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THE KING'S BELL.

THE KING'S BELL

BY

RICHARD HENRY STODDARD.

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*"For heaven's sake, let us sit upon the ground,
And tell sad stories of the death of kings."*

SHAKESPEARE.

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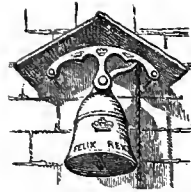
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To

JAMES LORIMER GRAHAM, JR.,

FROM HIS FRIEND,

R. H. S.



THE KING'S BELL.

PRINCE FELIX at his father's death was king.
So he commanded all the bells to ring
A jubilant peal, and bade his heralds say,
From that time forward every happy day
Should so be honoured. "Not an hour will pass,
Nay, scarce the turning of the smallest glass,
Without the merry clamour of my bells.
In sooth I fear they'll banish funeral knells,
And set the mourners dancing! I shall be
So happy the whole world will envy me."

Thus spake the new-made monarch, and indeed
He had some grounds to justify his creed.
Imprimis, he was young; and youth, we know,
Cannot be wretched, if it would be so,
For grant it sometimes weeps, and seems to pine,
It feels through all its royal self, like wine.
Then he was rich as Croesus: bags of gold
Heaped up his treasury, and wealth untold
Smouldered in guarded chests of precious stones,
And blazed like stars in sceptres, crowns, and thrones.
Powerful, and rich, and young—in short a King,
O happy man! why should his bells not ring?

He built himself a palace, like his state,
Magnificent, with many a marble gate;
A great dome in the centre, and thereon
A gilded belfry, shining like the sun,
And in it hung a bell of wondrous tone,
From which a silken cord ran to his throne:
Nor only there, but o'er his royal bed.
(O how unlike the sword above the head

Of that unhappy king of olden time !)
“ My people will be deafened by its chime,”
Quoth he, when all was done. And now began
That perfect life, not yet vouchsafed to man.
He chose his ministers as monarchs should,
Among the oldest men, the great and good,
And, placing in their hands the reins of State,
Charged them to make his people good and great.
‘ For me,’ he thought, ‘ an idle life is best :
They love to bustle—let them, I shall rest.’
He lolled upon his couch with dreamy eyes,
Watching he cared not what—the summer skies,
The nest of swans, the fountain’s rise and fall,
Or even the sunlight shifting on the wall.
Perchance he ordered music ; at the word
His fancy, flattered from its trance, was stirred
And quickened with sweet sounds, from harp and lute,
Or some rich voice that chid the music mute.
Ten times a day he stretched his hand to ring
The bell, he felt so glad, but some slight thing—

A buzzing gnat—the wind too cold, or hot—
Deterred him till the impulse was forgot.
'Have you been happy?' something seemed to say
At night: 'I see you have not rung to-day.'
"I must have been too idle," he replied;
And then, at dawn: "I will arise, and ride
A league or two in the dew and morning wind,
'Twill freshen and revive my drowsy mind."
He called a sleeping groom who cursed his fate,
And bade him take his courser to the gate,
That he might mount unseen, and ride away,
Before the court was stirring for the day.
The courser soon was saddled, and the groom
Returned, still yawning, to the monarch's room,
But found him fast asleep, so back he crept,
And late that day both groom and monarch slept.
The listless hours in idle reveries spent
Stung Felix to a noble discontent,
For shamed to think he loved his ease so well,
And longing for the music of the bell,

He charged the groom to bring his steed once more,
And if he slumbered thunder on his door
Until he woke. "And harkee, sirrah, see
That I rise, too, or 'twill be worse with thee."
'Twas done. Adown the palace walk he spurred
Into the misty dark, unseen, unheard;
Through meadows where the trampling of his steed
Fell muffled, noiseless as a winged seed
Sown by soft airs where endless summer smiles;
Through forest shades, like dim cathedral aisles,
Arching beneath a sky of brightening blue:
Sometimes he touched a spray and showers of dew
Baptized him, or some small bird, half awake,
Twittered an early ditty for his sake.
How sweet the morning was! how cool the wind!
A weight seemed lifted from his waking mind,
And faster flowed the current of his blood:
His proud steed bore him onward like a flood,
Shaking from his champed bit the snow-white foam.
The larks up-springing from their grassy home,

Winging the deeps of air—a jubilant choir ;
The leaden clouds consumed with morning's fire,
Melting in seas of gold : the silver rills,
The broad champaign, the woods, the purple hills—
He saw, and felt them all, and, filled with joy,
Forgot the king, and shouted like a boy,
And, rising in his stirrups, clutched the air
As if to ring his bell—ah ! why was it not there ?

Was Felix happy ? Had you asked him then,
He would have said, ' The happiest of men.'
But when three leagues were past, and he rode back,
His brow was knitted, and his bridle slack :
His little burst of happiness was o'er,
And he was sadder, idler than before ;
For what but pain could this remembrance bring—
Thou art a boy no longer, but a king ?

Returning gloomy to the court he sought
The crowded council-chamber, grave with thought,
But meeting at the door a merry lord,
Who made a lowly bow, and begged a word,

He stopped and heard,—alas! with greedy ear,
A trifling tale, not meet for him to hear,
A bit of scandalous gossip, then a jest;
The laughing pair linked arms: you guess the rest,
That day the council met without the king.
At night there was a sound of revelling
Within the banquet-chamber, loud and late.
There Felix sat, oblivious of his state,
Carousing with the roysterers of his court,
And what a drunken king should be—their sport.
They clinked their glasses with him, or they sang
Light songs, and shouted till the palace rang,
Or stamped in chorus when he rose to speak:
At last the boldest, in a tipsy freak,
Would play the king himself; he touched the crown,
But Felix, roused a moment, smote him down
Bleeding among the wine cups. “Fool, lie there!
Crowns were not made for such as you to wear.”
He spurned him with his foot. A draught of wine
Washed out the insult to his right divine,

And set his swimming thoughts adrift again ;
The purple sea kept mounting to his brain.
“ I hear,” he said, “ a buzzing in my ears,
The echoed music of the happy spheres :
What waves of sound ! and how they sink and swell !
It must be time to ring my golden bell.”
He rose, and staggering to his chamber-door
To ring the bell, he fell upon the floor,
And while his soberer guests their revels kept
He lay and moaned for help. At last he slept.

What cup shall he drain next ? What chase pursue,
Whose end is happiness and pleasure too ?
The bell is silent still—ah ! who can tell
What he must do to ring the happy bell ?
He rose betimes and rode, no more alone,
For when his taste for horsemanship was known,
The court was seized o'th' sudden with the whim
Of early rising, and would hunt with him ;
So when day broke you might have seen a train
Of lords and ladies spurring o'er the plain,

With hawks upon their wrists, or hounds behind,
The ready puppets of the royal mind.
The court of Felix, histories say, was then
Famed for its lovely dames and gallant men,
Light beauties, frank and bold, yet full of arts,
And rakes whose glory lay in breaking hearts.
His first temptation was a merry face,
Crimsoned with healthful roses in the chase :
His next a little tress of dangling hair,
Blown o'er plump shoulders with a jaunty air :
His third a white hand on a palfrey's mane,
Or small foot peeping from a flowing train.
Or, it may be, some balmy night in June,
When o'er the park there hung a yellow moon,
While on the banks reclined maids told their tales,
Or singing hushed the amorous nightingales,
He came on beauty, grace, perfection there,
In ripe round forms, white robes, and night-dark hair ;
Or met a mask, in some dim nook apart,
Whose lustrous eyes shot passion to his heart!

What could he do but love? Were they not fair?
Was he not young? 'Twas in the very air,
A soft infection he perforce must take,
No matter whose fond heart might bleed, or break!
Not his a lesser lover's doubt and pain,
He was assured of being loved again,
For was he not a king? What woman would
Withhold her heart from him? No woman could.
His first love was a fair, but fragile maid,
With drooping, violet eyes, half light, half shade;
A sweet, pale face, a little touched with care,
And nothing bright about her, save her hair.
Poor, fading flower! she had not time to die
Before the fickle Felix cast her by,
And plucked another, eager for her fate,
A full-blown beauty, made of love and hate;
With bold, black eyes, that smouldered with desire,
Or through its ashes flashed a dangerous fire;
About her brow great coils of midnight hair,
With one fierce ruby like a comet there;

Cheeks brown as olives, with a bloomy streak
Like twilight, burning in each dusky cheek :
A passionate, scornful mouth ; a hand superb,
Moulded to grasp a sceptre, or to curb
The tameless spirit of a desert steed :
A heart that loved to make the hearts of others bleed !
 What hours are his ! what moments of delight !
Sweet thoughts all day, and sweeter dreams at night !
And yet—the bell is silent ! Who can tell
Why Felix, loving, fails to ring the bell ?
Perchance he loves not wisely,—let him change ;
His opulent nature needs a wider range :
Slaves may be constant, and content with one,
Kings, like the sun, must shine on all, or none !
Like some light bee that sips each flower he meets,
A winged plunderer of the summer's sweets,
He wooed the splendid beauties of his court,
Wasting the precious days in amorous sport.
Toying with golden curls, nipping small ears,
Or kissing snowy lids that swam in loving tears !

'The king should wed,' the people thought at last;
'Tis time the follies of his youth were past,
And something better grafted in their stead;
We need a prince to rule when he is dead.'

"O mighty Felix!" Thus his Poet sung,
(His teeming fancy showed that he was young,)
"Until they see a bud upon the tree
They fear that beauty's rose will die with thee;
Put forth a bloom to comfort them, and save
Thy rich remembrance from the sullen grave.
An hundred fair princesses whose bright eyes
Are dowered with kingdoms, waste their days in sighs,
Thinking of thee, great king! O, let thy heart,
Maugre its royal rigour, take their part
Against itself, and thy too-cruel mind;
If not to all, to one, at least, be kind.
Select a queen, the fairest of the fair,
To grace thy marriage-bed, and bear an heir;
Thereby thou liv'st again, but dying now,
Thou art but ashes—dust; no Phoenix, thou,

That after crumbling on the funeral pyre,
Rises triumphant by its own bright fire.
Then leave a son when thou art laid to rest,
Whose golden plumes shall light thy royal nest."

The council, too; not in such dainty words,
But in the pithy phrases of grave lords,
Who, thinking much, say little. "He must wed."
The reasons followed. One grave seignor said,
"The State demands it," (words of awful weight!)
Another, "Yes, the welfare of the State."
Carried at last he weds. With whom? They scanned
Each marriageable princess in the land;
One brings five duchies, and a million down,
And one a kingdom, but disputed crown;
The third a silver mine, (but she is old,)
The fourth, (still older,) several mines of gold.
They chose a maid whom Felix had not seen,
More fitted for an Abbess, than a Queen,
For in a cloister's shade her youth had passed,
In virgin dreams of heaven, too bright to last!

When Felix heard their choice, (the council found
The royal idler playing with his hound,)
He sighed, and said: "I wish the lady joy!
We look for folly in a beardless boy,
And wisdom in gray hairs;—but yours, I see,
Thatch something worse than folly—cruelty.
Cruel, I say, for can she hope to be
Happy (she can not) with a man like me?
Enough; I take the sacrifice ye bring,
And though no lover I am still a king."

He sent a lord who grew up by his side,
With a long train of knights, to wed the bride.
Were I to paint them on their merry way,
The time should be the lover's season—May,
The sky an arch of sapphire, set in light,
Birds singing in the trees, the hedges white!
Then I'd describe the pile wherein they wed,
The fretted arches stretching overhead,
The saints and martyrs in the blazoned panes,
Through which in a rich dusk the sunlight rains:

The organ's burst, the choir, the hymn, the prayer,
The mitred Abbot, and the noble Pair !
Then over many a river and wide plain
Back to the court again should sweep the train,
With purple banners dancing in the air,
And proud steeds tramping to the trumpet's blare,
And in the midst the lady, riding slow,
Checking her ambling palfrey white as snow.
"Long live the Queen !" She knows the city near,
Before she sees its gleaming towers appear
Above the belt of woods that shut it in,
For the wind bears her snatches of the din
That welcomes her approach : a noise of bells
Blended with shouts and music sinks and swells,
Until the city bursts upon her sight,
Towers, temples, palaces, a-blaze with light :
The wall is hung with broidered cloths of gold,
And she can see her name on every fold ;
"AGNES AND FELIX " glitters everywhere.
White hands strew flowers upon her till the air

That stirs her veil grows languid with their sweets ;
Triumphal arches span the spacious streets,
Alive with merry faces, and bright eyes,
And clapping hands, and shouts that rend the skies.
When she draws near the palace from the crowd
A herald steps, and blows his trumpet loud,
Thrice at the gates, which on their hinges swing,
Parting like clouds till she beholds the king,
Who, waiting her approach, in royal state,
Comes like the Sun through morning's golden gate!
Dismounting from her steed the trembling bride
Gives him her hand, and slowly, side by side,
They cross the palace-threshold, and the gate,
Still to the trumpet's clang, closes behind like Fate!
He led her straightway to the balcony,
A robed and crowned Queen for all to see.
" Long live the Queen ! " " Long live the happy King ! "
The bells, a moment mute, began to ring
Louder than ever, whirling round and round,
Drunken, delirious in the storm of sound

That rocked the lofty belfries to and fro ;
And up and down the living sea below
Ran a great wind of shouts, and, wrapt in smoke,
From throats of grim black cannon thunders broke !
The streets were full of shows, and all were free,
Rope-dancing, juggling, mumming, minstrelsy,
Soldiers, and music's merriment divine,
And, better still, the fountains flowed with wine !
So passed the day ; at night the palace park
Was hung with lamps, that lit the leafy dark,
And showers of stars, from hissing rockets shed,
Mocked with their rainbow fires the stars o'erhead.
Meanwhile the bells kept ringing in their towers,
Hailing with jubilant throats the joyous hours ;
But one was still—(it would have struck a knell,
Had Felix touched the eord,)—the happy bell !

And is he then so wretched ? Nay, not so.
Between the neighbour lands of Joy and Wo
There is a middle state where many dwell,
Benumbed as in a dream, by some strange spell.

And thus it is with Felix, whose desires,
Raging intensely like volcanic fires,
Have burned away, and left a waste behind,
A heart of ashes, and a barren mind !
He does not love the woman he has wed,
At least not now, for love with him is dead.
It may revive in time, for none can say
What years may do, so changeable is clay.
We know that men are weak,—that woman's eyes
Colour in spite of them their destinies.
Eyes bright with trusting light, or dim with tears—
A patient smile—a heart that waits for years,
Content to bleed, and hope, or even to break—
A martyr dying for her dear one's sake—
He must be melted by it, must be won,
And be undone as she has been undone,
So terrible a might in woman lies,
If she but be, what Agnes was not—wise.
She loved her lord, I think, but loved not well.
How could a maid bred in a convent-cell,

And schooled by priests, know what a man demands
In her he loves—what work of heart, or hands?
She knew to count her beads, and say her prayers,
But not to share his joys and soothe his cares.
Wavering between her faith and what she felt,
When he was near her tender heart would melt,
But thoughts of heaven would check her sinful bliss,
For she loved him and heaven, and both, alas, amiss!
Unhappy pair, I pity your sad fate!
Not wise enough to love, too wise to hate:
God made ye both unlike, in brain and heart,
But Man hath joined what God would keep apart!
The wrong is common; common, too, the cure;
There is but one—forgive, forget, endure.
Dream not, but act; and if ye can not find,
Create some labour to employ the mind,
So shall the heart its fruitless struggles cease,
And, if not happy, be at least at peace!

But peace was not for Agnes: she was one
Who could be only what she was—a nun.

She made the court a convent. Tolerant, wise,
Poor Felix stood aloof, with watchful eyes,
Guarding his wife as if she were a child,
A kind but thoughtful man, who seldom smiled,
But as his hopes of happiness grew less,
Labour'd to give his people happiness.
And they were happy. Well they might be so ;
No wars, large harvests, and their taxes low :
Their king was just, their queen was good and fair,
Besides, there was a promise of an heir.
“ God send a boy !” they said. The days went by
Like withered leaves when autumn winds are high,
Or whirling snow flakes : autumn, winter passed,
Snows melted, budded leaves, spring came at last.

The long-expected child was born with spring.
They bore the joyous tidings to the king,
Who paced his chamber with an anxious brow,
And gravely wondered : ‘ Am I happy now ?
A father—tell me’ —But his challenged heart,
Disdaining parley, took the infant's part,

Whose cry he heard, and forced him to confess
A natural, manly thrill of happiness.
He stretched his hand to ring the silent bell,
But the grasped cord from out his fingers fell,
For entering now the grave physician said,
“Forbear your joy, my liege, the queen is dead!”
A deathly pallor seized him when he heard
These doleful words: he neither spake, nor stirred,
But stood transfixed to marble—all surprise,
Two great tears welling from his blinded eyes!
Why did he weep? He did not love the queen.
What could she be to him? What had she been?
He wedded her that she should bear a son,
That done, of course her end in life is done.
Why should her death disturb him? It may be
He sees therein his own mortality,
Or, sadder still, the solemn doom of all,
If so, his not unmanly tears may fall.
But be more just, and say his heart is wrung
With natural pity that she died so young,

Cut off untimely in her clouded morn,
Before the rose could burgeon o'er the thorn.
He weeps to think his joyless marriage-bed
Has borne at once the living and the dead—
That she has died to give his infant life,
In short he weeps because he loved his wife!
Yes, Felix loved her, strange as it may seem,
His long indifference was a troubled dream;
It left him darkly in his sorest strait,
He woke at last, but woke, alas! too late.
He loved her now, the bitter Past forgot,
Nor owned there was a time he loved her not.
'But grant it true,' (here conscience seemed to wake,)
'I would have loved her for the prince's sake!
All this and more—a world of hopeless pain—
Brooded like death upon his heart and brain,
Until he heard his new-born infant's cry,
Which called him back to life with many a sigh.
"Be calm, the child is living, sire." He smiled:
"But she is dead!" then went to see his child.

She lay in state, beneath a canopy,
Three mortal days for all the court to see,
In royal robes, her crown upon her head,
With blessed tapers burning round her bed ;
And prayers were said, and heavenly hymns arose,
And mass was chanted for her soul's repose.
Ah, Requiescat ! Then the funeral show,
The gorgeous pageant of a nation's wo :
The slow, sad march—the tap of mournful drums—
The death-like hush that tells the body comes—
The great car, seen afar—the turbaned grooms—
The led steeds, haughty with their ostrich plumes—
The king in his black coach—Why do they bring
In Death's triumphal march the happy king ?
Deep in an old Cathedral's holy gloom
They buried her with tears, and on her tomb
Carved in white marble like a drift of snow
An *Agnus Dei*, with her name below,
“ AGNES, THE WIFE OF FELIX,” (wretched wife !)
The rest was written in the Book of Life !

A dreadful shadow in the palace lay
Long after the poor queen had passed away,
And the court doffed its customary black :
Yea, till her virgin dust had mouldered back
To the cold dust it sprang from ! It was not
That Felix missed her in some hallowed spot,
And peopled it with memories,—(say, her room,)
But that her image filled the haunted gloom.
He saw her as she used to be in life,
A loving woman, but a troubled wife ;
Bent o'er her broidery frame, while roses grew—
Beneath her fingers, wet with silver dew :
Or where, like nuns, her spotless lilies stood—
The beauteous abbess of the sisterhood ;
Or in her chapel with ecstatic air,
Telling her rosary, each bead a prayer !
Or standing saintly in the moon's faint light,
Beside the cradle at the dead of night ;
The ghostly mother kissed her sleeping child,
That in its dream stretched out its arms and smiled !

What Felix felt, his wo or happiness,
Only a father's loving heart can guess.
Be sure he loved the babe, whose helpless life .
Cost it, poor thing ! its mother, him, his wife,
And when his state-craft could be brushed away,
Stole in to see it twenty times a day,
Hung o'er its cradle, if perchance it slept,
And gazed till called, then out on tip-toe crept ;
Returning soon, to gaze his fill again,
Perchance to still its little cry of pain,
With infant lullabies and drowsy charms ;
Or, sweeter far, to take it in his arms,
And pace the floor until it sank to rest,
A smiling burden on his aching breast !
The love he would have lavished on the queen,
But for that dreadful cloud that came between,
Groping the kingdom of the dead in vain,
(For what to them is mortal joy, or pain ?)
Returned in tears, and seeking to repair
Its early error by its late despair,

Clung to the child as if his heart would break :
He loved it madly for its mother's sake !
To paint his passion in its fond extremes,
The hopes, the fears, the endless golden dreams
He built on that frail life an hour might blight ;
Haunting the prince's cradle day and night,
Outwatching all the nurses ; as he grew
Fetching him costly playthings, quaint and new,
Teaching him pastimes full of merry noise,
Devised by fathers to divert their boys ;
Making grim shadows that awoke his fears,
The heads of rams, or sheep with monstrous ears,
Browsing along the wall with piteous bleat ;
Trotting him now a cock-horse on his feet,
With breathless shouts, and eager, clapping hands,
Through wondrous ways in undiscovered lands,
The fairy world of Nowhere : dropping now
A crown of kisses on his baby brow,
Then lifting him sedately to his throne,
The strong, broad shoulder where he sat alone,

Fearless and proud—he knew his royal part,
The king, the tyrant of his father's heart!
To tell how Felix as the years went by
Watched the soul brightening in his soft blue eye;
How while he smoothed his darkening hair, and smiled,
He breathed the sigh, '*Thou hast no mother, child!*'
How wandering in the Past with vain regret,
He asked the heavens, '*Has she forgiven me yet?*'
The volume of his life where this was writ,
Could I but open, and decipher it,
(Be sure the pages of the wasted years
Where that dead flower was prest were wet with tears!)
Would make a story, sadder, sweeter far
Than any I may try to tell, and mar;
A sad, sweet story, worth a famous pen,
The tears of women, and the thoughts of men.
Write it who can, let me go on to tell
How and when Felix rung the happy bell.

Ten years or more, (the time concerns us not,
Our epochs are the feelings, Life the plot:)

He schooled himself in all the craft of State,
The little business of the would-be great;
Not from a royal fondness for intrigue,
To break a useless, make a useful league,
Or strike the sceptre from a brother's hand,
But for the good and glory of his land,
Holding his people's happiness his own,
Their love the best foundation for his throne.
No king of all his race so shrewd as he,
So great a master of diplomacy.
It mattered little whom his rivals sent
To sound his secrets, as they came they went,
Ambassadors, who cunning trains had laid
How to betray, and not to be betrayed;
Old crafty ministers with stealthy eyes,
Skilled in the courtly art of hinting lies;
He baffled all, not by a deeper art,
But by a larger brain, and purer heart.
Nor better fared the servants of his throne,
If they mistook his wishes for their own,

Plotting to serve themselves, and not the State ;
Poor fools ! they did but trifle with their fate.
'Tis said his council was corrupt at first,
And the bench, too, with venal judges cursed,
Hucksters who Law, and sometimes Justice sold :
Also that in the Church, God's earthly fold,
Thieves in the guise of shepherds oft did creep,
Not to keep out the wolves, but fleece the sheep.
If this, alack ! were true, (who will, may doubt,)
He found a way to weed the culprits out,
And make his people happy. All went well,
Yet somehow Felix did not ring his bell !

At last there came a war. What led thereto
I have forgotten, if I ever knew ;
Doubtless the cause was just, or said to be,
Alike by Felix and his enemy,
The gray-haired father of his sainted queen,
Whose death had broken the last bond between
Their rival kingdoms. Having striven in vain
To keep the early promise of his reign,

And live and die beneath a peaceful star,
Felix, prepared, resolved on sudden war,
And marched his armies on the unready foe,
Who fled before the shadow of his blow.
He overran his royal kinsman's land,
Until his coward forces made a stand
For very shame, within a walled town
Famous for strength. Here Felix sat him down
For a long siege, as was the custom then.
The country round about swarmed with his men,
Felling old forests, filling swampy grounds,
Digging great trenches, throwing up huge mounds,
Drawing their circles closer day by day
Around the foe who kept them still at bay,
Safe in his stronghold. Nor less busy he,
Thinning their ranks with his dread enginery
That thundered all day long : and oft at night
He sallied from his gates in desperate fight,
That smote the darkness with a burst of flame,
That died in rolling drums as sudden as it came !

Their girding cannon batter at the walls,
That slowly crumble ; now a bastion falls,
Anon a turret ; still the foe defies,
Though low in dust his bravest captain lies.
Hour after hour the bloody work goes on,
Another day—the fated town is won.
But see, the gates are opened ! Who are these ?
The oldest burghers bringing out the keys !
“ We would not yield,” they say, “ till we were dead,
Did not our wives and children starve for bread :
We yield to Famine, Felix, not to thee.”
“ Your children and your wives are safe with me,
I only war with men. Take back your keys ;
Bread also.” Amazed, they fell upon their knees.
His soldiers shouted as the tidings flew,
They heard it on the walls, and shouted too :
The trumpet blew, the bells began to ring :
“ Long live the king ! Long live the happy king !”
His clemency and the prowess of his arms
Distracted the old king with fresh alarms ;

Repulse he might have schooled himself to meet,
But not defeat—such merciful defeat !
“ What shall be done with one who can subdue
Not only us, my lords, but himself too ?
Advise me.” And they did. “ We must pretend
His mercy is a cloak to some dark end,
(Say your dethronement, sire,) as time will show.”
So they conspired against their generous foe.
The silly people (were they ever wise ?)
Of course believed them, for a monarch's lies
Pass current, like his coin, from hand to hand,
However base the metal. The whole land
Bankrupt awhile through fear, but affluent now
With spurious courage—raised they knew not how—
Rose to defend, each man declared, his hearth,
And sweep the tyrant Felix from the earth !
The good king Felix heard the wicked cry
With noble anger, dying in a sigh.
“ Since they belie us so there is no way
To bring them to their senses, but to slay :

They must be taught to fear, as well as hate ;
Who speaks of pity now, he speaks too late.
What says the stern commandment of the Lord ?
' Who take the sword, shall perish by the sword. ' "

At last it came,—the dark, the fatal day,
When, face to face, in battle's dread array,
For the first time the hostile armies stood.
The low and sullen East was red as blood
Behind the ghostly tents of the old king,
O'er which a raven flapped its funeral wing,
Affrightened by strange thunders from below,
And puffs of driven cloud, up-mounting slow.
For now the glimmering field was rolled in smoke,
And heavily the boom of cannon broke,
Shattering the startled air, shaking the ground,
Pouring, whole parks at once, destruction round !
Then came the sharp fire of the musketeers,
And flights of arrows, and the thrust of spears ;
Steel rang on steel, drums beat, the trumpet's blare,
Ominous, threatening, smote the trembling air !

At first they fought by rule—the wings, the van,
As had been planned and ordered, every man
A tutored puppet in his captain's hand,
And all obedient to their king's command.
Did Felix say, or sign, "Go there," 'twas done,
A thousand men marched to the spot as one.
Where they should stand, they stand, firm as a wall,
Closing their shattered ranks fast as they fall;
Where they should move, they move: the cannon roar,
Ploughing them down; the spears grow more and more,
Bristling before them; clouds of arrows fly,
Darkening what little day is in the sky:
In vain,—they still encroach upon their foes.
So for awhile the tide of battle flows.
But by and by it takes a wider sweep,
Rolling its waves towards the eastern steep,
A raging sea, that swayed, and surged, and reeled,
Bursting tumultuous over the whole field.
Ere long the struggling hosts, on carnage bent,
So broken were, in such disorder blent,

That neither king could say, "These are my own,"
Or whether he were victorious, or o'erthrown !
Against the cannon archers twanged their bows ;
Where blows were thickest standards sank and rose ;
White crests were lost like foam-flecks in the sea,
And here and there were bands of cavalry,
Whose dreadful, flashing swords were dripping red,
Galloping o'er the dying and the dead !
'Twas chaos all. At noon there came in sight,
Swift-marching from the west, fresh, full of fight,
A second host which Felix had concealed,
To turn the doubtful fortunes of the field,
Rushing with glittering weapons, and a shout,
Which, heard a league off, put the foe to rout.
For as the red leaves, in an autumn gust,
Whirl round the self-same spot, in clouds of dust,
Till sweeping all before it like the sea,
Comes the north wind, when suddenly they flee ;
So, panic-struck, the old king's forces fled,
A coward mob, to honor, manhood dead !

In vain their captains strove to check their flight;
They turned on them the fury of the fight,
And cut them down—each man in that wild strife
Braving a thousand deaths to save his worthless life!
When Felix saw the field was won, his heart,
Glorying a moment, took the old king's part
For sheerest pity. "Death to him," he said,
"Who dares to hurt a hair of his gray head!"
Then spurring his white steed away he went,
The first to find and save him. In his tent,
Girt by the few that scorned to fly, he lay,
Bathed in his blood that swiftly ebbed away,
His son, Prince Irac, stooping at his side.
"Felix!" as he drew near, the old man cried.
Prince Irac started up, and snatched a spear—
Rage in his eyes and soul. "Rash boy, come here,"
His father groaned. "You dare to disobey?
Sir, I command you." Felix turned away,
His sweet thoughts changed to gall. "Like sire, like son;
They hate me—the whole race. There was but one

Who knew me as I am, and she is dead.”

“Felix!—Go, call him back,” (he raised his head,
The king still regnant in his fading eye,)

“For I must speak with him before I die.

—Felix, I know thee now, and long have known,

True man and good, too good to fill a throne ;

Above the petty lust of Power, which brings

Such wo to nations, and such death to kings!

For this bad war—O, let it end to-day!—

Not thine, but mine, the sin is mine, I say.

Irac, I made this war for selfish ends ;

They fail, death comes—be you and Felix friends.”

He clasped their hands in his, as they drew nigh

To catch his faltering words, and see him die,

And while they knelt he bade them swear to be

“Brothers in heart, and live in amity,

They and their people”—Here his spirit fled,

For when they looked again the poor old king was dead!

When, treaties signed with Irac, Felix came
Back to his kingdom, with a conqueror's fame,

Each man rejoiced, his cup filled to the brim,
As if some special good had fallen to him ;
The women laughed, the children clapped their hands :
It was a holiday throughout the lands,
Triumphal arches—banners—music's swell—
And all the bells were rung, except the happy bell !

The happy bell—what tales it could have told
Of what it saw below its house of gold,
Since first, in youth, Prince Felix hung it there
Above his palace towers in the wide air !
Beneath it and around, a league each way,
Mapped out in small, the mighty city lay,
A stretch of roofs, with slips of street between,
Glimpses of trees, and summer squares of green,
Cool, bosky places, sacred to repose,
Wherein, like shafts of silver, fountains rose :
And here and there a golden gleam of fire
Betrayed the cross on some cathedral spire ;
And bells were round, in tower and turret hung,
Great, brazen bells, whose ponderous iron tongue

Proclaimed the flying hours, by day and night—
The honied joys that wait the marriage rite,
(Ah, dreams of youth and love, too early fled!)
And man's unspeakable sorrow for his dead!
Year in and out the changeful sea of sound,
Fed from below, kept flowing, circling round;
Freighted with human life it rose and fell,
But drew no answer from the royal bell!

When first 'twas hung there in its airy hall
The park below, new-planted, was so small
Its trees, from that far height, were shadowy stalks
Drawn on the emerald grass and gravelled walks.
But by and by they grow more tall and dark;
The glossy rind becomes a wrinkled bark;
Tangled the boughs, and thicker the green leaves,
Through which the sun glints, and the soft wind grieves,
And birds are glancing. Soon the shady places
Are lighted by bright eyes, and laughing faces;
And knots of beauteous dames, in merry talk,
Go sauntering, arm in arm, from walk to walk,

With fluttering scarfs, rich robes, and jewelled sheen—
Brilliant as tropic flowers! Then comes the Queen,
Chaste as her bridal lily, and as pale,
A nun who wears a crown instead of veil.
It hears her marriage peal, her funeral knell,
But never rings itself—the silent bell!

Years pass without a sound from that high tower;
The bell hangs dumb, like some great drooping flower,
That never knows the bloom and blight below,
Now bright with sunshine, and now white with snow!
At last the snow, and sun, and the wild rains,
Clouded its burnished sides with darkening stains,
And muffled thick with dust its iron tongue,
And birds built there, and reared their clamorous young!

What good king Felix and his life had been
Through all these silent changes, we have seen;
Not much, perhaps, but still enough to see
He always missed his wished felicity.

We might have found, or made, a happier lot,
Born to the throne he filled, but *he* could not;

Ah! more's the pity, since his youth was past,
And manhood—age came stealing on at last:
First in a few gray hairs—a gleam of white,
That made his brown locks richer in the light;
Against the corners of his eyes a line
That could not be a wrinkle, 'twas so fine;
A step that lost a little of its spring,
Measured, deliberate, as became a king:
These shadows, say, of change, before his prime,
Ere one could think it was the work of Time,
For still his eyes were keen, his cheeks were red,
No leaf yet of their princely roses shed!
As year by year went by with all its care,
Thinner and whiter grew his wintry hair;
And Time, or Sorrow holding his old plough,
Did turn great furrows in his faded brow.
His stooping shoulders and his tottering gait,
His head that seemed to droop with its own weight,
Dim eyes, and trembling hands, so icy cold—
All these declared that he was growing old!

Such was the hapless king in his decay,
Forlorn and silent, till one summer's day,
When, weary of his cares, he stole apart,
And paced his chamber with an aching heart.
Gorgeous the royal chamber was, and vast,
Decked with the lavish splendors of the Past :
Lofty the walls, with priceless pictures hung,
Painted by master hands when Art was young :
Purple the heavy curtains, fold on fold,
With broidered silver stiff, and brede of gold ;
A sheet of flowers the carpet—such as blow
Only in Orient gardens, all a-glow
With morning richness, and the blended dyes
That dust the wings of swarming butterflies !
Couches, like clouds ; chairs, throne-like in their state ;
Great goblets, precious vases, massive plate ;
Exhaust your fancy for a monarch's hall—
'Twas here, and more : and in the midst of all,
(Grim as the halter in a hangman's cell !)
Behold the cord that never rings the bell !

Backward and forward with a listless tread,
With many a sudden stop, and shake o'th' head,
The old king paced the chamber, so forlorn
He wished that he were dead, or never had been born!
The darkest corner seemed to suit his gloom,
No fitter nook for sorrow—save the tomb;
Then he affected brightness, just to see
His shadow creep beside him wearily:
Anon he halted in his shifting mood,
Where some fresh landscape hung, or statue stood,
Taking their beauty in with vacant eyes,
Lost to the fairest shapes, the heavenliest skies!
His windows opened on a balcony,
Whence, under silken awnings, he could see
His slope of lawns, his gardens, and between
The winding, wooded walks, cool avenues of green!
He threw a casement up in his despair,
To watch the clouds, perchance, or feel the air,
Which, blowing freshly o'er his royal grounds,
Came freighted with fine odours, and sweet sounds—

The breath of flowers and dew, the song of birds,
The low (or did he dream?) of distant herds,
Shouts near at hand, (it was a holiday,
And the whole city was alive and gay,)
“*Long live the happy king !*” He bowed his head :
“The happy king ! O mockery !” he said.

“What is this thing called Happiness? And where
Does it abide, and who shall guide me there?
My feet have never struck the path thereto,
My groping hands have never found the clue,
Or, finding, straight have lost it. Can it be
Granted to others, yet denied to me?
Or are we all, kings, clowns, alike betrayed,
Running with eager arms to grasp a shade?
It can not be. There must be some attain :
All cannot struggle, like the few—in vain !
These hearts of ours, whose lightest throbs reveal
Their wants, creating every want they feel,
Pulsing desires along their crimson tide,
So simply, yet so seldom satisfied ;

Our minds that dwell as in a lofty tower,
Above the petty tumults of the hour,
Clear-eyed, and calm, demanding little—naught,
Save what they find of fancied power in thought :
These have, or should, the right to happiness,
Which wo that violates can ne'er make less :
These were not given to us in mockery,
Or we, and life, and all things are a lie !

Then why am I not happy ? Who can tell
Why I have never rung my golden bell ?
Perhaps I asked, in youth, what could not be—
A bliss too great for man, at least for me :
Raptures, for which all language would be weak,
Striking a sudden colour to the cheek :
A swelling of the heart not felt before,
Like the sea's, setting to a summer shore ;
A dance o'th' pulse, a brightening o'th' eye,
A light like endless morning in the sky ;
Something which should compel me to confess—
What I am dying to—This, *this* is Happiness !

It may be so; youth is not over wise,
Nor kings content with common destinies;
There lies, methinks, the secret—everything
Summed up at last in that one word—A King!

What is a King? His credulous subjects say
A being moulded of diviner clay
Than folds their petty souls. What mountains are,
He is to them, or some far-shining star;
But to himself—speak, Felix, what art thou?
(We may be frank, for none are listening now!)
Certes, no star, or one that vainly tries
To light the utter night that round it lies,
Drinking its dying twinkle. A mountain? No.
Or such whose head is lost in clouds and snow,
Dreadfully desolate! Alas, what then?
The most unhappy of unhappy men!

O wretched state of kings! O doleful fate!
Greatness misnamed, in misery only great!
Could men but know the endless wo it brings,
The wise would die, or ere they would be kings!

Think what a king must do ! It tasks the best
To rule the little world within his breast ;
Yet must he rule it, and the world beside,
Or king is none, undone by power and pride !
What is the business of a king ? It is
To make the welfare of his people his ;
To think and act for them ; their wants to know,
The well, the spring whence all their bounties flow ;
Their prosperous arts in peace, their arms in war ·
Their pilot steering by a certain star :
Great, wise, just, good—whatever God is, he
Whom God doth give to rule, should strive to be.
How many do ? Can one such king be found ?
In heaven there may, but not on earthly ground !
'Tis pitiful, 'tis lamentable—yet
There's one thing we can say, which men forget
When they rail at kings, giving their fancies wing—
They know not what it is to be a king !
What ill attends the state, and what it breeds,
A rank, luxuriant growth of poisonous weeds :

How bad the best become, puffed up with pride,
Slaves of their will, naught they demand denied :
How they are gulled by smooth-tongued parasites,
The greatest pandering to their appetites ;
How all things work to make them deaf, and blind,
Foes to themselves, and curses to mankind !
But say there be these wrongs in vain assail,
Glancing like arrows from their coats of mail,
Still must they fail of happiness, like me ;
There is *no* happy king—there can not be !
Think what a king must be—what burdens bear
From birth to death ! His life is one long care ;
It wears away in tasks that never end :
He has ten thousand foes, but not one friend !
Not for himself he lives, but for the State—
To make his thankless people good and great,
The head that guides their hands—to plough to-day,
To-morrow to grasp the dreadful sword and slay !
What's good in them must foster, check what's ill,
And save them from themselves against their will ;

Do many things they cannot understand,
And rule, when need is, with an iron hand ;
Look for revolt at home, and war abroad,
Prepared to strike at both, and strike like God !
O doleful state of kings ! O dreadful fate !
O hell in which we wake, like damned souls—too late !

Would I could doff my royal robes, and be
One of the people who are ruled by me ;
A shepherd hind, or any happy clown,
In field, or wood, or quiet country town
Long leagues away from this great city's roar,
No matter where, or who, so I were king no more !
I'd rise when dawn was glimmering in the blue,
And drive my flocks a-field through mist and dew,
Stopping to bind my crook with nameless flowers,
Or harken to the birds in neighbouring bowers.
Watching the snowy lambs that round me feed,
On some low knoll I touch my rustic reed ;
Or sing old ditties with a quaint refrain,
How Corydon did Phyllis love in vain,

Till Cupid, smit with ruth, became his friend,
Bringing his troubles to a blissful end!
My Phyllis sits with me, a blushing lass,
Plucking with down-cast eyes the blades of grass,
Listening the tale I whisper in her ear—
How dear she is to me—and am I dear?
Nor does she fear my arm around her waist,
Nor start when kissed, nor shrink to be embraced!
Ye know not, O my people! can not guess
How much I envy you your happiness!
Your calm, contented days, your dreamless nights,
Your power to make life's little things delights,
Your wakes, your festivals, your antique play,
The dance upon the green around the Queen of May!

I saw to-day a father at his door,
A simple clown, the poorest of the poor;
He stared upon me as I hurried by,
And I stared back at him with wistful eye:
'Ah why should I not sit like him, and see
My chubby children clamber up my knee?'

No more a child, my boy a man has grown,
And soon will follow me upon the throne.
What I could do to make him good, and wise,
Fit to shape out his people's destinies,
I've done ; he's generous, has a loving heart,
A scorn of low intrigue—the courtier's art ;
Commands his passions better than his sire ;
Not quick to take offence, though full of fire ;
Expert in arms and fearless in the fray,
(I know he'll win the jousting prize to-day :)
Indeed, a noble prince, who'll not disgrace
The kingly glories of his name and race.
This he is now, but who, alas ! can say
What he may be when I have passed away,
As soon I must, his tutor, and his friend ?
Woe's me ! my son, I can not see the end !
Knowing my own life, I am full of fears,
Nor can I help—to-day, at least—my tears,
Breathing in prayer my last, my sole desire—
May you be happier than your hapless sire !

Happy! alas! who's happy here on earth?
Why, man is wretched from his very birth;
Conceived in darkness, and brought forth in pain,
He enters life with a cry—to live, and die—in vain!
Frail as a flower's his hold of earth, none know
Whether the human bud will fade, or blow;
For hours on hours his lids are sealed in sleep,
And when at last he wakes—it is to weep!
And now begins his endless quest of joy;
At first he finds it in the simplest toy,
His rattle, bells, a string of tangled beads,
The beetle in the grass, a knot of weeds,
The letters in old books begirt with gold—
In everything that he can snatch and hold:
Yet brief as bold his sallies of delight,
For even while he laughs he weeps outright!
Youth comes, and then—as childhood went before,
Why, so youth goes in turn, to come no more;
Its little blisses never known, and prized,
Or only known amiss—to be despised!

But wiser manhood soon will make amends—
Has riper purposes and richer ends ;
We shall be fortunate and happy then,
Be all we would, as soon as we are men.
One, seeking pleasure, to the wine-cup flies,
Another drinks his bane from woman's eyes,
A third hoards gold, a fourth is mad for fame—
All aiming at one thing, whate'er their aim,
All mocked and baffled by it, (me, no less,
Me, most of all !) the phantom—Happiness !

Where flits the shadow ? We have lost its track :
The child looks forward, but the man looks back.
Back to our now-lamented youth we turn,
And pour our tears upon its sacred urn ;
Back to our childhood, which we find, too late,
Lay but a little way from Eden's gate !
Never what now we are, or now possess—
The Future, or the Past, is Happiness !

Who can be happy in a world like this,
Man being, as he must, the dust he is ?

Never his master, ever Nature's slave,
Each step a journey nearer to the grave!
The air he breathes is tainted with disease,
Now fevers scorch him, and now agues freeze;
Too hot the summer sun, the winter wind
Too cold; the body preying on the mind,
The mind the body—powerless to subdue,
Crushed by old evils, yet creating new!
And what he sees of men from youth to age,
His fellow players on this mortal stage;
How little they know, how vile they fill their parts,
What shallow minds they have, what hollow hearts;
Their love a wordy wasting of the breath,
Their hate life-long, unsatisfied with death;
The slimy ways through which they crawl to Power—
Mean parasites, the panders of the hour;
Their frauds, their lies, their base ingratitude;
Rapacious, cruel—everything but good,
Originals of all the fiends they fear,
Already in their hell—Who can be happy here?

At length old age ; gray hairs, a wrinkled brow,
The wreck of what he was—what I am now !
Then the last sickness, and the hour of death,
The slowly-glazing eye, the fluttering breath,
The swoon in which the senses slip away,
No pulse, heart stopped—a lifeless lump of clay,
That stirs no more—the feet that ran to ill
Still, and the busy, guilty hands,—*all* still,
Dead-cold from head to foot—a frozen form,
Twin of corruption, brother of the worm,
Dust, ashes, nothing!—Happy with all this?
Let me behold the wretched man who is !
There's no such man, he must be more, or less ;
There's no such thing as Death and Happiness !”

So said, or thought, that day the poor old king,
Sick of himself, and life, and everything,
Crushed by the secret that he seemed to know,
The solemn mystery of human wo.
Tortured in heart and brain he totters back,
Like one just lifted, broken, from the rack.

And falling on a couch which near him stands,
Buries his face forlornly in his hands ;
Then closing his dim eyes, that would not weep,
Drops in a moment into happy sleep,
So deep it looks like death. They find him there,
The night-wind blowing in his snowy hair.

'Twas known next morning that the king was ill.
The people caught the whisper, as they will,
But caring little for the affairs of kings,
Soon went their ways, and thought of other things.
In his still chamber, darkened from the day,
Low in his bed of state the sick man lay ;
A grave physician stood beside his bed,
(He who first told him that the queen was dead,
The prince was born,) the prince, too, pale, distressed,
But hoping, as youth always does, the best.
" You took the prize, I hear." His father spoke.
" Ay, sir, but rather by a lucky stroke,
Than any skill or prowess of my own."
" You'll have another soon,—I mean the throne."

“ May Heaven preserve you long !” He quickly chid
The foolish, loving prayer : “ May Heaven forbid !”

Next day “ The king is worse,” the rumour ran ;
And now it touched the people, who began
To ask his ailment. Would he soon be well ?
What did the doctor think ? but none could tell.
He knew not what to think, with all his skill
He only knew with them—the king was ill,
The cause thereof, the cure, he could not reach,
Though in his day a very famous leech ;
So to his books he went, what Galen thought
To see, and what great Avicenna taught,
Cardanus, Paracelsus learned by heart,
All mighty masters of the Healing Art,
Compounding drugs, pills, powders, with long names,
And sweltering like a smith above his chemic flames !

The third day's rumour was, “ The king will die.”
It passed from mouth to mouth with many a sigh ;
Each had some tale to tell, some proof to bring,
How happy all had been since he was king.

“Do you remember now seven years ago,
The famine-winter when we suffered so,
He melted up his plate to buy us bread,
And sold the golden crown from off his head
To keep life in us, who must else have died?”
“God bless him, yes!” his earnest listener cried :
“And, later, when the Pestilence was here,
(I never shall forget that fatal year,
My wife died then, God rest her soul above!)
There never was such courage, so much love
As his, for us his people, when we lay
Crowding with deaths each minute of the day!
Fear made all selfish, flying for their lives,
Wives from their husbands, husbands from their wives,
The mother from her child, despite its moan ;
The dying and the dead were left alone !
But he—was ever such a king before?—
He went from street to street, from door to door,
Physician, nurse, and friend ; no wretched den
Passed by, nor shrunk from the most desperate men ;

Moistened their lips with water, brought them wine,
And talked—the Bishop never talked so fine
In his long robe at Easter, when he stands
Blessing the world with much-bejewelled hands!
Don't tell me, sirs,—he is the best of kings.”
From this the gossip passed to other things;
One of the youth of Felix strove to tell,
Another babbled of his famous bell,
(All knew, alas! that folly of their king,)
How strange it was they never heard it ring,
Not even when the victory was won,
Nor on his marriage,—no, nor birthday of his son!
And now their thoughts the prince and queen divide;
How fair and good she was, how young she died:
How valiant he,—no knight could ride him down,
So handsome, too, his golden hair his crown.
“What better king than he can we desire?
May he be happy—happy as his sire!”

Felix meanwhile was dying. Day by day
His strength, his life had slowly ebbed away,

No wave returning from the shoreless sea
To which his soul was drifting wearily !
Pale, pale his sunken cheek, and sharp his chin,
His long, thin hands, so white, more long and thin,
(Like knotted cords their large, blue arteries rise,)
And what great orbs are in his pits of eyes,
Draped in the wrinkled lids whose fringes meet—
As dreadful as the dead beneath the winding sheet !
Ah yes ! and when at last the lids are stirred,
Lifting at some soft step, or loving word—
(Say, when the prince is by,) more dreadful yet,
Filled with such solemn light, such strange regret,
Unearthly, wild—as if the dead arose,
And stared about them in their burial clothes !
For hours he spoke not, moved not ; shunning all
He turned his face in sorrow to the wall,
And, lost in shadow, slept, or seemed to sleep :
He murmured ‘ Agnes ’ once, and woke to weep !
Then, rest denied, he tried to dream of rest,
Stretched on his back, his hands across his breast,

Clasped as in prayer, his upward-pointing feet
Drawing in long white folds the marble sheet ;
Pale, cold, dumb, dead—as awful in the gloom
As if he had become the statue on his tomb !
Vainly his books the sage physician read,
Not written for the living, but the dead,
The dreams of ancient fools, reputed wise,
That nor diseases knew, nor remedies.
Vainly he changed his potions,—potent, rare,
Wrung from the kingdoms of the earth and air,
Strong mineral poisons, each a secret boon,
Witch-herbs, enchanted by the mystic moon—
I know not what of chemic, magic skill ;
They could not cure, and, strange, they did not kill !
“ Give over, sir,” the sick man said at last :
“ The hour when drugs would do me good is past.
You know not my disease,—and yet 'tis rife.”
To which the leech : “ What is it, sire ? ” “ 'Tis Life.”
“ There is no cure for that.” “ There is but *one*.”
“ Dear Father ! say not so,” exclaimed his son,

His sorrow fainting in a storm of sighs,
The wild tears raining from his clouded eyes.
“ There’s nothing, boy, to weep for : if there be,
'Tis Life, not Death ; weep for yourself, not me.
That I must die, is but a little thing,
Not so that you must live—and be a King !”
Here some one entered with a smirking face,
To say the Bishop waited. “ Tell his Grace—
With all the reverence that befits his state,
The great, good man !—he comes too soon, or late :
Too soon—to bury me, too late—to save :
But bid him come to-morrow—to my grave !
Enough of him.—Who’ll lift me up in bed ?
I’m troublesome, I know.” He raised his head—
The weeping prince—with more than woman’s care,
Kissing with loving lips his silver hair !
And there he sat—a piteous sight to see,
Propped up beneath his gilded canopy,
Whose purple shadow o’er his features fell,
And near him hung the cord to ring the happy bell !

“Look up, my son,” the dying king began :
“Weep not, but take what’s coming like a man.
I do, and have ; you do not hear *me* sigh,
I know too much of life—to fear to die ;
Enough to say some bitter things—all true :
But wherefore should I say them, and to *you* ?
You could not look at life through my old eyes,
Nor would my early follies make you wise.
Youth will be youth, however age may prate ;
’Twill learn like age, perchance, but learn too late !
Besides, I love you so I can not bear
To darken your young days with future care.
No, keep the dew, the freshness of your heart,
As something precious, which must soon depart ;
Be—happy, if you are so, while you may :
For me, I have not seen one happy day !
Start not, nor ask the solemn reasons why—
Time flies too fast—you’ll know them by and by.
This I *will* say,—I must, for it is true,—
Could I have happy been, it were with *you*,

Whom I have loved—you never guessed how well!—
Almost enough to ring my silent bell!
You'll wear my crown to-morrow—Take it now,
O may it sit less heavy on your brow
Than mine! (See, feel how thin my hair is worn!)
Why every jewel in it is a thorn!
Remember what I've taught in my poor way—
(Would I had strength, I have so much to say!)
The office of a king—what he must be—
How good and wise a man, how—unlike me!"
"Dear Father!" cried the prince, up-looking then
With reverent eyes, "you are the best of men.
May I be half so good!" "Be better, sir.
Follow—but hark, what's that? I hear a stir,
A sound like summer rain of many feet,
And the low hum of voices in the street."
"It is your people, sire, who gather there,
(Throw up the casement, you, and give him air,
Knowing how ill you—were, (the news *would* fly,)
To show their love—they say, before you die."

“ My people love me then ? ” “ Ah Father ! yes.”
“ Well, that is something, if not happiness.”
He closed his eyes a moment, bowed his head,
And moved his silent lips ; at last he said :
“ Sit by my side—just there, and now your hand ;
When one is going to a distant land—
As I am now—he loves to have a friend—
A son, say,—as he starts, to cheer him to the end !
Speak kindly of me after I am gone,
And see my name be graven on the stone,
‘ INFELIX,’ mind; not ‘ FELIX,’—that would be
A cruel, lying epitaph for me.
And yet I know not, for methinks I seem
Slowly awaking from the strangest dream ;
The mystery of my life is growing clear ;
Something—it may be Happiness—is near.
I hear such heavenly music ! . . . Did you speak ?
Who’s shining yonder ? Look ! ” His voice grew weak,
Died to a whisper, while his swimming sight
Strained through the darkness to a shape of light,

Floating across the chamber to his bed.

"*Agnes!*"—he clutched the cord, and fell back—dead,
Striking in death the first stroke of his knell.

Thus Felix rang at last the happy bell.



