egypt's flesh-pots — nay, the drought was better.”

X

Oh, the crowd must have emphatic warrant !
Theirs, the Sinai-forehead's cloven brilliance,
Right-arm's rod-sweep, tongue's imperial fiat.
Never dares the man put off the prophet.

XI

Did he love one face from out the thousands,
(Were she Jethro's daughter, white and wifely,
Were she but the Æthiopian bondslave,)
He would envy yon dumb patient camel,
Keeping a reserve of scanty water
Meant to save his own life in the desert ;
Ready in the desert to deliver
(Kneeling down to let his breast be opened)
Hoard and life together for his mistress.

XII

I shall never, in the years remaining,
Paint you pictures, no, nor carve you statues,

ONE WORD MORE

Make you music that should all-express me ;
So it seems : I stand on my attainment.
This of verse alone, one life allows me ;
Verse and nothing else have I to give you.
Other heights in other lives, God willing :
All the gifts from all the heights, your own, Love !

XIII

Yet a semblance of resource avails us —
Shade so finely touched, love's sense must seize it.
Take these lines, look lovingly and nearly,
Lines I write the first time and the last time.
He who works in fresco, steals a hair-brush,
Curbs the liberal hand, subservient proudly,
Cramps his spirit, crowds its all in little,
Makes a strange art of an art familiar,
Fills his lady's missal-marge with flowerets.
He who blows thro' bronze, may breathe thro' silver,
Fitly serenade a slumbrous princess.
He who writes, may write for once as I do.

XIV

Love, you saw me gather men and women,
Live or dead or fashioned by my fancy,
Enter each and all, and use their service,
Speak from every mouth, — the speech, a poem.
Hardly shall I tell my joys and sorrows,
Hopes and fears, belief and disbelieving :
I am mine and yours — the rest be all men's,

ONE WORD MORE

Karshish, Cleon, Norbert and the fifty.
Let me speak this once in my true person,
Not as Lippo, Roland or Andrea,
Though the fruit of speech be just this sentence—
Pray you, look on these my men and women,
Take and keep my fifty poems finished ;
Where my heart lies, let my brain lie also !
Poor the speech ; be how I speak, for all things.

XV

Not but that you know me ! Lo, the moon's self !
Here in London, yonder late in Florence,
Still we find her face, the thrice-transfigured.
Curving on a sky imbrued with color,
Drifted over Fiesole by twilight,
Came she, our new crescent of a hair's-breadth.
Full she flared it, lamping Samminiato,
Rounder 'twixt the cypresses and rounder,
Perfect till the nightingales applauded.
Now, a piece of her old self, impoverished,
Hard to greet, she traverses the houseroofs,
Hurries with unhandsome thrift of silver,
Goes dispiritedly, glad to finish.

XVI

What, there's nothing in the moon note-worthy ?
Nay : for if that moon could love a mortal,
Use, to charm him (so to fit a fancy)

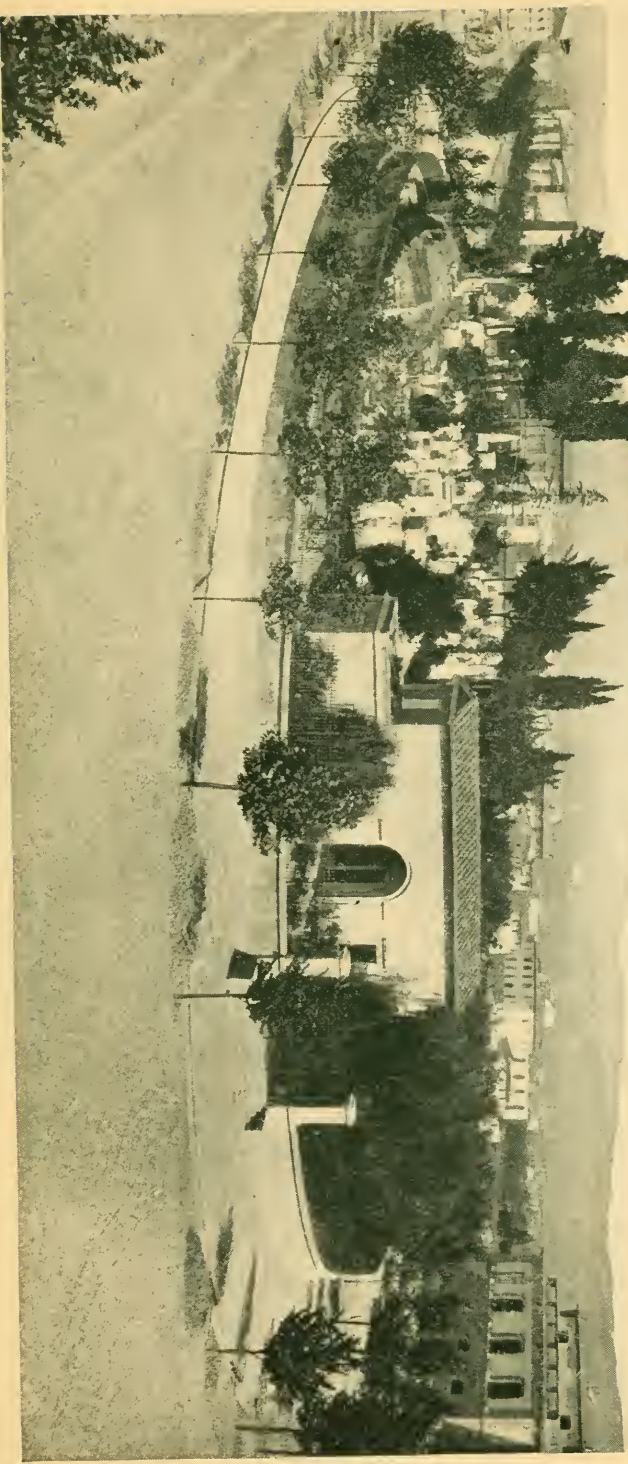
ONE WORD MORE

All her magic ('t is the old sweet mythos),
She would turn a new side to her mortal,
Side unseen of herdsman, huntsman, steersman —
Blank to Zoroaster on his terrace,
Blind to Galileo on his turret,
Dumb to Homer, dumb to Keats — him, even!
Think, the wonder of the moonstruck mortal —
When she turns round, comes again in heaven,
Opens out anew for worse or better!
Proves she like some portent of an iceberg
Swimming full upon the ship it founders,
Hungry with huge teeth of splintered crystals?
Proves she as the paved work of a sapphire
Seen by Moses when he climbed the mountain?
Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu
Climbed and saw the very God, the Highest,
Stand upon the paved work of a sapphire.
Like the bodied heaven in his clearness
Shone the stone, the sapphire of that paved work,
When they ate and drank and saw God also!

XVII

What were seen? None knows, none ever shall know.
Only this is sure — the sight were other,
Not the moon's same side, born late in Florence,
Dying now impoverished here in London.
God be thanked, the meanest of his creatures
Boasts two soul-sides, one to face the world with,
One to show a woman when he loves her!

PROTESTANT cemetery
in Piazza Donatello.



THE BURIAL-PLACE OF MRS. BROWNING

ONE WORD MORE

XVIII

This I say of me, but think of you, Love!
This to you — yourself my moon of poets!
Ah, but that's the world's side, there's the wonder,
Thus they see you, praise you, think they know you!
There, in turn I stand with them and praise you.
Out of my own self, I dare to phrase it.
But the best is when I glide from out them,
Cross a step or two of dubious twilight,
Come out on the other side, the novel
Silent silver lights and darks undreamed of,
Where I hush and bless myself with silence.

XIX

Oh, their Rafael of the dear Madonnas,
Oh, their Dante of the dread Inferno,
Wrote one song — and in my brain I sing it,
Drew one angel — borne, see, on my bosom!

R. B.

I N D E X

Index

- ANGELICO, Fra (da Fiesole), 36, 114, 129.
Apollo, Statue of, Uffizi Gallery, 109.
Arezzo, Province of, 40; town of, 181, 182, 183, 192.
Arno, four bridges over, 24.
- BACCIO Bandinelli's statue of Giovanni della Banda Nere, Piazza of San Lorenzo, 164.
Baldovinetti, Alesso, Madonna and Saints, Uffizi Gallery, 114.
Bandiera, the brothers, 54.
Bargello chapel, 45.
Beatrix, 45, 218.
Belosguardo, site of Galileo's villa, 64.
Bigordi, Domenico, 114.
Bridge of Santa Trinità, 167.
Brunelleschi's church, San Lorenzo, 44.
Buonarroti (Michelangelo), 43, 62, 115.
- CAMPANILE of Giotto, 25, 105, 111, 117.
Carlo Dolci, 115.
Carmine, Carmelite cloister of the, 121, 126, 130.
Casa Guidi, 22, 39, 68, 77, 79, 82, 94, 167.
Cascine, The, 99; piazza in the, 99.
Castellani, 163.
Cellini's Perseus, 43.
Charles Albert, 92.
Charles of Anjou, sees Cimabue's Virgin and Child, 34.
Chiusi, province Siena, 163.
Cimabue, 34, 35; discovers Giotto, 35.
Circoli, The, 71.
Cosimo Pater Patriæ, 121, 123; his palace (Palace of the Medici), 129.
Crystal Palace, London, 88-90.
- DANTE, 44, 45, 218, 219, 225; bust on gate of San Gallo, 60.
Dante's stone, 44, 45, 101, 116.
Da Vinci, Leonardo, 108, 146.
Dello Delli, 108.
Duomo, Palazzo del, 72, 117.
Dying Alexander, The, Uffizi Gallery, 109.
- FERDINAND I. de' Medici, Equestrian statue of, Piazza dell' Annunziata, 149, 150, 157.
Fiesole, 62, 137, 138, 223.
Filicaja, Vincenza da, 23.
Francis I. of France, patron of Andrea del Sarto, 142, 144, 145.
- GALILEO'S Tower, 224.
Gallo gate, 60.
Garibaldi, Death of wife and child of, 91, 92.
Ghiberti, Lorenzo, 113.
Ghirlandajo (Domenico Bigordi), 113.
Giotto, 24, 36, 45, 58, 106, 111, 117; Last Supper, 115; Saints, in Chapel of the Medici, Santa Croce, 127.
Glad Borgo (Borgo Allegri), 34.
Gualbert, St., Altar of, Fiesole, 63.
Guerazzi, 72, 75, 76.
Guidi, 130.
Guido Reni, 218.

INDEX

- JEROME, St., Painting of by Fra Lippo Lippi, Academy of Fine Arts, 123.
- Joconde, by Lionard, in the Louvre, 165.
- LAPACCIA, Monna, 124.
- Leopold, Grand-duke, 41, 42, 68-70, 75-77, 82.
- Lippino Lippi, 114.
- Lippo Lippi, Fra, 121-134.
- Lippo Lippi's, Fra, fresco of St. Lawrence, Prato, 132; altar-piece for S. Ambrogio, 133, 134; painting of St. Jerome, Academy of Fine Arts, 123.
- Loggia dei Lanzi, 43.
- Lorenzo the Magnificent, 32.
- Lucrezia, wife of Andrea del Sarto, 137-146.
- MACHIAVELLI, Niccolò, 34
- Margheritone, 36; Crucifixion, Santa Croce church, 114.
- Massa-Carrara, Province of, 40.
- Mazzini, Giuseppe, 83, 86, 87.
- Metternich, Prince, 46.
- Michelangelo (see also Buonarroti), 107, 141, 143, 144, 146.
- Michelangelo's Tomb of the Medici, 25; bust of Brutus, 43, 87; snow statue for Pietro, 26, 27.
- Monaco, Lorenzo, 114, 129.
- Mont St. Gothard, 116.
- Morello, 116, 140, 144.
- NICCOLÒ gate, 60.
- Niobe, Group of, Uffizi Gallery, 109.
- Novara, 80, 92.
- OGNISSANTI, 116.
- Orcagna (Orgagna), the brothers, Fresco of Inferno by, 34, 116.
- PETRAJA, Villa, 153.
- Petrarch's bust on gate of San Niccolò, 60.
- Piazza of the Grand-duke, 31.
- Pienza, 40.
- Pillar, Piazza Santa Trinità, 167.
- Pisano, Niccola (Nicolo, the Pisan), 113.
- Pisa, Province of, 40.
- Pitti palace, 22, 38, 42, 45, 68.
- Pius IX. (Pio Nono), 53, 54, 82, 83, 85.
- Pollajolo, 114.
- Porta Romana, 181.
- Prato cathedral, Frescos of the Baptist in, 122.
- RACERS, Frieze of the, 109.
- Radetzky, Count Johann, 116.
- Raphael (Raffael), 36, 62, 107, 141-144, 146; Madonnas by, 217, 218, 225.
- Riccardi, The Palazzo, Piazza dell' Annunziata, 149, 150, 165.
- Robbia, della, 156.
- Rossi, Count, 86.
- SAMMINIATO, 223.
- Sandro Botticelli, 114.
- San Felice, Church of, 22, 167, 181.
- San Lorenzo, Church of, 25, 123, 165.
- San Lorenzo, Piazza of, 164, 166.
- San Spirito, Church of, 116.
- Santa Croce church, 44.
- Santa Maria Novella, Church of, 33.
- Sarto, Andrea del, 137-146; Madonna, Pitti Gallery, 139, 143; copy of portrait of Leo X., 140, 141.
- Savonarola, 31, 32; martyrdom of, 150.
- Siena cathedral, Tombs of Borgia and Pope Joan in, 84.
- Siena, Province of, 40.
- Stefano, 108.
- Strozzi, Palace of the, 167.
- TADDEO Gaddi, Church of Santa Maria Novella, 114.
- Theseus, Statue of, Uffizi Gallery, 109.
- VALLOMBROSA, 63.
- Vasari, George, 108, 140.
- Via Larga, 26, 150.

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