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ROBERT BROWNING'S  
POETICAL WORKS







*Medal of Innocent XII dated 1696.  
representing the Pope in Consistory.*

# THE RING AND THE BOOK

BY

ROBERT BROWNING

//

*IN THREE VOLUMES*

VOL. I.

LONDON

SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE

1889



Posizione  
Di tutta La Causa Criminale  
Contro  
Guido Franceschini Nobile  
Aretino, e suoi Sicarij Stati  
fatti morire in Roma il di 22.  
Febb: 1690.  
Al primo con la decollazione et altri  
quattro di Forza  
Romana Homicidiorum  
Disputatur an et quando Maritus  
possit occidere Vxorem  
Adulteram  
absque incurso pœne Grd.<sup>rij</sup>





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# THE RING AND THE BOOK.

1868-9.

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## I.

### *THE RING AND THE BOOK.*

Do you see this Ring?

'T is Rome-work, made to match

(By Castellani's imitative craft)

Etrurian circlets found, some happy morn,

After a dropping April; found alive 5

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

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

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

(Craftsmen instruct me) one approved device

And but one, fits such slivers of pure gold 10

As this was,—such mere oozings from the mine,

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

Do you see this square old yellow Book, I toss  
 I' the air, and catch again, and twirl about  
 By the crumpled vellum covers,—pure crude fact      35  
 Secreted from man's life when hearts beat hard,

And brains, high-blooded, ticked two centuries since?  
Examine it yourselves! I found this book,  
Gave a *lira* for it, eightpence English just,  
(Mark the predestination!) when a Hand, 40  
Always above my shoulder, pushed me once,  
One day still fierce 'mid many a day struck calm,  
Across a Square in Florence, crammed with booths,  
Buzzing and blaze, noontide and market-time,  
Toward Baccio's marble,—ay, the basement-ledge 45  
O' the pedestal where sits and menaces  
John of the Black Bands with the upright spear,  
'Twixt palace and church,—Riccardi where they lived,  
His race, and San Lorenzo where they lie.  
This book,—precisely on that palace-step 50  
Which, meant for lounging knaves o' the Medici,  
Now serves re-venders to display their ware,—  
Mongst odds and ends of ravage, picture-frames  
White through the worn gilt, mirror-sconces chipped,  
Bronze angel-heads once knobs attached to chests, 55  
(Handled when ancient dames chose forth brocade)  
Modern chalk drawings, studies from the nude,  
Samples of stone, jet, breccia, porphyry  
Polished and rough, sundry amazing busts  
In baked earth, (broken, Providence be praised!) 60  
A wreck of tapestry, proudly-purposed web  
When reds and blues were indeed red and blue,

Now offered as a mat to save bare feet  
 (Since carpets constitute a cruel cost)  
 Treading the chill scagliola bedward : then 65  
 A pile of brown-etched prints, two *crazie* each,  
 Stopped by a conch a-top from fluttering forth  
 —Sowing the Square with works of one and the same  
 Master, the imaginative Sienese  
 Great in the scenic backgrounds—(name and fame 70  
 None of you know, nor does he fare the worse :)  
 From these . . . Oh, with a Lionard going cheap  
 If it should prove, as promised, that Joconde  
 Whereof a copy contents the Louvre !—these  
 I picked this book from. Five compeers in flank 75  
 Stood left and right of it as tempting more—  
 A dogseared Spicilegium, the 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, 80  
 Saint Somebody Else, his Miracles, Death and Life,—  
 With this, one glance at the lettered back of which,  
 And “ Stall ! ” cried I : a *lira* made it mine.

Here it is, this I toss and take again ;  
 Small-quarto size, part print part manuscript : 85  
 A book in shape but, really, pure crude fact  
 Secreted from man's life when hearts beat hard,

And brains, high-blooded, ticked two centuries since.  
 Give it me back ! The thing 's restorative  
 I' the touch and sight. 90

That memorable day,  
 (June was the month, Lorenzo named the Square)  
 I leaned a little and overlooked my prize  
 By the low railing round the fountain-source  
 Close to the statue, where a step descends : 95  
 While clinked the cans of copper, as stooped and rose  
 Thick-ankled girls who brimmed them, and made place  
 For marketmen glad to pitch basket down,  
 Dip a broad melon-leaf that holds the wet,  
 And whisk their faded fresh. And on I read 100  
 Presently, though my path grew perilous  
 Between the outspread straw-work, piles of plait  
 Soon to be flapping, each o'er two black eyes  
 And swathe of Tuscan hair, on festas fine :  
 Through fire-irons, tribes of tongs, shovels in sheaves,  
 Skeleton bedsteads, wardrobe-drawers agape, 106  
 Rows of tall slim brass lamps with dangling gear,—  
 And worse, cast clothes a-sweetening in the sun :  
 None of them took my eye from off my prize.  
 Still read I on, from written title-page 110  
 To written index, on, through street and street,  
 At the Strozzi, at the Pillar, at the Bridge ;

Till, by the time I stood at home again  
 In Casa Guidi by Felice Church,  
 Under the doorway where the black begins 115  
 With the first stone-slab of the staircase cold,  
 I had mastered the contents, knew the whole truth  
 Gathered together, bound up in this book,  
 Print three-fifths, written supplement the rest.  
 “*Romana Homicidiorum*”—nay, 120  
 Better translate—“A Roman murder-case :  
 “Position of the entire criminal cause  
 “Of Guido Franceschini, nobleman,  
 “With certain Four the cutthroats in his pay,  
 “Tried, all five, and found guilty and put to death  
 “By heading or hanging as befitted ranks, 126  
 “At Rome on February Twenty Two,  
 “Since our salvation Sixteen Ninety Eight :  
 “Wherein it is disputed if, and when,  
 “Husbands may kill adulterous wives, yet ’scape 130  
 “The customary forfeit.”

Word for word,  
 So ran the title-page : murder, or else  
 Legitimate punishment of the other crime,  
 Accounted murder by mistake,—just that 135  
 And no more, in a Latin cramp enough  
 When the law had her eloquence to launch,



But interfilleted with Italian streaks  
When testimony stooped to mother-tongue,—  
That, was this old square yellow book about. 140

Now, as the ingot, ere the ring was forged,  
Lay gold, (beseech you, hold that figure fast !)  
So, in this book lay absolutely truth,  
Fanciless fact, the documents indeed,  
Primary lawyer-pleadings for, against, 145  
The aforesaid Five ; real summed-up circumstance  
Adduced in proof of these on either side,  
Put forth and printed, as the practice was,  
At Rome, in the Apostolic Chamber's type,  
And so submitted to the eye o' the Court 150  
Presided over by His Reverence  
Rome's Governor and Criminal Judge,—the trial  
Itself, to all intents, being then as now  
Here in the book and nowise out of it ;  
Seeing, there properly was no judgment-bar, 155  
No bringing of accuser and accused,  
And whoso judged both parties, face to face  
Before some court, as we conceive of courts.  
There was a Hall of Justice ; that came last :  
For Justice had a chamber by the hall 160  
Where she took evidence first, summed up the same,  
Then sent accuser and accused alike,

In person of the advocate of each,  
 To weigh its worth, thereby arrange, array  
 The battle. 'T was the so-styled Fisc began, 165  
 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, 171  
 "That beggar hell's regalia to enrich  
 "Count Guido Franceschini : punish him !"  
 Thus was the paper put before the court  
 In the next stage, (no noisy work at all,) 175  
 'To study at ease. In due time like reply  
 Came from the so-styled Patron of the Poor,  
 Official mouthpiece of the five accused  
 Too poor to fee a better,—Guido's luck  
 Or else his fellows',—which, I hardly know,— 180  
 An outbreak as of wonder at the world,  
 A fury-fit of outraged innocence,  
 A passion of betrayed simplicity :  
 "Punish Count Guido? For what crime, what hint  
 "O' the colour of a crime, inform us first ! 185  
 "Reward him rather ! Recognize, we say,  
 "In the deed done, a righteous judgment dealt !  
 "All conscience and all courage,—there 's our Count

"Charactered in a word; and, what's more strange,  
 "He had companionship in privilege, 190  
 "Found four courageous conscientious friends:  
 "Absolve, applaud all five, as props of law,  
 "Sustainers of society!—perchance  
 "A trifle over-hasty with the hand  
 "To hold her tottering ark, had tumbled else; 195  
 "But that's a splendid fault whereat we wink,  
 "Wishing your cold correctness sparkled so!"  
 Thus paper second followed paper first,  
 Thus did the two join issue—nay, the four,  
 Each pleader having an adjunct. "True, he killed  
 "—So to speak—in a certain sort—his wife, 201  
 "But laudably, since thus it happened!" quoth one:  
 Whereat, more witness and the case postponed.  
 "Thus it happened not, since thus he did the deed,  
 "And proved himself thereby portentousest 205  
 "Of cutthroats and a prodigy of crime,  
 "As the woman that he slaughtered was a saint,  
 "Martyr and miracle!" quoth the other to match:  
 Again, more witness, and the case postponed.  
 "A miracle, ay—of lust and impudence; 210  
 "Hear my new reasons!" interposed the first:  
 "—Coupled with more of mine!" pursued his peer.  
 "Beside, the precedents, the authorities!"  
 From both at once a cry with an echo, that!

That was a firebrand at each fox's tail 215  
 Unleashed in a cornfield: soon spread flare enough,  
 As hurtled thither and there heaped themselves  
 From earth's four corners, all authority  
 And precedent for putting wives to death,  
 Or letting wives live, sinful as they seem. 220  
 How legislated, now, in this respect,  
 Solon and his Athenians? Quote the code  
 Of Romulus and Rome! Justinian speak!  
 Nor modern Baldo, Bartolo be dumb!  
 The Roman voice was potent, plentiful; 225  
*Cornelia de Sicariis* hurried to help  
*Pompeia de Parricidiis*; *Julia de*  
 Something-or-other jostled *Lex* this-and-that;  
 King Solomon confirmed Apostle Paul:  
 That nice decision of Dolabella, eh? 230  
 That pregnant instance of Theodoric, oh!  
 Down to that choice example *Ælian* gives  
 (An instance I find much insisted on)  
 Of the elephant who, brute-beast though he were,  
 Yet understood and punished on the spot 235  
 His master's naughty spouse and faithless friend;  
 A true tale which has edified each child,  
 Much more shall flourish favoured by our court!  
 Pages of proof this way, and that way proof,  
 And always—once again the case postponed. 240

\*Thus wrangled, brangled, jangled they a month,  
 —Only on paper, pleadings all in print,  
 Nor ever was, except i' the brains of men,  
 More noise by word of mouth than you hear now—  
 'Till the court cut all short with "Judged, your cause. 245  
 "Receive our sentence! Praise God! We pronounce  
 "Count Guido devilish and damnable:  
 "His wife Pompilia in thought, word and deed,  
 "Was perfect pure, he murdered her for that:  
 "As for the Four who helped the One, all Five— 250  
 "Why, let employer and hirelings share alike  
 "In guilt and guilt's reward, the death their due!"

So was the trial at end, do you suppose?

"Guilty you find him, death you doom him to?  
 "Ay, were not Guido, more than needs, a priest, 255  
 "Priest and to spare!"—this was a shot reserved;  
 I learn this from epistles which begin  
 Here where the print ends,—see the pen and ink  
 Of the advocate, the ready at a pinch!—  
 "My client boasts the clerklly privilege, 260  
 "Has taken minor orders many enough,  
 "Shows still sufficient chrism upon his pate  
 "To neutralize a blood-stain: *presbyter*,  
 "*Primæ tonsuræ, subdiaconus*,  
 "*Sacerdos*, so he slips from underneath 265

“Your power, the temporal, slides inside the robe  
 “Of mother Church: to her we make appeal  
 “By the Pope, the Church’s head!”

A parlous plea,

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

If mercy might be just and yet show grace ;  
 Much more unlikely then, in extreme age,  
 To take a life the general sense bade spare.  
 'T was plain that Guido would go scatheless yet.

But human promise, oh, how short of shine ! 295  
 How topple down the piles of hope we rear !  
 How history proves . . . nay, read Herodotus !  
 Suddenly starting from a nap, as it were,  
 A dog-sleep with one shut, one open orb,  
 Cried the Pope's great self,—Innocent by name 300  
 And nature too, and eighty-six years old,  
 Antonio Pignatelli of Naples, Pope  
 Who had trod many lands, known many deeds,  
 Probed many hearts, beginning with his own,  
 And now was far in readiness for God,— 305  
 '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, 311  
 Taste some vituperation, bite away,  
 Whether at marjoram-sprig or garlic-clove,  
 Aught it may sport with, spoil, and then spit forth)  
 "Leave them alone," bade he, "those Molinists ! 315

"Who may have other light than we perceive,  
 "Or why is it the whole world hates them thus?"  
 Also he peeled off that last scandal-rag  
 Of Nepotism ; and so observed the poor  
 That men would merrily say, "Halt, deaf and blind, 320  
 "Who feed on fat things, leave the master's self  
 "To gather up the fragments of his feast,  
 'These be the nephews of Pope Innocent !—  
 "His own meal costs but five carlines a day,  
 "Poor-priest's allowance, for he claims no more." 325  
 —He cried of a sudden, this great good old Pope,  
 When they appealed in last resort to him,  
 "I have mastered the whole matter : I nothing doubt.  
 "Though Guido stood forth priest from head to heel,  
 "Instead of, as alleged, a piece of one,— 330  
 "And further, were he, from the tonsured scalp  
 "To the sandaled sole of him, my son and Christ's,  
 "Instead of touching us by finger-tip  
 "As you assert, and pressing up so close  
 "Only to set a blood-smutch on our robe,— 335  
 "I and Christ would renounce all right in him.  
 "Am I not Pope, and presently to die,  
 "And busied how to render my account,  
 "And shall I wait a day ere I decide  
 "On doing or not doing justice here? 340  
 "Cut off his head to-morrow by this time,



“ Hang up his four mates, two on either hand,  
 “ And end one business more !”

So said, so done—

Rather so writ, for the old Pope bade this, 345  
 I find, with his particular chirograph,  
 His own no such infirm hand, Friday night ;  
 And next day, February Twenty Two,  
 Since our salvation Sixteen Ninety Eight,  
 —Not at the proper head-and-hanging-place 350  
 On bridge-foot close by Castle Angelo,  
 Where custom somewhat staled the spectacle,  
 (’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,— 355  
 The cavalcading promenading place  
 Beside the gate and opposite the church  
 Under the Pincian gardens green with Spring,  
 ’Neath the obelisk ’twixt the fountains in the Square,  
 Did Guido and his fellows find their fate, 360  
 All Rome for witness, and—my writer adds—  
 Remonstrant in its universal grief,  
 Since Guido had the suffrage of all Rome.

This is the bookful ; thus far take the truth,  
 The untempered gold, the fact untampered with, 365

The mere ring-metal ere the ring be made !  
 And what has hitherto come of it? Who preserves  
 The memory of this Guido, and his wife  
 Pompilia, more than Ademollo's name,  
 The etcher of those prints, two *crazie* each,           370  
 Saved by a stone from snowing broad the Square  
 With scenic backgrounds? Was this truth of force?  
 Able to take its own part as truth should,  
 Sufficient, self-sustaining? Why, if so—  
 Yonder 's a fire, into it goes my book,               375  
 As who shall say me nay, and what the loss?  
 You know the tale already : I may ask,  
 Rather than think to tell you, more thereof,—  
 Ask you not merely who were he and she,  
 Husband and wife, what manner of mankind,       380  
 But how you hold concerning this and that  
 Other yet-unnamed actor in the piece.  
 The young frank handsome courtly Canon, now,  
 The priest, declared the lover of the wife,  
 He who, no question, did elope with her,           385  
 For certain bring the tragedy about,  
 Giuseppe Caponsacchi ;—his strange course  
 I' the matter, was it right or wrong or both?  
 Then the old couple, slaughtered with the wife  
 By the husband as accomplices in crime,           390  
 Those Comparini, Pietro and his spouse,—

What say you to the right or wrong of that,  
 When, at a known name whispered through the door  
 Of a lone villa on a Christmas night,  
 It opened that the joyous hearts inside 395  
 Might welcome as it were an angel-guest  
 Come in Christ's name to knock and enter, sup  
 And satisfy the loving ones he saved ;  
 And so did welcome devils and their death?  
 I have been silent on that circumstance 400  
 Although the couple passed for close of kin  
 To wife and husband, were by some accounts  
 Pompilia's very parents : you know best.  
 Also that infant the great joy was for,  
 That Gaetano, the wife's two-weeks' babe, 405  
 The husband's first-born child, his son and heir,  
 Whose birth and being turned his night to day—  
 Why must the father kill the mother thus  
 Because she bore his son and saved himself?  
  
 Well, British Public, ye who like me not, 410  
 (God love you !) and will have your proper laugh  
 At the dark question, laugh it ! I laugh first.  
 Truth must prevail, the proverb vows ; and truth  
 —Here is it all i' the book at last, as first  
 There it was all i' the heads and hearts of Rome 415  
 Gentle and simple, never to fall nor fade

Nor be forgotten. Yet, a little while,  
 The passage of a century or so,  
 Decads thrice five, and here 's time paid his tax,  
 Oblivion gone home with her harvesting, 420  
 And all left smooth again as scythe could shave.  
 Far from beginning with you London folk,  
 I took my book to Rome first, tried truth's power  
 On likely people. "Have you met such names?  
 "Is a tradition extant of such facts? 425  
 "Your law-courts stand, your records frown a-row :  
 "What if I rove and rummage?" "—Why, you 'll  
     waste  
 "Your pains and end as wise as you began !"  
 Everyone snickered : "names and facts thus old  
 "Are newer much than Europe news we find 430  
 "Down in to-day's *Diario*. Records, quotha?  
 "Why, the French burned them, what else do the  
     French?  
 "The rap-and-rending nation ! And it tells  
 "Against the Church, no doubt,—another gird  
 "At the Temporality, your Trial, of course?" 435  
 "—Quite otherwise this time," submitted I ;  
 "Clean for the Church and dead against the world,  
 "The flesh and the devil, does it tell for once."  
 "—The rarer and the happier ! All the same,  
 "Content you with your treasure of a book, 440

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

Yes and no!

From the book, yes; thence bit by bit I dug  
 The lingot truth, that memorable day,  
 Assayed and knew my piecemeal gain was gold,— 460  
 Yes; but from something else surpassing that,  
 Something of mine which, mixed up with the mass,  
 Made it bear hammer and be firm to file.  
 Fancy with fact is just one fact the more;  
 To-wit, that fancy has informed, transpierced, 465

Thridded and so thrown fast the facts else free,  
As right through ring and ring runs the djereed  
And binds the loose, one bar without a break.  
I fused my live soul and that inert stuff,  
Before attempting smithcraft, on the night 470  
After the day when,—truth thus grasped and gained,—  
The book was shut and done with and laid by  
On the cream-coloured massive agate, broad  
'Neath the twin cherubs in the tarnished frame  
O' the mirror, tall thence to the ceiling-top. 475  
And from the reading, and that slab I leant  
My elbow on, the while I read and read,  
I turned, to free myself and find the world,  
And stepped out on the narrow terrace, built  
Over the street and opposite the church, 480  
And paced its lozenge-brickwork sprinkled cool;  
Because Felice-church-side stretched, a-glow  
Through each square window fringed for festival,  
Whence came the clear voice of the cloistered ones  
Chanting a chant made for midsummer nights— 485  
I know not what particular praise of God,  
It always came and went with June. Beneath  
I' the street, quick shown by openings of the sky  
When flame fell silently from cloud to cloud,  
Richer than that gold snow Jove rained on Rhodes, 490  
The townsmen walked by twos and threes, and talked,

Drinking the blackness in default of air—  
A busy human sense beneath my feet :  
While in and out the terrace-plants, and round  
One branch of tall datura, waxed and waned 495  
The lamp-fly lured there, wanting the white flower.  
Over the roof o' the lighted church I looked  
A bowshot to the street's end, north away  
Out of the Roman gate to the Roman road  
By the river, till I felt the Apennine. 500  
And there would lie Arezzo, the man's town,  
The woman's trap and cage and torture-place,  
Also the stage where the priest played his part,  
A spectacle for angels,—ay, indeed,  
There lay Arezzo ! Farther then I fared, 505  
Feeling my way on through the hot and dense,  
Romeward, until I found the wayside inn  
By Castelnuovo's few mean hut-like homes  
Huddled together on the hill-foot bleak,  
Bare, broken only by that tree or two 510  
Against the sudden bloody splendour poured  
Cursewise in 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. 515  
Whence I went on again, the end was near,  
Step by step, missing none and marking all,

Till Rome itself, the ghastly goal, I reached.  
Why, all the while,—how could it otherwise?—  
The life in me abolished the death of things, 520  
Deep calling unto deep: as then and there  
Acted itself over again once more  
The tragic piece. I saw with my own eyes  
In Florence as I trod the terrace, breathed  
The beauty and the fearfulness of night, 525  
How it had run, this round from Rome to Rome—  
Because, you are to know, they lived at Rome,  
Pompilia's parents, as they thought themselves,  
Two poor ignoble hearts who did their best  
Part God's way, part the other way than God's, 530  
To somehow make a shift and scramble through  
The world's mud, careless if it splashed and spoiled,  
Provided they might so hold high, keep clean  
Their child's soul, one soul white enough for three,  
And lift it to whatever star should stoop, 535  
What possible sphere of purer life than theirs  
Should come in aid of whiteness hard to save.  
I saw the star stoop, that they strained to touch,  
And did touch and depose their treasure on,  
As Guido Franceschini took away 540  
Pompilia to be his for evermore,  
While they sang "Now let us depart in peace,  
"Having beheld thy glory, Guido's wife!"



I saw the star supposed, but fog o' the fen,  
 Gilded star-fashion by a glint from hell ; 545  
 Having been heaved up, haled on its gross way,  
 By hands unguessed before, invisible help  
 From a dark brotherhood, and specially  
 Two obscure goblin creatures, fox-faced this,  
 Cat-clawed the other, called his next of kin 550  
 By Guido the main monster,—cloaked and caped,  
 Making as they were priests, to mock God more,—  
 Abate Paul, Canon Girolamo.  
 These who had rolled the starlike pest to Rome  
 And stationed it to suck up and absorb 555  
 The sweetness of Pompilia, rolled again  
 That bloated bubble, with her soul inside,  
 Back to Arezzo and a palace there—  
 Or say, a fissure in the honest earth  
 Whence long ago had curled the vapour first, 560  
 Blown big by nether fires to appal day :  
 It touched home, broke, and blasted far and wide.  
 I saw the cheated couple find the cheat  
 And guess what foul rite they were captured for,—  
 Too fain to follow over hill and dale 565  
 That child of theirs caught up thus in the cloud  
 And carried by the Prince o' the Power of the Air  
 Whither he would, to wilderness or sea.  
 I saw them, in the potency of fear,



No other than the angel of this life,  
Whose care is lest men see too much at once. 595  
He made the sign, such God-glimpse must suffice,  
Nor prejudice the Prince o' the Power of the Air,  
Whose ministration piles us overhead  
What we call, first, earth's roof and, last, heaven's floor,  
Now grate o' the trap, then outlet of the cage: 600  
So took the lady, left the priest alone,  
And once more canopied the world with black.  
But through the blackness I saw Rome again,  
And where a solitary villa stood  
In a lone garden-quarter: it was eve, 605  
The second of the year, and oh so cold!  
Ever and anon there flittered through the air  
A snow-flake, and a scanty couch of snow  
Crusted the grass-walk and the garden-mould.  
All was grave, silent, sinister,—when, ha? 610  
Glimmeringly did a pack of were-wolves pad  
The snow, those flames were Guido's eyes in front,  
And all five found and footed it, the track,  
To where a threshold-streak of warmth and light  
Betrayed the villa-door with life inside, 615  
While an inch outside were those blood-bright eyes,  
And black lips wrinkling o'er the flash of teeth,  
And tongues that lolled—Oh God that madest man!  
They parleyed in their language. Then one whined—

That was the policy and master-stroke — 620  
 Deep in his throat whispered what seemed a name—  
 “Open to Caponsacchi!” Guido cried:  
 “Gabriel!” cried Lucifer at Eden-gate.  
 Wide as a heart, opened the door at once,  
 Showing the joyous couple, and their child 625  
 The two-weeks’ mother, to the wolves, the wolves  
 To them. Close eyes! And when the corpses lay  
 Stark-stretched, and those the wolves, their wolf-work  
     done,  
 Were safe-embosomed by the night again,  
 I knew a necessary change in things; 630  
 As when the worst watch of the night gives way,  
 And there comes duly, to take cognizance,  
 The scrutinizing eye-point of some star—  
 And who despairs of a new daybreak now?  
 Lo, the first ray protruded on those five! 635  
 It reached them, and each felon writhed transfixed.  
 Awhile they palpitated on the spear  
 Motionless over Tophet: stand or fall?  
 “I say, the spear should fall—should stand, I say!”  
 Cried the world come to judgment, granting grace 640  
 Or dealing doom according to world’s wont,  
 Those world’s-bystanders grouped on Rome’s cross-  
     road  
 At prick and summons of the primal curse

Which bids man love as well as make a lie.  
There prattled they, discoursed the right and wrong,  
Turned wrong to right, proved wolves sheep and sheep  
wolves, 646  
So that you scarce distinguished fell from fleece ;  
Till out spoke a great guardian of the fold,  
Stood up, put forth his hand that held the crook,  
And motioned that the arrested point decline : 650  
Horribly off, the wriggling dead-weight reeled,  
Rushed to the bottom and lay ruined there.  
Though still at the pit's mouth, despite the smoke  
O' the burning, tarriers turned again to talk  
And trim the balance, and detect at least 655  
A touch of wolf in what showed whitest sheep,  
A cross of sheep redeeming the whole wolf,—  
Vex truth a little longer :—less and less,  
Because years came and went, and more and more  
Brought new lies with them to be loved in turn. 660  
Till all at once the memory of the thing,—  
The fact that, wolves or sheep, such creatures were,—  
Which hitherto, however men supposed,  
Had somehow plain and pillar-like prevailed  
I' the midst of them, indisputably fact, 665  
Granite, time's tooth should grate against, not graze,—  
Why, this proved sandstone, friable, fast to fly  
And give its grain away at wish o' the wind.

Ever and ever more diminutive,  
 Base gone, shaft lost, only entablature, 670  
 Dwindled into no bigger than a book,  
 Lay of the column ; and that little, left  
 By the roadside 'mid the ordure, shards and weeds.  
 Until I haply, wandering that lone way,  
 Kicked it up, turned it over, and recognized, 675  
 For all the crumblement, this abacus,  
 This square old yellow book,—could calculate  
 By this the lost proportions of the style.

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

To stay the craving of a client there,  
 Who bound the same and so produced my book. 695  
 Lovers of dead truth, did ye fare the worse?  
 Lovers of live truth, found ye false my tale?

Well, now ; there 's nothing in nor out o' the world  
 Good except truth : yet this, the something else,  
 What 's this then, which proves good yet seems untrue?  
 This that I mixed with truth, motions of mine 701  
 That quickened, made the inertness malleolable  
 O' the gold was not mine,—what 's your name for  
 this?

Are means to the end, themselves in part the end?  
 Is fiction which makes fact alive, fact too? 705  
 The somehow may be thishow.

I find first

Writ down for very A B C of fact,  
 " In the beginning God made heaven and earth ;"  
 From which, no matter with what lisp, I spell 710  
 And speak you out a consequence—that man,  
 Man,—as befits the made, the inferior thing,—  
 Purposed, since made, to grow, not make in turn,  
 Yet forced to try and make, else fail to grow,—  
 Formed to rise, reach at, if not grasp and gain 715  
 The good beyond him,—which attempt is growth,—  
 Repeats God's process in man's due degree,

Attaining man's proportionate result,—  
 Creates, no, but resuscitates, perhaps.  
 Inalienable, the arch-prerogative 720  
 Which turns thought. act—conceives, expresses too!  
 No less, man, bounded, yearning to be free,  
 May so project his surplusage of soul  
 In search of body, so add self to self  
 By owning what lay ownerless before,— 725  
 So find, so fill full, so appropriate forms—  
 That, although nothing which had never life  
 Shall get life from him, be, not having been,  
 Yet, something dead may get to live again,  
 Something with too much life or not enough, 730  
 Which, either way imperfect, ended once :  
 An end whereat man's impulse intervenes,  
 Makes new beginning, starts the dead alive,  
 Completes the incomplete and saves the thing.  
 Man's breath were vain to light a virgin wick,— 735  
 Half-burned-out, all but quite-quenched wicks o' the  
     lamp  
 Stationed for temple-service on this earth,  
 These indeed let him breathe on and relume!  
 For such man's feat is, in the due degree,  
 —Mimic creation, galvanism for life, 740  
 But still a glory portioned in the scale.  
 Why did the mage say,—feeling as we are wont



For truth, and stopping midway short of truth,  
And resting on a lie,—“ I raise a ghost ” ?  
“ Because,” he taught adepts, “ man makes not man.  
“ Yet by a special gift, an art of arts, 746  
“ More insight and more oversight and much more  
“ Will to use both of these than boast my mates,  
“ I can detach from me, commission forth  
“ Half of my soul ; which in its pilgrimage 750  
“ O'er old unwandered waste ways of the world,  
“ May chance upon some fragment of a whole,  
“ Rag of flesh, scrap of bone in dim disuse,  
“ Smoking flax that fed fire once : prompt therein  
“ I enter, spark-like, put old powers to play, 755  
“ Push lines out to the limit, lead forth last  
“ (By a moonrise through a ruin of a crypt)  
“ What shall be mistily seen, murmuringly heard,  
“ Mistakenly felt : then write my name with Faust's ! ”  
Oh, Faust, why Faust ? Was not Elisha once ?— 760  
Who bade them lay his staff on a corpse-face.  
There was no voice, no hearing : he went in  
Therefore, and shut the door upon them twain,  
And prayed unto the Lord : and he went up  
And lay upon the corpse, dead on the couch, 765  
And put his mouth upon its mouth, his eyes  
Upon its eyes, his hands upon its hands,  
And stretched him on the flesh ; the flesh waxed warm :

And he returned, walked to and fro the house,  
 And went up, stretched him on the flesh again, 770  
 And the eyes opened. 'T is a credible feat  
 With the right man and way.

Enough of me !

The Book ! I turn its medicinale leaves  
 In London now till, as in Florence erst, 775  
 A spirit laughs and leaps through every limb,  
 And lights my eye, and lifts me by the hair,  
 Letting me have my will again with these  
 —How title I the dead alive once more?

Count Guido Franceschini the Aretine, 780  
 Descended of an ancient house, though poor,  
 A beak-nosed bushy-bearded black-haired lord,  
 Lean, pallid, low of stature yet robust,  
 Fifty years old,—having four years ago  
 Married Pompilia Comparini, young, 785  
 Good, beautiful, at Rome, where she was born,  
 And brought her to Arezzo, where they lived  
 Unhappy lives, whatever curse the cause,—  
 This husband, taking four accomplices,  
 Followed this wife to Rome, where she was fled 790  
 From their Arezzo to find peace again,  
 In convoy, eight months earlier, of a priest,  
 Aretine also, of still nobler birth,

Giuseppe Caponsacchi,—caught her there  
 Quiet in a villa on a Christmas night, 795  
 With only Pietro and Violante by,  
 Both her putative parents ; killed the three,  
 Aged, they, seventy each, and she, seventeen,  
 And, two weeks since, the mother of his babe  
 First-born and heir to what the style was worth 800  
 O' the Guido who determined, dared and did  
 This deed just as he purposed point by point.  
 Then, bent upon escape, but hotly pressed,  
 And captured with his co-mates that same night,  
 He, brought to trial, stood on this defence— 805  
 Injury to his honour caused the act ;  
 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 810  
 I' the flight aforesaid, wronged nor God nor man.  
 “ Nor false she, nor yet faithless they,” replied  
 The accuser ; “ cloaked and masked this murder glooms ;  
 “ True was Pompilia, loyal too the pair ;  
 “ Out of the man's own heart a monster curled 815  
 “ 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 ;                   820  
 Then was the Pope, that good Twelfth Innocent,  
 Appealed to : who well weighed what went before,  
 Affirmed the guilt and gave the guilty doom.

Let this old woe step on the stage again !  
 Act itself o'er anew for men to judge,                   825  
 Not by the very sense and sight indeed—  
 (Which take at best imperfect cognizance,  
 Since, how heart moves brain, and how both move hand,  
 What mortal ever in entirety saw?)  
 —No dose of purer truth than man digests,                   830  
 But truth with falsehood, milk that feeds him now,  
 Not strong meat he may get to bear some day—  
 To-wit, by voices we call evidence,  
 Uproar in the echo, live fact deadened down,  
 Talked over, bruited abroad, whispered away,                   835  
 Yet helping us to all we seem to hear :  
 For how else know we save by worth of word?

Here are the voices presently shall sound  
 In due succession. First, the world's outcry  
 Around the rush and ripple of any fact                   840  
 Fallen stonewise, plumb on the smooth face of things ;  
 The world's guess, as it crowds the bank o' the pool,  
 At what were figure and substance, by their splash :

Then, by vibrations in the general mind,  
 At depth of deed already out of reach. 845  
 This threefold murder of the day before,—  
 Say, Half-Rome's feel after the vanished truth ;  
 Honest enough, as the way is : all the same,  
 Harbours in the centre of its sense  
 A hidden germ of failure, shy but sure, 850  
 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 ; 855  
 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 860  
 Rather than in Pompilia's wrong and right :  
 Who shall say how, who shall say why? 'T is there—  
 The instinctive theorizing whence a fact  
 Looks to the eye as the eye likes the look.  
 Gossip in a public place, a sample-speech. 865  
 Some worthy, with his previous hint to find  
 A husband's side the safer, and no whit  
 Aware he is not Æacus the while,—  
 How such an one supposes and states fact

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

Next, from Rome's other half, the opposite feel  
 For truth with a like swerve, like unsuccess,—  
 Or if success, by no skill but more luck 885  
 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?" 890  
 "—Why, if I must choose, he with the pink scarf."  
 Doubtless for some such reason choice fell here.  
 A piece of public talk to correspond  
 At the next stage of the story ; just a day

Let pass and new day brings the proper change. 895  
 Another sample-speech i' the market-place  
 O' the Barberini by the Capucins ;  
 Where the old Triton, at his fountain-sport,  
 Bernini's creature plated to the paps,  
 Puffs up steel sleet which breaks to diamond dust, 900  
 A spray of sparkles snorted from his conch,  
 High over the caritellas, out o' the way  
 O' the motley merchandizing multitude.  
 Our murder has been done three days ago,  
 The frost is over and gone, the south wind laughs, 905  
 And, to the very tiles of each red roof  
 A-smoke i' the sunshine, Rome lies gold and glad :  
 So, listen how, to the other half of Rome,  
 Pompilia seemed a saint and martyr both !

Then, yet another day let come and go, 910  
 With pause prelusive still of novelty,  
 Hear a fresh speaker !—neither this nor that  
 Half-Rome aforesaid ; something bred of both :  
 One and one breed the inevitable three.  
 Such is the personage harangues you next ; 915  
 The elaborated product, *tertium quid* :  
 Rome's first commotion in subsidence gives  
 The curd o' the cream, flower o' the wheat, as it were,  
 And finer sense o' the city. Is this plain?

You get a reasoned statement of the case, 920  
 Eventual verdict of the curious few  
 Who care to sift a business to the bran  
 Nor coarsely bolt it like the simpler sort.  
 Here, after ignorance, instruction speaks ;  
 Here, clarity of candour, history's soul, 925  
 The critical mind, in short : no gossip-guess.  
 What the superior social section thinks,  
 In person of some man of quality  
 Who,—breathing musk from lace-work and brocade,  
 His solitaire amid the flow of frill, 930  
 Powdered peruke on nose, and bag at back,  
 And cane dependent from the ruffled wrist,—  
 Harangues in silvery and selectest phrase  
 'Neath waxlight in a glorified saloon  
 Where mirrors multiply the girandole : 935  
 Courting the approbation of no mob,  
 But Eminence This and All-Illustrious That  
 Who take snuff softly, range in well-bred ring,  
 Card-table-quitters for observance' sake,  
 Around the argument, the rational word— 940  
 Still, spite its weight and worth, a sample-speech.  
 How Quality dissertated on the case.

So much for Rome and rumour ; smoke comes first :  
 Once let smoke rise untroubled, we descry



Clearlier what tongues of flame may spire and spit 945  
To eye and ear, each with appropriate tinge  
According to its food, or pure or foul.  
The actors, no mere rumours of the act,  
Intervene. First you hear Count Guido's voice,  
In a small chamber that adjoins the court, 950  
Where Governor and Judges, summoned thence,  
Tommati, Venturini and the rest,  
Find the accused ripe for declaring truth.  
Soft-cushioned sits he ; yet shifts seat, shirks touch,  
As, with a twitchy brow and wincing lip 955  
And cheek that changes to all kinds of white,  
He proffers his defence, in tones subdued  
Near to mock-mildness now, so mournful seems  
The obtuser sense truth fails to satisfy ;  
Now, moved, from pathos at the wrong endured, 960  
To passion ; for the natural man is roused  
At fools who first do wrong then pour the blame  
Of their wrong-doing, Satan-like, on Job.  
Also his tongue at times is hard to curb ;  
Incisive, nigh satiric bites the phrase, 965  
Rough-raw, yet somehow claiming privilege  
—It is so hard for shrewdness to admit  
Folly means no harm when she calls black white !  
—Eruption momentary at the most,  
Modified forthwith by a fall o' the fire, 970

Sage acquiescence ; for the world 's the world,  
 And, what it errs in, Judges rectify :  
 He feels he has a fist, then folds his arms  
 Crosswise and makes his mind up to be meek.  
 And never once does he detach his eye 975  
 From those ranged there to slay him or to save,  
 But does his best man's-service for himself,  
 Despite,—what twitches brow and makes lip wince,—  
 His limbs' late taste of what was called the Cord,  
 Or Vigil-torture more facetiously. 980  
 Even so ; they were wont to tease the truth  
 Out of loth witness (toying, trifling time)  
 By torture : 't was a trick, a vice of the age,  
 Here, there and everywhere, what would you have?  
 Religion used to tell Humanity 985  
 She gave him warrant or denied him course.  
 And since the course was much to his own mind,  
 Of pinching flesh and pulling bone from bone  
 To unhusk truth a-hiding in its hulls,  
 Nor whisper of a warning stopped the way, 990  
 He, in their joint behalf, the burly slave,  
 Bestirred him, mauled and maimed all recusants,  
 While, prim in place, Religion overlooked ;  
 And so had done till doomsday, never a sign  
 Nor sound of interference from her mouth, 995  
 But that at last the burly slave wiped brow,

Let eye give notice as if soul were there,  
 Muttered " 'T is a vile trick, foolish more than vile,  
 " Should have been counted sin ; I make it so :  
 " At any rate no more of it for me— 1000  
 " Nay, for I break the torture-engine thus !"  
 Then did Religion start up, stare amain,  
 Look round for help and see none, smile and say  
 " What, broken is the rack? Well done of thee !  
 " Did I forget to abrogate its use? 1005  
 " Be the mistake in common with us both !  
 " —One more fault our blind age shall answer for,  
 " Down in my book denounced though it must be  
 " Somewhere. Henceforth find truth by milder means !"  
 Ah but, Religion, did we wait for thee 1010  
 To ope the book, that serves to sit upon,  
 And pick such place out, we should wait indeed !  
 That is all history : and what is not now,  
 Was then, defendants found it to their cost.  
 How Guido, after being tortured, spoke. 1015

Also hear Caponsacchi who comes next,  
 Man and priest—could you comprehend the coil!—  
 In days when that was rife which now is rare.  
 How, mingling each its multifarious wires,  
 Now heaven, now earth, now heaven and earth at once,  
 Had plucked at and perplexed their puppet here, 1021

Played off the young frank personable priest ;  
 Sworn fast and tonsured plain heaven's celibate,  
 And yet earth's clear-accepted servitor,  
 A courtly spiritual Cupid, squire of dames 1025  
 By law of love and mandate of the mode.  
 The Church's own, or why parade her seal,  
 Wherefore that chrism and consecrative work ?  
 Yet verily the world's, or why go badged  
 A prince of sonneteers and lutanists, 1030  
 Show colour of each vanity in vogue  
 Borne with decorum due on blameless breast ?  
 All that is changed now, as he tells the court  
 How he had played the part excepted at ;  
 Tells it, moreover, now the second time : 1035  
 Since, for his cause of scandal, his own share  
 I' the flight from home and husband of the wife,  
 He has been censured, punished in a sort  
 By relegation,—exile, we should say,  
 To a short distance for a little time,— 1040  
 Whence he is summoned on a sudden now,  
 Informed that she, he thought to save, is lost,  
 And, in a breath, bidden re-tell his tale,  
 Since the first telling somehow missed effect,  
 And then advise in the matter. There stands he, 1045  
 While the same grim black-panelled chamber blinks  
 As though rubbed shiny with the sins of Rome

Told the same oak for ages—wave-washed wall  
Against which sets a sea of wickedness.  
There, where you yesterday heard Guido speak, 1050  
Speaks Caponsacchi ; and there face him too  
Tommati, Venturini and the rest  
Who, eight months earlier, scarce repressed the smile,  
Forewent the wink ; waived recognition so  
Of peccadillos incident to youth, 1055  
Especially youth high-born ; for youth means love,  
Vows can't change nature, priests are only men,  
And love likes stratagem and subterfuge  
Which age, that once was youth, should recognize,  
May blame, but needs not press too hard upon. 1060  
Here sit the old Judges then, but with no grace  
Of reverend carriage, magisterial port :  
For why? The accused of eight months since,—the  
same  
Who cut the conscious figure of a fool,  
Changed countenance, dropped bashful gaze to  
ground, 1065  
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,  
As he speaks rapidly, angrily, speech that smites : 1070  
And they keep silence, bear blow after blow,

Because the seeming-solitary man,  
 Speaking for God, may have an audience too,  
 Invisible, no discreet judge provokes.  
 How the priest Caponsacchi said his say. 1075

Then a soul sighs its lowest and its last  
 After the loud ones,—so much breath remains  
 Unused by the four-days'-dying ; for she lived  
 Thus long, miraculously long, 't was thought,  
 Just that Pompilia might defend herself. 1080  
 How, while the hireling and the alien stoop,  
 Comfort, yet question,—since the time is brief,  
 And folk, allowably inquisitive,  
 Encircle the low pallet where she lies  
 In the good house that helps the poor to die,— 1085  
 Pompilia tells the story of her life.  
 For friend and lover,—leech and man of law  
 Do service ; busy helpful ministrants  
 As varied in their calling as their mind,  
 Temper and age : and yet from all of these, 1090  
 About the white bed under the arched roof,  
 Is somehow, as it were, evolved a one,—  
 Small separate sympathies combined and large,  
 Nothings that were, grown something very much :  
 As if the bystanders gave each his straw, 1095  
 All he had, though a trifle in itself,

Which, plaited all together, made a Cross  
 Fit to die looking on and praying with,  
 Just as well as if ivory or gold.

So, to the common kindliness she speaks, 1100  
 There being scarce more privacy at the last  
 For mind than body : but she is used to bear,  
 And only unused to the brotherly look.  
 How she endeavoured to explain her life.

Then, since a Trial ensued, a touch o' the same 1105  
 To sober us, flustered with frothy talk,  
 And teach our common sense its helplessness.  
 For why deal simply with divining-rod,  
 Scrape where we fancy secret sources flow,  
 And ignore law, the recognized machine, 1110  
 Elaborate display of pipe and wheel  
 Framed to 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, 1115  
 Give you a single grind of law at least!  
 One orator, of two on either side,  
 Shall teach us the puissance of the tongue  
 —That is, o' the pen which simulated tongue  
 On paper and saved all except the sound 1120  
 Which never was. Law's speech beside law's thought?

That were too stunning, too immense an odds :  
 That point of vantage law lets nobly pass.  
 One lawyer shall admit us to behold  
 The manner of the making out a case,                    1125  
 First fashion of a speech ; the chick in egg,  
 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,—            1130  
 The jolly learned man of middle age,  
 Cheek and jowl all in laps with fat and law,  
 Mirthful as mighty, yet, as great hearts use,  
 Despite the name and fame that tempt our flesh,  
 Constant to that devotion of the hearth,            1135  
 Still captive in those dear domestic ties !—  
 How he,—having a cause to triumph with,  
 All kind of interests to keep intact,  
 More than one efficacious personage  
 To tranquillize, conciliate and secure,            1140  
 And above all, public anxiety  
 To quiet, show its Guido in good hands,—  
 Also, as if such burdens were too light,  
 A certain family-feast to claim his care,  
 The birthday-banquet for the only son—            1145  
 Paternity at smiling strife with law—  
 How he brings both to buckle in one bond ;



And, thick at throat, with waterish under-eye,  
 Turns to his task and settles in his seat  
 And puts his utmost means in practice now :      1150  
 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,  
 Conceives and inchoates the argument,      1155  
 Sprinkling each flower appropriate to the time,  
 —Ovidian quip or Ciceronian crank,  
 A-bubble in the larynx while he laughs,  
 As he had fritters deep down frying there.  
 How he turns, twists, and tries the oily thing      1160  
 Shall be—first speech for Guido 'gainst the Fisc.  
 Then with a skip as it were from heel to head,  
 Leaving yourselves fill up the middle bulk  
 O' the Trial, reconstruct its shape august,  
 From such exordium clap we to the close ;      1165  
 Give you, if we dare wing to such a height,  
 The absolute glory in some full-grown speech  
 On the other side, some finished butterfly,  
 Some breathing diamond-flake with leaf-gold fans,  
 That takes the air, no trace of worm it was,      1170  
 Or cabbage-bed it had production from.  
 Giovambattista o' the Bottini, Fisc,  
 Pompilia's patron by the chance of the hour,

To-morrow her persecutor,—composite, he,  
 As becomes who must meet such various calls— 1175  
 Odds of age joined in him with ends of youth.  
 A man of ready smile and facile tear,  
 Improvised hopes, despairs at nod and beck,  
 And language—ah, the gift of eloquence!  
 Language that goes, goes, easy as a glove, 1180  
 O'er good and evil, smoothens both to one.  
 Rashness helps caution with him, fires the straw,  
 In free enthusiastic careless fit,  
 On the first proper pinnacle of rock  
 Which offers, as reward for all that zeal, 1185  
 To lure some bark to founder and bring gain:  
 While calm sits Caution, rapt with heavenward eye,  
 A true confessor's gaze, amid the glare  
 Beaconing to the breaker, death and hell.  
 "Well done, thou good and faithful " she approves:  
 "Hadst thou let slip a faggot to the beach, 1191  
 "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!" 1195  
 Just so compounded is the outside man,  
 Blue juvenile pure eye and pippin cheek,  
 And brow all prematurely soiled and seamed  
 With sudden age, bright devastated hair.

Ah, but you miss the very tones o' the voice,      1200  
 The scrannel pipe that screams in heights of head,  
 As, in his modest studio, all alone,  
 The tall wight stands a-tiptoe, strives and strains,  
 Both eyes shut, like the cockerel that would crow,  
 Tries to his own self amorously o'er      1205  
 What never will be uttered else than so—  
 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,      1210  
 With desperate finger on dumb table-edge—  
 The sovereign rondo, shall conclude his *Suite*,  
 Charm an imaginary audience there,  
 From old Corelli to young Haendel, both  
 I' the flesh at Rome, ere he perforce go print      1215  
 The cold black score, mere music for the mind—  
 The last speech against Guido and his gang,  
 With special end to prove Pompilia pure.  
 How the Fisc vindicates Pompilia's fame.

Then comes the all but end, the ultimate      1220  
 Judgment save yours. Pope Innocent the Twelfth,  
 Simple, sagacious, mild yet resolute,  
 With prudence, probity and—what beside  
 From the other world he feels impress at times,

Having attained to fourscore years and six,— 1225  
 How, when the court found Guido and the rest  
 Guilty, but law supplied a subterfuge  
 And passed the final sentence to the Pope,  
 He, bringing his intelligence to bear  
 This last time on what ball behoves him drop 1230  
 In the urn, or white or black, does drop a black,  
 Send five souls more to just precede his own,  
 Stand him in stead and witness, if need were,  
 How he is wont to do God's work on earth.  
 The manner of his sitting out the dim 1235  
 Droop of a sombre February day  
 In the plain closet where he does such work,  
 With, from all Peter's treasury, one stool,  
 One table and one lathen crucifix.  
 There sits the Pope, his thoughts for company; 1240  
 Grave but not sad,—nay, something like a cheer  
 Leaves the lips free to be benevolent,  
 Which, all day long, did duty firm and fast.  
 A cherishing there is of foot and knee, 1244  
 A chafing loose-skinned large-veined hand with hand,—  
 What steward but knows when stewardship earns its  
     wage,  
 May levy praise, anticipate the lord?  
 He reads, notes, lays the papers down at last,  
 Muses, then takes a turn about the room;

Unclasps a huge tome in an antique guise,      1250  
Primitive print and tongue half obsolete,  
That stands him in diurnal stead ; opes page,  
Finds place where falls the passage to be conned  
According to an order long in use :  
And, as he comes upon the evening's chance,      1255  
Starts somewhat, solemnizes straight his smile,  
Then reads aloud that portion first to last,  
And at the end lets flow his own thoughts forth  
Likewise aloud, for respite and relief,  
Till by the dreary relics of the west      1260  
Wan through the half-moon window, all his light,  
He bows the head while the lips move in prayer,  
Writes some three brief lines, signs and seals the same,  
Tinkles a hand-bell, bids the obsequious Sir  
Who puts foot presently o' the closet-sill      1265  
He watched outside of, bear as superscribed  
That mandate to the Governor forthwith :  
Then heaves abroad his cares in one good sigh,  
Traverses corridor with no arm's help,  
And so to sup as a clear conscience should.      1270  
The manner of the judgment of the Pope.

Then must speak Guido yet a second time,  
Satan's old saw being apt here—skin for skin,  
All a man hath that will he give for life.

While life was graspable and gainable, 1275  
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 1280  
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. 1285  
On a stone bench in a close fetid cell,  
Where the hot vapour of an agony,  
Struck into drops on the cold wall, runs down—  
Horrible worms made out of sweat and tears—  
There crouch, well nigh to the knees in dungeon-straw,  
Lit by the sole lamp suffered for their sake, 1291  
Two awe-struck figures, this a Cardinal,  
That an Abate, both of old styled friends  
O' the thing part man part monster in the midst,  
So changed is Franceschini's gentle blood. 1295  
The tiger-cat screams now, that whined before,  
That pried and tried and trod so gingerly,  
Till in its silkiness the trap-teeth joined ;  
Then you know how the bristling fury foams.  
They listen, this wrapped in his folds of red, 1300

While his feet fumble for the filth below ;  
 The other, as beseems a stouter heart,  
 Working his best with beads and cross to ban  
 The enemy that comes in like a flood  
 Spite of the standard set up, verily 1305  
 And in no trope at all, against him there ·  
 For at the prison-gate, just a few steps  
 Outside, already, in the doubtful dawn,  
 Thither, from this side and from that, slow sweep  
 And settle down in silence solidly, 1310  
 Crow-wise, the frightful Brotherhood of Death.  
 Black-hatted and black-hooded huddle they,  
 Black rosaries a-dangling from each waist ;  
 So take they their grim station at the door,  
 Torches lit, skull-and-cross-bones-banner spread, 1315  
 And that gigantic Christ with open arms,  
 Grounded. Nor lacks there aught but that the group  
 Break forth, intone the lamentable psalm,  
 “ Out of the deeps, Lord, have I cried to thee ! ”—  
 When inside, from the true profound, a sign 1320  
 Shall bear intelligence that the foe is foiled,  
 Count Guido Franceschini has confessed,  
 And is absolved and reconciled with God.  
 Then they, intoning, may begin their march,  
 Make by the longest way for the People’s Square, 1325  
 Carry the criminal to his crime’s award :

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

Finally, even as thus by step and step 1330  
 I led you from the level of to-day  
 Up to the summit of so long ago,  
 Here, whence I point you the wide prospect round—  
 Let me, by like steps, slope you back to smooth,  
 Land you on mother-earth, no whit the worse, 1335  
 To feed o' the fat o' the furrow : free to dwell,  
 Taste our time's better things profusely spread  
 For all who love the level, corn and wine,  
 Much cattle and the many-folded fleece.  
 Shall not my friends go feast again on sward, 1340  
 Though cognizant of country in the clouds  
 Higher than wistful eagle's horny eye  
 Ever unclosed for, 'mid ancestral crags,  
 When morning broke and Spring was back once more,  
 And he died, heaven, save by his heart, unreached?  
 Yet heaven my fancy lifts to, ladder-like,— 1346  
 As Jack reached, holpen of his beanstalk-rungs !

A novel country : I might make it mine  
 By choosing which one aspect of the year  
 Suited mood best, and putting solely that 1350



On panel somewhere in the House of Fame,  
Landscaping what I saved, not what I saw :  
—Might fix you, whether frost in goblin-time  
Startled the moon with his abrupt bright laugh,  
Or, August's hair afloat in filmy fire, 1355  
She fell, arms wide, face foremost on the world,  
Swooned there and so singed out the strength of things.  
Thus were abolished Spring and Autumn both,  
The land dwarfed to one likeness of the land,  
Life cramped corpse-fashion. Rather learn and love  
Each facet-flash of the revolving year !— 1361  
Red, green and blue that whirl into a white,  
The variance now, the eventual unity,  
Which make the miracle. See it for yourselves,  
This man's act, changeable because alive ! 1365  
Action now shrouds, 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, 1370  
Shifted a hair's-breadth shoots you dark for bright,  
Suffuses bright with dark, and baffles so  
Your sentence absolute for shine or shade.  
Once set such orbs,—white styled, black stigmatized,—  
A-rolling, see them once on the other side 1375  
Your good men and your bad men every one

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

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

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

O lyric Love, half angel and half bird  
And all a wonder and a wild desire,—  
Boldest of hearts that ever braved the sun,  
Took sanctuary within the holier blue,  
And sang a kindred soul out to his face,— 1395  
Yet human at the red-ripe of the heart—  
When the first summons from the darkling earth  
Reached thee amid thy chambers, blanched their blue,  
And bared them of the glory—to drop down,

To toil for man, to suffer or to die,— 1400  
This is the same voice : can thy soul know change ?  
Hail then, and hearken from the realms of help !  
Never may I commence my song, my due  
To God who best taught song by gift of thee,  
Except with bent head and beseeching hand— 1405  
That still, despite the distance and the dark,  
What was, again may be ; some interchange  
Of grace, some splendour once thy very thought,  
Some benediction anciently thy smile :  
--Never conclude, but raising hand and head 1410  
Thither where eyes, that cannot reach, yet yearn  
For all hope, all sustainment, all reward,  
Their utmost up and on,—so blessing back  
In those thy realms of help, that heaven thy home,  
Some whiteness which, I judge, thy face makes proud,  
Some wanness where, I think, thy foot may fall ! 1416

## II.

*HALF-ROME.*

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

Sir, do you see,

They laid both bodies in the church, this morn

The first thing, on the chancel two steps up,  
 Behind the little marble balustrade ; 20  
 Disposed them, Pietro the old murdered fool  
 To the right of the altar, and his wretched wife  
 On the other side. In trying to count stabs,  
 People supposed Violante showed the most,  
 Till somebody explained us that mistake ; 25  
 His wounds had been dealt out indifferent where,  
 But she took all her stabbings in the face,  
 Since punished thus solely for honour's sake,  
*Honoris causâ*, that 's the proper term.  
 A delicacy there is, our gallants hold, 30  
 When you avenge your honour and only then,  
 That you disfigure the subject, fray the face,  
 Not just take life and end, in clownish guise.  
 It was Violante gave the first offence,  
 Got therefore the conspicuous punishment : 35  
 While Pietro, who helped merely, his mere death  
 Answered the purpose, so his face went free.  
 We fancied even, free as you please, that face  
 Showed itself still intolerably wronged ;  
 Was wrinkled over with resentment yet, 40  
 Nor calm at all, as murdered faces use,  
 Once the worst ended : an indignant air  
 O' the head there was—'t is said the body turned  
 Round and away, rolled from Violante's side

Where they had laid it loving-husband-like. 45  
 If so, if corpses can be sensitive,  
 Why did not he roll right down altar-step,  
 Roll on through nave, roll fairly out of church,  
 Deprive Lorenzo of the spectacle,  
 Pay back thus the succession of affronts 50  
 Whereto this church had served as theatre ?  
 For see : at that same altar where he lies,  
 To that same inch of step, was brought the babe  
 For blessing after baptism, and there stiled  
 Pompilia, and a string of names beside, 55  
 By his bad wife, some seventeen years ago,  
 Who purchased her simply to palm on him,  
 Flatter his dotage and defraud the heirs.  
 Wait awhile ! Also to this very step  
 Did this Violante, twelve years afterward, 60  
 Bring, the mock-mother, that child-cheat full-grown,  
 Pompilia, in pursuance of her plot,  
 And there brave God and man a second time  
 By linking a new victim to the lie.  
 There, having made a match unknown to him, 65  
 She, still unknown to Pietro, tied the knot  
 Which nothing cuts except this kind of knife ;  
 Yes, made her daughter, as the girl was held,  
 Marry a man, and honest man beside,  
 And man of birth to boot,—clandestinely 70

Because of this, because of that, because  
 O' the devil's will to work his worst for once,—  
 Confident she could top her part at need  
 And, when her husband must be told in turn,  
 Ply the wife's trade, play off the sex's trick 75  
 And, alternating worry with quiet qualms,  
 Bravado with submissiveness, prettily fool  
 Her Pietro into patience : so it proved.  
 Ay, 't is four years since man and wife they grew,  
 This Guido Franceschini and this same 80  
 Pompilia, foolishly thought, falsely declared  
 A Comparini and the couple's child :  
 Just at this altar where, beneath the piece  
 Of Master Guido Reni, Christ on cross,  
 Second to nought observable in Rome, 85  
 That couple lie now, murdered yestereve.  
 Even the blind can see a providence here.

From dawn till now that it is growing dusk  
 A multitude has flocked and filled the church,  
 Coming and going, coming back again, 90  
 Till to count crazed one. Rome was at the show.  
 People climbed up the columns, fought for spikes  
 O' the chapel-rail to perch themselves upon,  
 Jumped over and so broke the wooden work  
 Painted like porphyry to deceive the eye ; 95

Serve the priests right ! The organ-loft was crammed,  
 Women were fainting, no few fights ensued,  
 In short, it was a show repaid your pains :  
 For, though their room was scant undoubtedly,  
 Yet they did manage matters, to be just, 100  
 A little at this Lorenzo. Body o' me !  
 I saw a body exposed once . . . never mind !  
 Enough that here the bodies had their due.  
 No stinginess in wax, a row all round,  
 And one big taper at each head and foot. 105

So, people pushed their way, and took their turn,  
 Saw, threw their eyes up, crossed themselves, gave place  
 'To pressure from behind, since all the world  
 Knew the old pair, could talk the tragedy  
 Over from first to last : Pompilia too, 110  
 Those who had known her—what 't was worth to them !  
 Guido's acquaintance was in less request ;  
 The Count had lounged somewhat too long in Rome,  
 Made himself cheap ; with him were hand and glove  
 Barbers and blear-eyed, as the ancient sings. 115  
 Also he is alive and like to be :  
 Had he considerately died,—aha !  
 I jostled Luca Cini on his staff,  
 Mute in the midst, the whole man one amaze,  
 Staring amain and crossing brow and breast. 120



"How now?" asked I. "T is seventy years," quoth he,  
 "Since I first saw, holding my father's hand,  
 "Bodies set forth: a many have I seen,  
 "Yet all was poor to this I live and see.  
 "Here the world's wickedness seals up the sum: 125  
 "What with Molinos' doctrine and this deed,  
 "Antichrist surely comes and doomsday's near.  
 "May I depart in peace, I have seen my see."  
 "Depart then," I advised, "nor block the road  
 "For youngsters still behindhand with such sights!" 130  
 "Why no," rejoins the venerable sire,  
 "I know it's horrid, hideous past belief,  
 "Burdensome far beyond what eye can bear;  
 "But they do promise, when Pompilia dies  
 "I' the course o' the day,—and she can't outlive night,—  
 "They'll bring her body also to expose 136  
 "Beside the parents, one, two, three a-breast;  
 "That were indeed a sight, which might I see,  
 "I trust I should not last to see the like!"  
 Whereat I bade the senior spare his shanks, 140  
 Since doctors give her till to-night to live,  
 And tell us how the butchery happened. "Ah,  
 "But you can't know!" sighs he, "I'll not despair:  
 "Beside I'm useful at explaining things—  
 "As, how the dagger laid there at the feet, 145  
 "Caused the peculiar cuts; I mind its make,

“ Triangular i’ the blade, a Genoese,  
 “ Armed with those little hook-teeth on the edge  
 “ To open in the flesh nor shut again :  
 “ I like to teach a novice : I shall stay !” 150  
 And stay he did, and stay be sure he will.

A personage came by the private door  
 At noon to have his look : I name no names :  
 Well then, His Eminence the Cardinal,  
 Whose servitor in honourable sort 155  
 Guido was once, the same who made the match,  
 (Will you have the truth ?) whereof we see effect.  
 No sooner whisper ran he was arrived  
 Than up pops Curate Carlo, a brisk lad,  
 Who never lets a good occasion slip, 160  
 And volunteers improving the event.  
 We looked he ’d give the history’s self some help,  
 Treat us to how the wife’s confession went  
 (This morning she confessed her crime, we know)  
 And, may-be, throw in something of the Priest— 165  
 If he ’s not ordered back, punished anew,  
 The gallant, Caponsacchi, Lucifer  
 I’ the garden where Pompilia, Eve-like, lured  
 Her Adam Guido to his fault and fall.  
 Think you we got a sprig of speech akin 170  
 To this from Carlo, with the Cardinal there ?

Too wary he was, too widely awake, I trow.  
 He did the murder in a dozen words ;  
 Then said that all such outrages crop forth  
 I' the course of nature when Molinos' tares           175  
 Are sown for wheat, flourish and choke the Church :  
 So slid on to the abominable sect  
 And the philosophic sin—we've heard all that,  
 And the Cardinal too, (who book-made on the same)  
 But, for the murder, left it where he found.           180  
 Oh but he's quick, the Curate, minds his game !  
 And, after all, we have the main o' the fact :  
 Case could not well be simpler,—mapped, as it were,  
 We follow the murder's maze from source to sea,  
 By the red line, past mistake : one sees indeed   185  
 Not only how all was and must have been,  
 But cannot other than be to the end of time.  
 Turn out here by the Ruspoli ! Do you hold  
 Guido was so prodigiously to blame ?  
 A certain cousin of yours has told you so ?           190  
 Exactly ! Here 's a friend shall set you right,  
 Let him but have the handsel of your ear.

These wretched Comparini were once gay  
 And galliard, of the modest middle class :  
 Born in this quarter seventy years ago           195  
 And married young, they lived the accustomed life,

Citizens as they were of good repute :  
 And, childless, naturally took their ease  
 With only their two selves to care about  
 And use the wealth for : wealthy is the word,        200  
 Since Pietro was possessed of house and land—  
 And specially one house, when good days smiled,  
 In Via Vittoria, the respectable street  
 Where he lived mainly ; but another house  
 Of less pretension did he buy betimes,        205  
 The villa, meant for jaunts and jollity,  
 I' the Pauline district, to be private there—  
 Just what puts murder in an enemy's head.  
 Moreover,—here 's the worm i' the core, the germ  
 O' the rottenness and ruin which arrived,—        210  
 He owned some usufruct, had moneys' use  
 Lifelong, but to determine with his life  
 In heirs' default : so, Pietro craved an heir,  
 (The story always old and always new)  
 Shut his fool's-eyes fast on the visible good        215  
 And wealth for certain, opened them owl-wide  
 On fortune's sole piece of forgetfulness,  
 The child that should have been and would not be.

Hence, seventeen years ago, conceive his glee  
 When first Violante, 'twixt a smile and blush,        220  
 With touch of agitation proper too,

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

“ O’ the wife and throtle him Violante too—

“ She is the mischief ! ”

We had hit the mark.

She, whose trick brought the babe into the world,  
 She it was, when the babe was grown a girl, 250  
 Judged a new trick should reinforce the old,  
 Send vigour to the lie now somewhat spent  
 By twelve years’ service ; lest Eve’s rule decline  
 Over this Adam of hers, whose cabbage-plot  
 Throve dubiously since turned fools’-paradise, 255  
 Spite of a nightingale on every stump.  
 Pietro’s estate was dwindling day by day,  
 While he, rapt far above such mundane care,  
 Crawled all-fours with his baby pick-a-back,  
 Sat at serene cats’-cradle with his child, 260  
 Or took the measured tallness, top to toe,  
 Of what was grown a great girl twelve years old :  
 Till sudden at the door a tap discreet,  
 A visitor’s premonitory cough,  
 And poverty had reached him in her rounds. 265

This came when he was past the working-time,  
 Had learned to dandle and forgot to dig,  
 And who must but Violante cast about,  
 Contrive and task that head of hers again ?

She who had caught one fish, could make that catch  
 A bigger still, in angler's policy : 271  
 So, with an angler's mercy for the bait,  
 Her minnow was set wriggling on its barb  
 And tossed to mid-stream ; which means, this grown girl  
 With the great eyes and bounty of black hair 275  
 And first crisp youth that tempts a jaded taste,  
 Was whisked i' the way of a certain man, who snapped.

Count Guido Franceschini the Aretine  
 Was head of an old noble house enough,  
 Not over-rich, you can't have everything, 280  
 But such a man as riches rub against,  
 Readily stick to,—one with a right to them  
 Born in the blood : 't was in his very brow  
 Always to knit itself against the world,  
 Beforehand so, when that world stinted due 285  
 Service and suit : the world ducks and defers.  
 As such folks do, he had come up to Rome  
 To better his fortune, and, since many years,  
 Was friend and follower of a cardinal ;  
 Waiting the rather thus on providence 290  
 That a shrewd younger poorer brother yet,  
 The Abate Paolo, a regular priest,  
 Had long since tried his powers and found he swam  
 With the deftest on the Galilean pool :

But then he was a web-foot, free o' the wave, 295  
 And no ambiguous dab-chick hatched to strut,  
 Humbled by any fond attempt to swim  
 When fiercer fowl usurped his dunghill top—  
 A whole priest, Paolo, no mere piece of one  
 Like Guido tacked thus to the Church's tail! 300  
 Guido moreover, as the head o' the house,  
 Claiming the main prize, not the lesser luck,  
 The centre lily, no mere chickweed fringe.

He waited and learned waiting, thirty years ;  
 Got promise, missed performance—what would you have?  
 No petty post rewards a nobleman 306  
 For spending youth in splendid lackey-work,  
 And there 's concurrence for each rarer prize ;  
 When that falls, rougher hand and readier foot  
 Push aside Guido spite of his black looks. 310  
 The end was, Guido, when the warning showed,  
 'The first white hair i' the glass, gave up the game,  
 Determined on returning to his town,  
 Making the best of bad incurable,  
 Patching the old palace up and lingering there 315  
 The customary life out with his kin,  
 Where honour helps to spice the scanty bread.

Just as he trimmed his lamp and girt his loins



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

What if he gained thus much,  
 Wrung out this sweet drop from the bitter Past, 326  
 Bore off this rose-bud from the prickly brake  
 To justify such torn clothes and scratched hands,  
 And, after all, brought something back from Rome?  
 Would not a wife serve at Arezzo well 330  
 To light the dark house, lend a look of youth  
 To the mother's face grown meagre, left alone  
 And famished with the emptiness of hope,  
 Old Donna Beatrice? Wife you want  
 Would you play family-representative, 335  
 Carry you elder-brotherly, high and right  
 O'er what may prove the natural petulance  
 Of the third brother, younger, greedier still,  
 Girolamo, also a fledgeling priest,  
 Beginning life in turn with callow beak 340  
 Agape for luck, no luck had stopped and stilled.  
 Such were the pinks and greys about the bait  
 Persuaded Guido gulp down hook and all.

What constituted him so choice a catch,  
 You question? Past his prime and poor beside!  
 Ask that of any she who knows the trade. 346  
 Why first, here was a nobleman with friends,  
 A palace one might run to and be safe  
 When presently the threatened fate should fall,  
 A big-browed master to block door-way up, 350  
 Parley with people bent on pushing by  
 And praying the mild Pietro quick clear scores:  
 Is birth a privilege and power or no?  
 Also,—but judge of the result desired,  
 By the price paid and manner of the sale. 355  
 The Count was made woo, win and wed at once:  
 Asked, and was haled for answer, lest the heat  
 Should cool, to San Lorenzo, one blind eve,  
 And had Pompilia put into his arms  
 O' the sly there, by a hasty candle-blink, 360  
 With sanction of some priest-confederate  
 Properly paid to make short work and sure.

So did old Pietro's daughter change her style  
 For Guido Franceschini's lady-wife  
 Ere Guido knew it well; and why this haste 365  
 And scramble and indecent secrecy?  
 "Lest Pietro, all the while in ignorance,  
 "Should get to learn, gainsay and break the match:

" His peevishness had promptly put aside  
 " Such honour and refused the proffered boon, 370  
 " Pleased to become authoritative once.  
 " She remedied the wilful man's mistake—"

Did our discreet Violante. Rather say,  
 Thus did she, lest the object of her game,  
 Guido the gulled one, give him but a chance, 375  
 A moment's respite, time for thinking twice,  
 Might count the cost before he sold himself,  
 And try the clink of coin they paid him with.

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

The end, this : 390  
 Guido's broad back was saddled to bear all—  
 Pietro, Violante, and Pompilia too,—

Three lots cast confidently in one lap,  
 Three dead-weights with one arm to lift the three  
 Out of their limbo up to life again. 395  
 The Roman household was to strike fresh root  
 In a new soil, graced with a novel name,  
 Gilt with an alien glory, Aretine  
 Henceforth and never Roman any more,  
 By treaty and engagement ; thus it ran : 400  
 Pompilia's dowry for Pompilia's self  
 As a thing of course,—she paid her own expense ;  
 No loss nor gain there : but the couple, you see,  
 They, for their part, turned over first of all  
 Their fortune in its rags and rottenness 405  
 To Guido, fusion and confusion, he  
 And his with them and theirs,—whatever rag  
 With coin residuary fell on floor  
 When Brother Paolo's energetic shake  
 Should do the relics justice : since 't was thought,  
 Once vulnerable Pietro out of reach, 411  
 That, left at Rome as representative,  
 The Abate, backed by a potent patron here,  
 And otherwise with purple flushing him,  
 Might play a good game with the creditor, 415  
 Make up a moiety which, great or small,  
 Should go to the common stock—if anything,  
 Guido's, so far repayment of the cost

About to be,—and if, as looked more like,  
 Nothing,—why, all the nobler cost were his 420  
 Who guaranteed, for better or for worse,  
 To Pietro and Violante, house and home,  
 Kith and kin, with the pick of company  
 And life o' the fat o' the land while life should last.  
 How say you to the bargain at first blush? 425  
 Why did a middle-aged not-silly man  
 Show himself thus besotted all at once?  
 Quoth Solomon, one black eye does it all.

They went to Arezzo,—Pietro and his spouse,  
 With just the dusk o' the day of life to spend, 430  
 Eager to use the twilight, taste a treat,  
 Enjoy for once with neither stay nor stint  
 The luxury of lord-and-lady-ship,  
 And realize the stuff and nonsense long  
 A-simmer in their noddles; vent the fume 435  
 Born there and bred, the citizen's conceit  
 How fares nobility while crossing earth,  
 What rampart or invisible body-guard  
 Keeps off the taint of common life from such.  
 They had not fed for nothing on the tales 440  
 Of grandees who give banquets worthy Jove,  
 Spending gold as if Plutus paid a whim,  
 Served with obeisances as when . . . what God?

I 'm at the end of my tether ; 't is enough  
 You understand what they came primed to see : 445  
 While Guido who should minister the sight,  
 Stay all this qualmish greediness of soul  
 With apples and with flagons—for his part,  
 Was set on life diverse as pole from pole :  
 Lust of the flesh, lust of the eye,—what else 450  
 Was he just now awake from, sick and sage,  
 After the very debauch they would begin?—  
 Suppose such stuff and nonsense really were.  
 That bubble, they were bent on blowing big,  
 He had blown already till he burst his cheeks, 455  
 And hence found soapsuds bitter to the tongue.  
 He hoped now to walk softly all his days  
 In soberness of spirit, if haply so,  
 Pinching and paring he might furnish forth  
 A frugal board, bare sustenance, no more, 460  
 Till times, that could not well grow worse, should mend.

Thus minded then, two parties mean to meet  
 And make each other happy. The first week,  
 And fancy strikes fact and explodes in full.  
 “ This,” shrieked the Comparini, “ this the Count, 465  
 “ The palace, the signorial privilege,  
 “ The pomp and pageantry were promised us?  
 “ For this have we exchanged our liberty,

" Our competence, our darling of a child?  
 " To house as spectres in a sepulchre 470  
 " Under this black stone-heap, the street's disgrace,  
 " Grimmiest as that is of the gruesome town,  
 " And here pick garbage on a pewter plate  
 " Or cough at verjuice dripped from earthenware?  
 " Oh Via Vittoria, oh the other place 475  
 " I' the Pauline, did we give you up for this?  
 " Where 's the foregone housekeeping good and gay,  
 " The neighbourliness, the companionship,  
 " The treat and feast when holidays came round,  
 " The daily feast that seemed no treat at all, 480  
 " Called common by the uncommon fools we were!  
 " Even the sun that used to shine at Rome,  
 " Where is it? Robbed and starved and frozen too,  
 " We will have justice, justice if there be!"  
 Did not they shout, did not the town resound! 485  
 Guido's old lady-mother Beatrice,  
 Who since her husband, Count Tommaso's death,  
 Had held sole sway i' the house,—the doited crone  
 Slow to acknowledge, curtsy and abdicate,—  
 Was recognized of true novercal type, 490  
 Dragon and devil. His brother Girolamo  
 Came next in order: priest was he? The worse!  
 No way of winning him to leave his mumps  
 And help the laugh against old ancestry

And formal habits long since out of date, 495  
 Letting his youth be patterned on the mode  
 Approved of where Violante laid down law.  
 Or did he brighten up by way of change,  
 Dispose himself for affability?  
 The malapert, too complaisant by half 500  
 To the alarmed young novice of a bride !  
 Let him go buzz, betake himself elsewhere  
 Nor sing his fly-wings in the candle-flame !

Four months' probation of this purgatory,  
 Dog-snap and cat-claw, curse and counterblast, 505  
 The devil's self were sick of his own din ;  
 And Pietro, after trumpeting huge wrongs  
 At church and market-place, pillar and post,  
 Square's corner, street's end, now the palace-step  
 And now the wine-house bench—while, on her side, 510  
 Violante up and down was voluble  
 In whatsoever pair of ears would perk  
 From goody, gossip, cater-cousin and sib,  
 Curious to peep at the inside of things  
 And catch in the act pretentious poverty 515  
 At its wits' end to keep appearance up,  
 Make both ends meet,—nothing the vulgar loves  
 Like what this couple pitched them right and left.  
 Then, their worst done that way, both struck tent, marched:



— Renounced their share o' the bargain, flung what dues  
 Guido was bound to pay, in Guido's face, 521  
 Left their hearts'-darling, treasure of the twain  
 And so forth, the poor inexperienced bride,  
 To her own devices, bade Arezzo rot,  
 Cursed life signorial, and sought Rome once more. 525

I see the comment ready on your lip,  
 "The better fortune, Guido's—free at least  
 "By this defection of the foolish pair,  
 "He could begin make profit in some sort  
 "Of the young bride and the new quietness, 530  
 "Lead his own life now, henceforth breathe unplagued."  
 Could he? You know the sex like Guido's self.  
 Learn the *Violante*-nature!

Once in Rome,  
 By way of helping Guido lead such life, 535  
 Her first act to inaugurate return  
 Was, she got pricked in conscience: Jubilee  
 Gave her the hint. Our Pope, as kind as just,  
 Attained his eighty years, announced a boon  
 Should make us bless the fact, held Jubilee— 540  
 Short shrift, prompt pardon for the light offence,  
 And no rough dealing with the regular crime  
 So this occasion were not suffered slip—

Otherwise, sins commuted as before,  
 Without the least abatement in the price. 545  
 Now, who had thought it? All this while, it seems,  
 Our sage Violante had a sin of a sort  
 She must compound for now or not at all.  
 Now be the ready riddance! She confessed  
 Pompilia was a fable not a fact : 550  
 She never bore a child in her whole life.  
 Had this child been a changeling, that were grace  
 In some degree, exchange is hardly theft,  
 You take your stand on truth ere leap your lie :  
 Here was all lie, no touch of truth at all, 555  
 All the lie hers—not even Pietro guessed  
 He was as childless still as twelve years since.  
 The babe had been a find i' the filth-heap, Sir,  
 Catch from the kennel! There was found at Rome,  
 Down in the deepest of our social dregs, 560  
 A woman who professed the wanton's trade  
 Under the requisite thin coverture,  
*Communis meretrix* and washer-wife :  
 The creature thus conditioned found by chance  
 Motherhood like a jewel in the muck, 565  
 And straightway either trafficked with her prize  
 Or listened to the tempter and let be,—  
 Made pact abolishing her place and part  
 In womankind, beast-fellowship indeed.

She sold this babe eight months before its birth 570  
 To our Violante, Pietro's honest spouse,  
 Well-famed and widely-instanced as that crown  
 To the husband, virtue in a woman's shape.  
 She it was, bought, paid for, passed off the thing  
 As very flesh and blood and child of her 575  
 Despite the flagrant fifty years,—and why?  
 Partly to please old Pietro, fill his cup  
 With wine at the late hour when lees are left,  
 And send him from life's feast rejoicingly,—  
 Partly to cheat the rightful heirs, agape, 580  
 Each uncle's cousin's brother's son of him,  
 For that same principal of the usufruct  
 It vexed him he must die and leave behind.

Such was the sin had come to be confessed.  
 Which of the tales, the first or last, was true? 585  
 Did she so sin once, or, confessing now,  
 Sin for the first time? Either way you will.  
 One sees a reason for the cheat : one sees  
 A reason for a cheat in owning cheat  
 Where no cheat had been. What of the revenge?  
 What prompted the contrition all at once, 591  
 Made the avowal easy, the shame slight?  
 Why, prove they but Pompilia not their child,  
 No child, no dowry! this, supposed their child,

Had claimed what this, shown alien to their blood, 595  
 Claimed nowise : Guido's claim was through his wife,  
 Null then and void with hers. The biter bit,  
 Do you see ! For such repayment of the past,  
 One might conceive the penitential pair  
 Ready to bring their case before the courts, 600  
 Publish their infamy to all the world  
 And, arm in arm, go chuckling thence content.

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

More that will shake your confidence in things    620  
Your cousin tells you,—may I be so bold?

This makes the first act of the farce,—anon  
The sombre element comes stealing in  
Till all is black or blood-red in the piece.  
Guido, thus made a laughing-stock abroad,    625  
A proverb for the market-place at home,  
Left alone with Pompilia now, this graft  
So reputable on his ancient stock,  
This plague-seed set to fester his sound flesh,  
What does the Count?    Revenge him on his wife?  
Unfasten at all risks to rid himself    631  
The noisome lazar-badge, fall foul of fate,  
And, careless whether the poor rag was 'ware  
O' the part it played, or helped unwittingly,  
Bid it go burn and leave his frayed flesh free?    635  
Plainly, did Guido open both doors wide,  
Spurn thence the cur-cast creature and clear scores  
As man might, tempted in extreme like this?  
No, birth and breeding, and compassion too  
Saved her such scandal.    She was young, he thought,  
Not privy to the treason, punished most    641  
I' the proclamation of it; why make her  
A party to the crime she suffered by?  
Then the black eyes were now her very own,

Not any more Violante's: let her live, 645  
 Lose in a new air, under a new sun,  
 The taint of the imputed parentage  
 Truly or falsely, take no more the touch  
 Of Pietro and his partner anyhow!  
 All might go well yet. 650

So she thought, herself,  
 It seems, since what was her first act and deed  
 When news came how these kindly ones at Rome  
 Had stripped her naked to amuse the world  
 With spots here, spots there and spots everywhere?  
 —For I should tell you that they noised abroad 656  
 Not merely the main scandal of her birth,  
 But slanders written, printed, published wide,  
 Pamphlets which set forth all the pleasantry  
 Of how the promised glory was a dream, 660  
 The power a bubble, and the wealth—why, dust.  
 There was a picture, painted to the life,  
 Of those rare doings, that superlative  
 Initiation in magnificence  
 Conferred on a poor Roman family 665  
 By favour of Arezzo and her first  
 And famousest, the Franceschini there.  
 You had the Countship holding head aloft  
 Bravely although bespattered, shifts and straits

In keeping out o' the way o' the wheels o' the world,  
The comic of those home-contrivances 671  
When the old lady-mother's wit was taxed  
To find six clamorous mouths in food more real  
Than fruit plucked off the cobwebbed family-tree,  
Or acorns shed from its gilt mouldered frame— 675  
Cold glories served up with stale fame for sauce.  
What, I ask,—when the drunkenness of hate  
Hiccaped return for hospitality,  
Befouled the table they had feasted on,  
Or say,—God knows I'll not prejudge the case,—  
Grievances thus distorted, magnified, 681  
Coloured by quarrel into calumny,—  
What side did our Pompilia first espouse?  
Her first deliberate measure was—she wrote,  
Pricked by some loyal impulse, straight to Rome 685  
And her husband's brother the Abate there,  
Who, having managed to effect the match,  
Might take men's censure for its ill success.  
She made a clean breast also in her turn,  
And qualified the couple properly, 690  
Since whose departure, hell, she said, was heaven,  
And the house, late distracted by their peals,  
Quiet as Carmel where the lilies live.  
Herself had oftentimes complained : but why?  
All her complaints had been their prompting, tales

Trumped up, devices to this very end. 696  
 Their game had been to thwart her husband's love  
 And cross his will, malign his words and ways,  
 To reach this issue, furnish this pretence  
 For impudent withdrawal from their bond,— 700  
 Theft, indeed murder, since they meant no less  
 Whose last injunction to her simple self  
 Had been—what parents'-precept do you think?  
 That she should follow after with all speed,  
 Fly from her husband's house clandestinely, 705  
 Join them at Rome again, but first of all  
 Pick up a fresh companion in her flight,  
 So putting youth and beauty to fit use,—  
 Some gay dare-devil cloak-and-rapier spark  
 Capable of adventure,—helped by whom 710  
 She, some fine eve when lutes were in the air,  
 Having put poison in the posset-cup,  
 Laid hands on money, jewels and the like,  
 And, to conceal the thing with more effect,  
 By way of parting benediction too, 715  
 Fired the house,—one would finish famously  
 I' the tumult, slip out, scurry off and away  
 And turn up merrily at home once more.  
 Fact this, and not a dream o' the devil, Sir!  
 And more than this, a fact none dare dispute, 720  
 Word for word, such a letter did she write,



And such the Abate read, nor simply read  
 But gave all Rome to ruminare upon,  
 In answer to such charges as, I say,  
 The couple sought to be beforehand with. 725

The cause thus carried to the courts at Rome,  
 Guido away, the Abate had no choice  
 But stand forth, take his absent brother's part,  
 Defend the honour of himself beside.  
 He made what head he might against the pair, 730  
 Maintained Pompilia's birth legitimate  
 And all her rights intact—hers, Guido's now :  
 And so far by his policy turned their flank,  
 (The enemy being beforehand in the place)  
 That,—though the courts allowed the cheat for fact,  
 Suffered Violante to parade her shame, 736  
 Publish her infamy to heart's content,  
 And let the tale o' the feigned birth pass for proved,—  
 Yet they stopped there, refused to intervene  
 And dispossess the innocents, befooled 740  
 By gifts o' the guilty, at guilt's new caprice.  
 They would not take away the dowry now  
 Wrongfully given at first, nor bar at all  
 Succession to the aforesaid usufruct,  
 Established on a fraud, nor play the game 745  
 Of Pietro's child and now not Pietro's child

As it might suit the gamester's purpose. Thus  
 Was justice ever ridiculed in Rome :  
 Such be the double verdicts favoured here  
 Which send away both parties to a suit 750  
 Nor puffed up nor cast down,—for each a crumb  
 Of right, for neither of them the whole loaf.  
 Whence, on the Comparini's part, appeal—  
 Counter-appeal on Guido's,—that 's the game :  
 And so the matter stands, even to this hour, 755  
 Banded as balls are in a tennis-court,  
 And so might stand, unless some heart broke first,  
 Till doomsday.

Leave it thus, and now revert  
 To the old Arezzo whence we moved to Rome. 760  
 We 've had enough o' the parents, false or true,  
 Now for a touch o' the daughter's quality.  
 The start 's fair henceforth, every obstacle  
 Out of the young wife's footpath, she 's alone,  
 Left to walk warily now : how does she walk? 765  
 Why, once a dwelling's threshold marked and crossed  
 In rubric by the enemy on his rounds  
 As eligible, as fit place of prey,  
 Baffle him henceforth, keep him out who can !  
 Stop up the door at the first hint of hoof, 770  
 Presently at the window taps a horn,

And Satan 's by your fireside, never fear !  
 Pompilia, left alone now, found herself ;  
 Found herself young too, sprightly, fair enough,  
 Matched with a husband old beyond his age 775  
 (Though that was something like four times her own)  
 Because of cares past, present and to come :  
 Found too the house dull and its inmates dead,  
 So, looked outside for light and life.

And love 780

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

With the magnates of Arezzo, was seen here,  
 Heard there, felt everywhere in Guido's path  
 If Guido's wife's path be her husband's too. 800  
 Now he threw comfits at the theatre  
 Into her lap,—what harm in Carnival?  
 Now he pressed close till his foot touched her gown,  
 His hand brushed hers,—how help on promenade?  
 And, ever on weighty business, found his steps 805  
 Incline to a certain haunt of doubtful fame  
 Which fronted Guido's palace by mere chance ;  
 While—how do accidents sometimes combine !—  
 Pompilia chose to cloister up her charms  
 Just in a chamber that o'erlooked the street, 810  
 Sat there to pry, or peep thence at mankind.

This passage of arms and wits amused the town.  
 At last the husband lifted eyebrow,—bent  
 On day-book and the study how to wring  
 Half the due vintage from the worn-out vines 815  
 At the villa, tease a quarter the old rent  
 From the farmstead, tenants swore would tumble soon,—  
 Pricked up his ear a-singing day and night  
 With “ruin, ruin ;”—and so surprised at last—  
 Why, what else but a titter? Up he jumps. 820  
 Back to mind come those scratchings at the grange,  
 Prints of the paw about the outhouse ; rife

In his head at once again are word and wink,  
*Mum* here and *budget* there, the smell o' the fox,  
 The musk o' the gallant. "Friends, there 's falseness  
 here!"

The proper help of friends in such a strait 826  
 Is waggery, the world over. Laugh him free  
 O' the regular jealous-fit that 's incident  
 To all old husbands that wed brisk young wives,  
 And he 'll go duly docile all his days. 830

"Somebody courts your wife, Count? Where and when?"

"How and why? Mere horn-madness: have a care!"

"Your lady loves her own room, sticks to it,

"Locks herself in for hours, you say yourself.

"And—what, it 's Caponsacchi means you harm? 835

"The Canon? We caress him, he 's the world's,

"A man of such acceptance—never dream,

"Though he were fifty times the fox you fear,

"He 'd risk his brush for your particular chick,

"When the wide town 's his hen-roost! Fie o' the  
 fool!"

So they dispensed their comfort of a kind. 841

Guido at last cried "Something is in the air,

"Under the earth, some plot against my peace.

"The trouble of eclipse hangs overhead;

"How it should come of that officious orb 845

"Your Canon in my system, you must say :  
 "I say—that from the pressure of this spring  
 "Began the chime and interchange of bells,  
 "Ever one whisper, and one whisper more,  
 "And just one whisper for the silvery last, 850  
 "Till all at once a-row the bronze-throats burst  
 "Into a larum both significant  
 "And sinister : stop it I must and will.  
 "Let Caponsacchi take his hand away  
 "From the wire !—disport himself in other paths 855  
 "Than lead precisely to my palace-gate,—  
 "Look where he likes except one window's way  
 "Where, cheek on hand, and elbow set on sill,  
 "Happens to lean and say her litanies  
 "Every day and all day long, just my wife— 860  
 "Or wife and Caponsacchi may fare the worse !"

Admire the man's simplicity, "I 'll do this,  
 "I 'll not have that, I 'll punish and prevent !"—  
 "T is easy saying. But to a fray, you see,  
 Two parties go. The badger shows his teeth : 865  
 The fox nor lies down sheep-like nor dares fight.  
 Oh, the wife knew the appropriate warfare well,  
 The way to put suspicion to the blush !  
 At first hint of remonstrance, up and out  
 I' the face of the world, you found her : she could speak.

State her case,—Franceschini was a name, 871  
Guido had his full share of foes and friends—  
Why should not she call these to arbitrate?  
She bade the Governor do governance,  
Cried out on the Archbishop,—why, there now, 875  
Take him for sample! Three successive times,  
Had he to reconduct her by main-force  
From where she took her station opposite  
His shut door,—on the public steps thereto,  
Wringing her hands, when he came out to see, 880  
And shrieking all her wrongs forth at his foot,—  
Back to the husband and the house she fled:  
Judge if that husband warmed him in the face  
Of friends or frowned on foes as heretofore!  
Judge if he missed the natural grin of folk, 885  
Or lacked the customary compliment  
Of cap and bells, the luckless husband's fit!

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

Some money there had made itself wings too,—  
 The door lay wide and yet the servants slept  
 Sound as the dead, or dosed which does as well.  
 In short, Pompilia, she who, candid soul,  
 Had not so much as spoken all her life 900  
 To the Canon, nay, so much as peeped at him  
 Between her fingers while she prayed in church,—  
 This lamb-like innocent of fifteen years  
 (Such she was grown to by this time of day)  
 Had simply put an opiate in the drink 905  
 Of the whole household overnight, and then  
 Got up and gone about her work secure,  
 Laid hand on this waif and the other stray,  
 Spoiled the Philistine and marched out of doors  
 In company of the Canon who, Lord's love, 910  
 What with his daily duty at the church,  
 Nightly devoir where ladies congregate,  
 Had something else to mind, assure yourself,  
 Beside Pompilia, paragon though she be,  
 Or notice if her nose were sharp or blunt ! 915  
 Well, anyhow, albeit impossible,  
 Both of them were together jollily  
 Jaunting it Rome-ward, half-way there by this,  
 While Guido was left go and get undrugged,  
 Gather his wits up, groaningly give thanks 920  
 When neighbours crowded round him to condole.



" Ah," quoth a gossip, " well I mind me now,  
 " The Count did always say he thought he felt  
 " He feared as if this very chance might fall !  
 " And when a man of fifty finds his corns                     925  
 " Ache and his joints throb, and foresees a storm,  
 " Though neighbours laugh and say the sky is clear,  
 " Let us henceforth believe him weatherwise ! "

Then was the story told, I'll cut you short :  
 All neighbours knew : no mystery in the world.             930  
 The lovers left at nightfall—over night  
 Had Caponsacchi come to carry off  
 Pompilia,—not alone, a friend of his,  
 One Guillichini, the more conversant  
 With Guido's housekeeping that he was just                 935  
 A cousin of Guido's and might play a prank—  
 (Have not you too a cousin that 's a wag?)  
 —Lord and a Canon also,—what would you have?  
 Such are the red-clothed milk-swollen poppy-heads  
 That stand and stiffen 'mid the wheat o' the  
                   Church !—   940

This worthy came to aid, abet his best.  
 And so the house was ransacked, booty bagged,  
 The lady led downstairs and out of doors  
 Guided and guarded till, the city passed,  
 A carriage lay convenient at the gate.                     945  
 Good-bye to the friendly Canon ; the loving one

Could peradventure do the rest himself.  
 In jumps Pompilia, after her the priest,  
 "Whip, driver! Money makes the mare to go,  
 "And we've a bagful. Take the Roman road!" 950  
 So said the neighbours. This was eight hours since.

Guido heard all, swore the befitting oaths,  
 Shook off the relics of his poison-drench,  
 Got horse, was fairly started in pursuit  
 With never a friend to follow, found the track 955  
 Fast enough, 't was the straight Perugia way,  
 Trod soon upon their very heels, too late  
 By a minute only at Camoscia, reached  
 Chiusi, Foligno, ever the fugitives  
 Just ahead, just out as he galloped in, 960  
 Getting the good news ever fresh and fresh,  
 Till, lo, at the last stage of all, last post  
 Before Rome,—as we say, in sight of Rome  
 And safety (there's impunity at Rome  
 For priests, you know) at—what's the little  
                   place?— 965  
 What some call Castelnuovo, some just call  
 The Osteria, because o' the post-house inn,  
 There, at the journey's all but end, it seems,  
 Triumph deceived them and undid them both,  
 Secure they might foretaste felicity 970

Nor fear surprisal : so, they were surprised.  
 There did they halt at early evening, there  
 Did Guido overtake them : 't was day-break ;  
 He came in time enough, not time too much,  
 Since in the courtyard stood the Canon's self 975  
 Urging the drowsy stable-grooms to haste  
 Harness the horses, have the journey end,  
 The trifling four-hours'-running, so reach Rome.  
 And the other runaway, the wife? Upstairs,  
 Still on the couch where she had spent the night, 980  
 One couch in one room, and one room for both.  
 So gained they six hours, so were lost thereby.

Sir, what 's the sequel? Lover and beloved  
 Fall on their knees? No impudence serves here?  
 They beat their breasts and beg for easy death, 985  
 Confess this, that and the other?—anyhow  
 Confess there wanted not some likelihood  
 To the supposition so preposterous,  
 That, O Pompilia, thy sequestered eyes  
 Had noticed, straying o'er the prayerbook's edge, 990  
 More of the Canon than that black his coat,  
 Buckled his shoes were, broad his hat of brim :  
 And that, O Canon, thy religious care  
 Had breathed too soft a *benedicite*  
 To banish trouble from a lady's breast 995

So lonely and so lovely, nor so lean!  
 This you expect? Indeed, then, much you err.  
 Not to such ordinary end as this  
 Had Caponsacchi flung the cassock far,  
 Doffed the priest, donned the perfect cavalier. 1000  
 The die was cast: over shoes over boots:  
 And just as she, I presently shall show,  
 Pompilia, soon looked Helen to the life,  
 Recumbent upstairs in her pink and white,  
 So, in the inn-yard, bold as 't were Troy-town, 1005  
 There strutted Paris in correct costume,  
 Cloak, cap and feather, no appointment missed,  
 Even to a wicked-looking sword at side,  
 He seemed to find and feel familiar at.  
 Nor wanted words as ready and as big 1010  
 As the part he played, the bold abashless one.  
 "I interposed to save your wife from death,  
 "Yourself from shame, the true and only shame:  
 "Ask your own conscience else!—or, failing that,  
 "What I have done I answer, anywhere, 1015  
 "Here, if you will; you see I have a sword:  
 "Or, since I have a tonsure as you taunt,  
 "At Rome, by all means,—priests to try a priest.  
 "Only, speak where your wife's voice can reply!"  
 And then he fingered at the sword again. 1020  
 So, Guido called, in aid and witness both,

The Public Force. The Commissary came,  
 Officers also ; they secured the priest ;  
 Then, for his more confusion, mounted up  
 With him, a guard on either side, the stair 1025  
 To the bed-room where still slept or feigned a sleep  
 His paramour and Guido's wife : in burst  
 The company and bade her wake and rise.

Her defence? This. She woke, saw, sprang upright  
 I' the midst and stood as terrible as truth, 1030  
 Sprang to her husband's side, caught at the sword  
 That hung there useless,—since they held each hand  
 O' the lover, had disarmed him properly,—  
 And in a moment out flew the bright thing  
 Full in the face of Guido : but for help 1035  
 O' the guards who held her back and pinioned her  
 With pains enough, she had finished you my tale  
 With a flourish of red all round it, pinked her man  
 Prettily ; but she fought them one to six.  
 They stopped that,—but her tongue continued free :  
 She spat forth such invective at her spouse, 1041  
 O'erfrothed him with such foam of murderer,  
 Thief, pandar—that the popular tide soon turned,  
 The favour of the very *sbirri*, straight  
 Ebb'd from the husband, set toward his wife, 1045  
 People cried “ Hands off, pay a priest respect ! ”

And "persecuting fiend" and "martyred saint"  
 Began to lead a measure from lip to lip.

But facts are facts and flinch not ; stubborn things,  
 And the question "Prithee, friend, how comes my  
                   purse 1050

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

Taken to Rome they were ;

The husband trooping after, piteously, 1061  
 Tail between legs, no talk of triumph now—  
 No honour set firm on its feet once more  
 On two dead bodies of the guilty,—nay,  
 No dubious salve to honour's broken pate 1065  
 From chance that, after all, the hurt might seem  
 A skin-deep matter, scratch that leaves no scar :  
 For Guido's first search,—ferreting, poor soul,  
 Here, there and everywhere in the vile place  
 Abandoned to him when their backs were turned,

Found,—furnishing a last and best regale,— 1071  
 All the love-letters bandied 'twixt the pair  
 Since the first timid trembling into life  
 O' the love-star till its stand at fiery full.  
 Mad prose, mad verse, fears, hopes, triumph, despair,  
 Avowal, disclaimer, plans, dates, names,—was nought  
 Wanting to prove, if proof consoles at all, 1077  
 That this had been but the fifth act o' the piece  
 Whereof the due proemium, months ago  
 These playwrights had put forth, and ever since 1080  
 Matured the middle, added 'neath his nose.  
 He might go cross himself: the case was clear.

Therefore to Rome with the clear case; there plead  
 Each party its best, and leave law do each right,  
 Let law shine forth and show, as God in heaven, 1085  
 Vice prostrate, virtue pedestalled at last,  
 The triumph of truth! What else shall glad our gaze  
 When once authority has knit the brow  
 And set the brain behind it to decide  
 Between the wolf and sheep turned litigants? 1090  
 "This is indeed a business!" law shook head:  
 "A husband charges hard things on a wife,  
 "The wife as hard o' the husband: whose fault here?  
 "A wife that flies her husband's house, does wrong:  
 "The male friend's interference looks amiss, 1095

- “ Lends a suspicion : but suppose the wife,  
 “ On the other hand, be jeopardized at home—  
 “ Nay, that she simply hold, ill-groundedly,  
 “ An apprehension she is jeopardized,—  
 “ And further, if the friend partake the fear, 1100  
 “ And, in a commendable charity  
 “ Which trusteth all, trust her that she mistrusts,—  
 “ What do they but obey law—natural law?  
 “ Pretence may this be and a cloak for sin,  
 “ And circumstances that concur i’ the close 1105  
 “ Hint as much, loudly—yet scarce loud enough  
 “ To drown the answer ‘strange may yet be true :’  
 “ Innocence often looks like guiltiness.  
 “ The accused declare that in thought, word and deed,  
 “ Innocent were they both from first to last 1110  
 “ As male-babe haply laid by female-babe  
 “ At church on edge of the baptismal font  
 “ Together for a minute, perfect-pure.  
 “ Difficult to believe, yet possible,  
 “ As witness Joseph, the friend’s patron-saint. 1115  
 “ The night at the inn—there charity nigh chokes  
 “ Ere swallow what they both asseverate ;  
 “ Though down the gullet faith may feel it go,  
 “ When mindful of what flight fatigued the flesh  
 “ Out of its faculty and fleshliness, 1120  
 “ Subdued it to the soul, as saints assure :



- " So long a flight necessitates a fall  
 " On the first bed, though in a lion's den,  
 " And the first pillow, though the lion's back :  
 " Difficult to believe, yet possible. 1125  
 " Last come the letters' bundled beastliness—  
 " Authority repugns give glance to—nay,  
 " Turns head, and almost lets her whip-lash fall ;  
 " Yet here a voice cries ' Respite ! ' from the clouds—  
 " The accused, both in a tale, protest, disclaim, 1130  
 " Abominate the horror : ' Not my hand '  
 " Asserts the friend—' Nor mine ' chimes in the wife,  
 " ' Seeing I have no hand, nor write at all.'  
 " Illiterate—for she goes on to ask,  
 " What if the friend did pen now verse now prose, 1135  
 " Commend it to her notice now and then?  
 " 'T was pearls to swine : she read no more than wrote,  
 " And kept no more than read, for as they fell  
 " She ever brushed the burr-like things away,  
 " Or, better, burned them, quenched the fire in smoke.  
 " As for this fardel, filth and foolishness, 1141  
 " She sees it now the first time : burn it too !  
 " While for his part the friend vows ignorance  
 " Alike of what bears his name and bears hers :  
 " 'T is forgery, a felon's masterpiece, 1145  
 " And, as 't is said the fox still finds the stench,  
 " Home-manufacture and the husband's work.

- " Though he confesses, the ingenuous friend,  
 " That certain missives, letters of a sort,  
 " Flighty and feeble, which assigned themselves 1150  
 " To the wife, no less have fallen, far too oft,  
 " In his path : wherefrom he understood just this—  
 " That were they verily the lady's own.  
 " Why, she who penned them, since he never saw  
 " Save for one minute the mere face of her, 1155  
 " Since never had there been the interchange  
 " Of word with word between them all their life,  
 " Why, she must be the fondest of the frail,  
 " And fit, she for the '*apage*' he flung,  
 " Her letters for the flame they went to feed ! 1160  
 " But, now he sees her face and hears her speech,  
 " Much he repents him if, in fancy-freak  
 " For a moment the minutest measurable,  
 " He coupled her with the first flimsy word  
 " O' the self-spun fabric some mean spider-soul 1165  
 " Furnished forth : stop his films and stamp on him !  
 " Never was such a tangled knottiness,  
 " But thus authority cuts the Gordian through,  
 " And mark how her decision suits the need !  
 " Here 's troublesomeness, scandal on both sides, 1170  
 " Plenty of fault to find, no absolute crime :  
 " Let each side own its fault and make amends !  
 " What does a priest in cavalier's attire

- "Consorting publicly with vagrant wives  
 "In quarters close as the confessional, 1175  
 "Though innocent of harm? 'T is harm enough :  
 "Let him pay it,—say, be relegate a good  
 "Three years, to spend in some place not too far  
 "Nor yet too near, midway 'twixt near and far,  
 "Rome and Arezzo,—Civita we choose, 1180  
 "Where he may lounge away time, live at large,  
 "Find out the proper function of a priest,  
 "Nowise an exile,—that were punishment,—  
 "But one our love thus keeps out of harm's way  
 "Not more from the husband's anger than, mayhap  
 "His own . . . say, indiscretion, waywardness, 1186  
 "And wanderings when Easter eves grow warm.  
 "For the wife,—well, our best step to take with her,  
 "On her own showing, were to shift her root  
 "From the old cold shade and unhappy soil 1190  
 "Into a generous ground that fronts the south  
 "Where, since her callow soul, a-shiver late,  
 "Craved simply warmth and called mere passers-by  
 "To the rescue, she should have her fill of shine.  
 "Do house and husband hinder and not help? 1195  
 "Why then, forget both and stay here at peace,  
 "Come into our community, enroll  
 "Herself along with those good Convertites,  
 "Those sinners saved, those Magdalens re-made,

" Accept their ministration, well bestow 1200  
 " Her body and patiently possess her soul,  
 " Until we see what better can be done.  
 " Last for the husband : if his tale prove true,  
 " Well is he rid of two domestic plagues—  
 " Both wife that ailed, do whatsoever he would, 1205  
 " And friend of hers that undertook the cure.  
 " See, what a double load we lift from breast !  
 " Off he may go, return, resume old life,  
 " Laugh at the priest here and Pompilia there  
 " In limbo each and punished for their pains, 1210  
 " And grateful tell the inquiring neighbourhood—  
 " In Rome, no wrong but has its remedy."  
 The case was closed. Now, am I fair or no  
 In what I utter? Do I state the facts,  
 Having forechosen a side? I promised you ! 1215

The Canon Caponsacchi, then, was sent  
 To change his garb, re-trim his tonsure, tie  
 The clerkly silk round, every plait correct,  
 Make the impressive entry on his place  
 Of relegation, thrill his Civita, 1220  
 As Ovid, a like sufferer in the cause,  
 Planted a primrose-patch by Pontus : where,—  
 What with much culture of the sonnet-stave  
 And converse with the aborigines,

Soft savagery of eyes unused to roll 1225  
 And hearts that all awry went pit-a-pat  
 And wanted setting right in charity,—  
 What were a couple of years to while away?  
 Pompilia, as enjoined, betook herself  
 To the aforesaid Convertites, soft sisterhood 1230  
 In Via Lungara, where the light ones live,  
 Spin, pray, then sing like linnets o'er the flax.  
 "Anywhere, anyhow, out of my husband's house  
 "Is heaven," cried she,—was therefore suited so.  
 But for Count Guido Franceschini, he- 1235  
 The injured man thus righted—found no heaven  
 I' the house when he returned there, I engage,  
 Was welcomed by the city turned upside down  
 In a chorus of inquiry. "What, back—you?  
 "And no wife? Left her with the Penitents? 1240  
 "Ah, being young and pretty, 't were a shame  
 "To have her whipped in public: leave the job  
 "To the priests who understand! Such priests as yours—  
 "(Pontifex Maximus whipped Vestals once)  
 "Our madcap Caponsacchi: think of him! 1245  
 "So, he fired up, showed fight and skill of fence?  
 "Ay, you drew also, but you did not fight!  
 "The wiser, 't is a word and a blow with him,  
 "True Caponsacchi, of old Head-i'-the-Sack  
 "That fought at Fiesole ere Florence was: 1250

" He had done enough, to firke you were too much.  
 " And did the little lady menace you,  
 " Make at your breast with your own harmless sword?  
 " The spitfire! Well, thank God you 're safe and sound,  
 " Have kept the sixth commandment whether or no  
 " The lady broke the seventh: I only wish 1256  
 " I were as saint-like, could contain me so.  
 " I, the poor sinner, fear I should have left  
 " Sir Priest no nose-tip to turn up at me!"  
 You, Sir, who listen but interpose no word, 1260  
 Ask yourself, had you borne a baiting thus?  
 Was it enough to make a wise man mad?  
 Oh, but I 'll have your verdict at the end!

Well, not enough, it seems: such mere hurt falls,  
 Frets awhile, aches long, then grows less and less, 1265  
 And so gets done with. Such was not the scheme  
 O' the pleasant Comparini: on Guido's wound  
 Ever in due succession, drop by drop,  
 Came slow distilment from the alembic here  
 Set on to simmer by Canidian hate, 1270  
 Corrosives keeping the man's misery raw.  
 First fire-drop,—when he thought to make the best  
 O' the bad, to wring from out the sentence passed,  
 Poor, pitiful, absurd although it were,  
 Yet what might eke him out result enough 1275

And make it worth while to have had the right  
 And not the wrong i' the matter judged at Rome.  
 Inadequate her punishment, no less  
 Punished in some slight sort his wife had been ;  
 Then, punished for adultery, what else?           1280  
 On such admitted crime he thought to seize,  
 And institute procedure in the courts  
 Which cut corruption of this kind from man,  
 Cast loose a wife proved loose and castaway :  
 He claimed in due form a divorce at least.       1285

This claim was met now by a counterclaim :  
 Pompilia sought divorce from bed and board  
 Of Guido, whose outrageous cruelty,  
 Whose mother's malice and whose brother's hate  
 Were just the white o' the charge, such dreadful depths  
 Blackened its centre,—hints of worse than hate,   1291  
 Love from that brother, by that Guido's guile,  
 That mother's prompting.   Such reply was made,  
 So was the engine loaded, wound up, sprung  
 On Guido, who received bolt full in breast ;       1295  
 But no less bore up, giddily perhaps.  
 He had the Abate Paolo still in Rome,  
 Brother and friend and fighter on his side :  
 They rallied in a measure, met the foe  
 Manlike, joined battle in the public courts,       1301

As if to shame supine law from her sloth :  
 And waiting her award, let beat the while  
 Arezzo's banter, Rome's buffoonery,  
 On this ear and on that ear, deaf alike,  
 Safe from worse outrage. Let a scorpion nip, 1305  
 And never mind till he contorts his tail !  
 But there was sting i' the creature ; thus it struck.  
 Guido had thought in his simplicity—  
 That lying declaration of remorse,  
 That story of the child which was no child 1310  
 And motherhood no motherhood at all,  
 —That even this sin might have its sort of good  
 Inasmuch as no question more could be,—  
 Call it false, call the story true,—no claim  
 Of further parentage pretended now : 1315  
 The parents had abjured all right, at least,  
 I' the woman owned his wife : to plead right still  
 Were to declare the abjuration false :  
 He was relieved from any fear henceforth  
 Their hands might touch, their breath defile again  
 Pompilia with his name upon her yet. 1321  
 Well, no : the next news was, Pompilia's health  
 Demanded change after full three long weeks  
 Spent in devotion with the Sisterhood,—  
 Which rendered sojourn,—so the court opined,—1325  
 Too irksome, since the convent's walls were high



And windows narrow, nor was air enough  
 Nor light enough, but all looked prison-like,  
 The last thing which had come in the court's head.  
 Propose a new expedient therefore,—this ! 1330  
 She had demanded—had obtained indeed,  
 By intervention of her pitying friends  
 Or perhaps lovers—(beauty in distress,  
 Beauty whose tale is the town-talk beside,  
 Never lacks friendship's arm about her neck)— 1335  
 Obtained remission of the penalty,  
 Permitted transfer to some private place  
 Where better air, more light, new food might soothe—  
 Incarcerated (call it, all the same)  
 At some sure friend's house she must keep inside, 1340  
 Be found in at requirement fast enough,—  
*Domus pro carcere*, in Roman style.  
 You keep the house i' the main, as most men do  
 And all good women : but free otherwise,  
 Should friends arrive, to lodge them and what not ? 1345  
 And such a *domum*, such a dwelling-place,  
 Having all Rome to choose from, where chose she ?  
 What house obtained Pompilia's preference ?  
 Why, just the Comparini's—just, do you mark,  
 Theirs who renounced all part and lot in her 1350  
 So long as Guido could be robbed thereby,  
 And only fell back on relationship

And found their daughter safe and sound again  
 When that might surelier stab him : yes, the pair  
 Who, as I told you, first had baited hook 1355  
 With this poor gilded fly Pompilia-thing,  
 Then caught the fish, pulled Guido to the shore  
 And gutted him,—now found a further use  
 For the bait, would trail the gauze wings yet again  
 I' the way of what new swimmer passed their stand.  
 They took Pompilia to their hiding-place— 1361  
 Not in the heart of Rome as formerly,  
 Under observance, subject to control—  
 But out o' the way,—or in the way, who knows?  
 That blind mute villa lurking by the gate 1365  
 At Via Paulina, not so hard to miss  
 By the honest eye, easy enough to find  
 In twilight by marauders : where perchance  
 Some muffled Caponsacchi might repair,  
 Employ odd moments when he too tried change, 1370  
 Found that a friend's abode was pleasanter  
 Than relegation, penance and the rest.

Come, here 's the last drop does its worst to wound :  
 Here 's Guido poisoned to the bone, you say,  
 Your boasted still's full strain and strength : not so ! 1375  
 One master-squeeze from screw shall bring to birth  
 The hoard i' the heart o' the toad, hell's quintessence.

He learned the true convenience of the change,  
 And why a convent lacks the cheerful hearts  
 And helpful hands which female straits require, 1380  
 When, in the blind mute villa by the gate,  
 Pompilia—what? sang, danced, saw company?  
 —Gave birth, Sir, to a child, his son and heir,  
 Or Guido's heir and Caponsacchi's son.  
 I want your word now: what do you say to this?  
 What would say little Arezzo and great Rome, 1386  
 And what did God say and the devil say  
 One at each ear o' the man, the husband, now  
 The father? Why, the overburdened mind  
 Broke down, what was a brain became a blaze. 1390  
 In fury of the moment—(that first news  
 Fell on the Count among his vines, it seems,  
 Doing his farm-work,)—why, he summoned steward,  
 Called in the first four hard hands and stout hearts  
 From field and furrow, poured forth his appeal, 1395  
 Not to Rome's law and gospel any more,  
 But this clown with a mother or a wife,  
 That clodpole with a sister or a son:  
 And, whereas law and gospel held their peace,  
 What wonder if the sticks and stones cried out? 1400

All five soon somehow found themselves at Rome,  
 At the villa door: there was the warmth and light—

The sense of life so just an inch inside—  
Some angel must have whispered “One more chance !”

He gave it : bade the others stand aside : 1405  
Knocked at the door,—“ Who is it knocks ? ” cried one.  
“ I will make,” surely Guido’s angel urged,  
“ One final essay, last experiment,  
“ Speak the word, name the name from out all names  
“ Which, if,—as doubtless strong illusions are, 1410  
“ And strange disguisings whereby truth seems false,  
“ And, since I am but man, I dare not do  
“ God’s work until assured I see with God,—  
“ If I should bring my lips to breathe that name  
“ And they be innocent,—nay, by one mere touch 1415  
“ Of innocence redeemed from utter guilt,—  
“ That name will bar the door and bid fate pass.  
“ I will not say ‘ It is a messenger,  
“ ‘ A neighbour, even a belated man,  
“ ‘ Much less your husband’s friend, your husband’s self : ’  
“ At such appeal the door is bound to ope. 1421  
“ But I will say”—here ’s rhetoric and to spare !  
Why, Sir, the stumbling-block is cursed and kicked,  
Block though it be ; the name that brought offence  
Will bring offence : the burnt child dreads the fire 1425  
Although that fire feed on some taper-wick  
Which never left the altar nor singed a fly :

And had a harmless man tripped you by chance,  
 How would you wait him, stand or step aside,  
 When next you heard he rolled your way? Enough.

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

Now, Sir, tale is told,

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

For Caponsacchi,—why, they ’ll have him here,

As hero of the adventure, who so fit  
 To figure in the coming Carnival?  
 'T will make the fortune of whate'er saloon  
 Hears him recount, with helpful cheek, and eye 1455  
 Hotly indignant now, now dewy-dimmed,  
 The incidents of flight, pursuit, surprise,  
 Capture, with hints of kisses all between—  
 While Guido, wholly unromantic spouse,  
 No longer fit to laugh at since the blood 1460  
 Gave the broad farce an all too brutal air,  
 Why, he and those four luckless friends of his  
 May tumble in the straw this bitter day—  
 Laid by the heels i' the New Prison, I hear,  
 To bide their trial, since trial, and for the life, 1465  
 Follows if but for form's sake : yes, indeed !

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

Who is it dares impugn the natural law,  
 Deny God's word "the faithless wife shall die"?  
 What, are we blind? How can we fail to learn  
 This crowd of miseries make the man a mark, 1480  
 Accumulate on one devoted head  
 For our example?—yours and mine who read  
 Its lesson thus—"Henceforward let none dare  
 "Stand, like a natural in the public way,  
 "Letting the very urchins twitch his beard 1485  
 "And tweak his nose, to earn a nickname so,  
 "Be styled male-Grissel or else modern Job!"  
 Had Guido, in the twinkling of an eye,  
 Summed up the reckoning, promptly paid himself,  
 That morning when he came up with the pair 1490  
 At the wayside inn,—exacted his just debt  
 By aid of what first mattock, pitchfork, axe  
 Came to hand in the helpful stable-yard,  
 And with that axe, if providence so pleased,  
 Cloven each head, by some Rolando-stroke, 1495  
 In one clean cut from crown to clavicle,  
 —Slain the priest-gallant, the wife-paramour,  
 Sticking, for all defence, in each skull's cleft  
 The rhyme and reason of the stroke thus dealt,  
 To-wit, those letters and last evidence 1500  
 Of shame, each package in its proper place,—  
 Bidding, who pitied, undistend the skulls,—

I say, the world had praised the man. But no !  
 That were too plain, too straight, too simply just !  
 He hesitates, calls law forsooth to help. 1505  
 And law, distasteful to who calls in law  
 When honour is beforehand and would serve,  
 What wonder if law hesitate in turn,  
 Plead her disuse to calls o' the kind, reply  
 (Smiling a little) " 'T is yourself assess 1510  
 " The worth of what 's lost, sum of damage done.  
 " What you touched with so light a finger-tip,  
 " You whose concern it was to grasp the thing,  
 " Why must law gird herself and grapple with ?  
 " Law, alien to the actor whose warm blood 1515  
 " Asks heat from law whose veins run lukewarm milk,—  
 " What you dealt lightly with, shall law make out  
 " Heinous forsooth ?"

Sir, what 's the good of law  
 in a case o' the kind ? None, as she all but says. 1520  
 Call in law when a neighbour breaks your fence,  
 Cribs from your field, tampers with rent or lease,  
 Touches the purse or pocket,—but woos your wife ?  
 No : take the old way trod when men were men !  
 Guido preferred the new path,—for his pains, 1525  
 Stuck in a quagmire, floundered worse and worse  
 Until he managed somehow scramble back  
 Into the safe sure rutted road once more,



Revenged his own wrong like a gentleman.  
 Once back 'mid the familiar prints, no doubt 1530  
 He made too rash amends for his first fault,  
 Vaulted too loftily over what barred him late,  
 And lit i' the mire again,—the common chance,  
 The natural over-energy : the deed  
 Maladroit yields three deaths instead of one, 1535  
 And one life left : for where 's the Canon's corpse?  
 All which is the worse for Guido, but, be frank—  
 The better for you and me and all the world,  
 Husbands of wives, especially in Rome.  
 The thing is put right, in the old place,—ay, 1540  
 The rod hangs on its nail behind the door,  
 Fresh from the brine : a matter I commend  
 To the notice, during Carnival that 's near,  
 Of a certain what's-his-name and jackanapes  
 Somewhat too civil of eyes with lute and song 1545  
 About a house here, where I keep a wife.  
 (You, being his cousin, may go tell him so.)

## III.

*THE OTHER HALF-ROME.*

ANOTHER day that finds her living yet,  
 Little Pompilia, with the patient brow  
 And lamentable smile on those poor lips,  
 And, under the white hospital-array,  
 A flower-like body, to frighten at a bruise 5  
 You 'd think, yet now, stabbed through and through  
     again,  
 Alive i' the ruins. 'T is a miracle.  
 It seems that, when her husband struck her first,  
 She prayed Madonna just that she might live  
 So long as to confess and be absolved; 10  
 And whether it was that, all her sad life long  
 Never before successful in a prayer,  
 This prayer rose with authority too dread,—  
 Or whether, because earth was hell to her,  
 By compensation, when the blackness broke 15  
 She got one glimpse of quiet and the cool blue,  
 To show her for a moment such things were,—

Or else,—as the Augustinian Brother thinks,  
 The friar who took confession from her lip,—  
 When a probationary soul that moved 20  
 From nobleness to nobleness, as she,  
 Over the rough way of the world, succumbs,  
 Bloodies its last thorn with unflinching foot,  
 The angels love to do their work betimes,  
 Staunch some wounds here nor leave so much for God.  
 Who knows? However it be, confessed, absolved, 26  
 She lies, with overplus of life beside  
 To speak and right herself from first to last,  
 Right the friend also, lamb-pure, lion-brave,  
 Care for the boy's concerns, to save the son 30  
 From the sire, her two-weeks' infant orphaned thus,  
 And—with best smile of all reserved for him—  
 Pardon that sire and husband from the heart.  
 A miracle, so tell your Molinists !

There she lies in the long white lazar-house. 35  
 Rome has besieged, these two days, never doubt,  
 Saint Anna's where she waits her death, to hear  
 Though but the chink o' the bell, turn o' the hinge  
 When the reluctant wicket opes at last,  
 Lets in, on now this and now that pretence, 40  
 Too many by half,—complain the men of art,—  
 For a patient in such plight. The lawyers first

Paid the due visit—justice must be done ;  
 They took her witness, why the murder was.  
 Then the priests followed properly,—a soul 45  
 To shrive ; 't was Brother Celestine's own right,  
 The same who noises thus her gifts abroad.  
 But many more, who found they were old friends,  
 Pushed in to have their stare and take their talk  
 And go forth boasting of it and to boast. 50  
 Old Monna Baldi chatters like a jay,  
 Swears—but that, prematurely trundled out  
 Just as she felt the benefit begin,  
 The miracle was snapped up by somebody,—  
 Her palsied limb 'gan prick and promise life 55  
 At touch o' the bedclothes merely,—how much more  
 Had she but brushed the body as she tried !  
 Cavalier Carlo—well, there 's some excuse  
 For him—Maratta who paints Virgins so—  
 He too must fee the porter and slip by 60  
 With pencil cut and paper squared, and straight  
 There was he figuring away at face :  
 “ A lovelier face is not in Rome,” cried he,  
 “ Shaped like a peacock's egg, the pure as pearl,  
 “ That hatches you anon a snow-white chick.” 65  
 Then, oh that pair of eyes, that pendent hair,  
 Black this and black the other ! Mighty fine—  
 But nobody cared ask to paint the same,

Nor grew a poet over hair and eyes  
 Four little years ago when, ask and have, 70  
 The woman who wakes all this rapture leaned  
 Flower-like from out her window long enough,  
 As much uncomplimented as uncropped  
 By comers and goers in Via Vittoria : eh ?  
 'T is just a flower's fate : past parterre we trip, 75  
 Till peradventure someone plucks our sleeve—  
 "Yon blossom at the briar's end, that 's the rose  
 "Two jealous people fought for yesterday  
 "And killed each other : see, there 's undisturbed  
 "A pretty pool at the root, of rival red !" 80  
 Then cry we " Ah, the perfect paragon !"  
 Then crave we " Just one keepsake-leaf for us !"

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

Somebody, at the bedside, said much more,  
 Took on him to explain the secret cause

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

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

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

And quote for happy—see the signs distinct  
 Of happiness as we yon Triton's trump.  
 What could they be but happy?—balanced so,  
 Nor low i' the social scale nor yet too high, 120  
 Nor poor nor richer than comports with ease,  
 Nor bright and envied, nor obscure and scorned,  
 Nor so young that their pleasures fell too thick,  
 Nor old past catching pleasure when it fell,  
 Nothing above, below the just degree, 125  
 All at the mean where joy's components mix.  
 So again, in the couple's very souls  
 You saw the adequate half with half to match,  
 Each having and each lacking somewhat, both  
 Making a whole that had all and lacked nought. 130  
 The round and sound, in whose composure just  
 The acquiescent and recipient side  
 Was Pietro's, and the stirring striving one  
 Violante's: both in union gave the due  
 Quietude, enterprise, craving and content, 135  
 Which go to bodily health and peace of mind.  
 But, as 't is said a body, rightly mixed,  
 Each element in equipoise, would last  
 Too long and live for ever,—accordingly  
 Holds a germ—sand-grain weight too much i' the  
 scale— 140  
 Ordained to get predominance one day

And so bring all to ruin and release,—  
 Not otherwise a fatal germ lurked here :  
 “ With mortals much must go, but something stays ;  
 “ Nothing will stay of our so happy selves.” 145  
 Out of the very ripeness of life’s core  
 A worm was bred—“ Our life shall leave no fruit.”  
 Enough of bliss, they thought, could bliss bear seed,  
 Yield its like, propagate a bliss in turn  
 And keep the kind up ; not supplant themselves 150  
 But put in evidence, record they were,  
 Show them, when done with, i’ the shape of a child.  
 “ ’T is in a child, man and wife grow complete,  
 “ One flesh : God says so : let him do his work !”

Now, one reminder of this gnawing want, 155  
 One special prick o’ the maggot at the core,  
 Always befell when, as the day came round,  
 A certain yearly sum,—our Pietro being,  
 As the long name runs, an usufructuary,—  
 Dropped in the common bag as interest 160  
 Of money, his till death, not afterward,  
 Failing an heir : an heir would take and take,  
 A child of theirs be wealthy in their place  
 To nobody’s hurt—the stranger else seized all.  
 Prosperity rolled river-like and stopped, 165  
 Making their mill go ; but when wheel wore out,



The wave would find a space and sweep on free  
 And, half-a-mile off, grind some neighbour's corn.

Adam-like, Pietro sighed and said no more :  
 Eve saw the apple was fair and good to taste, 170  
 So, plucked it, having asked the snake advice.  
 She told her husband God was merciful,  
 And his and her prayer granted at the last :  
 Let the old mill-stone moulder,—wheel unworn,  
 Quartz from the quarry, shot into the stream 175  
 Adroitly, as before should go bring grist—  
 Their house continued to them by an heir,  
 Their vacant heart replenished with a child.  
 We have her own confession at full length  
 Made in the first remorse : 't was Jubilee 180  
 Pealed in the ear o' the conscience and it woke.  
 She found she had offended God no doubt,  
 So much was plain from what had happened since,  
 Misfortune on misfortune ; but she harmed  
 No one i' the world, so far as she could see. 185  
 The act had gladdened Pietro to the height,  
 Her spouse whom God himself must gladden so  
 Or not at all : thus much seems probable  
 From the implicit faith, or rather say  
 Stupid credulity of the foolish man 190  
 Who swallowed such a tale nor strained a whit

Even at his wife's far-over-fifty years  
 Matching his sixty-and-under. Him she blessed ;  
 And as for doing any detriment  
 To the veritable heir,—why, tell her first 195  
 Who was he? Which of all the hands held up  
 I' the crowd, one day would gather round their gate,  
 Did she so wrong by intercepting thus  
 The ducat, spendthrift fortune thought to fling  
 For a scramble just to make the mob break shins?  
 She kept it, saved them kicks and cuffs thereby. 201  
 While at the least one good work had she wrought,  
 Good, clearly and incontestably! Her cheat—  
 What was it to its subject, the child's self,  
 But charity and religion? See the girl! 205  
 A body most like—a soul too probably—  
 Doomed to death, such a double death as waits  
 The illicit offspring of a common trull,  
 Sure to resent and forthwith rid herself  
 Of a mere interruption to sin's trade, 210  
 In the efficacious way old Tiber knows.  
 Was not so much proved by the ready sale  
 O' the child, glad transfer of this irksome chance?  
 Well then, she had caught up this castaway:  
 This fragile egg, some careless wild bird dropped, 215  
 She had picked from where it waited the foot-fall,  
 And put in her own breast till forth broke finch

Able to sing God praise on mornings now.  
 What so excessive harm was done?—she asked.

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

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

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

So—giving now his great flap-hat a gloss  
 With flat o' the hand between-whiles, soothing now 265  
 The silk from out its creases o'er the calf,

Setting the stocking clerical again,  
 But never disengaging, once engaged,  
 The thin clear grey hold of his eyes on her—  
 He dissertated on that Tuscan house, 270  
 Those Franceschini,—very old they were—  
 Not rich however—oh, not rich, at least,  
 As people look to be who, low i' the scale  
 One way, have reason, rising all they can  
 By favour of the money-bag! 't is fair— 275  
 Do all gifts go together? But don't suppose  
 That being not so rich means all so poor!  
 Say rather, well enough—i' the way, indeed,  
 Ha, ha, to fortune better than the best:  
 Since if his brother's patron-friend kept faith, 280  
 Put into promised play the Cardinalate,  
 Their house might wear the red cloth that keeps warm,  
 Would but the Count have patience—there 's the point!  
 For he was slipping into years apace,  
 And years make men restless—they needs must spy 285  
 Some certainty, some sort of end assured,  
 Some sparkle, tho' from topmost beacon-tip,  
 That warrants life a harbour through the haze.  
 In short, call him fantastic as you choose,  
 Guido was home-sick, yearned for the old sights 290  
 And usual faces,—fain would settle himself  
 And have the patron's bounty when it fell

Irrigate far rather than deluge near,  
 Go fertilize Arezzo, not flood Rome.  
 Sooth to say, 't was the wiser wish : the Count      295  
 Proved wanting in ambition,—let us avouch,  
 Since truth is best,—in callousness of heart,  
 And winced at pin-pricks whereby honours hang  
 A ribbon o'er each puncture : his—no soul  
 Ecclesiastic (here the hat was brushed)      300  
 Humble but self-sustaining, calm and cold,  
 Having, as one who puts his hand to the plough,  
 Renounced the over-vivid family-feel—  
 Poor brother Guido ! All too plain, he pined  
 Amid Rome's pomp and glare for dinginess      305  
 And that dilapidated palace-shell  
 Vast as a quarry and, very like, as bare—  
 Since to this comes old grandeur now-a-days—  
 Or that absurd wild villa in the waste  
 O' the hill side, breezy though, for who likes air,  
 Vittiano, nor unpleasant with its vines,      311  
 Outside the city and the summer heats.  
 And now his harping on this one tense chord  
 The villa and the palace, palace this  
 And villa the other, all day and all night      315  
 Creaked like the implacable cicala's cry  
 And made one's ear-drum ache: nought else would  
     serve

But that, to light his mother's visage up  
 With second youth, hope, gaiety again,  
 He must find straightway, woo and haply win 320  
 And bear away triumphant back, some wife.  
 Well now, the man was rational in his way :  
 He, the Abate,—ought he to interpose?  
 Unless by straining still his tutelage  
 (Priesthood leaps over elder-brothership) 325  
 Across this difficulty : then let go,  
 Leave the poor fellow in peace ! Would that be  
 wrong ?

There was no making Guido great, it seems,  
 Spite of himself : then happy be his dole !  
 Indeed, the Abate's little interest 330  
 Was somewhat nearly touched i' the case, they saw :  
 Since if his simple kinsman so were bent,  
 Began his rounds in Rome to catch a wife,  
 Full soon would such unworldliness surprise  
 The rare bird, sprinkle salt on phoenix' tail, 335  
 And so secure the nest a sparrow-hawk.  
 No lack of mothers here in Rome,—no dread  
 Of daughters lured as larks by looking-glass !  
 The first name-pecking credit-scratching fowl  
 Would drop her unfledged cuckoo in our nest 340  
 To gather greyness there, give voice at length  
 And shame the brood . . . but it was long ago

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



A wife worth Guido's house and hand and heart?  
He came to see ; had spoken, he could no less— 370  
(A final cherish of the stockinged calf)  
If harm were,—well, the matter was off his mind.

Then with the great air did he kiss, devout,  
Violante's hand, and rise up his whole height  
(A certain purple gleam about the black) 375  
And go forth grandly,—as if the Pope came next.  
And so Violante rubbed her eyes awhile,  
Got up too, walked to wake her Pietro soon  
And pour into his ear the mighty news  
How somebody had somehow somewhere seen 380  
Their tree-top-tuft of bloom above the wall,  
And came now to apprise them the tree's self  
Was no such crab-sort as should go feed swine,  
But veritable gold, the Hesperian ball  
Ordained for Hercules to haste and pluck, 385  
And bear and give the Gods to banquet with—  
Hercules standing ready at the door.  
Whereon did Pietro rub his eyes in turn,  
Look very wise, a little woeful too,  
Then, periwig on head, and cane in hand, 390  
Sally forth dignifiedly into the Square  
Of Spain across Babbuino the six steps,  
Toward the Boat-fountain where our idlers lounge,—

Ask, for form's sake, who Hercules might be,  
And have congratulation from the world. 395

Heartily laughed the world in his fool's-face  
And told him Hercules was just the heir  
To the stubble once a corn-field, and brick-heap  
Where used to be a dwelling-place now burned.  
Guido and Franceschini ; a Count,—ay : 400  
But a cross i' the poke to bless the Countship? No!  
All gone except sloth, pride, rapacity,  
Humours of the imposthume incident  
To rich blood that runs thin,—nursed to a head  
By the rankly-salted soil—a cardinal's court 405  
Where, parasite and picker-up of crumbs,  
He had hung on long, and now, let go, said some,  
Shaken off, said others,—but in any case  
Tired of the trade and something worse for wear,  
Was wanting to change town for country quick, 410  
Go home again : let Pietro help him home !  
The brother, Abate Paolo, shrewder mouse,  
Had pricked for comfortable quarters, inched  
Into the core of Rome, and fattened so ;  
But Guido, over-burly for rat's hole 415  
Suited to clerical slimness, starved outside,  
Must shift for himself : and so the shift was this !  
What, was the snug retreat of Pietro tracked,

The little provision for his old age snuffed ?  
 “ Oh, make your girl a lady, an you list, 420  
 “ But have more mercy on our wit than vaunt  
 “ Your bargain as we burgesses who brag !  
 “ Why, Goodman Dullard, if a friend must speak,  
 “ Would the Count, think you, stoop to you and yours  
 “ Were there the value of one penny-piece 425  
 “ To rattle ’twixt his palms—or likelier laugh,  
 “ Bid your Pompilia help you black his shoe ? ”

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

The marriage thus impossible, the rest 435  
 Followed : our spokesman, Paolo, heard his fate,  
 Resignedly Count Guido bore the blow :  
 Violante wiped away the transient tear,  
 Renounced the playing Danae to gold dreams,  
 Praised much her Pietro’s prompt sagaciousness, 440  
 Found neighbours’ envy natural, lightly laughed  
 At gossips’ malice, fairly wrapped herself

In her integrity three folds about,  
 And, letting pass a little day or two,  
 Threw, even over that integrity, 445  
 Another wrappage, namely one thick veil  
 That hid her, matron-wise, from head to foot,  
 And, by the hand holding a girl veiled too,  
 Stood, one dim end of a December day,  
 In Saint Lorenzo on the altar-step— 450  
 Just where she lies now and that girl will lie—  
 Only with fifty candles' company  
 Now, in the place of the poor winking one  
 Which saw,—doors shut and sacristan made sure,—  
 A priest—perhaps Abate Paolo—wed 455  
 Guido clandestinely, irrevocably  
 To his Pompilia aged thirteen years  
 And five months,—witness the church register,—  
 Pompilia, (thus become Count Guido's wife  
 Clandestinely, irrevocably his,) 460  
 Who all the while had borne, from first to last,  
 As brisk a part i' the bargain, as yon lamb,  
 Brought forth from basket and set out for sale,  
 Bears while they chaffer, wary market-man  
 And voluble housewife, o'er it,—each in turn 465  
 Patting the curly calm unconscious head,  
 With the shambles ready round the corner there,  
 When the talk 's talked out and a bargain struck.

Transfer complete, why, Pietro was apprised.  
 Violante sobbed the sobs and prayed the prayers 470  
 And said the serpent tempted so she fell,  
 Till Pietro had to clear his brow apace  
 And make the best of matters : wrath at first,—  
 How else? pacification presently,  
 Why not?—could flesh withstand the impurpled one,  
 The very Cardinal, Paolo's patron-friend? 476  
 Who, justifiably surnamed "a hinge,"  
 Knew where the mollifying oil should drop  
 To cure the creak o' the valve,—considerate  
 For frailty, patient in a naughty world. 480  
 He even volunteered to supervise  
 The rough draught of those marriage-articles  
 Signed in a hurry by Pietro, since revoked :  
 Trust 's politic, suspicion does the harm,  
 There is but one way to brow-beat this world, 485  
 Dumb-founder doubt, and repay scorn in kind,—  
 To go on trusting, namely, till faith move  
 Mountains.

And faith here made the mountains move.

Why, friends whose zeal cried "Caution ere too  
 late!"— 490  
 Bade "Pause ere jump, with both feet joined, on  
 slough!"—

Counsell'd "If rashness then, now temperance!"—  
 Heard for their pains that Pietro had closed eyes,  
 Jumped and was in the middle of the mire,  
 Money and all, just what should sink a man.      495  
 By the mere marriage, Guido gained forthwith  
 Dowry, his wife's right; no rescinding there:  
 But Pietro, why must he needs ratify  
 One gift Violante gave, pay down one doit  
 Promised in first fool's-flurry? Grasp the bag      500  
 Lest the son's service flag,—is reason and rhyme,  
 Above all when the son's a son-in-law.  
 Words to the wind! The parents cast their lot  
 Into the lap o' the daughter: and the son  
 Now with a right to lie there, took what fell,      505  
 Pietro's whole having and holding, house and field,  
 Goods, chattels and effects, his worldly worth  
 Present and in perspective, all renounced  
 In favour of Guido. As for the usufruct—  
 The interest now, the principal anon,      510  
 Would Guido please to wait, at Pietro's death:  
 Till when, he must support the couple's charge,  
 Bear with them, housemates, pensionaries, pawned  
 To an alien for fulfilment of their pact.  
 Guido should at discretion deal them orts,      515  
 Bread-bounty in Arezzo the strange place,—  
 They who had lived deliciously and rolled

Rome's choicest comfit 'neath the tongue before.  
 Into this quag, "jump" bade the Cardinal!  
 And neck-deep in a minute there flounced they. 520

But they touched bottom at Arezzo: there—  
 Four months' experience of how craft and greed  
 Quickened by penury and pretentious hate  
 Of plain truth, brutify and bestialize,—  
 Four months' taste of apportioned insolence, 525  
 Cruelty graduated, dose by dose  
 Of ruffianism dealt out at bed and board,  
 And lo, the work was done, success clapped hands.  
 The starved, stripped, beaten brace of stupid dupes  
 Broke at last in their desperation loose, 530  
 Fled away for their lives, and lucky so;  
 Found their account in casting coat afar  
 And bearing off a shred of skin at least:  
 Left Guido lord o' the prey, as the lion is,  
 And, careless what came after, carried their wrongs  
 To Rome,—I nothing doubt, with such remorse 536  
 As folly feels, since pain can make it wise,  
 But crime, past wisdom, which is innocence,  
 Needs not be plagued with till a later day.

Pietro went back to beg from door to door, 540  
 In hope that memory not quite extinct

Of cheery days and festive nights would move  
 Friends and acquaintance—after the natural laugh,  
 And tributary “Just as we foretold—”  
 To show some bowels, give the dregs o’ the cup, 545  
 Scraps of the trencher, to their host that was,  
 Or let him share the mat with the mastiff, he  
 Who lived large and kept open house so long.  
 Not so Violante: ever a-head i’ the march,  
 Quick at the bye-road and the cut-across, 550  
 She went first to the best adviser, God—  
 Whose finger unmistakably was felt  
 In all this retribution of the past.  
 Here was the prize of sin, luck of a lie!  
 But here too was what Holy Year would help, 555  
 Bound to rid sinners of sin vulgar, sin  
 Abnormal, sin prodigious, up to sin  
 Impossible and supposed for Jubilee’ sake:  
 To lift the leadenest of lies, let soar  
 The soul unhampered by a feather-weight. 560  
 “I will” said she “go burn out this bad hole  
 “That breeds the scorpion, baulk the plague at least  
 “Of hope to further plague by progeny:  
 “I will confess my fault, be punished, yes,  
 “But pardoned too: Saint Peter pays for all.” 565

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



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

Replied the throne—"Ere God forgive the guilt,  
 " Make man some restitution ! Do your part !  
 " The owners of your husband's heritage, 585  
 " Barred thence by this pretended birth and heir,—  
 " Tell them, the bar came so, is broken so,  
 " Theirs be the due reversion as before !  
 " Your husband who, no partner in the guilt,  
 " Suffers the penalty, led blindfold thus 590  
 " By love of what he thought his flesh and blood

"To alienate his all in her behalf,—  
 "Tell him too such contract is null and void!  
 "Last, he who personates your son-in-law,  
 "Who with sealed eyes and stopped ears, tame and mute,  
 "Took at your hand that bastard of a whore 596  
 "You called your daughter and he calls his wife,—  
 "Tell him, and bear the anger which is just!  
 "Then, penance so performed, may pardon be!"

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

Said and done:

Home went Violante, disbosomed all:  
 And Pietro who, six months before, had borne 615  
 Word after word of such a piece of news

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

Now at its entry gave a leap for joy;

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

Should catch a hand from heaven and spring thereby

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

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

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

“ My chairs and tables, all mine evermore? ”

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

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

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

“ That used to be my own with her great eyes —

“ He who drove us forth, why should he keep her

“ When proved as very a pauper as himself? 630

“ Will she come back, with nothing changed at all,

“ And laugh ‘ But how you dreamed uneasily! ”

“ ‘ I saw the great drops stand here on your brow —

“ ‘ Did I do wrong to wake you with a kiss? ’ ”

“ No, indeed, darling! No, for wide awake 635

“ I see another outburst of surprise :

“ The lout-lord, bully-beggar, braggart-sneak,

“ Who not content with cutting purse, crops ear —

“ Assuredly it shall be salve to mine

“ When this great news red-letters him, the rogue! 640

“ Ay, let him taste the teeth o’ the trap, this fox,

" Give us our lamb back, golden fleece and all,  
 " Let her creep in and warm our breasts again !  
 " Why care for the past ? We three are our old selves,  
 " And know now what the outside world is worth." 645  
 And so, he carried case before the courts ;  
 And there Violante, blushing to the bone,  
 Made public declaration of her fault,  
 Renounced her motherhood, and prayed the law  
 To interpose, frustrate of its effect 650  
 Her folly, and redress the injury done.

Whereof was the disastrous consequence,  
 That though indisputably clear the case  
 (For thirteen years are not so large a lapse,  
 And still six witnesses survived in Rome 655  
 To prove the truth o' the tale)—yet, patent wrong  
 Seemed Guido's ; the first cheat had chanced on him :  
 Here was the pity that, deciding right,  
 Those who began the wrong would gain the prize.  
 Guido pronounced the story one long lie 660  
 Lied to do robbery and take revenge :  
 Or say it were no lie at all but truth,  
 Then, it both robbed the right heirs and shamed him  
 Without revenge to humanize the deed :  
 What had he done when first they shamed him thus ?  
 But that were too fantastic : losels they, 666

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

So answered Guido through the Abate's mouth.  
Wherefore the court, its customary way, 670

Inclined to the middle course the sage affect.  
They held the child to be a changeling,—good :  
But, lest the husband got no good thereby,  
They willed the dowry, though not hers at all,  
Should yet be his, if not by right then grace— 675

Part-payment for the plain injustice done.  
As for that other contract, Pietro's work,  
Renunciation of his own estate,  
That must be cancelled—give him back his gifts,  
He was no party to the cheat at least ! 680

So ran the judgment :—whence a prompt appeal  
On both sides, seeing right is absolute.  
Cried Pietro “ Is the child no child of mine ?  
“ Why give her a child's dowry ? ”—“ Have I right  
“ To the dowry, why not to the rest as well ? ” 685

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

Hence new disaster—here no outlet seemed ;  
Whatever the fortune of the battle-field, 690

No path whereby the fatal man might march  
 Victorious, wreath on head and spoils in hand,  
 And back turned full upon the baffled foe,—  
 Nor cranny whence, desperate and disgraced,  
 Stripped to the skin, he might be fain to crawl 695  
 Worm-like, and so away with his defeat  
 To other fortune and a novel prey.

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

“Cast her off? Turn her naked out of doors?”

“Easily said! But still the action pends,

“Still dowry, principal and interest,

“Pietro’s possessions, all I bargained for,—

“Any good day, be but my friends alert, 705

“May give them me if she continue mine.

“Yet, keep her? Keep the puppet of my foes—

“Her voice that lispeth me back their curse—her eye

“They lend their leer of triumph to—her lip

“I touch and taste their very filth upon?” 710

In short, he also took the middle course  
 Rome taught him—did at last excogitate  
 How he might keep the good and leave the bad  
 Twined in revenge, yet extricable,—nay  
 Make the very hate’s eruption, very rush 715

Of the unpent sluice of cruelty relieve  
 His heart first, then go fertilize his field. \*  
 What if the girl-wife, tortured with due care,  
 Should take, as though spontaneously, the road  
 It were impolitic to thrust her on? 720  
 If, goaded, she broke out in full revolt,  
 Followed her parents i' the face o' the world,  
 Branded as runaway not castaway,  
 Self-sentenced and self-punished in the act?  
 So should the loathed form and detested face 725  
 Launch themselves into hell and there be lost  
 While he looked o'er the brink with folded arms;  
 So should the heaped-up shames go shuddering back  
 O' the head o' the heapers, Pietro and his wife,  
 And bury in the breakage three at once: 730  
 While Guido, left free, no one right renounced,  
 Gain present, gain prospective, all the gain,  
 None of the wife except her rights absorbed,  
 Should ask law what it was law paused about—  
 If law were dubious still whose word to take, 735  
 The husband's—dignified and derelict,  
 Or the wife's—the . . . what I tell you. It should be.

Guido's first step was to take pen, indite  
 A letter to the Abate,—not his own,  
 His wife's,—she should re-write, sign, seal and send.

She liberally told the household-news, 741  
 Rejoiced her vile progenitors were gone,  
 Revealed their malice—how they even laid  
 A last injunction on her, when they fled,  
 That she should forthwith find a paramour, 745  
 Complot with him to gather spoil enough,  
 Then burn the house down,—taking previous care  
 To poison all its inmates overnight,—  
 And so companioned, so provisioned too,  
 Follow to Rome and there join fortunes gay. 750  
 This letter, traced in pencil-characters,  
 Guido as easily got re-traced in ink  
 By his wife's pen, guided from end to end,  
 As if it had been just so much Chinese.  
 For why? That wife could broider, sing perhaps, 755  
 Pray certainly, but no more read than write  
 This letter "which yet write she must," he said,  
 "Being half courtesy and compliment,  
 "Half sisterliness: take the thing on trust!"  
 She had as readily re-traced the words 760  
 Of her own death-warrant,—in some sort 't was so.  
 This letter the Abate in due course  
 Communicated to such curious souls  
 In Rome as needs must pry into the cause  
 Of quarrel, why the Comparini fled 765  
 The Franceschini, whence the grievance grew,



What the hubbub meant : "Nay,—see the wife's own  
word,

"Authentic answer ! Tell detractors too

"There 's a plan formed, a programme figured here

"—Pray God no after-practice put to proof, 770

"This letter cast no light upon, one day !"

So much for what should work in Rome : back now

To Arezzo, follow up the project there,

Forward the next step with as bold a foot,

And plague Pompilia to the height, you see ! 775

Accordingly did Guido set himself

To worry up and down, across, around,

The woman, hemmed in by her household-bars,—

Chase her about the coop of daily life,

Having first stopped each outlet thence save one 780

Which, like bird with a ferret in her haunt,

She needs must seize as sole way of escape

Though there was tied and twittering a decoy

To seem as if it tempted,—just the plume

O' the popinjay, not a real respite there 785

From tooth and claw of something in the dark,—

Giuseppe Caponsacchi.

Now begins

The tenebrific passage of the tale :

How hold a light, display the cavern's gorge? 790

How, in this phase of the affair, show truth?  
 Here is the dying wife who smiles and says  
 "So it was,—so it was not,—how it was,  
 "I never knew nor ever care to know—"  
 Till they all weep, physician, man of law, 795  
 Even that poor old bit of battered brass  
 Beaten out of all shape by the world's sins,  
 Common utensil of the lazar-house—  
 Confessor Celestino groans "'T is truth,  
 "All truth and only truth: there's something here,  
 "Some presence in the room beside us all, 801  
 "Something that every lie expires before:  
 "No question she was pure from first to last."  
 So far is well and helps us to believe:  
 But beyond, she the helpless, simple-sweet 805  
 Or silly-sooth, unskilled to break one blow  
 At her good fame by putting finger forth,—  
 How can she render service to the truth?  
 The bird says "So I fluttered where a springe  
 "Caught me: the springe did not contrive itself, 810  
 "That I know: who contrived it, God forgive!"  
 But we, who hear no voice and have dry eyes,  
 Must ask,—we cannot else, absolving her,—  
 How of the part played by that same decoy  
 I' the catching, caging? Was himself caught first?  
 We deal here with no innocent at least, 816

No witless victim,—he 's a man of the age  
And priest beside,—persuade the mocking world  
Mere charity boiled over in this sort !  
He whose own safety too,—(the Pope 's apprised—  
Good-natured with the secular offence, 821  
The Pope looks grave on priesthood in a scrape)  
Our priest's own safety therefore, may-be life,  
Hangs on the issue ! You will find it hard.  
Guido is here to meet you with fixed foot, 825  
Stiff like a statue—"Leave what went before !  
" My wife fled i' the company of a priest,  
" Spent two days and two nights alone with him :  
" Leave what came after !" He stands hard to throw  
Moreover priests are merely flesh and blood ; 830  
When we get weakness, and no guilt beside,  
'Tis no such great ill-fortune : finding grey,  
We gladly call that white which might be black,  
Too used to the double-dye. So, if the priest  
Moved by Pompilia's youth and beauty, gave 835  
Way to the natural weakness. . . . Anyhow  
Here be facts, charactery ; what they spell  
Determine, and thence pick what sense you may !  
There was a certain young bold handsome priest  
Popular in the city, far and wide 840  
Famed, since Arezzo 's but a little place,  
As the best of good companions, gay and grave

At the decent minute ; settled in his stall,  
 Or sidling, lute on lap, by lady's couch,  
 Ever the courtly Canon ; see in him 845  
 A proper star to climb and culminate,  
 Have its due handbreadth of the heaven at Rome,  
 Though meanwhile pausing on Arezzo's edge,  
 As modest candle does 'mid mountain fog,  
 To rub off redness and rusticity 850  
 Ere it sweep chastened, gain the silver-sphere !  
 Whether through Guido's absence or what else,  
 This Caponsacchi, favourite of the town,  
 Was yet no friend of his nor free o' the house,  
 Though both moved in the regular magnates' march :  
 Each must observe the other's tread and halt 856  
 At church, saloon, theatre, house of play.  
 Who could help noticing the husband's slouch,  
 The black of his brow—or miss the news that buzzed  
 Of how the little solitary wife 860  
 Wept and looked out of window all day long?  
 What need of minute search into such springs  
 As start men, set o' the move?—machinery  
 Old as earth, obvious as the noonday sun.  
 Why, take men as they come, —an instance now,—  
 Of all those who have simply gone to see 866  
 Pompilia on her deathbed since four days,  
 Half at the least are, call it how you please,

In love with her—I don't except the priests  
 Nor even the old confessor whose eyes run 870  
 Over at what he styles his sister's voice  
 Who died so early and weaned him from the world.  
 Well, had they viewed her ere the paleness pushed  
 The last o' the red o' the rose away, while yet  
 Some hand, adventurous 'twixt the wind and her, 875  
 Might let shy life run back and raise the flower  
 Rich with reward up to the guardian's face,—  
 Would they have kept that hand employed all day  
 At fumbling on with prayer-book pages? No!  
 Men are men: why then need I say one word 880  
 More than that our mere man the Canon here  
 Saw, pitied, loved Pompilia?

This is why;

This startling why: that Caponsacchi's self—  
 Whom foes and friends alike avouch, for good 885  
 Or ill, a man of truth whate'er betide,  
 Intrepid altogether, reckless too  
 How his own fame and fortune, tossed to the winds,  
 Suffer by any turn the adventure take,  
 Nay, more—not thrusting, like a badge to hide, 890  
 'Twixt shirt and skin a joy which shown is shame—  
 But flirting flag-like i' the face o' the world  
 This tell-tale kerchief, this conspicuous love

For the lady,—oh, called innocent love, I know !  
 Only, such scarlet fiery innocence 895  
 As most folk would try muffle up in shade,—  
 —'T is strange then that this else abashless mouth  
 Should yet maintain, for truth's sake which is God's,  
 That it was not he made the first advance,  
 That, even ere word had passed between the two, 900  
 Pompilia penned him letters, passionate prayers,  
 If not love, then so simulating love  
 That he, no novice to the taste of thyme,  
 Turned from such over-luscious honey-clot  
 At end o' the flower, and would not lend his lip 905  
 Till . . . but the tale here frankly outsoars faith :  
 There must be falsehood somewhere. For her part,  
 Pompilia quietly constantly avers  
 She never penned a letter in her life  
 Nor to the Canon nor any other man, 910  
 Being incompetent to write and read :  
 Nor had she ever uttered word to him, nor he  
 To her till that same evening when they met,  
 She on her window-terrace, he beneath  
 I' the public street, as was their fateful chance, 915  
 And she adjured him in the name of God  
 To find out, bring to pass where, when and how  
 Escape with him to Rome might be contrived.  
 Means were found, plan laid, time fixed, she avers,

And heart assured to heart in loyalty, 920  
All at an impulse! All extemporized  
As in romance-books! Is that credible?  
Well, yes: as she avers this with calm mouth  
Dying, I do think "Credible!" you'd cry—  
Did not the priest's voice come to break the spell. 925  
They questioned him apart, as the custom is,  
When first the matter made a noise at Rome,  
And he, calm, constant then as she is now,  
For truth's sake did assert and re-assert  
Those letters called him to her and he came, 930  
—Which damns the story credible otherwise.  
Why should this man,—mad to devote himself,  
Careless what comes of his own fame, the first,—  
Be studious thus to publish and declare  
Just what the lightest nature loves to hide, 935  
So screening lady from the byword's laugh  
"First spoke the lady, last the cavalier!"  
—I say,—why should the man tell truth just now  
When graceful lying meets such ready shrift?  
Or is there a first moment for a priest 940  
As for a woman, when invaded shame  
Must have its first and last excuse to show?  
Do both contrive love's entry in the mind  
Shall look, i' the manner of it, a surprise,—  
That after, once the flag o' the fort hauled down, 945

Effrontery may sink drawbridge, open gate,  
 Welcome and entertain the conqueror?  
 Or what do you say to a touch of the devil's worst?  
 Can it be that the husband, he who wrote  
 The letter to his brother I told you of,                   950  
 I' the name of her it meant to criminate,—  
 What if he wrote those letters to the priest?  
 Further the priest says, when it first befell,  
 This folly o' the letters, that he checked the flow,  
 Put them back lightly each with its reply.                   955  
 Here again vexes new discrepancy :  
 There never reached her eye a word from him :  
 He did write but she could not read—could just  
 Burn the offence to wifehood, womanhood,  
 So did burn : never bade him come to her,                   960  
 Yet when it proved he must come, let him come,  
 And when he did come though uncalled,—why, spoke  
 Prompt by an inspiration : thus it chanced.  
 Will you go somewhat back to understand?

When first, pursuant to his plan, there sprang,           965  
 Like an uncaged beast, Guido's cruelty  
 On soul and body of his wife, she cried  
 To those whom law appoints resource for such,  
 The secular guardian,—that's the Governor,  
 And the Archbishop, —that's the spiritual guide,   970



And prayed them take the claws from out her flesh.  
 Now, this is ever the ill consequence  
 Of being noble, poor and difficult,  
 Ungainly, yet too great to disregard,—  
 This—that born peers and friends hereditary,— 975  
 Though disinclined to help from their own store  
 The opprobrious wight, put penny in his poke  
 From private purse or leave the door ajar  
 When he goes wistful by at dinner-time,—  
 Yet, if his needs conduct him where they sit 980  
 Smugly in office, judge this, bishop that,  
 Dispensers of the shine and shade o' the place—  
 And if, friend's door shut and friend's purse undrawn,  
 Still potentates may find the office-seat  
 Do as good service at no cost—give help 985  
 By-the-bye, pay up traditional dues at once  
 Just through a feather-weight too much i' the scale,  
 Or finger-tip forgot at the balance-tongue,—  
 Why, only churls refuse, or Molinists.  
 Thus when, in the first roughness of surprise 990  
 At Guido's wolf-face whence the sheepskin fell,  
 The frightened couple, all bewilderment,  
 Rushed to the Governor,—who else rights wrong?  
 Told him their tale of wrong and craved redress—  
 Why, then the Governor woke up to the fact 995  
 That Guido was a friend of old, poor Count!—

So, promptly paid his tribute, promised the pair,  
 Wholesome chastisement should soon cure their qualms  
 Next time they came, wept, prated and told lies :  
 So stopped all prating, sent them dumb to Rome.  
 Well, now it was Pompilia's turn to try :                   1001  
 The troubles pressing on her, as I said,  
 Three times she rushed, maddened by misery,  
 To the other mighty man, sobbed out her prayer  
 At footstool of the Archbishop—fast the friend   1005  
 Of her husband also ! Oh, good friends of yore !  
 So, the Archbishop, not to be outdone  
 By the Governor, break custom more than he,  
 Thrice bade the foolish woman stop her tongue,  
 Unloosed her hands from harassing his gout,       1010  
 Coached her and carried her to the Count again,  
 —His old friend should be master in his house,  
 Rule his wife and correct her faults at need !  
 Well, driven from post to pillar in this wise,  
 She, as a last resource, betook herself               1015  
 To one, should be no family-friend at least,  
 A simple friar o' the city ; confessed to him,  
 Then told how fierce temptation of release  
 By self-dealt death was busy with her soul,  
 And urged that he put this in words, write plain   1020  
 For one who could not write, set down her prayer  
 'That Pietro and Violante, parent-like

If somehow not her parents, should for love  
 Come save her, pluck from out the flame the brand  
 Themselves had thoughtlessly thrust in so deep 1025  
 To send gay-coloured sparkles up and cheer  
 Their seat at the chimney-corner. The good friar  
 Promised as much at the moment ; but, alack,  
 Night brings discretion : he was no one's friend,  
 Yet presently found he could not turn about 1030  
 Nor take a step i' the case and fail to tread  
 On someone's toe who either was a friend,  
 Or a friend's friend, or friend's friend thrice-removed,  
 And woe to friar by whom offences come !  
 So, the course being plain,—with a general sigh 1035  
 At matrimony the profound mistake,—  
 He threw reluctantly the business up,  
 Having his other penitents to mind.

If then, all outlets thus secured save one,  
 At last she took to the open, stood and stared 1040  
 With her wan face to see where God might wait—  
 And there found Caponsacchi wait as well  
 For the precious something at perdition's edge,  
 He only was predestinate to save,—  
 And if they recognized in a critical flash 1045  
 From the zenith, each the other, her need of him,  
 His need of . . . say, a woman to perish for,

The regular way o' the world, yet break no vow,  
 Do no harm save to himself,—if this were thus?  
 How do you say? It were improbable;                   1050  
 So is the legend of my patron-saint.

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

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

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

The husband quotes this for incredible,  
 All of the story from first word to last :  
 Sees the priest's hand throughout upholding hers,  
 Traces his foot to the alcove, that night,  
 Whither and whence blindfold he knew the way, 1095  
 Proficient in all craft and stealthiness ;

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

"Ay. but at last, e'en have it how you will, 1110  
 "Whatever the means, whatever the way, explodes  
 "The consummation"—the accusers shriek :  
 "Here is the wife avowedly found in flight,  
 "And the companion of her flight, a priest ;  
 "She flies her husband, he the church his spouse :  
 "What is this?" 1116

Wife and priest alike reply

"This is the simple thing it claims to be,  
 "A course we took for life and honour's sake,  
 "Very strange, very justifiable." 1120

She says, "God put it in my head to fly,  
 " As when the martin migrates : autumn claps  
 " Her hands, cries ' Winter 's coming, will be here,  
 " ' Off with you ere the white teeth overtake !  
 " ' Flee ! ' So I fled : this friend was the warm day,  
 " The south wind and whatever favours flight ;      1126  
 " I took the favour, had the help, how else ?  
 " And so we did fly rapidly all night,  
 " All day, all night—a longer night—again,  
 " And then another day, longest of days,      1130  
 " And all the while, whether we fled or stopped,  
 " I scarce know how or why, one thought filled both,  
 " ' Fly and arrive ! ' So long as I found strength  
 " I talked with my companion, told him much,  
 " Knowing that he knew more, knew me, knew God  
 " And God's disposal of me,—but the sense      1136  
 " O' the blessed flight absorbed me in the main,  
 " And speech became mere talking through a sleep,  
 " Till at the end of that last longest night  
 " In a red daybreak, when we reached an inn      1140  
 " And my companion whispered ' Next stage—Rome ! '  
 " Sudden the weak flesh fell like piled-up cards,  
 " All the frail fabric at a finger's touch,  
 " And prostrate the poor soul too, and I said  
 " ' But though Count Guido were a furlong off,      1145  
 " ' Just on me, I must stop and rest awhile ! '

“ Then something like a huge white wave o’ the sea  
 “ Broke o’er my brain and buried me in sleep  
 “ Blessedly, till it ebbed and left me loose,  
 “ And where was I found but on a strange bed      1150  
 “ In a strange room like hell, roaring with noise,  
 “ Ruddy with flame, and filled with men, in front  
 “ Who but the man you call my husband? ay—  
 “ Count Guido once more between heaven and me,  
 “ For there my heaven stood, my salvation, yes—      1155  
 “ That Caponsacchi all my heaven of help,  
 “ Helpless himself, held prisoner in the hands  
 “ Of men who looked up in my husband’s face  
 “ To take the fate thence he should signify,  
 “ Just as the way was at Arezzo.    Then,                      1160  
 “ Not for my sake but his who had helped me—  
 “ I sprang up, reached him with one bound, and seized  
 “ The sword o’ the felon, trembling at his side,  
 “ Fit creature of a coward, unsheathed the thing  
 “ And would have pinned him through the poison-bag  
 “ To the wall and left him there to palpitate,              1166  
 “ As you serve scorpions, but men interposed—  
 “ Disarmed me, gave his life to him again  
 “ That he might take mine and the other lives,  
 “ And he has done so.    I submit myself! ”              1170  
 The priest says—oh, and in the main resul’  
 The facts asseverate, he truly says,



As to the very act and deed of him,  
However you mistrust the mind o' the man—  
The flight was just for flight's sake, no pretext 1175  
For aught except to set Pompilia free.  
He says "I cite the husband's self's worst charge  
" In proof of my best word for both of us.  
" Be it conceded that so many times  
" We took our pleasure in his palace: then, 1180  
" What need to fly at all?—or flying no less,  
" What need to outrage the lips sick and white  
" Of a woman, and bring ruin down beside,  
" By halting when Rome lay one stage beyond?"  
So does he vindicate Pompilia's fame, 1185  
Confirm her story in all points but one—  
This; that, so fleeing and so breathing forth  
Her last strength in the prayer to halt awhile,  
She makes confusion of the reddening white  
Which was the sunset when her strength gave way,  
And the next sunrise and its whitening red 1191  
Which she revived in when her husband came:  
She mixes both times, morn and eve, in one,  
Having lived through a blank of night 'twixt each  
Though dead-asleep, unaware as a corpse, 1195  
She on the bed above; her friend below  
Watched in the doorway of the inn the while,  
Stood i' the red o' the morn, that she mistakes,

In act to rouse and quicken the tardy crew  
 And hurry out the horses, have the stage 1200  
 Over, the last league, reach Rome and be safe :  
 When up came Guido.

Guido's tale begins —

How he and his whole household, drunk to death  
 By some enchanted potion, popped drugs 1205  
 Plied by the wife, lay powerless in gross sleep  
 And left the spoilers unimpeded way,  
 Could not shake off their poison and pursue,  
 Till noontide, then made shift to get on horse  
 And did pursue : which means he took his time, 1210  
 Pressed on no more than lingered after, step  
 By step, just making sure o' the fugitives,  
 Till at the nick of time, he saw his chance,  
 Seized it, came up with and surprised the pair.  
 How he must needs have gnawn lip and gnashed teeth,  
 Taking successively at tower and town, 1216  
 Village and roadside, still the same report  
 " Yes, such a pair arrived an hour ago,  
 " Sat in the carriage just where now you stand,  
 " While we got horses ready,—turned deaf ear 1220  
 " To all entreaty they would even alight ;  
 " Counted the minutes and resumed their course."  
 Would they indeed escape, arrive at Rome,  
 Leave no least loop-hole to let murder through,

But foil him of his captured infamy, 1225  
 Prize of guilt proved and perfect? So it seemed.  
 Till, oh the happy chance, at last stage, Rome  
 But two short hours off, Castelnuovo reached,  
 The guardian angel gave reluctant place,  
 Satan stepped forward with alacrity, 1230  
 Pompilia's flesh and blood succumbed, perforce  
 A halt was, and her husband had his will.  
 Perdue he couched, counted out hour by hour  
 Till he should spy in the east a signal-streak—  
 Night had been, morrow was, triumph would be. 1235  
 Do you see the plan deliciously complete?  
 The rush upon the unsuspecting sleep,  
 The easy execution, the outcry  
 Over the deed "Take notice all the world!  
 "These two dead bodies, locked still in embrace,—  
 "The man is Caponsacchi and a priest, 1241  
 "The woman is my wife: they fled me late,  
 "Thus have I found and you behold them thus,  
 "And may judge me: do you approve or no?"  
  
 Success did seem not so improbable, 1245  
 But that already Satan's laugh was heard,  
 His black back turned on Guido—left i' the lurch  
 Or rather, balked of suit and service now,  
 Left to improve on both by one deed more,

Burn up the better at no distant day, 1250  
 Body and soul one holocaust to hell.  
 Anyhow, of this natural consequence  
 Did just the last link of the long chain snap :  
 For an eruption was o' the priest, alive  
 And alert, calm, resolute and formidable, 1255  
 Not the least look of fear in that broad brow—  
 One not to be disposed of by surprise,  
 And armed moreover—who had guessed as much ?  
 Yes, there stood he in secular costume  
 Complete from head to heel, with sword at side, 1260  
 He seemed to know the trick of perfectly.  
 There was no prompt suppression of the man  
 As he said calmly “ I have saved your wife  
 “ From death ; there was no other way but this ;  
 “ Of what do I defraud you except death ? 1265  
 “ Charge any wrong beyond, I answer it.”  
 Guido, the valorous, had met his match,  
 Was forced to demand help instead of fight,  
 Bid the authorities o' the place lend aid  
 And make the best of a broken matter so. 1270  
 They soon obeyed the summons—I suppose,  
 Apprised and ready, or not far to seek—  
 Laid hands on Caponsacchi, found in fault,  
 A priest yet flagrantly accoutred thus,—  
 Then, to make good Count Guido's further charge,

Proceeded, prisoner made lead the way, 1276  
 In a crowd, upstairs to the chamber-door  
 Where wax-white, dead asleep, deep beyond dream,  
 As the priest laid her, lay Pompilia yet.

And as he mounted step and step with the crowd 1280  
 How I see Guido taking heart again !  
 He knew his wife so well and the way of her—  
 How at the outbreak she would shroud her shame  
 In hell's heart, would it mercifully yawn—  
 How, failing that, her forehead to his foot, 1285  
 She would crouch silent till the great doom fell,  
 Leave him triumphant with the crowd to see  
 Guilt motionless or writhing like a worm !  
 No ! Second misadventure, this worm turned,  
 I told you : would have slain him on the spot 1290  
 With his own weapon, but they seized her hands :  
 Leaving her tongue free, as it tolled the knell  
 Of Guido's hope so lively late. The past  
 Took quite another shape now. She who shrieked  
 " At least and for ever I am mine and God's, 1295  
 " Thanks to his liberating angel Death—  
 " Never again degraded to be yours  
 " The ignoble noble, the unmanly man,  
 " The beast below the beast in brutishness !"—  
 This was the froward child, " the restif lamb 1300

"Used to be cherished in his breast," he groaned—  
 "Eat from his hand and drink from out his cup,  
 "The while his fingers pushed their loving way  
 "Through curl on curl of that soft coat—alas,  
 "And she all silverly baaed gratitude 1305  
 "While meditating mischief!"—and so forth.  
 He must invent another story now!  
 The ins and outs o' the rooms were searched: he found  
 Or showed for found the abominable prize—  
 Love-letters from his wife who cannot write, 1310  
 Love-letters in reply o' the priest—thank God!—  
 Who can write and confront his character  
 With this, and prove the false thing forged throughout:  
 Spitting whereat, he needs must spatter whom  
 But Guido's self?—that forged and falsified 1315  
 One letter called Pompilia's, past dispute:  
 Then why not these to make sure still more sure?

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

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

Well, the result was something of a shade 1340  
 On the parties thus accused,—how otherwise ?  
 Shade, but with shine as unmistakable.  
 Each had a prompt defence : Pompilia first—  
 “ Earth was made hell to me who did no harm :  
 “ I only could emerge one way from hell 1345  
 “ By catching at the one hand held me, so  
 “ I caught at it and thereby stepped to heaven :  
 “ If that be wrong, do with me what you will !”  
 Then Caponsacchi with a grave grand sweep

- O' the arm as though his soul warned baseness off—  
 “ If as a man, then much more as a priest 1351  
 “ I hold me bound to help weak innocence :  
 “ If so my worldly reputation burst,  
 “ Being the bubble it is, why, burst it may :  
 “ Blame I can bear though not blameworthiness. 1355  
 “ But use your sense first, see if the miscreant proved,  
 “ The man who tortured thus the woman, thus  
 “ Have not both laid the trap and fixed the lure  
 “ Over the pit should bury body and soul !  
 “ His facts are lies : his letters are the fact— 1360  
 “ An infiltration flavoured with himself !  
 “ As for the fancies—whether . . . what is it you say ?  
 “ The lady loves me, whether I love her  
 “ In the forbidden sense of your surmise,—  
 “ If, with the midday blaze of truth above, 1365  
 “ The unlidded eye of God awake, aware,  
 “ You needs must pry about and trace the birth  
 “ Of each stray beam of light may traverse night  
 “ To the night's sun that's Lucifer himself,  
 “ Do so, at other time, in other place, 1370  
 “ Not now nor here ! Enough that first to last  
 “ I never touched her lip nor she my hand  
 “ Nor either of us thought a thought, much less  
 “ Spoke a word which the Virgin might not hear.  
 “ Be such your question, thus I answer it.” 1375



Then the court had to make its mind up, spoke.  
 " It is a thorny question, yea, a tale  
 " Hard to believe, but not impossible :  
 " Who can be absolute for either side ?  
 " A middle course is happily open yet. 1380  
 " Here has a blot surprised the social blank,—  
 " Whether through favour, feebleness or fault,  
 " No matter, leprosy has touched our robe  
 " And we unclean must needs be purified.  
 " Here is a wife makes holiday from home, 1385  
 " A priest caught playing truant to his church,  
 " In masquerade moreover : both allege  
 " Enough excuse to stop our lifted scourge  
 " Which else would heavily fall. On the other hand,  
 " Here is a husband, ay and man of mark, 1390  
 " Who comes complaining here, demands redress  
 " As if he were the pattern of desert—  
 " The while those plaguy allegations frown,  
 " Forbid we grant him the redress he seeks.  
 " To all men be our moderation known ! 1395  
 " Rewarding none while compensating each,  
 " Hurting all round though harming nobody,  
 " Husband, wife, priest, scot-free not one shall 'scape,  
 " Yet priest, wife, husband, boast the unbroken head  
 " From application of our excellent oil : 1400  
 " So that, whatever be the fact, in fine,

" We make no miss of justice in a sort.  
 " First, let the husband stomach as he may,  
 " His wife shall neither be returned him, no—  
 " Nor branded, whipped and caged, but just consigned  
 " To a convent and the quietude she craves ;           1406  
 " So is he rid of his domestic plague :  
 " What better thing can happen to a man ?  
 " Next, let the priest retire—unshent, unshamed,  
 " Unpunished as for perpetrating crime,               1410  
 " But relegated (not imprisoned, Sirs !)  
 " Sent for three years to clarify his youth  
 " At Civita, a rest by the way to Rome :  
 " There let his life skim off its last of lees  
 " Nor keep this dubious colour.   Judged the cause :  
 " All parties may retire, content, we hope."           1416  
 That 's Rome's way, the traditional road of law ;  
 Whither it leads is what remains to tell.

The priest went to his relegation-place,  
 The wife to her convent, brother Paolo               1420  
 To the arms of brother Guido with the news  
 And this beside—his charge was countercharged ;  
 The Comparini, his old brace of hates,  
 Were breathed and vigilant and venomous now—  
 Had shot a second bolt where the first stuck,       1425  
 And followed up the pending dowry-suit

By a procedure should release the wife  
 From so much of the marriage-bond as barred  
 Escape when Guido turned the screw too much  
 On his wife's flesh and blood, as husband may. 1430  
 No more defence, she turned and made attack,  
 Claimed now divorce from bed and board, in short :  
 Pleaded such subtle strokes of cruelty,  
 Such slow sure siege laid to her body and soul,  
 As, proved,—and proofs seemed coming thick and fast,—  
 Would gain both freedom and the dowry back 1436  
 Even should the first suit leave them in his grasp :  
 So urged the Comparini for the wife.  
 Guido had gained not one of the good things  
 He grasped at by his creditable plan 1440  
 O' the flight and following and the rest : the suit  
 That smouldered late was fanned to fury new,  
 This adjunct came to help with fiercer fire,  
 While he had got himself a quite new plague—  
 Found the world's face an universal grin 1445  
 At this last best of the Hundred Merry Tales  
 Of how a young and spritely clerk devised  
 To carry off a spouse that moped too much,  
 And cured her of the vapours in a trice :  
 And how the husband, playing Vulcan's part, 1450  
 Told by the Sun, started in hot pursuit  
 To catch the lovers, and came halting up,

Cast his net and then called the Gods to see  
 The convicts in their rosy impudence—  
 Whereat said Mercury “Would that I were Mars!”  
 On it was rare, and naughty all the same! 1456  
 Brief, the wife’s courage and cunning,—the priest’s show  
 Of chivalry and adroitness,—last not least,  
 The husband—how he ne’er showed teeth at all,  
 Whose bark had promised biting; but just sneaked  
 Back to his kennel, tail ’twixt legs, as ’t were,— 1461  
 All this was hard to gulp down and digest.  
 So pays the devil his liegeman, brass for gold.  
 But this was at Arezzo: here in Rome  
 Brave Paolo bore up against it all— 1465  
 Battled it out, nor wanting to himself  
 Nor Guido nor the House whose weight he bore  
 Pillar-like, by no force of arm but brain.  
 He knew his Rome, what wheels to set to work;  
 Plied influential folk, pressed to the ear 1470  
 Of the efficacious purple, pushed his way  
 To the old Pope’s self,—past decency indeed,—  
 Praying him take the matter in his hands  
 Out of the regular court’s incompetence.  
 But times are changed and nephews out of date 1475  
 And favouritism unfashionable: the Pope  
 Said “Render Cæsar what is Cæsar’s due!”  
 As for the Comparini’s counter-plea,

He met that by a counter-plea again,  
 Made Guido claim divorce—with help so far 1480  
 By the trial's issue: for, why punishment  
 However slight unless for guiltiness  
 However slender?—and a molehill serves  
 Much as a mountain of offence this way.  
 So was he gathering strength on every side 1485  
 And growing more and more to menace—when  
 All of a terrible moment came the blow  
 That beat down Paolo's fence, ended the play  
 O' the foil and brought mannaia on the stage.

Five months had passed now since Pompilia's flight,  
 Months spent in peace among the Convert nuns. 1491  
 This,—being, as it seemed, for Guido's sake  
 Solely, what pride might call imprisonment  
 And quote as something gained, to friends at home,—  
 This naturally was at Guido's charge: 1495  
 Grudge it he might, but penitential fare,  
 Prayers, preachings, who but he defrayed the cost?  
 So, Paolo dropped, as proxy, doit by doit  
 Like heart's blood, till—what's here? What notice  
 comes?  
 The convent's self makes application bland 1500  
 That, since Pompilia's health is fast o' the wane,  
 She may have leave to go combine her cure

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

You,

What would you answer? All so smooth and fair,  
 Even Paul's astuteness sniffed no harm i' the world.  
 He authorized the transfer, saw it made  
 And, two months after, reaped the fruit of the same,  
 Having to sit down, rack his brain and find 1521  
 What phrase should serve him best to notify  
 Our Guido that by happy providence  
 A son and heir, a babe was born to him  
 I' the villa,—go tell sympathizing friends! 1525  
 Yes, such had been Pompilia's privilege:  
 She, when she fled, was one month gone with child,  
 Known to herself or unknown, either way

Availing to explain (say men of art)  
 The strange and passionate precipitance 1530  
 Of maiden startled into motherhood  
 Which changes body and soul by nature's law.  
 So when the she-dove breeds, strange yearnings come  
 For the unknown shelter by undreamed-of shores,  
 And there is born a blood-pulse in her heart 1535  
 To fight if needs be, though with flap of wing,  
 For the wool-flock or the fur-tuft, though a hawk  
 Contest the prize,—wherefore, she knows not yet.  
 Anyhow, thus to Guido came the news.  
 "I shall have quitted Rome ere you arrive 1540  
 "To take the one step left,"—wrote Paolo.  
 Then did the winch o' the winepress of all hate,  
 Vanity, disappointment, grudge and greed,  
 Take the last turn that screws out pure revenge  
 With a bright bubble at the brim beside— 1545  
 By an heir's birth he was assured at once  
 O' the main prize, all the money in dispute :  
 Pompilia's dowry might revert to her  
 Or stay with him as law's caprice should point,—  
 But now—now—what was Pietro's shall be hers, 1550  
 What was hers shall remain her own,—if hers,  
 Why then,—oh, not her husband's but—her heir's !  
 That heir being his too, all grew his at last  
 By this road or by that road, since they join.

Before, why, push he Pietro out o' the world,— 1555  
 'The current of the money stopped, you see,  
 Pompilia being proved no Pietro's child :  
 Or let it be Pompilia's life he quenched,  
 Again the current of the money stopped,—  
 Guido debarred his rights as husband soon, 1560  
 So the new process threatened ;—now, the chance,  
 Now, the resplendent minute ! Clear the earth,  
 Cleanse the house, let the three but disappear  
 A child remains, depositary of all,  
 That Guido may enjoy his own again, 1565  
 Repair all losses by a master-stroke,  
 Wipe out the past, all done all left undone,  
 Swell the good present to best evermore,  
 Die into new life, which let blood baptize !

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



Harangued, equipped, instructed, pressed each clod  
 With his will's imprint ; then took horse, plied spur,  
 And so arrived, all five of them, at Rome 1582  
 On Christmas-Eve, and forthwith found themselves  
 Installed i' the vacancy and solitude  
 Left them by Paolo, the considerate man 1585  
 Who, good as his word, had disappeared at once  
 As if to leave the stage free. A whole week  
 Did Guido spend in study of his part,  
 Then played it fearless of a failure. One,  
 Struck the year's clock whereof the hours are days,  
 And off was rung o' the little wheels the chime 1591  
 " Good will on earth and peace to man : " but, two,  
 Proceeded the same bell and, evening come,  
 The dreadful five felt finger-wise their way  
 Across the town by blind cuts and black turns 1595  
 To the little lone suburban villa ; knocked—  
 " Who may be outside ? " called a well-known voice.  
 " A friend of Caponsacchi's bringing friends  
 " A letter."

That 's a test, the excusers say :

Ay, and a test conclusive, I return. 1600  
 What? Had that name brought touch of guilt or taste  
 Of fear with it, aught to dash the present joy  
 With memory of the sorrow just at end,—  
 She, happy in her parents' arms at length

With the new blessing of the two weeks' babe, — 1605  
 How had that name's announcement moved the wife?  
 Or, as the other slanders circulate,  
 Were Caponsacchi no rare visitant  
 On nights and days whither safe harbour lured,  
 What bait had been i' the name to ope the door? 1610  
 The promise of a letter? Stealthy guests  
 Have secret watchwords, private entrances:  
 The man's own self might have been found inside  
 And all the scheme made frustrate by a word.  
 No: but since Guido knew, none knew so well, 1615  
 The man had never since returned to Rome  
 Nor seen the wife's face more than villa's front,  
 So, could not be at hand to warn or save,—  
 For that, he took this sure way to the end.

“Come in,” bade poor Violante cheerfully, 1620  
 Drawing the door-bolt: that death was the first,  
 Stabbed through and through. Pietro, close on her  
                   heels,  
 Set up a cry—“Let me confess myself!  
 “Grant but confession!” Cold steel was the grant.  
 Then came Pompilia's turn. 1625

Then they escaped.

The noise o' the slaughter roused the neighbourhood.  
 They had forgotten just the one thing more

Which saves i' the circumstance, the ticket to-wit  
 Which puts post-horses at a traveller's use : 1630  
 So, all on foot, desperate through the dark  
 Reeled they like drunkards along open road,  
 Accomplished a prodigious twenty miles  
 Homeward, and gained Baccano very near,  
 Stumbled at last, deaf, dumb, blind through the feat,  
 Into a grange and, one dead heap, slept there 1636  
 Till the pursuers hard upon their trace  
 Reached them and took them, red from head to heel,  
 And brought them to the prison where they lie.  
 The couple were laid i' the church two days ago, 1640  
 And the wife lives yet by miracle.

All is told.

You hardly need ask what Count Guido says,  
 Since something he must say. "I own the deed—"  
 (He cannot choose,—but—) "I declare the same 1645  
 "Just and inevitable,—since no way else  
 "Was left me, but by this of taking life,  
 "To save my honour which is more than life.  
 "I exercised a husband's rights." To which  
 The answer is as prompt—"There was no fault 1650  
 "In any one o' the three to punish thus :  
 "Neither i' the wife, who kept all faith to you,  
 "Nor in the parents, whom yourself first duped,

- “ Robbed and maltreated, then turned out of doors.  
 “ You wronged and they endured wrong ; yours the  
     fault.  
 “ Next, had endurance overpassed the mark           1656  
 “ And turned resentment needing remedy,—  
 “ Nay, put the absurd impossible case, for once—  
 “ You were all blameless of the blame alleged  
 “ And they blameworthy where you fix all blame,   1660  
 “ Still, why this violation of the law ?  
 “ Yourself elected law should take its course,  
 “ Avenge wrong, or show vengeance not your right ;  
 “ Why, only when the balance in law’s hand  
 “ Trembles against you and inclines the way           1665  
 “ O’ the other party, do you make protest,  
 “ Renounce arbitrament, flying out of court,  
 “ And crying ‘ Honour’s hurt the sword must cure ’ ?  
 “ Aha, and so i’ the middle of each suit  
 “ Trying i’ the courts,—and you had three in play   1670  
 “ With an appeal to the Pope’s self beside,—  
 “ What, you may chop and change and right your wrongs  
 “ Leaving the law to lag as she thinks fit ? ”

That were too temptingly commodious, Count !  
 One would have still a remedy in reserve           1675  
 Should reach the safest oldest sinner, you see !  
 One’s honour forsooth ? Does that take hurt alone

From the extreme outrage? I who have no wife,  
Being yet sensitive in my degree  
As Guido,—must discover hurt elsewhere 1680  
Which, half compounded-for in days gone by,  
May profitably break out now afresh,  
Need cure from my own expeditious hands.  
The lie that was, as it were, imputed me  
When you objected to my contract's clause,— 1685  
The theft as good as, one may say, alleged,  
When you, co-heir in a will, excepted, Sir,  
To my administration of effects,  
—Aha, do you think law disposed of these?  
My honour's touched and shall deal death around!  
Count, that were too commodious, I repeat! 1691  
If any law be imperative on us all,  
Of all are you the enemy: out with you  
From the common light and air and life of man!

## IV.

*TERTIUM QUID.*

TRUE, Excellency—as his Highness says,  
 Though she 's not dead yet, she 's as good as stretched  
 Symmetrical beside the other two ;  
 Though he 's not judged yet, he 's the same as judged,  
 So do the facts abound and superabound : 5  
 And nothing hinders that we lift the case  
 Out of the shade into the shine, allow  
 Qualified persons to pronounce at last,  
 Nay, edge in an authoritative word  
 Between this rabble's-brabble of dolts and fools 10  
 Who make up reasonless unreasoning Rome.  
 “ Now for the Trial ! ” they roar : “ the Trial to test  
 “ The truth, weigh husband and weigh wife alike  
 “ I ' the scales of law, make one scale kick the beam ! ”  
 Law 's a machine from which, to please the mob, 15  
 Truth the divinity must needs descend  
 And clear things at the play's fifth act—aha !  
 Hammer into their noddles who was who

And what was what. I tell the simpletons  
 " Could law be competent to such a feat 20  
 " 'T were done already: what begins next week  
 " Is end o' the Trial, last link of a chain  
 " Whereof the first was forged three years ago  
 " When law addressed herself to set wrong right,  
 " And proved so slow in taking the first step 25  
 " That ever some new grievance,—tort, retort,  
 " On one or the other side,—o'ertook i' the game,  
 " Retarded sentence, till this deed of death  
 " Is thrown in, as it were, last bale to boat  
 " Crammed to the edge with cargo—or passengers? 30  
 " " *Trecentos inseris: ohe, jam satis est!*  
 " " *Huc appelle!*"—passengers, the word must be."  
 Long since, the boat was loaded to my eyes.  
 To hear the rabble and brabble, you 'd call the case  
 Fused and confused past human finding out. 35  
 One calls the square round, t' other the round square—  
 And pardonably in that first surprise  
 O' the blood that fell and splashed the diagram:  
 But now we' ve used our eyes to the violent hue  
 Can't we look through the crimson and trace lines? 40  
 It makes a man despair of history,  
 Eusebius and the established fact—fig's end!  
 Oh, give the fools their Trial, rattle away.  
 With the leash of lawyers, two on either side—

One barks, one bites,—Masters Arcangeli 45  
 And Spreti,—that 's the husband's ultimate hope  
 Against the Fisc and the other kind of Fisc,  
 Bound to do barking for the wife: bow – wow!  
 Why, Excellency, we and his Highness here  
 Would settle the matter as sufficiently 50  
 As ever will Advocate This and Fiscal That  
 And Judge the Other, with even—a word and a wink—  
 We well know who for ultimate arbiter.  
 Let us beware o' the basset-table—lest  
 We jog the elbow of Her Eminence, 55  
 Jostle his cards,—he 'll rap you out a . . . st!  
 By the window-seat! And here 's the Marquis too!  
 Indulge me but a moment: if I fail  
 —Favoured with such an audience, understand!—  
 To set things right, why, class me with the mob 60  
 As understander of the mind of man!

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



This Pietro, this Violante, live their life 70  
 At Rome in the easy way that 's far from worst  
 Even for their betters,—themselves love themselves,  
 Spend their own oil in feeding their own lamp  
 That their own faces may grow bright thereby.  
 They get to fifty and over : how 's the lamp ? 75  
 Full to the depth o' the wick,—moneys so much ;  
 And also with a remnant,—so much more  
 Of moneys,—which there 's no consuming now,  
 But, when the wick shall moulder out some day,  
 Failing fresh twist of tow to use up dregs, 80  
 Will lie a prize for the passer-by,—to-wit  
 Anyone that can prove himself the heir,  
 Seeing, the couple are wanting in a child :  
 Meantime their wick swims in the safe broad bowl  
 O' the middle rank,—not raised a beacon's height 85  
 For wind to ravage, nor dropped till lamp graze ground  
 Like cresset, mudlarks poke now here now there,  
 Going their rounds to probe the ruts i' the road  
 Or fish the luck o' the puddle. Pietro's soul  
 Was satisfied when cronies smirked, " No wine 90  
 " Like Pietro's, and he drinks it every day !"  
 His wife's heart swelled her boddice, joyed its fill  
 When neighbours turned heads wistfully at church,  
 Sighed at the load of lace that came to pray.  
 Well, having got through fifty years of flare, 95

They burn out so, indulge so their dear selves,  
 That Pietro finds himself in debt at last,  
 As he were any lordling of us all :  
 And, now that dark begins to creep on day,  
 Creditors grow uneasy, talk aside, 100  
 Take counsel, then importune all at once.  
 For if the good fat rosy careless man,  
 Who has not laid a ducat by, decease—  
 Let the lamp fall, no heir at hand to catch—  
 Why, being childless, there 's a spilth i' the street 105  
 O' the remnant, there 's a scramble for the dregs  
 By the stranger : so, they grant him no long day  
 But come in a body, clamour to be paid.

What 's his resource? He asks and straight obtains  
 The customary largess, dole dealt out 110  
 To, what we call our "poor dear shame-faced ones,"  
 In secret once a month to spare the shame  
 O' the slothful and the spendthrift,—pauper-saints  
 The Pope puts meat i' the mouth of, ravens they,  
 And providence he—just what the mob admires! 115  
 That is, instead of putting a prompt foot  
 On selfish worthless human slugs whose slime  
 Has failed to lubricate their path in life,  
 Why, the Pope picks the first ripe fruit that falls  
 And gracious puts it in the vermin's way. 120

Pietro could never save a dollar? Straight  
 He must be subsidized at our expense :  
 And for his wife—the harmless household sheep  
 One ought not to see harassed in her age —  
 Judge, by the way she bore adversity, 125  
 O' the patient nature you ask pity for !  
 How long, now, would the roughest marketman,  
 Handling the creatures huddled to the knife,  
 Harass a mutton ere she made a mouth  
 Or menaced biting? Yet the poor sheep here, 130  
 Violante, the old innocent burgess-wife,  
 In her first difficulty showed great teeth  
 Fit to crunch up and swallow a good round crime.  
 She meditates the tenure of the Trust,  
*Fidei commissum* is the lawyer-phrase, 135  
 These funds that only want an heir to take—  
 Goes o'er the gamut o' the creditor's cry  
 By semitones from whine to snarl high up  
 And growl down low, one scale in sundry keys,—  
 Pauses with a little compunction for the face 140  
 Of Pietro frustrate of its ancient cheer,—  
 Never a bottle now for friend at need,—  
 Comes to a stop on her own frittered lace  
 And neighbourly condolences thereat,  
 Then makes her mind up, sees the thing to do : 145  
 And so, deliberate, snaps house-book clasp,

Posts off to vespers, missal beneath arm,  
 Passes the proper San Lorenzo by,  
 Dives down a little lane to the left, is lost  
 In a labyrinth of dwellings best unnamed, 150  
 Selects a certain blind one, black at base,  
 Blinking at top,—the sign of we know what,—  
 One candle in a casement set to wink  
 Streetward, do service to no shrine inside,—  
 Mounts thither by the filthy flight of stairs, 155  
 Holding the cord by the wall, to the tip-top,  
 Gropes for the door i' the dark, ajar of course,  
 Raps, opens, enters in : up starts a thing  
 Naked as needs be—"What, you rogue, 't is you?  
 "Back,—how can I have taken a farthing yet? 160  
 "Mercy on me, poor sinner that I am !  
 "Here 's . . . why, I took you for Madonna's self  
 "With all that sudden swirl of silk i' the place !  
 "What may your pleasure be, my bonny dame?"  
 Your Excellency supplies aught left obscure? 165  
 One of those women that abound in Rome,  
 Whose needs oblige them eke out one poor trade  
 By another vile one : her ostensible work  
 Was washing clothes, out in the open air  
 At the cistern by Citorio ; her true trade— 170  
 Whispering to idlers, when they stopped and praised  
 The ankles she let liberally shine

In kneeling at the slab by the fountain-side,  
 That there was plenty more to criticize  
 At home, that eve, i' the house where candle blinked  
 Decorously above, and all was done 176  
 I' the holy fear of God and cheap beside.  
 Violante, now, had seen this woman wash,  
 Noticed and envied her propitious shape,  
 Tracked her home to her house-top, noted too, 180  
 And now was come to tempt her and propose  
 A bargain far more shameful than the first  
 Which trafficked her virginity away  
 For a melon and three pauls at twelve years old.  
 Five minutes' talk with this poor child of Eve, 185  
 Struck was the bargain, business at an end—  
 "Then, six months hence, that person whom you trust,  
 Comes, fetches whatsoever babe it be ;  
 I keep the price and secret, you the babe,  
 "Paying beside for mass to make all straight : 190  
 "Meantime, I pouch the earnest-money-piece."

Down stairs again goes fumbling by the rope  
 Violante, triumphing in a flourish of fire  
 From her own brain, self-lit by such success,—  
 Gains church in time for the "*Magnificat*" 195  
 And gives forth "My reproof is taken away,  
 "And blessed shall mankind proclaim me now,"

So that the officiating priest turns round  
 To see who proffers the obstreperous praise :  
 Then home to Pietro, the enraptured-much           200  
 But puzzled-more when told the wondrous news—  
 How orisons and works of charity,  
 (Beside that pair of pinners and a coif,  
 Birth-day surprise last Wednesday was five weeks)  
 Had borne fruit in the autumn of his life,—           205  
 They, or the Orvieto in a double dose.  
 Anyhow, she must keep house next six months,  
 Lie on the settle, avoid the three-legged stool,  
 And, chiefly, not be crossed in wish or whim,  
 And the result was like to be an heir.               210

Accordingly, when time was come about,  
 He found himself the sire indeed of this  
 Francesca Vittoria Pompilia and the rest  
 O' the names whereby he sealed her his, next day.  
 A crime complete in its way is here, I hope?       215  
 Lies to God, lies to man, every way lies  
 To nature and civility and the mode :  
 Flat robbery of the proper heirs thus foiled  
 O' the due succession,—and, what followed thence,  
 Robbery of God, through the confessor's ear       220  
 Debarred the most note-worthy incident  
 When all else done and undone twelve-month through

Was put in evidence at Easter-time.  
 All other peccadillos!—but this one  
 To the priest who comes next day to dine with us?  
 'T were inexpedient; decency forbade. 226

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

I thought as much.

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

O' the rose above the dungheap, the pure child  
 As good as new created, since withdrawn  
 From the horror of the pre-appointed lot  
 With the unknown father and the mother known      250  
 Too well,—some fourteen years of squalid youth,  
 And then libertinage, disease, the grave—  
 Hell in life here, hereafter life in hell :  
 Look at that horror and this soft repose !  
 Why, moralist, the sin has saved a soul !      255  
 Then, even the palpable grievance to the heirs—  
 'Faith, this was no frank setting hand to throat  
 And robbing a man, but . . . Excellency, by your leave,  
 How did you get that marvel of a gem,  
 The sapphire with the Graces grand and Greek ?      260  
 The story is, stooping to pick a stone  
 From the pathway through a vineyard—no-man's-land—  
 To pelt a sparrow with, you chanced on this :  
 Why now, do those five clowns o' the family  
 O' the vinedresser digest their porridge worse      265  
 That not one keeps it in his goatskin pouch  
 To do flint's-service with the tinder-box ?  
 Don't cheat me, don't cheat you, don't cheat a friend,  
 But are you so hard on who jostles just  
 A stranger with no natural sort of claim      270  
 To the havings and the holdings (here 's the point)  
 Unless by misadventure, and defect



Of that which ought to be—nay, which there 's none  
 Would dare so much as wish to profit by—  
 Since who dares put in just so many words 275  
 “ May Pietro fail to have a child, please God !  
 “ So shall his house and goods belong to me,  
 “ The sooner that his heart will pine betimes ” ?  
 Well then, God doesn't please, nor heart shall pine !  
 Because he has a child at last, you see, 280  
 Or selfsame thing as though a child it were,  
 He thinks, whose sole concern it is to think :  
 If he accepts it why should you demur ?

Moreover, say that certain sin there seem,  
 The proper process of unsinning sin 285  
 Is to begin well-doing somehow else.  
 Pietro,—remember, with no sin at all  
 I' the substitution,—why, this gift of God  
 Flung in his lap from over Paradise  
 Steadied him in a moment, set him straight 290  
 On the good path he had been straying from.  
 Henceforward no more wilfulness and waste,  
 Cuppings, carousings,—these a sponge wiped out.  
 All sort of self-denial was easy now  
 For the child's sake, the chatelaine to be, 295  
 Who must want much and might want who knows what?  
 And so, the debts were paid, habits reformed,

Expense curtailed, the dowry set to grow.  
 As for the wife,—I said, hers the whole sin :  
 So, hers the exemplary penance. 'T was a text 300  
 Whereon folk preached and praised, the district through :  
 " Oh, make us happy and you make us good !  
 " It all comes of God giving her a child :  
 " Such graces follow God's best earthly gift !"

Here you put by my guard, pass to my heart 305  
 By the home-thrust—" There 's a lie at base of all."  
 Why, thou exact Prince, is it a pearl or no,  
 Yon globe upon the Principessa's neck ?  
 That great round glory of pellucid stuff,  
 A fish secreted round a grain of grit ! 310  
 Do you call it worthless for the worthless core ?  
 (She doesn't, who well knows what she changed for it.)  
 So, to our brace of burgesses again !  
 You see so far i' the story, who was right,  
 Who wrong, who neither, don't you ? What, you don't ?  
 Eh ? Well, admit there 's somewhat dark i' the case,  
 Let 's on—the rest shall clear, I promise you. 317  
 Leap over a dozen years : you find, these past,  
 An old good easy creditable sire,  
 A careful housewife's beaming bustling face, 320  
 Both wrapped up in the love of their one child,  
 The strange tall pale beautiful creature grown

Lily-like out o' the cleft i' the sun-smit rock  
 To bow its white miraculous birth of buds  
 I' the way of wandering Joseph and his spouse,— 325  
 So painters fancy : here it was a fact.  
 And this their lily,—could they but transplant  
 And set in vase to stand by Solomon's porch  
 'Twixt lion and lion !—this Pompilia of theirs,  
 Could they see worthily married, well bestowed, 330  
 In house and home ! And why despair of this  
 With Rome to choose from, save the topmost rank ?  
 Themselves would help the choice with heart and soul,  
 Throw their late savings in a common heap  
 To go with the dowry, and be followed in time 335  
 By the heritage legitimately hers :  
 And when such paragon was found and fixed,  
 Why, they might chant their "*Nunc dimittis*" straight.

Indeed the prize was simply full to a fault,  
 Exorbitant for the suitor they should seek, 340  
 And social class should choose among, these cits.  
 Yet there 's a latitude : exceptional white  
 Amid the general brown o' the species, lurks  
 A burgess nearly an aristocrat,  
 Legitimately in reach : look out for him ! 345  
 What banker, merchant, has seen better days,  
 What second-rate painter a-pushing up,

Poet a-slipping down, shall bid the best  
 For this young beauty with the thumping purse?  
 Alack, were it but one of such as these 350  
 So like the real thing that they pass for it,  
 All had gone well! Unluckily, poor souls,  
 It proved to be the impossible thing itself,  
 Truth and not sham: hence ruin to them all.

For, Guido Franceschini was the head 355  
 Of an old family in Arezzo, old  
 To that degree they could afford be poor  
 Better than most: the case is common too.  
 Out of the vast door 'scutcheoned overhead,  
 Creeps out a serving-man on Saturdays 360  
 To cater for the week,—turns up anon  
 I' the market, chaffering for the lamb's least leg,  
 Or the quarter-fowl, less entrails, claws and comb:  
 Then back again with prize,—a liver begged  
 Into the bargain, gizzard overlooked. 365  
 He's mincing these to give the beans a taste,  
 When, at your knock, he leaves the simmering soup,  
 Waits on the curious stranger-visitant,  
 Napkin in half-wiped hand, to show the rooms,  
 Point pictures out have hung their hundred years, 370  
 "Priceless," he tells you,—puts in his place at once  
 The man of money: yes, you're banker-king

Or merchant-kaiser, wallow in your wealth  
 While patron, the house-master, can't afford  
 To stop our ceiling-hole that rain so rots : 375  
 But he 's the man of mark, and there 's his shield,  
 And yonder 's the famed Rafael, first in kind,  
 The painter painted for his grandfather,  
 And you have paid to see : " Good morning, Sir !"  
 Such is the law of compensation. Still 380  
 The poyerty was getting nigh acute ;  
 There gaped so many noble mouths to feed,  
 Beans must suffice unflavoured of the fowl.  
 The mother,—hers would be a spun-out life  
 I' the nature of things ; the sisters had done well 385  
 And married men of reasonable rank :  
 But that sort of illumination stops,  
 Throws back no heat upon the parent-hearth.  
 The family instinct felt out for its fire  
 To the Church,—the Church traditionally helps 390  
 A second son : and such was Paolo,  
 Established here at Rome these thirty years,  
 Who played the regular game,—priest and Abate,  
 Made friends, owned house and land, became of use  
 To a personage : his course lay clear enough. 395  
 The youngest caught the sympathetic flame,  
 And, though unfledged wings kept him still i' the cage,  
 Yet he shot up to be a Canon, so

Clung to the higher perch and crowed in hope.  
 Even our Guido, eldest brother, went 400  
 As far i' the way o' the Church as safety seemed,  
 He being Head o' the House, ordained to wive,—  
 So, could but dally with an Order or two  
 And testify good-will i' the cause: he clipped  
 His top-hair and thus far affected Christ. 405  
 But main promotion must fall otherwise,  
 Though still from the side o' the Church: and here was he  
 At Rome, since first youth, worn threadbare of soul  
 By forty-six years' rubbing on hard life,  
 Getting fast tired o' the game whose word is—"Wait!"  
 When one day,—he too having his Cardinal 411  
 To serve in some ambiguous sort, as serve  
 To draw the coach the plumes o' the horses' heads,—  
 The Cardinal saw fit to dispense with him,  
 Ride with one plume the less; and off it dropped. 415

Guido thus left,—with a youth spent in vain  
 And not a penny in purse to show for it,—  
 Advised with Paolo, bent no doubt in chafe  
 The black brows somewhat formidably, growled  
 "Where is the good I came to get at Rome? 420  
 "Where the repayment of the servitude  
 "To a purple popinjay, whose feet I kiss,  
 "Knowing his father wiped the shoes of mine?"

- "Patience," pats Paolo the recalcitrant—  
 "You have not had, so far, the proper luck, 425  
 "Nor do my gains suffice to keep us both :  
 "A modest competency is mine, not more.  
 "You are the Count however, yours the style,  
 "Heirdom and state,—you can't expect all good.  
 "Had I, now, held your hand of cards . . . well, well—  
 "What 's yet unplayed, I 'll look at, by your leave, 431  
 "Over your shoulder,—I who made my game,  
 "Let 's see, if I can't help to handle yours.  
 "Fie on you, all the Honours in your fist,  
 "Countship, Househeadship,—how have you misdealt !  
 "Why, in the first place, these will marry a man ! 436  
 "*Notum tonsoribus!* To the Tonsor then !  
 "Come, clear your looks, and choose your freshest suit,  
 "And, after function 's done with, down we go  
 "To the woman-dealer in perukes, a wench 440  
 "I and some others settled in the shop  
 "At Place Colonna : she 's an oracle. Hmm !  
 "' Dear, 't is my brother : brother, 't is my dear.  
 "' Dear, give us counsel ! Whom do you suggest  
 "' As properest party in the quarter round 445  
 "' For the Count here?—he is minded to take wife,  
 "' And further tells me he intends to slip  
 "' Twenty zecchines under the bottom-scalp  
 "' Of his old wig when he sends it to revive

“ ‘ For the wedding : and I add a trifle too. 450  
 “ ‘ You know what personage I ’m potent with.’ ”  
 And so plumped out Pompilia’s name the first.  
 She told them of the household and its ways,  
 The easy husband and the shrewder wife  
 In Via Vittoria,—how the tall young girl, 455  
 With hair black as yon patch and eyes as big  
 As yon pomander to make freckles fly,  
 Would have so much for certain, and so much more  
 In likelihood,—why, it suited, slipped as smooth  
 As the Pope’s pantoufle does on the Pope’s foot. 460  
 “ I ’ll to the husband ! ” Guido ups and cries.  
 “ Ay, so you ’d play your last court-card, no doubt ! ”  
 Puts Paolo in with a groan—“ Only, you see,  
 “ ’T is I, this time, that supervise your lead.  
 “ Priests play with women, maids, wives, mothers—  
                     why? 465  
 “ These play with men and take them off our hands.  
 “ Did I come, counsel with some cut-beard gruff  
 “ Or rather this sleek young-old barberess ?  
 “ Go, brother, stand you rapt in the ante-room  
 “ Of Her Efficacy my Cardinal 470  
 “ For an hour,—he likes to have lord-suitors lounge,—  
 “ While I betake myself to the grey mare,  
 “ The better horse,—how wise the people’s word !—  
 “ And wait on Madam Violante.”



Said and done. 475

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

Then was the matter broached to *Pietro* ; then 490  
 Did *Pietro* make demand and get response  
 That in the Countship was a truth, but in  
 The counting up of the Count's cash, a lie.  
 He thereupon stroked grave his chin, looked great,  
 Declined the honour. Then the wife wiped tear, 495  
 Winked with the other eye turned *Paolo*-ward,  
 Whispered *Pompilia*, stole to church at eve,  
 Found Guido there and got the marriage done,  
 And finally begged pardon at the feet

Of her dear lord and master. Whereupon 500  
 Quoth Pietro—"Let us make the best of things!"  
 "I knew your love would license us," quoth she :  
 Quoth Paolo once more, "Mothers, wives and maids,  
 "These be the tools wherewith priests manage men."

Now, here take breath and ask,—which bird o' the brace  
 Decoyed the other into clapnet? Who 506  
 Was fool, who knave? Neither and both, perchance.  
 There was a bargain mentally proposed  
 On each side, straight and plain and fair enough,  
 Mind knew its own mind: but when mind must speak,  
 The bargain have expression in plain terms, 511  
 There came the blunder incident to words,  
 And in the clumsy process, fair turned foul.  
 The straight backbone-thought of the crooked speech  
 Were just—"I Guido truck my name and rank 515  
 "For so much money and youth and female charms.—  
 ' We Pietro and Violante give our child  
 "And wealth to you for a rise i' the world thereby."  
 Such naked truth while chambered in the brain  
 Shocks nowise: walk it forth by way of tongue,— 520  
 Out on the cynical unseemliness!  
 Hence was the need, on either side, of a lie  
 To serve as decent wrappage: so, Guido gives  
 Money for money,—and they, bride for groom,

Having, he, not a doit, they, not a child 525  
 Honestly theirs, but this poor waif and stray.  
 According to the words, each cheated each ;  
 But in the inexpressive barter of thoughts,  
 Each did give and did take the thing designed,  
 The rank on this side and the cash on that— 530  
 Attained the object of the traffic, so.  
 The way of the world, the daily bargain struck  
 In the first market ! Why sells Jack his ware ?  
 “ For the sake of serving an old customer.”  
 Why does Jill buy it ? “ Simply not to break 535  
 “ A custom, pass the old stall the first time.”  
 Why, you know where the gist is of the exchange :  
 Each sees a profit, throws the fine words in.  
 Don't be too hard o' the pair ! Had each pretence  
 Been simultaneously discovered, stript 540  
 From off the body o' the transaction, just  
 As when a cook (will Excellency forgive ?)  
 Strips away those long rough superfluous legs  
 From either side the crayfish, leaving folk  
 A meal all meat henceforth, no garnishry, 545  
 (With your respect, Prince !)—balance had been kept,  
 No party blamed the other,—so, starting fair,  
 All subsequent fence of wrong returned by wrong  
 I' the matrimonial thrust and parry, at least  
 Had followed on equal terms. But, as it chanced, 550

One party had the advantage, saw the cheat  
 Of the other first and kept its own concealed :  
 And the luck o' the first discovery fell, beside,  
 To the least adroit and self-possessed o' the pair.

\*I was foolish Pietro and his wife saw first                   555  
 The nobleman was penniless, and screamed  
 " We are cheated ! "

Such unprofitable noise  
 Angers at all times : but when those who plague,  
 Do it from inside your own house and home,                   560  
 Gnats which yourself have closed the curtain round,  
 Noise goes too near the brain and makes you mad.  
 The gnats say, Guido used the candle-flame  
 Unfairly,—worsened that first bad of his,  
 By practising all kinds of cruelty                               565  
 To oust them and suppress the wail and whine,—  
 That speedily he so scared and bullied them,  
 Fain were they, long before five months had passed,  
 To beg him grant, from what was once their wealth,  
 Just so much as would help them back to Rome               570  
 Where, when they finished paying the last doit  
 O' the dowry, they might beg from door to door.  
 So say the Comparini—as if it came  
 Of pure resentment for this worse than bad,  
 That then Violante, feeling conscience prick,               575

Confessed her substitution of the child  
 Whence all the harm fell,—and that Pietro first  
 Bethought him of advantage to himself  
 I' the deed, as part revenge, part remedy  
 For all miscalculation in the pact. 580

On the other hand “Not so!” Guido retorts—  
 “I am the wronged, solely, from first to last,  
 “Who gave the dignity I engaged to give,  
 “Which was, is, cannot but continue gain.  
 “My being poor was a bye-circumstance, 585  
 “Miscalculated piece of untowardness,  
 “Might end to-morrow did heaven's windows ope,  
 “Or uncle die and leave me his estate.  
 “You should have put up with the minor flaw,  
 “Getting the main prize of the jewel. If wealth, 590  
 “Not rank, had been prime object in your thoughts,  
 “Why not have taken the butcher's son, the boy  
 “O' the baker or candlestick-maker? In all the rest,  
 “It was yourselves broke compact and played false,  
 “And made a life in common impossible. 595  
 “Show me the stipulation of our bond  
 “That you should make your profit of being inside  
 “My house, to hustle and edge me out o' the same,  
 “First make a laughing-stock of mine and me,  
 “Then round us in the ears from morn to night 600

- “ (Because we show wry faces at your mirth)  
 “ That you are robbed, starved, beaten and what not !  
 “ You fled a hell of your own lighting-up,  
 “ Pay for your own miscalculation too :  
 “ You thought nobility, gained at any price, 605  
 “ Would suit and satisfy,—find the mistake,  
 “ And now retaliate, not on yourselves, but me.  
 “ And how ? By telling me, i’ the face of the world,  
 “ I it is have been cheated all this while,  
 “ Abominably and irreparably,—my name 610  
 “ Given to a cur-cast mongrel, a drab’s brat,  
 “ A beggar’s bye-blow,—thus depriving me  
 “ Of what yourselves allege the whole and sole  
 “ Aim on my part i’ the marriage,—money to-wit.  
 “ This thrust I have to parry by a guard 615  
 “ Which leaves me open to a counter-thrust  
 “ On the other side,—no way but there ’s a pass  
 “ Clean through me. If I prove, as I hope to do,  
 “ There ’s not one truth in this your odious tale  
 “ O’ the buying, selling, substituting—prove 620  
 “ Your daughter was and is your daughter,—well,  
 “ And her dowry hers and therefore mine,—what  
     then ?  
 “ Why, where ’s the appropriate punishment for this  
 “ Enormous lie hatched for mere malice’ sake  
 “ To ruin me ? Is that a wrong or no ? 625

“ And if I try revenge for remedy,  
 “ Can I well make it strong and bitter enough ? ”

I anticipate however—only ask,  
 Which of the two here sinned most ? A nice point !  
 Which brownness is least black,—decide who can, 630  
 Wager-by-battle-of-cheating ! What do you say,  
 Highness ? Suppose, your Excellency, we leave  
 The question at this stage, proceed to the next,  
 Both parties step out, fight their prize upon,  
 In the eye o’ the world ? 635

They brandish law ’gainst law ;

The grinding of such blades, each parry of each,  
 Throws terrible sparks off, over and above the thrusts,  
 And makes more sinister the fight, to the eye,  
 Than the very wounds that follow. Beside the tale 640  
 Which the Comparini have to re-assert,  
 They needs must write, print, publish all abroad  
 The straitnesses of Guido’s household life—  
 The petty nothings we bear privately  
 But break down under when fools flock to jeer. 645  
 What is it all to the facts o’ the couple’s case,  
 How helps it prove Pompilia not their child,  
 If Guido’s mother, brother, kith and kin  
 Fare ill, lie hard, lack clothes, lack fire, lack food ?  
 That ’s one more wrong than needs. 650

On the other hand,

Guido,—whose cue is to dispute the truth  
 O' the tale, reject the shame it throws on him,—  
 He may retaliate, fight his foe in turn  
 And welcome, we allow. Ay, but he can't! 655  
 He 's at home, only acts by proxy here :  
 Law may meet law,—but all the gibes and jeers,  
 The superfluity of naughtiness,  
 Those libels on his House,—how reach at them?  
 Two hateful faces, grinning all a-glow, 660  
 Not only make parade of spoil they filched,  
 But foul him from the height of a tower, you see.  
 Unluckily temptation is at hand—  
 To take revenge on a trifle overlooked,  
 A pet lamb they have left in reach outside, 665  
 Whose first bleat, when he plucks the wool away,  
 Will strike the grinners grave : his wife remains  
 Who, four months earlier, some thirteen years old,  
 Never a mile away from mother's house  
 And petted to the height of her desire, 670  
 Was told one morning that her fate had come,  
 She must be married—just as, a month before,  
 Her mother told her she must comb her hair  
 And twist her curls into one knot behind.  
 These fools forgot their pet lamb, fed with flowers, 675  
 Then 'ticed as usual by the bit of cake



Out of the bower into the butchery.  
 Plague her, he plagues them threefold : but how plague?  
 The world may have its word to say to that :  
 You can't do some things with impunity. 680  
 What remains . . . well, it is an ugly thought . . .  
 But that he drive herself to plague herself—  
 Herself disgrace herself and so disgrace  
 Who seek to disgrace Guido?

There 's the clue 685

To what else seems gratuitously vile,  
 If, as is said, from this time forth the rack  
 Was tried upon Pompilia : 't was to wrench  
 Her limbs into exposure that brings shame.  
 The aim o' the cruelty being so crueller still, 690  
 That cruelty almost grows compassion's self  
 Could one attribute it to mere return  
 O' the parents' outrage, wrong avenging wrong.  
 They see in this a deeper deadlier aim,  
 Not to vex just a body they held dear, 695  
 But blacken too a soul they boasted white,  
 And show the world their saint in a lover's arms,  
 No matter how driven thither,—so they say.

On the other hand, so much is easily said,  
 And Guido lacks not an apologist. 700

The pair had nobody but themselves to blame,  
 Being selfish beasts throughout, no less, no more :  
 —Cared for themselves, their supposed good, nought  
     else,

And brought about the marriage ; good proved bad,  
 As little they cared for her its victim—nay,      705

Meant she should stay behind and take the chance,  
 If haply they might wriggle themselves free.

They baited their own hook to catch a fish  
 With this poor worm, failed o' the prize, and then  
 Sought how to unbait tackle, let worm float      710

Or sink, amuse the monster while they 'scaped.

Under the best stars Hymen brings above,  
 Had all been honesty on either side,  
 A common sincere effort to good end,  
 Still, this would prove a difficult problem, Prince!   715

—Given, a fair wife, aged thirteen years,  
 A husband poor, care-bitten, sorrow-sunk,  
 Little, long-nosed, bush-bearded, lantern-jawed,  
 Forty-six years old,—place the two grown one,  
 She, cut off sheer from every natural aid,      720

In a strange town with no familiar face—  
 He, in his own parade-ground or retreat  
 If need were, free from challenge, much less check  
 To an irritated, disappointed will—

How evolve happiness from such a match?      725

T were hard to serve up a congenial dish  
Out of these ill-agreeing morsels, Duke,  
By the best exercise of the cook's craft,  
Best interspersion of spice, salt and sweet!  
But let two ghastly scullions concoct mess 730  
With brimstone, pitch, vitriol and devil's-dung—  
Throw in abuse o' the man, his body and soul,  
Kith, kin and generation shake all slab  
At Rome, Arezzo, for the world to nose,  
Then end by publishing, for fiend's arch-prank, 735  
That, over and above sauce to the meat's self,  
Why, even the meat, bedevilled thus in dish,  
Was never a pheasant but a carrion-crow—  
Prince, what will then the natural loathing be?  
What wonder if this?—the compound plague o' the pair  
Pricked Guido,—not to take the course they hoped, 741  
That is, submit him to their statement's truth,  
Accept its obvious promise of relief,  
And thrust them out of doors the girl again  
Since the girl's dowry would not enter there, 745  
—Quit of the one if baulked of the other : no !  
Rather did rage and hate so work in him,  
Their product proved the horrible conceit  
That he should plot and plan and bring to pass  
His wife might, of her own free will and deed, 750  
Relieve him of her presence, get her gone,

And yet leave all the dowry safe behind,  
 Confirmed his own henceforward past dispute,  
 While blotting out, as by a belch of hell,  
 Their triumph in her misery and death. 755

You see, the man was Aretine, had touch  
 O' the subtle air that breeds the subtle wit ;  
 Was noble too, of old blood thrice-refined  
 That shrinks from clownish coarseness in disgust :  
 Allow that such an one may take revenge, 760  
 You don't expect he 'll catch up stone and fling,  
 Or try cross-buttock, or whirl quarter-staff?  
 Instead of the honest drubbing clowns bestow,  
 When out of temper at the dinner spoilt,  
 On meddling mother-in-law and tiresome wife,—  
 Substitute for the clown a nobleman, 766  
 And you have Guido, practising, 't is said,  
 Immitigably from the very first,  
 The finer vengeance : this, they say, the fact  
 O' the famous letter shows—the writing traced 770  
 At Guido's instance by the timid wife  
 Over the pencilled words himself writ first—  
 Wherein she, who could neither write nor read,  
 Was made unblushingly declare a tale  
 To the brother, the Abate then in Rome, 775  
 How her putative parents had impressed,

On their departure, their enjoiment ; bade  
 “ We being safely arrived here, follow, you !  
 “ Poison your husband, rob, set fire to all,  
 “ And then by means o’ the gallant you procure 780  
 “ With ease, by helpful eye and ready tongue,  
 “ Some brave youth ready to dare, do and die,  
 “ You shall run off and merrily reach Rome  
 “ Where we may live like flies in honey-pot : ”—  
 Such being exact the programme of the course 785  
 Imputed her as carried to effect.

They also say,—to keep her straight therein,  
 All sort of torture was piled, pain on pain,  
 On either side Pompilia’s path of life,  
 Built round about and over against by fear, 790  
 Circumvallated month by month, and week  
 By week, and day by day, and hour by hour,  
 Close, closer and yet closer still with pain,  
 No outlet from the encroaching pain save just  
 Where stood one saviour like a piece of heaven, 795  
 Hell’s arms would strain round but for this blue gap.  
 She, they say further, first tried every chink,  
 Every imaginable break i’ the fire,  
 As way of escape : ran to the Commissary,  
 Who bade her not malign his friend her spouse ; 800  
 Flung herself thrice at the Archbishop’s feet,

Where three times the Archbishop let her lie,  
 Spend her whole sorrow and sob full heart forth,  
 And then took up the slight load from the ground  
 And bore it back for husband to chastise,— 805  
 Mildly of course,—but natural right is right.  
 So went she slipping ever yet catching at help,  
 Missing the high till come to lowest and last,  
 To-wit a certain friar of mean degree,  
 Who heard her story in confession, wept, 810  
 Crossed himself, showed the man within the monk.  
 “Then, will you save me, you the one i’ the world?  
 “I cannot even write my woes, nor put  
 “My prayer for help in words a friend may read,—  
 “I no more own a coin than have an hour 815  
 “Free of observance,—I was watched to church,  
 “Am watched now, shall be watched back presently,—  
 “How buy the skill of scribe i’ the market-place?  
 “Pray you, write down and send whatever I say  
 “O’ the need I have my parents take me hence!” 820  
 The good man rubbed his eyes and could not choose—  
 Let her dictate her letter in such a sense  
 That parents, to save breaking down a wall,  
 Might lift her over: she went back, heaven in heart.  
 Then the good man took counsel of his couch, 825  
 Woke and thought twice, the second thought the best:  
 “Here am I, foolish body that I be,

" Caught all but pushing, teaching, who but I,  
 " My betters their plain duty,—what, I dare  
 " Help a case the Archbishop would not help,           830  
 " Mend matters, peradventure, God loves mar?  
 " What hath the married life but strifes and plagues  
 " For proper dispensation? So a fool  
 " Once touched the ark,—poor Uzzah that I am!  
 " Oh married ones, much rather should I bid,           835  
 " In patience all of ye possess your souls!  
 " This life is brief and troubles die with it:  
 " Where were the prick to soar up homeward else?"

So saying, he burnt the letter he had writ,  
 Said *Ave* for her intention, in its place,           840  
 Took snuff and comfort, and had done with all.  
 Then the grim arms stretched yet a little more  
 And each touched each, all but one streak i' the midst,  
 Whereat stood Caponsacchi, who cried, " This way,  
 " Out by me! Hesitate one moment more           845  
 " And the fire shuts out me and shuts in you!  
 " Here my hand holds you life out!" Whereupon  
 She clasped the hand, which closed on hers and drew  
 Pompilia out o' the circle now complete.  
 Whose fault or shame but Guido's?—ask her friends.

But then this is the wife's—Pompilia's tale—           851  
 Eve's . . . no, not Eve's, since Eve, to speak the truth,

Was hardly fallen (our candour might pronounce)  
 When simply saying in her own defence  
 "The serpent tempted me and I did eat." 855  
 So much of paradisaal nature, Eve's!  
 Her daughters ever since prefer to urge  
 "Adam so starved me I was fain accept  
 "The apple any serpent pushed my way."  
 What an elaborate theory have we here, 860  
 Ingeniously nursed up, pretentiously  
 Brought forth, pushed forward amid trumpet-blast,  
 To account for the thawing of an icicle,  
 Show us there needed *Ætna vomit flame*  
 Ere run the crystal into dew-drops! Else, 865  
 How, unless hell broke loose to cause the step,  
 How could a married lady go astray?  
 Bless the fools! And 't is just this way they are  
 blessed,  
 And the world wags still,—because fools are sure  
 —Oh, not of my wife nor your daughter! No! 870  
 But of their own: the case is altered quite.  
 Look now,—last week, the lady we all love,—  
 Daughter o' the couple we all venerate,  
 Wife of the husband we all cap before,  
 Mother o' the babes we all breathe blessings on,— 875  
 Was caught in converse with a negro page.  
 Hell thawed that icicle, else "Why was it—



“ Why ? ” asked and echoed the fools. “ Because, you  
fools,—”

So did the dame’s self answer, she who could,  
With that fine candour only forthcoming 880

When ’t is no odds whether withheld or no—

“ Because my husband was the saint you say,

“ And,—with that childish goodness, absurd faith,

“ Stupid self-satisfaction, you so praise,—

“ Saint to you, insupportable to me. 885

“ Had he,—instead of calling me fine names,

“ Lucretia and Susanna and so forth,

“ And curtaining Correggio carefully

“ Lest I be taught that Leda had two legs,—

“ —But once never so little tweaked my nose 890

“ For peeping through my fan at Carnival,

“ Confessing thereby ‘ I have no easy task—

“ ‘ I need use all my powers to hold you mine,

“ ‘ And then,—why ’t is so doubtful if they serve,

“ ‘ That—take this, as an earnest of despair ! ’ 895

“ Why, we were quits : I had wiped the harm away,

“ Thought ‘ The man fears me ! ’ and foregone revenge.”

We must not want all this elaborate work

To solve the problem why young Fancy-and-flesh

Slips from the dull side of a spouse in years, 900

Betakes it to the breast of Brisk-and-bold

Whose love-scrapes furnish talk for all the town !

Accordingly one word on the other side  
 Tips over the piled-up fabric of a tale.  
 Guido says—that is, always, his friends say— 905  
 It is unlikely, from the wickedness,  
 That any man treat any woman so.  
 The letter in question was her very own,  
 Unprompted and unaided : she could write—  
 As able to write as ready to sin, or free, 910  
 When there was danger, to deny both facts.  
 He bids you mark, herself from first to last  
 Attributes all the so-styled torture just  
 To jealousy,—jealousy of whom but just  
 This very Caponsacchi ! How suits here 915  
 This with the other alleged motive, Prince ?  
 Would Guido make a terror of the man  
 He meant should tempt the woman, as they charge ?  
 Do you fright your hare that you may catch your hare ?  
 Consider too, the charge was made and met 920  
 At the proper time and place where proofs were plain—  
 Heard patiently and disposed of thoroughly  
 By the highest powers, possessors of most light,  
 The Governor for the law, and the Archbishop  
 For the gospel : which acknowledged primacies, 925  
 'T is impudently pleaded, he could warp  
 Into a tacit partnership with crime—  
 He being the while, believe their own account,

Impotent, penniless and miserable !  
 He further asks—Duke, note the knotty point !— 930  
 How he,—concede him skill to play such part  
 And drive his wife into a gallant's arms,—  
 Could bring the gallant to play his part too  
 And stand with arms so opportunely wide ?  
 How bring this Caponsacchi,—with whom, friends 935  
 And foes alike agree, throughout his life  
 He never interchanged a civil word  
 Nor lifted courteous cap to—him how bend  
 To such observancy of beck and call,  
 —To undertake this strange and perilous feat 940  
 For the good of Guido, using, as the lure,  
 Pompilia whom, himself and she avouch,  
 He had nor spoken with nor seen, indeed,  
 Beyond sight in a public theatre,  
 When she wrote letters (she that could not write !) 945  
 The importunate shamelessly-protessed love  
 Which brought him, though reluctant, to her feet,  
 And forced on him the plunge which, howsoe'er  
 She might swim up i' the whirl, must bury him  
 Under abysmal black : a priest contrive 950  
 No better, no amour to be hushed up,  
 But open flight and noon-day infamy ?  
 Try and concoct defence for such revolt !  
 Take the wife's tale as true, say she was wronged,—

Pray, in what rubric of the breviary 955  
 Do you find it registered—the part of a priest  
 Is—that to right wrongs from the church he skip,  
 Go journeying with a woman that 's a wife,  
 And be pursued, o'ertaken and captured . . . how?  
 In a lay-dress, playing the kind sentinel 960  
 Where the wife sleeps (says he who best should know)  
 And sleeping, sleepless, both have spent the night!  
 Could no one else be found to serve at need—  
 No woman—or if man, no safer sort  
 Than this not well-reputed turbulence? 965

Then, look into his own account o' the case!  
 He, being the stranger and astonished one,  
 Yet received protestations of her love  
 From lady neither known nor cared about:  
 Love, so protested, bred in him disgust 970  
 After the wonder,—or incredulity,  
 Such impudence seeming impossible.  
 But, soon assured such impudence might be,  
 When he had seen with his own eyes at last  
 Letters thrown down to him i' the very street 975  
 From behind lattice where the lady lurked,  
 And read their passionate summons to her side—  
 Why then, a thousand thoughts swarmed up and in,—  
 How he had seen her once, a moment's space,

Observed she was both young and beautiful, 980  
 Heard everywhere report she suffered much  
 From a jealous husband thrice her age,—in short  
 There flashed the propriety, expediency  
 Of treating, trying might they come to terms,  
 —At all events, granting the interview 985  
 Prayed for, one so adapted to assist  
 Decision as to whether he advance,  
 Stand or retire, in his benevolent mood !  
 Therefore the interview befell at length ;  
 And at this one and only interview, 990  
 He saw the sole and single course to take—  
 Bade her dispose of him, head, heart and hand,  
 Did her behest and braved the consequence,  
 Not for the natural end, the love of man  
 For woman whether love be virtue or vice, 995  
 But, please you, altogether for pity's sake—  
 Pity of innocence and helplessness !  
 And how did he assure himself of both ?  
 Had he been the house-inmate, visitor,  
 Eye-witness of the described martyrdom, 1000  
 So, competent to pronounce its remedy  
 Ere rush on such extreme and desperate course—  
 Involving such enormity of harm,  
 Moreover, to the husband judged thus, doomed  
 And damned without a word in his defence? 1005

Not he! the truth was felt by instinct here,  
 —Process which saves a world of trouble and time.  
 There 's the priest's story: what do you say to it,  
 Trying its truth by your own instinct too,  
 Since that 's to be the expeditious mode? 1010  
 " And now, do hear my version," Guido cries:  
 " I accept argument and inference both.  
 " It would indeed have been miraculous  
 " Had such a confidency sprung to birth  
 " With no more fanning from acquaintanceship 1015  
 " Than here avowed by my wife and this priest.  
 " Only, it did not: you must substitute  
 " The old stale unromantic way of fault,  
 " The commonplace adventure, mere intrigue  
 " In prose form with the unpoetic tricks, 1020  
 " Cheatings and lies: they used the hackney chair  
 " Satan jaunts forth with, shabby and serviceable,  
 " No gilded gimcrack-novelty from below,  
 " To bowl you along thither, swift and sure.  
 " That same officious go-between, the wench 1025  
 " Who gave and took the letters of the two,  
 " Now offers self and service back to me:  
 " Bears testimony to visits night by night  
 " When all was safe, the husband far and away,—  
 " To many a timely slipping out at large 1030  
 " By light o' the morning-star, ere he should wake.

“ And when the fugitives were found at last,  
 “ Why, with them were found also, to belie  
 “ What protest they might make of innocence,  
 “ All documents yet wanting, if need were, 1035  
 “ To establish guilt in them, disgrace in me—  
 “ The chronicle o’ the converse from its rise  
 “ To culmination in this outrage : read !  
 “ Letters from wife to priest, from priest to wife,—  
 “ Here they are, read and say where they chime in  
 “ With the other tale, superlative purity 1041  
 “ O’ the pair of saints ! I stand or fall by these. ”

But then on the other side again,—how say  
 The pair of saints? That not one word is theirs—  
 No syllable o’ the batch or writ or sent 1045  
 Or yet received by either of the two.  
 “ Found,” says the priest, “ because he needed them,  
 “ Failing all other proofs, to prove our fault .  
 “ So, here they are, just as is natural.  
 “ Oh yes—we had our missives, each of us ! 1050  
 “ Not these, but to the full as vile, no doubt :  
 “ Hers as from me,—she could not read, so burnt,—  
 “ Mine as from her,—I burnt because I read.  
 “ Who forged and found them? *Cui profuerint!*”  
 (I take the phrase out of your Highness’ mouth) 1055  
 “ He who would gain by her fault and my fall,

“ The trickster, schemer and pretender—he  
 “ Whose whole career was lie entailing lie  
 “ Sought to be sealed truth by the worst lie last !”

Guido rejoins—“ Did the other end o’ the tale      1060  
 “ Match this beginning ! ’T is alleged I prove  
 “ A murderer at the end, a man of force  
 “ Prompt, indiscriminate, effectual : good !  
 “ Then what need all this trifling woman’s-work,  
 “ Letters and embassies and weak intrigue,      1065  
 “ When will and power were mine to end at once  
 “ Safely and surely ? Murder had come first  
 “ Not last with such a man, assure yourselves !  
 “ The silent *acquetta*, stilling at command—  
 “ A drop a day i’ the wine or soup, the dose,—      1070  
 “ The shattering beam that breaks above the bed  
 “ And beats out brains, with nobody to blame  
 “ Except the wormy age which eats even oak,—  
 “ Nay, the staunch steel or trusty cord,—who cares  
 “ I’ the blind old palace, a pitfall at each step,      1075  
 “ With none to see, much more to interpose  
 “ O’ the two, three, creeping house-dog-servant-things  
 “ Born mine and bred mine ? Had I willed gross death,  
 “ I had found nearer paths to thrust him prey  
 “ Than this that goes meandering here and there      1080  
 “ Through half the world and calls down in its course



" Notice and noise,—hate, vengeance, should it fail,  
 " Derision and contempt though it succeed !  
 " Moreover, what o' the future son and heir ?  
 " The unborn babe about to be called mine,— 1085  
 " What end in heaping all this shame on him,  
 " Were I indifferent to my own black share ?  
 " Would I have tried these crookednesses, say,  
 " Willing and able to effect the straight ? "

" Ay, would you ! "—one may hear the priest retort,  
 " Being as you are, i' the stock, a man of guile, 1091  
 " And ruffianism but an added graft.  
 " You, a born coward, try a coward's arms,  
 " Trick and chicane,—and only when these fail  
 " Does violence follow, and like fox you bite 1095  
 " Caught out in stealing. Also, the disgrace  
 " You hardly shrunk at, wholly shrivelled her :  
 " You plunged her thin white delicate hand i' the flame  
 " Along with your coarse horny brutish fist,  
 " Held them a second there, then drew out both 1100  
 " —Yours roughed a little, hers ruined through and  
     through.  
 " Your hurt would heal forthwith at ointment's touch—  
 " Namely, succession to the inheritance  
 " Which bolder crime had lost you : let things change,  
 " The birth o' the boy warrant the bolder crime, 1105

" Why, murder was determined, dared and done.  
 " For me," the priest proceeds with his reply,  
 " The look o' the thing, the chances of mistake,  
 " All were against me,—that, I knew the first :  
 " But, knowing also what my duty was, 1110  
 " I did it : I must look to men more skilled  
 " In reading hearts than ever was the world."

Highness, decide ! Pronounce, Her Excellency !  
 Or . . . even leave this argument in doubt,  
 Account it a fit matter, taken up 1115  
 With all its faces, manifold enough,  
 To ponder on—what fronts us, the next stage,  
 Next legal process? Guido, in pursuit,  
 Coming up with the fugitives at the inn,  
 Caused both to be arrested then and there 1120  
 And sent to Rome for judgment on the case—  
 Thither, with all his armoury of proofs,  
 Betook himself : 't is there we 'll meet him now,  
 Waiting the further issue.

Here you smile 1125

" And never let him henceforth dare to plead,—  
 " Of all pleas and excuses in the world  
 " For any deed hereafter to be done,—  
 " His irrepressible wrath at honour's wound !  
 " Passion and madness irrepressible? 1130

“ Why, Count and cavalier, the husband comes  
 “ And catches foe i’ the very act of shame !  
 “ There ’s man to man,—nature must have her way,—  
 “ We look he should have cleared things on the spot.  
 “ Yes, then, indeed—even tho’ it prove he erred— 1135  
 “ Though the ambiguous first appearance, mount  
 “ Of solid injury, melt soon to mist,  
 “ Still,—had he slain the lover and the wife—  
 “ Or, since she was a woman and his wife,  
 “ Slain him, but stript her naked to the skin 1140  
 “ Or at best left no more of an attire  
 “ Than patch sufficient to pin paper to,  
 “ Some one love-letter, infamy and all,  
 “ As passport to the Paphos fit for such,  
 “ Safe-conduct to her natural home the stews,— 1145  
 “ Good! One had recognized the power o’ the pulse.  
 “ But when he stands, the stock-fish,—sticks to law—  
 “ Offers the hole in his heart, all fresh and warm,  
 “ For scrivener’s pen to poke and play about—  
 “ Can stand, can stare, can tell his beads perhaps, 1150  
 “ Oh, let us hear no syllable o’ the rage !  
 “ Such rage were a convenient afterthought  
 “ For one who would have shown his teeth belike,  
 “ Exhibited unbridled rage enough,  
 “ Had but the priest been found, as was to hope, 1155  
 “ In serge, not silk, with crucifix, not sword :

"Whereas the grey innocuous grub, of yore,  
 "Had hatched a hornet, tickle to the touch,  
 "The priest was metamorphosed into knight.  
 "And even the timid wife, whose cue was—shriek, 1160  
 "Bury her brow beneath his trampling foot,—  
 "She too sprang at him like a pythoness :  
 "So, gulp down rage, passion must be postponed,  
 "Calm be the word ! Well, our word is—we brand  
 "This part o' the business, howsoever the rest 1165  
 "Befall."

"Nay," interpose as prompt his friends—  
 "This is the world's way ! So you adjudge reward  
 "To the forbearance and legality  
 "Yourselves begin by inculcating—ay, 1170  
 "Exacting from us all with knife at throat !  
 "This one wrong more you add to wrong's amount,—  
 "You publish all, with the kind comment here,  
 " ' Its victim was too cowardly for revenge.' "  
 Make it your own case,—you who stand apart ! 1175  
 The husband wakes one morn from heavy sleep,  
 With a taste of poppy in his mouth,—rubs eyes,  
 Finds his wife flown, his strong box ransacked too,  
 Follows as he best can, overtakes i' the end.  
 You bid him use his privilege : well, it seems 1180  
 He 's scarce cool-blooded enough for the right move—  
 Does not shoot when the game were sure, but stands

Bewildered at the critical minute,—since  
 He has the first flash of the fact alone  
 To judge from, act with, not the steady lights      1185  
 Of after-knowledge,—yours who stand at ease  
 To try conclusions : he 's in smother and smoke,  
 You outside, with explosion at an end :  
 The sulphur may be lightning or a squib—  
 He 'll know in a minute, but till then, he doubts.      1190  
 Back from what you know to what he knew not !  
 Hear the priest's lofty " I am innocent,"  
 The wife's as resolute " You are guilty !"      Come !  
 Are you not staggered?—pause, and you lose the move !  
 Nought left you but a low appeal to law,      1195  
 " Coward " tied to your tail for compliment !  
 Another consideration : have it your way !  
 Admit the worst : his courage failed the Count,  
 He 's cowardly like the best o' the burgesses  
 He 's grown incorporate with,—a very cur,      1200  
 Kick him from out your circle by all means !  
 Why, trundled down this reputable stair,  
 Still, the Church-door lies wide to take him in,  
 And the Court-porch also : in he sneaks to each,—  
 " Yes, I have lost my honour and my wife,      1205  
 " And, being moreover an ignoble hound,  
 " I dare not jeopardize my life for them !"  
 Religion and Law lean forward from their chairs,

“ Well done, thou good and faithful servant ! ” Ay,  
 Not only applaud him that he scorned the world,  
 But punish should he dare do otherwise. 1211  
 If the case be clear or turbid,—you must say !

Thus, anyhow, it mounted to the stage  
 In the law-courts,—let ’s see clearly from this point !—  
 Where the priest tells his story true or false, 1215  
 And the wife her story, and the husband his,  
 All with result as happy as before.  
 The courts would nor condemn nor yet acquit  
 This, that or the other, in so distinct a sense  
 As end the strife to either’s absolute loss : 1220  
 Pronounced, in place of something definite,  
 “ Each of the parties, whether goat or sheep  
 “ I’ the main, has wool to show and hair to hide.  
 “ Each has brought somehow trouble, is somehow cause  
 “ Of pains enough,—even though no worse were proved.  
 “ Here is a husband, cannot rule his wife 1226  
 “ Without provoking her to scream and scratch  
 “ And scour the fields,—causelessly, it may be :  
 “ Here is that wife,—who makes her sex our plague,  
 “ Wedlock, our bugbear,—perhaps with cause enough :  
 “ And here is the truant priest o’ the trio, worst 1231  
 “ Or best—each quality being conceivable.  
 “ Let us impose a little mulct on each.

" We punish youth in state of pupilage  
 " Who talk at hours when youth is bound to sleep,  
 " Whether the prattle turn upon Saint Rose 1236  
 " Or Donna Olimpia of the Vatican :  
 " 'T is talk, talked wisely or unwisely talked,  
 " I' the dormitory where to talk at all,  
 " Transgresses, and is mulct : as here we mean. 1240  
 " For the wife,—let her betake herself, for rest,  
 " After her run, to a House of Convertites—  
 " Keep there, as good as real imprisonment :  
 " Being sick and tired, she will recover so.  
 " For the priest, spritely strayer out of bounds, 1245  
 " Who made Arezzo hot to hold him,—Rome  
 " Profits by his withdrawal from the scene.  
 " Let him be relegate to Civita,  
 " Circumscribed by its bounds till matters mend :  
 " There he at least lies out o' the way of harm 1250  
 " From foes—perhaps from the too friendly fair.  
 " And finally for the husband, whose rash rule  
 " Has but itself to blame for this ado,—  
 " If he be vexed that, in our judgments dealt,  
 " He fails obtain what he accounts his right, 1255  
 " Let him go comforted with the thought, no less,  
 " That, **turn** each sentence howsoever he may,  
 " There 's satisfaction to extract therefrom.  
 " For, does he wish his wife proved innocent ?

" Well, she 's not guilty, he may safely urge, 1260  
 " Has missed the stripes dishonest wives endure—  
 " This being a fatherly pat o' the cheek, no more.  
 " Does he wish her guilty? Were she otherwise  
 " Would she be locked up, set to say her prayers,  
 " Prevented intercourse with the outside world, 1265  
 " And that suspected priest in banishment,  
 " Whose portion is a further help i' the case?  
 " Oh, ay, you all of you want the other thing,  
 " The extreme of law, some verdict neat, complete,—  
 " Either, the whole o' the dowry in your poke 1270  
 " With full release from the false wife, to boot,  
 " And heading, hanging for the priest, beside—  
 " Or, contrary, claim freedom for the wife,  
 " Repayment of each penny paid her spouse,  
 " Amends for the past, release for the future! Such  
 " Is wisdom to the children of this world; 1276  
 " But we 've no mind, we children of the light,  
 " To miss the advantage of the golden mean,  
 " And push things to the steel point." Thus the courts.

Is it settled so far? Settled or disturbed, 1280  
 Console yourselves: 't is like . . . an instance, now!  
 You 've seen the puppets, of Place Navona, play,—  
 Punch and his mate,—how threats pass, blows are dealt,  
 And a crisis comes: the crowd or clap or hiss



Accordingly as disposed for man or wife — 1285  
 When down the actors duck awhile perdue,  
 Donning what novel rag-and-feather trim  
 Best suits the next adventure, new effect :  
 And,—by the time the mob is on the move,  
 With something like a judgment *pro* and *con*,— 1290  
 There 's a whistle, up again the actors pop  
 In t' other tatter with fresh-tinseled staves,  
 To re-engage in one last worst fight more  
 Shall show, what you thought tragedy was farce.  
 Note, that the climax and the crown of things 1295  
 Invariably is, the devil appears himself,  
 Armed and accoutred, horns and hoofs and tail !  
 Just so, nor otherwise it proved—you 'll see :  
 Move to the murder, never mind the rest !

Guido, at such a general duck-down, 1300  
 I' the breathing-space,—of wife to convent here,  
 Priest to his relegation, and himself  
 To Arezzo,—had resigned his part perforce  
 To brother Abate, who bustled, did his best,  
 Retrieved things somewhat, managed the three suits—  
 Since, it should seem, there were three suits-at-law  
 Behoved him look to, still, lest bad grow worse : 1307  
 First civil suit,—the one the parents brought,  
 Impugning the legitimacy of his wife,

Affirming thence the nullity of her rights : 1310  
 This was before the Rota,—Molinès,  
 That 's judge there, made that notable decree  
 Which partly leaned to Guido, as I said,—  
 But Pietro had appealed against the same  
 To the very court will judge what we judge now—  
 Tommati and his fellows,—Suit the first. 1316  
 Next civil suit,—demand on the wife's part  
 Of separation from the husband's bed  
 On plea of cruelty and risk to life—  
 Claims restitution of the dowry paid, 1320  
 Immunity from paying any more :  
 This second, the Vicegerent has to judge.  
 Third and last suit,—this time, a criminal one,—  
 Answer to, and protection from, both these,—  
 Guido's complaint of guilt against his wife 1325  
 In the Tribunal of the Governor,  
 Venturini, also judge of the present cause.  
 Three suits of all importance plaguing him,  
 Beside a little private enterprise  
 Of Guido's,—essay at a shorter cut. 1330  
 For Paolo, knowing the right way at Rome,  
 Had, even while superintending these three suits  
 I' the regular way, each at its proper court,  
 Ingeniously made interest with the Pope  
 To set such tedious regular forms aside, 1335

And, acting the supreme and ultimate judge,  
 Declare for the husband and against the wife.  
 Well, at such crisis and extreme of straits,—  
 The man at bay, buffeted in this wise,—  
 Happened the strangest accident of all. 1340  
 “Then,” sigh friends, “the last feather broke his back,  
 “Made him forget all possible remedies  
 “Save one—he rushed to, as the sole relief  
 “From horror and the abominable thing.”  
 “Or rather,” laugh foes, “then did there befall 1345  
 “The luckiest of conceivable events,  
 “Most pregnant with impunity for him,  
 “Which henceforth turned the flank of all attack,  
 “And bade him do his wickedest and worst.”  
 —The wife’s withdrawal from the Convertites, 1350  
 Visit to the villa where her parents lived,  
 And birth there of his babe. Divergence here!  
 I simply take the facts, ask what they show.

First comes this thunderclap of a surprise :  
 Then follow all the signs and silences 1355  
 Premonitory of earthquake. Paolo first  
 Vanished, was swept off somewhere, lost to Rome :  
 (Wells dry up, while the sky is sunny and blue.)  
 Then Guido girds himself for enterprise,  
 Hies to Vittiano, counsels with his steward, 1360

Comes to terms with four peasants young and bold,  
 And starts for Rome the Holy, reaches her  
 At very holiest, for 't is Christmas Eve,  
 And makes straight for the Abate's dried-up font,  
 The lodge where Paolo ceased to work the pipes. 1365  
 And then, rest taken, observation made  
 And plan completed, all in a grim week,  
 The five proceed in a body, reach the place,  
 —Pietro's, at the Paolina, silent, lone,  
 And stupefied by the propitious snow. 1370  
 'T is one i' the evening : knock : a voice "Who 's there?"  
 " Friends with a letter from the priest your friend."  
 At the door, straight smiles old Violante's self.  
 She falls,—her son-in-law stabs through and through,  
 Reaches through her at Pietro—" With your son 1375  
 " This is the way to settle suits, good sire !"  
 He bellows " Mercy for heaven, not for earth !  
 " Leave to confess and save my sinful soul,  
 " Then do your pleasure on the body of me !"  
 —" Nay, father, soul with body must take its chance !"  
 He presently got his portion and lay still. 1381  
 And last, Pompilia rushes here and there  
 Like a dove among the lightnings in her brake,  
 Falls also : Guido's, this last husband's-act.  
 He lifts her by the long dishevelled hair, 1385  
 Holds her away at arm's length with one hand,

While the other tries if life come from the mouth—  
 Looks out his whole heart's hate on the shut eyes,  
 Draws a deep satisfied breath, "So—dead at last!"  
 Throws down the burden on dead Pietro's knees, 1390  
 And ends all with "Let us away, my boys!"

And, as they left by one door, in at the other  
 Tumbled the neighbours—for the shrieks had pierced  
 To the mill and the grange, this cottage and that  
 shed.

Soon followed the Public Force ; pursuit began 1395  
 Though Guido had the start and chose the road :  
 So, that same night was he, with the other four,  
 Overtaken near Baccano,—where they sank  
 By the way-side, in some shelter meant for beasts,  
 And now lay heaped together, nuzzling swine, 1400  
 Each wrapped in bloody cloak, each grasping still  
 His unwiped weapon, sleeping all the same  
 The sleep o' the just,—a journey of twenty miles  
 Brought just and unjust to a level, you see.  
 The only one i' the world that suffered aught 1405  
 By the whole night's toil and trouble, flight and chase,  
 Was just the officer who took them, Head  
 O' the Public Force,—Patrizj, zealous soul,  
 Who, having but duty to sustain weak flesh,  
 Got heated, caught a fever and so died : 1410

A warning to the over-vigilant,  
 —Virtue in a chafe should change her linen quick,  
 Lest pleurisy get start of providence.  
 (That 's for the Cardinal, and told, I think !)

Well, they bring back the company to Rome. 1415  
 Says Guido, " By your leave, I fain would ask  
 " How you found out 't was I who did the deed?  
 " What put you on my trace, a foreigner,  
 " Supposed in Arezzo,—and assuredly safe  
 " Except for an oversight : who told you, pray ?" 1420  
 " Why, naturally your wife !" Down Guido drops  
 O' the horse he rode,—they have to steady and stay,  
 At either side the brute that bore him bound,  
 So strange it seemed his wife should live and speak !  
 She had prayed—at least so people tell you now—  
 For but one thing to the Virgin for herself, 1426  
 Not simply,—as did Pietro 'mid the stabs,—  
 Time to confess and get her own soul saved  
 But time to make the truth apparent, truth  
 For God's sake, lest men should believe a lie : 1430  
 Which seems to have been about the single prayer  
 She ever put up, that was granted her.  
 With this hope in her head, of telling truth,—  
 Being familiarized with pain, beside,—  
 She bore the stabbing to a certain pitch 1435

Without a useless cry, was flung for dead  
 On Pietro's lap, and so attained her point.  
 Her friends subjoin this—have I done with them?—  
 And cite the miracle of continued life  
 (She was not dead when I arrived just now) 1440  
 As attestation to her probity.

Does it strike your Excellency? Why, your Highness,  
 The self-command and even the final prayer,  
 Our candour must acknowledge explicable  
 As easily by the consciousness of guilt. 1445  
 So, when they add that her confession runs  
 She was of wifehood one white innocence  
 In thought, word, act, from first of her short life  
 To last of it; praying, i' the face of death,  
 That God forgive her other sins—not this, 1450  
 She is charged with and must die for, that she failed  
 Anyway to her husband: while thereon  
 Comments the old Religious—"So much good  
 "Patience beneath enormity of ill,  
 "I hear to my confusion, woe is me, 1455  
 "Sinner that I stand, shamed in the walk and gait  
 "I have practised and grown old in, by a child!"—  
 Guido's friends shrug the shoulder, "Just this same  
 "Prodigious absolute calm in the last hour  
 "Confirms us,—being the natural result 1460

" Of a life which proves consistent to the close.  
 " Having braved heaven and deceived earth throughout,  
 " She braves still and deceives still, gains thereby  
 " Two ends, she prizes beyond earth or heaven :  
 " First sets her lover free, imperilled sore 1465  
 " By the new turn things take : he answers yet  
 " For the part he played : they have summoned him  
     indeed :  
 " The past ripped up, he may be punished still :  
 " What better way of saving him than this ?  
 " Then,—thus she dies revenged to the uttermost 1470  
 " On Guido, drags him with her in the dark,  
 " The lower still the better, do you doubt ?  
 " Thus, two ways, does she love her love to the end,  
 " And hate her hate,—death, hell is no such price  
 " To pay for these,—lovers and haters hold." 1475  
 But there 's another parry for the thrust.  
 " Confession," cry folks—" a confession, think !  
 " Confession of the moribund is true !"  
 Which of them, my wise friends ? This public one,  
 Or the private other we shall never know ? 1480  
 The private may contain,—your casuists teach,—  
 The acknowledgment of, and the penitence for,  
 That other public one, so people say.  
 However it be,—we trench on delicate ground,  
 Her Eminence is peeping o'er the cards,— 1485



Can one find nothing in behalf of this  
 Catastrophe? Deaf folks accuse the dumb!  
 You criticize the drunken reel, fool's speech,  
 Maniacal gesture of the man,— we grant!  
 But who poured poison in his cup, we ask? 1490  
 Recall the list of his excessive wrongs,  
 First cheated in his wife, robbed by her kin,  
 Rendered anon the laughing-stock o' the world  
 By the story, true or false, of his wife's birth,—  
 The last seal publicly apposed to shame 1495  
 By the open flight of wife and priest,—why, Sirs,  
 Step out of Rome a furlong, would you know  
 What another-guess tribunal than ours here,  
 Mere worldly Court without the help of grace,  
 Thinks of just that one incident o' the flight? 1500  
 Guido preferred the same complaint before  
 The court at Arezzo, bar of the Granduke,—  
 In virtue of it being Tuscany  
 Where the offence had rise and flight began,—  
 Self-same complaint he made in the sequel here 1505  
 Where the offence grew to the full, the flight  
 Ended: offence and flight, one fact judged twice  
 By two distinct tribunals,—what result?  
 There was a sentence passed at the same time  
 By Arezzo and confirmed by the Granduke, 1510  
 Which nothing baulks of swift and sure effect

But absence of the guilty, (flight to Rome  
 Frees them from Tuscan jurisdiction now)  
 —Condemns the wife to the opprobrious doom  
 Of all whom law just lets escape from death. 1515  
 The Stinche, House of Punishment, for life,—  
 That 's what the wife deserves in Tuscany :  
 Here, she deserves—remitting with a smile  
 'To her father's house, main object of the flight !  
 The thief presented with the thing he steals ! 1520

At this discrepancy of judgments—mad,  
 The man took on himself the office, judged ;  
 And the only argument against the use  
 O' the law he thus took into his own hands  
 Is . . . what, I ask you?—that, revenging wrong,  
 He did not revenge sooner, kill at first 1526  
 Whom he killed last ! That is the final charge.  
 Sooner ? What 's soon or late i' the case ?—ask we.  
 A wound i' the flesh no doubt wants prompt redress ;  
 It smarts a little to-day, well in a week, 1530  
 Forgotten in a month ; or never, or now, revenge !  
 But a wound to the soul ? That rankles worse and  
 worse.

Shall I comfort you, explaining—“ Not this once  
 “ But now it may be some five hundred times  
 “ I called you ruffian, pandar, liar and rogue : 1535

“The injury must be less by lapse of time?”  
 The wrong is a wrong, one and immortal too,  
 And that you bore it those five hundred times,  
 Let it rankle unrevenged five hundred years,  
 Is just five hundred wrongs the more and worse! 1540  
 Men, plagued this fashion, get to explode this way,  
 If left no other.

“But we left this man  
 “Many another way, and there’s his fault,”  
 ’T is answered—“He himself preferred our arm 1545  
 “O’ the law to fight his battle with. No doubt  
 “We did not open him an armoury  
 “To pick and choose from, use, and then reject.  
 “He tries one weapon and fails,—he tries the next  
 “And next: he flourishes wit and common sense, 1550  
 “They fail him,—he plies logic doughtily,  
 “It fails him too,—thereon, discovers last  
 “He has been blind to the combustibles—  
 “That all the while he is a-glow with ire,  
 “Boiling with irrepressible rage, and so 1555  
 “May try explosives and discard cold steel,—  
 “So hires assassins, plots, plans, executes!  
 “Is this the honest self-forgetting rage  
 “We are called to pardon? Does the furious bull  
 “Pick out four help-mates from the grazing herd 1560

“ And journey with them over hill and dale  
 “ Till he find his enemy ? ”

What rejoinder? save

That friends accept our bull-similitude.  
 Bull-like,—the indiscriminate slaughter, rude      1565  
 And reckless aggravation of revenge,  
 Were all i' the way o' the brute who never once  
 Ceases, amid all provocation more,  
 To bear in mind the first tormentor, first  
 Giver o' the wound that goaded him to fight:      1570  
 And, though a dozen follow and reinforce  
 The aggressor, wound in front and wound in flank,  
 Continues undisturbedly pursuit,  
 And only after prostrating his prize  
 Turns on the pettier, makes a general prey.      1575  
 So Guido rushed against Violante, first  
 Author of all his wrongs, *fons et origo*  
*Malorum*—drops first, deluge since,—which done,  
 He finished with the rest. Do you blame a bull?

In truth you look as puzzled as ere I preached!  
 How is that? There are difficulties perhaps      1581  
 On any supposition, and either side.  
 Each party wants too much, claims sympathy  
 For its object of compassion, more than just.

Cry the wife's friends, " O the enormous crime  
 " Caused by no provocation in the world ! " 1586  
 " Was not the wife a little weak ? "—inquire—  
 " Punished extravagantly, if you please,  
 " But meriting a little punishment ?  
 " One treated inconsiderately, say, 1590  
 " Rather than one deserving not at all  
 " Treatment and discipline o' the harsher sort ? "  
 No, they must have her purity itself,  
 Quite angel,—and her parents angels too  
 Of an aged sort, immaculate, word and deed : 1595  
 At all events, so seeming, till the fiend,  
 Even Guido, by his folly, forced from them  
 The untoward avowal of the trick o' the birth,  
 Which otherwise were safe and secret now.  
 Why, here you have the awfulest of crimes 1600  
 For nothing ! Hell broke loose on a butterfly !  
 A dragon born of rose-dew and the moon !  
 Yet here is the monster ! Why he 's a mere man—  
 Born, bred and brought up in the usual way.  
 His mother loves him, still his brothers stick 1605  
 To the good fellow of the boyish games ;  
 The Governor of his town knows and approves,  
 The Archbishop of the place knows and assists :  
 Here he has Cardinal This to vouch for the past,  
 Cardinal That to trust for the future,—match 1610

And marriage were a Cardinal's making,—in short,  
 What if a tragedy be acted here  
 Impossible for malice to improve,  
 And innocent Guido with his innocent four  
 Be added, all five, to the guilty three,                   1615  
 That we of these last days be edified  
 With one full taste o' the justice of the world?

The long and the short is, truth seems what I show :—  
 Undoubtedly no pains ought to be spared  
 To give the mob an inkling of our lights.                   1620  
 It seems unduly harsh to put the man  
 To the torture, as I hear the court intends,  
 Though readiest way of twisting out the truth ;  
 He is noble, and he may be innocent.  
 On the other hand, if they exempt the man                   1625  
 (As it is also said they hesitate  
 On the fair ground, presumptive guilt is weak  
 I' the case of nobility and privilege),—  
 What crime that ever was, ever will be,  
 Deserves the torture? Then abolish it!                   1630  
 You see the reduction *ad absurdum*, Sirs?

Her Excellency must pronounce, in fine !  
 What, she prefers going and joining play?  
 Her Highness finds it late, intends retire?

I am of their mind : only, all this talk talked, 1635  
'T was not for nothing that we talked, I hope ?  
Both know as much about it, now, at least,  
As all Rome : no particular thanks, I beg !  
(You 'll see, I have not so advanced myself,  
After my teaching the two idiots here !) 1640

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