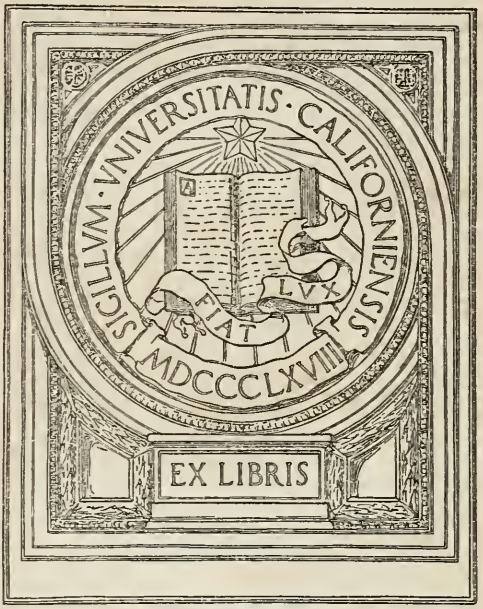

Mrs Cadwallader

Mrs Talbot

Mrs Gore Browne

FIFINE AT THE FAIR
RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY
AND THE INN ALBUM

BY

ROBERT BROWNING

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FIFINE AT THE FAIR.

DONE ELVIRE.

Vous plaît-il, don Juan, nous éclaircir ces beaux mystères ?

DON JUAN.

Madame, à vous dire la vérité . . .

DONE ELVIRE.

Ah ! que vous savez mal vous défendre pour un homme de cour, et qui doit être accoutumé à ces sortes de choses ! J'ai pitié de vous voir la confusion que vous avez. Que ne vous armez-vous le front d'une noble effronterie ? Que ne me jurez-vous que vous êtes toujours dans les mêmes sentimens pour moi, que vous m'aimez toujours avec une ardeur sans égale, et que rien n'est capable de vous détacher de moi que la mort ? — *Molière*, *Don Juan*, Act 1ier. Scène 3e.

DONNA ELVIRA.

Don Juan, might you please to help one give a guess,
Hold up a candle, clear this fine mysteriousness?

DON JUAN.

Madam, if needs I must declare the truth, — in short . . .

DONNA ELVIRA.

Fie! for a man of mode, accustomed at the court
To such a style of thing, how awkwardly my lord
Attempts defence! You move compassion, — that's the word, —
Dumfoundered and chapfallen! Why don't you arm your brow
With noble impudence? Why don't you swear and vow
No sort of change is come to any sentiment
You ever had for me? Affection holds the bent;
You love me now as erst, with passion that makes pale
All ardor else: nor aught in nature can avail
To separate us two, save what, in stopping breath,
May, peradventure, stop devotion likewise, — death!

PROLOGUE.

Amphibian.

I.

The fancy I had to-day, —
  Fancy which turned a fear!
I swam far out in the bay,
  Since waves laughed warm and clear.

II.

I lay and looked at the sun;
  The noon-sun looked at me:
Between us two, no one
  Live creature, that I could see.

III.

Yes! — there came floating by
  Me, who lay floating too,
Such a strange butterfly! —
  Creature as dear as new;

IV.

Because the membraned wings,
  So wonderful, so wide,
So sun-suffused, were things
  Like soul, and nought beside.

V.

A handbreadth overhead!
  All of the sea my own,
It owned the sky instead:
  Both of us were alone.

VI.

I never shall join its flight;
  For nought buoys flesh in air.
If it touch the sea, good-night!
  Death sure and swift waits there.

VII.

Can the insect feel the better
  For watching the uncouth play
Of limbs that slip the fetter,
  Pretend as they were not clay?

VIII.

Undoubtedly I rejoice
  That the air comports so well
With a creature which had the choice
  Of the land once. Who can tell?

IX.

What if a certain soul
  Which early slipped its sheath,
And has for its home the whole
  Of heaven, thus look beneath;

X.

Thus watch one, who, in the world
  Both lives, and likes life's way,
Nor wishes the wings unfurled
  That sleep in the worm, they say?

XI.

But sometimes, when the weather
  Is blue, and warm waves tempt
To free one's self of tether,
  And try a life exempt

XII.

From worldly noise and dust,
  In the sphere which overbrims
With passion and thought, — why, just
  Unable to fly, one swims!

XIII.

By passion and thought upborne,
  One smiles to one's self, "They fare
Scarce better, they need not scorn
  Our sea, who live in the air."

XIV.

Emancipate through passion
  And thought, with sea for sky,
We substitute, in a fashion,
  For heaven, poetry:

XV.

Which sea, to all intent,
  Gives flesh such noon-disport
As a finer element
  Affords the spirit-sort.

XVI.

Whatever they are, we seem;
  Imagine the thing they know;
All deeds they do, we dream:
  Can heaven be else but so?

XVII.

And, meantime, yonder streak
  Meets the horizon's verge:
That is the land to seek,
  If we tire, or dread the surge, —

XVIII.

Land the solid and safe,
  To welcome again (confess!)
When, high and dry, we chafe
  The body, and don the dress.

XIX.

Does she look, pity, wonder,
At one who mimics flight,
Swims, — heaven above, sea under,
Yet always earth in sight?

FIFINE AT THE FAIR.

I.

Oh, trip and skip, Elvire! Link arm in arm with me:
Like husband and like wife, together let us see
The tumbling-troop arrayed, the strollers on their stage
Drawn up and under arms, and ready to engage.

II.

Now, who supposed the night would play us such a prank?—
That what was raw and brown, rough pole and shaven plank,
Mere bit of hoarding, half by trestle propped, half tub,
Would flaunt it forth as brisk as butterfly from grub?

This comes of sun and air, of autumn afternoon,
And Pornic and Saint Gille, whose feast affords the
boon, —
This scaffold turned parterre, this flower-bed in full blow,
Bateleurs, baladines! We shall not miss the show!
They pace and promenade; they presently will dance:
What good were else i' the drum and fife? O pleasant
land of France!

III.

Who saw them make their entry? At wink of eve,
be sure,
They love to steal a march, nor lightly risk the lure.
They keep their treasure hid, nor stale (improvident)
Before the time is ripe, each wonder of their tent, —
Yon six-legged sheep, to wit, and he who beats a gong,
Lifts cap, and waves salute, exhilarates the throng, —
Their ape of many years and much adventure, grim
And gray with pitying fools who find a joke in him.
Or, best, the human beauty, Mimi, Toinette, Fifine,
Tricot fines down if fat, padding plumps up if lean,

Ere, shedding petticoat, modesty, and such toys,
They bounce forth, squalid girls transformed to gamesome boys.

IV.

No, no, thrice, Pornic, no! Perpend the authentic tale!
'Twas not for every Gawain to gaze upon the Grail!
But whoso went his rounds when flew bat, flitted midge,
Might hear across the dusk — where both roads join the bridge,
Hard by the little port — creak a slow caravan,
A chimneyed house on wheels; so shyly-sheathed, began
To broaden out the bud, which, bursting unaware,
Now takes away our breath, queen-tulip of the Fair!

V.

Yet morning promised much; for, pitched and slung and reared
On terrace 'neath the tower, 'twixt tree and tree appeared
An airy structure: how the pennon from its dome,
Frenetic to be free, makes one red stretch for home! —

The home far and away, the distance where lives joy,
The cure, at once and ever, of world and world's annoy;
Since what lolls full in front, a furlong from the booth,
But ocean-idleness, sky-blue, and millpond-smooth?

VI.

Frenetic to be free! And do you know there beats
Something within my breast as sensitive? — repeats
The fever of the flag? My heart makes just the same
Passionate stretch, fires up for lawlessness, lays claim
To share the life they lead, — losels, who have and use
The hour what way they will, — applaud them, or abuse
Society, whereof myself am at the beck,
Whose call obey, and stoop to burden stiffest neck!

VII.

Why is it, that whene'er a faithful few combine
To cast allegiance off, play truant, nor repine,
Agree to bear the worst, forego the best in store
For us, who, left behind, do duty as of yore, —
Why is it, that, disgraced, they seem to relish life the
more? —

Seem as they said, "We know a secret passing praise
Or blame of such as you! Remain! we go our ways
With something you o'erlooked, forgot, or chose to sweep
Clean out of door, — our pearl picked from your rubbish-heap.
You care not for your loss: we calculate our gain.
All's right. Are you content? Why, so let things remain!
To the wood then, to the wild: free life, full liberty!"
And when they rendezvous beneath the inclement sky,
House by the hedge, reduced to brute-companionship, —
Misguided ones who gave society the slip,
And find too late how boon a parent they despised,
What ministration spurned, how sweet and civilized, —
Then, left alone at last with self-sought wretchedness,
No interloper else! why is it — can we guess? —
At somebody's expense goes up so frank a laugh?
As though they held the corn, and left us only chaff
From garners crammed and closed; and we indeed are clever
If we get grain as good by thrashing straw forever.

VIII.

Still, truants as they are, and purpose yet to be,
That nowise needs forbid they venture — as you see —
To cross confine, approach the once familiar roof
O' the kindly race their flight estranged: half stand aloof,
Half sidle up, press near, and proffer wares for sale,
In their phrase; make, in ours, white levy of black mail.
They, of the wild, require some touch of us the tame;
Since clothing, meat, and drink mean money all the same.

IX.

If hunger, proverbs say, allures the wolf from wood,
Much more the bird must dare a dash at something good;
Must snatch up, bear away in beak, the trifle-treasure
To wood and wild, and then — oh, how enjoy at leisure!
Was never tree-built nest, you climbed and took, of bird,
(Rare city-visitant, talked of, scarce seen or heard,)
But, when you would dissect the structure piece by piece,
You found inwreathed amid the country-product — fleece

And feather, thistle-fluffs and bearded windlestraws —
Some shred of foreign silk, unravelling of gauze,
Bit, maybe, of brocade, 'mid fur and thistle-down ;
Filched plainly from mankind, dear tribute paid by town,
Which proved how oft the bird had plucked up heart of grace,
Swooped down at waif and stray, made furtively our place
Pay tax and toll, then borne the booty to enrich
Her paradise i' the waste ; the how and why of which,
That is the secret, there the mystery that stings.

X.

For what they traffic in consists of just the things
We proud ones who so scorn dwellers without the pale,
Bateleurs, baladines, white leviers of black mail, —
I say, they sell what we most pique us that we keep :
How comes it, all we hold so dear they count so cheap ?

XI.

What price should you impose, for instance, on repute,
Good fame, your own good fame and family's to boot ?

Stay start of quick mustache, arrest the angry rise
Of eyebrow! All I asked is answered by surprise.
Now tell me: are you worth the cost of a cigar?
Go boldly, enter booth, disburse the coin at bar
Of doorway where presides the master of the troop,
And forthwith you survey his Graces in a group, —
Live picture, picturesque no doubt, and close to life:
His sisters, right and left; the Grace in front, his wife.
Next, who is this performs the feat of the trapeze?
Lo, she is launched: look, fie, the fairy! — how she flees
O'er all those heads thrust back! — mouths, eyes, one gape and stare.
No scrap of skirt impedes free passage through the air,
Till, plumb on the other side, she lights, and laughs again, —
That fairy-form, whereof each muscle, nay, each vein,
The curious may inspect, — his daughter that he sells
Each rustic for five sous. Desiderate aught else
O' the vender? As you leave his show, — why, joke the man: —
"You cheat: your six-legged sheep, I recollect, began

Both life and trade, last year, trimmed properly and clipt
As the Twin-headed Babe and Human Nondescript."
What does he care? You paid his price, may pass your jest.
So values he repute, good fame, and all the rest.

XII.

But try another tack: say, "I indulge caprice,
Who am Don and Duke, and Knight, beside, o' the Golden Fleece,
And never mind how rich. Abandon this career;
Have hearth and home; nor let your womankind appear
Without as multiplied a coating as protects
An onion from the eye; become, in all respects,
God-fearing householder, subsistent by brain-skill,
Hand-labor; win your bread whatever way you will,
So it be honestly, — and, while I have a purse,
Means shall not lack:" his thanks will be the roundest curse
That ever rolled from lip.

XIII.

Now, what is it—returns
The question—heartens so this losel, that he spurns
All we so prize? I want put down in black and white
What compensating joy, unknown and infinite,
Turns lawlessness to law, makes destitution wealth,
Vice virtue, and disease of soul and body health.

XIV.

Ah the slow shake of head, the melancholy smile,
The sigh almost a sob! What's wrong, was right ere while?
Why are we two at once such ocean-width apart?
Pale fingers press my arm, and sad eyes probe my heart.
Why is the wife in trouble?

XV.

This way, this way, Fifine!
Here's she shall make my thoughts be surer what they mean!
First let me read the signs, portray you past mistake
The gypsy's foreign self, no swarth our sun could bake.

Yet where's a woolly trace, degrades the wiry hair?
And note the Greek-nymph nose, and — oh, my Hebrew
pair
Of eye and eye, — o'erarched by velvet of the mole, —
That swim as in a sea, that dip and rise and roll,
Spilling the light around! while either ear is cut
Thin as a dusk-leaved rose carved from a cocoa-nut.
And then her neck! — now, grant you had the power to
deck,
Just as your fancy pleased, the bistre-length of neck;
Could lay, to shine against its shade, a moon-like row
Of pearl, each round and white as bubble Cupids blow
Big out of mother's milk: what pearl-moon would surpass
That string of mock-turquoise, those almandines of glass,
Where girlhood terminates? for with breasts'-birth com-
mence
The boy, and page-costume, till pink and impudence
End admirably all: complete, the creature trips
Our way now, brings sunshine upon her spangled hips,
As here she fronts us full, with pose half frank, half
fierce!

XVI.

Words urged in vain, Elvire! You waste your carte
and tierce,
Lunge at a phantom here, try fence in fairy-land.
For me, I own defeat; ask but to understand
The acknowledged victory of whom I call my queen,
Sexless and bloodless sprite: though mischievous and
mean,
Yet free and flower-like too, with loveliness for law,
And self-sustainment made morality.

XVII.

A flaw
Do you account i' the lily, of lands which travellers
know,
That, just as a golden gloom supersedes northern snow
I' the chalice, so, about each pistil, spice is packed,
Deliriously-drugged scent, in lieu of odor lacked,
With us, by bee and moth, their banquet to enhance
At morn and eve, when dew, the chilly sustenance,
Needs mixture of some chaste and temperate perfume?
I ask, is she in fault who guards such golden gloom,

Such dear and damning scent, by who cares what devices,
And takes the idle life of insects she entices,
When, drowned to heart's desire, they satiate the inside
O' the lily, mark her wealth, and manifest her pride?

XVIII.

But, wiser, we keep off, nor tempt the acrid juice;
Discreet we peer and praise, put rich things to right use.
No flavorous venomed bell, — the rose it is, I wot,
Only the rose, we pluck and place, unwronged a jot,
No worse for homage done by every devotee,
I' the proper loyal throne, on breast where rose should be.
Or if the simpler sweets we have to choose among
Would taste between our teeth, and give its toy the tongue, —
O gorgeous poison-plague! on thee no hearts are set;
We gather daisy meek, or maiden violet:
I think it is Elvire we love, and not Fifine.

XIX.

"How does she make my thoughts be sure of what they mean?"

Judge, and be just! Suppose an age and time long past
Renew for our behoof one pageant more, the last
O' the kind, sick Louis liked to see defile between
Him and the yawning grave its passage served to screen.
With eye as gray as lead, with cheek as brown as bronze,
Here where we stand, shall sit and suffer Louis Onze;
The while from yonder tent parade forth, not — oh, no! —
Bateleurs, baladines, but range themselves a-row
Those well-sung women-worthies whereof loud fame still finds
Some echo linger faint, less in our hearts than minds.

XX.

See, Helen! pushed in front o' the world's worst night and storm
By Lady Venus' hand on shoulder; the sweet form
Shrinkingly prominent, though mighty, like a moon
Outbreaking from a cloud, to put harsh things in tune,

And magically bring mankind to acquiesce
In its own ravage, — call no curse upon, but bless
(Beldam a moment since) the outbreaking beauty, now,
That casts o'er all the blood a candor from her brow.
See, Cleopatra! bared, the entire and sinuous wealth
O' the shining shape; each orb of indolent ripe health,
Captured, just where it finds a fellow-orb as fine
I' the body; traced about by jewels which outline,
Fire-frame, and keep distinct, perfections, lest they melt
To soft smooth unity ere half their hold be felt:
Yet, o'er that white and wonder, a soul's predominance
I' the head so high and haught, except one thievish glance,
From back of oblong eye, intent to count the slain.
Hush, oh! I know, Elvire! Be patient; more remain.
What say you to Saint — pish! whatever saint you please,
Cold-pinnacled aloft o' the spire, prays calm the seas
From Pornic church, and oft at midnight (peasants say)
Goes walking out to save from shipwreck: well she may;

For think how many a year has she been conversant
With nought but winds and rains, sharp courtesy, and scant
O' the wintry snow that coats the pent-house of her shrine,
Covers each knee, climbs near, but spares the smile benign
Which seems to say, "I looked for scarce so much from earth."
She follows, one long, thin pure finger in the girth
O' the girdle, whence the folds of garment, eye and eye,
Besprent with fleur-de-lis, flow down and multiply
Around her feet; and one pressed hushingly to lip,
As if, while thus we made her march, some foundering ship
Might miss her from her post, nearer to God half-way
In heaven; and she thought, "Who that treads earth can pray?
I doubt if even she, the unashamed! though, sure,
She must have stripped herself only to clothe the poor."

XXI.

This time, enough's a feast, not one more form, Elvire!
Provided you allow, that, bringing up the rear
O' the bevy I am loath to — by one bird — curtail,
First note may lead to last, an octave crown the scale,
And this feminity be followed — do not flout! —
By — who concludes the mask with courtesy, smile, and pout,
Submissive-mutinous? No other than Fifine
Points toe, imposes haunch, and pleads with tambourine.

XXII.

"Well, what's the meaning here, what does the mask intend,
Which, unabridged, we saw file past us, with no end
Of fair ones, till Fifine came, closed the catalogue?"

XXIII.

Task fancy yet again. Suppose you cast this clog
Of flesh away (that weeps, upbraids, withstands my arm),
And pass to join your peers; paragon charm with charm,

As I shall show you may ; prove best of beauty there ;
Yourself confront yourself. This help me to declare,
That yonder-you, who stand beside these, braving each,
And blinking none, beat her who lured to Troy-town beach
The purple prows of Greece ; nay, beat Fifine, whose face
Mark how I will inflame, when seigneur-like I place
I' the tambourine, to spot the strained and piteous blank
Of pleading parchment, see, no less than a whole franc !

XXIV.

Ah ! do you mark the brown o' the cloud, made bright with fire
Through and through ? as, old wiles succeeding to desire,
Quality (you and I) once more compassionate
A hapless infant, doomed (fie on such partial fate !)
To sink the inborn shame, waive privilege of sex,
And posture as you see, support the nods and becks

Of clowns that have their stare, nor always pay its
price ;
An infant born, perchance, as sensitive and nice
As any soul of you, proud dames, whom destiny
Keeps uncontaminate from stigma of the sty
She wallows in ! You draw back skirts from filth like
her,
Who possibly braves scorn, if, scorned, she minister
To age, want, and disease of parents one or both ;
Nay, peradventure, stoops to degradation, loath
That some just budding sister, the dew yet on the rose,
Should have to share in turn the ignoble trade : who
knows ?

XXV.

Ay, who indeed ! Myself know nothing, but dare
guess
That off she trips in haste to hand the booty — yes,
Twixt fold and fold of tent there looms he, dim dis-
cerned,
The ogre, lord of all — those lavish limbs have earned !

Brute-beast-face — ravage, scar, scowl, and malignancy —
O' the Strong Man, whom (no doubt, her husband) by and by
You shall behold do feats, — lift up, nor quail beneath,
A quintal in each hand, a cart-wheel 'twixt his teeth.
Oh! she prefers sheer strength to ineffective grace,
Breeding, and culture; seeks the essential in the case.
To him has flown my franc; and welcome, if that squint
O' the diabolic eye so soften, through absinthe,
That, for once, tambourine, tunic, and tricot 'scape
Their customary curse, "Not half the gain of the ape!"
Ay, they go in together.

XXVI.

Yet still her phantom stays
Opposite, where you stand as steady 'neath our gaze, —
The live Elvire's and mine, — though fancy-stuff and mere
Illusion, to be judged, — dream-figures, — without fear
Or favor, those the false, by you and me the true.

XXVII.

"What puts it in my head to make yourself judge you?"

Well, it may be the name of Helen brought to mind
A certain myth I mused in years long left behind:
How she that fled from Greece with Paris, whom she loved,
And came to Troy, and there found shelter, and so proved
Such cause of the world's woe, — how she, old stories call
This creature, Helen's self, never saw Troy at all.
Jove had his fancy-fit; must needs take empty air,
Fashion her likeness forth, and set the phantom there
I' the midst for sport, to try conclusions with the blind
And blundering race, the game create for gods, mankind:
Experiment on these; establish who would yearn
To give up life for her, who, other-minded, spurn
The best her eyes could smile; make half the world sublime,
And half absurd, for just a phantom all the time:

Meanwhile true Helen's self sat, safe and far away,
By a great river-side, beneath a purer day,
With solitude around, tranquillity within ;
Was able to lean forth, look, listen, through the din
And stir ; could estimate the worthlessness or worth
Of Helen, who inspired such passion to the earth,
A phantom all the time ! That put it in my head
To make yourself judge you, — the phantom-wife, instead
O' the tearful, true Elvire.

XXVIII.

I thank the smile at last
Which thins away the tear. Our sky was overcast,
And something fell ; but day clears up : if there chanced rain,
The landscape glistens more. I have not vexed in vain
Elvire ; because she knows, now she has stood the test,
How, this and this being good, herself may still be best
O' the beauty in review ; because the flesh that claimed
Unduly my regard, she thought, the taste she blamed

In me for things externe, was all mistake, she finds,
Or will find when I prove that bodies show me minds ;
That, through the outward sign, the inward grace allures,
And sparks from heaven transpierce earth's coarsest covertures, —
All by demonstrating the value of Fifine !

XXIX.

Partake my confidence. No creature's made so mean,
But that, some way, it boasts, could we investigate,
Its supreme worth ; fulfils, by ordinance of fate,
Its momentary task ; gets glory all its own ;
Tastes triumph in the world, pre-eminent, alone.
Where is the single grain of sand, 'mid millions heaped
Confusedly on the beach, but, did we know, has leaped,
Or will leap would we wait, i' the century, some once,
To the very throne of things ? — earth's brightest for the nonce,
When sunshine shall impinge on just that grain's facette
Which fronts him fullest, first, returns his ray with jet

Of promptest praise, thanks God best in creation's
name.
As firm is my belief, quick sense perceives the same
Self-vindicating flash illustrate every man
And woman of our mass, and prove, throughout the
plan,
No detail, but, in place allotted it, was prime
And perfect.

XXX.

Witness her, kept waiting all this time!
What happy angle makes Fifine reverberate
Sunshine, — least sand-grain, she, of shadiest social
state?
No adamantine shield, polished like Helen there,
Fit to absorb the sun, regorge him till the glare,
Dazing the universe, draw Troy-ward those blind beaks
Of equal-sided ships rowed by the well-greaved Greeks.
No Asian mirror like yon Ptolematic witch
Able to fix sun fast, and tame sun down, enrich,
Not burn, the world with beams thus flatteringly rolled
About her, head to foot, turned slavish snakes of gold!

And, oh! no tinted pane of oriel sanctity
Does our Fifine afford, such as permits supply
Of lustrous heaven, revealed, far more than mundane sight
Could master, to thy cell, pure saint! where, else too bright,
So suits thy sense the orb, that what outside was noon
Pales through thy lozenged blue to meek benefic moon!
What then? — does that prevent each dunghill we may pass
Daily from boasting, too, its bit of looking-glass,
Its sherd, which, sun-smit, shines, shoots arrowy fire beyond
That satin-muffled mope, your sulky diamond?

XXXI.

And, now, the mingled ray she shoots I decompose.
Her antecedents take for execrable! Gloze
No whit on your premise: let be there was no worst
Of degradation spared Fifine, ordained from first
To last, in body and soul, for one life-long debauch, —
The Pariah of the North, the European Nautch!

This, far from seek to hide, she puts in evidence
Calmly, displays the brand, bids pry without offence
Your finger on the place. You comment, " Fancy us
So operated on, maltreated, mangled thus !
Such torture in our case, had we survived an hour ?
Some other sort of flesh and blood must be, with power
Appropriate to the vile, unsensitive, tough-thonged,
In lieu of our fine nerve ! Be sure she was not wronged
Too much : you must not think she winced at prick as we ! "
Come, come, that's what you say; or would, were thoughts but free.

XXXII.

Well then, thus much confessed, what wonder if there steal
Unchallenged to my heart the force of one appeal
She makes, and justice stamp the sole claim she asserts ?
So absolutely good is truth, truth never hurts
The teller, whose worst crime gets somehow grace avowed.
To me, that silent pose and prayer proclaimed aloud,

"Know all of me outside: the rest be emptiness
For such as you! I call attention to my dress,
Coiffure, outlandish features, and memorable limbs,
Piquant entreaty, all that eye-glance overskims.
Does this much pleasure? Then repay the pleasure; put
Its price i' the tambourine! Do you seek farther? Tut!
I'm just my instrument,—sound hollow; mere smooth skin
Stretched o'er gilt framework, I: rub-dub, nought else within—
Always, for such as you!—if I have use elsewhere;
If certain bells, now mute, can jingle, need you care?
Be it enough, there's truth i' the pleading, which comports
With no word spoken out in cottages or courts;
Since all I plead is, 'Pay for just the sight you see,
And give no credit to another charm in me.'
Do I say, like your love, 'To praise my face is well;
But who would know my worth must search my heart to tell'?

Do I say, like your wife? — 'Had I passed in review
The produce of the globe, my man of men were — you!'
Do I say, like your Helen? — 'Yield yourself up, obey
Implicitly, nor pause to question, to survey
Even the worshipful; prostrate you at my shrine:
Shall you dare controvert what the world counts divine?
Array your private taste, own liking of the sense,
Own longing of the soul, against the impudence
Of history, the blare and bullying of verse?
As if man ever yet saw reason to disburse
The amount of what sense liked, soul longed for, —
given, devised
As love, forsooth, — until the price was recognized
As moderate enough by divers fellow-men!
Then, with his warrant safe that these would love too, then,
Sure that particular gain implies a public loss,
And that no smile he buys but proves a slash across
The face, a stab into the side of somebody;
Sure that, along with love's main purchase, he will buy
Up the whole stock of earth's uncharitableness,
Envy and hatred, — then decides he to profess

His estimate of one love had discerned, though dim
To all the world beside: since what's the world to
    him?'
Do I say, like your Queen of Egypt? — 'Who foregoes
My cup of witchcraft — fault be on the fool! He
    knows
Nothing of how I pack my wine-press, turn its winch
Three times three, all the time to song and dance, nor
    flinch
From charming on and on, till at the last I squeeze
Out the exhaustive drop that leaves behind mere lees
And dregs, vapidity, thought essence heretofore!
Sup of my sorcery, old pleasures please no more!
Be great, be good, love, learn, have potency of hand
Or heart or head, — what boots? You die, nor under-
    stand
What bliss might be in life: you ate the grapes, but
    knew
Never the taste of wine, such vintage as I brew!'
Do I say, like your saint? — 'An exquisitest touch
Bides in the birth of things: no after-time can much

Enhance that fine, that faint, fugitive first of all!
What color paints the cup o' the May-rose like the small
Suspicion of a blush which doubtfully begins?
What sound out-warbles brook, while, at the source, it wins
That moss and stone dispart, allow its bubblings breathe?
What taste excels the fruit, just where sharp flavors sheathe
Their sting, and let encroach the honey that allays?
And so with soul and sense: when sanctity betrays
First fear lest earth below seem real as heaven above,
And holy worship, late, change soon to sinful love,
Where is the plenitude of passion which endures
Comparison with that, I ask of amateurs?'
Do I say, like Elvire"—

XXXIII.

(Your husband holds you fast.
Will have you listen, learn your character at last!) —
"Do I say? — like her mixed unrest and discontent,
Reproachfulness and scorn, with that submission blent

So strangely in the face by sad smiles and gay tears, —
Quiescence which attacks, rebellion which endears, —
Say? — 'As you love me once, could you but love me
now!
Years probably have graved their passage on my brow,
Lips turn more rarely red, eyes sparkle less than erst;
Such tribute body pays to time: but, unamerced,
The soul retains, nay, boasts old treasure multiplied.
Though dew-prime flee, — mature at noonday, love defied
Chance, the wind, change, the rain; love, strenuous all
the more
For storm, struck deeper root, and choicer fruitage bore,
Despite the rocking world. Yet truth struck root in
vain:
While tenderness bears fruit, you praise, not taste again.
Why? They are yours, which once were hardly yours,
might go
To grace another's ground; and then — the hopes we
know,
The fears we keep in mind! when, ours to arbitrate,
Your part was to bow neck, bid fall decree of fate.

Then, oh the knotty point! — white-night's work to revolve, —
What meant that smile, that sigh? Not Solon's self could solve!
Then, oh the deep surmise what one word might express!
And if what sounded "No" may not have echoed "Yes!"
Then such annoy could cause cold welcome, such acquist
Of rapture, that, refused the arm, hand touched the wrist!
Now, what's a smile to you? Poor candle that lights up
The decent household gloom which sends you out to sup.
A tear? worse! warns that health requires you keep aloof
From nuptial chamber, since rain penetrates the roof!
For all is got and gained, inalienably safe,
Your own, and, so, despised; more worth has any waif
Or stray from neighbor's pale: pouch that, — 'tis pleasure, pride,
Novelty, property, and larceny beside!

Preposterous thought! to find no value fixed in things;
To covet all you see, hear, dream of, till fate brings
About, that, what you want, you get; then comes a change.
Give you the sun to keep, forthwith must fancy range:
A goodly lamp, no doubt; yet might you catch her hair,
And capture, as she frisks, the fen-fire dancing there!
What do I say? at least, a meteor's half in heaven:
Provided filth but shine, my husband hankers even
After putridity that's phosphorescent; cribs
The rustic's tallow-rush; makes spoil of urchins' squibs;
In short, prefers to me — chaste, temperate, serene —
What sputters green and blue, this fizgig called Fifine!'"

XXXIV.

So all your sex mistake! Strange that so plain a fact
Should raise such dire debate! Few families were racked
By torture self-supplied, did Nature grant but this, —
That women comprehend mental analysis!

XXXV.

Elvire, do you recall when, years ago, our home
The intimation reached, a certain pride of Rome,
Authenticated piece, in the third, last, and best
Manner, — whatever fools and connoisseurs contest, —
No particle disturbed by rude restorer's touch,
The palaced picture-pearl, so long eluding clutch
Of creditor, at last the Raphael might — could we
But come to terms — change lord, pass from the prince
to me?
I think you recollect my fever of a year;
How the prince would, and how he would not: now, too
dear
That promise was he made his grandsire so long since, —
Rather to boast "I own a Raphael" than "am prince!"
And now, the fancy soothed, — if really sell he must
His birthright for a mess of pottage, — such a thrust
I' the vitals of the prince were mollified by balm,
Could he prevail upon his stomach to bear qualm,
And bequeath Liberty (because a purchaser
Was ready with the sum, — a trifle!); yes, transfer

His heart, at all events, to that land where, at least,
Free institutions reign! And so, its price increased
Fivefold (Americans are such importunates!),
Soon must his Raphael start for the United States.
Oh alternating bursts of hope, and then despair!
At last, the bargain's struck; I'm all but beggared: there
The Raphael faces me, in fine, no dream at all,
My housemate, evermore to glorify my wall.
A week I pass, before heart-palpitations sink,
In gloating o'er my gain, so lately on the brink
Of loss; a fortnight more I spend in paradise: —
"Was outline e'er so true, could coloring entice
So calm, did harmony and quiet so avail?
How right, how resolute, the action tells the tale!"
A month, I bid my friends congratulate their best: —
"You happy Don!" (to me) "The blockhead!" (to the rest):
"No doubt he thinks his daub original, poor dupe!"
Then I resume my life: one chamber must not coop
My life in, though it boast a marvel like my prize.
This year, I saunter past with unaverted eyes;

Nay, loll and turn my back ; perchance to overlook
With relish, leaf by leaf, Doré's last picture-book.

XXXVI.

Imagine that a voice reproached me from its frame :—
" Here do I hang, and may ! Your Raphael, just the same ;
'Tis only you that change : no ecstasies of yore !
No purposed suicide distracts you any more ! "
Prompt would my answer turn such frivolous attack :—
" You misappropriate sensations. What I lack,
And labor to obtain, is hoped and feared about
After a fashion : what I once obtain, makes doubt,
Expectancy, old fret and fume, henceforward void.
But do I think to hold my havings unalloyed
By novel hope and fear, of fashion just as new,
To correspond i' the scale ? Nowise, I promise you !
Mine you are, therefore mine will be, as fit to cheer
My soul and glad my sense to-day as this-day-year.
So, any sketch or scrap, pochade, caricature,
Made in a moment, meant a moment to endure,

I snap at, seize, and then forever throw aside,
And find you in your place. But if a servant cried
'Fire in the gallery!'—methinks, were I engaged
In Doré, elbow-deep, portfolios million-paged
To the four winds would pack, sped by the heartiest
curse
Was ever launched from lip, to strew the universe;
While I would brave the best o' the burning, bear away
Either my perfect piece in safety, or else stay
And share its fate: if made a martyr, why repine?
Inextricably wed, such ashes mixed with mine!"

XXXVII.

For which I get the eye, the hand, the heart, the whole
O' the wondrous wife again!

XXXVIII.

But no: play out your rôle
I' the pageant! 'Tis not fit your phantom leave the
stage:
I want you, there, to make you, here, confess you wage

Successful warfare, pique those proud ones, and advance
Claim to — equality? nay, but predominance
In physique o'er them all, where Helen heads the scene
Closed by its tiniest of tail-tips, pert Fifine.
How ravishingly pure you stand in pale constraint!
My new-created shape, without or touch or taint,
Inviolate of life and worldliness and sin, —
Fettered, I hold my flower, her own cup's weight would win
From off the tall slight stalk a-top of which she turns
And trembles, makes appeal to one who roughly earns
Her thanks instead of blame (did lily only know),
By thus constraining length of lily, letting snow
Of cup-crown, that's her face, look from its guardian stake,
Superb on all that crawls beneath, and mutely make
Defiance, with the mouth's white movement of disdain,
To all that stoops, retires, and hovers round again!
How windingly the limbs delay to lead up, reach
Where, crowned, the head waits calm! as if reluctant, each,

That eye should traverse quick such lengths of loveliness,
From feet, which just are found embedded in the dress
Deep swathed about with folds and flowings virginal
Up to the pleated breasts, rebellious 'neath their pall,
As if the vesture's snow were moulding sleep, not death;
Must melt, and must release: whereat, from the fine sheath,
The flower-cup-crown starts free, the face is unconcealed;
And what shall now divert, once the sweet face revealed,
From all I loved so long, so lingeringly left?

XXXIX.

Because, indeed, your face fits into just the cleft
O' the heart of me, Elvire; makes right and whole once more
All that was half itself without you! As before,
My truant in its place! Because e'en sea-shells yearn,
Plundered by any chance: would have their pearl return,
Let negligently slip away into the wave!
Never may they desist, those eyes so gray and grave,

From their slow sure supply of the effluent soul within!
And — would you humor me? — I dare to ask, unpin
The web of that brown hair! O'erwash o' the sudden, but
As promptly, too, disclose, on either side, the jut
Of alabaster brow! So part, those rillets dyed
Deep by the woodland leaf, when down they pour, each side
O' the rock-top, pushed by Spring!

XL.

"And where i' the world is all
This wonder, I detail so trippingly, espied?
Your mirror would reflect a tall, thin, pale, deep-eyed
Personage, pretty once, it may be, doubtless still,
Loving, — a certain grace yet lingers, if I will, —
But all this wonder, where?"

XLI.

Why, where but in the sense
And soul of me, the judge of art? Art-evidence,

That thing was, is, might be; but no more thing itself
Than flame is fuel. Once the verse-book laid on shelf,
The picture turned to wall, the music fled from ear,
Each beauty, born of each, grows clearer and more
clear,
Mine henceforth, ever mine!

XLII.

But if I would retrace
Effect in art to cause, corroborate, erase
What's right or wrong i' the lines, test fancy in my brain
By fact which gave it birth? I reperuse in vain
The verse; I fail to find that vision of delight
I' the Razzi's lost profile, eye-edge so exquisite.
And music: what? that burst of pillared cloud by day
And pillared fire by night was product, must we say,
Of modulating just by enharmonic change, —
The augmented sixth resolved, — from out the straighter
range
Of D sharp minor, — leap of disimprisoned thrall, —
Into thy light and life, D major natural?

XLIII.

Elvire, will you partake in what I shall impart?
I seem to understand the way heart chooses heart
By help of the outside face, — a reason for our wild
Diversity in choice, — why each grows reconciled
To what is absent, what superfluous in the mask:
Material meant to yield, — did Nature ply her task
As artist should, — precise the features of the soul;
Which, if in any case they found expression, whole
I' the traits, would give a type, undoubtedly display
A novel, true, distinct perfection in its way.
Never shall I believe any two souls were made
Similar: granting, then, each soul of every grade
Was meant to be itself, and in itself complete,
And in completion good, — nay, best o' the kind, — as meet
Needs must it be that show on the outside correspond
With inward substance, — flesh, the dress which soul has donned,
Exactly reproduce, — were only justice done
Inside and outside too, — types perfect every one.

How happens it that here we meet a mystery
Insoluble to man, a plaguy puzzle? Why
Either is each soul made imperfect, and deserves
As rude a face to match, or else a bungler swerves,
And Nature, on a soul worth rendering aright,
Works ill, or proves perverse, or, in her own despite, —
Here too much, there too little, — makes each face more or less
Retire from beauty, and approach to ugliness?
And yet succeeds the same: since, what is wanting to success,
If somehow every face, no matter how deform,
Evidence to some one of hearts on earth, that, warm
Beneath the veriest ash, there hides a spark of soul,
Which, quickened by love's breath, may yet pervade the whole
O' the gray, and, free again, be fire? — of worth the same,
Howe'er produced; for, great or little, flame is flame.
A mystery, whereof solution is to seek.

XLIV.

I find it in the fact that each soul, just as weak
Its own way as its fellow, — departure from design
As flagrant in the flesh, — goes striving to combine
With what shall right the wrong, the under or above
The standard ; supplement unloveliness by love.
Ask Plato else ! And this corroborates the sage,
That art, — which I may style the love of loving, rage
Of knowing, seeing, feeling the absolute truth of things
For truth's sake, whole and sole, nor any good truth brings
The knower, seer, feeler, beside, — instinctive art,
Must fumble for the whole, once fixing on a part,
However poor, surpass the fragment, and aspire
To reconstruct thereby the ultimate entire.
Art, working with a will, discards the superflux,
Contributes to defect, toils on, till — *fiat lux* —
There's the restored, the prime, the individual type !

XLV.

Look, for example, now ! This piece of broken pipe

(Some shipman's solace erst) shall act as crayon ; and
What tablet better serves my purpose than the sand ? —
Smooth slab whereon I draw, no matter with what skill,
A face, and yet another, and yet another still.
There lie my three prime types of beauty !

XLVI.

Laugh your best !
" Exaggeration and absurdity ? " Confessed !
Yet what may that face mean ? — no matter for its nose,
A yard long ; or its chin, a foot short.

XLVII.

" You suppose,
Horror ? " Exactly ! What's the odds, if, more or less
By yard or foot, the features do manage to express
Such meaning in the main ? Were I of Gerôme's force,
Nor feeble as you see, quick should my crayon course
O'er outline, curb, excite, till — so completion speeds
With Gerôme well at work — observe how brow recedes,

Head shudders back on spine, as if one haled the hair,
Would have the full-face front what pin-point eye's sharp
stare
Announces ; mouth agape to drink the flowing fate,
While chin protrudes to meet the burst o' the wave : elate
Almost, spurred on to brave necessity, expend
All life left, in one flash, as fire does at its end.
Retrenchment and addition effect a masterpiece,
Not change i' the motive : here diminish, there increase ;
And who wants Horror has it.

XLVIII.

Who wants some other show
Of soul may seek elsewhere, — this second of the row ?
What does it give for germ, monadic mere intent
Of mind in face, faint first of meanings ever meant ?
Why, possibly, a grin, that, strengthened, grows a laugh ;
That, softened, leaves a smile ; that, tempered, bids you
quaff
At such a magic cup as English Reynolds once
Compounded : for the witch pulls out of you response

Like Garrick's to Thalia, however due may be
Your homage claimed by that stiff-stoled Melpomene!

XLIX.

And just this one face more! Pardon the bold pretence!
May there not lurk some hint, struggle toward evidence,
In that compressed mouth, those strained nostrils, steadfast eyes
Of utter passion, absolute self-sacrifice,
Which — could I but subdue the wild grotesque, refine
That bulge of brow, make blunt that nose's aquiline,
And let, although compressed, a point of pulp appear
I' the mouth — would give at last the portrait of Elvire?

L.

Well, and if so succeed hand-practice on awry
Preposterous art-mistake, shall soul-proficiency
Despair, — when exercised on nature, which at worst
Always implies success, — however crossed and curst

By failure, — such as art would emulate in vain?
Shall any soul despair of setting free again
Trait after trait, until the type as wholly start
Forth, visible to sense, as that minutest part,
(Whate'er the chance,) which, first arresting eye, warned soul,
That, under wrong enough and ravage, lay the whole
O' the loveliness it "loved," — I take the accepted phrase?

LI.

So I account for tastes: each chooses, none gainsays
The fancy of his fellow, a paradise for him,
A hell for all beside. You can but crown the brim
O' the cup: if it be full, what matters less or more?
Let each i' the world amend his love, as I o' the shore
My sketch, and the result as undisputed be!
Their handiwork to them, and my Elvire to me:
Result more beautiful than Beauty's self, when, lo,
What was my Raphael turns my Michelagnolo!

LII.

For we two boast, beside our pearl, a diamond.
I' the palace-gallery, the corridor beyond,
Upheaves itself a marble, a magnitude man-shaped
As snow might be. One hand — the Master's — smoothed and scraped
That mass he hammered on and hewed at, till he hurled
Life out of death, and left a challenge : for the world,
Death still ; since who shall dare, close to the image, say
If this be purposed Art, or mere mimetic play
Of Nature ? — wont to deal with crag or cloud, as stuff
To fashion novel forms, like forms we know, enough
For recognition, but enough unlike the same
To leave no hope ourselves may profit by her game :
Death therefore to the world. Step back a pace or two !
And then who dares dispute the gradual birth its due
Of breathing life, or breathless immortality,
Where out she stands, and yet stops short, half bold, half shy,

Hesitates on the threshold of things, since partly blent
With stuff she needs must quit, her native element
I' the mind o' the Master, — what's the creature, dear-divine
Yet earthly-awful too, so manly-feminine,
Pretends this white advance? What startling brain-escape
Of Michelagnolo takes elemental shape?
I think he meant the daughter of the old man o' the sea,
Emerging from her wave, goddess Eidotheé, —
She who, in elvish sport, spite with benevolence
Mixed Mab-wise up, must needs instruct the hero whence
Salvation dawns o'er that mad misery of his isle.
Yes, she imparts to him by what a pranksome wile
He may surprise her sire, asleep beneath a rock,
When he has told their tale, amid his web-foot flock
Of sea-beasts, "fine fat seals with bitter breath!" laughs she
At whom she likes to save, no less: Eidotheé,

Whom you shall never face evolved, in earth, in air,
In wave; but, manifest i' the soul's domain,—why, there
She ravishingly moves to meet you, all through aid
O' the soul! Bid shine what should, dismiss into the shade
What should not be, and there triumphs the paramount
Emprise o' the Master! But attempt to make account
Of what the sense without the soul perceives? I bought
That work (despite plain proof whose hand it was had wrought
I' the rough, I think we trace the tool of triple-tooth
Here, there, and everywhere), — bought dearly that uncouth,
Unwieldy bulk, for just ten dollars, — "Bulk would fetch —
Converted into lime — some five pauls!" grinned a wretch,
Who, bound on business, paused to hear the bargaining,
And would have pitied me "but for the fun o' the thing!"

LIII.

Shall such a wretch be — you? Must — while I show Elvire
Shaming all other forms, seen as I see her here
I' the soul — this other-you perversely look outside,
And ask me, "Where i' the world is charm to be descried
I' the tall thin personage, with paled eye, pensive face,
Any amount of love, and some remains of grace?"
See yourself in my soul!

LIV.

And what a world for each
Must somehow be i' the soul! — accept that mode of speech, —
Whether an *aura* gird the soul, wherein it seems
To float and move, a belt of all the glints and gleams
It struck from out that world its weaklier fellows found
So dead and cold; or whether these not so much surround
As pass into the soul itself, add worth to worth,
As wine enriches blood, and straightway send it forth,

Conquering and to conquer, through all eternity :
That's battle without end.

LV.

I search but cannot see
What purpose serves the soul that strives, or world it tries
Conclusions with, unless the fruit of victories
Stay, one and all, stored up and guaranteed its own
Forever by some mode whereby shall be made known
The gain of every life. Death reads the title clear, —
What each soul for itself conquered from out things here ;
Since in the seeing soul all worth lies, I assert,
And nought i' the world, which, save for soul that sees, inert
Was, is, and would be ever, — stuff for transmuting, — null
And void until man's breath evoke the beautiful ;
But, touched aright, prompt yields each particle its tongue
Of elemental flame, no matter whence flame sprung

From gums and spice, or else from straw and rottenness,
So long as soul has power to make them burn, express
What lights and warms henceforth, leaves only ash behind,
Howe'er the chance : if soul be privileged to find
Food so soon, that at first snatch of eye, suck of breath,
It shall absorb pure life ; or, rather, meeting death
I' the shape of ugliness, by fortunate recoil
So put on its resource, it finds therein a foil
For a new birth of life, the challenged soul's response
To ugliness and death, — creation for the nonce.

LVI.

I gather heart through just such conquests of the soul,
Through evocation out of that, which, on the whole,
Was rough, ungainly, partial accomplishment at best,
And — what, at worst, save failure to spit at and detest ? —
Through transference of all, achieved in visible things,
To rest, secure from wrong, 'mid mere imaginings ;

Through ardor to bring help just where completion halts,
Do justice to the purpose, ignore the slips and faults ;
And last, not least, with stark deformity through fight
Which wrings thence, at the end, precise its opposite.
I praise the loyalty o' the scholar — stung by taunt
Of fools, " Does this evince thy Master they so vaunt?
Did he then perpetrate the plain abortion here ? " —
Who cries, " His work am I ! full fraught by him, I clear
His fame from each result of accident and time,
And thus restore his work to its fresh morning-prime :
Not daring touch the mass of marble, fools deride,
But putting my idea in plaster by its side,
His, since mine ; I, he made, vindicate who made me ! "

LVII.

For, you must know, I too achieve Eidotheé,
In silence and by night, — dared justify the lines
Plain to my soul, although, to sense, that triple-tine's
Achievement halt half-way, break down, or leave a blank.
If she stood forth at last, the Master was to thank !

Yet may there not have smiled approval in his eyes, —
That one at least was left, who, born to recognize
Perfection in the piece imperfect, worked that night
In silence, such his faith, until the apposite
Design was out of him, truth palpable once more;
And then — for at one blow its fragments strewed the floor —
Recalled the same to live within his soul as heretofore.

LVIII.

And, even as I hold and have Eidotheé,
I say, I cannot think that gains, — which would not be
Except a special soul had gained them, — that such gain
Can ever be estranged, do aught but appertain
Immortally, by right firm, indefeasible,
To who performed the feat, through God's grace and man's will!
Gain never shared by those who practised with earth's stuff,
And spoiled whate'er they touch, leaving its roughness rough,

Its blankness bare, and, when the ugliness opposed,
Either struck work, or laughed, "He doted or he
dozed!"

LIX.

While, oh, how all the more will love become intense
Hereafter, when "to love" means yearning to dispense,
Each soul, its own amount of gain, through its own mode
Of practising with life, upon some soul which owed
Its treasure, all diverse, and yet in worth the same,
To new work and changed way! Things furnish you
rose-flame,
Which burn up red, green, blue, nay, yellow, more than
needs,
For me, I nowise doubt: why doubt a time succeeds
When each one may impart, and each receive, both share
The chemic secret, learn, where I lit force,—why, there
You drew forth lambent pity; where I found only food
For self-indulgence, you still blew a spark at brood
I' the grayest ember, stopped not till self-sacrifice im-
bued

Heaven's face with flame? What joy when each may supplement
The other, changing each, as changed, till, wholly blent,
The old things shall be new, and, what we both ignite,
Fuse, lose the varicolor in achromatic white!
Exemplifying law, apparent even now
In the eternal progress, — love's law, which I avow,
And thus would formulate: each soul lives, longs, and works
For itself, by itself, because a loadstar lurks,
An other than itself, — in whatsoe'er the niche
Of mistiest heaven it hide, whoe'er the Glumdalclich
May grasp the Gulliver: or it, or he, or she, —
Theosutos e broteios eper kekramene, —
(For fun's sake, where the phrase has fastened, leave it fixed!
So soft it says, — God, man, or both together mixed!)
This, guessed at through the flesh, by parts which prove the whole,
This constitutes the soul discernible by soul, —
Elvire, by me!

LX.

"And then" (so you permit remain
This hand upon my arm! — your cheek dried, if you deign,
Choosing my shoulder) — "then!" (stand up for, boldly state,
The objection in its length and breadth!) — "you abdicate,
With boast yet on your lip, soul's empire, and accept
The rule of sense; the man, from monarch's throne has stept, —
Leaped, rather, at one bound, to base, and there lies, brute.
You talk of soul, — how soul, in search of soul to suit,
Must needs review the sex, the army rank and file
Of womankind; report no face nor form so vile
But that a certain worth, by certain signs, may thence
Evolve itself, and stand confessed — to soul — by sense.
Sense? Oh, the loyal bee endeavors for the hive!
Disinterested hunts the flower-field through, alive

Not one mean moment, no, — suppose on flower he
light, —
To his peculiar drop, petal-dew perquisite,
Matter-of-course snatched snack : unless he taste, how
try ?
This, light on tongue-tip laid, allows him pack his thigh,
Transport all he counts prize, provision for the comb,
Food for the future day, — a banquet, but at home !
Soul ? Ere you reach Fifine's, some flesh may be to
pass !
That bombèd brow, that eye, a kindling chrysoprase,
Beneath its stiff black lash, inquisitive how speeds
Each functionary limb, how play of foot succeeds,
And how you let escape or duly sympathize
With gastro-knemian grace, — true, your soul tastes and
tries,
And trifles time with these, but, fear not, will arrive
At essence in the core, bring honey home to hive,
Brain-stock and heart-stuff both, — to strike objectors
dumb, —
Since only soul affords the soul fit pabulum !

Be frank for charity! Who is it you deceive —
Yourself or me or God — with all this make-believe?"

LXI.

And frank I will respond as you interrogate.
Ah, Music, wouldst thou help! Words struggle with the weight
So feebly of the False, thick element between
Our soul, the True, and Truth! which, but that intervene
False shows of things, were reached as easily by thought
Reducible to word, as now by yearnings wrought
Up with thy fine, free force, O Music! that canst thrid,
Electrically win, a passage through the lid
Of earthly sepulchre, our words may push against,
Hardly transpierce as thou! Not dissipate, thou deign'st,
So much as tricksily elude what words attempt
To heave away, i' the mass, and let the soul, exempt
From all that vapory obstruction, view, instead
Of glimmer underneath, a glory overhead.

Not feebly, like our phrase, against the barrier go
In suspirative swell the authentic notes I know;
By help whereof, I would our souls were found without
The pale, above the dense and dim which breeds the doubt!
But Music, dumb for you, withdraws her help from me;
And, since to weary words recourse again must be,
At least permit they rest their burthen here and there,
Music-like: cover space! My answer — need you care
If it exceed the bounds, reply to questioning
You never meant should plague? Once fairly on the wing,
Let me flap far and wide!

LXII.

For this is just the time,
The place, the mood in you and me, when all things chime,
Clash forth life's common chord; whence, list how there ascend
Harmonics far and faint, till our perception end, —

Reverberated notes whence we construct the scale
Embracing what we know and feel and are! How fail
To find, or, better, lose your question, in this quick
Reply which Nature yields, ample and catholic?
For, arm in arm, we two have reached, nay, passed, you see,
The village-precinct: sun sets mild on Saint-Marie, —
We only catch the spire; and yet I seem to know
What's hid i' the turn o' the hill; how all the graves must glow
Soberly, as each warms its little iron cross,
Flourished about with gold, and graced (if private loss
Be fresh) with stiff rope-wreath of yellow, crisp bead-blooms
Which tempt down birds to pay their supper, 'mid the tombs,
With prattle good as song, amuse the dead a while,
If couched they hear beneath the matted camomile!

LXIII.

Bid them good-by before last friend has sung and supped!
Because we pick our path, and need our eyes, — abrupt
Descent enough; but here's the beach, and there's the bay,
And, opposite, the streak of Isle Noirmoutier.
Thither the waters tend: they freshen as they haste,
At feel o' the night-wind; though, by cliff and cliff embraced,
This breadth of blue retains its self-possession still;
As you and I intend to do, who take our fill
Of sights and sounds, — soft sound, the countless hum and skip
Of insects we disturb, and that good fellowship
Of rabbits our foot-fall sends huddling, each to hide
He best knows how and where; and what whirred past, wings wide?
That was an owl, their young may justlier apprehend!
Though you refuse to speak, your beating heart, my friend,

I feel against my arm ; though your bent head forbids
A look into your eyes, yet on my cheek their lids,
That ope and shut, soft send a silken thrill the same.
Well, out of all and each these nothings comes — what came
Often enough before — the something that would aim
Once more at the old mark ; the impulse to at last
Succeed where hitherto was failure in the past,
And yet again essay the adventure. Clearlier sings
No bird to its couched corpse, "Into the truth of things —
Out of their falseness rise, and reach thou, and remain !"

LXIV.

"That rise into the true out of the false — explain ?"
May an example serve ? In yonder bay I bathed
This sunny morning ; swam my best ; then hung, half swathed
With chill and half with warmth, i' the channel's midmost deep :
You know how one — not treads, but stands in water ? Keep

Body and limbs below, hold head back, uplift chin,
And, for the rest, leave care! If brow, eyes, mouth, should win
Their freedom, — excellent! If they must brook the surge,
No matter though they sink, let but the nose emerge.
So all of me in brine lay soaking: did I care
One jot? I kept alive by man's due breath of air
I' the nostrils, high and dry. At times, o'er these would run
The ripple, even wash the wavelet; for the sun
Tempted advance, no doubt: and always flash of froth,
Fish-outbreak, bubbling by, would find me nothing loath
To rise and look around; then all was overswept
With dark and death at once. But trust the old adept!
Back went again the head; a merest motion made,
Fin-fashion, either hand; and nostril soon conveyed
The news that light and life were still in reach as erst:
Always the last, and — wait and watch — sometimes the first.

Try to ascend breast-high? wave arms wide free of
tether?
Be in the air, and leave the water altogether?
Under went all again, till I resigned myself
To only breathe the air, that's footed by an elf;
And only swim the water, that's native to a fish.
But there is no denying, that ere I curbed my wish,
And schooled my restive arms, salt entered mouth and
eyes
Often enough, — sun, sky, and air so tantalize!
Still the adept swims, this accorded, that denied;
Can always breathe, sometimes see and be satisfied!

LXV.

I liken to this play o' the body — fruitless strife
To slip the sea, and hold the heaven — my spirit's life
'Twixt false, whence it would break, and true, where it
would bide.
I move in, yet resist; am upborne every side
By what I beat against, — an element too gross
To live in, did not soul duly obtain her dose

Of life-breath, and inhale from truth's pure plenitude
Above her, snatch and gain enough to just illude
With hope that some brave bound may baffle evermore
The obstructing medium, make who swam henceforward soar :
Gain scarcely snatched, when, foiled by the very effort, sowse,
Underneath ducks the soul, her truthward yearnings dowse
Deeper in falsehood ! ay, but fitted less and less
To bear in nose and mouth old briny bitterness
Proved alien more and more ; since each experience proves
Air the essential good, not sea, wherein who moves
Must thence, in the act, escape, apart from will or wish.
Move a mere hand to take waterweed, jelly-fish,
Upward you tend ! And yet our business with the sea
Is not with air, but just o' the water, watery :
We must endure the false, no particle of which
Do we acquaint us with, but up we mount a pitch

Above it, find our head reach truth, while hands explore
The false below: so much while here we bathe, — no more!

LXVI.

Now, there is one prime point, (hear and be edified!)
One truth more true for me than any truth beside;
To wit, that I am I, who have the power to swim,
The skill to understand the law whereby each limb
May bear to keep immersed, since, in return, made sure
That its mere movement lifts head clean through coverture.
By practice with the false, I reach the true? Why, thence
It follows, that the more I gain self-confidence,
Get proof I know the trick, can float, sink, rise, at will,
The better I submit to what I have the skill
To conquer in my turn, even now, and by and by
Leave wholly for the land, and there laugh, shake me dry
To last drop, saturate with noonday, — no need more
Of wet and fret, plagued once: on Pornic's placid shore

Abundant air to breathe, sufficient sun to feel!
Meantime I buoy myself: no whit my senses reel
When over me there breaks a billow; nor, elate
Too much by some brief taste, I quaff intemperate
The air, o'ertop breast-high the wave-environment.
Full well I know, the thing I grasp, as if intent
To hold, — my wandering wave, — will not be grasped at all:
The solid-seeming grasped, the handful great or small
Must go to nothing, glide through fingers fast enough;
But none the less, to treat liquidity as stuff —
Though failure — certainly succeeds beyond its aim;
Sends head above, far past the thing hands miss, the same.

LXVII.

So with this wash o' the world, wherein life-long we drift:
We push and paddle through the foam by making shift
To breathe above at whiles, when, after deepest duck
Down underneath the show, we put forth hand, and pluck

At what seems somehow like reality, — a soul.
I catch at this and that to capture and control ;
Presume I hold a prize ; discover that my pains
Are run to nought ; my hands are balked ; my head regains
The surface, where I breathe and look about a space.
The soul that helped me mount ? Swallowed up in the race
O' the tide, come who knows whence, gone gayly who knows where !
I thought the prize was mine ; I flattered myself there.
It did its duty, though : I felt it ; it felt me ;
Or where I look about and breathe I should not be.
The main point is, the false fluidity was bound
Acknowledge that it frothed o'er substance nowise found
Fluid, but firm and true. Man, outcast, " howls," — at rods ? —
If " sent in playful spray a-shivering to his gods ! "
Childishest childe, man makes thereby no bad exchange.
Stay with the flat-fish, thou ! We like the upper range

Where the "gods" live, perchance the demons also
dwell,
Where operates a Power, which every throb and swell
Of human heart invites that human soul approach,
"Sent" near and nearer still, however "spray" encroach
On "shivering" flesh below, to altitudes, which gained,
Evil proves good, wrong right, obscurity explained,
And "howling" childishness. Whose howl have we to
thank
If all the dogs 'gan bark, and puppies whine, till sank
Each yelper's tail 'twixt legs? for Huntsman Common-
sense
Came to the rescue; caused prompt thwack of thong
dispense
Quiet i' the kennel; taught that ocean might be blue,
And rolling, and much more, and yet the soul have,
too,
Its touch of God's own flame, which he may so expand
"Who measurèd the waters i' the hollow of his hand."
That ocean's self shall dry, turn dew-drop in respect
Of all-triumphant fire, matter with intellect

Once fairly matched; bade him who egged on hounds to
bay
Go curse i' the poultry-yard his kind: "there let him
lay"
The swan's one addled egg; which yet shall put to use,
Rub breast-bone warm against, so many a sterile goose!

LXVIII.

No, I want sky, not sea; prefer the larks to shrimps;
And never dive so deep but that I get a glimpse
O' the blue above, a breath of the air around. Elvire,
I seize — by catching at that melted beryl here,
The tawny wavelet just has trickled off — Fifine!
Did not we two trip forth to just enjoy the scene, —
The tumbling-troop arrayed, the strollers on their stage
Drawn up and under arms, and ready to engage;
Dabble, and there an end, with foam and froth o'er
face,
Till suddenly Fifine suggested change of place?
Now we taste ether, scorn the wave, and interchange
apace

No ordinary thoughts, but such as evidence
The cultivated mind in both! On what pretence
Are you and I to sneer at who lent help to hand,
And gave the lucky lift?

LXIX.

Still sour? I understand!
One ugly circumstance discredits my fair plan, —
That woman does the work: I waive the help of man.
"Why should experiment be tried with only waves,
When solid spars float round? Still some Thalassia saves
Too pertinaciously, as though no Triton, bluff
As e'er blew brine from conch, were free to help enough!
Surely, to recognize a man, his mates serve best!
Why is there not the same or greater interest
In the strong spouse as in the pretty partner, pray?
Were recognition just your object, as you say,
Amid this element o' the false."

LXX.

We come to terms.
I need to be proved true ; and nothing so confirms
One's faith in the prime point that one's alive, not dead,
In all descents to hell whereof I ever read,
As when a phantom there, male enemy or friend,
Or merely stranger-shade, is struck, is forced suspend
His passage: "You that breathe, along with us the ghosts?"
Here why must it still be a woman that accosts?

LXXI.

Because one woman's worth, in that respect, such hairy hosts
Of the other sex and sort! Men? Say you have the power
To make them yours, rule men, throughout life's little hour,
According to the phrase; what follows? Men you make,
By ruling them, your own: each man for his own sake

Accepts you as his guide, avails him of what worth
He apprehends in you to sublimate his earth
With fire; content, if so you convoy him through night,
That you shall play the sun, and he, the satellite,
Pilfer your light and heat and virtue, starry pelf,
While, caught up by your course, he turns upon himself.
Women rush into you, and there remain absorbed.
Beside, 'tis only men completely formed, full-orbed,
Are fit to follow track, keep pace, illustrate so
The leader: any sort of woman may bestow
Her atom on the star, or clod she counts for such;
Each little making less bigger by just that much.
Women grow you, while men depend on you at best.
And what dependence! Bring and put him to the test,
Your specimen disciple, a handbreadth separate
From you, he almost seemed to touch before! Abate
Complacency you will, I judge, at what's divulged!
Some flabbiness you fixed, some vacancy out-bulged,

Some, — much, — nay, all, perhaps, the outward man's
your work ;
But inside man ? — find him, wherever he may lurk,
And where's a touch of you in his true self?

LXXII.

I wish
Some wind would waft this way a glassy bubble-fish
O' the kind the sea inflates, and show you, once detached
From wave — or no ; the event is better told than watched :
Still may the thing float free, globose and opaline
All over, save where just the amethysts combine
To blue their best, rim-round the sea-flower with a tinge
Earth's violet never knew ! Well, 'neath that gem-tipped fringe
A head lurks — of a kind — that acts as stomach too ;
Then comes the emptiness which out the water blew
So big and belly-like, but, dry of water drained,
Withers away nine-tenths. Ah, but a tenth remained !

That was the creature's self; no more akin to sea,
Poor rudimental head and stomach, you agree,
Than sea's akin to who dips yonder his red edge.

LXXIII.

But take the rillet, ends a race o'er yonder ledge
O' the fissured cliff, to find its fate in smoke below!
Disengage that, and ask — what news of life, you know
It led, that long lone way, through pasture, plain, and
waste?
All's gone to give the sea! no touch of earth, no taste
Of air, reserved to tell how rushes used to bring
The butterfly and bee, and fisher-bird that's king
O' the purple kind, about the snow-soft, silver-sweet
Infant of mist and dew; only these atoms fleet,
Imbittered evermore, to make the sea one drop
More big thereby, — if thought keep count where sense
must stop.

LXXIV.

The full-blown ingrate, mere recipient of the brine,
That takes all, and gives nought, is man: the feminine

Rillet, that taking all, and giving nought in turn,
Goes headlong to her death i' the sea, without concern
For the old inland life, snow-soft and silver-clear,—
That's woman, typified from Fifine to Elvire.

LXXV.

Then how diverse the modes prescribed to who would deal
With either kind of creature! 'Tis man you seek to seal
Your very own? Resolve, for first step, to discard
Nine-tenths of what you are! To make, you must be marred;
To raise your race, must stoop; to teach them aught, must learn
Ignorance, meet half way what most you hope to spurn
I' the sequel. Change yourself, dissimulate the thought
And vulgarize the word, and see the deed be brought
To look like nothing done with any such intent
As teach men,—though perchance it teach by accident!
So may you master men; assured that if you show
One point of mastery, departure from the low

And level, — head or heart revolt at long disguise,
Immurement, stifling soul in mediocrities, —
If inadvertently a gesture, much more, word,
Reveal the hunter no companion for the herd,
His chance of capture's gone. Success means, they may snuff,
Examine, and report, — a brother, sure enough,
Disports him in brute-guise; for skin is truly skin,
Horns, hoofs, are hoofs and horns, and all, outside and in,
Is veritable beast, whom fellow-beasts resigned
May follow, made a prize in honest pride, behind
One of themselves, and not creation's upstart lord!
Well, there's your prize i' the pound: much joy may it afford
My Indian! Make survey, and tell me, — was it worth
You acted part so well, went all-fours upon on earth
The live-long day, brayed, belled, and all to bring to pass
That stags should deign eat hay when winter stints them grass?

LXXVI.

So much for men, and how disguise may make them mind
Their master. But you have to deal with womankind?
Abandon stratagem for strategy; cast quite
The vile disguise away; try truth clean-opposite
Such creep-and-crawl; stand forth all man, and, might it chance,
Somewhat of angel too! — whate'er inheritance,
Actual on earth, in heaven prospective, be your boast,
Lay claim to! Your best self revealed at uttermost —
That's the wise way o' the strong! And, e'en should falsehood tempt
The weaker sort to swerve, at least the lie's exempt
From slur, that's loathlier still, of aiming to debase
Rather than elevate its object. Mimic grace,
Not make deformity your mask! Be sick by stealth,
Nor traffic with disease, — malingering in health!
No more of — "Countrymen, I boast me one like you, —
My lot, the common strength, the common weakness too!

I think the thoughts you think; and if I have the
knack
Of fitting thoughts to words, you peradventure lack
Envy me not the chance, yourselves more fortunate!
Many the loaded ship self-sunk through treasure-freight;
Many the pregnant brain brings never child to birth;
Many the great heart bursts beneath its girdle-girth!
Be mine the privilege to supplement defect,
Give dumbness voice, and let the laboring intellect
Find utterance in word, or possibly in deed!
What though I seem to go before? 'tis you that lead!
I follow what I see so plain, — the general mind
Projected pillar-wise, flame kindled by the kind,
Which dwarfs the unit — me — to insignificance!
Halt you, I stop forthwith; proceed, I too advance!"

LXXVII.

Ay, that's the way to take with men you wish to lead,
Instruct, and benefit. Small prospect you succeed
With women so! Be all that's great and good and wise,
August, sublime; swell out your frog the right ox-size:

He's buoyed like a balloon, to soar, not burst, you'll
see!
The more you prove yourself, less fear the prize will flee
The captor. Here you start after no pompous stag
Who condescends be snared, with toss of horn, and brag
Of bray, and ramp of hoof; you have not to subdue
The foe through letting him imagine he snares you:
'Tis rather with —

LXXVIII.

Ah, thanks! quick! — where the
dipping disk
Shows red against the rise and fall o' the fin! there frisk
In shoal the — porpoises? Dolphins, they shall and
must
Cut through the freshening clear; dolphins, my in-
stance just!
'Tis fable, therefore truth: who has to do with these
Needs never practise trick of going hands and knees
As beasts require. Art fain the fish to captivate?
Gather thy greatness round, Arion! Stand in state,

As when the banqueting thrilled conscious, — like a rose
Throughout its hundred leaves at that approach it knows
Of music in the bird, — while Corinth grew one breast
A-throb for song and thee ; nay, Periander pressed
The Methymnæan hand, and felt a king indeed, and guessed
How Phœbus' self might give that great mouth of the gods
Such a magnificence of song ! The pillar nods,
Rocks roof, and trembles door, gigantic, post and jamb,
As harp and voice rend air, — the shattering dithyramb !
So stand thou, and assume the robe that tingles yet
With triumph ; strike the harp, whose every golden fret
Still smoulders with the flame was late at finger's end :
So, standing on the bench o' the ship, let voice expend
Thy soul ; sing, unalloyed by meaner mode, thine own,
The Orthian lay ; then leap from Music's lofty throne
Into the lowest surge, make fearlessly thy launch !
Whatever storm may threat, some dolphin will be stanch !

Whatever roughness rage, some exquisite sea-thing
Will surely rise to save, will bear — palpitating —
One proud humility of love beneath its load,
Stem tide, part wave, till both roll on, thy jewelled road
Of triumph, and the grim o' the gulf grow wonder-
white
I' the phosphorescent wake; and still the exquisite
Sea-thing stems on, saves still, palpitatingly thus,
Lands safe at length its love of load at Tænarus,
True woman-creature!

LXXIX.

Man? Ah! would you prove what power
Marks man; what fruit his tree may yield beyond the
sour
And stinted crab he calls love-apple, which remains
After you toil and moil your utmost, — all, love gains
By lavishing manure? — try quite the other plan!
And, to obtain the strong true product of a man,
Set him to hate a little! Leave cherishing his root,
And rather prune his branch, nip off the pettiest shoot

Superfluous on his bough! I promise, you shall learn
By what grace came the goat, of all beasts else, to earn
Such favor with the god o' the grape: 'twas only he
Who, browsing on its tops, first stung fertility
Into the stock's heart, stayed much growth of tendril-twine,
Some faintish flower, perhaps, but gained the indignant wine,
Wrath of the red press! Catch the puniest of the kind, —
Man-animalcule, starved body, stunted mind, —
And, as you nip the blotch 'twixt thumb and finger-nail,
Admire how heaven above and earth below avail
No jot to soothe the mite, sore at God's prime offence
In making mites at all; coax from its impotence
One virile drop of thought or word or deed, by strain
To propagate for once, — which nature rendered vain,
Who lets first failure stay, yet cares not to record
Mistake that seems to cast opprobrium on the Lord!

Such were the gain from love's best pains! But let the elf
Be touched with hate because some real man bears himself
Manlike in body and soul, and, since he lives, must thwart
And furify and set a-fizz this counterpart
O' the pismire that's surprised to effervescence, if,
By chance, black bottle come in contact with chalk cliff,
Acid with alkali! Then thrice the bulk out blows
Our insect, does its kind, and cuckoo-spits some rose!

LXXX.

No: 'tis ungainly work, the ruling men, at best!
The graceful instinct's right: 'tis women stand confessed
Auxiliary, the gain that never goes away,
Takes nothing, and gives all: Elvire, Fifine, 'tis they
Convince, — if little, much, no matter! — one degree
The more, at least, convince unreasonable me

That I am, anyhow, a truth, though all else seem
And be not: if I dream, at least I know I dream.
The falsity, beside, is fleeting: I can stand
Still, and let truth come back, — your steadying touch
of hand
Assists me to remain self-centred, fixed amid
All on the move. Believe in me, at once you bid
Myself believe, that, since one soul has disengaged
Mine from the shows of things, so much is fact: I waged
No foolish warfare, then, with shades, myself a shade,
Here in the world; may hope my pains will be repaid!
How false things are, I judge; how changeable, I learn:
When, where, and how it is I shall see truth return,
That I expect to know, because Fifine knows me!
How much more, if Elvire!

LXXXI.

"And why not, only she?
Since there can be for each one Best, no more, such
Best,
For body and mind of him, abolishes the rest

O' the simply Good and Better. You please select Elvire
To give you this belief in truth; dispel the fear
Yourself are, after all, as false as what surrounds;
And why not be content? When we two watched the rounds
The boatman made 'twixt shoal and sandbank yesterday,
As, at dead slack of tide, he chose to push his way
With oar and pole across the creek, and reach the isle
After a world of pains, my word provoked your smile,
Yet none the less deserved reply: ''Twere wiser wait
The turn o' the tide, and find conveyance for his freight —
How easily — within the ship to purpose moored,
Managed by sails, not oars! But no: the man's allured
By liking for the new and hard in his exploit!
First come shall serve! He makes — courageous and adroit —
The merest willow-leaf of boat do duty, bear
His merchandise across: once over, needs he care

If folk arrive by ship six hours hence, fresh and gay?'
No: he scorns commonplace; affects the unusual way;
And good Elvire is moored, with not a breath to flap
The yards of her; no lift of ripple to o'erlap
Keel, much less prow. What care? since here's a cockle-shell,
Fifine, that's taut and crank, and carries just as well
Such seamanship as yours!"

LXXXII.

Alack, our life is lent,
From first to last, the whole, for this experiment
Of proving what I say, — that we ourselves are true!
I would there were one voyage, and then no more to do
But tread the firm land, tempt the uncertain sea no more!
I would we might dispense with change of shore for shore
To evidence our skill, demonstrate — in no dream
It was we tided o'er the trouble of the stream!
I would the steady voyage, and not the fitful trip, —
Elvire, and not Fifine, — might test our seamanship!

But why expend one's breath to tell you change of boat
Means change of tactics too? Come see the same
afloat
To-morrow, all the change, new stowage fore and aft
O' the cargo; then to cross requires new sailor-craft!
To-day one step from stern to bow keeps boat in trim:
To-morrow some big stone — or woe to boat and him! —
Must ballast both. That man stands for Mind, paramount
Throughout the adventure: ay, howe'er you make
account,
'Tis mind that navigates; skips over, twists between
The bales i' the boat; now gives importance to the
mean,
And now abates the pride of life, accepts all fact,
Discards all fiction; steers Fifine, and cries, in the act,
"Thou art so bad, and yet so delicate a brown!
Wouldst tell no end of lies: I talk to smile or frown!
Wouldst rob me: do men blame a squirrel, lithe and
sly,
For pilfering the nut she adds to hoard? Nor I.

Elvire is true as truth, honesty's self, alack!
The worse! too safe the ship, the transport there and back
Too certain! one may loll and lounge and leave the helm,
Let wind and tide do work: no fear that waves o'erwhelm
The steady-going bark, as sure to feel her way
Blind-fold across, reach land, next year as yesterday!
How can I but suspect the true feat were to slip
Down side, transfer myself to cockle-shell from ship,
And try if, trusting to sea-tracklessness, I class
With those around whose breast grew oak and triple brass;
Who dreaded no degree of death, but with dry eyes
Surveyed the turgid main and its monstrosities,
And rendered futile, so, the prudent Power's decree
Of separate earth and disassociating sea?
Since how is it observed, if impious vessels leap
Across, and tempt a thing they should not touch, — the deep?

(See Horace to the boat, wherein, for Athens bound,
When Virgil must embark — Jove keep him safe and
sound! —
The poet bade his friend start on the watery road,
Much re-assured by this so comfortable ode.")

LXXXIII.

Then never grudge my poor Fifine her compliment!
The rakish craft could slip her moorings in the tent,
And, hoisting every stitch of spangled canvas, steer
Through divers rocks and shoals; in fine, deposit here
Your Virgil of a spouse in Attica; yea, thrid
The mob of men, select the special virtue hid
In him, forsooth, and say, or rather smile so sweet,
"Of all the multitude, you — I prefer to cheat!
Are you for Athens bound? I can perform the trip,
Shove little pinnace off, while yon superior ship,
The Elvire, refits in port!" So off we push from beach
Of Pornic Town: and lo, ere eye can wink, we reach
The Long Walls, and I prove that Athens is no dream;
For there the temples rise! they are; they nowise seem!

Earth is not all one lie, this truth attests me true!
Thanks, therefore, to Fifine! Elvire, I'm back with you!
Share in the memories! Embark I trust we shall
Together some fine day, and so, for good and all,
Bid Pornic Town adieu; then just the strait to cross,
And we reach harbor, safe, in Iostephanos!

LXXXIV.

How quickly night comes! Lo! already 'tis the land
Turns sea-like: overcrept by gray, the plains expand,
Assume significance; while ocean dwindles, shrinks
Into a pettier bound: its plash and plaint, methinks,
Six steps away, how both retire, as if their part
Were played, another force were free to prove her art,
Protagonist in turn! Are you unterrified?
All false, all fleeting too! And nowhere things abide,
And everywhere we strain that things should stay, — the one
Truth, that ourselves are true!

LXXXV.

A word, and I have done.
Is it not just our hate of falsehood, fleetingness,
And the mere part things play, that constitutes express
The inmost charm of this Fifine and all her tribe?
Actors! We also act; but only they inscribe
Their style and title so, and preface — only they —
Performance with, "A lie is all we do or say."
Wherein but there can be the attraction, Falsehood's bribe,
That wins so surely o'er to Fifine and her tribe
The liking, nay, the love, of who hate Falsehood most,
Except that these alone of mankind make their boast,
"Frankly, we simulate!" To feign means — to have grace,
And so get gratitude! This ruler of the race,
Crowned, sceptred, stoled to suit, — 'tis not that you detect
The cobbler in the king, but that he makes effect
By seeming the reverse of what you know to be
The man, the mind, whole form, fashion, and quality.

Mistake his false for true one minute, — there's an end
Of the admiration! Truth we grieve at or rejoice:
'Tis only falsehood, plain in gesture, look, and voice,
That brings the praise desired, since profit comes thereby.
The histrionic truth is in the natural lie.
Because the man who wept the tears was, all the time,
Happy enough; because the other man, a-grime
With guilt, was, at the least, as white as I and you;
Because the timid type of bashful maidhood, who
Starts at her own pure shade, already numbers seven
Born babes, and in a month will turn their odd to even;
Because the saucy prince would prove, could you unfurl
Some yards of wrap, a meek and meritorious girl, —
Precisely as you see success attained by each
O' the mimes, do you approve, not foolishly impeach
The falsehood!

LXXXVI.

That's the first o' the truths found: all things, slow
Or quick i' the passage, come at last to that, you know!

Each has a false outside, whereby a truth is forced
To issue from within: truth, falsehood, are divorced
By the excepted eye, at the rare season, for
The happy moment. Life means — learning to abhor
The false, and love the true, — truth treasured snatch by snatch,
Waifs counted at their worth. And when with strays they match
I' the party-colored world; when under foul shines fair,
And truth, displayed i' the point, flashes forth everywhere
I' the circle, manifest to soul, though hid from sense,
And no obstruction more affects this confidence;
When faith is ripe for sight, — why, reasonably, then
Comes the great clearing-up. Wait threescore years and ten!

LXXXVII.

Therefore I prize stage-play, the honest cheating; thence
The impulse pricked, when fife and drum bade Fair commence,

To bid you trip and skip, link arm in arm with me,
Like husband and like wife, and so together see
The tumbling-troop arrayed, the strollers on their stage
Drawn up and under arms, and ready to engage.
And if I started thence upon abstruser themes—
Well, 'twas a dream, pricked too!

LXXXVIII.

A poet never dreams:
We prose-folk always do: we miss the proper duct
For thoughts on things unseen, which stagnate and obstruct
The system, therefore: mind, sound in a body sane,
Keeps thoughts apart from facts, and to one flowing vein
Confines its sense of that which is not, but might be,
And leaves the rest alone. What ghosts do poets see?
What demons fear? what man or thing misapprehend?
Unchoked, the channel's flush, the fancy's free to spend
Its special self aright in manner, time, and place.
Never believe that who create the busy race

O' the brain, bring poetry to birth, such act performed,
Feel trouble them, the same, such residue as warmed
My prosy blood this morn, — intrusive fancies, meant
For outbreak and escape by quite another vent!
Whence follows, that, asleep, my dreamings oft exceed
The bound. But you shall hear.

LXXXIX.

I smoked. The webs o' the weed,
With many a break i' the mesh, were floating to re-form
Cupola-wise above; chased thither by soft, warm
Inflow of air without; since I, — of mind to muse, to clench
The gain of soul and body got by their noon-day drench
In sun and sea, — I flung both frames o' the window wide,
To soak my body still, and let soul soar beside.
In came the country sounds and sights and smells, — that fine
Sharp needle in the nose from our fermenting wine!

In came a dragon-fly with whir and stir, then out,
Off, and away; in came — kept coming, rather, pout
Succeeding smile, and take-away still close on give —
One loose long creeper-branch, tremblingly sensitive
To risk, which blooms and leaves, — each leaf tongue-
broad, each bloom
Mid-finger-deep, — must run by prying in the room
Of one who loves and grasps and spoils and speculates.
All, so far, plain enough to sight and sense: but weights,
Measures, and numbers, — ah! could one apply such test
To other visitants that came at no request
Of who kept open house; to fancies manifold
From this four-cornered world, the memories new and old,
The antenatal prime experience — what know I? —
The initiatory love preparing us to die, —
Such were a crowd to count, a sight to see, a prize
To turn to profit, were but fleshly ears and eyes
Able to cope with those o' the spirit!

XC.

Therefore, — since
Thought hankers after speech, while no speech may evince
Feeling like music, — mine, o'erburthened with each gift
From every visitant, at last resolved to shift
Its burthen to the back of some musician dead
And gone, who, feeling once what I feel now, instead
Of words, sought sounds, and saved forever, in the same,
Truth that escapes prose; nay, puts poetry to shame.
One reads the note, one strikes the key, one bids *record*
The instrument, — thanks for the veritable word!
And not in vain one cries, "O dead and gone away,
Assist who struggles yet, thy strength become my stay,
Thy record serve as well to register, — I felt
And knew thus much of truth! With me must knowledge melt
Into surmise and doubt and disbelief, unless
Thy music re-assure, — I gave no idle guess,
But gained a certitude myself may hardly keep!
What care? since round is piled a monumental heap

Of music that conserves the assurance thou as well
Wast certain of the same! — thou, master of the spell,
Mad'st moonbeams marble, didst *record* what other men
Feel only to forget!" Who was it helped me, then?
What master's work first came responsive to my call,
Found my eye, fixed my choice?

XCI.

Why, Schumann's "Carnival"!
Choice chiming in, you see, exactly with the sounds
And sights of yester-eve, when, going on my rounds,
Where both roads join the bridge, I heard across the dusk
Creak a slow caravan, and saw arrive the husk
O' the spice-nut, which peeled off this morning, and displayed
'Twixt tree and tree a tent whence the red pennon made
Its vivid reach for home and ocean-idleness,
And where, my heart surmised, at that same moment, — yes, —

Tugging her tricot on, yet tenderly, lest stitch
Announce the crack of doom, reveal disaster which
Our Pornic's modest stock of merceries in vain
Were ransacked to retrieve, — there, cautiously a-strain,
(My heart surmised) must crouch in that tent's corner, curved
Like spring-month's russet moon, some beauty fate reserved
To give me once again the electric snap and spark
That prove, when finger finds out finger in the dark
O' the world, there's fire and life and truth there, link but hands,
And pass the secret on ! till, link by link, expands
The circle, lengthens out the chain ; and one embrace
Of high with low is found uniting the whole race, —
Not simply you and me and our Fifine, but all
The world : the Fair expands into the Carnival,
And Carnival again to — Ah, but that's my dream !

XCII.

I somehow played the piece ; remarked on each old theme

I' the new dress; saw how food o' the soul, the stuff
that's made
To furnish man with thought and feeling, is purveyed
Substantially the same from age to age, with change
Of the outside only for successive feasters. Range
The banquet-room o' the world, from the dim farthest
head
O' the table to its foot, for you and me bespread
This merry morn, we find sufficient fare, I trow.
But novel? Scrape away the sauce, and taste, below,
The verity o' the viand, you shall perceive there went
To board-head just the dish which other condiment
Makes palatable now: guests came, sat down, fell to,
Rose up, wiped mouth, went way, — lived, died, — and
never knew
That generations yet should, seeking sustenance,
Still find the selfsame fare, with somewhat to enhance
Its flavor in the kind of cooking. As with hates
And loves and fears and hopes, so with what emulates
The same, expresses hates, loves, fears, and hopes in art·
The forms, the themes, — no one without its counterpart

Ages ago; no one, but, mumbled the due time
I' the mouth of the eater, needs be cooked again in rhyme,
Dished up anew in paint, sauce-smothered fresh in sound,
To suit the wisdom-tooth, just cut, of the age, that's found
With gums obtuse to gust and smack which relished so
The meat o' the meal folks made some fifty years ago.
But don't suppose the new was able to efface
The old without a struggle, a pang! The commonplace
Still clung about his heart long after all the rest
O' the natural man, at eye and ear, was caught, confessed
The charm of change, although wry lip and wrinkled nose
Owned ancient virtue more conducive to repose
Than modern nothing roused to something by some shred
Of pungency, perchance garlic in amber's stead?

And so on, till, one day, another age, by due
Rotation, pries, sniffs, smacks, discovers old is new,
And sauce our sires pronounced insipid proves again
Sole piquant, and resumes its titillating reign,
With music, most of all the arts, since change is there
The law, and not the lapse: the precious means the rare,
And not the absolute in all good save surprise.
So I remarked upon our Schumann's victories
Over the commonplace, how faded phrase grew fine,
And palled perfection, piqued, upstartled by that brine,
His pickle, bit the mouth and burnt the tongue aright;
Beyond the merely good no longer exquisite;
Then took things as I found, and thanked without demur
The pretty piece, — played through that movement, you prefer,
Where dance and shuffle past, he scolding while she pouts,
She canting while he calms, in those eternal bouts
Of age, the dog — with youth, the cat — by rose-festoon
Tied teasingly forever, — Columbine, Pantaloon,

She, toe-tips and *staccato*, — *legato*, shakes his poll
And shambles in pursuit, the senior. *Fi la folle!*
Lie to him! get his gold, and pay its price! begin
Your trade betimes, nor wait till you've wed Harlequin,
And need, at the week's end, to play the duteous wife,
And swear you still love slaps and leapings more than life!
Pretty! I say.

XCIII.

And so I somehow-nohow played
The whole o' the pretty piece; and then — whatever weighed
My eyes down, furled the films about my wits, — suppose,
The morning-bath, — the sweet monotony of those
Three keys, flat, flat and flat, never a sharp at all;
Or else the brain's fatigue, forced even here to fall
Into the same old track, and recognize the shift
From old to new, and back to old again, and, swift
Or slow, no matter, still the certainty of change,
Conviction we shall find the false, where'er we range,

In art no less than nature, — or what if wrist were
numb,
And over-tense the mucle, abductor of the thumb,
Taxed by those tenths' and twelfths' unconscionable
stretch ?
Howe'er it came to pass, I soon was far to fetch, —
Gone off in company with Music !

XCIV.

Whither bound
Except for Venice ? She it was, by instinct found,
Carnival-country proper, who, far below the perch
Where I was pinnacled, showed, opposite, Mark's
Church,
And, underneath, Mark's Square, with those two lines
of street,
Procuratié-sides, each leading to my feet ;
Since I gazed from above, however I got there.

XCV.

And what I gazed upon was a prodigious Fair,

Concourse immense of men and women, crowned or
casqued,
Turbaned or tiar'd, wreathed, plumed, hatted or wigged,
but masked, —
Always masked, — only, how? No face-shape, beast
or bird,
Nay, fish and reptile even, but some one had preferred,
From out its frontispiece, feathered or scaled or curled,
To make the vizard whence himself should view the
world,
And where the world believed himself was manifest.
Yet, when you came to look, mixed up among the
rest
More funnily by far were masks to imitate
Humanity's mishap: the wrinkled brow, bald pate,
And rheumy eyes of Age, peaked chin and parchment
chap,
Were signs of day-work done, and wage-time near, —
mishap
Merely; but Age reduced to simple greed and guile,
Worn apathetic else as some smooth slab, erewhile

A clear-cut man-at-arms i' the pavement, till foot's tread
Effaced the sculpture, left the stone you saw instead, —
Was not that terrible beyond the mere uncouth?
Well, and perhaps the next revolting you was Youth,
Stark ignorance and crude conceit, half smirk, half stare,
On that frank fool-face, gay beneath its head of hair
Which covers nothing.

XCVI.

These, you are to understand,
Were the mere hard and sharp distinctions. On each hand,
I soon became aware, flocked the infinitude
Of passions, loves and hates, man pampers till his mood
Becomes himself, the whole sole face we name him by,
Nor want denotement else, if age or youth supply
The rest of him: old, young, — classed creature: in the main
A love, a hate, a hope, a fear, each soul a-strain

Some one way through the flesh,— the face the evidence
O' the soul at work inside ; and, all the more intense,
So much the more grotesque.

XCVII.

" Why should each soul be tasked
Some one way, by one love or else one hate ? " I asked ;
When it occurred to me, from all these sights beneath
There rose not any sound : a crowd, yet dumb as
death !

XCVIII.

But I knew why. (Propose a riddle, and 'tis solved
Forthwith — in dream !) They spoke ; but — since on
me devolved
To see, and understand by sight — the vulgar speech
Might be dispensed with. " He who cannot see must
reach
As best he may the truth of men by help of words
They please to speak ; must fare at will of who affords

The banquet:" so I thought. "Who sees not, hears, and so
Gets to believe: myself it is, that, seeing, know,
And, knowing, can dispense with voice and vanity
Of speech. What hinders then, that, drawing closer, I
Put privilege to use, see and know better still
These *simulachra*, taste the profit of my skill,
Down in the midst?"

XCIX.

And plumb I pitched into the square,—
A groundling like the rest. What think you happened there?
Precise the contrary of what one would expect!
For — whereas all the more monstrosities deflect
From nature and the type the more yourself approach
Their precinct — here I found brutality encroach
Less on the human, lie the lightlier as I looked
The nearer on these faces that seemed but now so crooked

And clawed away from God's prime purpose. They diverged
A little from the type, but somehow rather urged
To pity than disgust: the prominent before
Now dwindled into mere distinctness, — nothing more.
Still, at first sight, stood forth undoubtedly the fact
Some deviation was: in no one case there lacked
The certain sign and mark, say hint, say trick of lip
Or twist of nose, that proved a fault in workmanship,
Change in the prime design, some hesitancy here
And there, which checked man's make, and let the beast appear;
But that was all.

C.

All; yet enough to bid each tongue
Lie in abeyance still. They talked, themselves among,
Of themselves, to themselves: I saw the mouths at play,
The gesture that enforced, the eye that strove to say
The same thing as the voice, and seldom gained its point:
That this was so, I saw; but all seemed out of joint

I' the vocal medium 'twixt the world and me. I gained
Knowledge by notice, not by giving ear; attained
To truth by what men seemed, not said: to me one
glance
Was worth whole histories of noisy utterance;
At least, to me in dream.

CI.

And presently I found,
That, just as ugliness had withered, so unwound
Itself, and perished off, repugnance to what wrong
Might linger yet i' the make of man. My will was strong
I' the matter: I could pick and choose, project my weight,
(Remember how we saw the boatman trim his freight!)
Determine to observe, or manage to escape,
Or make divergency assume another shape
By shift of point of sight in me the observer: thus
Corrected, added to, subtracted from, discuss
Each variant quality, and brute-beast touch was turned
Into mankind's safeguard! Force, guile, were arms which
earned

My praise, not blame at all! for we must learn to live,
Case-hardened at all points, not bare and sensitive,
But plated for defence, nay, furnished for attack,
With spikes at the due place, that neither front nor back
May suffer in that squeeze with nature we find — life.
Are we not here to learn the good of peace through strife,
Of love through hate, and reach knowledge by ignorance?
Why, those are helps thereto which late we eyed askance,
And nicknamed unaware! Just so, a sword we call
Superfluous, and cry out against, at festival:
Wear it in time of war, its clink and clatter grate
O' the ear to purpose then!

CII.

I found one must abate
One's scorn of the soul's case, distinct from the soul's self, —
Which is the centre-drop; whereas the pride in pelf,

The lust to seem the thing it cannot be, the greed
For praise, and all the rest seen outside, — these, indeed,
Are the hard polished cold crystal environment
Of those strange orbs unearthed i' the Druid temple, meant
For divination (so the learned lean to think),
Wherein you may admire one dew-drop roll and wink,
All unaffected by — quite alien to — what sealed
And saved it long ago: though how it got congealed
I shall not give a guess; nor how, by power occult,
The solid surface-shield was outcome and result
Of simple dew at work to save itself amid
The unwatery force around: protected thus, dew slid
Safe through all opposites impatient to absorb
Its spot of life, and lasts forever in the orb
We now from hand to hand pass with impunity.

CIII.

And the delight wherewith I watch this crowd must be
Akin to that which crowns the chemist when he winds
Thread up and up till clew be fairly clutched; unbinds

The composite ; ties fast the simple to its mate ;
And, tracing each effect back to its cause, elate,
Constructs in fancy, from the fewest primitives,
The complex and complete, all diverse life, that lives
Not only in beast, bird, fish, reptile, insect, but
The very plants and earths and ores. Just so I glut
My hunger both to be and know the thing I am
By contrast with the thing I am not ; so, through sham
And outside, I arrive at inmost real, probe
And prove how the nude form obtained the checkered
robe.

CIV.

— Experience I am glad to master soon or late,
Here, there, and everywhere i' the world, without debate ;
Only in Venice why ? What reason for Mark's Square
Rather than Timbuctoo ?

CV.

And I became aware,
Scarcely the word escaped my lips, that swift ensued
In silence and by stealth, and yet with certitude,

A formidable change of the amphitheatre
Which held the Carnival; although the human stir
Continued just the same amid that shift of scene.

CVI.

For as on edifice of cloud i' the gray and green
Of evening, — built about some glory of the west
To barricade the sun's departure, — manifest,
He plays, pre-eminently gold, gilds vapor, crag, and crest
Which bend in rapt suspense above the act and deed
They cluster round and keep their very own, nor heed
The world at watch; while we, breathlessly at the base
O' the castellated bulk, note momently the mace
Of night fall here, fall there, bring change with every blow,
Alike to sharpened shaft and broadened portico
I' the structure; heights and depths, beneath the leaden stress,
Crumble and melt and mix together, coalesce,
Re-form, but sadder still, subdued yet more and more
By every fresh defeat, till wearied eyes need pore

No longer on the dull impoverished decadence
Of all that pomp of pile in towering evidence
So lately: —

CVII.

Even thus, nor otherwise, meseemed
That if I fixed my gaze a while on what I dreamed
Was Venice' Square, Mark's Church, the scheme was straight unschemed,
A subtle something had its way within the heart
Of each and every house I watched, with counterpart
Of tremor through the front and outward face, until
Mutation was at end: impassive and stock-still
Stood now the ancient house, grown, — new is scarce the phrase,
Since older, in a sense, — altered to — what i' the ways
Ourselves are won't to see, coerced by city, town,
Or village, anywhere i' the world, pace up or down
Europe! In all the maze, no single tenement
I saw, but I could claim acquaintance with!

CVIII.

There went
Conviction to my soul, that what I took of late
For Venice was the world; its Carnival the state
Of mankind, masquerade in life-long permanence
For all time, and no one particular feast-day. Whence
'Twas easy to infer what meant my late disgust
At the brute-pageant, each grotesque of greed and lust
And idle hate, and love as impotent for good,
When from my pride of place I passed the interlude
In critical review; and what the wonder that ensued,
When, from such pinnacled pre-eminence, I found
Somehow the proper goal for wisdom was the ground,
And not the sky, — so, slid sagaciously betimes
Down heaven's baluster-rope, to reach the mob of mimes
And mummers: whereby came discovery there was just
Enough and not too much of hate, love, greed, and lust,
Could one discerningly but hold the balance, shift
The weight from scale to scale, do justice to the drift
Of nature, and explain the glories by the shames
Mixed up in man, one stuff miscalled by different names.

According to what stage i' the process turned his rough,
Even as I gazed, to smooth, — only get close enough! —
What was all this except the lesson of a life?

CIX.

And consequent upon the learning how from strife
Grew peace, — from evil, good, — came knowledge, that, to get
Acquaintance with the way o' the world, we must nor fret
Nor fume on altitudes of self-sufficiency,
But bid a frank farewell to what — we think — should be,
And, with as good a grace, welcome what is — we find.

CX.

Is — for the hour, observe! Since something to my mind
Suggested soon the fancy, nay, certitude, that change,
Never suspending touch, continued to derange
What architecture, we, walled up within the cirque
O' the world, consider fixed as fate, not fairy-work.

For those were temples, sure, which tremblingly grew
blank
From bright, then broke afresh in triumph: ah! but
sank
As soon; for liquid change through artery and vein
O' the very marble wound its way! And first a stain
Would startle and offend amid the glory; next
Spot swift succeeded spot, but found me less perplexed
By potents; then, as 'twere, a sleepiness soft stole
Over the stately fane, and shadow sucked the whole
Façade into itself, made uniformly earth
What was a piece of heaven; till, lo! a second birth,
And the veil broke away because of something new
Inside, that pushed to gain an outlet, paused in view
At last, and proved a growth of stone or brick or wood,
Which, alien to the aim o' the Builder, somehow stood
The test, could satisfy, if not the early race
For whom he built, at least our present populace,
Who must not bear the blame for what, blamed, proves
mishap
Of the Artist: his work gone, another fills the gap,

Serves the prime purpose so. Undoubtedly there spreads
Building around, above, which makes men lift their heads
To look at, or look through, or look, for aught I care,
Over, — if only up it is, not down, they stare,
"Commercing with the skies," and not the pavement in the square.

CXI.

But are they only temples that subdivide, collapse,
And tower again, transformed? Academies, perhaps!
Domes where dwells Learning, seats of Science, bower and hall
Which house Philosophy, — do these, too, rise and fall,
Based though foundations be on steadfast mother-earth,
With no chimeric claim to supermundane birth;
No boast, that, dropped from cloud, they did not grow from ground?
Why, these fare worst of all: these vanish, and are found
Nowhere, by who tasks eye some twice within his term
Of threescore years and ten for tidings what each germ

Has burgeoned out into, whereof the promise stunned
His ear with such acclaim, — praise-payment to refund
The praises, never doubt, some twice before they die
Whose days are long i' the land.

CXII.

Alack, Philosophy!
Despite the chop and change, diminished or increased,
Patched up and plastered o'er, Religion stands at least
I' the temple-type. But thou? Here gape I, all agog
These thirty years, to learn how tadpole turns to frog;
And thrice at least have gazed with mild astonishment,
As, skyward up and up, some fire-new fabric sent
Its challenge to mankind, that, clustered underneath, —
They hear the word and straight believe, ay, in the teeth
O' the Past, clap hands, and hail triumphant Truth's out-
break, —
Tadpole-frog-theory propounded past mistake!
In vain! A something ails the edifice: it bends,
It bows, it buries. . . . Haste! cry "Heads below" to
friends;

But have no fear they find, when smother shall subside,
Some substitution perk with unabated pride
I' the predecessor's place!

CXIII.

No: the one voice which failed
Never, the preachment's coigne of vantage nothing ailed, —
That had the luck to lodge i' the house not made with hands!
And all it preached was this: "Truth builds upon the sands,
Though stationed on a rock; and so her work decays,
And so she builds afresh, with like result. Nought stays
But just the fact that Truth not only is, but fain
Would have men know she needs must be, by each so plain
Attempt to visibly inhabit where they dwell."
Her works are work, while she is she: that work does well

Which lasts mankind their lifetime through, and lets believe
One generation more, that, though sand run through sieve,
Yet earth now reached is rock, and what we moderns find
Erected here is Truth, who, 'stablished to her mind
I' the fulness of the days, will never change in show
More than in substance erst: men thought they knew; we know!

CXIV.

Do you, my generation? Well, let the blocks prove mist
I' the main enclosure; church and college, if they list,
Be something for a time, and every thing anon,
And any thing a while, as fit is off or on,
Till they grow nothing, soon to re-appear no less
As something, — shape reshaped, till out of shapelessness
Come shape again as sure! no doubt, or round or square
Or polygon its front, some building will be there,

Do duty in that nook o' the wall o' the world where once
The Architect saw fit precisely to ensconce
College or church, and bid such bulwark guard the line
O' the barrier round about, — humanity's confine.

CXV.

Leave watching change at work i' the greater scale, on these
The main supports, and turn to their interstices
Filled up by fabrics too, less costly and less rare,
Yet of importance, yet essential to the Fair
They help to circumscribe, instruct, and regulate !
See where each booth-front boasts, in letters small or great,
Its specialty, proclaims its privilege to stop
A breach beside the best !

CXVI.

Here History keeps shop ;
Tells how past deeds were done, so and not otherwise : —
" Man, hold truth evermore ! forget the early lies ! "

There sits Morality, demure behind her stall,
Dealing out life and death: "This is the thing to call
Right; and this other, wrong: thus think, thus do, thus say,
Thus joy, thus suffer! — not to-day as yesterday:
Yesterday's doctrine dead, this only shall endure!
Obey its voice, and live!" — enjoins the dame demure.
While Art gives flag to breeze, bids drum beat, trumpet blow,
Inviting eye and ear to yonder raree-show.
Up goes the canvas, hauled to height of pole. I think
We know the way — long lost, late learned — to paint! A wink
Of eye, and, lo, the pose! the statue on its plinth!
How could we moderns miss the heart o' the labyrinth
Perversely all these years, permit the Greek seclude
His secret till to-day? And here's another feud
Now happily composed: inspect this quartet-score!
Got long past melody, no word has Music more

To say to mortal man! But is the bard to be
Behindhand? Here's his book; and now perhaps you see,
At length, what poetry can do!

CXVII.

Why, that's stability
Itself, that change on change we sorrowfully saw
Creep o'er the prouder piles! We acquiesced in law
When the fine gold grew dim i' the temple; when the brass
Which pillared that so brave abode where Knowledge was
Bowed and resigned the trust: but bear all this caprice,
Harlequinade where swift to birth succeeds decease
Of hue at every turn o' the tinsel-flag which flames
While Art holds booth in Fair? Such glories chased by shames
Like these distract beyond the solemn and august
Procedure to decay, evanishment in dust,
Of those marmoreal domes, — above vicissitude,
We used to hope!

CXVIII.

"So all is change, in fine," pursued
The preachment to a pause. When — "All is permanence!"
Returned a voice. Within? without? No matter whence
The explanation came; for, understand, I ought
To simply say — I saw, each thing I say I thought.
Since ever as, unrolled, the strange scene-picture grew
Before me, sight flashed first, though mental comment too
Would follow in a trice, come hobblingly to halt.

CXIX.

So what did I see next, but, — much as when the vault
I' the west, — wherein we watch the vapory, manifold
Transfiguration, — tired would turn to rest, — behold,
Peak reconciled to base, dark ending feud with bright,
The multiform subsides, is found the definite.
Contrasting lives and strifes, where battle they i' the blank
Severity of death and peace, for which we thank

One cloud that comes to quell the concourse, fall at last
Into a shape befits the close of things, and cast
Palpably o'er vexed earth heaven's mantle of repose?

CXX.

Just so, in Venice' Square, that things were at the close
Was signalled to my sense; for I perceived arrest
O' the change all round about. As if some impulse pressed
Each gently into each, what was distinctness late
Grew vague, and, line from line no longer separate,
No matter what the style, edifice — shall I say,
Died into edifice? I find no simpler way
Of saying how, without or dash or shock or trace
Of violence, I found unity in the place
Of temple, tower, and hall and house and hut, — one blank
Severity of death and peace; to which they sank
Resigned enough, till — ah! conjecture, I beseech,
What special blank did they agree to, all and each?

What common shape was that wherein they mutely merged
Likes and dislikes of form, so plain before?

CXXI.

I urged
Your step this way, prolonged our path of enterprise
To where we stand at last, in order that your eyes
Might see the very thing, and save my tongue describe
The Druid monument which fronts you. Could I bribe
Nature to come in aid, illustrate what I mean,
What wants there she would lend to solemnize the scene?

CXXII.

How does it strike you, this construction gaunt and gray?
Sole object, these piled stones, that gleam unground away
By twilight's hungry jaw, which champs fine all beside
I' the solitary waste we grope through. Oh, no guide,

However, need we now to reach the monstrous door
Of granite! Take my word, the deeper you explore
That caverned passage, filled with fancies to the brim,
The less will you approve the adventure! such a grim
Bar-sinister soon blocks abrupt your path, and ends
All with a cold dread shape, — shape whereon Learning spends
Labor, and leaves the text obscurer for the gloss;
While Ignorance reads right, — recoiling from that Cross!
Whence came the mass and mass, strange quality of stone
Unquarried anywhere i' the region round? Unknown!
Just as unknown how such enormity could be
Conveyed by land, or else transported over sea,
And laid in order, so, precisely each on each
As you and I would build a grotto where the beach
Sheds shell, — to last an hour: this building lasts from age
To age the same. But why?

CXXIII.

Ask Learning! I engage
You get a prosy wherefore shall help you to advance
In knowledge just as much as helps you Ignorance
Surmising, in the mouth of peasant lad or lass, —
"I heard my father say he understood it was
A building people built as soon as earth was made
Almost, because they might forget (they were afraid)
Earth did not make itself, but came of Somebody.
They labored that their work might last, and show thereby
He stays, while we and earth and all things come and go.
Come whence? Go whither? That, when come and gone, we know,
Perhaps, but not while earth and all things need our best
Attention: we must wait and die to know the rest.
Ask, if that's true, what use in setting up the pile?
To make one fear and hope; remind us, all the while
We come and go, outside there's Somebody that stays, —
A circumstance which ought to make us mind our ways;

Because, — whatever end we answer by this life, —
Next time, best chance must be for who with toil and
strife
Manages now to live most like what he was meant
Become: since who succeeds so far, 'tis evident,
Stands foremost on the file; who fails has less to hope
From new promotion. That's the rule, — with even a
rope
Of mushrooms like this rope I dangle! those that
grew
Greatest and roundest, all in life they had to do,
Gain a reward, a grace they never dreamed, I think;
Since, outside white as milk, and inside black as ink,
They go to the Great House to make a dainty dish
For Don and Donna; while this basket-load, I wish
Well off my arm, it breaks, — no starveling of the heap
But had his share of dew, his proper length of sleep
I' the sunshine: yet, of all, the outcome is, — this queer
Cribbed quantity of dwarfs which burthen basket here
Till I reach home; 'tis there, that, having run their rigs,
They end their earthly race, are flung as food for pigs.

Any more use I see? Well, you must know, there lies
Something, the curé says, that points to mysteries
Above our grasp: a huge stone pillar, once upright,
Now laid at length, half lost, — discreetly shunning sight
I' the bush and brier, because of stories in the air, —
Hints what it signified, and why was stationed there,
Once on a time. In vain the curé tasked his lungs;
Showed, in a preachment, how, at bottom of the rungs
O' the ladder Jacob saw, where heavenly angels stept
Up and down, lay a stone which served him, while he slept,
For pillow; when he woke, he set the same upright
As pillar, and atop poured oil: things requisite
To instruct posterity, there mounts from floor to roof
A staircase, earth to heaven; and also put in proof,
When we have scaled the sky, we well may let alone
What raised us from the ground, and — paying to the stone
Proper respect, of course — take staff and go our way,
Leaving the Pagan night for Christian break of day.

For,' preached he, 'what they dreamed, these Pagans, wide-awake,
We Christians may behold. How strange, then, were mistake,
Did anybody style the stone — because of drop
Remaining there from oil which Jacob poured atop —
Itself the Gate of Heaven; itself the end, and not
The means thereto!' Thus preached the curé, and no jot
The more persuaded people, but that, what once a thing
Meant, and had right to mean, it still must mean. So cling
Folk somehow to the prime authoritative speech,
And so distrust report, it seems as they could reach
Far better the arch-word, whereon their fate depends,
Through rude charactery, than all the grace it lends,
That lettering of your scribes! who flourish pen apace,
And ornament the text, they say; we say, efface.
Hence, when the earth began its life afresh in May,
And fruit-trees bloomed, and waves would wanton, and the bay

Ruffle its wealth of weed, and stranger-birds arrive,
And beasts take each a mate, — folk, too, found sensitive,
Surmised the old gray stone upright there, through such tracts
Of solitariness and silence, kept the facts
Intrusted it, could deal out doctrine, did it please:
No fresh and frothy draught, but liquor on the lees,
Strong, savage, and sincere, — first bleedings from a vine,
Whereof the product now do curés so refine
To insipidity, that, when heart sinks, we strive
And strike from out the old stone the old restorative.
'Which is?' — why, go and ask our grandams how they used
To dance around it, till the curé disabused
Their ignorance, and bade the parish in a band
Lay flat the obtrusive thing that cumbered so the land!
And there, accordingly, in bush and brier, it — 'bides
Its time to rise again' (so somebody derides,
That's pert from Paris); 'since yon spire, you keep erect
Yonder, and pray beneath, is nothing, I suspect,

But just the symbol's self, expressed in slate for rock, —
Art's smooth for Nature's rough, new chip from the old block!'
There, sir, my say is said! Thanks, and Saint Gille increase
The wealth bestowed so well!" — wherewith he pockets piece,
Doffs cap, and takes the road. I leave in Learning's clutch
More money for his book, but scarcely gain as much.

CXXIV.

To this it was, this same primeval monument,
That, in my dream, I saw building with building blent
Fall: each on each they fast and founderingly went
Confusion-ward; but thence again subsided fast,
Became the mound you see. Magnificently massed
Indeed, those mammoth-stones, piled by the Protoplast
Temple-wise in my dream! beyond compare with fanes,
Which, solid-looking late, had left no least remains
I' the bald and blank, now sole usurper of the plains

Of heaven, diversified and beautiful before.
And yet simplicity appeared to speak no more
Nor less to me than spoke the compound. At the core,
One and no other word, as in the crust of late,
Whispered, which, audible through the transition-state,
Was no loud utterance in even the ultimate
Disposure. For as some imperial chord subsists,
Steadily underlies the accidental mists
Of music springing thence, that run their mazy race
Around, and sink, absorbed, back to the triad base;
So, out of that one word, each variant rose and fell,
And left the same "All's change, but permanence as well."
Grave note, whence — list aloft! — harmonics sound, that mean, —
"Truth inside; and, outside, truth also; and, between
Each, falsehood that is change, as truth is permanence.
The individual soul works through the shows of sense
(Which, ever proving false, still promise to be true)
Up to an outer soul as individual too;

And, through the fleeting, lives to die into the fixed,
And reach at length 'God, man, or both together
mixed,'
Transparent through the flesh, by parts which prove a
whole,
By hints which make the soul discernible by soul, —
Let only soul look up, not down, not hate, but love,
As truth successively takes shape, one grade above
Its last presentment, tempts as it were truth indeed
Revealed this time; so tempts, till we attain to
read
The signs aright, and learn, by failure, truth is forced
To manifest itself through falsehood; whence divorced
By the excepted eye, at the rare season, for
The happy moment, truth instructs us to abhor
The false, and prize the true, obtainable thereby.
Then do we understand the value of a lie:
Its purpose served, its truth once safe deposited,
Each lie, superfluous now, leaves, in the singer's stead,
The indubitable song; the historic personage
Put by, leaves prominent the impulse of his age;

Truth sets aside speech, act, time, place, indeed, but brings
Nakedly forward now the principle of things
Highest and least."

CXXV.

Wherewith change ends. What other change to dread,
When, disengaged at last from every veil, instead
Of type remains the truth? Once — falsehood; but anon
Theosuton e broteion eper kekramenon, —
Something as true as soul is true, though veils between
Are false, and fleet away. As I mean, did he mean,
The poet whose bird-phrase sits, singing in my ear
A mystery not unlike? What through the dark and drear
Brought comfort to the Titan? Emerging from the lymph,
"God, man, or mixture," proved only to be a nymph:

"From whom the clink on clink of metal" (money, judged
Abundant in my purse) "struck" (bumped at, till it budged)
"The modesty, her soul's habitual resident,"
(Where late the sisterhood were lively in their tent,)
"As out of wingèd car" (that caravan on wheels)
"Impulsively she rushed, no slippers to her heels,"
And "Fear not, friends we flock!" soft smiled the sea-Fifine, —
Primitive of the veils (if he meant what I mean)
The poet's Titan learned to lift, ere "Three-formed Fate,
Moirai Trimorphoi," stood unmasked the Ultimate.

CXXVI.

Enough o' the dream! You see how poetry turns prose.
Announcing wonder-work, I dwindle at the close
Down to mere commonplace which everybody knows.
But dreaming disappoints. The fresh and strange at first
Soon wear to trite and tame, nor warrant the outburst

Of heart with which we hail those heights, at very brink
Of heaven, whereto one least of lifts would lead, we think;
But wherefrom quick decline conducts our step, we find,
To homely earth, and fact familiar left behind.
Did not this monument, for instance, long ago
Say all it had to say, show all it had to show,
Nor promise to do duty more in dream?

CXXVII.

Awaking so,
What if we, homeward-bound, all peace and some fatigue,
Trudge, soberly complete our tramp of near a league,
Last little mile which makes the circuit just, Elvire?
We end where we began: that consequence is clear.
All peace and some fatigue, wherever we were nursed
To life, we bosom us on death, find last is first,
And thenceforth final too.

CXXVIII.

"Why final? Why the more
Worth credence now than when such truth proved false
before?"
Because a novel point impresses now: each lie
Redounded to the praise of man, was victory
Man's nature had both right to get, and might to gain,
And by no means implied submission to the reign
Of other quite as real a nature, that saw fit
To have its way with man, not man its way with it.
This time, acknowledgment and acquiescence quell
Their contrary in man; promotion proves as well
Defeat; and Truth, unlike the False with Truth's outside,
Neither plumes up his will, nor puffs him out with pride.
I fancy there must lurk some cogency i' the claim,
Man, such abatement made, submits to, all the same.
Soul finds no triumph, here, to register like Sense,
With whom 'tis ask and have, — the want, the evidence
That the thing wanted, soon or late will be supplied.
This indeed plumes up will, this, sure, puffs out with
pride,

When, reading records right, man's instincts still attest
Promotion comes to Sense because Sense likes it best :
For bodies sprouted legs, through a desire to run ;
While hands, when fain to filch, got fingers one by one ;
And nature, that's ourself, accommodative brings
To bear, that, tired of legs which walk, we now bud wings,
Since of a mind to fly. Such savor in the nose
Of Sense would stimulate Soul sweetly, I suppose, —
Soul with its proper itch of instinct, prompting clear
To recognize Soul's self Soul's only master here
Alike from first to last. But if time's pressure, light's,
Or rather dark's, approach, wrest thoroughly the rights
Of rule away, and bid the soul submissive bear
Another soul than it play master everywhere
In great and small, — this time, I fancy, none disputes
There's something in the fact that such conclusion suits
Nowise the pride of man, nor yet chimes in with attributes
Conspicuous in the lord of nature. He receives,
And not demands, — not first likes faith, and then believes.

CXXIX.

And as with the last essence, so with its first faint type.
Inconstancy means raw; 'tis faith alone means ripe
I' the soul which runs its round: no matter how it range
From Helen to Fifine, Elvire bids back the change
To permanence. Here, too, love ends where love began.
Such ending looks like law, because the natural man
Inclines the other way, feels lordlier free than bound.
Poor pabulum for pride when the first love is found
Last also! and, so far from realizing gain,
Each step aside just proves divergency in vain.
The wanderer brings home no profit from his quest
Beyond the sad surmise that keeping house were best
Could life begin anew. His problem posed aright
Was, "From the given point evolve the infinite!"
Not, "Spend thyself in space, endeavoring to joint
Together, and so make infinite, point and point:

Fix into one Elvire a Fair-ful of Fifines!"
Fifine, the foam-flake, she: Elvire, the sea's self, means
Capacity at need to shower how many such!
And yet we left her calm profundity, to clutch
Foam-flutter, bell on bell, that, bursting at a touch,
Blistered us for our pains. But, wise, we want no more
O' the fickle element. Enough of foam and roar!
Land-locked, we live and die henceforth; for here's the villa-door.

CXXX.

How pallidly you pause o' the threshold! Hardly night,
Which drapes you, ought to make real flesh and blood so white!
Touch me, and so appear alive to all intents!
Will the saint vanish from the sinner that repents?
Suppose you are a ghost! — a memory, a hope,
A fear, a conscience! Quick! — give back the hand I grope
I' the dusk for!

CXXXI.

That is well. Our double horoscope
I cast, while you concur. Discard that simile
O' the fickle element! Elvire is land, not sea, —
The solid land, the safe. All these word-bubbles came
O' the sea, and bite like salt. The unlucky bath's to blame.
This hand of yours on heart of mine, no more the bay
I beat, nor bask beneath the blue! In Pornic, say,
The mayor shall catalogue me duly domiciled,
Contributable, good-companion of the guild
And mystery of marriage. I stickle for the town,
And not this tower apart; because, though, half way down,
Its mullions wink o'er-webbed with bloomy greenness yet,
Who mounts to staircase top may tempt the parapet,
And sudden there's the sea! No memories to arouse,
No fancies to delude! Our honest civic house
Of the earth be earthy too! — or graced perchance with shell
Made prize of long ago, picked haply where the swell

Menaced a little once ; or seaweed-branch that yet
Dampens and softens, notes a freak of wind, a fret
Of wave : though why on earth should sea-change mend
or mar
The calm contemplative householders that we are ?
So shall the seasons fleet, while our two selves abide :
E'en past astonishment how sunrise and springtide
Could tempt one forth to swim ; the more if time ap-
points
That swimming grow a task for one's rheumatic joints.
Such honest civic house, behold, I constitute
Our villa ! Be but flesh and blood, and smile to
boot !
Enter for good and all ! then fate bolt fast the door,
Shut you and me inside, never to wander more !

CXXXII.

Only, you do not use to apprehend attack !
No doubt, the way I march, one idle arm, thrown slack
Behind me, leaves the open hand defenceless at the
back,

Should an impertinent on tiptoe steal, and stuff —
Whatever can it be? A letter sure enough,
Pushed betwixt palm and glove! That largess of a franc?
Perhaps inconsciously, — to better help the blank
O' the nest, her tambourine, and, laying egg, persuade
A family to follow, the nest-egg that I laid
May have contained — but just to foil suspicious folk —
Between two silver whites a yellow double yolk!
Oh, threaten no farewell! five minutes shall suffice
To clear the matter up. I go, and in a trice
Return; five minutes past, expect me! If in vain, —
Why, slip from flesh and blood, and play the ghost again!

EPILOGUE.

The Householder.

I.

Savage I was sitting in my house, late, lone;
Dreary, weary with the long day's work;
Head of me, heart of me, stupid as a stone;
Tongue-tied now, now blaspheming like a Turk;
When, in a moment, just a knock, call, cry,
Half a pang, and all a rapture, there again were we!
"What, and is it really you again?" quoth I.
"I again; what else did you expect?" quoth She.

II.

"Never mind: hie away from this old house, —
Every crumbling brick imbrowned with sin and shame!
Quick! in its corners ere certain shapes arouse!
Let them — every devil of the night — lay claim,
Make and mend, or rap and rend, for me! Good-by!
God be their guard from disturbance at their glee,
Till, crash, comes down the carcass in a heap!" quoth I.
"Nay; but there's a decency required!" quoth She.

III.

"Ah, but if you knew how time has dragged, days, nights!
All the neighbor-talk with man and maid, — such men!
All the fuss and trouble of street-sounds, window-sights;
All the worry of flapping door and echoing roof; and, then,
All the fancies. . . . Who were they had leave, dared try
Darker arts that almost struck despair in me?
If you knew but how I dwelt down here!" quoth I.
"And was I so better off up there?" quoth She.

IV.

"Help and get it over! *Re-united to his wife,*
(How draw up the paper lets the parish-people know?)
Lies M. or N., departed from this life,
Day the this or that, month and year the so and so.

What i' the way of final flourish? Prose, verse? Try.
Affliction sore long time he bore, or what is it to be?
Till God did please to grant him ease. Do end!" quoth I.
"I end with — Love is all, and Death is nought!" quoth She.

PRINCE HOHENSTIEL-SCHWANGAU,

SAVIOUR OF SOCIETY.

Ὕδραν φονεύσας, μυρίων τ' ἄλλων πόνων
διῆλθον ἀγέλας . . .
τὸ λοίσθιον δὲ τόνδ' ἔτλην τάλας πόνον,
δῶμα θριγκῶσαι κακοῖς.

I slew the Hydra, and from labor passed
To labor, — tribes of labors! Till at last,
Attempting one more labor, in a trice,
Alack! with ills I *crowned the edifice.*

Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau,

Saviour of Society.

You have seen better days, dear? So have I, —
And worse too; for they brought no such bud-mouth
As yours to lisp, "You wish you knew me!" Well,
Wise men, 'tis said, have sometimes wished the same,
And wished and had their trouble for their pains.
Suppose my Œdipus should lurk at last
Under a pork-pie hat and crinoline,
And, latish, pounce on Sphinx in Leicester Square?
Or, likelier, what if Sphinx in wise old age,
Grown sick of snapping foolish people's heads,
And jealous for her riddle's proper rede, —

Jealous that the good trick which served the turn
Have justice rendered it, nor class one day
With friend Home's stilts and tongs and medium-ware, —
What if the once redoubted Sphinx, I say,
(Because night draws on, and the sands increase,
And desert-whispers grow a prophecy,)
Tell all to Corinth of her own accord,
Bright Corinth, not dull Thebes, for Laïs' sake,
Who finds me hardly gray, and likes my nose,
And thinks a man of sixty at the prime?
Good! It shall be! Revealment of myself!
But listen; for we must co-operate.
I don't drink tea: permit me the cigar.

First, how to make the matter plain, of course, —
What was the law by which I lived. Let's see:
Ay, we must take one instant of my life
Spent sitting by your side in this neat room:
Watch well the way I use it, and don't laugh.
Here's paper on the table, pen and ink:
Give me the soiled bit, not the pretty rose.

See! having sat an hour, I'm rested now,
Therefore want work; and spy no better work
For eye and hand, and mind that guides them both,
During this instant, than to draw my pen
From blot One — thus — up, up to blot Two — thus —
Which I at last reach, thus; and here's my line
Five inches long, and tolerably straight.
Better to draw than leave undrawn, I think;
Fitter to do than let alone, I hold;
Though better, fitter, by but one degree.
Therefore it was, that, rather than sit still
Simply, my right hand drew it while my left
Pulled smooth and pinched the mustache to a point.

Now I permit your plump lips to unpurse: —
"So far, one possibly may understand
Without recourse to witchcraft." True, my dear.
Thus folks begin with Euclid; finish, how?
Trying to square the circle! — at any rate,
Solving abstruser problems than this first,—
"How find the nearest way 'twixt point and point."

Deal but with moral mathematics so;
Master one merest moment's work of mine,
Even this practising with pen and ink;
Demonstrate why I rather plied the quill
Than left the space a blank, — you gain a fact;
And God knows what a fact's worth! So proceed
By inference from just this moral fact;
I don't say to that plaguy quadrature,
"What the whole man meant, whom you wish you knew,"
But what meant certain things he did of old
Which puzzled Europe; why, you'll find them plain,
This way, not otherwise: I guarantee,
Understand one, you comprehend the rest.
Rays from all round converge to any point:
Study the point, then, ere you track the rays.
The size o' the circle's nothing: subdivide
Earth, and earth's smallest grain of mustard-seed,
You count as many parts, small matching large,
If you can use the mind's eye; otherwise,
Material optics, being gross at best,
Prefer the large, and leave our mind the small.

And pray how many folks have minds can see?
Certainly you, and somebody in Thrace
Whose name escapes me at the moment. You —
Lend me your mind, then. Analyze with me
This instance of the line 'twixt blot and blot
I rather chose to draw than leave a blank,
Things else being equal. You are taught thereby
That 'tis my nature, when I am at ease,
Rather than idle out my life too long,
To want to do a thing, to put a thought,
Whether a great thought or a little one,
Into an act, as nearly as may be.
Make what is absolutely new, I can't;
Mar what is made already well enough,
I won't: but turn to best account the thing
That's half made, that I can. Two blots you saw
I knew how to extend into a line
Symmetric on the sheet they blurred before:
Such little act sufficed, this time, such thought.

Now we'll extend rays, widen out the verge,

Describe a larger circle, leave this first
Clod of an instance we began with, rise
To the complete world many clods effect.
Only continue patient while I throw,
Delver-like, spadeful after spadeful up,
Just as truths come, the subsoil of me, mould
Whence spring my moods : your object, — just to find,
Alike from hand-lift and from barrow-load,
What salts and silts may constitute the earth,
If it be proper stuff to blow man glass,
Or bake him pottery, bear him oaks or wheat ;
What's born of me, in brief ; which found, all's known.
If it were genius did the digging job,
Logic would speedily sift its product smooth,
And leave the crude truths bare for poetry ;
But I'm no poet, and am stiff i' the back.
What one spread fails to bring, another may.
In goes the shovel, and out comes scoop, — as here !

I live to please myself. I recognize
Power passing mine, immeasurable, God, —

Above me whom he made, as heaven beyond
Earth, — to use figures which assist our sense.
I know that he is there as I am here,
By the same proof, which seems no proof at all,
It so exceeds familiar forms of proof.
Why "there," not "here"? Because, when I say "there,"
I treat the feeling with distincter shape
That space exists between us; I, not he,
Live, think, do human work here: no machine
His will moves, but a being by myself,
His, and not he who made me for a work,
Watches my working, judges its effect,
But does not interpose. He did so once,
And probably will again some time, not now,
Life being the minute of mankind, not God's,
In a certain sense, like time before and time
After man's earthly life, so far as man
Needs apprehend the matter. Am I clear?
Suppose I bid a courier take to-night, —
(Once for all, let me talk as if I smoked
Yet in the Residenz, a personage:

I must still represent the thing I was,
Galvanically make dead muscle play,
Or how shall I illustrate muscle's use?) —
I could then, last July, bid courier take
Message for me, post-haste, a thousand miles.
I bid him, since I have the right to bid;
And, my part done so far, his part begins.
He starts with due equipment, will and power,
Means he may use, misuse, not use at all,
At his discretion, at his peril too.
I leave him to himself: but, journey done,
I count the minutes, call for the result
In quickness and the courier quality,
Weigh its worth, and then punish or reward
According to proved service; not before.
Meantime he sleeps through noontide, rides till dawn,
Sticks to the straight road, tries the crooked path,
Measures and manages resource, trusts, doubts
Advisers by the wayside, does his best
At his discretion, lags, or launches forth
(He knows and I know) at his peril too.

You see? Exactly thus men stand to God, —
I with my courier, God with me. Just so
I have his bidding to perform; but mind
And body, all of me, though made and meant
For that sole service, must consult, concert,
With my own self, and nobody beside,
How to effect the same: God helps not else.
'Tis I who, with my stock of craft and strength,
Choose the directer cut across the hedge,
Or keep the foot-track that respects a crop;
Lie down and rest; rise up and run; live spare;
Feed free, — all that's my business: but arrive,
Deliver message, bring the answer back,
And make my bow, I must; then God will speak, —
Praise me, or haply blame, as service proves.
To other men, to each and every one,
Another law: what likelier? God, perchance,
Grants each new man, by some as new a mode,
Intercommunication with himself,
Wreaking on finiteness infinitude;
By such a series of effects gives each

Last his own imprint: old, yet ever new,
The process: 'tis the way of Deity.
How it succeeds, he knows: I only know
That varied modes of creatureship abound,
Implying just as varied intercourse
For each with the Creator of them all.
Each has his own mind, and no other's mode.
What mode may yours be? I shall sympathize.
No doubt, you, good young lady that you are,
Despite a natural naughtiness or two,
Turn eyes up like a Pradier Magdalen,
And see an outspread providential hand
Above the owl's-wing aigrette — guard and guide —
Visibly o'er your path, about your bed,
Through all your practisings with London-town.
It points, you go; it stays fixed, and you stop:
You quicken its procedure by a word
Spoken, a thought in silence, prayer, and praise.
Well, I believe that such a hand may stoop,
And such appeals to it may stave off harm,
Pacify the grim guardian of this square,

And stand you in good stead on quarter-day:
Quite possible in your case, not in mine.
"Ah! but I choose to make the difference,
Find the emancipation?" No, I hope.
If I deceive myself, take noon for night,
Please to become determinedly blind
To the true ordinance of human life
Through mere presumption, that is my affair,
And truly a grave one: but as grave I think
Your affair, — yours, the specially observed;
Each favored person that perceives his path
Pointed him inch by inch, and looks above
For guidance, through the mazes of this world,
In what we call its meanest life-career, —
Not how to manage Europe properly,
But how keep open shop, and yet pay rent,
Rear household, and make both ends meet, — the same.
I say, such man is no less tasked than I
To duly take the path appointed him
By whatsoever sign he recognize.
Our insincerity on both our heads!

No matter what the object of a life,
Small work or large, — the making thrive a shop,
Or seeing that an empire take no harm, —
There are known fruits to judge obedience by.
You've read a ton's weight, now, of newspaper, —
Lives of me, gabble about the kind of prince:
You know my work i' the rough: I ask you, then,
Do I appear subordinated less
To hand-impulsion, one prime push for all,
Than little lives of men, the multitude
That cried out every quarter of an hour
For fresh instructions, did or did not work,
And praised in the odd minutes?
Eh, my dear?
Such is the reason why I acquiesced
In doing what seemed best for me to do,
So as to please myself on the great scale,
Having regard to immortality
No less than life; did that which head and heart
Prescribed my hand, in measure with its means
Of doing; used my special stock of power,

Not from the aforesaid head and heart alone,
But every sort of helpful circumstance,
Some problematic, and some nondescript;
All regulated by the single care
I' the last resort, — that I made thoroughly serve
The when and how, toiled where was need, reposed
As resolutely to the proper point,
Braved sorrow, courted joy, to just one end, —
Namely, that just the creature I was bound
To be I should become, nor thwart at all
God's purpose in creation. I conceive
No other duty possible to man, —
Highest mind, lowest mind, — no other law
By which to judge life failure or success,
What folks call being saved or cast away.

Such was my rule of life: I worked my best,
Subject to ultimate judgment, — God's, not man's.
Well, then, this settled, — take your tea, I beg,
And meditate the fact 'twixt sip and sip, —
This settled, — why I pleased myself, you saw,

By turning blot and blot into a line
O' the little scale, — we'll try now (as your tongue
Tries the concluding sugar-drop) what's meant
To please me most o' the great scale. Why, just now,
With nothing else to do within my reach,
Did I prefer making two blots one line
To making yet another separate
Third blot, and leaving those I found unlinked?
It meant, I like to use the thing I find,
Rather than strive at unfound novelty:
I make the best of the old, nor try for new.
Such will to act, such choice of action's way,
Constitute — when at work on the great scale,
Driven to their farthest natural consequence
By all the help from all the means — my own
Particular faculty of serving God,
Instinct for putting power to exercise
Upon some wish and want o' the time, I prove
Possible to mankind as best I may.
This constitutes my mission (grant the phrase):
Namely, to rule men, — men within my reach;

To order, influence, and dispose them so
As render solid, and stabilify
Mankind in particles, the light and loose,
For their good and my pleasure in the act.
Such good accomplished proves twice good to me, —
Good for its own sake, as the just and right;
And, in the effecting also, good again
To me its agent, tasked as suits my taste.

Is this much easy to be understood
At first glance? Now begin the steady gaze.

My rank (if I must tell you simple truth:
Telling were else not worth the whiff o' the weed
I lose for the tale's sake), dear, my rank i' the world,
Is hard to know and name precisely: err
I may, but scarcely over-estimate
My style and title. Do I class with men
Most useful to their fellows? Possibly,
Therefore, in some sort, best; but greatest mind
And rarest nature? Evidently no.

A conservator call me, if you please,
Not a creator nor destroyer, — one
Who keeps the world safe. I profess to trace
The broken circle of society ;
Dim actual order I can redescribe,
Not only where some segment silver-true
Stays clear, but where the breaks of black commence
Baffling you all who want the eye to probe,
As I make out yon problematic thin
White paring of your thumb-nail outside there,
Above the plaster monarch on his steed ;
See an inch ; name an ell ; and prophesy
O' the rest that ought to follow, — the round moon
Now hiding in the night of things : that round,
I labor to demonstrate moon enough
For the month's purpose ; that society,
Render efficient for the age's need :
Preserving you in either case the old,
Nor aiming at a new and greater thing, —
A sun for moon, a future to be made
By first abolishing the present law :

No such proud task for me by any means!
History shows you men whose master-touch
Not so much modifies as makes anew, —
Minds that transmute, nor need restore at all.
A breath of God made manifest in flesh
Subjects the world to change from time to time;
Alters the whole conditions of our race
Abruptly, not by unperceived degrees,
Nor play of elements already there,
But quite new leaven, leavening the lump,
And liker, so, the natural process. See!
Where Winter reigned for ages, — by a turn
I' the time, some star-change (ask geologists),
The ice-tracts split, clash, splinter, and disperse,
And there's an end of immobility,
Silence, and all that tinted pageant, base
To pinnacle, one flush from fairy-land
Dead-asleep and deserted somewhere, — see! —
As a fresh sun, wave, spring, and joy outburst.
Or else the earth it is, time starts from trance,
Her mountains tremble into fire, her plains

Heave blinded by confusion: what result?
New teeming growth, surprises of strange life
Impossible before, a world broke up
And re-made, order gained by law destroyed.
Not otherwise, in our society,
Follow like portents, all as absolute
Regenerations: they have birth at rare,
Uncertain, unexpected intervals
O' the world, by ministry impossible
Before and after fulness of the days:
Some dervis desert-spectre, swordsman, saint,
Law-giver, lyrist, — oh! we know the names.
Quite other these than I. Our time requires
No such strange potentate, — who else would dawn, —
No fresh force till the old have spent itself.
Such seems the natural economy.
To shoot a beam into the dark assists:
To make that beam do fuller service, spread
And utilize such bounty to the height, —
That assists also; and that work is mine.
I recognize, contemplate, and approve

The general compact of society,
Not simply as I see effected good,
But good i' the germ, each chance that's possible
I' the plan traced so far; all results, in short,
For better or worse of the operation due
To those exceptional natures, unlike mine,
Who, helping. thwarting, conscious, unaware,
Did somehow manage to so far describe
This diagram left ready to my hand,
Waiting my turn of trial. I see success,
See failure, see what makes or mars throughout.
How shall I else but help complete this plan,
Of which I know the purpose, and approve,
By letting stay therein what seems to stand,
And adding good thereto of easier reach
To-day than yesterday?

So much, no more!

Whereon, "No more than that?" inquire aggrieved
Half of my critics: "nothing new at all?
The old plan saved, instead of a sponged slate

And fresh-drawn figure?" While, "So much as that?"
Object their fellows of the other faith:
"Leave uneffaced the crazy labyrinth
Of alteration and amendment, lines
Which every dabster felt in duty bound
To signalize his power of pen and ink
By adding to a plan once plain enough?
Why keep each fool's bequeathment, scratch and blur
Which overscrawl and underscore the piece;
Nay, strengthen them by touches of your own?"

Well, that's my mission, so I serve the world,
Figure as man o' the moment, — in default
Of somebody inspired to strike such change
Into society, — from round to square,
The ellipsis to the rhomboid, — how you please,
As suits the size and shape o' the world he finds.
But this I can, — and nobody my peer, —
Do the best with the least change possible;
Carry the incompleteness on a stage;
Make what was crooked straight, and roughness smooth,

And weakness strong: wherein if I succeed,
It will not prove the worst achievement, sure,
In the eyes at least of one man, — one I look
Nowise to catch in critic company;
To wit, the man inspired, the genius' self,
Destined to come and change things thoroughly.
He, at least, finds his business simplified,
Distinguishes the done from undone, reads
Plainly what meant and did not mean this time
We live in, and I work on, and transmit
To such successor: he will operate
On good hard substance, not mere shade and shine.
Let all my critics, born to idleness
And impotency, get their good, and have
Their hooting at the giver: I am deaf,
Who find great good in this society,
Great gain, the purchase of great labor. Touch
The work I may and must, but — reverent
In every fall o' the finger-tip, no doubt.
Perhaps I find all good there's warrant for
I' the world as yet: nay, to the end of time;

Since evil never means part company
With mankind, only shift side and change shape.
I find advance i' the main, and notably
The Present an improvement on the Past,
And promise for the Future, which shall prove
Only the Present with its rough made smooth,
Its indistinctness emphasized: I hope
No better, nothing newer, for mankind,
But something equably smoothed everywhere, —
Good, reconciled with hardly-quite-as-good,
Instead of good and bad each jostling each.
"And that's all?" Ay, and quite enough for me!
We have toiled so long to gain what gain I find
I' the Present, let us keep it! We shall toil
So long before we gain, if gain God grant,
A Future with one touch of difference
I' the heart of things, and not their outside face,
Let us not risk the whiff of my cigar
For Fourier, Comte, and all that ends in smoke!

This I see clearest probably of men,

With power to act and influence, now alive:
Juster than they to the true state of things;
In consequence, more tolerant, that, side
By side, shall co-exist, and thrive alike
In the age, the various sorts of happiness
Moral, mark! — not material, — moods o' the mind
Suited to man and man his opposite:
Say, minor modes of movement, — hence to there,
Or thence to here, or simply round about, —
So long as each toe spares its neighbor's kibe,
Nor spoils the major march and main advance.
The love of peace, care for the family,
Contentment with what's bad, but might be worse, —
Good movements these! and good, too, discontent,
So long as that spurs good, which might be best,
Into becoming better anyhow:
Good, — pride of country, putting hearth and home
I' the background, out of undue prominence;
Good, — yearning after change, strife, victory,
And triumph. Each shall have its orbit marked,
But no more, — none impede the other's path

In this wide world ; though each and all alike,
Save for me, fain would spread itself through space,
And leave its fellow not an inch of way.
I rule and regulate the course, excite,
Restrain ; because the whole machine should march
Impelled by those diversely-moving parts,
Each blind to aught beside its little bent.
Out of the turnings round and round inside
Comes that straightforward world-advance I want,
And none of them supposes God wants too,
And gets through just their hinderance and my help.
I think that to have held the balance straight
For twenty years, say, weighing claim and claim,
And giving each its due, no less, no more, —
This was good service to humanity,
Right usage of my power in head and heart,
And reasonable piety beside.
Keep those three points in mind while judging me.
You stand, perhaps, for some one man, not men ;
Represent this or the other interest,
Nor mind the general welfare ; so, impugn

My practice, and dispute my value : why ?
You man of faith, I did not tread the world
Into a paste, and thereof make a smooth
Uniform mound whereon to plant your flag,
The lily-white, above the blood and brains ;
Nor yet did I, you man of faithlessness,
So roll things to the level which you love,
That you could stand at ease there, and survey
The universal Nothing undisgraced
By pert obtrusion of some old church-spire
I' the distance. Neither friend would I content ;
Nor, as the world were simply meant for him,
Thrust out his fellow, and mend God's mistake.
Why, you two fools, — my dear friends all the same, —
Is it some change o' the world, and nothing else,
Contents you ? Should whatever was, not be ?
How thanklessly you view things ! There's the root
Of the evil, source of the entire mistake :
You see no worth i' the world, nature, and life,
Unless we change what is to what may be ;
Which means, — may be i' the brain of one of you !

"Reject what is?" — all capabilities, —
Nay, you may style them chances if you choose, —
All chances, then, of happiness that lie
Open to anybody that is born,
Tumbles into this life and out again, —
All that may happen, good and evil too,
I' the space between, to each adventurer
Upon this 'sixty, Anno Domini:
A life to live, — and such a life! a world
To learn, one's lifetime in, — and such a world!
How ever did the foolish pass for wise
By calling life a burden, man a fly
Or worm, or what's most insignificant?
"O littleness of man!" deplores the bard;
And then, for fear the Powers should punish him,
"O grandeur of the visible universe
Our human littleness contrasts withal!
O sun, O moon, ye mountains, and thou sea,
Thou emblem of immensity, thou this,
That, and the other! — what impertinence
In man to eat and drink and walk about,

And have his little notions of his own,
The while some wave sheds foam upon the shore!"
First of all, 'tis a lie some three times thick:
The bard, — this sort of speech being poetry, —
The bard puts mankind well outside himself,
And then begins instructing them: "This way
I and my friend the sea conceive of you!
What would you give to think such thoughts as ours
Of you and the sea together?" Down they go
On the humbled knees of them: at once they draw
Distinction, recognize no mate of theirs
In one, despite his mock humility,
So plain a match for what he plays with. Next
The turn of the great ocean-playfellow,
When the bard, leaving Bond Street very far
From ear-shot, cares not to ventriloquize,
But tells the sea its home-truths: "You, my match?
You, all this terror and immensity,
And what not? Shall I tell you what you are?
Just fit to hitch into a stanza: so
Wake up and set in motion who's asleep

O' the other side of you, in England, else
Unaware, as folk pace their Bond Street now,
Somebody here despises them so much !
Between us, — they are the ultimate ! to them
And their perception go these lordly thoughts :
Since what were ocean, — mane and tail to boot, —
Mused I not here, how make thoughts thinkable ?
Start forth my stanza, and astound the world !
Back, billows, to your insignificance !
Deep, you are done with ! "

Learn, my gifted friend,
There are two things i' the world, still wiser folk
Accept, — intelligence and sympathy.
You pant about unutterable power
I' the ocean, all you feel but cannot speak ?
Why, that's the plainest speech about it all :
You did not feel what was not to be felt.
Well, then, all else but what man feels is nought, —
The wash o' the liquor that o'erbrims the cup
Called man, and runs to waste adown his side,

Perhaps to feed a cataract : who cares ?
I'll tell you : all the more I know mankind,
The more I thank God, like my grandmother,
For making me a little lower than
The angels, honor-clothed and glory-crowned.
This is the honor, — that no thing I know,
Feel, or conceive, but I can make my own
Somehow, by use of hand or head or heart :
This is the glory, — that in all conceived,
Or felt or known, I recognize a mind
Not mine, but like mine, — for the double joy, —
Making all things for me, and me for Him.
There's folly for you at this time of day !
So think it ! and enjoy your ignorance
Of what — no matter for the worthy's name —
Wisdom set working in a noble heart,
When he, who was earth's best geometer
Up to that time of day, consigned his life
With its results into one matchless book, —
The triumph of the human mind so far,
All in geometry man yet could do, —

And then wrote on the dedication-page,
In place of name the universe applauds,
"But, God, what a geometer art thou!"
I suppose heaven is, through eternity,
The equalizing, ever and anon,
In momentary rapture, great with small,
Omniscience with intelligency, God
With man, — the thunder-glow from pole to pole
Abolishing, a blissful moment-space,
Great cloud alike and small cloud, in one fire, —
As sure to ebb as sure again to flow
When the new receptivity deserves
The new completion. There's the heaven for me.
And I say, therefore, to live out one's life
I' the world here, with the chance — whether by pain
Or pleasure be the process, long or short
The time, august or mean the circumstance
To human eye — of learning how set foot
Decidedly on some one path to heaven,
Touch one point in the circle whence all lines
Lead to the centre equally, — red lines

Or black lines, so they but produce themselves, —
This, I do say, — and here my sermon ends, —
This makes it worth our while to tenderly
Handle a state of things which mend we might,
Mar we may, but which meanwhile helps so far.
Therefore my end is, save society.

" And that's all ? " twangs the never-railing taunt
O' the foe. " No novelty, creativeness,
Mark of the master that renews the age ? "
" Nay, all that ? " rather will demur my judge
I look to hear some day, — nor friend nor foe, —
" Did you attain, then, to perceive that God
Knew what he undertook when he made things ? "
Ay : that my task was to co-operate
Rather than play the rival, chop and change
The order whence comes all the good we know,
With this, — good's last expression to our sense, —
That there's a further good conceivable
Beyond the utmost earth can realize ;

And, therefore, that to change the agency,
The evil whereby good is brought about, —
Try to make good do good as evil does, —
Were just as if a chemist, wanting white,
And knowing black ingredients bred the dye,
Insisted these, too, should be white forsooth.
Correct the evil, mitigate your best,
Blend mild with harsh, and soften black to gray
If gray may follow with no detriment
To the eventual perfect purity ;
But as for hazarding the main result
By hoping to anticipate one-half
In the intermediate process, — no, my friends !
This bad world I experience and approve :
Your good world, — with no pity, courage, hope,
Fear, sorrow, joy, devotedness, in short,
Which I account the ultimate of man,
Of which there's not one day nor hour but brings,
In flower or fruit, some sample of success
Out of this same society I save, —

None of it for me! That I might have none,
I rapped your tampering knuckles twenty years:
Such was the task imposed me, such my end.

Now for the means thereto. Ah, confidence!
Keep we together, or part company?
This is the critical minute. "Such my end?"
Certainly: how could it be otherwise?
Can there be question which was the right task, —
To save, or to destroy, society?
Why, even prove, that, by some miracle,
Destruction were the proper work to choose,
And that a torch best remedies what's wrong
I' the temple, whence the long procession wound
Of powers and beauties, earth's achievements all, —
The human strength that strove and overthrew;
The human love, that, weak itself, crowned strength;
The instinct, crying, "God is whence I came!"
The reason laying down the law, "And such
His will i' the world must be!" the leap and shout
Of genius, "For I hold his very thoughts,

The meaning of the mind of him!" nay, more,
The ingenuities; each active force,
That, turning in a circle on itself,
Looks neither up nor down, but keeps the spot,
Mere creature-like, and, for religion, works,
Works only and works ever, makes and shapes
And changes, still wrings more of good from less,
Still stamps some bad out where was worst before,
So leaves the handiwork, the act and deed,
Were it but house and land and wealth, to show
Here was a creature perfect in the kind, —
Whether as bee, beaver, or behemoth,
What's the importance? he has done his work
For work's sake, worked well, earned a creature's praise, —
I say, concede that same fane, whence deploys,
Age after age, all this humanity,
Diverse but ever dear, out of the dark
Behind the altar into the broad day
By the portal; enter, and concede there mocks
Each lover of free motion and much space

A perplexed length of apse and aisle and nave, —
Pillared roof and carved screen, and what care I? —
That irk the movement, and impede the march;
Nay, possibly, bring flat upon his nose
At some odd break-neck angle, by some freak
Of old-world artistry, that personage,
Who, could he but have kept his skirts from grief,
And, catching at the hooks and crooks about,
Had stepped out on the daylight of our time
Plainly the man of the age, — still, still, I bar
Excessive conflagration in the case.
"Shake the flame freely!" shout the multitude:
The architect approves I stuck my torch
Inside a good stout lantern, hung its light
Above the hooks and crooks, and ended so.
To save society was well: the means
Whereby to save it, — there begins the doubt
Permitted you, imperative on me.
Were mine the best means? Did I work aright
With powers appointed me? since powers denied me
Concern me nothing.

Well, my work, reviewed
Fairly, leaves more hope than discouragement.
First, there's the deed done : what I found I leave ;
What tottered I kept stable : if it stand
One month without sustainment, still thank me,
The twenty years' sustainer ! Now, observe,
Sustaining is no brilliant self-display,
Like knocking down, or even setting up.
Much bustle these necessitate ; and still,
To vulgar eye, the mightier of the myth
Is Hercules, who substitutes his own
For Atlas' shoulder, and supports the globe
A whole day, — not the passive and obscure
Atlas who bore ere Hercules was born,
And is to go on bearing that same load
When Hercules turns ash on Œta's top.
'Tis the transition-stage, the tug and strain,
That strike men : standing still is stupid-like.
My pressure was too constant on the whole
For any part's eruption into space
'Mid sparkles, crackling, and much praise of me.

I saw, that, in the ordinary life,
Many of the little makes a mass of men
Important beyond greatness here and there ;
As certainly as, in life exceptional,
When old things terminate, and new commence,
A solitary great man's worth the world.
God takes the business into his own hands
At such time : who creates the novel flower
Contrives to guard, and give it breathing-room :
I merely tend the corn-field, care for crop,
And weed no acre thin to let emerge
What prodigy may stifle there perchance ;
No, though my eye have noted where he lurks.
Oh those mute myriads that spoke loud to me ! —
The eyes that craved to see the light ; the mouths
That sought the daily bread, and nothing more ;
The hands that supplicated exercise ;
Men that had wives, and women that had babes ;
And all these making suit to only live !
Was I to turn aside from husbandry,
Leave hope of harvest for the corn, my care,

To play at horticulture, rear some rose
Or poppy into perfect leaf and bloom,
When, 'mid the furrows, up was pleased to sprout
Some man, cause, system, special interest
I ought to study, stop the world meanwhile?
"But I am liberty, philanthropy,
Enlightenment, or patriotism, the power
Whereby you are to stand or fall!" cries each:
"Mine, and mine only, be the flag you flaunt!"
And when I venture to object, "Meantime,
What of yon myriads with no flag at all,—
My crop, which who flaunts flag must tread across?"
"Now, this it is to have a puny mind!"
Admire my mental prodigies: "down, down,
Ever at home o' the level and the low,
There bides he brooding! Could he look above,
With less of the owl, and more of the eagle eye,
He'd see there's no way helps the little cause
Like the attainment of the great. Dare first
The chief emprise; dispel yon cloud between
The sun and us; nor fear, that, though our heads

Find earlier warmth and comfort from his ray,
What lies about our feet, the multitude,
Will fail of benefaction presently.
Come, now, let each of us a while cry truce
To special interests; make common cause
Against the adversary; or perchance
Mere dullard to his own plain interest!
Which of us will you choose? Since needs must be
Some one o' the warring causes you incline
To hold, i' the main, has right, and should prevail,
Why not adopt and give it prevalence?
Choose strict faith or lax incredulity, —
King, caste, and cultus, — or the rights of man,
Sovereignty of each Proudhon o'er himself,
And all that follows in just consequence;
Go free the stranger from a foreign yoke;
Or stay, concentrate energy at home;
Succeed! — when he deserves, the stranger will;
Comply with the great nation's impulse, print
By force of arms, — since reason pleads in vain,
And, 'mid the sweet compulsion, pity weeps, —

Hohenstiel-Schwangau on the universe!
Snub the Great Nation, cure the impulsive itch
With smartest fillip on a restless nose
Was ever launched by thumb and finger! Bid
Hohenstiel-Schwangau first repeal the tax
On pig-tails and pomatum, and then mind
Abstruser matters for next century!
Is your choice made? Why, then, act up to choice!
Leave the illogical touch, now here, now there,
I' the way of work; the tantalizing help
First to this, then the other opposite;
The blowing hot and cold, sham policy,
Sure ague of the mind, and nothing more,
Disease of the perception or the will,
That fain would hide in a fine name! Your choice;
Speak it out, and condemn yourself thereby!"

Well, Leicester Square is not the Residenz:
Instead of shrugging shoulder, turning friend
The deaf ear with a wink to the police,
I'll answer — by a question, wisdom's mode.

How many years, o' the average, do men
Live in this world? Some score, say computists.
Quintuple me that term, and give mankind
The likely hundred, and with all my heart
I'll take your task upon me, work your way,
Concentrate energy on some one cause;
Since, counsellor, I also have my cause,
My flag, my faith in its effect, my hope
In its eventful triumph for the good
O' the world. And once upon a time, when I
Was like all you, — mere voice, and nothing more, —
Myself took wings, soared sunward, and thence sang,
"Look where I live i' the loft! come up to me,
Groundlings, nor grovel longer! gain this height,
And prove you breathe here better than below!
Why, what emancipation far and wide
Will follow in a trice! They too can soar,
Each tenant of the earth's circumference
Claiming to elevate humanity;
They also must attain such altitude,
Live in the luminous circle that surrounds

The planet, not the leaden orb itself.
Press out, each point, from surface to yon verge
Which one has gained and guaranteed your realm ' "
Ay, still my fragments wander, music-fraught,
Sighs of the soul, mine once, mine now, and mine
Forever ! Crumbled arch, crushed aqueduct,
Alive with tremors in the shaggy growth
Of wildwood, crevice-sown, that triumphs there,
Imparting exultation to the hills !
Sweep of the swath when only the winds walk,
And waft my words above the grassy sea
Under the blinding blue that basks o'er Rome, —
Hear ye not still, " Be Italy again " ?
And ye — what strikes the panic to your heart ?
Decrepit council-chambers, where some lamp
Drives the unbroken black three paces off
From where the graybeards huddle in debate,
Dim cowls and capes, and midmost glimmers one
Like tarnished gold, and what they say is doubt,
And what they think is fear, and what suspends
The breath in them is not the plaster-patch

Time disengages from the painted wall
Where Raphael moulderingly bids adieu,
Nor tick of the insect turning tapestry
To dust, which a queen's finger traced of old;
But some word, resonant, redoubtable,
Of who once felt upon his head a hand
Whereof the head now apprehends his foot.
"Light in Rome, law in Rome, and liberty
O' the soul in Rome, — the free Church, the free State!
Stamp out the nature that's best typified
By its embodiment in Peter's dome,
The scorpion-body with the greedy pair
Of outstretched nippers, either colonnade
Agape for the advance of heads and hearts!"
There's one cause for you! — one, and only one;
For I am vocal through the universe,
I' the work-shop, manufactory, exchange
And market-place, seaport and custom-house,
O' the frontier: listen if the echoes die: —
"Unfettered commerce! Power to speak and hear,
And print and read! The universal vote!

Its rights for labor!" This, with much beside,
I spoke when I was voice, and nothing more,
But altogether such a one as you
My censors. "Voice, and nothing more, indeed!"
Re-echoes round me: "that's the censure; there's
Involved the ruin of you soon or late!
Voice, — when its promise beat the empty air;
And nothing more, — when solid earth's your stage,
And we desiderate performance. deed
For word, the realizing all you dreamed
In the old days: now, for deed, we find at door
O' the council-chamber posted, mute as mouse,
Hohenstiel-Schwangau, sentry and safeguard
O' the graybeards all a-chuckle, cowl to cape,
Who challenge Judas — that's endearment's style —
To stop their mouths, or let escape grimace,
While they keep cursing Italy and him.
The power to speak, hear, print, and read, is ours?
Ay, we learn where and how, when clapped inside
A convict-transport bound for cool Cayenne!
The universal vote we have; its urn

We also have, where votes drop, fingered o'er
By the universal prefect. Say, Trade's free,
And Toil turned master out o' the slave it was:
What then? These feed man's stomach; but his sou
Craves finer fare, nor lives by bread alone,
As somebody says somewhere. Hence you stand
Proved and recorded either false or weak,
Faulty in promise or performance: which?"
Neither, I hope. Once pedestalled on earth,
To act, not speak, I found earth was not air.
I saw that multitude of mine, and not
The nakedness and nullity of air,
Fit only for a voice to float in free.
Such eyes I saw that craved the light alone!
Such mouths that wanted bread, and nothing else!
Such hands that supplicated handiwork!
Men with the wives, and women with the babes;
Yet all these pleading just to live, not die!
Did I believe one whit less in belief,
Take truth for falsehood, wish the voice revoked
That told the truth to heaven for earth to hear?

No: this should be, and shall; but when and how?
At what expense to these who average
Your twenty years of life, my computists?
"Not bread alone," but bread before all else,
For these: the bodily want serve first, said I:
If earth-space and the lifetime help not here,
Where is the good of body having been?
But helping body, if we somewhat balk
The soul of finer fare, such food's to find
Elsewhere and afterward, — all indicates,
Even this selfsame fact, — that soul can starve,
Yet body still exist its twenty years:
While, stint the body, there's an end at once
O' the revel in the fancy that Rome's free,
And superstition's fettered, and one prints
Whate'er one pleases, and who pleases reads
The same, and speaks out, and is spoken to;
And divers hundred thousand fools may vote
A vote untampered with by one wise man,
And so elect Barabbas deputy
In lieu of his concurrent. I, who trace

The purpose written on the face of things
For my behoof and guidance (whoso needs
No such sustainment, sees beneath my signs,
Proves what I take for writing, penmanship,
Scribble, and flourish with no sense for me
O' the sort I solemnly go spelling out :
Let him ! there's certain work of mine to show
Alongside his work ; which gives warranty
Of shrewder vision in the workman, judge !), —
I, who trace Providence without a break
I' the plan of things, drop plumb on this plain print
Of an intention with a view to good,
That man is made in sympathy with man
At outset of existence, so to speak ;
But in dissociation, more and more,
Man from his fellow, as their lives advance
In culture : still humanity, that's born
A mass, keeps flying off, fining away
Ever into a multitude of points,
And ends in isolation, each from each :
Peerless above i' the sky, the pinnacle ;

Absolute contact, fusion, all below
At the base of being. How comes this about? —
This stamp of God, characterizing man,
And nothing else but man, in the universe, —
That while he feels with man (to use man's speech)
I' the little things of life, — its fleshly wants
Of food and rest and health and happiness,
Its simplest spirit-motions, loves and hates,
Hopes, fears, soul-cravings on the ignoblest scale,
O' the fellow-creature, — owns the bond at base, —
He tends to freedom and divergency
In the upward progress, plays the pinnacle
When life's at greatest? (grant again the phrase;
Because there's neither great nor small in life.)
"Consult thou for thy kind that have the eyes
To see, the mouths to eat, the hands to work,
Men with the wives, and women with the babes,"
Prompts Nature. "Care thou for thyself alone
I' the conduct of the mind God made thee with;
Think as if man had never thought before;
Act as if all creation hung attent

On the acting of such faculty as thine,
To take prime pattern from thy masterpiece."
Nature prompts also: neither law obeyed
To the uttermost by any heart and soul
We know or have in record; both of them
Acknowledged blindly by whatever man
We ever knew or heard of in this world.
"Will you have why and wherefore, and the fact
Made plain as pikestaff?" modern science asks.
"That mass man sprung from was a jelly-lump
Once on a time: he kept an after-course
Through fish and insect, reptile, bird, and beast,
Till he attained to be an ape at last,
Or last but one. And if this doctrine shock
In aught the natural pride" — Friend, banish fear,
The natural humility replies.
Do you suppose, even I, poor potentate,
Hohenstiel-Schwangau, who once ruled the roast, —
I was born able at all points to ply
My tools? or did I have to learn my trade?
Practise as exile ere perform as prince?

The world knows something of my ups and downs;
But grant me time, give me the management
And manufacture of a model me, —
Me fifty-fold, a prince without a flaw, —
Why, there's no social grade, the sordidest,
My embryo potentate should blink and 'scape.
King, all the better he was cobbler once,
He should know, sitting on the throne, how tastes
Life to who sweeps the doorway. But life's hard,
Occasion rare: you cut probation short,
And, being half instructed, on the stage
You shuffle through your part as best you may,
And bless your stars, as I do. God takes time.
I like the thought he should have lodged me once
I' the hole, the cave, the hut, the tenement,
The mansion, and the palace; made me learn
The feel o' the first, before I found myself
Loftier i' the last, not more emancipate:
From first to last of lodging, I was I,
And not at all the place that harbored me.
Do I refuse to follow farther yet

I' the backwardness ; repine if tree and flower,
Mountain or streamlet, were my dwelling-place
Before I gained enlargement, grew mollusk ?
As well account that way for many a thrill
Of kinship I confess to with the powers
Called Nature : animate, inanimate,
In parts or in the whole, there's something there
Man-like, that, somehow, meets the man in me.
My pulse goes altogether with the heart
O' the Persian, that old Xerxes, when he stayed
His march to conquest of the world, a day
I' the desert, for the sake of one superb
Plane-tree which queened it there in solitude ;
Giving her neck its necklace, and each arm
Its armlet, suiting soft waist, snowy side,
With cincture and apparel. Yes, I lodged
In those successive tenements ; perchance
Taste yet the straitness of them while I stretch
Limb, and enjoy new liberty the more.
And some abodes are lost or ruinous ;
Some patched up and pieced out, and so transformed,

They still accommodate the traveller
His day of life-time. Oh! you count the links;
Descry no bar of the unbroken man?
Yes; and who welds a lump of ore, suppose
He likes to make a chain, and not a bar,
And reach by link on link, link small, link large,
Out to the due length, — why, there's forethought still
Outside o' the series, forging at one end;
While, at the other, there's — no matter what
The kind of critical intelligence
Believing that last link had last but one
For parent, and no link was, first of all,
Fitted to anvil, hammered into shape.
Else I accept the doctrine, and deduce
This duty, — that I recognize mankind
In all its height and depth, and length and breadth.
Mankind i' the main have little wants, not large:
I, being of will and power to help, i' the main,
Mankind, must help the least wants first. My friend,
That is, my foe, without such power and will,
May plausibly concentrate all he wields,

And do his best at helping some large want,
Exceptionally noble cause, that's seen
Subordinate enough from where I stand.
As he helps, I helped once, when like himself,
Unable to help better, work more wide;
And so would work with heart and hand to-day,
Did only computists confess a fault,
And multiply the single score by five, —
Five only, — give man's life its hundred years.
Change life, in me shall follow change to match.
Time were, then, to work here, there, everywhere,
By turns, and try experiment at ease!
Full time to mend as well as mar: why wait
The slow and sober uprise all around
O' the building? Let us run up, right to roof,
Some sudden marvel, piece of perfectness,
And testify what we intend the whole!
Is the world losing patience? "Wait!" say we:
"There's time: no generation needs to die
Unsolaced: you've a century in store!"
But no: I sadly let the voices wing

Their way i' the upper vacancy, nor test
Truth on this solid as I promised once.
Well, and what is there to be sad about?
The world's the world, life's life, and nothing else.
'Tis part of life, a property to prize,
That those o' the higher sort engaged i' the world
Should fancy they can change its ill to good,
Wrong to right, ugliness to beauty; find
Enough success in fancy turning fact
To keep the sanguine kind in countenance,
And justify the hope that busies them:
Failure enough, — to who can follow change
Beyond their vision; see new good prove ill
I' the consequence; see blacks and whites of life
Shift square indeed, but leave the checkered face
Unchanged i' the main, — failure enough for such
To bid ambition keep the whole from change
As their best service. I hope nought beside.
No, my brave thinkers, whom I recognize
Gladly, myself the first, as, in a sense,
All that our world's worth, flower and fruit of man!

Such minds myself award supremacy
Over the common insignificance,
When only Mind's in question : Body bows
To quite another government, you know.
Be Kant crowned king o' the castle in the air !
Hans Slouch — his own and children's mouths to feed
I' the hovel on the ground — wants meat, nor chews
"The Pure Critique of Reason" in exchange.
But, now, suppose I could allow your claims,
And quite change life to please you : would it please ?
Would life comport with change, and still be life ?
Ask, now, a doctor for a remedy :
There's his prescription. Bid him point you out
Which of the five or six ingredients saves
The sick man. "Such the efficacity ?
Then why not dare and do things in one dose
Simple and pure, all virtue, no alloy
Of the idle drop and powder ?" What's his word ?
The efficacity, neat, were neutralized :
It wants dispersing and retarding ; nay,
Is put upon its mettle, plays its part

Precisely through such hinderance everywhere,
Finds some mysterious give and take i' the case,
Some gain by opposition, he foregoes
Should he unfetter the medicament.
So with this thought of yours that fain would work
Free in the world : it wants just what it finds, —
The ignorance, stupidity, the hate,
Envy and malice and uncharitableness,
That bar your passage, break the flow of you
Down from those happy heights where many a cloud
Combined to give you birth, and bid you be
The royalest of rivers : on you glide
Silverly till you reach the summit-edge ;
Then over, on to all that ignorance,
Stupidity, hate, envy, bluffs, and blocks,
Posted to fret you into foam and noise.
What of it ? Up you mount in minute mist,
And bridge the chasm that crushed your quietude,
A spirit-rainbow, earth-born jewelry
Outsparkling the insipid firmament
Blue above Terni and its orange-trees.

Do not mistake me! You, too, have your rights.
Hans must not burn Kant's house above his head
Because he cannot understand Kant's book;
And still less must Hans' pastor burn Kant's self
Because Kant understands some books too well.
But, justice seen to on this little point,
Answer me, is it manly, is it sage,
To stop and struggle with arrangements here
It took so many lives, so much of toil,
To tinker up into efficiency?
Can't you contrive to operate at once —
Since time is short, and art is long — to show
Your quality i' the world, whate'er you boast,
Without this fractious call on folks to crush
The world together just to set you free,
Admire the capers you will cut perchance,
Nor mind the mischief to your neighbors?

"Age!
Age and experience, bring discouragement,"
You taunt me: I maintain the opposite.

Am I discouraged, who — perceiving health,
Strength, beauty, as they tempt the eye of soul,
Are uncombinable with flesh and blood —
Resolve to let my body live its best,
And leave my soul what better yet may be,
Or not be, in this life or afterward? —
In either fortune, wiser than who waits
Till magic art procure a miracle.
In virtue of my very confidence
Mankind ought to outgrow its babyhood,
I prescribe rocking, deprecate rough hands,
While thus the cradle holds it past mistake.
Indeed, my task's the harder, — equable
Sustainment everywhere, all strain, no push, —
Whereby friends credit me with indolence,
Apathy, hesitation. "Stand stock-still
If able to move briskly? 'All a-strain,' —
So must we compliment your passiveness?
Sound asleep, rather!"

Just the judgment passed

Upon a statue, luckless like myself,
I saw at Rome once! 'Twas some artist's whim
To cover all the accessories close
I' the group, and leave you only Laocoön,
With neither sons nor serpents to denote
The purpose of his gesture. Then a crowd
Was called to try the question; criticise
Wherefore such energy of legs and arms,
Nay, eyeballs starting from the socket. One, —
I give him leave to write my history, —
Only one, said, "I think the gesture strives
Against some obstacle we cannot see."
All the rest made their minds up: "'Tis a yawn
Of sheer fatigue subsiding to repose;
The statue's 'Somnolency' clear enough!"

There, my arch stranger-friend, my audience both
And arbitress, you have one-half your wish,
At least, — you know the thing I tried to do
All, so far, to my praise and glory; all
Told as befits the self-apologist,

Who ever promises a candid sweep
And clearance of those errors, miscalled crimes,
None knows more, none laments so much, as he,
And ever rises from confession, proved
A god whose fault was — trying to be man.
Just so, fair judge, — if I read smile aright, —
I condescend to figure in your eyes
As biggest heart and best of Europe's friends,
And hence my failure. God will estimate
Success one day; and, in the mean time, — you!

I dare say there's some fancy of the sort
Frolicking round this final puff I send
To die up yonder in the ceiling-rose, —
Some consolation-stakes, we losers win!
A plague of the return to "I — I — I
Did this, meant that, hoped, feared, the other thing!"
Autobiography, adieu! The rest
Shall make amends, be pure blame, history
And falsehood; not the ineffective truth,
But Thiers-and-Victor-Hugo exercise.

Hear what I never was, but might have been
I' the better world where goes tobacco-smoke!
Here lie the dozen volumes of my life:
(Did I say "lie"? the pregnant word will serve.)
Cut on to the concluding chapter, though;
Because the little hours begin to strike.
Hurry Thiers-Hugo to the labor's end!

Something like this the unwritten chapter reads.

Exemplify the situation thus!
Hohenstiel-Schwangau, being, no dispute,
Absolute mistress, chose the Assembly, first,
To serve her; chose this man, its president
Afterward, to serve also, — specially
To see that they did service one and all.
And now the proper term of years was out
When the head servant must vacate his place;
And nothing lay so patent to the world
As that his fellow-servants one and all
Were — mildly make we mention — knaves or fools,

Each of them with his purpose flourished full
I' the face of you by word and impudence,
Or filtered slyly out by nod and wink,
And nudge upon your sympathetic rib;
That not one minute more did knave or fool
Mean to keep faith, and serve as he had sworn
Hohenstiel-Schwangau, once that head away.
Why did such swear, except to get the chance,
When time should ripen and confusion bloom,
Of putting Hohenstielers-Schwangauese
To the true use of human property?
Restoring souls and bodies, — this to pope,
And that to king, that other to his planned
Perfection of a share-and-share-alike,
That other still to empire absolute
In shape of the head servant's very self
Transformed to master whole and sole: each scheme
Discussible, concede one circumstance, —
That each scheme's parent were, beside himself,
Hohenstiel-Schwangau, not her serving-man
Sworn to do service in the way she chose

Rather than his way, — way superlative,
Only — by some infatuation — his
And his and his, and every one's but hers
Who stuck to just the Assembly and the head.
I make no doubt the head, too, had his dream
Of doing sudden duty swift and sure
On all that heap of untrustworthiness ;
Catching each vaunter of the villany
He meant to perpetrate when time was ripe,
Once the head servant fairly out of doors ;
And caging here a knave, and there a fool,
Cry, " Mistress of the servants, these and me,
Hohenstiel-Schwangau ! I, their trusty head,
Pounce on a pretty scheme concocting here,
That's stopped, extinguished, by my vigilance.
Your property is safe again ; but mark !
Safe in these hands, not yours, who lavish trust
Too lightly. Leave my hands their charge a while !
I know your business better than yourself :
Let me alone about it ! Some fine day,
Once we are rid of the embarrassment,

You shall look up and see your longings crowned!"
Such fancy may have tempted to be false;
But this man chose truth, and was wiser so.
He recognized, that, for great minds i' the world,
There is no trial like the appropriate one
Of leaving little minds their liberty
Of littleness to blunder on through life;
Now aiming at right end by foolish means,
Now at absurd achievement through the aid
Of good and wise means, — trial to acquiesce
In folly's life-long privilege, though with power
To do the little minds the good they need,
Despite themselves, by just abolishing
Their right to play the part and fill the place
I' the scheme of things He schemed who made alike
Great minds and little minds, saw use for each.
Could the orb sweep those puny particles
It just half-lights at distance, hardly leads
I' the leash; sweep out each speck of them from space
They anticise in with their days and nights
And whirlings round and dancings off, forsooth,

And all that fruitless individual life
One cannot lend a beam to but they spoil;
Sweep them into itself, and so, one star,
Preponderate henceforth i' the heritage
Of heaven! No! in less senatorial phrase,
The man endured to help, not save outright,
The multitude, by substituting him
For them, his knowledge, will, and way, for God's;
Not change the world, such as it is, and was,
And will be, for some other, suiting all
Except the purpose of the Maker. No!
He saw that weakness, wickedness, will be,
And therefore should be; that the perfect man,
As we account perfection, — at most pure
O' the special gold, whate'er the form it take,
Head-work or heart-work, fined and thrice-refined
I' the crucible of life, whereto the powers
Of the refiner, one and all, were flung
To feed the flame their utmost, — e'en that block,
He holds out breathlessly triumphant, — breaks
Into some poisonous ore, its opposite,

At the very purest, so compensating
The Adversary — what if we believe? —
For earlier stern exclusion of his stuff.
See the sage, with the hunger for the truth,
And see his system that's all true, except
The one weak place that's stanchioned by a lie!
The moralist, that walks with head erect
I' the crystal charity of air so long,
Until a stumble, and the man's one mire!
Philanthropy undoes the social knot
With axe-edge; makes love room 'twixt head and trunk!
Religion — but enough: the thing's too clear!
Well, if these sparks break out i' the greenest tree,
Our topmost of performance, yours and mine,
What will be done i' the dry ineptitude
Of ordinary mankind, bark and bole,
All seems ashamed of but their mother-earth?
Therefore throughout his term of servitude
He did the appointed service, and forbore
Extraneous action that were duty else,
Done by some other servant, idle now

Or mischievous: no matter, each his own, —
Own task, and, in the end, own praise or blame!
He suffered them strut, prate, and brag their best;
Squabble at odds on every point save one,
And there shake hands; agree to trifle time;
Obstruct advance with, each, his cricket-cry,
"Wait till the head be off the shoulders here!
Then comes my king, my pope, my autocrat,
My socialist republic to her own, —
To wit, that property of only me,
Hohenstiel-Schwangau, who conceits herself
Free, forsooth, and expects I keep her so!" —
Nay, suffered when, perceiving with dismay
His silence paid no tribute to that noise,
They turned on him. "Dumb menace in that mouth,
Malice in that unstridulosity!
He cannot but intend some stroke of state
Shall signalize his passage into peace
Out of the creaking; hinder transference
O' the Hohenstielers-Schwangauese to king,
Pope, autocrat, or socialist republic! That's

Exact the cause his lips unlocked would cry!
Therefore be stirring; brave, beard, bully him!
Dock, by the million, of its friendly joints,
The electoral body short at once! who did
May do again, and undo us beside.
Wrest from his hands the sword for self-defence,
The right to parry any thrust in play
We peradventure please to meditate!"
And so forth; creak, creak, creak: and ne'er a line
His locked mouth oped the wider, till at last,
O' the long degraded and insulting day,
Sudden the clock told it was judgment-time.
Then he addressed himself to speak indeed
To the fools, not knaves: they saw him walk straight down
Each step of the eminence, as he first engaged,
And stand at last o' the level, — all he swore.
"People, and not the people's varletry, —
This is the task you set myself and these!
Thus I performed my part of it, and thus
They thwarted me throughout, here, here, and here:

Study each instance! yours the loss, not mine.
What they intend now is demonstrable
As plainly: here's such man; and here's such mode
Of making you some other than the thing
You, wisely or unwisely, choose to be,
And only set him up to keep you so.
Do you approve this? Yours the loss, not mine.
Do you condemn it? There's a remedy.
Take me, — who know your mind, and mean your good,
With clearer head and stouter arm than they,
Or you, or, haply, anybody else, —
And make me master for the moment! Choose
What time, what power you trust me with: I, too,
Will choose as frankly ere I trust myself
With time and power: they must be adequate
To the end and aim, since mine the loss, with yours,
If means be wanting: once their worth approved,
Grant them, and I shall forthwith operate —
Ponder it well! — to the extremest stretch
O' the power you trust me; if with unsuccess,
God wills it, and there's nobody to blame."

Whereon the people answered with a shout,
"The trusty one! no tricksters any more!"
How could they other? He was in his place.

What followed? Just what he foresaw, what proved
The soundness of both judgments, — his, o' the knaves
And fools, each trickster with his dupe; and theirs,
The people, in what head and arm should help.
There was uprising, masks dropped, flags unfurled,
Weapons outflourished in the wind, my faith!
Heavily did he let his fist fall plumb
On each perturber of the public peace,
No matter whose the wagging head it broke, —
From bald-pate craft and greed and impudence
Of night-hawk at first chance to prowl and prey
For glory and a little gain beside,
Passing for eagle in the dusk of the age,
To florid head-top, foamy patriotism,
And tribunitial daring, breast laid bare
Through confidence in rectitude, with hand
On private pistol in the pocket: these,

And all the dupes of these, who lent themselves
As dust and feather do to help offence
O' the wind that whirls them at you, then subsides
In safety somewhere, leaving filth afloat,
Annoyance you may brush from eyes and beard, —
These he stopped ; bade the wind's spite howl or whine
Its worst outside the building, wind conceives
Meant to be pulled together, and become
Its natural playground so. What foolishness
Of dust or feather proved importunate,
And fell 'twixt thumb and finger, found them gripe
To detriment of bulk and buoyancy.
Then followed silence and submission. Next
The inevitable comment came on work
And work's cost : he was censured as profuse
Of human life and liberty ; too swift
And thorough his procedure, who had lagged
At the outset, lost the opportunity
Through timid scruples as to right and wrong.
"There's no such certain mark of a small mind"
(So did Sagacity explain the fault)

"As when it needs must square away, and sink
To its own small dimensions, private scale
Of right and wrong, — humanity i' the large,
The right and wrong of the universe, forsooth!
This man addressed himself to guard and guide
Hohenstiel-Schwangau. When the case demands
He frustrate villany in the egg, unhatched,
With easy stamp and minimum of pang
E'en to the punished reptile, 'There's my oath
Restrains my foot,' objects our guide and guard;
'I must leave guardianship and guidance now:
Rather than stretch one handbreath of the law,
I am bound to see it break from end to end.
First show me death i' the body politic;
Then prescribe pill and potion, what may please
Hohenstiel-Schwangau! all is for her sake:
'Twas she ordained my service should be so.
What if the event demonstrate her unwise,
If she unwill the thing she willed before?
I hold to the letter, and obey the bond,
And leave her to perdition loyally.'

Whence followed thrice the expenditure we blame
Of human life and liberty: for want
O' the by-blow came deliberate butcher's-work!"
"Elsewhere go carry your complaint," bade he.
"Least, largest, there's one law for all the minds,
Here or above: be true at any price!
'Tis just o' the great scale that such happy stroke
Of falsehood would be found a failure. Truth
Still stands unshaken at her base by me,
Reigns paramount i' the world, for the large good
O' the long late generations, — I and you
Forgotten like this buried foolishness!
Not so the good I rooted in its grave."

This is why he refused to break his oath;
Rather appealed to the people; gained the power
To act as he thought best; then used it once
For all, no matter what the consequence
To knaves and fools. As thus began his sway,
So, through its twenty years, one rule of right
Sufficed him: govern for the many first,

The poor mean multitude, all mouths and eyes;
Bid the few, better favored in the brain,
Be patient, nor presume on privilege,
Help him, or else be quiet. — never crave
That he help them, — increase, forsooth, the gulf
Yawning so terribly 'twixt mind and mind
I' the world here, which his purpose was to block
At bottom, were it by an inch, and bridge,
If by a filament, no more, at top.
Equalize things a little! And the way
He took to work that purpose out was plain
Enough to intellect and honesty
And — superstition style it if you please,
So long as you allow there was no lack
O' the quality imperative in man —
Reverence. You see deeper? thus saw he,
And, by the light he saw, must walk: how else
Was he to do his part? the man's, with might
And main, and not a faintest touch of fear,
Sure he was in the hand of God, who comes
Before and after, with a work to do

Which no man helps nor hinders. Thus the man, —
So timid when the business was to touch
The uncertain order of humanity,
Imperil, for a problematic cure
Of grievance on the surface, any good
I' the deep of things, dim yet discernible, —
This same man, so irresolute before,
Show him a true excrescence to cut sheer,
A devil's-graft on God's foundation-stone,
Then — no complaint of indecision more!
He wrenched out the whole canker, root and branch,
Deaf to who cried the world would tumble in
At its four corners if he touched a twig.
Witness that lie of lies, arch-infamy,
When the Republic, with all life involved
In just this law, — "Each people rules itself
Its own way, not as any stranger please," —
Turned, and, for first proof she was living, bade
Hohenstiel-Schwangau fasten on the throat
Of the first neighbor that claimed benefit
O' the law herself established: "Hohenstiel

For Hohenstielers! Rome, by parity
Of reasoning, for Romans? That's a jest
Wants proper treatment, — lancet-puncture suits
The proud flesh: Rome ape Hohenstiel forsooth!"
And so the siege and slaughter and success,
Whereof we nothing doubt that Hohenstiel
Will have to pay the price in God's good time;
Which does not always fall on Saturday,
When the world looks for wages. Anyhow,
He found this infamy triumphant. Well,
Sagacity suggested, make this speech: —
"The work was none of mine: suppose wrong wait,
Stand over for redressing? Mine for me;
My predecessors' work on their own head!
Meantime, there's plain advantage, should we leave
Things as we find them. Keep Rome manacled
Hand and foot: no fear of unruliness!
Her foes consent to even seem our friends
So long, no longer. Then there's glory got
I' the boldness and bravado to the world.
The disconcerted world must grin and bear

The old saucy writing, — 'Grunt thereat who may:
So shall things be, for such my pleasure is, —
Hohenstiel-Schwangau.' How that reads in Rome,
I' the capitol where Brennus broke his pate!
And what a flourish for our journalists!"
Only it was nor read nor flourished of,
Since not a moment did such glory stay
Excision of the canker! Out it came,
Root and branch, with much roaring, and some blood,
And plentiful abuse of him from friend
And foe. Who cared? Not Nature, that assuaged
The pain, and set the patient on his legs
Promptly: the better! — had it been the worse,
'Tis Nature you must try conclusions with,
Not he; since nursing canker kills the sick
For certain, while to cut may cure at least.
"Ah," groaned a second time Sagacity,
"Again the little mind, precipitate,
Rash, rude, when even in the right, as here!
The great mind knows the power of gentleness;
Only tries force because persuasion fails.

Had this man, by prelusive trumpet-blast,
Signified, 'Truth and Justice mean to come;
Nay, fast approach your threshold! Ere they knock,
See that the house be set in order, swept
And garnished, windows shut, and doors thrown wide.
The free State comes to visit the free Church:
Receive her! or — or — never mind what else!'
Thus moral suasion heralding brute force,
How had he seen the old abuses die,
And new life kindle here, there, everywhere,
Roused simply by that mild yet potent spell, —
Beyond or beat of drum, or stroke of sword, —
Public opinion!."

"How, indeed?" he asked,
"When all to see, after some twenty years,
Were your own fool-face waiting for the sight,
Faced by as wide a grin from ear to ear
O' the knaves, that, while the fools were waiting, worked
Broke yet another generation's heart, —
'Twenty years' respite helping! Teach your nurse

'Compliance with, before you suck, the teat!'
Find what that means, and meanwhile hold your
tongue!"

Whereof the war came which he knew must be.

Now, this had proved the dry-rot of the race
He ruled o'er, that in the old day, when was need
They fought for their own liberty and life,
Well did they fight, none better: whence such love
Of fighting somehow still for fighting's sake
Against no matter whose the liberty
And life, so long as self-conceit should crow
And clap the wing, while Justice sheathed her claw, —
That what had been the glory of the world,
When thereby came the world's good, grew its plague
Now that the champion-armor, donned to dare
The dragon once, was clattered up and down
Highway and by-path of the world at peace,
Merely to mask marauding, or for sake
O' the shine and rattle that apprised the fields

Hohenstiel-Schwangau was a fighter yet,
And would be till the weary world suppressed
A peccant humor out of fashion now.
Accordingly, the world spoke plain at last;
Promised to punish who next played with arms.

So at his advent, such discomfiture
Taking its true shape of beneficence,
Hohenstiel-Schwangau, half sad and part wise,
Sat: if with wistful eye reverting oft
To each pet weapon rusty on its peg,
Yet with a sigh of satisfaction too,
That, peacefulness become the law, herself
Got the due share of godsends in its train,
Cried shame, and took advantage quietly.
Still, so the dry-rot had been nursed into
Blood. bones, and marrow, that, from worst to best,
All, — clearest brains and soundest hearts, save here,
All had this lie acceptable for law
Plain as the sun at noonday, — "War is best,
Peace is worst; peace we only tolerate

As needful preparation for new war:
War may be for whatever end we will;
Peace only as the proper help thereto.
Such is the law of right and wrong for us,
Hohenstiel-Schwangau; for the other world,
As naturally, quite another law.
Are we content? — the world is satisfied.
Discontent? — then the world must give us leave
Strike right and left to exercise our arm,
Torpid of late, through overmuch repose,
And show its strength is still superlative
At somebody's expense in life or limb:
Which done, let peace succeed, and last a year!"
Such devil's-doctrine was so judged God's law,
We say, when this man stepped upon the stage,
That it had seemed a venial fault at most
Had he once more obeyed Sagacity.
"You come i' the happy interval of peace,
The favorable weariness from war:
Prolong it! — artfully, as if intent
On ending peace as soon as possible.

Quietly so increase the sweets of ease
And safety, so employ the multitude,
Put hod and trowel so in idle hands,
So stuff and stop the wagging jaws with bread,
That Selfishness shall surreptitiously
Do Wisdom's office ; whisper in the ear
Of Hohenstiel-Schwangau, there's a pleasant feel
In being gently forced down, pinioned fast
To the easy arm-chair by the pleading arms
O' the world beseeching her to there abide
Content with all the harm done hitherto,
And let herself be petted in return,
Free to re-wage, in speech and prose and verse,
The old unjust wars, nay, — in verse and prose
And speech, — to vaunt new victories, as vile
A plague o' the future, — so that words suffice
For present comfort, and no deeds denote
That — tired of illimitable line on line
Of boulevard-building, tired o' the theatre
With the tuneful thousand in their thrones above,
For glory of the male intelligence,

And Nakedness in her due niche below,
For illustration of the female use —
She, 'twixt a yawn and sigh, prepares to slip
Out of the arm-chair, wants some blood again
From over the boundary to color up
The sheeny sameness, keep the world aware
Hohenstiel-Schwangau must have exercise
Despite the petting of the universe!
Come, you're a city-builder: what's the way
Wisdom takes, when time needs that she entice
Some fierce tribe, castled on the mountain-peak,
Into the quiet and amenity
O' the meadow-land below? By crying, 'Done
With fight now, down with fortress'? Rather, 'Dare
On, dare ever, not a stone displaced!'
Cries Wisdom, 'Cradle of our ancestors,
Be bulwark; give our children safety still!
Who of our children please may stoop and taste
O' the valley-fatness, unafraid; for why?
At first alarm, they have thy mother-ribs
To run upon for refuge: foes forget

Scarcely what Terror on her vantage-coigne,
Couchant supreme among the powers of air,
Watches — prepared to pounce — the country wide!
Meanwhile the encouraged valley holds its own,
From the first hut's adventure in descent,
Half home, half hiding-place, to dome and spire
Befitting the assured metropolis:
Nor means offence to the fort which caps the crag,
All undismantled of a turret-stone,
And bears the banner-pole that creaks at times,
Embarrassed by the old emblazonment,
When festal days are to commemorate.
Otherwise left untenanted, no doubt,
Since, never fear, our myriads from below
Would rush, if needs were, man the walls once more,
Renew the exploits of the earlier time
At moment's notice! But, till notice sound,
Inhabit we in ease and opulence!'
And so, till one day thus a notice sounds,
Not trumpeted, but in a whisper-gust
Fitfully playing through mute city streets

At midnight weary of day's feast and game, —
'Friends, your famed fort's a ruin past repair!
Its use is, to proclaim it had a use
Stolen away long since. Climb to study there
How to paint barbican and battlement
I' the scenes of our new theatre! We fight
Now — by forbidding neighbors to sell steel
Or buy wine, not by blowing out their brains!
Moreover, while we let time sap the strength
O' the walls omnipotent in menace once,
Neighbors would seem to have prepared surprise;
Run up defences in a mushroom growth,
For all the world like what we boasted: brief, —
Hohenstiel-Schwangau's policy is peace!'"

Ay, so Sagacity advised him filch
Folly from fools; handsomely substitute
The dagger o' lath, while gay they sang and danced
For that long dangerous sword they liked to feel,
Even at feast-time, clink and make friends start.
No! he said, "Hear the truth, and bear the truth,

And bring the truth to bear on all you are
And do, assured that only good comes thence,
Whate'er the shape good take! While I have rule,
Understand! — war for war's sake, war for the sake
O' the good war gets you as war's sole excuse,
Is damnable, and damned shall be. You want
Glory? Why, so do I, and so does God.
Where is it found, — in this paraded shame, —
One particle of glory? Once you warred
For liberty against the world, and won:
There was the glory. Now you fain would war
Because the neighbor prospers overmuch;
Because there has been silence half an hour,
Like heaven on earth, without a cannon-shot
Announcing Hohenstielers-Schwangauese
Are minded to disturb the jubilee;
Because the loud tradition echoes faint,
And who knows but posterity may doubt
If the great deeds were ever done at all,
Much less believe, were such to do again,
So the event would follow: therefore prove

The old power at the expense of somebody!
O Glory! — gilded bubble, bard and sage
So nickname rightly, — would thy dance endure
One moment, would thy mocking make believe
Only one upturned eye thy ball was gold,
Hadst thou less breath to buoy thy vacancy
Than a whole multitude expends in praise,
Less range for roaming than from head to head
Of a whole people? Flit, fall, fly again;
Only fix never where the resolute hand
May prick thee, prove the lie thou art, at once!
Give me real intellect to reason with,
No multitude, no entity that apes
One wise man, being but a million fools!
How and whence wishest glory, thou wise one?
Wouldst get it — didst thyself guide Providence —
By stinting of his due each neighbor round
In strength and knowledge and dexterity,
So as to have thy littleness grow large
By all those somethings once, turned nothings now,
As children make a molehill mountainous

By scooping out the plain into a trench,
And saving so their favorite from approach?
Quite otherwise the cheery game of life,
True yet mimetic warfare, whereby man
Does his best with his utmost, and so ends
The victor most of all in fair defeat.
Who thinks, — would he have no one think beside?
Who knows, who does, — must other learning die,
And action perish? Why, our giant proves
No better than a dwarf, with rivalry
Prostrate around him. 'Let the whole race stand
And try conclusions fairly!' he cries first.
Show me the great man would engage his peer
Rather by grinning, 'Cheat, thy gold is brass!'
Than granting, 'Perfect piece of purest ore!
Still is it less good mintage, this of mine?'
Well, and these right and sound results of soul
I' the strong and healthy one wise man, — shall such
Be vainly sought for, scornfully renounced
I' the multitude that make the entity, —
The people? — to what purpose, if no less,

In power and purity of soul, below
The reach of the unit than in multiplied
Might of the body, vulgarized the more,
Above, in thick and threefold brutishness?
See! you accept such one wise man, myself:
Wiser or less wise, still I operate
From my own stock of wisdom, nor exact
Of other sort of natures you admire,
That whoso rhymes a sonnet pays a tax,
Who paints a landscape dips brush at his cost,
Who scores a septet true for strings and wind
Mulcted must be: else how should I impose
Properly, attitudinize aright,
Did such conflicting claims as these divert
Hohenstiel-Schwangau from observing me?
Therefore what I find facile, you be sure,
With effort or without it, you shall dare, —
You, I aspire to make my better self,
And truly the Great Nation. No more war
For war's sake, then! and — seeing wickedness
Springs out of folly — no more foolish dread

O' the neighbor waxing too inordinate
A rival through his gain of wealth and ease!
What? — keep me patient, Powers! — the people here,
Earth presses to her heart, nor owns a pride
Above her pride i' the race all flame and air
And aspiration to the boundless Great,
The incommensurably Beautiful,
Whose very falterings groundward come of flight
Urged by a pinion all too passionate
For heaven and what it holds of gloom and glow:
Bravest of thinkers, bravest of the brave
Doers, exalt in science, rapturous
In art, the — more than all — magnetic race
To fascinate their fellows, mould mankind
Hohenstiel-Schwangau-fashion, — these, what? — these
Will have to abdicate their primacy
Should such a nation sell them steel untaxed,
And such another take itself, on hire
For the natural sen'night, somebody for lord
Unpatronized by me whose back was turned?
Or such another yet would fain build bridge,

Lay rail, drive tunnel, busy its poor self
With its appropriate fancy: so there's — flash —
Hohenstiel-Schwangau up in arms at once!
Genius has somewhat of the infantine;
But of the childish not a touch nor taint,
Except through self-will, which, being foolishness,
Is certain, soon or late, of punishment.
Which Providence avert! — and, that it may
Avert what both of us would so deserve,
No foolish dread o' the neighbor, I enjoin!
By consequence, no wicked war with him,
While I rule!

Does that mean — no war at all
When just the wickedness I here proscribe
Comes, haply, from the neighbor? Does my speech
Precede the praying that you beat the sword
To plough-share, and the spear to pruning-hook,
And sit down henceforth under your own vine
And fig-tree through the sleepy summer month,
Letting what hurly-burly please explode

On the other side the mountain-frontier? No,
Beloved! I foresee and I announce
Necessity of warfare in one case,
For one cause: one way, I bid broach the blood
O' the world. For truth and right, and only right
And truth, — right, truth, on the absolute scale of God,
No pettiness of man's admeasurement, —
In such case only, and for such one cause,
Fight your hearts out, whatever fate betide
Hands energetic to the uttermost!
Lie not! Endure no lie which needs your heart
And hand to push it out of mankind's path;
No lie that lets the natural forces work
Too long ere lay it plain and pulverized,
Seeing man's life lasts only twenty years!
And such a lie, before both man and God,
Being, at this time present, Austria's rule
O'er Italy, — for Austria's sake the first,
Italy's next, and our sake last of all,
Come with me and deliver Italy!
Smite hip and thigh until the oppressor leave

Free from the Adriatic to the Alps
The oppressed one! We were they who laid her low
In the old bad day when Villany braved Truth
And Right, and laughed, 'Henceforward, God deposed,
The Devil is to rule forevermore
I' the world!' — whereof to stop the consequence,
And for atonement of false glory there
Gaped at and gabbled over by the world,
We purpose to get God enthroned again
For what the world will gird at as sheer shame
I' the cost of blood and treasure. 'All for nought, —
Not even, say, some patch of province, splice
O' the frontier? — some snug honorarium-fee
Shut into glove and pocketed apace?'
(Questions Sagacity) 'in deference
To the natural susceptibility
Of folks at home, unwitting of that pitch
You soar to, and misdoubting if Truth, Right,
And the other such augustnesses, repay
Expenditure in coin o' the realm, but prompt
To recognize the cession of Savoy

And Nice as marketable value!' No,
Sagacity! go preach to Metternich,
And, sermon ended, stay where he resides!
Hohenstiel-Schwangau, you and I must march
The other road! war for the hate of war,
Not love, this once!" So Italy was free.

What else noteworthy and commendable
I' the man's career? — that he was resolute
No trepidation, much less treachery,
On his part, should imperil from its poise
The ball o' the world, heaved up at such expense
Of pains so far, and ready to rebound,
Let but a finger maladroitly fall
Under pretence of making fast and sure
The inch gained by late volubility,
And run itself back to the ancient rest
At foot o' the mountain. Thus he ruled, gave proof
The world had gained a point, progressive so,
By choice, this time, as will and power concurred,
O' the fittest man to rule; not chance of birth,

Or such-like dice-throw. Oft Sagacity
Was at his ear : " Confirm this clear advance ;
Support this wise procedure ! You, elect
O' the people, mean to justify their choice,
And out-king all the kingly imbeciles.
But that's just half the enterprise : remains
You find them a successor like yourself
In head and heart and eye and hand and aim,
Or all done's undone ; and whom hope to mould
So like you as the pupil Nature sends,
The son and heir's completeness which you lack ?
Lack it no longer ! Wed the pick o' the world
Where'er you think you find it ! Should she be
A queen, — tell Hohenstielers-Schwangauese,
' So do the old enthroned decrepitudes
Acknowledge, in the rotten hearts of them,
Their knell is knolled, they hasten to make peace
With the new order, recognize in me
Your right to constitute what king you will,
Cringe therefore crown in hand, and bride on arm,
To both of us : we triumph, I suppose ! '

Is it the other sort of rank? — bright eye,
Soft smile, and so forth, all her queenly boast?
Undaunted the exordium, 'I, the man
O' the people, with the people mate myself;
So stand, so fall. Kings, keep your crowns and brides!
Our progeny (if Providence agree)
Shall live to tread the bawbles underfoot,
And bid the scarecrows consort with their kin.
For son, as for his sire, be the free wife
In the free state!'"

That is, Sagacity
Would prop up one more lie, the most of all
Pernicious fancy, that the son and heir
Receives the genius from the sire, himself
Transmits as surely, — ask Experience else!
Which answers, "Never was so plain a truth
As that God drops his seed of heavenly flame
Just where he wills on earth, — sometimes where man
Seems to tempt — such the accumulated store
Of faculties — one spark to fire the heap;

Sometimes where, fire-ball-like, it falls upon
The naked unpreparedness of rock,
Burns, beaconing the nations through their night.
Faculties, fuel for the flame? All helps
Come, ought to come, or come not, crossed by chance,
From culture and transmission. What's your want
I' the son and heir? Sympathy, aptitude,
Teachableness, the fuel for the flame?
You'll have them for your pains; but the flame's self,
The novel thought of God, shall light the world?
No, poet, though your offspring rhyme and chime
I' the cradle; painter, no, for all your pet
Draws his first eye, beats Salvatore's boy;
And thrice no, statesman, should your progeny
Tie bib and tucker with no tape but red,
And make a foolscap-kite of protocols!
Critic and copyist and bureaucrat
To heart's content! The seed o' the apple-tree
Brings forth another tree which bears a crab:
'Tis the great gardener grafts the excellence
On wildings where he will."

" How plain I view,
Across those misty years 'twixt me and Rome,"
(Such the man's answer to Sagacity,)
" The little wayside temple, half way down
To a mild river that makes oxen white
Miraculously, un-mouse-colors hide,
Or so the Roman country people dream!
I view that sweet small shrub-embedded shrine
On the declivity was sacred once
To a transmuting Genius of the land
Could touch and turn its dunnest natures bright;
Since Italy means the Land of the Ox, we know.
Well, how was it the due succession fell
From priest to priest who ministered i' the cool
Calm fane o' the Clitumnian god? The sire
Brought forth a son and sacerdotal sprout,
Endowed instinctively with good and grace
To suit the gliding gentleness below,
Did he? Tradition tells another tale.
Each priest obtained his predecessor's staff,
Robe, fillet, and insignia, blamelessly,

By springing out of ambush, soon or late,
And slaying him : the initiative rite
Simply was murder, save that murder took,
I' the case, another and religious name.
So it was once, is now, shall ever be,
With genius and its priesthood in this world :
The new power slays the old, but handsomely.
There he lies, not diminished by an inch
Of stature that he graced the altar with ;
Though somebody of other bulk and build
Cries, ' What a goodly personage lies here
Reddening the water where the bulrush roots !
May I conduct the service in his place,
Decently and in order, as did he,
And, as he did not, keep a wary watch
When meditating 'neath a willow shade ! '
Find out your best man ; sure the son of him
Will prove best man again, and, better still
Somehow than best, the grandson-prodigy !
You think the world would last another day,
Did we so make us masters of the trick

Whereby the works go, we could pre-arrange
Their play, and reach perfection when we please?
Depend on it, the change and the surprise
Are part o' the plan: 'tis we wish steadiness:
Nature prefers a motion by unrest,
Advancement through this force that jostles that.
And so, since much remains i' the world to see,
Here is it still, affording God the sight."
Thus did the man refute Sagacity
Ever at this one whisper in his ear:—
"Here are you picked out by a miracle,
And placed conspicuously enough, folks say,
And you believe, by Providence outright
Taking a new way — nor without success —
To put the world upon its mettle: good!
But Fortune alternates with Providence:
Resource is soon exhausted. Never count
On such a happy hit occurring twice!
Try the old method next time!"

"Old enough,"

(To whisper in his ear, the laugh outbroke,)
"And most discredited of all the modes
By just the men and women who make boast
They are kings and queens thereby! Mere self-defence
Should teach them, on one chapter of the law
Must be no sort of trifling, — chastity:
They stand or fall as their progenitors
Were chaste or unchaste. Now, run eye around
My crowned acquaintance; give each life its look,
And no more: why, you'd think each life was led
Purposely for example of what pains
Who leads it took to cure the prejudice,
And prove there's nothing so unprovable
As who is who, what son of what a sire,
And, inferentially, how faint the chance
That the next generation needs to fear
Another fool o' the selfsame type as he
Happily regnant now by right divine
And luck o' the pillow! No: select your lord
By the direct employment of your brains
As best you may: bad as the blunder prove,

A far worse evil stank beneath the sun
When some legitimate blockhead managed so
Matters, that high time was to interfere,
Though interference came from hell itself,
And not the blind mad miserable mob
Happily ruled so long by pillow-luck
And divine right; by lies, in short, not truth.
And meanwhile use the allotted minute —

One,
Two, three, four, five, — yes, five the pendule warns!
Eh? Why, this wild work wanders past all bound
And bearing! Exile, Leicester Square, the life
I' the old gay miserable time, rehearsed,
Tried on again like cast clothes, still to serve
At a pinch, perhaps? "Who's who?" was aptly asked,
Since certainly I am not I! since when?
Where is the bud-mouthed arbitress? A nod
Out-Homering Homer! Stay!—there flits the clew

I fain would find the end of! Yes: "Meanwhile,
Use the allotted minute!" Well, you see,
(Veracious and imaginary Thiers,
Who map out thus the life I might have led,
But did not, — all the worse for earth and me, —
Doff spectacles, wipe pen, shut book, decamp!)
You see 'tis easy in heroics! Plain
Pedestrian speech shall help me perorate.
Ah, if one had no need to use the tongue!
How obvious and how easy 'tis to talk
Inside the soul, a ghostly dialogue, —
Instincts with guesses, — instinct, guess, again
With dubious knowledge, half-experience; each
And all the interlocutors alike
Subordinating, — as decorum bids,
Oh, never fear! but still decisively, —
Claims from without that take too high a tone, —
("God wills this, man wants that, the dignity
Prescribed a prince would wish the other thing,") —
Putting them back to insignificance
Beside one intimatest fact, — myself

Am first to be considered, since I live
Twenty years longer, and then end, perhaps!
But, where one ceases to soliloquize,
Somehow the motives, that did well enough
I' the darkness, when you bring them into light
Are found, like those famed cave-fish, to lack eye
And organ for the upper magnitudes.
The other common creatures, of less fine
Existence, that acknowledge earth and heaven,
Have it their own way in the argument.
Yes, forced to speak, one stoops to say — one's aim
Was — what it peradventure should have been, —
To renovate a people; mend or end
That bane come of a blessing meant the world;
Inordinate culture of the sense made quick
By soul; the lust o' the flesh, lust of the eye,
And pride of life; and, consequent on these,
The worship of that prince o' the power o' the air
Who paints the cloud and fills the emptiness,
And bids his votaries, famishing for truth,
Feed on a lie.

Alack, one lies one's self
Even in the stating that one's end was truth,
Truth only, if one states as much in words!
Give me the inner chamber of the soul
For obvious easy argument! 'tis there
One pits the silent truth against a lie, —
Truth which breaks shell a careless, simple bird,
Nor wants a gorget nor a beak filed fine,
Steel spurs, and the whole armory o' the tongue,
To equalize the odds. But, do your best,
Words have to come; and, somehow, words deflect
As the best cannon ever rifled will.

So, i' the Residenz yet, not Leicester Square,
Alone, — no such congenial intercourse! —
My revery concludes, as dreaming should,
With daybreak: nothing done and over yet,
Except cigars! The adventure thus may be,
Or never needs to be at all: who knows?
My Cousin-Duke, perhaps, at whose hard head —
Is it, now — is this letter to be launched,

The sight of whose gray oblong, and whose seal,
Set all these fancies floating for an hour?

Twenty years are good gain, come what come will!
Double or quits! The letter goes! Or stays?

HERVÉ RIEL.

HERVÉ RIEL.

On the sea and at the Hogue, sixteen hundred ninety-two,
Did the English fight the French, — woe to France!
And the thirty-first of May, helter-skelter through the blue,
Like a crowd of frightened porpoises a shoal of sharks pursue,
Came crowding ship on ship to St. Malo on the Rance,
With the English fleet in view.

'Twas the squadron that escaped, with the victor in full chase:
First and foremost of the drove, in his great ship, Damfreville;
Close on him fled, great and small,
Twenty-two good ships in all;
And they signalled to the place,
"Help the winners of a race!
Get us guidance, give us harbor, take us quick; or, quicker still,
Here's the English can and will!"

Then the pilots of the place put out brisk, and leaped on board:
"Why, what hope or chance have ships like these to pass?" laughed they:
"Rocks to starboard, rocks to port, all the passage scarred and scored,
Shall the 'Formidable' here with her twelve and eighty guns
Think to make the river-mouth by the single narrow way,

Trust to enter where 'tis ticklish for a craft of twenty tons,
And with flow at full beside ?
Now 'tis slackest ebb of tide.
Reach the mooring? Rather say,
While rock stands, or water runs,
Not a ship will leave the bay ! "

Then was called a council straight:
Brief and bitter the debate.
" Here's the English at our heels : would you have them take in tow
All that's left us of the fleet, linked together stern and bow,
For a prize to Plymouth Sound ?
Better run the ships aground ! "
(Ended Damfreville his speech.)
" Not a minute more to wait !
Let the captains all and each
Shove ashore, then blow up, burn the vessels on the beach !
France must undergo her fate."

"Give the word!" But no such word
Was ever spoke or heard:
For up stood, for out stepped, for in struck, amid all these, —
A captain? a lieutenant? a mate, — first, second, third?
No such man of mark, and meet
With his betters to compete!
But a simple Breton sailor pressed by Tourville for the fleet,
A poor coasting-pilot he, — Hervé Riel the Croisickese.

And "What mockery or malice have we here?" cries Hervé Riel.
"Are you mad, you Malouins? Are you cowards, fools, or rogues?
Talk to me of rocks and shoals? — me, who took the soundings, tell
On my fingers every bank, every shallow, every swell,
'Twixt the offing here and Grève, where the river disembogues?

Are you bought by English gold? Is it love the lying's for?
Morn and eve, night and day,
Have I piloted your bay,
Entered free and anchored fast at the foot of Solidor.
Burn the fleet, and ruin France? That were worse than fifty Hogues!
Sirs, they know I speak the truth! Sirs, believe me, there's a way!
Only let me lead the line,
Have the biggest ship to steer,
Get this 'Formidable' clear,
Make the others follow mine,
And I lead them, most and least, by a passage I know well,
Right to Solidor, past Grève,
And there lay them safe and sound;
And, if one ship misbehave, —
Keel so much as grate the ground, —
Why, I've nothing but my life: here's my head!" cries Hervé Riel.

Not a minute more to wait.
" Steer us in, then, small and great !
  Take the helm, lead the line, save the squadron ! "
    cried its chief.
Captains, give the sailor place !
  He is admiral, in brief.
Still the north wind, by God's grace.
See the noble fellow's face,
As the big ship, with a bound,
Clears the entry like a hound,
Keeps the passage as its inch of way were the wide
    sea's profound !
  See, safe through shoal and rock,
  How they follow in a flock !
Not a ship that misbehaves, not a keel that grates the
    ground,
  Not a spar that comes to grief !
The peril, see, is past !
All are harbored to the last !
And, just as Hervé Riel hollas " Anchor ! " sure as fate,
Up the English come, — too late !

So the storm subsides to calm :
  They see the green trees wave
  On the heights o'erlooking Grève ;
Hearts that bled are stanched with balm.
" Just our rapture to enhance,
  Let the English rake the bay,
Gnash their teeth, and glare askance
  As they cannonade away !
'Neath rampired Solidor pleasant riding on the Rance ! "
How hope succeeds despair on each captain's countenance !
Outburst all with one accord,
  " This is paradise for hell !
    Let France, let France's king,
    Thank the man that did the thing ! "
What a shout, and all one word,
  " Hervé Riel ! "
As he stepped in front once more ;
  Not a symptom of surprise
  In the frank blue Breton eyes, —
Just the same man as before.

Then said Damfreville, "My friend,
I must speak out at the end,
  Though I find the speaking hard:
Praise is deeper than the lips:
You have saved the king his ships;
  You must name your own reward.
'Faith, our sun was near eclipse!
Demand whate'er you will,
France remains your debtor still.
Ask to heart's content, and have! or my name's not
    Damfreville."

Then a beam of fun outbroke
On the bearded mouth that spoke,
As the honest heart laughed through
Those frank eyes of Breton blue: —
"Since I needs must say my say;
  Since on board the duty's done,
  And from Malo Roads to Croisic Point what is it but
    a run? —

Since 'tis ask and have, I may;
  Since the others go ashore, —
Come! A good whole holiday!
  Leave to go and see my wife, whom I call the Belle
    Aurore!"
  That he asked, and that he got, — nothing more.

Name and deed alike are lost:
Not a pillar nor a post
  In his Croisic keeps alive the feat as it befell;
Not a head in white and black
On a single fishing-smack
In memory of the man but for whom had gone to
    wrack
  All that France saved from the fight whence England
    bore the bell.
Go to Paris; rank on rank
  Search the heroes flung pell-mell
On the Louvre, face and flank:
  You shall look long enough ere you come to Hervé
    Riel.

So, for better and for worse,
Hervé Riel, accept my verse!
In my verse, Hervé Riel, do thou once more
Save the squadron, honor France, love thy wife the Belle
Aurore!

RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY;

OR,

TURF AND TOWERS.

To

Miss Thackeray.

Red Cotton Night-cap Country;

or,

TURF AND TOWERS.

I.

And so, here happily we meet, fair friend!
Again once more, as if the years rolled back,
And this our meeting-place were just that Rome
Out in the champaign, say, o'er-rioted
By verdure, ravage, and gay winds that war
Against strong sunshine settled to his sleep;
Or on the Paris Boulevard, might it prove,
You and I came together saunteringly,

Bound for some shop-front in the Place Vendôme—
Gold-smithy and Golconda mine, that makes
"The Firm-Miranda" blazed about the world—
Or, what if it were London, where my toe
Trespassed upon your flounce? "Small blame," you
smile,
Seeing the Stair-case Party in the Square
Was Small and Early, and you broke no rib.

Even as we met where we have met so oft,
Now meet we on this unpretending beach
Below the little village: little, ay!
But pleasant, may my gratitude subjoin?
Meek, hitherto un-Murrayed bathing-place,
Best loved of sea-coast-nook-full Normandy!
That, just behind you, is mine own hired house:
With right of path-way through the field in front,
No prejudice to all its growth unsheaved
Of emerald luzern bursting into blue.
Be sure I keep the path that hugs the wall,
Of mornings, as I pad from door to gate!

Yon yellow — what if not wild-mustard flower? —
Of that, my naked sole makes lawful prize,
Bruising the acrid aromatics out,
Till, what they preface, good salt savors sting
From, first, the sifted sands, then sands in slab,
Smooth save for pipy wreath-work of the worm:
(Granite and mussel-shell are ground alike
To glittering paste, — the live worm troubles yet.)
Then, dry and moist, the varech limit-line,
Burnt cinder-black, with brown uncrumpled swathe
Of berried softness, sea-swoln thrice its size;
And, lo, the wave protrudes a lip at last,
And flecks my foot with froth, nor tempts in vain.

Such is Saint-Rambert, wilder very much
Than Joyeux, that famed Joyous-Gard of yours,
Some five miles farther down; much homelier too —
Right for me, — right for you the fine and fair!
Only, I could endure a transfer — wrought
By angels famed still, through our countryside,
For weights they fetched and carried in old time

When nothing like the need was — transfer, just
Of Joyeux church, exchanged for yonder prig,
Our brand-new stone cream-colored masterpiece.

Well — and you know, and not since this one year,
The quiet seaside country? So do I:
And like it, in a manner, just because
Nothing is prominently likable
To vulgar eye without a soul behind,
Which, breaking surface, brings before the ball
Of sight, a beauty buried everywhere.
If we have souls, know how to see and use,
One place performs, like any other place,
The proper service every place on earth
Was framed to furnish man with: serves alike
To give him note that, through the place he sees,
A place is signified he never saw,
But, if he lack not soul, may learn to know.
Earth's ugliest walled and ceiled imprisonment
May suffer, through its single rent in roof,
Admittance of a cataract of light

Beyond attainment through earth's palace-panes
Pinholed athwart their windowed filagree
By twinklings sobered from the sun outside.
Doubtless the High Street of our village here
Imposes hardly as Rome's Corso could:
And our projected race for sailing-boats
Next Sunday, when we celebrate our Saint,
Falls very short of that attractiveness,
That artistry in festive spectacle,
Paris insures you when she welcomes back
(When shall it be?) the Assembly from Versailles;
While the best fashion and intelligence
Collected at the counter of our Mayor
(Dry goods he deals in, grocery beside)
What time the post-bag brings the news from Vire,—
I fear me much, it scarce would hold its own,
That circle, that assorted sense and wit,
With Five o'clock Tea in a house we know.

Still, 'tis the check that gives the leap its lift.
The nullity of cultivated souls,

Even advantaged by their news from Vire,
Only conduces to enforce the truth
That, thirty paces off, this natural blue
Broods o'er a bag of secrets, all unbroached,
Beneath the bosom of the placid deep,
Since first the Post Director sealed them safe;
And formidable I perceive this fact —
Little Saint-Rambert touches the great sea.
From London, Paris, Rome, where men are men,
Not mice, and mice not Mayors presumably,
Thought scarce may leap so fast, alight so far.
But this is a pretence, you understand,
Disparagement in play, to parry thrust
Of possible objector: nullity
And ugliness, the taunt be his, not mine
Nor yours, — I think we know the world too well!
Did you walk hither, jog it by the plain,
Or jaunt it by the highway, braving bruise
From springless and uncushioned vehicle?
Much, was there not, in place and people both,
To lend an eye to? and what eye like yours —

The learned eye is still the loving one!
Our land; its quietude, productiveness,
Its length and breadth of grain-crop, meadow-ground,
Its orchards in the pasture, farms a-field,
And hamlets on the road-edge, nought you missed
Of one and all the sweet rusticities!
From stalwart strider by the wagon-side,
Brightening the acre with his purple blouse,
To those dark-featured comely women-folk,
Healthy and tall, at work, and work indeed,
On every cottage door-step, plying brisk
Bobbins that bob you ladies out such lace!
Oh, you observed! and how that nimble play
Of finger formed the sole exception, bobbed
The one disturbance to the peace of things,
Where nobody esteems it worth his while,
If time upon the clock-face goes asleep,
To give the rusted hands a helpful push.
Nobody lifts an energetic thumb
And index to remove some dead and gone
Notice which, posted on the barn, repeats

For truth what two years' passage made a lie.
Still is for sale, next June, that same château
With all its immobilities, — were sold
Duly next June behind the last but last;
And, woe's me, still placards the Emperor
His confidence in war he means to wage,
God aiding and the rural populace.
No: rain and wind must rub the rags away,
And let the lazy land untroubled snore.

Ah, in good truth? and did the drowsihead
So suit, so soothe the learned loving eye,
That you were minded to confer a crown,
(Does not the poppy boast such?) call the land
By one slow hither-thither stretching, fast
Subsiding-into-slumber sort of name,
Symbolic of the place and people too,
"*White Cotton Night-cap Country?*" Excellent!
For they do, all, dear women young and old,
Upon the heads of them bear notably
This badge of soul and body in repose;

Nor its fine thimble fits the acorn-top,
Keeps woolly ward above that oval brown,
Its placid feature, more than muffler makes
A safeguard, circumvents intelligence
In — what shall evermore be named and famed,
If happy nomenclature aught avail,
"*White Cotton Night-cap Country.*"

Do I hear —
Oh, better, very best of all the news —
You mean to catch and cage the winged word,
And make it breed and multiply at home
Till Norman idlesse stock our England too?
Normandy shown minute yet magnified
In one of those small books, the truly great,
We never know enough, yet know so well?
How I foresee the cursive diamond-dints, —
Composite pen that plays the pencil too, —
As, touch the page and up the glamour goes,
And filmily o'er grain-crop, meadow-ground,
O'er orchard in the pasture, farm a-field,

And hamlet on the road-edge, floats and forms
And falls, at lazy last of all, the Cap
That crowns the country! we, awake outside,
Farther than ever from the imminence
Of what cool comfort, what close coverture
Your magic, deftly weaving, shall surround
The unconscious captives with. Be theirs to drowse
Trammelled, and ours to watch the trammel-trick!
Ours be it, as we con the book of books,
To wonder how is winking possible!

All hail, "White Cotton Night-cap Country," then!
And yet, as on the beach you promise book, —
On beach, mere razor-edge 'twixt earth and sea,
I stand at such a distance from the world
That 'tis the whole world which obtains regard,
Rather than any part, though part presumed
A perfect little province in itself,
When wayfare made acquaintance first therewith.
So standing, therefore, on this edge of things,
What if the backward glance I gave, return

Loaded with other spoils of vagrancy
Than I despatched it for, till I propose
The question — puzzled by the sudden store
Officious fancy plumps beneath my nose —
"Which sort of Night-cap have you glorified?"

You would be gracious to my ignorance:
"What other Night-cap than the normal one? —
Old honest guardian of man's head and hair
In its elastic yet continuous, soft,
No less persisting, circumambient gripe,
Night's notice, life is respited from day!
Its form and fashion vary suiting so
Each seasonable want of youth and age.
In infancy, the rosy naked ball
Of brain, and that faint golden fluff it bears,
Are smothered from disaster, — nurses know
By what foam-fabric; but when youth succeeds,
The sterling value of the article
Discards adornment, cap is cap henceforth
Unfeathered by the futile row on row.

Manhood strains hard a sturdy stocking-stuff
O'er well-deserving head and ears: the cone
Is tassel-tipt, commendably takes pride,
Announcing workday done and wages pouched,
And liberty obtained to sleep, nay, snore.
Unwise, he peradventure shall essay
The sweets of independency for once —
Waive its advantage on his wedding-night:
Fool, only to resume it, night the next,
And never part companionship again.
Since, with advancing years, night's solace soon
Intrudes upon the daybreak dubious life,
Persuades it to appear the thing it is,
Half-sleep; and so, encroaching more and more,
It lingers long past the abstemious meal
Of morning, and, as prompt to serve, precedes
The supper-summons, gruel grown a feast.
Finally, when the last sleep finds the eye
So tired it cannot even shut itself,
Does not a kind domestic hand unite
Friend to friend, lid from lid to part no more,

Consigned alike to that receptacle
So bleak without, so warm and white within?

"Night-caps, night comfort of the human race:
Their usage may be growing obsolete,
Still, in the main, the institution stays.
And though yourself may possibly have lived,
And probably will die, undignified —
The Never-night-capped — more experienced folk
Laugh you back answer — What should Night-cap be
Save Night-cap pure and simple? Sorts of such?
Take cotton for the medium, cast an eye
This side to comfort, lambswool, or the like,
That side to frilly cambric costliness,
And all between proves Night-cap proper." Add
"Fiddle!" and I confess the argument.

Only, your ignoramus here again
Proceeds as tardily to recognize
Distinctions: ask him what a fiddle means,
And "Just a fiddle" seems the apt reply.

Yet, is not there, while we two pace the beach,
This blessed moment, at your Kensington,
A special Fiddle-Show and rare array
Of all the sorts were ever set to cheek,
'Stablished on clavicle, sawn bow-hand-wise,
Or touched lute-fashion and fore-finger-plucked?
I doubt not there be duly catalogued
Achievements all and some of Italy,
Guarnerius, Straduarius, — old and new,
Augustly rude, refined to finicking,
This mammoth with his belly full of blare,
That mouse of music — inch-long silvery wheeze.
And here a specimen has effloresced
Into the scroll-head, there subsides supreme,
And with the tail-piece satisfies mankind.
Why should I speak of woods, grains, stains and streaks,
The topaz varnish or the ruby gum?
We preferably pause where tickets teach,
"Over this sample would Corelli croon,
Grieving, by minors, like the cushat-dove,

Most dulcet Giga, dreamiest Saraband."
"From this did Paganini comb the fierce
Electric sparks, or to tenuity
Pull forth the inmost wailing of the wire —
No cat-gut could swoon out so much of soul!"

Three hundred violin-varieties
Exposed to public view! And dare I doubt
Some future enterprise shall give the world
Quite as remarkable a Night-cap-show?
Methinks, we, arm-in-arm, that festal day,
Pace the long range of relics shrined aright,
Framed, glazed, each cushioned curiosity,
And so begin to smile and to inspect:
"Pope's sickly head-sustainment, damped with dews
Wrung from the all-unfair fight — such a frame —
Though doctor and the devil helped their best —
Fought such a world that, waiving doctor's help,
Had the mean devil at its service too!
Voltaire's imperial velvet! Hogarth eyed
The thumb-nail record of some alley-phiz,

Then chucklingly clapped yonder cosiness
On pate, and painted with true flesh and blood!
Poor hectic Cowper's soothing sarsnet-stripe!"
And so we profit by the catalogue,
Somehow our smile subsiding more and more,
Till we decline into . . but no! shut eyes
And hurry past the shame uncoffined here,
The hangman's toilet! If we needs must trench,
For science' sake which craves completeness still,
On the sad confine, not the district's self,
The object that shall close review may be . . .

Well, it is French, and here are we in France:
It is historic, and we live to learn,
And try to learn by reading story-books.
It is an incident of 'Ninety-two,
And, twelve months since, the Commune had the sway.
Therefore resolve that, after all the Whites
Presented you, a solitary Red
Shall pain us both, a minute and no more!

Do not you see poor Louis pushed to front
Of palace-window, in persuasion's name,
A spectacle above the howling mob
Who tasted, as it were, with tiger-smack,
The outstart, the first spurt of blood on brow,
The Phrygian symbol, the new crown of thorns,
The Cap of Freedom? See the feeble mirth
At odds with that half-purpose to be strong
And merely patient under misery!
And note the ejaculation, ground so hard
Between his teeth, that only God could hear,
As the lean pale proud insignificance
With the sharp-featured liver-worried stare
Out of the two gray points that did him stead,
And passed their eagle-owner to the front
Better than his mob-elbowed undersize, —
The Corsican lieutenant commented,
"Had I but one good regiment of my own,
How soon should volleys to the due amount
Lay stiff upon the street-flags this canaille!
As for the droll there, he that plays the king,

And screws out smile with a Red night-cap on,
He's done for! somebody must take his place."
White Cotton Night-cap Country: excellent!
Why not Red Cotton Night-cap Country too?

"Why not say swans are black and blackbirds
white,
Because the instances exist?" you ask.
"Enough that white, not red, predominates,
Is normal, typical, in cleric phrase
Quod semel, semper, et ubique." Here,
Applying such a name to such a land,
Especially you find inopportune,
Impertinent, my scruple whether white
Or red describes the local color best.
"Let be," (you say) "the universe at large
Supplied us with exceptions to the rule,
So manifold, they bore no passing-by, —
Little Saint-Rambert has conserved at least
The pure tradition: white from head to heel,
Where is a hint of the ungracious hue?

See, we have traversed with hop, step and jump,
From heel to head, the main-street in a trice,
Measured the garment (help my metaphor!)
Not merely criticised the cap, forsooth;
And were you pricked by that collecting-itch,
That pruriency for writing o'er your reds
'Rare, rarer, rarest, not rare but unique,'—
The shelf, Saint-Rambert, of your cabinet,
Unlabelled,—virginal, no Rahab-thread
For blushing token of the spy's success,—
Would taunt with vacancy, I undertake!
What, yonder is your best apology,
Pretence at most approach to naughtiness,
Impingement of the ruddy on the blank?
This is the criminal Saint-Rambertese
Who smuggled in tobacco, half a pound!
The Octroi found it out and fined the wretch.
This other is the culprit who despatched
A hare, he thought a hedgehog, (clods obstruct)
Unfurnished with Permission for the Chase!
As to the womankind—renounce from those

The hope of getting a companion-tinge,
First faint touch promising romantic fault!"

Enough: there stands Red Cotton Night-cap shelf—
A cavern's ostentatious vacancy—
My contribution to the show; while yours—
White, heaps your row of pegs from every hedge
Outside, and house inside Saint-Rambert here—
We soon have come to end of. See, the church
With its white steeple gives your challenge point,
Perks as it were the night-cap of the town,
Starchedly warrants all beneath is matched
By all above, one snowy innocence!

You put me on my mettle. British maid
And British man, suppose we have it out
Here in the fields, decide the question so?
Then, British fashion, shake hands hard again,
Go home together, friends the more confirmed
That one of us—assuredly myself—
Looks puffy about eye, and pink at nose?

Which "pink" reminds me that the arduousness
We both acknowledge in the enterprise,
Claims, counts upon a large and liberal
Acceptance of as good as victory
In whatsoever just escapes defeat.
You must be generous, strain point, and call
Victory, any the least flush of pink
Made prize of, labelled scarlet for the nonce —
Faintest pretension to be wrong and red
And picturesque, that varies by a splotch
The righteous flat of insipidity.

Quick to the quest, then — forward, the firm foot!
Onward, the quarry-overtaking eye!
For what is this, by way of march-tune, makes
The musicalist buzzing at my ear
By re-assurance of that promise old
Though sins are scarlet they shall be as wool?
Whence — what fantastic hope do I deduce?
I am no Liebig: when the dyer dyes
A texture, can the red die prime the white?

And if we washed well, wrung the texture hard,
Would we arrive, here, there and everywhere,
At a fierce ground beneath the surface meek?

I take the first chance, rub to threads what rag
Shall flutter snowily in sight. For see!
Already these few yards upon the rise,
Our back to brave Saint-Rambert, how we reach
The open, at a dozen steps or strides!
Turn round and look about, a breathing-while!
There lie, out-spread at equidistance, thorpes
And villages and towns along the coast,
Distinguishable, each and all alike,
By white persistent Night-cap, spire on spire.
Take the left: yonder town is — what say you
If I say "Londres"? Ay, the mother-mouse
(Reversing fable, as truth can and will)
Which gave our mountain of a London birth!
This is the Conqueror's country, bear in mind,
And Londres-district blooms with London-pride.
Turn round: La Roche, to right, where oysters thrive:

Monlieu — the lighthouse is a telegraph;
This, full in front, Saint-Rambert; then succeeds
Villeneuve, and Pons the Young with Pons the Old,
And — ere faith points to Joyeux, out of sight,
A little nearer — oh, La Ravissante!

There now is something like a Night-cap spire,
Donned by no ordinary Notre-Dame!
For, one of the three safety-guards of France,
You front now, lady! Nothing intercepts
The privilege, by crow-flight, two miles far.
She and her sisters Lourdes and La Salette
Are at this moment hailed the cynosure
Of poor dear France, such waves have buffeted
Since she eschewed infallibility,
And chose to steer by the vague compass-box.
This same midsummer month, a week ago,
Was not the memorable day observed
For reinstatement of the misused Three
In old supremacy forevermore?
Did not the faithful flock in pilgrimage

By railway, diligence and steamer — nay
On foot with staff and scrip, to see the sights
Assured them? And I say best sight was here:
And nothing justified the rival Two
In their pretension to equality;
Our folk laid out their ticket-money best,
And wiseliest, if they walked, wore shoe away;
Not who went farther only to fare worse.
For, what was seen at Lourdes and La Salette
Except a couple of the common cures
Such as all three can boast of, any day?
While here it was, here and by no means there,
That the Pope's self sent two great real gold crowns
As thick with jewelry as thick could stick,
His present to the Virgin and her Babe —
Provided for — who knows not? — by that fund,
Count Alessandro Sforza's legacy,
Which goes to crown some Virgin every year.
But this year, Pope was in the prison-house,
And money had to go for something else;
And therefore, though their present seemed the Pope's,

The faithful of our province raised the sum
Preached and prayed out of — nowise purse alone.
Gentle and simple paid in kind, not cash,
The most part: the great lady gave her brooch,
The peasant-girl, her hair-pin; 'twas the rough
Bluff farmer mainly who, — admonished well
By wife to care lest his new colewort-crop
Stray sorrowfully sparse like last year's seed, —
Lugged from reluctant pouch the fifty-franc,
And had the Curé's hope that rain would cease.
And so, the sum in evidence at length,
Next step was to obtain the donative
By the spontaneous bounty of the Pope —
No easy matter, since his Holiness
Had turned a deaf ear, long and long ago,
To much entreaty on our Bishop's part,
Commendably we boast. "But no," quoth he,
"Image and image needs must take their turn:
Here stand a dozen as importunate."
Well, we were patient; but the cup ran o'er
When — who was it pressed in and took the prize

But our own offset, set far off indeed
To grow by help of our especial name,
She of the Ravissante — in Martinique!
"What?" cried our patience at the boiling-point,
"The daughter crowned, the mother's head goes bare?
Bishop of Raimbaux!" — that's our diocese —
"Thou hast a summons to repair to Rome,
Be efficacious at the Council there:
Now is the time or never! Right our wrong!
Hie thee away, thou valued Morillon,
And have the promise, thou who hast the vote!"
So said, so done, so followed in due course
(To cut the story short) this festival,
This famous Twenty-second, seven days since.

Oh, but you heard at Joyeux! Pilgrimage,
Concourse, procession with, to head the host,
Cardinal Mirecourt, quenching lesser lights:
The leafy street-length through, decked end to end
With August-strippage, and adorned with flags,
That would have waved right well but that it rained

Just this picked day, by some perversity.
And so were placed, on Mother and on Babe,
The pair of crowns: the Mother's, you must see!
Miranda, the great Paris goldsmith, made
The marvel, — he's a neighbor: that's his park
Before you, tree-topped wall we walk toward.
His shop it was, turned out the masterpiece,
Probably at his own expenditure;
Anyhow, his was the munificence
Contributed the central and supreme
Splendor that crowns the crown itself, The Stone.
Not even Paris, ransacked, could supply
That gem: he had to forage in New York,
This jeweller, and country gentleman,
And most undoubted devotee beside!
Worthily wived, too: since his wife it was
Bestowed "with friendly hand" — befitting phrase!
The lace which trims the coronation robe —
Stiff wear — a mint of wealth on the brocade.

Do go and see what I saw yesterday!

And, for that matter, see in fancy still,
Since . .
There now! Even for unthankful me,
Who stuck to my devotions at high-tide
That festal morning, never had a mind
To trudge the little league and join the crowd —
Even for me is miracle vouchsafed!
How pointless proves the sneer at miracles!
As if, contrariwise to all we want
And reasonably look to find, they graced
Merely those graced-before, grace helps no whit,
Unless, made whole, they need physician still.
I — sceptical in every inch of me —
Did I deserve that, from the liquid name
"Miranda," — faceted as lovelily
As his own gift, the gem, — a shaft should shine,
Bear me along, another Abaris,
Nor let me light till, lo, the Red is reached,
And yonder lies in luminosity!

Look, lady! where I bade you glance, but now!

Next habitation, though two miles away, —
No tenement for man or beast between, —
That, park and domicile, is country-seat
Of this same good Miranda! I accept
The augury. Or there, or nowhere else,
Will I establish that a Night-cap gleams
Of visionary Red, not White for once!
"Heaven," saith the sage, "is with us, here inside
Each man:" "Hell also," simpleness subjoins,
By White and Red describing human flesh.

And yet as we continue, quicken pace,
Approach the object which determines me
Victorious or defeated, more forlorn
My chance seems, — that is certainty at least.
Halt midway, reconnoitre! Either side
The path we traverse (turn and see) stretch fields
Without a hedge: one level, scallop-striped
With bands of beet and turnip and luzern,
Limited only by each color's end,
Shelves down, — we stand upon an eminence, —

To where the earth-shell scallops out the sea,
A sweep of semicircle; and at edge —
Just as the milk-white incrustations stud
At intervals some shell-extremity,
So do the little growths attract us here,
Towns with each name I told you: say, they touch
The sea, and the sea them, and all is said,
So sleeps and sets to slumber that broad blue!
The people are as peaceful as the place.
This, that I call "the path" is road, highway;
But has there passed us by a market-cart,
Man, woman, child, or dog to wag a tail?
True, I saw weeders stooping in a field;
But — formidably white the Cap's extent!

Round again! Come, appearance promises!
The boundary, the park-wall, ancient brick,
Upholds a second wall of tree-heads high
Which overlean its top, a solid green.
That surely ought to shut in mysteries!
A jeweller — no unsuggestive craft!

Trade that admits of much romance, indeed.
For, whom but goldsmiths used old monarchs pledge
Regalia to, or seek a ransom from,
Or pray to furnish dowry, at a pinch,
According to authentic story-books?
Why, such have revolutionized this land
With diamond-necklace-dealing! not to speak
Of families turned upside-down, because
The gay wives went and pawned clandestinely
Jewels, and figured, till found out, with paste,
Or else redeemed them — how, is horrible!
Then there are those enormous criminals
That love their ware and cannot lose their love,
And murder you to get your purchase back.
Others go courting after such a stone,
Make it their mistress, marry for their wife,
And find out, some day, it was false the while,
As ever wife or mistress, man too fond
Has named his Pilgrim, Hermit, Ace of Hearts.

Beside — what style of edifice begins

To grow in sight at last and top the scene?
That gray roof, with the range of lucarnes, four
I count, and that erection in the midst —
Clock-house, or chapel-spire, or what, above?
Conventual, that, beyond manorial, sure!
And reason good; for Clairvaux, such its name,
Was built of old to be a Priory,
Dependence on that Abbey-for-the-Males
Our Conqueror founded in world-famous Caen,
And where his body sought the sepulture,
It was not to retain: you know the tale.
Such Priory was Clairvaux, prosperous
Hundreds of years; but nothing lasts below,
And when the Red Cap pushed the Crown aside,
The Priory became, like all its peers,
A National Domain: which, bought and sold
And resold, needs must change, with ownership,
Both outside show and inside use; at length
The messuage, three and twenty years ago,
Became the purchase of rewarded worth
Impersonate in Father — I must stoop

To French phrase for precision's sake I fear —
Father Miranda, goldsmith of renown:
By birth, a Madrilene, by domicile
And sojourning, accepted French at last.
His energy it was which, trade transferred
To Paris, throve as with a golden thumb,
Established in the Place Vendôme. He bought
Not building only, but belongings far
And wide, at Gonthier there, Monlieu, Villeneuve,
A plentiful estate: which, twelve years since,
Passed, at the good man's natural demise,
To Son and Heir Miranda — Clairvaux here,
The Paris shop, the mansion — not to say
Palatial residence on Quai Rousseau,
With money, movables, a mine of wealth —
And young Léonce Miranda got it all.

Ah, but — whose might the transformation be?
Were you prepared for this, now? As we talked,
We walked, we entered the half-privacy,
The partly-guarded precinct: passed beside

The little paled-off islet, trees and turf,
Then found us in the main ash-avenue
Under the blessing of its branchage-roof.
Till, on emergence, what affronts our gaze?
Priory — Conqueror — Abbey-for-the-Males —
Hey, presto, pass, who conjured all away?
Look through the railwork of the gate: a park
— Yes, but *à l'Anglaise*, as they compliment!
Grass like green velvet, gravel-walks like gold,
Bosses of shrubs, embosomings of flowers,
Wind you — through sprinkled trees of tiny breed
Disporting, within reach of coverture,
By some habitual acquiescent oak
Or elm, that thinks, and lets the youngsters laugh —
Wind, waft at last your soul that walks the air,
Up to the house-front, or its back perhaps —
Whether façade or no, one coquetry
Of colored brick and carved stone! Stucco? Well,
The daintiness is cheery, that I know,
And all the sportive floral framework fits
The lightsome purpose of the architect.

Those lucarnes which I called conventual, late,
Those are the outlets in the mansard-roof;
And, underneath, what long light elegance
Of windows here suggests how brave inside
Lurk eyeballed gems they play the eyelids to!
Festive arrangements look through such, be sure!
And now the tower a-top, I took for clock's
Or bell's abode, turns out a quaint device,
Pillared and temple-treated Belvedere —
Pavilion safe within its railed-about
Sublimity of area — whence what stretch,
Of sea and land, throughout the seasons' change,
Must greet the solitary! Or suppose,
— If what the husband likes, the wife likes too —
The happy pair of students cloistered high,
Alone in April when the Spring arrives!
Or no, he mounts there by himself to meet
Winds, welcome wafts of sea-smell, first white bird
That flaps thus far to taste the land again,
And all the promise of the youthful year;
Then he descends, unbosoms straight his store

Of blessings in the bud, and both embrace,
Husband and wife, since earth is Paradise,
And man at peace with God. You see it all?

Let us complete our survey, go right round
The place: for here, it may be, we surprise
The Priory, — these solid walls, big barns,
Gray orchard-grounds, huge four-square stores for
stock,
Betoken where the Church was busy once.
Soon must we come upon the Chapel's self.
No doubt next turn will treat us to . . Aha,
Again our expectation proves at fault!
Still the bright graceful modern — not to say
Modish adornment, meets us: *Parc Anglais*,
Tree-sprinkle, shrub-embossment as before.
See, the sun splits on yonder bauble world
Of silvered glass concentring, every side,
All the adjacent wonder, made minute
And touched grotesque by ball-convexity!
Just so a sense that something is amiss,

Something is out of sorts in the display,
Affects us, past denial, everywhere.
The right erection for the Fields, the Wood,
(Fields — but *Elysées*, wood — but *de Boulogne*)
Is peradventure wrong for wood and fields
When Vire, not Paris, plays the capital.

So may a good man have deficient taste;
Since Son and Heir Miranda, he it was
Who, six years now elapsed, achieved the work,
And truly made a wilderness to smile.
Here did their domesticity reside,
A happy husband and as happy wife,
Till . . how can I in conscience longer keep
My little secret that the man is dead
I, for artistic purpose, talk about
As if he lived still? No, these two years now,
Has he been dead. You ought to sympathize —
Not mock the sturdy effort to redeem
My pledge, and wring you out some tragedy
From even such a perfect commonplace!

Suppose I boast the death of such desert
My tragic bit of Red? Who contravenes
Assertion that a tragedy exists
In any stoppage of benevolence,
Utility, devotion above all?
Benevolent? There never was his like:
For poverty, he had an open hand
. . Or stop — I use the wrong expression here —
An open purse, then, ever at appeal;
So that the unreflecting rather taxed
Profusion than penuriousness in alms.
One, in his day and generation, deemed
Of use to the community? I trust
Clairvaux thus renovate and regalized,
Paris expounded thus to Normandy,
Answers that question. Was the man devout?
After a life — one mere munificence
To Church and all things churchly, men or mice, —
Dying, his last bequeathment gave, land, goods,
Cash, every stick and stiver, to the Church,
And notably to that church yonder, that

Beloved of his soul, La Ravissante —
Wherefrom, the latest of his gifts, the Stone
Gratefully bore me as on arrow-flash
To Clairvaux, as I told you.

"Ay, to find
Your Red desiderated article,
Where every scratch and scrape provokes my White
To all the more superb a prominence!
Why, 'tis the story served up fresh again —
How it befell the restive prophet old
Who came and tried to curse but blessed the land.
Come, your last chance! he disinherited
Children: he made his widow mourn too much
By this endowment of the other Bride —
Nor understood that gold and jewelry
Adorn her in a figure, not a fact.
You make the White I want, so very white,
'Tis I say now — some trace of Red should be
Somewhere in this Miranda-sanctitude!"

Not here, at all events, sweet mocking friend!

For he was childless; and what heirs he had
Were an uncertain sort of Cousinry
Scarce claiming kindred so as to withhold
The donor's purpose though fantastical:
Heirs, for that matter, wanting no increase
Of wealth, since rich already as himself;
Heirs that had taken trouble off his hands,
Bought that productive goldsmith-business, he,
With abnegation wise as rare, renounced
Precisely at a time of life when youth,
Nigh on departure, bids mid-age discard
Life's other loves and likings in a pack,
To keep, in lucre, comfort worth them all.
This Cousinry are they who boast the shop
Of "Firm-Miranda, London and New York."
Cousins are an unconscionable kind;
But these — pretension surely on their part
To share inheritance were too absurd!

"Remains then, he dealt wrongly by his wife,
Despoiled her somehow by such testament?"

Farther than ever from the mark, fair friend!
The man's love for his wife exceeded bounds
Rather than failed the limit. 'Twas to live
Hers and hers only, to abolish earth
Outside — since Paris holds the pick of earth —
He turned his back, shut eyes, stopped ears, to all
Delicious Paris tempts her children with,
And fled away to this far solitude —
She peopled solitude sufficiently!
She, partner in each heavenward flight sublime,
Was, with each condescension to the ground,
Duly associate also: hand in hand,
. . Or side by side, I say by preference —
On every good work sidlingly they went.
Hers was the instigation — none but she
Willed that, if death should summon first her lord,
Though she, sad relict, must drag residue
Of days encumbered by this load of wealth —
(Submitted to with something of a grace
So long as her surviving vigilance
Might worthily administer, convert

Wealth to God's glory and the good of man,
Give, as in life, so now in death, effect
To cherished purpose) — yet she begged and prayed
That, when no longer she could supervise
The House, it should become a Hospital:
For the support whereof, lands, goods, and cash
Alike will go, in happy guardianship,
To yonder church, La Ravissante: who debt
To God and man undoubtedly will pay.

"Not of the world, your heroine!"

Do you know

I saw her yesterday — set eyes upon
The veritable personage, no dream?
I in the morning strolled this way, as oft,
And stood at entry of the avenue.
When, out from that first garden-gate, we gazed
Upon and through, a small procession swept —
Madame Miranda with attendants five.
First, of herself: she wore a soft and white

Engaging dress, with velvet stripes and squares
Severely black, yet scarce discouraging:
Fresh Paris-manufacture! (Vire's would do?
I doubt it, but confess my ignorance.)
Her figure? somewhat small and darlinglike,
Her face? well, singularly colorless,
For first thing: which scarce suits a blonde, you know.
Pretty you would not call her: though perhaps
Attaining to the ends of prettiness,
And somewhat more, suppose enough of soul.
Then she is forty full: you cannot judge
What beauty was her portion at eighteen,
The age she married at. So, colorless
I stick to, and if featureless I add,
Your notion grows completer: for, although
I noticed that her nose was aquiline,
The whole effect amounts with me to — blank!
I never saw what I could less describe.
The eyes, for instance, unforgettable
Which ought to be, are out of mind as sight.

Yet is there not conceivably a face,
A set of wax-like features, blank at first,
Which, as you bendingly grow warm above,
Begins to take impressment from your breath?
Which, as your will itself were plastic here
Nor needed exercise of handicraft,
From formless moulds itself to correspond
With all you think and feel and are — in fine
Grows a new revelation of yourself,
Who know now for the first time what you want?
Here has been something that could wait a while,
Learn your requirement, nor take shape before,
But, by adopting it, make palpable
Your right to an importance of your own,
Companions somehow were so slow to see!
— Far delicater solace to conceit
Than should some absolute and final face,
Fit representative of soul inside,
Summon you to surrender — in no way
Your breath's impressment, nor, in stranger's guise,
Yourself — or why of force to challenge you?

Why should your soul's reflection rule your soul?
("You" means not you, nor me, nor any one
Framed, for a reason I shall keep suppressed,
To rather want a master than a slave:
The slavish still aspires to dominate!)
So, all I say is, that the face, to me
One blurr of blank, might flash significance
To who had seen his soul reflected there
By that symmetric silvery phantom-like
Figure, with other five processional.
The first, a black-dressed matron — may be, maid
Mature, and dragonish of aspect, — marched;
Then four came tripping in a joyous flock,
Two giant goats and two prodigious sheep
Pure as the arctic fox that suits the snow,
Tripped, trotted, turned the march to merriment,
But ambled at their mistress' heel — for why?
A rod of guidance marked the Châtelaine,
And ever and anon would sceptre wave,
And silky subject leave meandering.
Nay, one great naked sheep-face stopped to ask

Who was the stranger, snuffed inquisitive
My hand that made acquaintance with its nose,
Examined why the hand — of man at least —
Patted so lightly, warmly, so like life!
Are they such silly natures after all?
And thus accompanied, the paled-off space,
Isleted shrubs and verdure, gained the group;
Till, as I gave a furtive glance, and saw
Her back-hair was a block of solid gold,
The gate shut out my harmless question — Hair
So young and yellow, crowning sanctity,
And claiming solitude . . can hair be false?

"Shut in the hair and with it your last hope
Yellow might on inspection pass for Red! —
Red, Red, where is the tinge of promised Red
In this old tale of town and country life,
This rise and progress of a family?
First comes the bustling man of enterprise,
The fortune-founding father, rightly rough,
As who must grub and grab, play pioneer.

Then, with a light and airy step, succeeds
The son, surveys the fabric of his sire,
And enters home, unsmirched from top to toe.
Polish and education qualify
Their fortunate possessor to confine
His occupancy to the first-floor suite
Rather than keep exploring needlessly
Where dwelt his sire content with cellarage:
Industry bustles underneath, no doubt;
The supervisor should not sit too close.
Next, rooms built, there's the furniture to buy,
And what adornment like a worthy wife?
In comes she like some foreign cabinet,
Purchased indeed, but purifying quick
What space receives her, from its traffic-taint.
She tells of other habits, palace-life;
Royalty may have pried into those depths
Of sandal-wooded drawer, and set a-creak
That pygmy portal pranked with lazuli.
More fit by far, the ignoble were replaced
By objects suited to such visitant,

Than that her dignity be desecrate
By neighborhood of vulgar table, chair,
Which haply helped old age to smoke and doze.
The end is, an exchange of city stir
And too intrusive burgess-fellowship,
For rural isolated elegance,
Careless simplicity, how preferable!
There one may fairly throw behind one's back
The used-up worn-out past, we want away,
And make a fresh beginning of stale life.
'In just the place' — does any one object? —
'Where aboriginal gentility
Will scout the upstart, twit him with each trick
Of town, trade-mark that stamps each word and deed,
And most of all resent that here the dirt
Is daubed with money-color to deceive!'
Rashly objected! Is there not the Church
To intercede and bring benefic truce
At outset? She it is shall equalize
The laborers in the vineyard, last as first.

Pay court to her, she stops impertinence.
'Duke, once your sires crusaded it, we know:
Our friend the new-comer observes, no less,
Your chapel, rich with their emblazonry,
Wants roofing — might he but supply the means!
Marquise, you gave the honor of your name,
Titulur patronage, abundant will,
To what should be an Orphan Institute:
Gave every thing but funds, in brief; and these,
Our friend, the lady newly resident,
Proposes to contribute, by your leave!'
Brothers and sisters lie they in thy lap,
Thou none-excluding, all-collecting Church!
Sure, one has half a foot i' the hierarchy
Of birth, when 'Nay, my dear,' laughs out the Duke,
'I may be cushion-carrier, but the crown —
Who gave its central glory, I or you?'
When Marquise jokes 'My quest, forsooth? Each doit
I scrape together goes for Peter-pence
To purvey bread and water in his bonds

For Peter's self imprisoned — Lord, how long?
Yours, yours alone the bounty, dear my dame,
You plumped the purse, which, poured into the plate,
Made the Archbishop open brows so broad!
And if you really mean to give that length
Of lovely lace to edge the robe!' . . Ah, friends,
Gem better serves so, than by calling crowd
Round shop-front to admire the million's-worth!
Lace gets more homage than from lorgnette-stare,
And comment coarse to match, (should one display
One's robe a trifle o'er the baignoire-edge,)
'Well may she line her slippers with the like,
If minded so! their shop it was, produced
That wonderful *parure*, the other day,
Whereof the Baron said, it beggared him.'
And so the paired Mirandas built their house,
Enjoyed their fortune, sighed for family,
Found friends would serve their purpose quite as well,
And come, at need, from Paris — anyhow,
With evident alacrity, from Vire —
Endeavor at the chase, at least succeed

In smoking, eating, drinking, laughing, and
Preferring country, oh so much to town!
Thus lived the husband; though his wife would sigh
In confidence, when Countesses were kind,
'Cut off from Paris and society!'
White, White, I once more round you in the ears!
Though you have marked it, in a corner, yours
Henceforth, — red-lettered 'Failure,' very plain,
I shall acknowledge, on the snowy hem
Of ordinary Night-cap! Come, enough!
We have gone round its cotton vastitude,
Or half-round, for the end's consistent still,
A *cul-de-sac* with stoppage at the sea.
Here we return upon our steps. One look
May bid good-morning — properly good-night —
To civic bliss, Miranda and his mate!
Are we to rise and go?"

No, sit and stay!
Now comes my moment, with the thrilling throw
Of curtain from each side a shrouded case.

Don't the rings shriek an ominous "Ha! ha!
So you take Human Nature upon trust?"
List but with like trust to an incident
Which speedily shall make quite Red enough
Burn out of yonder spotless napery!
Sit on the little mound here, whence you seize
The whole of the gay front sun-satisfied,
One laugh of color and embellishment!
Because it was there, — past those laurustines,
On that smooth gravel-sweep 'twixt flowers and sward, —
There tragic death befell; and not one grace
Outspread before you but is registered
In that sinistrous coil, these last two years
Were occupied in winding smooth again.

"True?" Well, at least it was concluded so,
Sworn to be truth, allowed by Law as such,
(With my concurrence, if it matter here)
A month ago: at Vire they tried the case.

II.

Monsieur Léonce Miranda, then, . . but stay!
Permit me a preliminary word,
And, after, all shall go so straight to end!

Have you, the travelled lady, found yourself
Inside a ruin, fane or bath or cirque,
Renowned in story, dear through youthful dream?
If not, — imagination serves as well.
Try fancy-land, go back a thousand years,
Or forward, half the number, and confront
Some work of art gnawn hollow by Time's tooth, —
Hellenic temple, Roman theatre,
Gothic cathedral, Gallic Tuileries,

But ruined, one and whichsoe'er you like.
Obstructions choke what still remains intact,
Yet proffer change that's picturesque in turn;
Since little life begins where great life ends,
And vegetation soon amalgamates,
Smooths novel shape from out the shapeless old,
Till broken column, battered cornice block
The centre with a bulk half weeds and flowers,
Half relics you devoutly recognize.
Devoutly recognizing, — hark, a voice
Not to be disregarded! "Man worked here
Once on a time; here needs again to work;
Ruins obstruct, which man must remedy."
Would you demur "Let Time fulfil his task,
And, till the scythe-sweep find no obstacle,
Let man be patient?"
The reply were prompt:
"Glisteningly beneath the May-night moon,
Herbage and floral coverture bedeck
Yon splintered mass amidst the solitude:
Wolves occupy the background, or some snake

Glides by at distance: picturesque enough!
Therefore, preserve it? Nay, pour daylight in, —
The mound proves swarming with humanity.
There never was a thorough solitude,
Now you look nearer: mortal busy life
First of all brought the crumblings down on pate,
Which trip man's foot still, plague his passage much,
And prove — what seems to you so picturesque
To him is . . but experiment yourself
On how conducive to a happy home
Will be the circumstance, your bed for base
Boasts tessellated pavement, — equally
Affected by the scorpion for his nest, —
While what o'erroofs bed is an architrave,
Marble, and not unlikely to crush man
To mummy, should its venerable prop,
Some fig-tree-stump, play traitor underneath.
Be wise! Decide! For conservation's sake,
Clear the arena forthwith! lest the tread
Of too-much-tried impatience trample out
Solid and unsubstantial to one blank

Mud-mixture, picturesque to nobody, —
And, task done, quarrel with the parts intact
Whence came the filtered fine dust, whence the crash
Bides but its time to follow. Quick conclude
Removal, time effects so tardily,
Of what is plain obstruction; rubbish cleared,
Let partial ruin stand while ruin may,
And serve world's use, since use is manifold.
Repair wreck, stanchion wall to heart's content,
But never think of renovation, pure
And simple, which involves creation too:
Transform and welcome! Yon tall tower may help
(Though built to be a belfry and nought else)
Some Father Secchi, to tick Venus off
In transit: never bring there bell again,
To damage him aloft, brain us below,
When new vibrations bury both in brick!

Monsieur Léonce Miranda, furnishing
The application at his cost, poor soul!
Was instance how, — because the world lay strewn

With ravage of opinions in his path,
And neither he, nor any friendly wit,
Knew and could teach him which was firm, which
frail,
In his adventure to walk straight through life
The partial-ruin, — in such enterprise,
He straggled into rubbish, struggled on,
And stumbled out again observably.
"Yon buttress still can back me up," he judged:
And at a touch down came both he and it.
"A certain statue, I was warned against,
Now, by good fortune, lies well under foot,
And cannot tempt to folly any more:"
So, lifting eye, aloft since safety lay,
What did he light on? the Idalian shape,
The undeposed, erectly Victrix still!
"These steps ascend the labyrinthine stair
Whence, darkling and on all-fours, out I stand
Exalt and safe, and bid low earth adieu —
For so instructs 'Advice to who would climb:'"
And all at once the climbing landed him

— Where, is my story.

Take its moral first.
Do you advise a climber? Have respect
To the poor head, with more or less of brains
To spill, should breakage follow your advice!
Head-break to him will be heart-break to you
For having preached "Disturb no ruins here!
Are not they crumbling of their own accord?
Meantime, let poets, painters keep a prize!
Beside, a sage pedestrian picks his way."
A sage pedestrian — such as you and I!
What if there trip, in merry carelessness,
And come to grief, a weak and foolish child?
Be cautious how you counsel climbing then!

Are you adventurous and climb yourself?
Plant the foot warily, accept a staff,
Stamp only where you probe the standing-point,
Move forward, well assured that move you may:
Where you mistrust advance, stop short and stick!

This makes advancing slow and difficult?
Hear what came of endeavor of brisk youth
To foot it fast and easy! Keep this same
Notion of outside mound and inside mash,
Towers yet intact round turfy rottenness,
Symbolic partial ravage, — keep in mind!
Here fortune placed his feet who first of all
Found no incumbrance, till head found . . But hear!

This son and heir then of the jeweller,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda, at his birth,
Mixed the Castilian passionate blind blood
With answerable gush, his mother's gift,
Of spirit, French and critical and cold.
Such mixture makes a battle in the brain,
Ending as faith or doubt gets uppermost;
Then will has way a moment, but no more,
So nicely balanced are the adverse strengths,
And victory entails reverse next time.
The tactics of the two are different
And equalize the odds: for blood comes first,

Surrounding life with undisputed faith.
But presently, a new antagonist,
By scarce-suspected passage in the dark,
Steals spirit, fingers at each crevice found
Athwart faith's stronghold, fronts the astonished man:
"Such pains to keep me far, yet here stand I,
Your doubt inside the faith-defence of you!"

With faith it was friends bulwarked him about
From infancy to boyhood; so, by youth,
Faith stood the impenetrable circuit, high
As heaven and low as hell: what lacked he there,
Guarded against aggression, storm or sap?
What foe would dare approach? Historic Doubt?
Ay, were there some half-knowledge to attack!
Batter doubt's best, sheer ignorance will beat.
Acumen metaphysic?—drills its way
Through what, I wonder! A thick feather-bed
Of thoughtlessness, no operating tool—
Framed to transpierce the flint-stone—fumbles at,
With chance of finding an impediment!

This Ravissante, now: when he saw the church
For the first time, and to his dying-day,
His firm belief was that the name fell fit
From the Delivering Virgin, niched and known;
As if there wanted records to attest
The appellation was a pleasantry,
A pious rendering of Rare Vissante,
The proper name which erst our province bore.
He would have told you that Saint Aldabert
Founded the church, (Heaven early favored France,)
About the second century from Christ;
Though the true man was Bishop of Raimbaux,
Eleventh in succession, Eldobert,
Who flourished after some six hundred years.
He it was brought the image "from afar,"
(Made out of stone the place produces still)
"Infantine Art divinely artless," (Art
In the decrepitude of Decadence)
And set it up a-working miracles
Until the Northmen's fury laid it low,
Not long, however: an egregious sheep,

Zealous with scratching hoof and routing horn,
Unearthed the image in good Mailleville's time,
Count of the country. "If the tale be false,
Why stands it carved above the portal plain?"
Monsieur Léonce Miranda used to ask.
To Londres went the prize in solemn pomp,
But, liking old abode and loathing new,
Was borne — this time by angels — back again.
And, re-inaugurated, miracle
Succeeded miracle, a lengthy list,
Until indeed the culmination came —
Archbishop Chaumont prayed a prayer and vowed
A vow — gained prayer and paid vow properly —
For the conversion of Prince Vertgalant.
These facts, sucked in along with mother's milk,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda would dispute
As soon as that his hands were flesh and bone,
Milk-nourished two and twenty years before.

So fortified by blind Castilian blood,
What say you to the chances of French cold

Critical spirit, should Voltaire besiege
"Alp, Apennine, and fortified redoubt?"
Ay, would such spirit please to play faith's game
Faith's way, attack where faith defends so well!
But then it shifts, tries other strategy.
Coldness grows warmth, the critical becomes
Unquestioning acceptance. "Share and share
Alike in facts, to truth add other truth!
Why with old truth needs new truth disagree?"

Thus doubt was found invading faith, this time,
By help of not the spirit but the flesh:
Fat Rabelais chuckled, where faith lay in wait
For lean Voltaire's grimace — French, either foe.
Accordingly, while round about our friend
Ran faith without a break which learned eye
Could find at two and twenty years of age,
The twenty-two-years-old frank footstep soon
Assured itself there spread a standing-space
Flowery and comfortable, nowise rock
Nor pebble-pavement roughed for champion's tread

Who scorns discomfort, pacing at his post.
Tall, long-limbed, shoulder right and shoulder left,
And 'twixt *acromia* such a latitude,
Black heaps of hair on head, and blacker bush
O'er-rioting chin, cheek and throat and chest,—
His brown meridional temperament
Told him — or rather pricked into his sense
Plainer than language — "Pleasant station here!
Youth, strength, and lustihood can sleep on turf
Yet pace the stony platform afterward:
First signal of a foe and up they start!
Saint Eldobert, at all such vanity,
Nay — sinfulness, had shaken head austere.
Had he! But did Prince Vertgalant? And yet,
After how long a slumber, of what sort,
Was it, he stretched octogenary joints,
And, nigh on Day-of-Judgment trumpet-blast,
Jumped up and manned wall, brisk as any bee?"

Nor Rabelais nor Voltaire, but Sganarelle,
You comprehend, was pushing through the chink!

That stager in the saint's correct costume,
Who ever has his speech in readiness
For thick-head juvenility at fault:
"Go pace yon platform and play sentinel!
You won't? The worse! but still a worse might hap.
Stay then, provided that you keep in sight
The battlement, one bold leap lands you by!
Resolve not desperately 'Wall or turf,
Choose this, choose that, but no alternative!'
No! Earth left once were left for good and all:
'With Heaven you may accommodate yourself.'"

Saint Eldobert — I much approve his mode;
With sinner Vertgalant I sympathize;
But histrionic Sganarelle, who prompts
While pulling back, refuses yet concedes, —
Whether he preach in chair, or print in book,
Or whisper due sustainment to weak flesh,
Counting his sham beads threaded on a lie —
Surely, one should bid pack that mountebank!
Surely, he must have momentary fits

Of self-sufficient stage-forgetfulness,
Escapings of the actor-lassitude,
When he allows the grace to show the grin,
Which ought to let even thickheads recognize
(Through all the busy and benefic part, —
Bridge-building, or rock-riving, or good clean
Transport of church and congregation both
From this to that place with no harm at all,)
The Devil, that old stager, at his trick
Of general utility, who leads
Downward, perhaps, but fiddles all the way!

Therefore, no sooner does our candidate
For saintship spotlessly emerge soul-cleansed
From First Communion to mount guard at post,
Paris-proof, top to toe, than up there starts
The Spirit of the Boulevard — you know Who —
With jocund "So, a structure fixed as fate,
Faith's tower joins on to tower, no ring more round,
Full fifty years at distance, too, from youth!

Once reach that precinct and there fight your best,
As looking back you wonder what has come
Of daisy-dappled turf you danced across!
Few flowers that played with youth shall pester age,
However age esteem the courtesy;
And Eldobert was something past his prime,
Stocked Caen with churches ere he tried hand here.
Saint-Sauveur, Notre-Dame, Saint-Pierre, Saint-Jean
Attest, his handiwork commenced betimes.
He probably would preach that turf is mud.
Suppose it mud, through mud one picks a way,
And when, clay-clogged, the struggler steps to stone,
He uncakes shoe, arrives in manlier guise
Than carried pick-a-back by Eldobert
Big-baby-fashion, lest his leathers leak!
All that parade about Prince Vertgalant
Amounts to — your Castilian helps enough —
Inveni ovem quæ perierat.
But ask the pretty votive statue-thing
What the lost sheep's meantime amusements were
Till the Archbishop found him! That stays blank:

They washed the fleece well and forgot the rest.
Make haste, since time flies, to determine, though!"

Thus opportunely took up parable, —
Admonishing Miranda just emerged
Pure from The Ravissante and Paris-proof, —
Saint Sganarelle: then slipped aside, changed mask,
And made re-entry as a gentleman
Born of the Boulevard, with another speech,
I spare you.

So, the year or two revolved,
And ever the young man was dutiful
To altar and to hearth: had confidence
In the whole Ravissantish history.
Voltaire? Who ought to know so much of him, —
Old sciolist, whom only boys think sage, —
As one whose father's house upon the Quai
Neighbored the very house where that Voltaire
Died mad and raving, not without a burst
Of squibs and crackers, too significant?

Father and mother hailed their best of sons,
Type of obedience, domesticity,
Never such an example inside doors!
Outside, as well not keep too close a watch;
Youth must be left to some discretion there.
And what discretion proved, I find deposed
At Vire, confirmed by his own words: to wit,
How, with the sprightliness of twenty-five,
Five — and not twenty, for he gave their names
With laudable precision — were the few
Appointed by him unto mistress-ship;
While, meritoriously the whole long week
A votary of commerce only, week
Ended, "at shut of shop on Saturday,
Do I, as is my wont, get drunk," he writes
In airy record to a confidant.
"Bragging and lies!" replied the apologist:
"And do I lose by that?" laughed Somebody,
At the Court-edge a-tiptoe, 'mid the crowd,
In his own clothes, a-listening to men's Law.

Thus while, prospectively a combatant,
The volunteer bent brows, clinched jaws, and fierce
Whistled the march-tune "Warrior to the wall!"
Something like flowery laughters round his feet
Tangled him of a sudden with "Sleep first!"
And fairly flat upon the turf sprawled he,
And let strange creatures make his mouth their
home.

Anyhow, 'tis the nature of the soul
To seek a show of durability,
Nor, changing, plainly be the slave of change.
Outside the turf, the towers: but, round the turf,
A tent may rise, a temporary shroud,
Mock-faith to suit a mimic dwelling-place:
Tent which, while screening jollity inside
From the external circuit — evermore
A menace to who lags when he should march —
Yet stands a-tremble, ready to collapse
At touch of foot: turf is acknowledged grass,
And grass, though pillowy, held contemptible

Compared with solid rock, the rampired ridge.
To truth, a pretty homage thus we pay
By testifying — what we dally with,
Falsehood, (which, never fear we take for truth!)
We may enjoy, but then — how we despise!

Accordingly, on weighty business bound,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda stooped to play,
But, with experience, soon reduced the game
To principles, and thenceforth played by rule:
Rule, dignifying sport as sport, proclaimed
No less that sport was sport, and nothing more
He understood the worth of womankind, —
To furnish man — provisionally — sport:
Sport transitive — such earth's amusements are:
But, seeing that amusements pall by use,
Variety therein is requisite.
And since the serious work of life were wronged
Should we bestow importance on our play,
It follows, in such womankind pursuit,
Cheating is lawful chase. We have to spend

An hour — they want a lifetime thrown away:
We seek to tickle sense — they ask for soul,
As if soul had no higher ends to serve!
A stag-hunt gives the royal creature law:
Bat-fowling is all fair with birds at roost,
The lantern and the clapnet suit the hedge.
Which must explain why, bent on Boulevard game,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda decently
Was prudent in his pleasure — passed himself
Off on the fragile fair about his path
As the gay devil rich in mere good looks,
Youth, hope — what matter though the purse be
void?
"If I were only young Miranda, now,
Instead of a poor clerkly drudge at desk
All day, poor artist vainly bruising brush
On palette, poor musician scraping gut
With horsehair teased that no harmonics come!
Then would I love with liberality,
Then would I pay! — who now shall be repaid,
Repaid alike for present pain and past,

If Mademoiselle permit the contre-danse,
Sing 'Gay in garret youth at twenty lives,'
And afterward accept a lemonade!"

Such sweet facilities of intercourse
Afford the Winter-Garden and Mabille!
"Oh, I unite"—runs on the confidence,
Poor fellow, that was read in open Court,
—"Amusement with discretion: never fear
My escapades cost more than market-price!
No durably-attached Miranda-dupe,
Sucked dry of substance by two clinging lips,
Promising marriage, and performing it!
Trust me, I know the world, and know myself,
And know where duty takes me—in good time!"

Thus fortified and realistic, then,
At all points thus against illusion armed,
He wisely did New Year inaugurate
By playing truant to the favored five:
And sat installed at "The Varieties,"—

Playhouse appropriately named, — to note
(Prying amid the turf that's flowery there)
What primrose, firstling of the year, might push
The snows aside to deck his button-hole —
Unnoticed by that outline sad, severe,
(Though fifty good long years removed from youth)
That tower and tower, — our image, bear in mind!

No sooner was he seated than, behold,
Out burst a polyanthus! He was 'ware
Of a young woman niched in neighborhood;
And ere one moment flitted, fast was he
Found bondslave to the beauty evermore,
For life, for death, for heaven, for hell, her own.
Philosophy, bewail thy fate! Adieu,
Youth realistic and illusion-proof!
Monsieur Léonce Miranda, — hero late
Who "understood the worth of womankind,"
"Who found therein — provisionally — sport," —
Felt, in the flitting of a moment, fool
Was he, and folly all that seemed so wise,

And the best proof of wisdom's birth would be
That he made all endeavor, body, soul,
By any means, at any sacrifice
Of labor, wealth, repute, and (—well, the time
For choosing between heaven on earth, and heaven
In heaven, was not at hand immediately—)
Made all endeavor, without loss incurred
Of one least minute, to obtain her love.
"Sport transitive?" "Variety required?"
"In loving were a lifetime thrown away?"
How singularly may young men mistake!
The fault must be repaired with energy.

Monsieur Léonce Miranda ate her up
With eye-devouring; when the unconscious fair
Passed from the close-packed hall, he pressed behind;
She mounted vehicle, he did the same,
Coach stopped, and cab fast followed, at one door—
Good house in unexceptionable street.

Out stepped the lady, — never think, alone!
A mother was not wanting to the maid,
Or, may be, wife, or widow, might one say?
Out stepped and properly down flung himself
Monsieur Léonce Miranda at her feet —
And never left them after, so to speak,
For twenty years, till his last hour of life,
When he released them, as precipitate.
Love proffered and accepted then and there!
Such potency in word and look has truth.

Truth I say, truth I mean: this love was true,
And the rest happened by due consequence.
By which we are to learn that there exists
A falsish false, for truth's inside the same,
And truth that's only half true, falsish truth.
The better for both parties! folks may taunt
That half your rock-built wall is rubble-heap:
Answer them, half their flowery turf is stones!
Our friend had hitherto been decking coat
If not with stones, with weeds that stones befit,

With dandelions — "primrose-buds," smirked he;
This proved a polyanthus on his breast,
Prize-lawful or prize-lawless, flower the same.
So with his other instance of mistake:
Was Christianity the Ravissante?

And what a flower of flowers he chanced on now!
To primrose, polyanthus I prefer
As illustration, from the fancy-fact
That out of simple came the composite
By culture: that the florist bedded thick
His primrose-root in ruddle, bullock's blood,
Ochre and devils'-dung, for aught I know,
Until the pale and pure grew fiery-fine,
Ruby and topaz, rightly named anew.
This lady was no product of the plain;
Social manure had raised a rarity.
Clara de Millefleurs (note the happy name)
Blazed in the full-blown glory of her Spring.
Peerlessly perfect, form and face: for both —
"Imagine, what, at seventeen, may have proved

Miss Pages, the actress: Pages herself, my dear!"
Noble she was, the name denotes: and rich?
"'The apartment in this Coliseum Street,
Furnished, my dear, with such an elegance,
Testifies wealth, my dear, sufficiently!
What quality, what style and title, eh?
Well now, waive nonsense, you and I are boys
No longer: somewhere must a screw be slack!
Don't fancy, Duchesses descend at door
From carriage-step to stranger prostrate stretched,
And bid him take heart, and deliver mind,
March in and make himself at ease forthwith,—
However broad his chest and black his beard,
And comely his belongings,—all through love
Protested in a world of ways save one
Hinting at marriage!"—marriage which yet means
Only the obvious method, easiest help
To satisfaction of love's first demand,
That love endure eternally: "my dear,
Somewhere or other must a screw be slack!"

Truth is the proper policy: from truth —
Whate'er the force wherewith you fling your speech, —
Be sure that speech will lift you, by rebound,
Somewhere above the lowness of a lie!
Monsieur Léonce Miranda heard too true
A tale — perhaps I may subjoin, too trite!
As the meek martyr takes her statued stand
Above our pity, claims our worship just
Because of what she puts in evidence,
Signal of suffering, badge of torture borne
In days gone by, shame then, but glory now,
Barb in the breast, turned aureole for the front!
So, half timidity, composure half,
Clara de Millefleurs told her martyrdom.

Of poor though noble parentage, deprived
Too early of a father's guardianship,
What wonder if the prodigality
Of nature in the girl, whose mental gifts
Matched her external dowry, form and face —

If these suggested a too prompt resource
To the resourceless mother? "Try the Stage,
And so escape starvation! Prejudice
Defames mimetic art: be yours to prove
That gold and dross may meet, and never mix,
Purity plunge in pitch, yet soil no plume!"

All was prepared in London — (you conceive
The natural shrinking from publicity
In Paris, where the name excites remark)
London was ready for the grand debût;
When some perverse ill fortune, incident
To art mimetic, some malicious thrust
Of Jealousy who sidles 'twixt the scenes,
Or pops up sudden from the prompter's hole, —
Somehow the brilliant bubble burst in suds.
Want followed: in a foreign land, the pair!
Oh! hurry over the catastrophe —
Mother too sorely tempted, daughter tried
Scarcely so much as circumvented, say!
Caged unsuspecting artless innocence!

Monsieur Léonce Miranda tell the rest! —
The rather that he told it in a style
To puzzle Court Guide students, much more me.
"Brief, she became the favorite of Lord N.,
An aged but illustrious Duke, thereby
Breaking the heart of his competitor,
The Prince of O. Behold her palaced straight
In splendor, clothed in diamonds," (phrase how fit!)
"Giving tone to the City by the Thames!
Lord N., the aged but illustrious Duke,
Was even on the point of wedding her —
Giving his name to her" (why not to us?)
"But that her better angel interposed.
She fled from such a fate to Paris back,
A fortnight since: conceive Lord N.'s despair!
Duke as he is, there's no invading France.
He must restrict pursuit to postal plague
Of writing letters daily, duly read
As darlingly she hands them to myself,
The privileged supplanter, who therewith
Light a cigar and see abundant blue" —

(Either of heaven or else Havana-smoke.)
"Think! she, who helped herself to diamonds late,
In passion of disinterestedness
Now — will accept no tribute of my love
Beyond a paltry ring, three Louis'-worth!
Little she knows I have the rummaging
Of old Papa's shop in the Place Vendôme!"
So wrote entrancedly to confidant,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda. Surely now,
If Heaven, that sees all, understands no less,
It finds temptation pardonable here,
It mitigates the promised punishment,
It recognizes that to tarry just
An April hour amid such dainty turf
Means no rebellion against task imposed
Of journey to the distant wall one day!
Monsieur Léonce Miranda puts the case!
Love, he is purposed to renounce, abjure;
But meanwhile, is the case a common one?
Is it the vulgar sin, none hates as he?

Which question, put directly to "his dear"
(His brother — I will tell you in a trice)
Was doubtless meant, by due meandering,
To reach, to fall not unobserved before
The auditory cavern 'neath the cope
Of Her, the placable, the Ravissante.
But here's the drawback, that the image smiles,
Smiles on, smiles ever, says to supplicant
"Ay, ay, ay" — like some kindly weathercock
Which, stuck fast at Set Fair, Favonian Breeze,
Still warrants you from rain, through Auster's lead
Bring down the sky above your cloakless mirth.
Had he proposed this question to, nor "dear"
Nor Ravissante, but prompt to the Police,
The Commissary of his Quarter, now —
There had been shaggy eyebrows elevate
With twinkling apprehension in each orb
Beneath, and when the sudden shut of mouth
Relaxed, — lip pressing lip, lest out should plump
The pride of knowledge in too frank a flow, —
Then, fact on fact forthcoming, dose were dealt

Of truth remedial, in sufficiency
To save a chicken threatened with the pip,
Head-staggers and a tumble from its perch.

Alack, it was the lady's self that made
The revelation, after certain days
— Nor so unwisely! As the hashish-man
Prepares a novice to receive his drug,
Adroitly hides the soil with sudden spread
Of carpet ere he seats his customer:
Then shows him how to smoke himself about
With Paradise; and only when, at puff
Of pipe, the Houri dances round the brain
Of dreamer, does he judge no need is now
For circumspection and punctiliousness;
He may resume the serviceable scrap
That made the votary unaware of muck.
Just thus the lady, when her brewage — love —
Was well a-fume about the novice-brain,
Saw she might boldly pluck, from underneath
Her lover, the preliminary lie.

Clara de Millefleurs, of the noble race,
Was Lucie Steiner, child to Dominique
And Magdalen Commercy; born at Sierck,
About the bottom of the Social Couch.
The father having come and gone again,
The mother and the daughter found their way
To Paris, and professed mode-merchandise;
Were milliners, we English roughlier say;
And soon a fellow-lodger in the house,
Monsieur Ulysse Muhlhausen young and smart,
Tailor by trade, perceived his house-mate's youth
Smartness, and beauty over and above.
Courtship was brief, and marriage followed quick,
And quicklier — impecuniosity.
The young pair quitted Paris to reside
At London: which repaid the compliment
But scurvily, since not a wit the more
Trade prospered by the Thames than by the Seine.
Failing all other, as a last resource,
"He would have trafficked in his wife," — she said.
If for that cause they quarrelled, 'twas, I fear,

Rather from reclamation of her rights
To wifely independence, than as wronged
Otherwise by the course of life proposed:
Since, on escape to Paris back again,
From horror and the husband, — ill-exchanged
For safe maternal home recovered thus, —
I find her domiciled and dominant
In that apartment, Coliseum Street,
Where all the splendid magic met and mazed
Monsieur Léonce Miranda's venturous eye.
Only, the same was furnished at the cost
Of some one notable in days long since,
Carlino Centofanti: he it was,
Found entertaining unawares — if not
An angel, yet a youth in search of one.

Why this revealment after reticence?
Wherefore, beginning "Millefleurs," end at all
Steiner, Muhlhausen, and the ugly rest?
Because the unsocial purse-controlling wight,
Carlino Centofanti, made aware

By misadventure that his bounty — crumbs
From table — comforted a visitant,
Took churlish leave, and left, too, debts to pay.
Loaded with debts, the lady needs must bring
Her soul to bear assistance from a friend
Beside that paltry ring, three Louis'-worth ;
And therefore might the little circumstance
That Monsieur Léonce had the rummaging
Of Old Papa's shop in the Place Vendôme,
Pass, perhaps, not so unobservably.

Frail shadow of a woman in the flesh,
These very eyes of mine saw yesterday,
Would I re-tell this story of your woes,
Would I have heart to do you detriment
By pinning all this shame and sorrow plain
To that poor chignon, — staying with me still,
Though form and face have well nigh faded now, —
But that men read it, rough in brutal print,
As two years since some functionary's voice
Rattled all this — and more by very much —

Into the ear of vulgar Court and crowd,
Whence, by reverberation, rumblings grew
To what had proved a week-long roar in France,
Had not the dreadful cannonry drowned all.
Was, now, the answer of your advocate
More than just this? "The shame fell long ago,
The sorrow keeps increasing: God forbid
We judge man, by the faults of youth, in age!"
Permit me the expression of a hope
Your youth proceeded like your avenue,
Stepping by bush, and tree, and taller tree,
Until, columnar, at the house they end.
So might your creeping youth, columnar rise
And reach, by year and year, symmetrical,
To where all shade stops short, shade's service
done.
Bushes on either side, and boughs above,
Darken, deform the path, else sun would streak;
And, cornered halfway somewhere, I suspect
Stagnation and a horse-pond: hurry past!
For here's the house, the happy half-and-half

Existence — such as stands for happiness
True and entire, howe'er the squeamish talk!
Twenty years long, you may have loved this man;
He must have loved you; that's a happy life,
Whatever was your right to lead the same.
The white domestic pigeon pairs secure,
Nay, does mere duty by bestowing egg
In authorized compartment, warm and safe,
Boarding about, and gilded spire above,
Hoisted on pole, to dogs' and cats' despair!
But I have spied a veriest trap of twigs
On tree-top, every straw a thievery,
Where the wild dove — despite the fowler's snare,
The sportsman's shot, the urchin's stone, — crooned gay,
And solely gave her heart to what she hatched,
Nor minded a malignant world below.
I throw first stone forsooth? 'Tis mere assault
Of playful sugarplum against your cheek,
Which, if it makes cheek tingle, wipes off rouge!
You, my worst woman? Ah, that touches pride,

Puts on his mettle the exhibiter
Of Night-caps, if you taunt him "This, no doubt,—
Now we have got to Female-garniture,—
Crowns your collection, Reddest of the row!"
O unimaginative ignorance
Of what dye's depth keeps best apart from worst
In womankind!—how heaven's own pure may seem
To blush aurorally beside such blanched
Divineness as the women-wreaths named White:
While hell, eruptive and fuliginous,
Sickens to very pallor as I point
Her place to a Red clout called woman too!
Hail, heads that ever had such glory once
Touch you a moment, like God's cloven tongues
Of fire, your lambent aureoles lost, that leave
You marked yet, dear beyond all diadems!
And hold, each foot, nor spurn, to man's disgrace,
What other twist of fetid rag may fall!
Let slink into the sewer the cupping-cloth!

Lucie, much solaced, I re-finger you,

The medium article; if ruddy marked
With iron-mould, your cambric, — clean at least
From poison-speck of rot and purulence!
Lucie Muhlhausen said — "Such thing am I:
Love me, or love me not!" Miranda said,
"I do love, more than ever, most for this."
The revelation of the very truth,
Proved the concluding necessary shake
That bids the tardy mixture crystallize
Or else stay ever liquid: shoot up shaft,
Durably diamond, or evaporate —
Sluggish solution through a minute's slip.
Monsieur Léonce Miranda took his soul
In both his hands, as if it were a vase,
To see what came of the convulsion there,
And found, amid subsidence, love new-born
So sparklingly resplendent, old was new.
"Whatever be my lady's present, past,
Or future, this is certain of my soul,
I love her! in despite of all I know,
Defiance of the much I have to fear,

I venture happiness on what I hope,
And love her from this day forevermore!
No prejudice to old profound respect
For certain Powers! I trust they bear in mind
A most peculiar case, and straighten out
What's crooked there, before we close accounts.
Renounce the world for them — some day I will:
Meantime, to me let her become the world!"

Thus, mutely might our friend soliloquize
Over the tradesmen's bills, his Clara's gift —
In the apartment, Coliseum Street,
Carlino Centofanti's legacy,
Provided rent and taxes were discharged —
In face of Steiner now, De Millefleurs once,
The tailor's wife and runaway confessed.

On such a lady if election light,
(According to a social prejudice)
If henceforth "all the world" she constitute
For any lover, — needs must he renounce

Our world in ordinary, walked about
By couples loving as our laws prescribe, —
Renunciation sometimes difficult.
But, in this instance, time and place and thing
Combined to simplify experiment,
And make Miranda, in the current phrase,
Master the situation passably.

For first facility, his brother died —
Who was, I should have told you, confidant,
Adviser, referee, and substitute,
All from a distance: but I knew how soon
This younger brother, lost in Portugal,
Had to depart and leave our friend at large.
Cut off abruptly from companionship
With brother-soul of bulk about as big,
(Obvious recipient — by intelligence
And sympathy, poor little pair of souls —
Of much affection and some foolishness)
Monsieur Léonce Miranda, meant to lean
By nature, needs must shift the leaning-place

To his love's bosom from his brother's neck,
Or fall flat unrelieved of freight sublime.

Next died the lord of the Aladdin's cave,
Master o' the mint, and keeper of the keys
Of chests chock-full with gold and silver changed
By Art to forms where wealth forgot itself,
And caskets where reposed each pullet-egg
Of diamond, slipping flame from fifty slants.
In short, the father of the family
Took his departure also from our scene,
Leaving a fat succession to his heir,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda, — "fortunate,
If ever man was, in a father's death,"
(So commented the world, — not he, too kind,
Could that be, rather than scarce kind enough)
Indisputably fortunate so far,
That little of encumbrance in his path,
Which money kicks aside, would lie there long.

And finally, a rough but wholesome shock,

An accident which comes to kill or cure,
A jerk which mends a dislocated joint!
Such happy chance, at cost of twinge, no doubt,
Into the socket back again put truth,
And stopped the limb from longer dragging lie.
For love suggested, "Better shamble on,
And bear your lameness with what grace you may!"
And but for this rude wholesome accident,
Continuance of disguise and subterfuge,
Retention of first falsehood as to name
And nature in the lady, might have proved
Too necessary for abandonment.
Monsieur Léonce Miranda probably
Had else been loath to cast the mask aside,
So politic, so self-preservative,
Therefore so pardonable — though so wrong!
For see the bugbear in the background! Breathe
But ugly name, and wind is sure to waft
The husband news of the wife's whereabout:
From where he lies perdue in London town,
Forth steps the needy tailor on the stage,

Deity-like from dusk machine of fog,
And claims his consort, or his consort's worth
In rubies which her price is far above.
Hard to propitiate, harder to oppose, —
Who but the man's self came to banish fear,
A pleasant apparition, such as shocks
A moment, tells a tale, then goes for good!

Monsieur Ulysse Muhlhausen proved no less
Nor more than "Gustave," lodging opposite
Monsieur Léonce Miranda's diamond-cave
And ruby-mine, and lacking little thence
Save that its gnome would keep the captive safe,
Never return his Clara to his arms.
For why? He was become the man in vogue,
The indispensable to who went clothed
Nor cared encounter Paris fashion's blame, —
Such miracle could London absence work.
Rolling in riches — so translate "the vogue" —
Rather his object was to keep off claw
Should griffin scent the gold, should wife lay claim

To lawful portion at a future day,
Than tempt his partner from her private spoils.
Best forage each for each, nor coupled hunt!

Pursuantly, one morning, — knock at door
With knuckle, dry authoritative cough,
And easy stamp of foot, broke startlingly
On household slumber, Coliseum Street:
"Admittance in the name of Law!" In marched
The Commissary and subordinate.
One glance sufficed them. "A marital pair:
We certify, and bid good morning, sir!
Madame, a thousand pardons!" Whereupon
Monsieur Ulysse Muhlhausen, otherwise
Called "Gustave" for conveniency of trade,
Deposing in due form complaint of wrong,
Made his demand of remedy — divorce
From bed, board, share of name, and part in goods.
Monsieur Léonce Miranda owned his fault,
Protested his pure ignorance, from first
To last, of rights infringed in "Gustave's" case:

Submitted him to judgment. Law decreed
"Body and goods be henceforth separate!"
And thereupon each party took its way,
This right, this left, rejoicing, to abide
Estranged yet amicable opposites
In life as in respective dwelling-place.
Still does one read on his establishment
Huge-lettered "Gustave," — gold out-glittering
"Miranda, goldsmith," just across the street —
"A first-rate hand at riding-habits" — say
The instructed — "special cut of chamber-robes."

Thus by a rude in seeming — rightlier judged
Beneficent surprise, publicity
Stopped further fear and trembling, and what tale
Cowardice thinks a covert: one bold splash
Into the mid-shame, and the shiver ends,
Though cramp and drowning may begin perhaps.

To cite just one more point which crowned success:
Madame, Miranda's mother, most of all

An obstacle to his projected life
In license, as a daughter of the Church,
Duteous, exemplary, severe by right —
Moreover one most thoroughly beloved
Without a rival till the other sort
Possessed her son, — first storm of anger spent,
Seemed, grumblingly and grudgingly no doubt,
To aquiesce, let be what needs must be.
"With Heaven — accommodation possible!"
Saint Sganarelle had preached with such effect,
She saw now mitigating circumstance.
"The erring one was most unfortunate,
No question: but worse Magdalens repent.
Were Clara free, did only Law allow,
What fitter choice in marriage could have made
Léonce or anybody?" 'Tis alleged
And evidenced, I find, by advocate,
"Never did she consider such a tie
As baleful, springe to snap whate'er the cost."
And when the couple were in safety once
At Clairvaux, motherly, considerate,

She shrank not from advice. "Since safe you be,
Safely abide! for Winter, I know well,
Is troublesome in a cold country-house.
I recommend the south room, that we styled,
Your sire and I, the Winter-chamber."

Chance
Or purpose, — who can read the mystery? —
Combined, I say, to bid "Entrench yourself,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda, on this turf,
About this flower, so firmly that, as tent
Rises on every side around you both,
The question shall become, — Which arrogates
Stability, tent or towers afar?
May not the temporary structure suit
The stable circuit, co-exist in peace? —
Always until the proper time, no fear!
'Lay flat your tent!' is easier said than done."

So, with the best of auspices, betook
Themselves Léonce Miranda and his bride —

Provisionary — to their Clairvaux house,
Never to leave it — Till the proper time.

I told you what was Clairvaux-Priory
Ere the improper time: an old demesne
With memories, — relic, half, and ruin, whole, —
The very place, then, to repair the wits
Worn out with Paris-traffic, when its lord,
Miranda's father, took his month of ease
Purchased by industry. What contrast here!
Repose and solitude, and healthy ways!
That ticking at the back of head, he took
For motion of an inmate, stopped at once,
Proved nothing but the pavement's rattle left
Behind at Paris: here was holiday!
Welcome the quaint succeeding to the spruce,
The large and lumbersome and — might he breathe
In whisper to his own ear — dignified
And gentry-fashioned old-style haunts of sleep!
Palatial gloomy chambers for parade,
And passage-lengths of lost significance,

Never constructed as receptacle,
At his odd hours, for him their actual lord
By dint of diamond-dealing, goldsmithry.
Therefore Miranda's father chopped and changed
Nor roof-tile nor yet floor-brick, undismayed
By rains a-top or rats at bottom there.
Such contrast is so piquant for a month!
But now arrived quite other occupants
Whose cry was "Permanency, — life and death
Here, here, not elsewhere, change is all we dread!"
Their dwelling-place must be adapted, then,
To inmates, no mere truants from the town,
No temporary sojourners, forsooth,
At Clairvaux: change it into Paradise!

Fair friend, — who listen and let talk, alas! —
You would, in even such a state of things,
Pronounce, — or am I wrong? — for bidding stay
The old-world inconvenience, fresh as found.
All folks of individuality
Prefer to be reminded, now and then,

Though at the cost of vulgar cosiness,
That the shell-outside only harbors man
The vital and progressive, meant to build,
When build he may, with quite a difference,
Some time, in that far land we dream about,
Where every man is his own architect.
But then the couple here in question, each
At one in project for a happy life,
Were by no acceptation of the word
So individual that they must aspire
To architecture all-appropriate,
And therefore, in this world impossible:
They needed house to suit the circumstance,
Proprietors, not tenants for a term.
Despite a certain marking, here and there,
Of fleecy black or white distinguishment,
These vulgar sheep wore the flock's uniform.
They love the country, *they* renounce the town?
They gave a kick, as our Italians say,
To Paris ere it turned and kicked themselves!
Acquaintances might prove too hard to seek,

Or the reverse of hard to find, perchance,
Since Monsieur Gustave's apparition there.
And let me call remark upon the list
Of notabilities invoked, in Court
At Vire, to witness, by their phrases culled
From correspondence, what was the esteem
Of those we pay respect to, for "the pair
Whereof they knew the inner life," 'tis said.
Three, and three only, answered the appeal.
First, Monsieur Vaillant, music-publisher,
"Begs Madame will accept civilities."
Next, Alexandre Dumas, — sire, not son, —
"Sends compliments to Madame and to you."
And last — but now prepare for England's voice!
I will not mar nor make — here's word for word —
"A rich proprietor of Paris, he
To whom belonged that beauteous *Bagatelle*
Close to the wood of Boulogne, Hertford hight,
Assures of homages and compliments
Affectionate" — not now Miranda but
"Madame Muhlhausen." (Was this friend, the Duke

Redoubtable in rivalry before?)
Such was the evidence when evidence
Was wanted, then if ever, to the worth
Whereat acquaintances in Paris prized
Monsieur Léonce Miranda's household charm.
No wonder, then, his impulse was to live,
In Norman solitude, the Paris life:
Surround himself with Art transported thence,
And nature like those famed Elysian Fields:
Then, warm up the right color out of both,
By Boulevard friendships tempted to come taste
How Paris lived again in little there.

Monsieur Léonce Miranda practised Art.
Do let a man for once live as man likes!
Politics? Spend your life, to spare the world's:
Improve each unit by some particle
Of joy the more, deteriorate the orb
Entire, your own: poor profit, dismal loss!
Write books, paint pictures, or make music — since
Your nature leans to such life-exercise!

Ay, but such exercise begins too soon,
Concludes too late, demands life whole and sole,
Artistry being battle with the age
It lives in! Half life, — silence, while you learn
What has been done; the other half, — attempt
At speech, amid world's wail of wonderment —
"Here's something done, was never done before!"
To be the very breath that moves the age,
Means not, to have breath drive you bubble-like
Before it — but yourself to blow: that's strain;
Strain's worry through the life-time, till there's peace;
We know where peace expects the artist-soul.

Monsieur Léonce Miranda knew as much.
Therefore in Art he nowise cared to be
Creative; but creation, that had birth
In storminess long years before was born
Monsieur Léonce Miranda, — Art, enjoyed
Like fleshly objects of the chase that tempt
In cookery, not capture — these might feast
The dilettante, furnish tavern-fare

Open to all with purses open too.
To sit free and take tribute seigneur-like —
Now, not too lavish of acknowledgment,
Now, self-indulgently profuse of pay,
Always Art's seigneur, not Art's serving-man,
Whate'er the style and title and degree, —
That is the quiet life and easy death
Monsieur Léonce Miranda would approve
Wholly — provided (back I go again
To the first simile) that while glasses clink,
And viands steam, and banqueting laughs high,
All that's outside the temporary tent,
The dim grim outline of the circuit-wall,
Forgets to menace "soon or late will drop
Pavilion, soon or late you needs must march,
And laggards will be sorry they were slack!
Always — unless excuse sound plausible!"

Monsieur Léonce Miranda knew as much:
Whence his determination just to paint
So creditably as might help the eye

To comprehend how painter's eye grew dim
Ere it produced L'Ingegno's piece of work —
So to become musician that his ear
Should judge, by its own tickling and turmoil,
Who made the Solemn Mass might well die deaf —
So cultivate a literary knack
That, by experience how it whiles the time,
He might imagine how a poet, rapt
In rhyming wholly, grew so poor at last
By carelessness about his banker's-book,
That the Sieur Boileau (to provoke our smile)
Began abruptly, — when he paid devoir
To Louis Quatorze as he dined in state, —
"Sire, send a drop of broth to Pierre Corneille
Now dying and in want of sustenance!"
— I say, these half-hour playings at life's toil,
Diversified by billiards, riding, sport —
With now and then a visitor — Dumas,
Hertford — to check no aspiration's flight —
While Clara, like a diamond in the dark,
Should extract shining from what else were shade,

And multiply chance rays a million-fold, —
How could he doubt that all offence outside, —
Wrong to the towers, which, pillowed on the turf,
He thus shut eyes to, — were as good as gone?

So, down went Clairvaux-Priory to dust,
And up there rose, in lieu, yon structure gay
Above the Norman ghosts: and where the stretch
Of barren country girdled house about,
Behold the Park, the English preference!
Thus made undoubtedly a desert smile,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda.

Ay, but she?
One should not so merge soul in soul, you think?
And I think: only let us wait, nor want
Two things at once — her turn will come in time.
A cork-float danced upon the tide, we saw,
This morning, blinding-bright with briny dews:
There was no disengaging soaked from sound,
Earth-product from the sister-element.

But when we turn, the tide will turn, I think,
And bare on beach will lie exposed the buoy:
A very proper time to try, with foot
And even finger, which was buoying wave,
Which merely buoyant substance, — power to lift,
And power to be sent skyward passively.
Meanwhile, no separation of the pair!

III.

And so slipt pleasantly away five years
Of Paradisiac dream; till, as there flit
Premonitory symptoms, pricks of pain,
Because the dreamer has to start awake
And find disease dwelt active all the while
In head or stomach through his night-long sleep,—
So happened here disturbance to content.

Monsieur Léonce Miranda's last of cares,
Ere he composed himself, had been to make
Provision, that, while sleeping safe he lay,
Somebody else should, dragon-like, let fall
Never a lid, coiled round the apple-stem,

But watch the precious fruitage. Somebody
Kept shop, in short, played Paris substitute.
Himself, shrewd, well-trained, early exercised,
Could take in, at an eye-glance, luck or loss —
Know commerce throve, though lazily uplift
On elbow merely: leave his bed, forsooth?
Such active service was the substitute's.

But one October morning, at first drop
Of appled gold, first summons to be grave
Because rough Autumn's play turns earnest now,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda was required
In Paris to take counsel, face to face,
With Madame-mother: and be rated, too,
Roundly at certain items of expense
Whereat the government provisional,
The Paris substitute and shopkeeper,
Shook head, and talked of funds inadequate:
Oh, in the long run, — not if remedy
Occurred betimes! Else, — tap the generous bole
Too near the quick, — it withers to the root —

Leafy, prolific, golden apple-tree,
"Miranda," sturdy in the Place Vendôme!

"What is this reckless life you lead?" began
Madame Miranda, — whom he feared and loved, —
Her greeting. "Luxury, extravagance,
Sardanapalus' self might emulate, —
Did your good father's money go for this?
Where are the fruits of education, where
The morals which at first distinguished you,
The faith which promised to adorn your age?
And why such wastefulness outbreaking now,
When heretofore you loved economy?
Explain this pulling down and building up
Of Clairvaux, which your father bought because
Clairvaux he found it, and so left to you,
Not a gilt gingerbread big baby-house!
True, we could somehow shake head and shut eye
To what was past prevention on our part —
This reprehensible illicit bond:
We, in a manner, winking, watched consort

Our modest well-conducted pious son
With Delilah: we thought the smoking flax
Would smoulder soon away and end in snuff!
Is spark to strengthen, prove consuming fire?
No lawful family calls Clairvaux 'home'—
Why play the fool of Scripture that the voice
Admonished 'Whose shall be those things to-night,
Provided for thy morning jollity?'
To take one specimen of pure caprice
Out of the heap conspicuous in this plan,—
Puzzle of change, I call it,—titled big
'Clairvaux Restored:' what means this Belvedere?
This Tower, stuck like a fools'-cap on the roof—
Do you intend to soar to heaven from thence?
Tower, truly! Better had you planted turf—
More fitly would you dig yourself a hole
Beneath it, for the final journey's help!
O we poor parents—could we prophesy!"

Léonce was found affectionate enough
To man, to woman, child, bird, beast, alike;

But all affection, all one fire of heart
Flaming toward Madame-mother. Had she posed
The question plainly at the outset, "Choose!
Cut clean in half your all-the-world of love,
The mother and the mistress: then resolve,
Take me or take her, throw away the one!" —
He might have made the choice and marred my tale.
But, much I apprehend, the problem put
Was, "Keep both halves, yet do no detriment
To either! Prize each opposite in turn!"
Hence, while he prized at worth the Clairvaux-life
With all its tolerated naughtiness,
He, visiting in fancy Quai Rousseau,
Saw, cornered in the cosiest nook of all
That range of rooms through number Thirty-three,
The lady-mother bent o'er her *Bézique;*
While Monsieur Curé This, and Sister That, —
Superior of no matter what good House —
Did duty for Duke Hertford and Dumas,
Nay, — at his mother's age, — for Clara's self.
At Quai Rousseau, things comfortable thus,

Why should poor Clairvaux be so troublesome?
She played at cards, he built a Belvedere.
But here's the difference: she had reached the Towers
And there took pastime: he was still on Turf —
Though fully minded that, when once he marched,
No sportive fancy should distract him more.

In brief, the man was angry with himself,
With her, with all the world and much beside:
And so the unseemly words were interchanged
Which crystallize what else evaporates,
And make mere misty petulance grow hard
And sharp inside each softness, heart and soul.
Monsieur Léonce Miranda flung at last
Out of doors, fever-flushed: and there the Seine
Rolled at his feet, obsequious remedy
For fever, in a cold autumnal flow.
"Go and be rid of memory in a bath!"
Craftily whispered Who besets the ear
On such occasions.

Done as soon as dreamed.
Back shivers poor Léonce to bed — where else?
And there he lies a month 'twixt life and death,
Raving. "Remorse of conscience!" friends opine.
"Sirs, it may partly prove so," represents
Beaumont — (the family physician, he
Whom last year's Commune murdered, do you mind?)
Beaumont reports "There is some active cause,
More than mere pungency of quarrel past, —
Cause that keeps adding other food to fire.
I hear the words and know the signs, I say!
Dear Madame, you have read the Book of Saints,
How Antony was tempted? As for me,
Poor heathen, 'tis by pictures I am taught
I say then, I see standing here, — between
Me and my patient, and that crucifix
You very properly would interpose, —
A certain woman-shape, one white appeal,
'Will you leave me, then, me, me, me for her?'
Since cold Seine could not quench this flame, since flare

Of fever does not redden it away, —
Be rational, indulgent, mute — should chance
Come to the rescue — Providence, I mean —
The while I blister and phlebotomize!"

Well, somehow rescued by whatever power,
At month's end, back again conveyed himself
Monsieur Léonce Miranda, worn to rags,
Nay, tinder: stuff irreparably spoiled,
Though kindly hand should stitch and patch its best.
Clairvaux in Autumn is restorative.
A friend stitched on, patched ever. All the same,
Clairvaux looked grayer than a month ago.
Unglossed was shrubbery, unglorified
Each copse, so wealthy once; the garden-plots,
The orchard-walks, showed dearth and dreariness.
The sea lay out at distance crammed by cloud
Into a leaden wedge; and sorrowful
Sulked field and pasture with persistent rain.
Nobody came so far from Paris now:
Friends did their duty by an invalid

Whose convalescence claimed entire repose.
Only a single ministrant was stanch
At quiet reparation of the stuff —
Monsieur Léonce Miranda, worn to rags:
But she was Clara and the world beside.

Another month, the year packed up his plagues
And sullenly departed, peddler-like,
As apprehensive old-world ware might show
To disadvantage when the new-comer,
Merchant of novelties, young 'Sixty-eight,
With brand-new bargains, whistled o'er the lea.
Things brightened somewhat o'er the Christmas hearth,
As Clara plied assiduously her task.

"Words are but words and wind. Why let the wind
Sing in your ear, bite, sounding, to your brain?
Old folk and young folk, still at odds, of course!
Age quarrels because Spring puts forth a leaf
While Winter has a mind that boughs stay bare;
Or rather — worse than quarrel — age descries

Propriety in preaching life to death.
'Enjoy nor youth, nor Clairvaux, nor poor me?'
Dear Madame, you enjoy your age, 'tis thought!
Your number Thirty-three on Quai Rousseau
Cost fifty times the price of Clairvaux, tipped
Even with our prodigious Belvedere;
You entertain the Curé, — we, Dumas:
We play charades, while you prefer *Bézique:*
Do lead your own life and let ours alone!
Cross Old Year shall have done his worst, my friend!
Here comes gay New Year with a gift, no doubt!
Look up and let in light that longs to shine —
One flash of light, and where will darkness hide?
Your cold makes me too cold, love! Keep me warm!"

Whereat Léonce Miranda raised his head
From his two white thin hands, and forced a smile,
And spoke: "I do look up, and see your light
Above me! Let New Year contribute warmth —
I shall refuse no fuel that may blaze."

Nor did he. Three days after, just a spark
From Paris, answered by a snap at Caen
Or whither reached the telegraphic wire:
"Quickly to Paris! On arrival, learn
Why you are wanted!" Curt and critical!

Off starts Léonce, one fear from head to foot;
Caen, Rouen, Paris, as the railway helps;
Then come the Quai and Number Thirty-three.
"What is the matter, concierge?" — a grimace!
He mounts the staircase, makes for the main seat
Of dreadful mystery which draws him there —
Bursts in upon a bedroom known too well —
There lies all left now of the mother once.
Tapers define the stretch of rigid white,
Nor want there ghastly velvets of the grave.
A blackness sits on either side at watch,
Sisters, good souls but frightful all the same,
Silent: a priest is spokesman for his corpse.
"Dead, through Léonce Miranda! stricken down
Without a minute's warning, yesterday!

What did she say to you, and you to her,
Two months ago? This is the consequence!
The doctors have their name for the disease;
I, you, and God say — heart-break, nothing more!"
Monsieur Léonce Miranda, like a stone
Fell at the bedfoot and found respite so,
While the priest went to tell the company.
What follows you are free to disbelieve.
It may be true or false that this good priest
Had taken his instructions, — who shall blame? —
From quite another quarter than, perchance,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda might suppose
Would offer solace in such pressing need.
All he remembered of his kith and kin
Was, they were worthily his substitutes
In commerce, did their work and drew their pay.
But *they* remembered, in addition, this —
They fairly might expect inheritance,
As nearest kin, called Family by law
And gospel both. Now, since Miranda's life
Showed nothing like abatement of distaste

For conjugality, but preference
Continued and confirmed of that smooth chain
Which slips and leaves no knot behind, no heir —
Presumption was, the man, become mature,
Would at a calculable day, discard
His old and outworn . . what we blush to name,
And make society the just amends ;
Scarce by a new attachment — Heaven forbid !
Still less by lawful marriage : that's reserved
For those who make a proper choice at first —
Not try both courses, and would grasp in age
The very treasure youth preferred to spurn !
No ! putting decently such thought aside,
The penitent must rather give his powers
To such a reparation of the past
As, edifying kindred, makes them rich.
Now, how would it enrich prospectively
The Cousins, if he lavished such expense
On Clairvaux ? — pretty as a toy, but then
As toy, so much productive, and no more !
If all the outcome of the goldsmith's shop

Went to gild Clairvaux, where remained the funds
For Cousinry to spread out lap and take?
This must be thought of and provided for.
I give it you as mere conjecture, mind!
To help explain the wholesome unannounced
Intelligence, the shock that startled guilt,
The scenic show, much yellow, black and white
By taper-shine, the nuns — portentous pair,
And, more than all, the priest's admonishment —
"No flattery of self! You murdered her!
The gray lips, silent now, reprove by mine.
You wasted all your living, rioted
In harlotry — she warned and I repeat!
No warning had she, for she needed none:
If this should be the last yourself receive?"
Done for the best, no doubt, though clumsily, —
Such, and so startling, the reception here.
You hardly wonder if down fell at once
The tawdry tent, pictorial, musical,
Poetical, besprent with hearts and darts;
Its cobweb-work, betinselled stitchery,

Lay dust about our sleeper on the turf,
And showed an outer wall distinct and dread.

Senseless he fell, and long he lay, and much
Seemed salutary in his punishment
To planners and performers of the piece.
When pain ends, pardon prompt may operate.
There was a good attendance close at hand,
Waiting the issue in the great saloon,
Cousins with consolation and advice.

All things thus happily performed to point,
No wonder at success commensurate.
Once swooning stopped, once anguish subsequent
Raved out, — a sudden resolution chilled
His blood and changed his swimming eyes to stone,
As the poor fellow raised himself upright,
Collected strength, looked, once for all, his look,
Then, turning, put officious help aside,
And passed from out the chamber. "For affairs!"
So he announced himself to the saloon:

"We owe a duty to the living too!" —
Monsieur Léonce Miranda tried to smile.

How did the hearts of Cousinry rejoice
At their stray sheep returning thus to fold,
As, with a dignity, precision, sense,
All unsuspected in the man before,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda made minute
Detail of his intended scheme of life
Thenceforward and forever. "Vanity
Was ended: its redemption must begin —
And, certain, would continue; but since life
Was awfully uncertain — witness here! —
Behooved him lose no moment, but discharge
Immediate burthen of the world's affairs
On backs that kindly volunteered to crouch.
Cousins, with easier conscience, blamelessly
Might carry on the goldsmith's trade, in brief,
Uninterfered with by its lord who late
Was used to supervise and take due tithe.
A stipend now sufficed his natural need:

Themselves should fix what sum allows man live.
But half a dozen words concisely plain
Might, first of all, make sure that, on demise,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda's property
Passed by bequeathment, every particle,
To the right heirs, the cousins of his heart.
As for that woman — they would understand!
This was a step would take her by surprise!
It were too cruel did he snatch away
Decent subsistence. She was young, and fair,
And . . and attractive! Means must be supplied
To save her from herself, and from the world,
And . . from anxieties, might haunt him else
When he were fain have other thoughts in mind."

It was a sight to melt a stone, that thaw
Of rigid disapproval into dew
Of sympathy, as each extended palm
Of cousin hasted to enclose those five
Cold fingers, tendered so mistrustfully,
Despairingly of condonation now!

One would have thought, — at every fervent shake,
In re-assurance of those timid tips, —
The penitent had squeezed, considerate,
By way of fee into physician's hand
For physicking his soul, some diamond knob.

And now let pass a week. Once more behold
The same assemblage in the same saloon —
Waiting the entry of protagonist
Monsieur Léonce Miranda. "Just a week
Since the death-day, — was ever man transformed
Like this man?" questioned cousin of his mate.

Last seal to the repentance had been set
Three days before, at Sceaux in neighborhood
Of Paris, where they laid with funeral pomp
Mother by father. Let me spare the rest:
How the poor fellow, in his misery,
Buried hot face and bosom, where heaped snow
Offered assistance, at the grave's black edge,
And there lay, till uprooted by main force

From where he prayed to grow and ne'er again
Walk earth unworthily as heretofore.
It is not with impunity priests teach
The doctrine he was dosed with from his youth —
"Pain to the body — profit to the soul;
Corporeal pleasure — so much woe to pay
When disembodied spirit gives account."

However, woe had done its worst, this time.
Three days allow subsidence of much grief.
Already, regular and equable,
Forward went purpose to effect. At once
The testament was written, signed and sealed.
Disposure of the commerce — that took time,
And would not suffer by a week's delay;
But the immediate, the imperious need,
The call demanding of the Cousinry
Co-operation, what convened them thus,
Was — how and when should deputation march
To Coliseum Street, the old abode
Of wickedness, and there acquaint — oh, shame!

Her, its old inmate, who had followed up
And lay in wait in the old haunt for prey —
That they had rescued, they possessed Léonce,
Whose loathing at re-capture equalled theirs —
Upbraid that sinner with her sinfulness,
Impart the fellow-sinner's firm resolve
Never to set eyes on her face again:
Then, after stipulations strict but just,
Hand her the first instalment, — moderate
Enough, no question, — of her salary:
Admonish for the future, and so end. —
All which good purposes, decided on
Sufficiently, were waiting full effect
When presently the culprit should appear.

Somehow appearance was delayed too long;
Chatting and chirping sunk unconsciously
To silence, nay, uneasiness at length
Alarm, till — any thing for certitude! —
A peeper was commissioned to explore,
At keyhole, what the laggard's task might be —

What caused so palpable a disrespect!

Back came the tiptoe cousin from his quest.
"Monsieur Léonce was busy," he believed,
"Contemplating — those love-letters, perhaps,
He always carried, as if precious stones,
About with him. He read, one after one,
Some sort of letters. But his back was turned.
The empty coffer open at his side,
He leant on elbow by the mantle-piece
Before the hearth-fire; big and blazing too."

"Better he shovelled them all in at once,
And burned the rubbish!" was a cousin's quip,
Warming his own hands at the fire the while.
I told you, snow had fallen outside, I think.

When suddenly a cry, a host of cries,
Screams, hubbub and confusion thrilled the room.
All by a common impulse rushed thence, reached
The late death-chamber, tricked with trappings still,

Skulls, cross-bones, and such moral broidery.
Madame Muhlhausen might have played the witch,
Dropped down the chimney, and appalled Léonce
By some proposal, "Parting touch of hand!"
If she but touched his foolish hand, you know!

Something had happened quite contrariwise.
Monsieur Léonce Miranda, one by one,
Had read the letters and the love they held,
And that task finished, had required his soul
To answer frankly what the prospect seemed
Of his own love's departure — pledged to part!
Then, answer being unmistakable,
He had replaced the letters quietly,
Shut coffer, and so, grasping either side
By its convenient handle, plunged the whole —
Letters and coffer and both hands to boot,
Into the burning grate and held them there.
"Burn, burn and purify my past!" said he,
Calmly, as if he felt no pain at all.

In vain they pulled him from the torture place:
The strong man, with the soul of tenfold strength,
Broke from their clutch: and there again smiled he,
The miserable hands re-bathed in fire —
Constant to that ejaculation, "Burn,
Burn, purify!" And when, combining force,
They fairly dragged the victim out of reach
Of further harm, he had no hands to hurt —
Two horrible remains of right and left,
"Whereof the bones, phalanges formerly,
Carbonized, were still crackling with the flame,"
Said Beaumont. And he fought them all the while:
"Why am I hindered when I would be pure?
Why leave the sacrifice still incomplete?
She holds me, I must have more hands to burn!"
They were the stronger, though, and bound him fast.

Beaumont was in attendance presently.
"What did I tell you? Preachment to the deaf!
I wish he had been deafer when they preached,
Those priests! But wait till next Republic comes!"

As for Léonce, a single sentiment
Possessed his soul and occupied his tongue —
Absolute satisfaction at the deed.
Never he varied, 'tis observable,
Nor in the stage of agonies (which proved
Absent without leave, — science seemed to think)
Nor yet in those three months' febricity
Which followed, — never did he vary tale —
Remaining happy beyond utterance.
"Ineffable beatitude" — I quote
The words, I cannot give the smile — "such bliss
Abolished pain! Pain might or might not be:
He felt in heaven, where flesh desists to fret.
Purified now and henceforth, all the past
Reduced to ashes with the flesh defiled!
Why all those anxious faces round his bed?
What was to pity in their patient, pray,
When doctor came and went, and Cousins watched?
— Kindness, but in pure waste!" he said and smiled.
And if a trouble would at times disturb
The ambrosial mood, it came from other source

Than the corporeal transitory pang.
"If sacrifice be incomplete!" cried he —
"If ashes have not sunk reduced to dust,
To nullity! If atoms coalesce
Till something grow, grow, get to be a shape
I hate, I hoped to burn away from me!
She is my body, she and I are one,
Yet, all the same, there, there at bed-foot stands
The woman wound about my flesh and blood,
There, the arms open, the more wonderful,
The whiter for the burning . . Vanish thou!
Avaunt, fiend's self found in the form I wore!"

"Whereat," said Beaumont, "since his hands were gone,
The patient in a frenzy kicked and kicked
To keep off some imagined visitant.
So will it prove as long as priests may preach
Spiritual terrors!" groaned the evidence
Of Beaumont that his patient was stark mad —
Produced in time and place: of which anon.
"Mad, or why thus insensible to pain?

Body and soul are one thing, with two names
For more or less elaborated stuff."

Such is the new *Religio Medici.*
Though antiquated faith held otherwise,
Explained that body is not soul, but just
Soul's servant: that, if soul be satisfied,
Possess already joy or pain enough,
It uses to ignore, as master may,
What increase, joy or pain, its servant brings —
Superfluous contribution: soul, once served,
Has nought to do with body's service more.
Each, speculated on exclusively,
As if its office were the only one,
Body or soul, shows either, service paid
In joy and pain, that's blind and objectless —
A servant toiling for no master's good —
Or else shows good received and put to use,
As if within soul's self grew joy and pain,
Nor needed body for a ministrant.
I note these old unscientific ways:

Poor Beaumont cannot: for the Commune ruled
Next year, and ere they shot his priests, shot him.

Monsieur Léonce Miranda raved himself
To rest; lay three long months in bliss or bale,
Inactive, anyhow: more need that heirs,
His natural protectors, should assume
The management, bestir their cousinship,
And carry out that purpose of reform
Such tragic work now made imperative.
A deputation, with austerity,
Nay, sternness, bore her sentence to the field
Aforesaid, — she at watch for turn of wheel
And fortune's favor, Street — you know the name.
A certain roughness seemed appropriate: "You —
Steiner, Muhlhausen, whatsoe'er your name,
Cause whole and sole of this catastrophe!" —
And so forth, introduced the embassage.

"Monsieur Léonce Miranda was divorced
Once and forever from his — ugly word.

Himself had gone for good to Portugal:
They came empowered to act and stipulate.
Hold! no discussion! Terms were settled now:
So much of present and prospective pay,
But also — good engagement in plain terms
She never seek renewal of the past!"

This little harmless tale produced effect.
Madame Muhlhausen owned her sentence just,
Its execution gentle. "Stern their phrase,
These kinsfolk with a right she recognized —
But kind its import probably, which now
Her agitation, her bewilderment,
Rendered too hard to understand, perhaps.
Let them accord the natural delay,
And she would ponder and decide. Meantime,
So far was she from wish to follow friend
Who fled her, that she would not budge from place —
Now that her friend was fled to Portugal, —
Never! *She* leave this Coliseum Street?

No, not a footstep!" she assured them.

So —

They saw they might have left that tale untold
When, after some weeks more were gone to waste,
Recovery seemed incontestable,
And the poor mutilated figure, once
The gay and glancing fortunate young spark,
Miranda, humble and obedient took
The doctor's counsel, issued sad and slow
From precincts of the sick-room, tottered down,
And out, and into carriage for fresh air,
And so drove straight to Coliseum Street,
And tottered upstairs, knocked, and in a trice
Was clasped in the embrace of whom you know —
With much asseveration, I omit,
Of constancy henceforth till life should end.
When all this happened, — "What reward," cried she,
"For judging her Miranda by herself!
For never having entertained a thought

Of breaking promise, leaving home forsooth,
To follow who was fled to Portugal!
As if she thought they spoke a word of truth!
She knew what love was, knew that he loved her;
The Cousinry knew nothing of the kind."

I will not scandalize you and recount
How matters made the morning pass away.
Not one reproach, not one acknowledgment,
One explanation: all was understood!
Matters at end, the home-uneasiness
Cousins were feeling at this jaunt prolonged
Was ended also by the entry of —
Not simply him whose exit had been made
By mild command of doctor "Out with you!
I warrant we receive another man!"
But — would that I could say, the married pair!
And, quite another man assuredly,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda took on him
Forthwith to bid the trio, priest and nuns,
Constant in their attendance all this while,

Take his thanks and their own departure too;
Politely but emphatically. Next,
The Cousins were dismissed: "No protest, pray!
Whatever I engaged to do is done,
Or shall be — I but follow your advice:
Love I abjure: the lady, you behold,
Is changed as I myself; her sex is changed:
This is my Brother — He will tend me now,
Be all my world henceforth as brother should.
Gentlemen, of a kinship I revere,
Your interest in trade is laudable;
I purpose to indulge it: manage mine,
My goldsmith-business in the Place Vendôme,
Wholly — through purchase at the price adjudged
By experts I shall have assistance from.
If, in conformity with sage advice,
I leave a busy world of interests
I own myself unfit for — yours the care
That any world of other aims, wherein
I hope to dwell, be easy of access
Through ministration of the moneys due,

As we determine, with all proper speed,
Since I leave Paris to repair my health.
Say farewell to our Cousins, Brother mine!"

And, all submissiveness, as brother might,
The lady courtesied gracefully, and dropt
More than mere courtesy, a concluding phrase
So silver-soft, yet penetrative too,
That none of it escaped the favored ears:
"Had I but credited one syllable,
I should to-day be lying stretched on straw,
The produce of your miserable *rente!*
Whereas, I hold him — do you comprehend?"
Cousin regarded cousin, turned up eye,
And took departure, as our Tuscans laugh,
Each with his added palm-breadth of long nose, —
Curtailed but imperceptibly, next week,
When transfer was accomplished, and the trade
In Paris did indeed become their own,
But bought by them and sold by him on terms
'Twixt man and man, — might serve 'twixt wolf and
wolf,

Substitute "bit and clawed" for "signed and
sealed" —
Our ordinary business-terms, in short.
Another week, and Clairvaux broke in bloom
At end of April, to receive again
Monsieur Léonce Miranda, gentleman,
Ex-jeweller and goldsmith: never more, —
According to the purpose he professed, —
To quit this paradise, his property,
This Clara, his companion: so it proved.

The Cousins, each with elongated nose,
Discussed their bargain, reconciled them soon
To hard necessity, disbursed the cash,
And hastened to subjoin, wherever type
Proclaimed "Miranda" to the public, "Called
Now Firm-Miranda." There, a colony,
They flourish underneath the name that still
Maintains the old repute, I understand.
They built their Clairvaux, dream-Château, in Spain
Perhaps — but Place Vendôme is waking worth:

Oh, they lost little! — only, man and man
Hardly conclude transactions of the kind
As cousin should with cousin, — cousins think.
For the rest, all was honorably done,
So, ere buds break to blossom, let us breathe!
Never suppose there was one particle
Of recrudescence — wound, half-healed before,
Set freshly running — sin, repressed as such,
New loosened as necessity of life!
In all this revocation and resolve,
Far be sin's self-indulgence from your thought!
The man had simply made discovery,
By process I respect if not admire,
That what was, was: — that turf, his feet had touched,
Felt solid just as much as yonder wall
He saw with eyes, but did not stand upon,
And could not, if he would, reach in a leap.
People had told him flowery turf was false
To footstep, tired the traveller soon, beside:
That was untrue. They told him "One fair stride
Plants on safe platform, and secures man rest."

That was untrue. Some varied the advice:
"Neither was solid, towers no more than turf:"
Double assertion, therefore twice as false.
"I like these amateurs"—our friend had laughed
Could he turn what he felt to what he thought,
And, that again, to what he put in words:
"I like their pretty trial, proof of paste
Or precious stone, by delicate approach
Of eye askance, fine feel of finger-tip,
Or touch of tongue inquisitive for cold.
I tried my jewels in a crucible:
Fierce fire has felt them, licked them, left them
sound.
Don't tell me that my earthly love is sham,
My heavenly fear a clever counterfeit!
Each may oppose each, yet be true alike!"

To build up, independent of the towers,
A durable pavilion o'er the turf,
Had issued in disaster. "What remained
Except, by tunnel, or else gallery,

To keep communication 'twixt the two,
Unite the opposites, both near and far,
And never try complete abandonment
Of one or other?" so he thought, not said.

And to such engineering feat, I say,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda saw the means
Precisely in this revocation prompt
Of just those benefits of worldly wealth
Conferred upon his Cousinry — all but!

This Clairvaux — you would know, were you at top
Of yonder crowning grace, its Belvedere —
Is situate in one angle-niche of three,
At equidistance from Saint-Rambert — there
Behind you, and The Ravissante, beside —
There: steeple, steeple, and this Clairvaux-top,
(A sort of steeple) constitute a trine,
With not a tenement to break each side,
Two miles or so in length, if eye can judge.

Now, this is native land of miracle.
O why, why, why, from all recorded time,
Was miracle not wrought, but only once,
To help whoever wanted help indeed?
If on the day when Spring's green girlishness
Grew nubile, and she trembled into May,
And our Miranda climbed to clasp the Spring
A-tiptoe o'er the sea, those wafts of warmth,
Those cloudlets scudding under the bare blue,
And all that new sun, that fresh hope about
His airy place of observation, — friend,
Feel with me that if just then, just for once,
Some angel, — such as the authentic pen
Yonder records a daily visitant
Of ploughman Claudeum, rheatic in the joints,
And spinster Jeanne, with megrim troubled much, —
If such an angel, with nought else to do,
Had taken station on the pinnacle
And simply said, "Léonce, look straight before!
Neither to the right hand nor to left: for why?
Being a stupid soul, you want a guide

To turn the goodness in you to account
And make stupidity submit itself.
Go to Saint-Rambert! Straightway get such guide!
There stands a man of men. You, jeweller,
Must needs have heard how once the biggest block
Of diamond now in Europe lay exposed
Mid specimens of stone and earth and ore,
On huckster's stall, — Navona names the Square,
And Rome the city for the incident, —
Labelled 'quartz-crystal, price one halfpenny.'
Haste and secure, that ha'p'worth, on your life!
That man will read you rightly head to foot,
Mark the brown face of you, the bushy beard,
The breadth 'twixt shoulder blades, and through each black
Castilian orbit, see into your soul.
Talk to him for five minutes — nonsense, sense,
No matter what — describe your horse, your hound, —
Give your opinion of the policy
Of Monsieur Rouher, — will he succor Rome?
Your estimate of what may outcome be

From Ecumenical Assemblage there!
After which samples of intelligence,
Rapidly run through those events you call
Your past life, tell what once you tried to do,
What you intend on doing this next May!
There he stands, reads an English newspaper,
Stock-still, and now, again upon the move,
Paces the beach to taste the Spring, like you,
Since both are human beings in God's eye.
He will have understood you, I engage.
Endeavor, for your part, to understand
He knows more, and loves better, than the world
That never heard his name, and never may.
He will have recognized, ere breath be spent
And speech at end, how much that's good in man,
And generous, and self-devoting, makes
Monsieur Léonce Miranda worth his help;
While sounding to the bottom ignorance
Historical and philosophical
And moral and religious, all one couch
Of crassitude, a portent of its kind.

Then, just as he would pityingly teach
Your body to repair maltreatment, give
Advice that you should make those stumps to stir
With artificial hands of caoutchouc,
So would he soon supply your crippled soul
With crutches, from his own intelligence,
Able to help you onward in the path
Of rectitude whereto your face is set,
And counsel justice — to yourself, the first,
To your associate, very like a wife
Or something better, — to the world at large,
Friends, strangers, horses, hounds and Cousinry —
All which amount of justice will include
Justice to God. Go and consult his voice!"
Since angel would not say this simple truth,
What hinders that my heart relieve itself,
O friend, who makest warm my wintry world,
And wise my heaven, if there we consort too?
Monsieur Léonce Miranda turned, alas,
Or was turned, by no angel, t'other way,
And got him guidance of The Ravissante.

Now, into the originals of faith,
Yours, mine, Miranda's, no inquiry here,
Of faith, as apprehended by mankind,
The causes, were they caught and catalogued,
Would too distract, too desperately foil
Inquirer. How may analyst reduce
Quantities to exact their opposites,
Value to zero, then bring zero back
To value of supreme preponderance?
How substitute thing meant for thing expressed?
Detect the wire-thread through that fluffy silk
Men call their rope, their real compulsive power?
Suppose effected such anatomy,
And demonstration made of what belief
Has moved believer — were the consequence
Reward at all? would each man straight deduce,
From proved reality of cause, effect
Conformable? believe and unbelieve
According to your True thus disengaged
From all his heap of False called reason first?

No: hand once used to hold a soft thick twist,
Cannot now grope its way by wire alone:
Childhood may catch the knack, scarce Youth, not
Age!
That's the reply rewards you. Just as well
Remonstrate to yon peasant in the blouse
That, had he justified the true intent
Of Nature who composed him thus and thus,
Weakly or strongly, here he would not stand
Struggling with uncongenial earth and sky,
But elsewhere tread the surface of the globe,
Since one meridian suits the faulty lungs,
Another bids the sluggish liver work.
"Here I was born, for better or for worse:
I did not choose a climate for myself;
Admit, my life were healthy, led elsewhere,"
(He answers) "how am I to migrate, pray?"

Therefore the course to take is — spare your pains,
And trouble uselessly with discontent
Nor soul nor body, by parading proof

That neither haply had known ailment, placed
Precisely where the circumstance forbade
Their lot should fall to either of the pair.
But try and, what you find wrong, remedy,
Accepting the conditions: never ask
"How came you to be born here with those lungs,
That liver?" But bid asthma smoke a pipe,
Stramonium, just as if no Tropics were,
And ply with calomel the sluggish duet,
Nor taunt "The born Norwegian breeds no bile!"
And as with body, so proceed with soul:
Nor less discerningly, where faith you found,
However foolish and fantastic, grudge
To play the doctor and amend mistake,
Because a wisdom were conceivable
Whence faith had sprung robust above disease.
Far beyond human help, that source of things!
Since, in the first stage, so to speak, — first stare
Of apprehension at the invisible,
Begins divergency of mind from mind,
Superior from inferior: leave this first!

Little you change there! What comes afterward —
From apprehended thing, each inference
With practicality concerning life,
This you may test and try, confirm the right
Or contravene the wrong which reasons there.
The offspring of the sickly faith must prove
Sickly act also: stop a monster-birth!
When water's in the cup, and not the cloud,
Then is the proper time for chemic test:
Belief permits your skill to operate
When, drop by drop condensed from misty heaven,
'Tis wrung out, lies a bowl-full in the fleece.
How dew came down to earth, let Gideon say:
What purpose water serves, your word or two
May teach him, should he fancy it lights fire.

Concerning, then, our vaporous Ravissante —
How fable first precipitated faith —
Silence you get upon such point from me.
But when I see come posting to the pair
At Clairvaux, for the cure of soul-disease,

This Father of the Mission, Parish-priest,
This Mother of the Convent, Nun I know —
They practise in that second stage of things;
They boast no fresh distillery of faith;
'Tis dogma in the bottle, bright and old,
They bring; and I pretend to pharmacy.
They undertake the cure with all my heart!
He trusts them, and they surely trust themselves.
I ask no better. Never mind the cause,
Fons et origo of the malady,
Apply the drug with courage! Here's our case.
Monsieur Léonce Miranda asks of God,
— May a man, living in illicit tie,
Continue, by connivance of the Church,
No matter what amends he please to make
Short of forthwith relinquishing the sin?
Physicians, what do you propose for cure?

Father and Mother of The Ravissante,
Read your own records, and you find prescribed
As follows, when a couple out of sorts

Rather than gravely suffering, sought your skill
And thereby got their health again. Perpend!
Two and a half good centuries ago,
Luc de la Maison Rouge, a nobleman
Of Claise, (the river gives this country name)
And, just as noblewoman, Maude his wife,
Having been married many happy years
Spent in God's honor and man's service too,
Conceived, while yet in flower of youth and hope,
The project of departing each from each
Forever, and dissolving marriage-bonds
That both might enter a religious life.
Needing, before they came to such resolve,
Divine illumination, — course was clear, —
They visited your church in pilgrimage.
On Christmas morn, communicating straight,
They heard three Masses proper for the day,
"It is incredible with what effect" —
Quoth the Cistercian monk I copy from —
And, next day, came, again communicants,
Again heard Masses manifold, but now

With added thanks to Christ for special grace
And consolation granted: in the night,
Had been divorce from marriage, manifest
By signs and tokens. So, they made great gifts,
Left money for more Masses, and returned
Homeward rejoicing — he, to take the rules,
As Brother Dionysius, Capucin,
She, to become first postulant, then nun
According to the rules of Benedict,
Sister Scolastica: so ended they,
And so do I — not end nor yet commence
One note or comment. What was done was done.
Now, Father of the Mission, here's your case!
And, Mother of the Convent, here's its cure!
If separation was permissible,
And that decree of Christ, "What God hath joined
Let no man put asunder," nullified
Because a couple, blameless in the world,
Had the conceit that, still more blamelessly,
Out of the world, by breach of marriage-vow,
Their life was like to pass, — you oracles

Of God, — since holy Paul says such you are, —
Hesitate, not one moment, to pronounce
When questioned by the pair now needing help
"Each from the other go, you guilty ones,
Preliminary to your least approach
Nearer the Power that thus could strain a point
In favor of a pair of innocents
Who thought their wedded hands not clean enough
To touch and leave unsullied their souls' snow!
Are not your hands found filthy by the world,
Mere human law and custom? Not a step
Nearer till hands be washed and purified!"

What they did say is immaterial, since
Certainly it was nothing of the kind.
There was no washing hands of him (alack,
You take me? — in the figurative sense!)
But, somehow, gloves were drawn o'er dirt and all,
And practice with the Church procured thereby.
Seeing that, — all remonstrance proved in vain,
Persuasives tried and terrors put to use,

I nowise question, — when the guilty pair
Only embraced the closelier, obstinate, —
Father and Mother went from Clairvaux back
Their weary way, with heaviness of heart,
I grant you, but each palm well crossed with coin,
And nothing like a smutch perceptible.
Monsieur Léonce Miranda might compound
For sin? — no, surely! but by gifts — prepare
His soul the better for contrition, say!
Gift followed upon gift, at all events.
Good counsel was rejected, on one part:
Hard money, on the other — may we hope
Was unreflectingly consigned to purse?

Two years did this experiment engage
Monsieur Léonce Miranda: how by gifts
To God and to God's poor, a man might stay
In sin and yet stave off sin's punishment.
No salve could be conceived more nicely mixed
For this man's nature, — generosity, —
Susceptibility to human ills,

Corporeal, mental, — self-devotedness
Made up Miranda — whether strong or weak
Elsewhere, may be inquired another time.
In mercy, he was strong, at all events.
Enough! he could not see a beast in pain,
Much less a man, without the will to aid;
And where the will was, there the means were too,
Since that good bargain with the Cousinry.

The news flew fast about the countryside
That, with the kind man, it was ask and have;
And ask and have they did. To instance you: —
A mob of beggars at The Ravissante
Clung to his skirts one day, and cried, "We thirst!"
Forthwith he bade a cask of wine be broached
To satisfy all comers, till, dead-drunk
And satisfied, they strewed the holy place.
For this was grown religious and a rite:
Such slips of judgment, gifts irregular,
Showed but as spillings of the golden grist
On either side the hopper, through blind zeal;

Steadily the main stream went pouring on
From mill to mouth of sack — held wide and close
By Father of the Mission, Parish-priest,
And Mother of the Convent, Nun I know,
With such effect that, in the sequel, proof
Was tendered to the Court at Vire, last month,
That in these same two years, expenditure
At quiet Clairvaux rose to the amount
Of Forty Thousand English pounds: whereof
A trifle went, no inappropriate close
Of bounty, to supply the Virgin's crown
With that stupendous jewel from New York,
Now blazing as befits the Star of Sea.

Such signs of grace, outward and visible,
I rather give you, for your sake and mine,
Than put in evidence the inward strife,
Spiritual effort to compound for fault
By payment of devotion — thank the phrase!
That payment was as punctual, do not doubt,
As its far easier fellow. Yesterday

I trudged the distance from The Ravissante
To Clairvaux, with my two feet: but our friend,
The more to edify the country-folk,
Was wont to make that journey on both knees.
"Maliciously perverted incident!"
Snarled the retort, when this was told at Vire:
"The man paid mere devotion as he passed,
Knelt decently at just each wayside shrine!"
Alas, my lawyer, I trudged yesterday —
On my two feet, and with both eyes wide ope, —
The distance, and could find no shrine at all!
According to his lights, I praise the man.
Enough! incessant was devotion, say —
With her, you know of, praying at his side.
Still, there be relaxations of the tense:
Or life indemnifies itself for strain,
Or finds its very strain grow feebleness.
Monsieur Léonce Miranda's days were passed
Much as of old, in simple work and play.
His first endeavor, on recovery
From that sad ineffectual sacrifice,

Had been to set about repairing loss:
Never admitting, loss was to repair.
No word at any time escaped his lips
— Betrayed a lurking presence, in his heart,
Of sorrow; no regret for mischief done —
Punishment suffered, he would rather say.
Good-tempered schoolboy-fashion, he preferred
To laugh away his flogging, fair price paid
For pleasure out of bounds: if needs must be,
Get pleasure and get flogged a second time!
A sullen subject would have nursed the scars
And made excuse, for throwing grammar by,
That bench was grown uneasy to the seat.
No: this poor fellow cheerfully got hands
Fit for his stumps, and what hands failed to do,
The other members did in their degree —
Unwonted service. With his mouth alone
He wrote, nay, painted pictures — think of that?
He played on a piano pedal-keyed,
Kicked out — if it was Bach's — good music thence.
He rode, that's readily conceivable,

But then he shot and never missed his bird,
With other feats as dexterous: I infer
He was not ignorant what hands are worth,
When he resolved on ruining his own.

So the two years passed somehow — who shall say
Foolishly, — as one estimates mankind,
The work they do, the play they leave undone? —
Two whole years spent in that experiment
I told you of, at Clairvaux all the time,
From April on to April: why that month
More than another, notable in life?
Does the awakening of the year arouse
Man to new projects, nerve him for fresh feats
Of what proves, for the most part of mankind
Playing or working, novel folly too?
At any rate, I see no slightest sign
Of folly (let me tell you in advance)
Nothing but wisdom meets me manifest
In the procedure of the Twentieth Day
Of April, 'Seventy, — folly's year in France.

It was delightful Spring, and out of doors
Temptation to adventure. Walk or ride?
There was a wild young horse to exercise,
And teach the way to go, and pace to keep:
Monsieur Léonce Miranda chose to ride.
So, while they clapped soft saddle straight on back,
And bitted jaw to satisfaction, — since
The partner of his days must stay at home,
Teased by some trifling legacy of March
To throat or shoulder, — visit duly paid
And "farewell" given and received again, —
As chamber-door considerately closed
Behind him, still five minutes were to spend.
How better, than by clearing, two and two,
The staircase-steps and coming out aloft
Upon the platform yonder (raise your eyes!)
And tasting, just as those two years before,
Spring's bright advance upon the tower a-top,
The feature of the front, the Belvedere?

Look at it for a moment while I breathe.

IV.

Ready to hear the rest? How good you are!

Now for this Twentieth splendid day of Spring,
All in a tale, — sun, wind, sky, earth and sea, —
To bid man, "Up, be doing!" Mount the stair,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda mounts so brisk,
And look — ere his elastic foot arrive —
Your longest, far and wide, o'er fronting space.
Yon white streak — Havre lighthouse! Name and name,
How the mind runs from each to each relay,
Town after town, till Paris' self be touched,
Superlatively big with life and death

To all the world, that very day perhaps!
But who stepped out upon the platform here,
Pinnacled over the expanse, gave thought
Neither to Rouher nor Ollivier, Roon
Nor Bismarck, Emperor nor King, but just
To steeple, church, and shrine, The Ravissante!

He saw Her, whom myself saw, but when Spring
Was passing into Fall: not robed and crowned
As, thanks to him, and her you know about,
She stands at present; but She smiled the same.
Thither he turned—to never turn away.

He thought . .

(Suppose I should prefer "He said"?
Along with every act—and speech is act—
There go, a multitude impalpable
To ordinary human faculty,
The thoughts which give the act significance.
Who is a poet needs must apprehend

Alike both speech and thoughts which prompt to
speak.
Part these, and thought withdraws to poetry:
Speech is reported in the newspaper.)

He said, then, probably no word at all,
But thought as follows — in a minute's space —
One particle of ore beats out such leaf!

"This Spring morn, I am forty-three years old:
In prime of life, perfection of estate
Bodily, mental, nay, material too, —
My very worldly fortunes reach their height.
Body and soul alike on eminence:
It is not probable I ever raise
Soul above standard by increase of worth,
Nor reasonably may expect to lift
Body beyond the present altitude.

"Behold me, Lady called The Ravissante!
Such as I am, I — gave myself to you

So long since, that I cannot say 'I give.'
All my belongings, what is summed in life,
I have submitted wholly — as man might,
At least, as *I* might, who am weak, not strong, —
Wholly, then, to your rule and governance,
So far as I had strength. My weakness was —
I felt a fascination, at each point
And pore of me, a Power as absolute
Claiming, my soul should recognize her sway.
O you were no whit clearlier Queen, I see,
Throughout the life that rolls out ribbon-like
Its shot-silk length behind me, than the strange
Mystery — how shall I denominate
The unrobed One? Robed you go and crowned as well,
Named by the nations: she is hard to name,
Though you have spelt out certain characters
Obscure upon what fillet binds her brow,
Lust of the flesh, lust of the eye, life's pride.
'So call her, and contemn the enchantress!' — 'Crush
The despot, and recover liberty!'
Cry despot and enchantress at each ear.

You were conspicuous and pre-eminent,
Authoritative and imperial, — you
Spoke first, claimed homage he: did I hesitate?
Born for no mastery, but servitude,
I cannot serve two masters, says the Book;
Master should measure strength with master, then,
Before the servant be imposed a task.
You spoke first, promised best, and threatened most;
The other never threatened, promised, spoke
A single word, but, when your part was done,
Lifted a finger, and I, prostrate, knew
Films were about me, though you stood aloof
Smiling or frowning, 'Where is power like mine
To punish or reward thee? Rise, thou fool!
Will to be free, and, lo, I lift thee loose!'
Did I not will, and could I rise a whit?
Lay I, at any time, content to lie?
'To lie, at all events, brings pleasure: make
Amends by undemanded pain!' I said.
Did not you prompt me? 'Purchase now by pain
Pleasure hereafter in the world to come!'

I could not pluck my heart out, as you bade:
Unbidden, I burned off my hands at least.
My soul retained its treasure; but my purse
Lightened itself with much alacrity.
Well, where is the reward? what promised fruit
Of sacrifice in peace, content? what sense
Of added strength to bear or to forbear?
What influx of new light assists me now
Even to guess you recognize a gain
In what was loss enough to mortal me?
But she, the less authoritative voice,
Oh, how distinct enunciating, how
Plain dealing! Gain she gave was gain indeed!
That, you deny: that, you contemptuous call
Acorns, swine's food not man's meat! 'Spurn the draff!'
Ay, but those life-tree apples I prefer,
Am I to die of hunger till they drop?
Husks keep flesh from starvation, anyhow.
Give those life-apples! — one, worth woods of oak,
Worth acorns by the wagon-load, — one shoot
Through heart and brain, assurance bright and brief

That you, my Lady, my own Ravissante,
Feel, through my famine, served and satisfied,
Own me, your starveling, soldier of a sort!
Your soldier! do I read my title clear
Even to call myself your friend, not foe?
What is the pact between us but a truce?
At best I shall have staved off enmity,
Obtained a respite, ransomed me from wrath.
I pay, instalment by instalment, life,
Earth's tribute-money, pleasures great and small,
Whereof should at the last one penny piece
Fall short, the whole heap becomes forfeiture.
You find in me deficient soldiership:
Want the whole life or none. I grudge that whole
Because I am not sure of recompense:
Because I want faith. Whose the fault? I ask.
If insufficient faith have done thus much,
Contributed thus much of sacrifice,
More would move mountains, you are warrant. Well,
Grant, you, the grace, I give the gratitude!
And what were easier? 'Ask and have' folk call

Miranda's method: 'Have, nor need to ask!'
So do they formulate your quality
Superlative beyond my human grace.
The Ravissante, you ravish men away
From puny aches and petty pains, assuaged
By man's own art with small expenditure
Of pill or potion, unless, put to shame,
Nature is roused and sets things right herself.
Your miracles are grown our common-place;
No day but pilgrim hobbles his last mile,
Kneels down and rises up, flings crutch away,
Or else appends it to the reverend heap
Beneath you, votive cripple-carpentry.
Some few meet failure — oh, they wanted faith,
And may betake themselves to La Salette,
Or seek Lourdes, so that hence the scandal limp!
The many get their grace and go their way
Rejoicing, with a tale to tell, — most like,
A staff to borrow, since the crutch is gone,
Should the first telling happen at my house,
And teller wet his whistle with my wine.

I tell this to a doctor and he laughs:
'Give me permission to cry — Out of bed,
You loath rheumatic sluggard! Cheat yon chair
Of laziness, its gouty occupant! —
You should see miracles performed! But now,
I give advice, and take as fee ten francs,
And do as much as does your Ravissante.
Send her that case of cancer to be cured,
I have refused to treat for any fee,
Bring back my would-be patient sound and whole,
And see me laugh on t'other side my mouth!'
Can he be right, and are you hampered thus?
Such pettiness restricts a miracle
Wrought by the Great Physician, who hears prayer,
Visibly seated in your mother-lap?
He, out of nothing, made sky, earth, and sea,
And all that in them is, man, beast, bird, fish,
Down to this insect on my parapet.
Look how the marvel of a minim crawls!
Were I to kneel among the halt and maimed,
And pray, 'Who mad'st the insect with ten legs,

Make me one finger grow where ten were once!'
The very priests would thrust me out of church.
'What folly does the madman dare expect?
No faith obtains — in this late age, at least —
Such cure as that! We ease rheumatics, though!'

"Ay, bring the early ages back again,
What prodigy were unattainable?
I read your annals. Here came Louis Onze,
Gave thrice the sum he ever gave before
At one time, some three hundred crowns, to wit —
On pilgrimage to pray for — health, he found?
Did he? I do not read it in Commines.
Here sent poor joyous Marie-Antoinette
To thank you that a Dauphin dignified
Her motherhood — since Duke of Normandy
And Martyr of the Temple, much the same
As if no robe of hers had dressed you rich,
No silver lamps, she gave, illumed your shrine!
Here, following example, fifty years
Ago, in gratitude for birth again

Of yet another destined King of France,
Did not the Duchess fashion with her hands,
And frame in gold and crystal, and present
A bouquet made of artificial flowers?
And was he King of France, and is not he
Still Count of Chambord?

"Such the days of faith,
And such their produce to encourage mine!
What now, if I too count without my host?
I too have given money, ornament,
And 'artificial flowers'—which, when I plucked,
Seemed rooting at my heart and real enough:
What if I gain thereby nor health of mind,
Nor youth renewed which perished in its prime,
Burnt to a cinder 'twixt the red-hot bars,
Nor gain to see my second baby-hope
Of managing to live on terms with both
Opposing potentates, the Power and you,
Crowned with success, but dawdle out my days
In exile here at Clairvaux, with mock love,

That gives, while whispering 'Would I dared refuse!' —
What the loud voice declares my heart's free gift!
Mock worship, mock superiority
O'er those I style the world's benighted ones,
That irreligious sort I pity so,
Dumas and even Hertford, who is Duke?

"Impiety? Not if I know myself!
Not if you know the heart and soul, I bear,
I bid you cut, hack, slash, anatomize,
Till peccant part be found and flung away!
Demonstrate where I need more faith! Describe
What act shall evidence sufficiency
Of faith, your warrant for such exercise
Of power, in my behalf, as all the world,
Except poor praying me, declares profuse?
Poor me? It is that world, not me alone,
That world which prates of fixed laws and the like,
I fain would save, poor world so ignorant!
And your part were — what easy miracle?

Oh, Lady, could I make your want like mine!"

Then his face grew one luminosity.

"Simple, sufficient! Happiness at height!
I solve the riddle, I persuade mankind.
I have been just the simpleton who stands —
Summoned to claim his patrimonial rights —
At shilly-shally, may he knock or no
At his own door in his own house and home
Whereof he holds the very title-deeds!
Here is my title to this property,
This power you hold for profit of myself
And all the world at need — which need is now!

My title — let me hear who controverts!
Count Mailleville built yon church. Why did he so?
Because he found your image. How came that?
His shepherd told him that a certain sheep
Was wont to scratch with hoof and scrape with horn
At ground where once the Danes had razed a church.

Thither he went, and there he dug, and thence
He disinterred the image he conveyed
In pomp to Londres yonder, his domain.
You liked the old place better than the new.
The Count might surely have divined as much:
He did not; some one might have spoke a word:
No one did. A mere dream had warned enough,
That back again in pomp you best were borne:
No dream warned, and no need of convoy was;
An angel caught you up and clapped you down,—
No mighty task, you stand one metre high,
Aud people carry you about at times.
Why, then, did you despise the simple course?
Because you are the Queen of Angels: when
You front us in a picture, there flock they,
Angels around you, here and everywhere.

"Therefore, to prove indubitable faith,
Those angels that acknowledge you their queen,
I summon them to bear me to your feet
From Clairvaux through the air, an easy trip!

Faith without flaw! I trust your potency,
Benevolence, your will to save the world —
By such a simplest of procedures, too!
Not even by affording angel-help,
Unless it please you: there's a simpler mode:
Only suspend the law of gravity,
And, while at back, permitted to propel,
The air helps onward, let the air in front
Cease to oppose my passage through the midst!

"Thus I bestride the railing, leg o'er leg,
Thus, lo, I stand, a single inch away,
At dizzy edge of death, — no touch of fear,
As safe on tower above as turf below!
Your smile enswathes me in beatitude,
You lift along the votary — who vaults,
Who, in the twinkling of an eye, revives,
Dropped safely in the space before the church —
How crowded, since this morn is market-day!
I shall not need to speak. The news will run
Like wild-fire. 'Thousands saw Miranda's flight!'

'Tis telegraphed to Paris in a trice.
The Boulevard is one buzz 'Do you believe?
Well, this time, thousands saw Miranda's flight:
You know him, goldsmith in the Place Vendôme.'
In goes the Empress to the Emperor,
'Now — will you hesitate to make disgorge
Your wicked King of Italy his gains,
Give the Legations to the Pope once more?'
Which done, — why, grace goes back to operate,
They themselves set a good example first,
Resign the empire twenty years usurped,
And Henry, the Desired One, reigns o'er France!
Regenerated France makes all things new!
My house no longer stands on Quai Rousseau,
But Quai rechristened Alacoque: a quai
Where Renan burns his book, and Veuillot burns
Renan beside, since Veuillot rules the roast,
Re-edits now indeed 'The Universe.'
O blessing, O superlatively big
With blessedness beyond all blessing dreamed
By man! for just that promise has effect,

'Old things shall pass away and all be new!'
Then, for a culminating mercy-feat,
Wherefore should I dare dream impossible
That I too have my portion in the change?
My past with all its sorrow, sin and shame,
Becomes a blank, a nothing! There she stands,
Clara de Millefleurs, all deodorized,
Twenty years' stain wiped off her innocence!
There never was Muhlhausen, nor at all
Duke Hertford: nought that was, remains, except
The beauty,—yes, the beauty is unchanged!
Well, and the soul too, that must keep the same!
And so the trembling little virgin hand
Melts into mine, that's back again, of course!
—Think not I care about my poor old self!
I only want my hand for that one use,
To take her hand, and say, 'I marry you—
Men, women, angels, you behold my wife!
There is no secret, nothing wicked here,
Nothing she does not wish the world to know!'
None of your married women have the right

To mutter, 'Yes, indeed, she beats us all
In beauty, — but our lives are pure at least!'
Bear witness, for our marriage is no thing
Done in a corner! 'Tis The Ravissante
Repairs the wrong of Paris. See, She smiles,
She beckons, She bids, 'Hither, both of you!'
And may we kneel? And will you bless us both?
And may I worship you, and yet love her?
Then!"
A sublime spring from the balustrade
About the tower so often talked about,
A flash in middle air, and stone-dead lay
Monsieur Léonce Miranda on the turf.

A gardener who watched, at work the while
Dibbling a flower-bed for geranium-shoots,
Saw the catastrophe, and, straightening back,
Stood up and shook his brows. "Poor soul, poor soul,
Just what I prophesied the end would be!
Ugh — the Red Night-cap!" (as he raised the head)

"This must be what he meant by those strange
words
While I was weeding larkspurs, yesterday,
'Angels would take him!' Mad!"

No! sane, I say.
Such being the conditions of his life,
Such end of life was not irrational.
Hold a belief, you only half believe,
With all-momentous issues either way, —
And I advise you imitate this leap,
Put faith to proof, be cured or killed at once!
Call you man, killed through cutting cancer out,
The worse for such an act of bravery?
That's more than *I* know. In my estimate,
Better lie prostrate on his turf at peace,
Than, wistful, eye, from out the tent, the tower,
Racked with a doubt, "Will going on bare knees
All the way to The Ravissante and back,
Saying my Ave Mary all the time,
Somewhat excuse if I postpone my march?

—Make due amends for that one kiss I gave
In gratitude to her who held me out
Superior Fricquot's sermon, hot from press,
A-spread with hands so sinful yet so smooth?"

And now, sincerely do I pray she stand,
Clara, with interposing sweep of robe,
Between us and this horror! Any screen
Turns white by contrast with the tragic pall;
And her dubiety distracts at least,
As well as snow, from such decided black.
With womanhood, at least, we have to do:
Ending with Clara—is the word too kind?

Let pass the shock! There's poignancy enough
When what one parted with, a minute since,
Alive and happy, is returned a wreck—
All that was, all that seemed about to be,
Razed out and ruined now forevermore,
Because a straw descended on this scale
Rather than that, made death o'er-balance life.

But think of cage-mates in captivity,
Inured to day-long, night-long vigilance
Each of the other's tread and angry turn
When, bolt on prison-bars, a captive came!
These two, society shut out, and thus
Penned in, to settle down and regulate
By the strange law, the solitary life—
When death divorces such a fellowship,
This may pair off with that prodigious woe
Imagined of a ghastly brotherhood—
One watcher left in lighthouse out at sea,
With leagues of surf between the land and him,
Alive with his dead partner on the rock;
One galley-slave, whom curse and blow compel
To labor on at oar—beside his chain,
Encumbered with his corpse-companion now.
Such these: although, no prisoners, self-intrenched,
They kept the world off from their barricade.

Memory, gratitude was poignant, sure,
Though pride brought consolation of a kind.

Twenty years long, had Clara been — of whom
The rival, nay, the victor, past dispute?
What if in turn The Ravissante at length
Proved victor — which was doubtful — anyhow,
Here lay the inconstant with, conspicuous too,
The fruit of his good fortune!

"Has he gained
By leaving me?" she might soliloquize:
"All love could do, I did for him. I learned
By heart his nature, what he loved and loathed,
Leaned to with liking, turned from with distaste.
No matter what his least velleity,
I was determined he should want no wish,
And in conformity administered
To his requirement; most of joy I mixed
With least of sorrow in life's daily draught,
Twenty years long, life's proper average.
And when he got to quarrel with my cup,
Would needs out-sweeten honey, and discard
That gall-drop we require lest nectar cloy, —

I did not call him fool, and vex my friend,
But quietly allowed experiment,
Encouraged him to dust his drink, and now
Grate *lignum vitæ*, now bruise so-called grains
Of Paradise, and now, for perfume, pour
Distilment rare, the rose of Jericho,
Holy-thorn, passion-flower, and what know I?
Till beverage obtained the fancied smack.
'Twas wild-flower-wine that neither helped nor harmed
Who sipped and held it for restorative —
What harm? But here has he been through the hedge
Straying in search of simples, while my back
Was turned a minute, and he finds a prize,
Monkshood and belladonna! O my child,
My truant little boy, despite the beard,
The body two feet broad and six feet long,
And what the calendar counts middle age —
You wanted, did you, to enjoy a flight?
Why not have taken into confidence

Me, that was mother to you? — never mind
What mock disguise of mistress held you mine!
Had you come laughing, crying, with request,
'Make me fly, mother!' I had run up stairs,
And held you tight the while I danced you high
In air from tower-top, singing, 'Off we go
(On pilgrimage to Lourdes some day next month),
And swift we soar (to Rome with Peter-pence),
And low we light (at Paris where we pick
Another jewel from our store of stones
And send it for a present to the Pope)!'
So, dropped indeed you were, but on my knees,
Rolling and crowing, not a bit the worse
For journey to your Ravissante and back.
Now, no more Clairvaux — which I made you build,
And think an inspiration of your own —
No more fine house, trim garden, pretty park,
Nothing I used to busy you about,
And make believe you worked for my surprise!
What weariness to me will work become
Now that I need not seem surprised again!

This boudoir, for example, with the doves
(My stupid maid has damaged, dusting one)
Embossed in stucco o'er the looking-glass
Beside the toilet-table! dear — dear me!"

Here she looked up from her absorbing grief,
And round her, crow-like grouped, the Cousinry,
(She grew âware) sat witnesses at watch.
For, two days had elapsed since fate befel
The courser in the meadow, stretched so stark.
They did not cluster on the tree-tops, close
Their sooty ranks, caw and confabulate
For nothing: but, like calm determined crows,
They came to take possession of their corpse.
And who shall blame them? Had not they the right?

One spoke. "They would be gentle, not austere.
They understood, and were compassionate.
Madame Muhlhausen lay too abject now
For aught but the sincerest pity; still,
Since plain speech salves the wound it seems to make,

They must speak plainly — circumstances spoke!
Sin had conceived and brought forth death indeed.
As the commencement, so the close of things:
Just what might be expected all along!
Monsieur Léonce Miranda launched his youth
Into a cesspool of debauchery,
And, if he thence emerged all dripping slime,
— "Where was the change except from thin to thick,
One warm rich mud-bath, Madame? — you, in place
Of Paris-drainage and distilment, you
He never needed budge from, boiled to rags!
True, some good instinct left the natural man,
Some touch of that deep dye wherewith imbued
By education, in his happier day,
The hopeful offspring of high parentage
Was fleece-marked moral and religious sheep, —
Some ruddle, faint reminder, (we admit)
Stuck to Miranda, rubbed he ne'er so rude
Against the goatly coarseness; to the last,
Moral he styled himself, religious too!
Which means — what ineradicable good,

You found, you never left till good's self proved
Perversion and distortion, nursed to growth
So monstrous, that the tree-stock, dead and dry,
Were seemlier far than such a heap grotesque
Of fungous flourishing excresence. Here,
Sap-like affection, meant for family,
Stole off to feed one sucker fat — yourself;
While branchage, trained religiously aloft
To rear its head in reverence to the sun,
Was pulled down earthward, pegged and picketed,
By topiary contrivance, till the tree
Became an arbor where, at vulgar ease,
Sat superstition grinning through the loops.
Still, nature is too strong or else too weak
For cockney treatment: either, tree springs back
To pristine shape, or else degraded droops,
And turns to touchwood at the heart. So here —
Body and mind, at last the man gave way.
His body — there it lies, what part was left
Unmutilated! for, the strife commenced
Two years ago, when, both hands burnt to ash,

A branch broke loose, by loss of what choice twigs!
As for his mind — behold our register
Of all its moods, from the incipient mad,
Nay, mere erratic, to the stark insane,
Absolute idiocy or what is worse!
All have we catalogued — extravagance
In worldly matters, luxury absurd,
And zeal as crazed in its expenditure
Of nonsense called devotion. Don't we know
— We Cousins, bound in duty to our kin, —
What mummeries were practised by you two
At Clairvaux? Not a servant got discharge
But came and told his grievance, testified
To acts which turn religion to a farce.
And as the private mock, so patent — see —
The public scandal! Ask the neighborhood —
Or rather, since we asked them long ago,
Read what they answer, depositions down,
Signed, sealed and sworn to! Brief, the man was mad.
We are his heirs and claim our heritage.

Madame Muhlhausen, — whom good taste forbids
We qualify as do these documents, —
Fear not lest justice stifle mercy's prayer!
True, had you lent a willing ear at first,
Had you obeyed our call two years ago,
Restrained a certain insolence of eye,
A volubility of tongue, that time,
Your prospects had been none the worse, perhaps.
Still, fear not but a decent competence
Shall smooth the way for your declining age!
What we propose, then . ."

Clara dried her eyes,
Sat up, surveyed the consistory, spoke,
After due pause, with something of a smile.

"Gentlemen, kinsfolk of my friend defunct,
In thus addressing me — of all the world! —
You much misapprehend what part I play.
I claim no property you speak about.
You might as well address the park-keeper,

Harangue him on some plan advisable
For covering the park with cottage-plots.
He is the servant, no proprietor,
His business is to see the sward kept trim,
Untrespassed over by the indiscreet:
Beyond that, he refers you to myself —
Another servant of another kind —
Who again — quite as limited in act —
Refer you, with your projects, — can I else?
To who in mastery is ultimate,
The Church. The Church is sole administrant,
Since sole possessor of what worldly wealth
Monsieur Léonce Miranda late possessed.
Often enough has he attempted, nay,
Forced me, well-nigh, to occupy the post
You seemingly suppose I fill, — receive
As gift the wealth intrusted me as grace.
This — for quite other reasons than appear
So cogent to your perspicacity, —
This I refused; and, firm as you could wish,
Still was my answer, 'We two understand

Each one the other. I am intimate
— As how can be mere fools and knaves — or say,
Even your Cousins? — with your love to me,
Devotion to the Church. Would Providence
Appoint, and make me certain of the same,
That I survive you (which is little like,
Seeing you hardly overpass my age
And more than match me in abundant health)
In such case, certainly I would accept
Your bounty: better I than alien hearts
Should execute your planned benevolence
To man, your proposed largess to the Church.
But though I be survivor, — weakly frame,
With only woman's wit to make amends, —
When I shall die, or while I am alive,
Cannot you figure me an easy mark
For hypocritical rapacity,
Kith, kin and generation, couching low,
Ever on the alert to pounce on prey?
Far be it I should say they profited
By that first frenzy-fit themselves induced, —

Cold-blooded scenical buffoons at sport
With horror and damnation o'er a grave:
That were too shocking — I absolve them there!
Nor did they seize the moment of your swoon
To rifle pocket, wring a paper thence,
Their Cousinly dictation, and enrich
Thereby each mother's son as heart could wish,
Had nobody supplied a codicil.
But when the pain, poor friend! had prostrated
Your body, though your soul was right again,
I fear they turned your weakness to account!
Why else to me, who agonizing watched,
Sneak, cap in hand, now bribe me to forsake
My maimed Léonce, now bully, cap on head,
The impudent pretension to assuage
Such sorrows as demanded Cousin's care? —
For you rejected, hated, fled me, far,
In foreign lands you laughed at me! — they judged.
And, think you, will the unkind ones hesitate
To try conclusions with my helplessness, —
To pounce on, misuse me, your derelict,

Helped by advantage that bereavement lends
Folks, who, while yet you lived, played tricks like
these?
You only have to die, and they detect,
In all you said and did, insanity!
Your faith was fetish-worship, your regard
For Christ's prime precept which endows the poor
And strips the rich, a craze from first to last!
They so would limn your likeness, paint your life,
That if it ended by some accident, —
For instance, if, attempting to arrange
The plants below that dangerous Belvedere
I cannot warn you from sufficiently,
You lost your balance and fell headlong — fine
Occasion, such, for crying, *Suicide!*
Non compos mentis, naturally next,
Hands over Clairvaux to a Cousin-tribe
Who nor like me nor love The Ravissante,
Therefore be ruled by both! Life-interest
In Clairvaux, — conservation, guardianship
Of earthly good for heavenly purpose, — give

Such and no other proof of confidence!
Let Clara represent The Ravissante!"
—To whom accordingly, he then and there
Bequeathed each stick and stone, by testament
In holograph, mouth managing the quill:
Go, see the same in Londres, if you doubt!"

Then smile grew laugh, as sudden up she stood
And out she spoke: intemperate the speech!

"And now, sirs, for your special courtesy,
Your candle held up to the character
Of Lucie Steiner, whom you qualify
As coming short of perfect womanhood.
Yes, kindly critics, truth for once you tell!
True is it that through childhood, poverty,
Sloth, pressure of temptation, I succumbed,
And, ere I found what honor meant, lost mine.
So was the sheep lost, which the Shepherd found
And never lost again. My friend found me;
Or better say, the Shepherd found us both—

Since he, my friend, was much in the same mire
When first we made acquaintance. Each helped
each, —
A twofold extrication from the slough;
And, saving me, he saved himself. Since then,
Unsmirched we kept our cleanliness of coat.
It is his perfect constancy, you call
My friend's main fault — he never left his love!
While as for me, I dare your worst, impute
One breach of loving bond, these twenty years,
To me whom only cobwebs bound, you count!
'He was religiously disposed in youth!'
That may be, though we did not meet at church.
Did he become Voltarian like your scamps,
Under my teaching, fools who mock his faith?
'Infirm of body!' I am silent there:
Even yourselves acknowledge service done,
Whatever motive your own souls supply
As inspiration. Love made labor light."

Then laugh grew frown, and frown grew terrible.

Do recollect what sort of person shrieked —
"Such was I, saint or sinner, what you please:
And who is it casts stone at me but you?
By your own showing, sirs, you bought and sold,
Took what advantage bargain promised bag,
Abundantly did business, and with whom?
Miranda! — you pronounce imbecile, push
Indignantly aside if he presume
To settle his affairs like other folk!
How is it you have stepped into his shoes,
And stand there, bold as brass, 'Miranda, late,
Now, Firm-Miranda?' Sane, he signed away
That little birthright, did he? Hence to trade!
I know you, and he knew who dipped and ducked,
Truckled and played the parasite in vain,
As now one, now the other, here you cringed,
Were feasted, took our presents, you — those drops,
Just for your wife's adornment! you — that spray
Exactly suiting, as most diamonds do,
Your daughter on her marriage! No word then
Of somebody the wanton! Hence, I say,

Subscribers to the 'Siècle,' every snob —
For here the post brings me the 'Univers'!
Home and make money in the Place Vendôme,
Sully yourselves no longer by my sight,
And, when next Schneider wants a new *parure*,
Be careful lest you stick there by mischance
That stone beyond compare intrusted you
To kindle faith with, when, Miranda's gift,
Crowning the very crown, The Ravissante
Shall claim it! As to Clairvaux — talk to Her!
She answers by the Chapter of Raimbaux!"
Vituperative, truly! All this wrath
Because the man's relations thought him mad!
Whereat, I hope you see the Cousinry
Turn each to other, blankly dolorous,
Consult a moment, more by shrug and shrug
Than mere man's language, — finally conclude
To leave the reprobate untroubled now
In her unholy triumph, till the Law
Shall right the injured ones; for gentlemen
Allow the female sex, this sort at least,

Its privilege. So, simply "Cockatrice!" —
"Jezebel!" — "Queen of the Camellias!" — cried
Cousin to cousin, as yon hinge a-creak
Shut out the party, and the gate returned
To custody of Clairvaux. "Pretty place!
What say you, when it proves our property,
To trying a concurrence with La Roche,
And laying down a rival oyster-bed?
Where the park ends, the sea begins, you know."
So took they comfort till they came to Vire.

But I would linger, fain to snatch a look
At Clara as she stands in pride of place,
Somewhat more satisfying than my glance
So furtive, so near futile, yesterday,
Because one must be courteous. Of the masks
That figure in this little history,
She only has a claim to my respect,
And one-eyed, in her French phrase, rules the blind.
Miranda hardly did his best with life:
He might have opened eye, exerted brain,

Attained conception as to right and law
In certain points respecting intercourse
Of man with woman — love, one likes to say;
Which knowledge had dealt rudely with the claim
Of Clara to play representative
And from perdition rescue soul, forsooth!
Also, the sense of him should have sufficed
For building up some better theory
Of how God operates in heaven and earth,
Than would establish Him participant
In doings yonder at The Ravissante.
The heart was wise according to its lights
And limits; but the head refused more sun,
And shrank into its mew, and craved less space.
Clara, I hold the happier specimen, —
It may be, through that artist-preference
For work complete, inferiorly proposed,
To incompletion, though it aim aright.
Morally, no! Aspire, break bounds! I say
Endeavor to be good, and better still,
And best! Success is nought, endeavor's all.

But intellect adjusts the means to ends,
Tries the low thing, and leaves it done, at least,
No prejudice to high thing, intellect
Would do and will do, only give the means.
Miranda, in my picture-gallery,
Presents a Blake; be Clara — Meissonnier!
Merely considered so, by artist, mind!
For, break through Art and rise to poetry,
Bring Art to tremble nearer, touch enough
The verge of vastness to inform our soul
What orb makes transit through the dark above,
And there's the triumph! — there the incomplete,
More than completion, matches the immense, —
Then, Michelagnolo against the world!
With this proviso, let me study her
Approvingly, the finished little piece!
Born, bred, with just one instinct, — that of growth:
Her quality was, caterpillar-like,
To all-unerringly select a leaf
And without intermission feed her fill,
Become the Painted Peacock, or belike

The Brimstone-wing, when time of year should suit;
And 'tis a sign (say entomologists)
Of sickness, when the creature stops its meal
One minute, either to look up at heaven,
Or turn aside for change of aliment.
No doubt there was a certain ugliness
In the beginning, as the grub grew worm:
She could not find the proper plant at once,
But crawled and fumbled through a whole parterre.
Husband Muhlhausen served for stuff not long:
Then came confusion of the slimy track
From London, "where she gave the tone a while,"
To Paris: let the stalks start up again,
Now she is off them, all the greener they!
But, settled on Miranda, how she sucked,
Assimilated juices, took the tint,
Mimicked the form and texture of her food!
Was he for pastime? Who so frolic-fond
As Clara? Had he a devotion-fit?
Clara grew serious with like qualm, be sure!
In health and strength he, — healthy too and strong,

She danced, rode, drove, took pistol-practice, fished,
Nay, "managed sea-skiff with consummate skill."
In pain and weakness, he, — she patient watched
And whiled the slow drip-dropping hours away.
She bound again the broken self-respect,
She picked out the true meaning from mistake,
Praised effort in each stumble, laughed, "Well-climbed!"
When others groaned, "None ever grovelled so!"
"Rise, you have gained experience!" was her word:
"Lie satisfied, the ground is just your place!"
They thought appropriate counsel. "Live, not die,
And take my full life to eke out your own:
That shall repay me and with interest!
Write! — is your mouth not clever as my hand?
Paint! — the last Exposition warrants me,
Plenty of people must ply brush with toes.
And as for music — look, what folks nickname
A lyre, those ancients played to ravishment, —
Over the pendule, see, Apollo grasps
A three-stringed gimcrack which no Liszt could coax
Such music from as jews-harp makes to-day!

Do your endeavor like a man, and leave
The rest to 'fortune who assists the bold' —
Learn, you, the Latin which you taught me first,
You clever creature — clever, yes, I say!"

If he smiled, "Let us love, love's wrong comes right,
Shows reason last of all! Necessity
Must meanwhile serve for plea — so, mind not much
Old Fricquot's menace!" — back she smiled "Who
minds?"
If he sighed, "Ah, but She is strict, they say,
For all Her mercy at The Ravissante,
She scarce will be put off so!" — straight a sigh
Returned, "My lace must go to trim Her gown!"
I nowise doubt she inwardly believed
Smiling and sighing had the same effect
Upon the venerated image. What
She did believe in, I as little doubt,
Was — Clara, and her birthright to sustain
Existence, grow from grub to butterfly,
Upon unlimited Miranda-leaf;

In which prime article of faith confirmed,
According to capacity, she fed
On and on till the leaf was eaten up,
That April morning. Even then, I praise
Her forethought which prevented leafless stalk
Bestowing any hoarded succulence
On earwig and blackbeetle squat beneath; —
Clairvaux, that stalk whereto her hermitage
She tacked by golden throw of silk, so fine,
So any thing but feeble, that her sleep
Inside it, through last winter, two years long,
Recked little of the storm and strife without.
"But — loved him?" Friend, I do not praise her love!
True love works never for the loved one so,
Nor spares skin-surface, smoothening truth away.
Love bids touch truth, endure truth, and embrace
Truth, though, embracing truth, love crush itself.
"Worship not me, but God!" the angels urge:
That is love's grandeur: still, in pettier love
The nice eye can distinguish grade and grade.
Shall mine degrade the velvet green and puce

Of caterpillar, palmer-worm — or what —
Ball in and out of ball, each ball with brush
Of Venus' eye-fringe round the turquoise egg
That nestles soft, — compare such paragon
With any scarabæus of the brood
That, born to fly, keeps wing in wing-case, walks
Persistently a-trundling dung on earth?

Egypt may venerate such hierophants,
Not I — the couple yonder, Father Priest
And Mother Nun, who came and went and came,
Beset this Clairvaux, trundled money-muck
To midden and the main heap oft enough,
But never bade unshut from sheath the gauze,
Nor showed that, who would fly, should let fall filth,
Warning, "Your jewel, brother, is a blotch:
Sister, your lace trails ordure. Leave your sins,
And so best gift the Crown and grace the Robe!"

The superstition is extinct, you hope?
It were, with my good will! Suppose it so,

Bethink you likewise of the latest use
Whereto a Night-cap is convertible,
And draw your very thickest, thread and thrum,
O'er such a decomposing face of things,
Once so alive, it seemed immortal too!

This happened two years since. The Cousinry
Returned to Paris, called in help from Law,
And in due form proceeded to dispute
Monsieur Léonce Miranda's competence,
Being insane, to make a valid Will.

Much testimony volunteered itself;
The issue hardly could be doubtful — but
For that sad 'Seventy which must intervene,
Provide poor France with other work to mind
Than settling lawsuits, even for the sake
Of such a party as The Ravissante.
It only was this Summer that the case
Could come and be disposed of, two weeks since,
At Vire — Tribunal Civil — Chamber First.

Here, issued with all regularity,
I hold the judgment — just, inevitable,
Nowise to be contested by what few
Can judge the judges; sum and substance, thus —

"Inasmuch as we find, the Cousinry,
During that very period when they take
Monsieur Léonce Miranda for stark mad,
Considered him to be quite sane enough
For doing much important business with —
Nor showed suspicion of his competence
Until, by turning of the tables, loss
Instead of gain accrued to them thereby, —
Plea of incompetence we set aside.
— "The rather, that the dispositions, sought
To be impugned, are natural and right,
Nor jar with any reasonable claim
Of kindred, friendship or acquaintance here.
Nobody is despoiled, none overlooked;
Since the testator leaves his property
To just that person whom, of all the world,

He counted he was most indebted to.
In mere discharge, then, of conspicuous debt,
Madame Muhlhausen has priority,
Enjoys the usufruct of Clairvaux.

"Next,
Such debt discharged, such life determining,
Such earthly interest provided for,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda may bequeath,
In absence of more fit recipient, fund
And usufruct together to the Church
Whereof he was a special devotee.

—"Which disposition, being consonant
With a long series of such acts and deeds
Notorious in his life-time, needs must stand,
Unprejudiced by eccentricity
Nowise amounting to distemper: since,
In every instance signalized as such,
We recognize no over-leaping bounds,
No straying out of the permissible:

Duty to the Religion of the Land, —
Neither excessive nor inordinate.

"The minor accusations are dismissed;
They prove mere freak and fancy, boyish mood
In age mature of simple kindly man.
Exuberant in generosities
To all the world: no fact confirms the fear
He meditated mischief to himself
That morning when he met the accident
Which ended fatally. The case is closed."

How otherwise? So, when I grazed the skirts,
And had the glimpse of who made, yesterday, —
Woman and retinue of goats and sheep, —
The sombre path one whiteness, vision-like,
As out of gate, and in at gate again,
They wavered, — she was lady there for life:
And, after life — I hope, a white success
Of some sort, wheresoever life resume
School interrupted by vacation — death;

Seeing that home she goes with prize in hand,
Confirmed the Châtelaine of Clairvaux.

True,
Such prize fades soon to insignificance.
Though she have eaten her Miranda up,
And spun a cradle-cone through which she pricks
Her passage, and proves peacock-butterfly,
This Autumn — wait a little week of cold!
Peacock and death's-head-moth end much the same.
And could she still continue spinning, — sure,
Cradle would soon crave shroud for substitute,
And o'er this life of hers distaste would drop
Red-cotton-Night-cap-wise.

How say you, friend?
Have I redeemed my promise? Smile assent
Through the dark Winter-gloom between us both!
Already, months ago and miles away,
I just as good as told you, in a flash,

The while we paced the sands before my house,
All this poor story — truth and nothing else.
Accept that moment's flashing, amplified,
Impalpability reduced to speech,
Conception proved by birth, — no other change!
Can what Saint-Rambert flashed me in a thought,
Good gloomy London make a poem of?
Such ought to be whatever dares precede,
Play ruddy herald-start to your white blaze
About to bring us day. How fail imbibe
Some foretase of effulgence? Sun shall wax,
And star shall wane: what matter, so star tell
The drowsy world to start awake, rub eyes,
And stand all ready for morn's joy a-blush?

January 23, 1873.

THE INN ALBUM.

The Inn Album.

I.

"That oblong book's the Album; hand it here!
Exactly! page on page of gratitude
For breakfast, dinner, supper, and the view!
I praise these poets: they leave margin-space;
Each stanza seems to gather skirts around,
And primly, trimly, keep the foot's confine,
Modest and maidlike; lubber prose o'ersprawls
And straddling stops the path from left to right.
Since I want space to do my cipher-work,
Which poem spares a corner? What comes first?
'*Hail calm acclivity, salubrious spot!*'
(Open the window, we burn daylight, boy!)

Or see — succincter beauty, brief and bold —
'*If a fellow can dine On rumpsteaks and port wine,*
He needs not despair Of dining well here' —
'*Here!*' I myself could find a better rhyme;
That bard's a Browning; he neglects the form:
But ah, the sense, ye gods, the weighty sense!
Still, I prefer this classic. Ay, throw wide!
I'll quench the bits of candle yet unburnt.
A minute's fresh air, then to cipher-work!
Three little columns hold the whole account:
Ecarté, after which — Blind Hookey — then
Cutting-the-Pack, five hundred pounds the cut.
'Tis easy reckoning: I have lost, I think."

Two personages occupy this room
Shabby-genteel, that's parlor to the inn
Perched on a view-commanding eminence;
— Inn which may be a veritable house
Where somebody once lived and pleased good taste
Till tourists found his coigne of vantage out,
And fingered blunt the individual mark

And vulgarized things comfortably smooth.
On a sprig-pattern-papered wall there brays
Complaint to sky Sir Edwin's dripping stag;
His couchant coast-guard creature corresponds;
They face the Huguenot and Light o' the World.
Grim o'er the mirror on the mantlepiece,
Varnished and coffined, *Salmo ferox* glares,
— Possibly at the List of Wines which, framed
And glazed, hangs somewhat prominent on peg.
So much describes the stuffy little room —
Vulgar flat smooth respectability:
Not so the burst of landscape surging in,
Sunrise and all, as he who of the pair
Is, plain enough, the younger personage
Draws sharp the shrieking curtain, sends aloft
The sash, spreads wide and fastens back to wall
Shutter and shutter, shows you England's best.
He leans into a living glory-bath
O' air and light where seems to float and move
The wooded watered country, hill and dale
And steel-bright thread of stream, a-smoke with mist

A-sparkle with May morning, diamond drift
O' the sun-touched dew. Except the red-roofed patch
Of half a dozen dwellings that, crept close
For hill-side shelter, make the village-clump,
This inn is perched above to dominate —
Except such sign of human neighborhood,
And this surmised rather than sensible,
There's nothing to disturb absolute peace,
The reign of English nature — which means art
And civilized existence. Wildness' self
Is just the cultured triumph. Presently
Deep solitude, be sure, reveals a Place
That knows the right way to defend itself:
Silence hems round a burning spot of life.
Now, where a Place burns, must a village brood,
And where a village broods, an inn should boast —
Close and convenient: here you have them both.
This inn, the Something-arms — the family's —
(Don't trouble Guillim: heralds leave out half)
Is dear to lovers of the picturesque,
And epics have been planned here; but who plan

Take holy orders and find work to do.
Painters are more productive, stop a week,
Declare the prospect quite a Corot, — ay,
For tender sentiment, — themselves incline
Rather to handsweep large and liberal ;
Then go, but not without success achieved
— Haply some pencil-drawing, oak or beech,
Ferns at the base and ivies up the bole,
On this a slug, on that a butterfly.
Nay, he who hooked the *salmo* pendent here,
Also exhibited, this same May-month,
'*Foxgloves : a study*' — so inspires the scene,
The air, which now the younger personage
Inflates him with till lungs o'erfraught are fain
Sigh forth a satisfaction might bestir
Even those tufts of tree-tops to the South
I' the distance where the green dies off to gray,
Which, easy of conjecture, front the Place ;
He eyes them, elbows wide, each hand to cheek.

His fellow, the much older — either say

A youngish-old man or man oldish young —
Sits at the table: wicks are noisome-deep
In wax, to detriment of plated ware;
Above — piled, strewn — is store of playing-cards,
Counters and all that's proper for a game.
He sets down, rubs out figures in the book,
Adds and subtracts, puts back here, carries there,
Until the summed-up satisfaction stands
Apparent, and he pauses o'er the work:
Soothes what of brain was busy under brow,
By passage of the hard palm, curing so
Wrinkle and crow-foot for a second's space;
Then lays down book and laughs out. No mistake.
Such the sum-total — ask Colenso else!

Roused by which laugh, the other turns, laughs too —
The youth, the good strong fellow, rough perhaps.

"Well, what's the damage — three, or four, or five?
How many figures in a row? Hand here!
Come now, there's one expense all yours not mine —

Scribbling the people's Album over, leaf
The first and foremost too! You think, perhaps,
They'll only charge you for a bran-new book,
Nor estimate the literary loss?
Wait till the small account comes! '*To one night's . . .*
Lodging,' for — 'beds,' they can't say, — '*pound or so;*
Dinner, Appollinaris, — what they please,
Attendance not included;' last looms large
'*Defacement of our Album late enriched*
With' — let's see what! Here, at the window, though!
Ay, breathe the morning and forgive your luck!
Fine enough country for a fool like me
To own, as next month, I suppose I shall!
Eh? True fool's fortune! so console yourself.
Let's see, however — hand the book, I say!
Well, you've improved the classic by romance.
Queer reading! Verse with parenthetic prose —
'*Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot!*'
(Three-two fives) '*life how profitably spent*'
(Five-nought, five-nine fives) '*yonder humble cot*,'

(More and more noughts and fives) '*in mild content;*
And did my feelings find the natural vent
In friendship and in love, how blest my lot!'
Then follow the dread figures — five! '*Content!*'
That's apposite! Are you content as he —
Simpkin the sonneteer? *Ten thousand pounds*
Give point to his effusion — by so much
Leave me the richer and the poorer you
After our night's play; who's content the most,
I, you, or Simpkin?"

So the polished snob.
The elder man, refinement every inch
From brow to boot-end, quietly replies:

"Simpkin's no name I know. I had my whim."

"Ay, had you! And such things make friendship thick.
Intimates, I may boast we were; henceforth,
Friends — shall it not be? — who discard reserve,
Use plain words, put each dot upon each i,

Till death us twain do part? The bargain's struck!
Old fellow, if you fancy — (to begin) —
I failed to penetrate your scheme last week,
You wrong your poor disciple. Oh, no airs!
Because you happen to be twice my age
And twenty times my master, must perforce
No blink of daylight struggle through the web
There's no unwinding? You entoil my legs,
And welcome, for I like it: blind me, — no!
A very pretty piece of shuttle-work
Was that — your mere chance question at the club —
'*Do you go anywhere this Whitsuntide?*
I'm off for Paris, there's the Opera — there's
The Salon, there's a china-sale, — beside
Chantilly; and, for good companionship,
There's Such-and-such and So-and-so. Suppose
We start together?' '*No such holiday!*'
I told you: '*Paris and the rest be hanged!*
Why plague me who am pledged to home-delights?
I'm the engaged now; through whose fault but yours?
On duty. As you well know. Don't I drowse

The week away down with the Aunt and Niece?
No help: it's leisure, loneliness, and love.
'Wish I could take you; but fame travels fast, —
A man of much newspaper-paragraph,
You scare domestic circles; and beside
Would not you like your lot, that second taste
Of nature and approval of the grounds!
You might walk early or lie late, so shirk
Week-day devotions: but stay Sunday o'er,
And morning church is obligatory;
No mundane garb permissible or dread
The butler's privileged monition! No!
Pack off to Paris, nor wipe tear away!'
Whereon how artlessly the happy flash
Followed, by inspiration! ''*Tell you what—*
Let's turn their flank, try things on t'other side!
Inns for my money! Liberty's the life!
We'll lie in hiding: there's the crow-nest nook,
The tourist's joy, the Inn they rave about,
Inn that's out — out of sight and out of mind
And out of mischief to all four of us —

Aunt and niece, you and me. At night arrive;
At morn, find time for just a Pisgah-view
Of my friend's Land of Promise; then depart,
And while I'm whizzing onward by first train,
Bound for our own place (since my Brother sulks
And says I shun him like the plague) yourself —
Why, you have stepped thence, start from platform, gay,
Despite the sleepless journey, — love lends wings, —
Hug aunt and niece who, none the wiser, wait
The faithful advent! Eh?' 'With all my heart,'
Said I to you; said I to mine own self:
'*Does he believe I fail to comprehend*
He wants just one more final friendly snack
At friend's exchequer ere friend runs to earth,
Marries, renounces yielding friends such sport?'
And did I spoil sport, pull face grim, — nay, grave?
Your pupil does you better credit! No!
I parleyed with my pass-book, — rubbed my pair
At the big balance in my banker's hands, —
Folded a check cigar-case-shape, — just wants
Filling and signing, — and took train, resolved

To execute myself with decency
And let you win — if not Ten thousand quite,
Something by way of wind-up, farewell burst
Of firework-nosegay! Where's your fortune fled?
Or is not fortune constant after all?
You lose ten thousand pounds: had I lost half
Or half that, I should bite my lips, I think.
You man of marble! Strut and stretch my best
On tiptoe, I shall never reach your height.
How does the loss feel? Just one lesson more!"

The more refined man smiles a frown away.

"The lesson shall be — only boys like you
Put such a question at the present stage.
I had a ball lodge in my shoulder once,
And, full five minutes, never guessed the fact;
Next day, I felt decidedly: and still,
At twelve years' distance, when I lift my arm
A twinge reminds me of the surgeon's probe.
Ask me, this day month, how I feel my luck!

And meantime please to stop impertinence,
For — don't I know its object? All this chaff
Covers the corn; this preface leads to speech,
This boy stands forth a hero. '*There, my lord!*
Our play was true play, fun not earnest! I
Empty your purse, inside out, while my poke
Bulges to bursting? You can badly spare
A doit, confess now, Duke though brother be!
While I'm gold-daubed so thickly, spangles drop
And show my father's warehouse-apron: pshaw!
Enough! We've had a palpitating night!
Good morning! Breakfast and forget our dreams.
My mouth's shut, mind! I tell nor man nor mouse.'
There, see! He don't deny it! Thanks, my boy!
Hero and welcome — only, not on me
Make trial of your 'prentice-hand! Enough!
We've played, I've lost and owe ten thousand pounds.
Whereof I muster, at the moment, — well,
What's for the bill here and the back to town.
Still, I've my little character to keep:
You may expect your money at month's end."

The young man at the window turns round quick —
A clumsy giant handsome creature ; grasps
In his large red the little lean white hand
Of the other, looks him in the sallow face.

"I say now — is it right to so mistake
A fellow, force him in mere self-defence
To spout like Mister *Mild Acclivity*
In album-language? You know well enough
Whether I like you — *like's* no album-word,
Anyhow : point me to one soul beside
In the wide world I care one straw about !
I first set eyes on you a year ago ;
Since when you've done me good — I'll stick to it —
More than I got in the whole twenty-five
That make my life up, Oxford years and all —
Throw in the three I fooled away abroad,
Seeing myself and nobody more sage
Until I met you, and you made me man
Such as the sort is and the fates allow.
I do think, since we two kept company,

I've learnt to know a little — all through you!
It's nature if I like you. Taunt away!
As if I need you teaching me my place —
The snob I am, the Duke your brother is,
When just the good you did was — teaching me
My own trade, how a snob and millionnaire
May lead his life and let the Duke's alone,
Clap wings, free jackdaw, on his steeple-perch,
Burnish his black to gold in sun and air,
Nor pick up stray plumes, strive to match in strut
Regular peacocks who can't fly an inch
Over the court-yard-paling. Head and heart
(That's album-style) are older than you know,
For all your knowledge: boy, perhaps — ay, boy
Had his adventure, just as he were man —
His ball-experience in the shoulder blade,
His bit of life-long ache to recognize,
Although he bears it cheerily about,
Because you came and clapped him on the back,
Advised him '*Walk and wear the aching off!*'
Why, I was minded to sit down for life

Just in Dalmatia, build a seaside tower
High on a rock, and so expend my days
Pursuing chemistry or botany
Or, very like, astronomy because
I noticed stars shone when I passed the place:
Letting my cash accumulate the while
In England — to lay out in lump at last
As Ruskin should direct me! All or some
Of which should I have done or tried to do,
And preciously repented, one fine day,
Had you discovered Timon, climbed his rock
And scaled his tower, some ten years thence, suppose,
And coaxed his story from him! Don't I see
The pair conversing! It's a novel writ
Already, I'll be bound, — our dialogue!
'What?' cried the elder and yet youthful man —
So did the eye flash 'neath the lordly front,
And the imposing presence swell with scorn,
As the haught high-bred bearing and dispose
Contrasted with his interlocutor
The flabby low-born who, of bulk before,

Had steadily increased, one stone per week,
Since his abstention from horse-exercise:—
'What? you, as rich as Rothschild, left, you say,
London the very year you came of age,
Because your father manufactured goods —
Commission-agent hight of Manchester —
Partly, and partly through a baby case
Of disappointment I've pumped out at last —
And here you spend life's prime in gaining flesh
And giving science one more asteroid?'
Brief, my dear fellow, you instructed me,
At Alfred's and not Istria! proved a snob
May turn a million to account although
His brother be no Duke, and see good days
Without the girl he lost and some one gained.
The end is, after one year's tutelage,
Having, by your help, touched society,
Polo, Tent-pegging, Hurlingham, the Rink —
I leave all these delights, by your advice,
And marry my young pretty cousin here
Whose place, whose oaks ancestral you behold.

(Her father was in partnership with mine —
Does not his purchase look a pedigree?)
My million will be tail and tassels smart
To this plump-bodied kite, this house and land
Which, set a-soaring, pulls me, soft as sleep,
Along life's pleasant meadow, — arm left free
To lock a friend's in, — whose, but yours, old boy?
Arm in arm glide we over rough and smooth,
While hand, to pocket held, saves cash from cards.
Now, if you don't esteem ten thousand pounds
(— Which I shall probably discover snug
Hid somewhere in the column-corner capped
With '*Credit*,' based on '*Balance*,' — which, I swear,
By this time next month I shall quite forget
Whether I lost or won — ten thousand pounds,
Which at this instant I would give . . . let's see,
For Galopin — nay, for that Gainsborough
Sir Richard won't sell, and if bought by me,
Would get my glance and praise some twice a year,—)
Well, if you don't esteem that price dirt-cheap
For teaching me Dalmatia was mistake —

Why then, my last illusion-bubble breaks,
My one discovered phœnix proves a goose,
My cleverest of all companions — oh,
Was worth nor tenpence nor ten thousand pounds!
Come! Be yourself again! So endeth here
The morning's lesson! Never while life lasts
Do I touch card again. To breakfast now!
To bed — I can't say, since you needs must start
For station early — oh, the down-train still,
First plan and best plan — townward trip be hanged!
You're due at your big brother's — pay that debt,
Then owe me not a farthing! Order eggs —
And who knows but there's trout obtainable?"

The fine man looks well-nigh malignant: then —

"Sir, please subdue your manner! Debts are debts:
I pay mine — debts of this sort — certainly.
What do I care how you regard your gains,
Want them or want them not? The thing *I* want
Is — not to have a story circulate

From club to club — how, bent on clearing out
Young So-and-so, young So-and-so cleaned me,
Then set the empty kennel flush again,
Ignored advantage and forgave his friend —
For why? There was no wringing blood from stone!
Oh, don't be savage! You would hold your tongue,
Bite it in two, as man may; but those small
Hours in the smoking-room, when instance apt
Rises to tongue's root, tingles on to tip,
And the thinned company consists of six
Capital well-known fellows one may trust!
Next week it's in the 'World.' No, thank you much.
I owe ten thousand pound: I'll pay them!"

"Now, —
This becomes funny. You've made friends with me:
I can't help knowing of the ways and means!
Or stay! they say your brother closets up
Correggio's long lost Leda: if he means
To give you that, and if you give it me . . ."
"*I* polished snob off to aristocrat?

You compliment me! father's apron still
Sticks out from son's court-vesture; still silk purse
Roughs finger with some bristle sow-ear-born!
Well, neither I nor you mean harm at heart!
I owe you and shall pay you: which premised,
Why should what follows sound like flattery?
The fact is — you do compliment too much
Your humble master, as I own I am;
You owe me no such thanks as you protest.
The polisher needs precious stone no less
Than precious stone needs polisher: believe
I struck no tint from out you but I found
Snug lying first 'neath surface hairbreadth-deep!
Beside, I liked the exercise: with skill
Goes love to show skill for skill's sake. You see,
I'm old and understand things: too absurd
It were you pitched and tossed away your life,
As diamond were Scotch pebble! all the more,
That I myself misused a stone of price.
Born and bred clever — people used to say
Clever as most men, if not something more —

Yet here I stand a failure, cut awry
Or left opaque, — no brilliant named and known.
Whate'er my inner stuff, my outside's blank;
I'm nobody — or rather, look that same —
I'm — who I am — and know it; but I hold
What in my hand out for the world to see?
What ministry, what mission, or what book
— I'll say, book even? Not a sign of these!
I began — laughing — '*All these when I like!*'
I end with — well, you've hit it! — '*This boy's check*
For just as many thousands as he'll spare!'
The first — I could and would not; your spare cash
I would, and could not: have no scruple, pray,
But, as I hoped to pocket yours, pouch mine
— When you are able!"

"Which is — when to be?
I've heard, great characters require a fall
Of fortune to show greatness by uprise:
They touch the ground to jollily rebound,
Add to the Album! Let a fellow share

Your secret of superiority!
I know, my banker makes the money breed
Money; I eat and sleep, he simply takes
The dividends and cuts the coupons off,
Sells out, buys in, keeps doubling, tripling cash,
While I do nothing but receive and spend.
But you, spontaneous generator, hatch
A wind-egg; cluck, and forth struts Capital
As Interest to me from egg of gold.
I am grown curious: pay me by all means!
How will you make the money?"

"Mind your own —
Not my affair. Enough: or money, or
Money's worth, as the case may be, expect
Ere month's end,— keep but patient for a month!
Who's for a stroll to station? Ten's the time;
Your man, with my things, follow in the trap;
At stoppage of the down-train, play the arrived
On platform and you'll show the due fatigue
Of the night-journey, — not much sleep, — perhaps,

Your thoughts were on before you — yes, indeed,
You join them, being happily awake
With thought's sole object as she smiling sits
At breakfast-table. I shall dodge meantime
In and out station-precinct, while away
The hour till up my engine pants and smokes.
No doubt, she goes to fetch you. Never fear!
She gets no glance at me, who shame such saints!"

II.

So, they ring bell, give orders, pay, depart
Amid profuse acknowledgment from host
Who well knows what may bring the younger back,
Light the cigar, descend in twenty steps
The "*calm acclivity*," inhale — beyond
Tobacco's balm — the better smoke of turf
And wood fire, — cottages at cookery
I' the morning, — reach the main road straightening on
'Twixt wood and wood, two black walls full of night
Slow to disperse, though mists thin fast before
The advancing foot, and leave the flint-dust fine
Each speck with its fire-sparkle. Presently
The road's end with the sky's beginning mix
In one magnificence of glare, due East,
So high the sun rides, — May's the merry month.

They slacken pace: the younger stops abrupt,
Discards cigar, looks his friend full in face.

"All right; the station comes in view at end;
Five minutes from the beech-clump, there you are!
I say: let's halt, let's borrow yonder gate
Of its two magpies, sit and have a talk!
Do let a fellow speak a moment! More
I think about and less I like the thing—
No, you must let me! Now, be good for once!
Ten thousand pounds be done for, dead and damned!
We played for love, not hate: yes, hate! I hate
Thinking you beg or borrow or reduce
To strychnine some poor devil of a lord
Licked at Unlimited Loo. I had the cash
To lose—you knew that!—lose and none the less
Whistle to-morrow: it's not every chap
Affords to take his punishment so well!
Now, don't be angry with a friend whose fault
Is that he thinks—upon my soul, I do—
Your head the best head going. Oh, one sees

Names in the newspaper — great this, great that,
Gladstone, Carlyle, the Laureate: — much I care!
Others have their opinion, I keep mine:
Which means — by right you ought to have the things
I want a head for. Here's a pretty place,
My cousin's place, and presently my place,
Not yours! I'll tell you how it strikes a man.
My cousin's fond of music and of course
Plays the piano (it won't be for long!)
A bran-new bore she calls a '*semigrand*'
Rosewood and pearl, that blocks the drawing-room,
And cost no end of money. Twice a week
Down comes Herr Somebody and seats himself,
Sets to work teaching — with his teeth on edge —
I've watched the rascal. '*Does he play first rate?*'
I ask: '*I rather think so*,' answers she —
'*He's What's-his-Name!*' — '*Why give you lessons then?*' —
'*I pay three guineas and the train beside.*'
'*This instrument, has he one such at home?*'

'*He? Has to practise on a table-top,*
When he can't hire the proper thing.' — '*I see!*
You've the piano, he the skill, and God
The distribution of such gifts.' So here:
After your teaching, I shall sit and strum
Polkas on this piano of a Place
You'd make resound with '*Rule Britannia*'!"

"Thanks!
I don't say but this pretty cousin's place,
Appendaged with your million, tempts my hand
As key-board I might touch with some effect."

"Then, why not have obtained the like? House, land,
Money, are things obtainable, you see,
By clever head-work: ask my father else!
You, who teach me, why not have learned, yourself?
Played like Herr Somebody with power to thump
And flourish and the rest, not bend demure

Pointing out blunders — '*Sharp, not natural!*
Permit me — on the black key use the thumb!'
There's some fatality, I'm sure! You say
'*Marry the cousin, that's your proper move!*'
And I do use the thumb and hit the sharp:
You should have listened to your own head's hint,
As I to you! The puzzle's past my power,
How you have managed — with such stuff, such means —
Not to be rich nor great nor happy man:
Of which three good things where's a sign at all?
Just look at Dizzy! Come, — what tripped your heels?
Instruct a goose that boasts wings and can't fly!
I wager I have guessed it! — never found.
The old solution of the riddle fail!
'*Who was the woman?*' I don't ask, but — '*Where*
I' the path of life stood she who tripped you?'"

"Goose

You truly are! I own to fifty years.

Why don't I interpose and cut out — you?
Compete with five and twenty? Age, my boy!"

"Old man, no nonsense! — even to a boy
That's ripe at least for rationality
Rapped into him, as may be mine was, once!
I've had my small adventure lesson me
Over the knuckles! — likely, I forget
The sort of figure youth cuts now and then,
Competing with old shoulders but young head
Despite the fifty grizzling years!'

"Aha!
Then that means — just the bullet in the blade
Which brought Dalmatia on the brain, — that, too,
Came of a fatal creature? Can't pretend
Now, for the first time to surmise as much!
Make a clean breast! Recount! a secret's safe
'Twixt you, me and the gate-post!"

— "Can't pretend,
Neither, to never have surmised your wish!

It's no use, — case of unextracted ball —
Winces at finger-touching. Let things be ! "

" Ah, if you love your love still ! I hate mine."

" I can't hate."

" I won't teach you ; and won't tell
You, therefore, what you please to ask of me
As if I, also, may not have my ache ! "

" My sort of ache ? No, no ! and yet — perhaps !
All comes of thinking you superior still.
But live and learn ! I say ! Time's up ! Good jump !
You old, indeed ! I fancy there's a cut
Across the wood, a grass-path : shall we try ?
It's venturesome, however ! "

" Stop, my boy !
Don't think I'm stingy of experience ! Life
— It's like this wood we leave. Should you and I

Go wandering about there, though the gaps
We went in and came out by were opposed
As the two poles, still, somehow, all the same,
By nightfall we should probably have chanced
On much the same main points of interest —
Both of us measured girth of mossy trunk,
Stript ivy from its strangled prey, clapped hands
At squirrel, sent a fir-cone after crow,
And so forth, — never mind what time betwixt.
So in our lives; allow I entered mine
Another way than you: 'tis possible
I ended just by knocking head against
That plaguy, low-hung branch yourself began
By getting bump from; as at last you too
May stumble o'er that stump which first of all
Bade me walk circumspectly. Head and feet
Are vulnerable both, and I, foot-sure,
Forgot that ducking down saves brow from bruise.
I, early old, played young man four years since
And failed confoundedly: so, hate alike
Failure and who caused failure, — curse her cant!"

"Oh, I see! You, though somewhat past the prime,
Were taken with a rosebud beauty! Ah —
But how should chits distinguish? She admired
Your marvel of a mind, I'll undertake!
But as to body . . . nay, I mean, . . . that is,
When years have told on face and figure." . . .

"Thanks,
Mister *sufficiently-instructed!* Such
No doubt was bound to be the consequence
To suit your self-complacency: she liked
My head enough, but loved some heart beneath
Some head with plenty of brown hair a-top
After my young friend's fashion! What becomes
Of that fine speech you made a minute since
About the man of middle age you found
A formidable peer at twenty-one?
So much for your mock-modesty! and yet
I back your first against this second sprout
Of observation, insight, what you please.
My middle age, Sir, had too much success!

It's odd: my case occurred four years ago —
I finished just while you commenced that turn
I' the wood of life, that takes us to the wealth
Of honeysuckle, heaped for who can reach.
Now, I don't boast: it's bad style, and beside,
The feat proves easier than it looks: I plucked
Full many a flower unnamed in that bouquet
(Mostly of peonies and poppies, though!)
Good nature sticks into my button-hole.
Therefore it was with nose in want of snuff
Rather than Ess or Psidium, that I chanced
On what — so far from '*rosebud beauty*.' . . . Well —
She's dead: at least you never heard her name;
She was no courtly creature, had nor birth
Nor breeding — mere fine-lady breeding; but
Oh, such a wonder of a woman! Grand
As a Greek statue! Stick fine clothes on that,
Style that a Duchess or a Queen, — you know,
Artists would make an outcry: all the more,
That she had just a statue's sleepy grace
Which broods o'er its own beauty. Nay, her fault

(Don't laugh!) was just perfection: for suppose
Only the little flaw, and I had peeped
Inside it, learned what soul inside was like.
At Rome some tourist raised the grit beneath
A Venus' forehead with his whittling-knife —
I wish, — now, — I had played that brute, brought
blood
To surface from the depths I fancied chalk!
As it was, her mere face surprised so much
That I stopped short there, struck on heap, as stares
The cockney stranger at a certain bust
With drooped eyes, — she's the thing I have in mind, —
Down at my Brother's. All-sufficient prize —
Such outside! Now, — confound me for a prig! —
Who cares? I'll make a clean breast once for all!
Beside, you've heard the gossip. My life long
I've been a woman-liker, — liking means
Loving and so on. There's a lengthy list
By this time I shall have to answer for —
So say the good folks: and they don't guess half —
For the worst is, let once collecting-itch

Possess you, and, with perspicacity
Keeps growing such a greediness that theft
Follows at no long distance, — there's the fact!
I knew that on my Leporello-list
Might figure this, that and the other name
Of feminine desirability,
But if I happened to desire inscribe,
Along with these, the only Beautiful —
Here was the unique specimen to snatch
Or now or never. 'Beautiful' I said —
'Beautiful' say in cold blood, — boiling then
To tune of '*Haste, secure whate'er the cost*
This rarity, die in the act, be damned,
So you complete collection, crown your list!'
It seemed as though the whole world, once aroused
By the first notice of such wonder's birth,
Would break bounds to contest my prize with me
The first discoverer, should she but emerge
From that safe den of darkness, where she dozed
Till I stole in, that country parsonage
Where, country parson's daughter, motherless,

Brotherless, sisterless, for eighteen years
She had been vegetating lily-like.
Her father was my brother's tutor, got
The living that way: him I chanced to see —
Her I saw — her the world would grow one eye
To see, I felt no sort of doubt at all!
'*Secure her!*' cried the devil: '*afterward*
Arrange for the disposal of the prize!'
The devil's doing! yet I seem to think —
Now, when all's done, — think with '*a head reposed*'
In French phrase — hope I think I meant to do
All requisite for such a rarity
When I should be at leisure, have due time
To learn requirement. But in evil day —
Bless me, at week's end, long as any year,
The father must begin '*Young Somebody,*
Much recommended — for I break a rule —
Comes here to read, next long vacation.' '*Young!*'
That did it. Had the epithet been '*rich,*'
'*Noble,*' '*a genius,*' even '*handsome,*' — but
— '*Young*'!"

"I say — just a word! I want to know —
You are not married?"

"I?"

"Nor ever were?"

"Never! Why?"

"Oh, then — never mind! Go on!
I had a reason for the question."

"Come, —
You could not be the young man?"

"No, indeed!
Certainly — if you never married her!"

"That I did not: and there's the curse, you'll see!
Nay, all of it's one curse, my life's mistake
Which, nourished with manure that's warranted

To make the plant bear wisdom, blew out full
In folly beyond field-flower-foolishness!
The lies I used to tell my womankind,
Knowing they disbelieved me all the time
Though they required my lies, their decent due,
This woman — not so much believed, I'll say,
As just anticipated from my mouth:
Since being true, devoted, constant — she
Found constancy, devotion, truth, the plain
And easy commonplace of character.
No mock-heroics but seemed natural
To her who underneath the face, I knew
Was fairness' self, possessed a heart, I judged
Must correspond in folly just as far
Beyond the common, — and a mind to match, —
Not made to puzzle conjurors like me
Who, therein, proved the fool who fronts you, Sir,
And begs leave to cut short the ugly rest!
'*Trust me!*' I said: she trusted. '*Marry me!*'
Or rather, '*We are married: when, the rite?*'
That brought on the collector's next-day qualm

At counting acquisition's cost. There lay
My marvel, there my purse more light by much
Because of its late lie-expenditure:
Ill-judged such moment to make fresh demand—
Bid cage as well as catch my rarity!
So, I began explaining. At first word
Outbroke the horror. '*Then, my truths were lies!*'
I tell you, such an outbreak, such new strange
All-unsuspected revelation — soul
As supernaturally grand as face
Was fair beyond example — that at once
Either I lost — or, if it please you, found
My senses, — stammered somehow — '*Jest! and now,*
Earnest! Forget all else but — heart has loved,
Does love, shall love you ever! take the hand!'
Not she! no marriage for superb disdain,
Contempt incarnate!"

"Yes, it's different, —
It's only like in being four years since.
I see now!"

"Well, what did disdain do next,
Think you?"

"That's past me: did not marry you! —
That's the main thing I care for, I suppose.
Turned nun, or what?"

"Why, married in a month
Some parson, some smug crop-haired smooth-chinned sort
Of curate-creature, I suspect, — dived down,
Down, deeper still, and came up somewhere else —
I don't know where — I've not tried much to know, —
In short, she's happy: what the clodpoles call
'Countrified' with a vengeance! leads the life
Respectable and all that drives you mad:
Still — where, I don't know, and that's best for both."

"Well, that she did not like you, I conceive.
But why should you hate her, I want to know?"

"My good young friend — because or her or else
Malicious Providence I have to hate.
For, what I tell you proved the turning-point
Of my whole life and fortune toward success
Or failure. If I drown, I lay the fault
Much on myself who caught at reed not rope,
But more on reed which, with a packthread's pith,
Had buoyed me till the minute's cramp could thaw
And I strike out afresh and so be saved.
It's easy saying — I had sunk before,
Disqualified myself by idle days
And busy nights, long since, from holding hard
On cable, even, had fate cast me such!
You boys don't know how many times men fail
Perforce o' the little to succeed i' the large,
Husband their strength, let slip the petty prey,
Collect the whole power for the final pounce!
My fault was the mistaking man's main prize
For intermediate boy's diversion; clap
Of boyish hands here frightened game away
Which, once gone, goes forever. Oh, at first

I took the anger easily, nor much
Minded the anguish — having learned that storms
Subside, and teapot-tempests are akin.
Time would arrange things, mend whate'er might be
Somewhat amiss: precipitation, eh?
Reason and rhyme prompt — reparation! Tiffs
End properly in marriage and a dance!
I said, 'We'll marry, make the past a blank' —
And never was such damnable mistake!
That interview, that laying bare my soul,
As it was first, so was it last chance — one
And only. Did I write? Back letter came
Unopened as it went. Inexorable
She fled, I don't know where, consoled herself
With the smug curate-creature: chop and change!
Sure am I, when she told her shaveling all
His Magdalen's adventure, tears were shed,
Forgiveness evangelically shown,
'Loose hair and lifted eye,' — as some one says.
And now, he's worshipped for his pains, the sneak!"

"Well, but your turning-point of life, — what's here
To hinder you contesting Finsbury
With Orton, next election? I don't see." . . .

"Not you! But *I* see. Slowly, surely, creeps
Day by day o'er me the conviction — here
Was life's prize grasped at, gained, and then let go!
— That with her — may be, for her — I had felt
Ice in me melt, grow steam, drive to effect
Any or all the fancies sluggish here
I' the head that needs the hand she would not take
And I shall never lift now. Lo, your wood —
Its turnings which I likened life to! Well, —
There she stands, ending every avenue,
Her visionary presence on each goal
I might have gained had we kept side by side!
Still string nerve and strike foot? Her frown forbids:
The steam congeals once more: I'm old again!
Therefore I hate myself — but how much worse
Do not I hate who would not understand,
Let me repair things — no, but sent a-slide

My folly falteringly, stumblingly
Down, down and deeper down until I drop
Upon the need of your ten thousand pounds
And consequently loss of mine! I lose
Character, cash, nay, common sense itself
Recounting such a lengthy cock-and-bull
Adventure, lose my temper in the act" . . .

"And lose beside, — if I may supplement
The list of losses, — train and ten-o'clock!
Hark, pant and puff, there travels the swart sign!
So much the better! You're my captive now!
I'm glad you trust a fellow: friends grow thick
This way — that's twice said; we were thickish, though,
Even last night, and, ere night comes again,
I prophesy good luck to both of us!
For see now! — back to '*balmy eminence*'
Or '*calm acclivity*' or what's the word,
Bestow you there an hour, concoct at ease
A sonnet for the Album, while I put
Bold face on, best foot forward, make for house,

March in to aunt and niece, and tell the truth —
(Even white-lying goes against my taste
After your little story.) Oh, the niece
Is rationality itself! The aunt —
If she's amenable to reason too —
Why, you stopped short to pay her due respect,
And let the Duke wait (I'll work well the Duke).
If she grows gracious, I return for you;
If thunder's in the air, why — bear your doom,
Dine on rump-steaks and port, and shake the dust
Of aunty from your shoes as off you go
By evening-train, nor give the thing a thought
How you shall pay me — that's as sure as fate,
Old fellow! Off with you, face left about!
Yonder's the path I have to pad. You see,
I'm in good spirits, God knows why! Perhaps
Because the woman did not marry you
— Who look so hard at me, — and have the right,
One must be fair and own!"

The two stand still
Under an oak.

"Look here!" resumes the youth.
"I never quite knew how I came to like
You — so much — whom I ought not court at all:
Nor how you had a leaning just to me
Who am assuredly not worth your pains,
For there must needs be plenty such as you
Somewhere about, — although I can't say where, —
Able and willing to teach all you know;
While — how can you have missed a score like me
With money and no wit, precisely each
A pupil for your purpose, were it — ease
Fool's poke of tutor's *honorarium*-fee?
And yet, howe'er it came about, I felt
At once my master: you as prompt descried
Your man, I warrant, so was bargain struck.
Now, these same lines of liking, loving, run
Sometimes so close together they converge —
Life's great adventures — you know what I mean —
In people. Do you know, as you advanced,
It got to be uncommonly like fact
We two had fallen in with — liked and loved

Just the same woman in our different ways?
I began life — poor groundling as I prove —
Winged and ambitious to fly high: why not?
There's something in 'Don Quixote' to the point,
My shrewd old father used to quote and praise —
'*Am I born man?*' asks Sancho, '*being man,*
By possibility I may be Pope!'
So, Pope I meant to make myself, by step
And step, whereof the first should be to find
A perfect woman; and I tell you this —
If what I fixed on, in the order due
Of undertakings, as next step, had first
Of all disposed itself to suit my tread,
And I had been, the day I came of age,
Returned at head of poll for Westminster
— Nay, and moreover summoned by the Queen
At week's end, when my maiden-speech bore fruit,
To form and head a Tory ministry —
It would not have seemed stranger, no, nor been
More strange to me, as now I estimate,
Than what did happen — sober truth, no dream.

I saw my wonder of a woman, — laugh,
I'm past that! — in Commemoration-week.
A plenty have I seen since, fair and foul, —
With eyes, too, helped by your sagacious wink;
But one to match that marvel — no least trace,
Least touch of kinship and community!
The end was — I did somehow state the fact,
Did, with no matter what imperfect words,
One way or other give to understand
That woman, soul and body were her slave
Would she but take, but try them — any test
Of will, and some poor test of power beside:
So did the strings within my brain grow tense
And capable of . . . hang similitudes!
She answered kindly but beyond appeal.
'*No sort of hope for me, who came too late.*
She was another's. Love went — mine to her,
Hers just as loyally to some one else.'
Of course! I might expect it! Nature's law —
Given the peerless woman, certainly
Somewhere shall be the peerless man to match!

I acquiesced at once, submitted me
In something of a stupor, went my way.
I fancy there had been some talk before
Of somebody — her father or the like —
To coach me in the holidays, — that's how
I came to get the sight and speech of her, —
But I had sense enough to break off sharp,
Save both of us the pain."

"Quite right there!"

"Eh?

Quite wrong, it happens! Now comes worst of all!
Yes, I did sulk aloof and let alone
The lovers — *I* disturb the angel-mates?"

"Seraph paired off with cherub!"

"Thank you! While

I never plucked up courage to inquire
Who he was, even, — certain-sure of this,

That nobody I knew of had blue wings
And wore a star-crown as he needs must do, —
Some little lady, — plainish, pock-marked girl, —
Finds out my secret in my woeful face,
Comes up to me at the Apollo Ball,
And pityingly pours her wine and oil
This way into the wound: *'Dear f-f-friend,*
Why waste affection thus on — must I say,
A somewhat worthless object? Who's her choice —
Irrevocable as deliberate —
Out of the wide world? I shall name no names —
But there's a person in society,
Who, blessed with rank and talent, has grown gray
In idleness and sin of every sort
Except hypocrisy: he's thrice her age,
A byword for 'successes with the sex'
As the French say — and, as we ought to say,
Consummately a liar and a rogue,
Since — show me where's the woman won without
The help of this one lie which she believes —
That, never mind how things have come to pass,

And let who loves have loved a thousand times —
All the same he now loves her only, loves
Her ever! if by 'won' you just mean 'sold,'
That's quite another compact. Well, this scamp,
Continuing descent from bad to worse,
Must leave his fine and fashionable prey
(Who — fathered, brothered, husbanded, — are hedged
About with thorny danger) and apply
His arts to this poor country ignorance,
Who sees forthwith in the first rag of man
Her model hero! Why continue waste
On such a woman treasures of a heart
Would yet find solace, — yes, my f-f-friend —
In some congenial — fiddle-diddle-dee?' "

"Pray, is the pleasant gentleman described
Exact the portrait which my '*f-f-friends*'
Recognize as so like? 'Tis evident
You half surmised the sweet original
Could be no other than myself, just now!
Your stop and start were flattering!"

"Of course
Caricature's allowed for in a sketch!
The longish nose becomes a foot in length,
The swarthy cheek gets copper-colored, — still
Prominent beak and dark-hued skin are facts:
And '*parson's daughter*' — '*young man coachable*' —
'*Elderly party*' — '*four years since*' — were facts
To fasten on, a moment! Marriage, though —
That made the difference, I hope."

"All right!'
I never married; wish I had — and then
Unwish it: people kill their wives, sometimes!
I hate my mistress, but I'm murder-free.
In your case, where's the grievance? You came last,
The earlier bird picked up the worm. Suppose
You, in the glory of your twenty-one,
Had happened to precede myself! 'tis odds
But this gigantic juvenility,
This offering of a big arm's bony hand —
I'd rather shake than feel shake me, I know —

Had moved *my* dainty mistress to admire
An altogether new Ideal — deem
Idolatry less due to life's decline
Productive of experience, powers mature
By dint of usage, the made man — no boy
That's all to make! I was the earlier bird —
And what I found, I let fall; what you missed,
Who is the fool that blames you for?"

"Myself —
For nothing, every thing! For finding out
She, whom I worshipped, was a worshipper
In turn of . . . but why stir up settled mud?
She married him — the fifty-years-old rake —
How you have teased the talk from me! At last
My secret's told you. I inquired no more,
Nay, stopped ears when informants unshut mouth;
Enough that she and he live, deuce take where,
Married and happy, or else miserable —
It's 'Cut-the-pack;' she turned up ace or knave,
And I left Oxford, England, dug my hole

Out in Dalmatia, till you drew me thence
Badger-like, — '*Back to London*' was the word —
'*Do things, a many, there, you fancy hard,*
I'll undertake are easy!' — the advice.
I took it, had my twelvemonth's fling with you —
(Little hand holding large hand pretty tight
For all its delicacy — eh, my lord?)
Until when, t'other day, I got a turn
Somehow and gave up tired: and '*Rest!*' bade you,
'*Marry your cousin, double your estate,*
And take your ease by all means!' So, I loll
On this the springy sofa, mine next month —
Or should loll, but that you must needs beat rough
The very down you spread me out so smooth.
I wish this confidence were still to make!
Ten thousand pounds? You owe me twice the sum
For stirring up the black depths! There's repose
Or, at least, silence when misfortune seems
All that one has to bear; but folly — yes,
Folly, it all was! Fool to be so meek,
So humble, — such a coward rather say!

Fool, to adore the adorer of a fool!
Not to have faced him, tried (a useful hint)
My big and bony, here, against the bunch
Of lily-colored five with signet-ring,
Most like, for little-finger's sole defence —
Much as you flaunt the blazon there! I grind
My teeth, that bite my very heart, to think —
To know I might have made that woman mine
But for the folly of the coward — know —
Or what's the good of my apprenticeship
This twelvemonth to a master in the art?
Mine — had she been mine — just one moment mine
For honor, for dishonor — anyhow,
So that my life, instead of stagnant . . . Well,
You've poked and proved stagnation is not sleep —
Hang you!"

"Hang *you* for an ungrateful goose!
All this means — I who since I knew you first
Have helped you to conceit yourself this cock
O' the dunghill with all hens to pick and choose —

Ought to have helped you when shell first was chipped
By chick that wanted prompting '*Use the spur!*'
While I was elsewhere putting mine to use.
As well might I blame you who kept aloof,
Seeing you could not guess I was alive,
Never advised me '*Do as I have done* —
Reverence such a jewel as your luck
Has scratched up to enrich unworthiness!'
As your behavior was, should mine have been,
— Faults which we both, too late, are sorry for —
Opposite ages, each with its mistake:
'*If youth but would* — *if age but could*,' you know!
Don't let us quarrel! Come, we're — young and old —
Neither so badly off! Go you your way
Cut to the Cousin! I'll to Inn, await
The issue of diplomacy with Aunt,
And wait my hour on '*calm acclivity*'
In rumination manifold — perhaps
About ten thousand pounds I have to pay!"

III.

Now, as the elder lights the fresh cigar
Conducive to resource, and saunteringly
Betakes him to the left-hand backward path, —
While, much sedate, the younger strides away
To right and makes for — islanded in lawn
And edged with shrubbery — the brilliant bit
Of Barry's building that's the Place, — a pair
Of women, at this nick of time, one young,
One very young, are ushered with due pomp
Into the same Inn-parlor — '*disengaged*
Entirely now!' the obsequious landlord smiles,
'*Since the late occupants — whereof but one*
Was quite a stranger' — (smile enforced by bow)
'*Left, a full two hours since, to catch the train,*
Probably for the stranger's sake!' (Bow, smile,

And backing out from door soft closed behind.)

Woman and girl, the two, alone inside,
Begin their talk: the girl, with sparkling eyes —

"Oh, I forewent him purposely! but you,
Who joined at — journeyed from the Junction here —
I wonder how he failed your notice! Few
Stop at our station: fellow-passengers
Assuredly you were — I saw indeed
His servant, therefore he arrived all right.
I wanted, you know why, to have you safe
Inside here first of all, so dodged about
The dark end of the platform; that's his way —
To swing from station straight to avenue
And stride the half a mile for exercise.
I fancied you might notice the huge boy.
He soon gets o'er the distance: at the house
He'll hear I went to meet him and have missed;
He'll wait. No minute of the hour's too much
Meantime for our preliminary talk;

First word of which must be — O good beyond
Expression of all goodness — you to come!"

The elder, the superb one, answers slow.

"There was no helping that. You called for me,
Cried, rather; and my old heart answered you.
Still, thank me! since the effort breaks a vow —
At least, a promise to myself."

"I know!
How selfish get you happy folks to be!
If I should love my husband, must I needs
Sacrifice straightway all the world to him,
As you do? Must I never dare leave house
On this dread Arctic expedition, out
And in again, six mortal hours, though you —
You even, my own friend for evermore,
Adjure me — fast your friend till rude love pushed
Poor friendship from her vantage — just to grant
The quarter of a whole day's company

And counsel? This makes counsel so much more
Need and necessity. For here's my block
Of stumbling: in the face of happiness
So absolute, fear chills me. If such change
In heart be but love's easy consequence,
Do I love? If to marry mean — let go
All I now live for, should my marriage be?"

The other never once has ceased to gaze
On the great elm-tree in the open, posed
Placidly full in front, smooth bole, broad branch,
And leafage, one green plenitude of May.
The gathered thought runs into speech at last.

"O you exceeding beauty, bosomful
Of lights and shades, murmurs and silences,
Sun-warmth, dew-coolness, — squirrel, bee and bird,
High, higher, highest, till the blue proclaims
Leave earth, there's nothing better till next step
Heavenward!' — so, off flies what has wings to help!"

And henceforth they alternate. Says the girl —

"That's saved then: marriage spares the early taste."

"Four years now, since my eye took note of tree!"

"If I had seen no other tree but this
My life-long, while yourself came straight, you said,
From tree which overstretched you, and was just
One fairy tent with pitcher-leaves that held
Wine, and a flowery wealth of suns and moons,
And magic fruits whereon the angels feed —
I looking out of window on a tree
Like yonder — otherwise well-known, much-liked,
Yet just an English ordinary elm —
What marvel if you cured me of conceit
My elm's bird bee, and squirrel tenantry
Was quite the proud possession I supposed?
And there is evidence you tell me true.
The fairy marriage-tree reports itself
Good guardian of the perfect face and form,
Fruits of four years' protection! Married friend,
You are more beautiful than ever!"

"Yes —
I think that likely. I could well dispense
With all thought fair in feature, mine or no,
Leave but enough of face to know me by —
With all found fresh in youth except such strength
As lets a life-long labor earn repose
Death sells at just that price, they say; and so,
Possibly, what I care not for, I keep."

"How you must know he loves you! Chill, before,
Fear sinks to freezing. Could I sacrifice —
Assured my lover simply loves my soul —
One nose-breadth of fair feature? No, indeed!
Your own love." . . .

"The preliminary hour —
Don't waste it!"

"But I can't begin at once!
The angel's self that comes to hear me speak

Drives away all the care about the speech.
What an angelic mystery you are —
Now — that is certain! when I knew you first,
No break of halo and no bud of wing!
I thought I knew you, saw you, round and through,
Like a glass ball; suddenly, four years since,
You vanished, how and whither? Mystery!
Wherefore? No mystery at all: you loved,
Were loved again, and left the world of course, —
Who would not? Lapped four years in fairy-land,
Out comes, by no less wonderful a chance,
The changeling, touched athwart her trellised bliss
Of blush-rose bower by just the old friend's voice
That's now struck dumb at her own potency.
I talk of my small fortunes? Tell me yours —
Rather! The fool I ever was — I am,
You see that: the true friend you ever had,
You have, you also recognize. Perhaps,
Giving you all the love of all my heart,
Nature, that's niggard in me, has denied
The after-birth of love there's some one claims,

— This huge boy, swinging up the avenue;
And I want counsel — is defect in me,
Or him who has no right to raise the love?
My cousin asks my hand: he's young enough,
Handsome, — my maid thinks, — manly's more the word:
He asked my leave to '*drop*' the elm-tree there,
Some morning before breakfast. Gentleness
Goes with the strength, of course. He's honest too,
Limpidly truthful. For ability —
All's in the rough yet. His first taste of life
Seems to have somehow gone against the tongue:
He travelled, tried things — came back, tried still more —
He says he's sick of all. He's fond of me
After a certain careless-earnest way
I like: the iron's crude, — no polished steel
Somebody forged before me. I am rich —
That's not the reason, he's far richer: no,
Nor is it that he thinks me pretty, — frank
Undoubtedly on that point! He saw once

The pink of face-perfection — oh, not you —
Content yourself, my beauty! — for she proved
So thoroughly a cheat, his charmer . . . nay,
He runs into extremes, I'll say at once,
Lest you say! Well, I understand he wants
Some one to serve, something to do: and both
Requisites so abound in me and mine
That here's the obstacle which stops consent —
The smoothness is too smooth, and I mistrust
The unseen cat beneath the counterpane.
Therefore I thought — '*Would she but judge for me,*
Who, judging for herself, succeeded so!'
Do I love him, does he love me, do both
Mistake for knowledge — easy ignorance?
Appeal to the proficient in each art!
I got rough-smooth through a piano-piece,
Rattled away last week till tutor came,
Heard me to end, then grunted, '*Ach, mein Gott!*
Sagen Sie "easy"? Every note is wrong!
All thumped mit wrist — we'll trouble fingers now!
The Fräulein will please roll up Raff again

And exercise at Czerny for one month!'
Am I to roll up cousin, exercise
At Trollope's novels for a month? Pronounce!"

"Now, place each in the right position first,
Adviser and advised one! I perhaps
Am three — nay, four years older; am, beside,
A wife: advantages — to balance which,
You have a full fresh joyous sense of life
That finds you out life's fit food everywhere,
Detects enjoyment where I, slow and dull,
Fumble at fault. Already, these four years,
Your merest glimpses at the world without
Have shown you more than ever met my gaze;
And now, by joyance you inspire joy, — learn
While you profess to teach, and teach, although
Avowedly a learner. I am dazed
Like any owl by sunshine which just sets
The sparrow preening plumage! Here's to spy
— Your cousin! You have scanned him all your life,
Little or much; I never saw his face.

You have determined on a marriage — used
Deliberation therefore — I'll believe
No otherwise, with opportunity
For judgment so abounding! Here stand I —
Summoned to give my sentence, for a whim
(Well, at first cloud-fleck thrown athwart your blue)
On what is strangeness' self to me, — say '*Wed!*'
Or '*Wed not!*' whom you promise I shall judge
Presently, at propitious lunch-time, just
While he carves chicken! Sends he leg for wing?
That revelation into character
And conduct must suffice me! Quite as well
Consult with yonder solitary crow
That eyes us from your elm-top!"

"Still the same!
Do you remember, at the library
We saw together somewhere, those two books
Somebody said were notice-worthy? One
Lay wide on table, sprawled its painted leaves
For all the world's inspection; shut on shelf

Reclined the other volume, closed, clasped, locked —
Clear to be let alone. Which page had we
Preferred the turning over of? You were,
Are, ever will be the locked lady, hold
Inside you secrets written, — soul absorbed,
My ink upon your blotting-paper. *I* —
What trace of you have I to show in turn?
Delicate secrets! No one juvenile
Ever essayed at croquet and performed
Superiorly but I confided you
The sort of hat he wore and hair it held.
While you? One day a calm note comes by post —
'*I am just married, you may like to hear.*'
Most men would hate you, or they ought; we love
What we fear, — *I* do! '*Cold*' I shall expect
My cousin calls you. I — dislike not him,
But (if I comprehend what loving means)
Love you immeasurably more — more — more
Than even he who, loving you his wife,
Would turn up nose at me impertinent,
Frivolous, forward — *love* that excellence

Of all the earth he bows in worship to!
And who's this paragon of privilege?
Simply a country parson: his the charm
That worked the miracle! Oh, too absurd—
But that you stand before me as you stand!
Such beauty does prove something, every thing!
Beauty's the prize-power which dispenses eye
From peering into what has nourished root—
Dew or manure: the plant best knows its place.
Enough, from teaching youth and tending age
And hearing sermons, — haply writing tracts, —
From such strange love-besprinkled compost, lo,
Out blows this triumph! Therefore, love's the soil
Plants find or fail of. You, with wit to find,
Exercise wit on the old friend's behalf,
Keep me from failure! Scan and scrutinize
This cousin! Surely he's as worth your pains
To study as my elm-tree, crow and all,
You still keep staring at! I read your thoughts!"

"At last?"

"At first! '*Would, tree, a-top of thee*
I winged were, like crow perched moveless there,
And so could straightway soar, escape this bore,
Back to my nest where broods whom I love best —
The parson o'er his parish — garish — rarish' —
Oh I could bring the rhyme in if I tried:
The Album here inspires me! Quite apart
From lyrical expression, have I read
The stare aright, and sings not soul just so?"

"Or rather *so?* '*Cool comfortable elm*
That men make coffins out of, — none for me
At thy expense, so thou permit I glide
Under thy ferny feet, and there sleep, sleep,
Nor dread awaking though in heaven itself!'"

The younger looks with face struck sudden white.
The elder answers its inquiry.

"Dear,
You are a guesser, not a '*clairvoyante.*'

I'll so far open you the locked and shelved
Volume, my soul, that you desire to see,
As let you profit by the titlepage" —

"*Paradise Lost?*"

"*Inferno!* — All which comes
Of tempting me to break my vow. Stop here!
Friend, whom I love the best in the whole world,
Come at your call, be sure that I will do
At your requirement — see and say my mind.
It may be that by sad apprenticeship
I have a keener sense: I'll task the same.
Only indulge me — here let sight and speech
Happen — this Inn is neutral ground, you know!
I cannot visit the old house and home,
Encounter the old sociality
Abjured forever. Peril quite enough
In even this first — last, I pray it prove —
Renunciation of my solitude!
Back, you, to house and cousin! Leave me here,

Who want no entertainment, carry still
My occupation with me. While I watch
The shadow inching round those ferny feet,
Tell him '*A school friend wants a word with me*
Up at the inn: time, tide and train won't wait:
I must go see her — on and off again —
You'll keep me company?' Ten minutes' talk,
With you in presence, ten more afterward
With who, alone, convoys me station-bound,
And I see clearly — to say honestly
To-morrow: pen shall play tongue's part, you know!
Go — quick! for I have made our hand-in-hand
Return impossible. So scared you look, —
If cousin does not greet you with, '*What ghost*
Has crossed your path?' I set him down obtuse."

And after one more look, with face still white,
The younger does go, while the elder stands
Occupied by the elm at window there.

IV.

Occupied by the elm; and, as its shade
Has crept clock-hand-wise till it ticks at fern
Five inches farther to the south, — the door
Opens abruptly, some one enters sharp,
The elder man returned to wait the youth —
Never observes the room's new occupant,
Throws hat on table, stoops quick, elbow-propped
Over the Album wide there, bends down brow
A cogitative minute, whistles shrill,
Then, — with a cheery-hopeless laugh-and-lose
Air of defiance to fate visibly
Casting the toils about him, — moths once more
'*Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot!*'
Then clasps-to cover, sends book spinning off
T'other side table, looks up, starts erect

Full-face with her who, — roused from that abstruse
Question '*Will next tick tip the fern or no?*' —
Fronts him as fully.

All her languor breaks,
Away withers at once the weariness
From the black-blooded brow, anger and hate
Convulse. Speech follows slowlier, but at last —

"You here! I felt, I knew it would befall!
Knew, by some subtle undivinable
Trick of the trickster, I should, silly-sooth,
Late or soon, somehow be allured to leave
Safe hiding and come take of him arrears,
My torment due on four years' respite! Time
To pluck the bird's healed breast of down o'er wound!
Have your success! Be satisfied this sole
Seeing you has undone all heaven could do
These four years, puts me back to you and hell!
What will next trick be, next success? No doubt
When I shall think to glide into the grave,

There will you wait disguised as beckoning Death,
And catch and capture me for evermore!
But, God, though I am nothing, be thou all!
Contest him for me! Strive, for he is strong!"

Already his surprise dies palely out
In laugh of acquiescing impotence.
He neither gasps nor hisses: calm and plain —

"I also felt and knew — but otherwise!
You out of hand and sight and care of me
These four years, whom I felt, knew, all the while . . .
Oh, it's no superstition! It's a gift
O' the gamester that he snuffs the unseen powers
Which help or harm him! Well I knew what lurked,
Lay perdue paralyzing me, — drugged, drowsed
And damnified my soul and body both!
Down and down, see where you have dragged me to,
You and your malice! I was, four years since,
— Well, a poor creature! I become a knave.
I squandered my own pence: I plump my purse

With other people's pounds. I practised play
Because I liked it: play turns labor now
Because there's profit also in the sport.
I gamed with men of equal age and craft:
I steal here with a boy as green as grass
Whom I have tightened hold on slow and sure
This long while, just to bring about to-day
When the boy beats me hollow, buries me
In ruin who was sure to beggar him.
O time indeed I should look up and laugh,
'*Surely she closes on me!*' Here you stand!"

And stand she does: while volubility,
With him, keeps on the increase, for his tongue
After long locking-up is loosed for once.

"Certain the taunt is happy!" he resumes:
"So, I it was allured you — only I
— I, and none other — to this spectacle —
Your triumph, my despair — you woman-fiend
That front me! Well, I have my wish, then! See

The low wide brow oppressed by sweeps of hair
Darker and darker as they coil and swathe
The crowned corpse-wanness whence the eyes burn black,
Not asleep now! not pin-points dwarfed beneath
Either great bridging eyebrow — poor blank beads —
Babies, I've pleased to pity in my time:
How they protrude and glow immense with hate!
The long triumphant nose attains — retains
Just the perfection; and there's scarlet-skein
My ancient enemy, her lip and lip,
Sense-free, sense-frighting lips clenched cold and bold
Because of chin, that based resolved beneath!
Then the columnar neck completes the whole
Greek-sculpture-baffling body! Do I see?
Can I observe? You wait next word to come?
Well, wait and want! since no one blight I bid
Consume one least perfection. Each and all,
As they are rightly shocking now to me,
So may they still continue! Value them?
Ay, as the vender knows the money-worth
Of his Greek statue, fools aspire to buy,

And he to see the back of! Let us laugh!
You have absolved me from my sin at least!
You stand stout, strong, in the rude health of hate,
No touch of the tame timid nullity
My cowardice, forsooth, has practised on!
Ay, while you seemed to hint some fine fifth act
Of tragedy should freeze blood, end the farce,
I never doubted all was joke. I kept,
May be, an eye alert on paragraphs,
Newspaper-notice, — let no inquest slip,
Accident, disappearance: sound and safe
Were you, my victim, not of mind to die!
So, my worst fancy that could spoil the smooth
Of pillow, and arrest descent of sleep
Was '*Into what dim hole can she have dived,*
She and her wrongs, her woe that's wearing flesh
And blood away?" Whereas, see, sorrow swells!
Or, fattened, fulsome, have you fed on me,
Sucked out my substance? How much gloss, I pray,
O'erbloomed those hair-swathes when there crept from
you

To me that craze, else unaccountable,
Which urged me to contest our county-seat
With whom but my own brother's nominee?
Did that mouth's pulp glow ruby from carmine
While I misused my moment, pushed, — one word, —
One hair's breadth more of gesture, — idiot-like
Past passion, floundered on to the grotesque,
And lost the heiress in a grin? At least,
You made no such mistake! You tickled fish,
Landed your prize the true artistic way!
How did the smug young curate rise to tune
Of '*Friend, a fatal fact divides us! Love*
Suits me no longer! I have suffered shame,
Betrayal: past is past; the future — yours —
Shall never be contaminate by mine!
I might have spared me this confession, not
— O, never by some hideousest of lies,
Easy, impenetrable! No! but say,
By just the quiet answer — "I am cold."
Falschood avaunt, each shadow of thee, hence!
Had happier fortune willed . . . but dreams are vain!

Now, leave me — yes, for pity's sake!' Aha,
Who fails to see the curate as his face
Reddened and whitened, wanted handkerchief
At wrinkling brow and twinkling eye, until
Out burst the proper '*Angel, whom the fiend*
Has thought to smirch, — thy whiteness, at one wipe
Of holy cambric, shall disgrace the swan!
Mine be the task' . . . and so forth! Fool? not he!
Cunning in flavors, rather! What but sour
Suspected makes the sweetness doubly — sweet?
And what stings love from faint to flamboyant
But the fear-sprinkle? Even horror helps —
'*Love's flame in me by such recited wrong*
Drenched, quenched, indeed? It burns the fiercelier
thence!'
Why, I have known men never love their wives
Till somebody — myself, suppose — had '*drenched*
And quenched love,' so the blockheads whined: as if
The fluid fire that lifts the torpid limb
Were a wrong done to palsy. But I thrilled
No palsied person: half my age, or less

The curate was, I'll wager: o'er young blood
Your beauty triumphed! Eh, but — was it *he?*
Then, it *was* he, I heard of! None beside!
How frank you were about the audacious boy
Who fell upon you like a thunderbolt —
Passion and protestation! He it was
Reserved *in petto!* Ay, and '*rich*' beside —
'*Rich*' — how supremely did disdain curl nose!
All that I heard was — '*wedded to a priest;*'
Informants sunk youth, riches and the rest.
And so my lawless love disparted loves,
That loves might come together with a rush!
Surely this last achievement sucked me dry:
Indeed, that way my wits went! Mistress-queen,
Be merciful, and let your subject slink
Into dark safety! He's a beggar, see —
Do not turn back his ship, Australia-bound,
And bid her land him right amid some crowd
Of creditors, assembled by your curse!
Don't cause the very rope to crack (you can!)
Whereon he spends his last (friend's) sixpence, just

The moment when he hoped to hang himself!
Be satisfied you beat him!"

She replies —

"Beat him! I do. To all that you confess
Of abject failure, I extend belief.
Your very face confirms it: God is just!
Let my face — fix your eyes! — in turn confirm
What I shall say. All-abject's but half truth;
Add to all-abject knave as perfect fool!
So is it you probed human nature, *so*
Prognosticated of me? Lay these words
To heart then, or where God meant heart should lurk!
That moment when you first revealed yourself,
My simple impulse prompted — end forthwith
The ruin of a life uprooted thus
To surely perish! How should such a tree
Henceforward balk the wind of its worst sport,
Fail to go falling deeper, falling down
From sin to sin until some depth were reached

Doomed to the weakest by the wickedest
Of weak and wicked human kind? But when,
That self-display made absolute, — behold
A new revealment! — round you pleased to veer,
Propose me what should prompt annul the past,
Make me '*amends by marriage*' — in your phrase,
Incorporate me henceforth, body and soul,
With soul and body which mere brushing past
Brought leprosy upon me — '*marry*' these!
Why, then despair broke, reassurance dawned,
Clear-sighted was I that who hurled contempt
As I — thank God! — at the contemptible,
Was scarce an utter weakling. Rent away
By treason from my rightful pride of place,
I was not destined to the shame below.
A cleft had caught me: I might perish there,
But thence to be dislodged and whirled at last
Where the black torrent sweeps the sewage — no!
'*Bare breast be on hard rock*,' laughed out my soul
In gratitude, '*howe'er rock's grip may grind!*
The plain, rough, wretched holdfast shall suffice

This wreck of me!' The wind, — I broke in bloom
At passage of, — which stripped me bole and branch,
Twisted me up and tossed me here, — turns back
And, playful ever, would replant the spoil?
Be satisfied, not one least leaf that's mine
Shall henceforth help wind's sport to exercise!
Rather I give such remnant to the rock
Which never dreamed a straw would settle there.
Rock may not thank me, may not feel my breast,
Even: enough that *I* feel, hard and cold,
Its safety my salvation. Safe and saved,
I lived, live. When the tempter shall persuade
His prey to slip down, slide off, trust the wind, —
Now that I know if God or Satan be
Prince of the Power of the Air, — then, then, indeed,
Let my life end and degradation too!"

"Good!" he smiles, "true Lord Byron! '*Tree and rock:*'
'*Rock*' — there's advancement! He's at first a youth,
Rich, worthless therefore; next he grows a priest:

Youth, riches prove a notable resource,
When to leave me for their possessor gluts
Malice abundantly ; and now, last change,
The young rich parson represents a rock
— Bloodstone, no doubt. He's evangelical ?
Your Ritualists prefer the Church for spouse ! "

She speaks. " I have a story to relate.
There was a parish-priest, my father knew,
Elderly, poor : I used to pity him
Before I learned what woes are pity-worth.
Elderly was grown old now, scanty means
Were straitening fast to poverty, beside
The ailments which await in such a case.
Limited every way, a perfect man
Within the bounds built up and up since birth
Breast-high about him till the outside world
Was blank save o'erhead one blue bit of sky —
Faith : he had faith in dogma, small or great,
As in the fact that if he clave his skull
He'd find a brain there : such a fact who proves

No falsehood by experiment at price
Of soul and body? The one rule of life
Delivered him in childhood was '*Obey!*
Labor!' He had obeyed and labored — tame,
True to the mill-track blinked on from above.
Some scholarship he may have gained in youth:
Gone — dropt or flung behind. Some blossom-flake,
Spring's boon, descends on every vernal head,
I used to think; but January joins
December, as his year had known no May
Trouble its snow-deposit, — cold and old!
I heard it was his will to take a wife,
A helpmate. Duty bade him tend and teach —
How? with experience null, nor sympathy
Abundant, — while himself worked dogma dead,
Who would play ministrant to sickness, age,
Womankind, childhood? These demand a wife,
Supply the want, then! theirs the wife; for him —
No coarsest sample of the proper sex
But would have served his purpose equally
With God's own angel, — let but knowledge match

Her coarseness: zeal does only half the work.
I saw this — knew the purblind honest drudge
Was wearing out his simple blameless life,
And wanted help beneath a burden — borne
To treasure-house or dust-heap, what cared I?
Partner he needed: I proposed myself,
Nor much surprised him — duty was so clear!
Gratitude? What for? Gain of Paradise —
Escape, perhaps, from the dire penalty
Of who hides talent in a napkin! No.
His scruple was — should I be strong enough
— In body? since of weakness in the mind,
Weariness in the heart — what fear of these?
He took me as these Arctic voyagers
Take an aspirant to their toil and pain:
Can he endure them? — that's the point, and not
— Will he? Who would not, rather! Whereupon,
I pleaded far more earnestly for leave
To give myself away, than you to gain
What you called priceless till you gained the heart
And soul and body! which, as beggars serve

Extorted alms, you straightway spat upon.
Not so my husband, — for I gained my suit,
And had my value put at once to proof.
Ask him! These four years I have died away
In village life. The village? Ugliness
At best and filthiness at worst — inside.
Outside, sterility — earth sown with salt,
Or what keeps even grass from growing fresh.
The life? I teach the poor and learn, myself,
That commonplace to such stupidity
Is all-recondite. Being brutalized
Their true need is brute language, cheery grunts
And kindly cluckings, no articulate
Nonsense that's elsewhere knowledge. Tend the sick,
Sickened myself at pig perversity,
Cat-craft, dog-snarling, — may be, snapping " . . .

" Brief —
You eat that root of bitterness called Man
— Raw: I prefer it cooked, with social sauce!
So, he was not the rich youth after all!

Well, I mistook. But somewhere needs must be
The compensation. If not young nor rich" . . .

"You interrupt!"

"Because you've daubed enough
Bistre for background. Play the artist now,
Produce your figure well-relieved in front!
The contrast — do not I anticipate?
Though neither rich nor young — what then? 'Tis all
Forgotten, all this ignobility,
In the dear home, the darling word, the smile,
The something sweeter" . . .

"Yes, you interrupt.
I have my purpose and proceed. Who lives
With beasts assumes beast-nature, look and voice,
And, much more, thought, — for beasts think. Selfishness
In us met selfishness in them, deserved
Such answer as it gained. My husband, bent

On saving his own soul by saving theirs, —
They, bent on being saved if saving soul
Included body's getting bread and cheese
Somehow in life and somehow after death, —
Both parties were alike in the same boat,
One danger, therefore one equality.
Safety induces culture: culture seeks
To institute, extend and multiply
The difference between safe man and man,
Able to live alone now; progress means
What but abandonment of fellowship?
We were in common danger, still stuck close.
No new books, — were the old ones mastered yet?
No pictures and no music: these divert
— What from? the staving danger off! You paint
The waterspout above, you set to words
The roaring of the tempest round you? Thanks!
Amusement? Talk at end of the tired day
Of the more tiresome morrow! I transcribed
The page on page of sermon-scrawlings — stopped
My intellectual eye to sense and sound —

Vainly: the sound and sense would penetrate
To brain, and plague there in despite of me,
Maddened to know more moral good were done
Had we two simply sallied forth and preached
I' the '*Green*' they call their grimy, — I with twang
Of long-disused guitar, — with cut and slash
Of much misvalued horsewhip he, — to bid
The peaceable come dance, the peace-breaker
Pay in his person! Whereas — Heaven and Hell,
Excite with that, restrain with this! — so dealt
His drugs my husband; as he dosed himself,
He drenched his cattle: and, for all my part
Was just to dub the mortar, never fear
But drugs, hand pestled at, have poisoned nose!
Heaven he let pass, left wisely undescribed:
As applicable therefore to the sleep
I want, that knows no waking — as to what's
Conceived of as the proper prize to tempt
Souls less world-weary: there, no fault to find!
But Hell he made explicit. After death,
Life: man created new, ingeniously

Perfect for a vindictive purpose now
That man, first fashioned in beneficence,
Was proved a failure ; intellect at length
Replacing old obtuseness, memory
Made mindful of delinquent's bygone deeds
Now that remorse was vain, which life-long lay
Dormant when lesson might be laid to heart ;
New gift of observation up and down
And round man's self, new power to apprehend
Each necessary consequence of act
In man for well or ill — things obsolete —
Just granted to supplant the idiotcy
Man's only guide while act was yet to choose,
And ill or well momentously its fruit ;
A faculty of immense suffering
Conferred on mind and body, — mind, erewhile
Unvisited by one compunctious dream
During sin's drunken slumber, startled up,
Stung through and through by sin's significance
Now that the holy was abolished — just
As body which, alive, broke down beneath

Knowledge, lay helpless in the path to good,
Failed to accomplish aught legitimate,
Achieve aught worthy, — which grew old in youth,
And at its longest fell a cut-down flower, —
Dying, this too revived by miracle
To bear no end of burden now that back
Supported torture to no use at all,
And live imperishably potent — since
Life's potency was impotent to ward
One plague off which made earth a hell before.
This doctrine, which one healthy view of things,
One sane sight of the general ordinance —
Nature, — and its particular object, — man, —
Which one mere eye-cast at the character
Of Who made these and gave man sense to boot,
Had dissipated once and evermore, —
This doctrine I have dosed our flock withal.
Why? Because none believed it. *They* desire
Such Heaven and dread such Hell, whom every day
The alehouse tempts from one, a dog-fight bids
Defy the other? All the harm is done

Ourselves — done my poor husband who in youth
Perhaps read Dickens, done myself who still
Could play both Bach and Brahms. Such life I lead —
Thanks to you, knave! You learn its quality —
Thanks to me, fool!"

He eyes her earnestly,
But she continues.

"— Life which, thanks once more
To you, arch-knave as exquisitest tool,
I acquiescingly — I gratefully
Take back again to heart! and hence this speech
Which yesterday had spared you. Four years long
Life — I began to find intolerable,
Only this moment. Ere your entry just,
The leap of heart which answered, spite of me,
A friend's first summons, first provocative
Authoritative, nay, compulsive call
To quit — though for a single day — my house
Of bondage — made return seem horrible.

I heard again a human lucid laugh
All trust, no fear ; again saw earth pursue
Its narrow busy way amid small cares,
Smaller contentments, much weeds, some few flowers, —
Never suspicious of a thunderbolt
Avenging presently each daisy's death.
I recognized the beech-tree, knew the thrush
Repeated his old music-phrase, — all right,
How wrong was I, then ! But your entry broke
Illusion, bade me back to bounds at once.
I honestly submit my soul : which sprang
At love, and losing love lies signed and sealed
'*Failure.*' No love more ? then, no beauty more
Which tends to breed love ! Purify my powers,
Effortless till some other world procure
Some other chance of prize ! or, if none be, —
Nor second world nor chance, — undesecrate
Die then this aftergrowth of heart, surmised
Where May's precipitation left June blank !
Better have failed in the high aim, as I,
Than vulgarly in the low aim succeed

As, God be thanked, I do not! Ugliness
Had I called beauty, falsehood — truth, and you
My lover! No — this earth's unchanged for me,
By his enchantment whom God made the Prince
O' the Power o' the Air, into a Heaven: there is
Heaven, since there is Heaven's simulation — earth;
I sit possessed in patience; prison-roof
Shall break one day and Heaven beam overhead!"

His smile is done with; he speaks bitterly.

"Take my congratulations, and permit
I wish myself had proved as teachable!
— Or, no! until you taught me, could I learn
A lesson from experience ne'er till now
Conceded? Please you listen while I show
How thoroughly you estimate my worth
And yours — the immeasurably superior! I
Believed at least in one thing, first to last, —
Your love to me: I was the vile, and you
The precious; I abused you, I betrayed,

But doubted — never! Why else go my way
Judas-like plodding to this Potter's Field
Where fate now finds me? What has dinned my ear
And dogged my step? The spectre with the shriek
'*Such she was, such were you, whose punishment*
Is just!' And such she was not, all the while!
She never owned a love to outrage, faith
To pay with falsehood! For, myself know this —
Love once and you love always. Why, it's down
Here in the Album: every lover knows
Love may use hate but — turn to hate, itself —
Turn even to indifference — no, indeed!
Well, I have been spell-bound, deluded like
The witless negro by the Obeah-man
Who bids him wither: so, his eye grows dim,
His arm slack, arrow misses aim and spear
Goes wandering wide, — and all the woe because
He proved untrue to Fetish, who, he finds,
Was just a feather-phantom! I wronged love,
Am ruined, — and there was no love to wrong!"

"No love? Ah, dead love! I invoke thy ghost
To show the murderer where thy heart poured life
At summons of the stroke he doubts was dealt
On pasteboard and pretence! Not love, my love!
I changed for you the very laws of life:
Made you the standard of all right, all fair.
No genius but you could have been, no sage,
No sufferer — which is grandest — for the truth!
My hero — where the heroic only hid
To burst from hiding, brighten earth one day!
Age and decline were man's maturity;
Face, form were nature's type; more grace, more strength,
What had they been but just superfluous gauds,
Lawless divergence? I have danced through day,
On tiptoe at the music of a word,
Have wondered where was darkness gone as night
Burst out in stars at brilliance of a smile!
Lonely, I placed the chair to help me seat
Your fancied presence; in companionship,
I kept my finger constant to your glove

Glued to my breast; then — where was all the world?
I schemed — not dreamed — how I might die some death
Should save your finger aching! Who creates
Destroys, he only: I had laughed to scorn
Whatever angel tried to shake my faith
And make you seem unworthy: you yourself
Only could do that! With a touch 'twas done.
'*Give me all, trust me wholly!*' At the word,
I did give, I did trust — and thereupon
The touch did follow. Ah, the quiet smile,
The masterfully folded arm in arm,
As trick obtained its triumph one time more!
In turn, my soul too triumphs in defeat:
Treason like faith moves mountains: love is gone!"

He paces to and fro, stops, stands quite close,
And calls her by her name. Then —
"God forgives
Forgive you, delegate of God, brought near
As never priest could bring him to this soul

That prays you both — forgive me! I abase —
Know myself mad and monstrous utterly
In all I did that moment; but as God
Gives me this knowledge — heart to feel and tongue
To testify — so be you gracious too!
Judge no man by the solitary work
Of — well, they do say and I can believe —
The devil in him: his, the moment, — mine
The life — your life!"

He names her name again

"You were just — merciful as just, you were
In giving me no respite: punishment
Followed offending. Sane and sound once more,
The patient thanks decision, promptitude,
Which flung him prone and fastened him from hurt
Haply to others, surely to himself.
I wake and would not you had spared one pang.
All's well that ends well!"

Yet again her name.

"Had *you* no fault? Why must you change, forsooth,
Parts, why reverse positions, spoil the play?
Why did your nobleness look up to me,
Not down on the ignoble thing confessed?
Was it your part to stoop, or lift the low?
Wherefore did God exalt you? Who would teach
The brute man's tameness and intelligence
Must never drop the dominating eye:
Wink — and what wonder if the mad fit break,
Followed by stripes and fasting? Sound and sane,
My life, chastised now, couches at your foot.
Accept, redeem me! Do your eyes ask '*How?*'
I stand here penniless, a beggar; talk
What idle trash I may, this final blow
Of fortune fells me. *I* disburse, indeed,
This boy his winnings? when each bubble scheme
That danced athwart my brain, a minute since,
The worse the better, — of repairing straight
My misadventure by fresh enterprise,
Capture of other boys in foolishness
His fellows, — when these fancies fade away

At first sight of the lost so long, the found
So late, the lady of my life, before
Whose presence I, the lost, am also found
Incapable of one least touch of mean
Expedient, I who teemed with plot and wile —
That family of snakes your eye bids flee!
Listen! Our troublesomest dreams die off
In daylight: I awake and dream is — where?
I rouse up from the past: one touch dispels
England and all here. I secured long since
A certain refuge, solitary home
To hide in, should the head strike work one day,
The hand forget its cunning, or perhaps
Society grow savage, — there to end
My life's remainder, which, say what fools will,
Is or should be the best of life, — its fruit,
All tends to, root and stem and leaf and flower.
Come with me, love, loved once, loved only, come,
Blend loves there! Let this parenthetic doubt
Of love, in me, have been the trial-test
Appointed to all flesh at some one stage

Of soul's achievement, — when the strong man doubts
His strength, the good man whether goodness be,
The artist in the dark seeks, fails to find
Vocation, and the saint forswears his shrine.
What if the lover may elude, no more
Than these, probative dark, must search the sky
Vainly for love, his soul's star? But the orb
Breaks from eclipse: I breathe again: I love!
Tempted, I fell; but fallen — fallen lie
Here at your feet, see! Leave this poor pretence
Of union with a nature and its needs
Repugnant to your needs and nature! Nay,
False, beyond falsity you reprehend
In me, is such mock marriage with such mere
Man-mask as — whom you witless wrong, beside,
By that expenditure of heart and brain
He recks no more of than would yonder tree
If watered with your life-blood: rains and dews
Answer its ends sufficiently, while me
One drop saves — sends to flower and fruit at last
The laggard virtue in the soul which else

Cumbers the ground! Quicken me! Call me yours —
Yours and the world's — yours and the world's and
God's!
Yes, for you can, you only! Think! Confirm
Your instinct! Say, a minute since, I seemed
The castaway you count me, — all the more
Apparent shall the angelic potency
Lift me from out perdition's deep of deeps
To light and life and love! — that's love for you —
Love that already dares match might with yours.
You loved one worthy, — in your estimate, —
When time was; you descried the unworthy taint,
And where was love then? No such test could e'er
Try my love: but you hate me and revile;
Hatred, revilement — had you these to bear,
Would you, as I do, nor revile, nor hate,
But simply love on, love the more, perchance?
Abide by your own proof! '*Your love was love:*
Its ghost knows no forgetting!' Heart of mine,
Would that I dared remember! Too unwise
Were he who lost a treasure, did himself

Enlarge upon the sparkling catalogue
Of gems to her his queen who trusted late
The keeper of her caskets! Can it be
That I, custodian of such relic still
As your contempt permits me to retain,
All I dare hug to breast is — '*How your glove
Burst and displayed the long thin lily-streak!*'
What may have followed — that is forfeit now!
I hope the proud man has grown humble! True —
One grace of humbleness absents itself —
Silence! yet love lies deeper than all words,
And not the spoken but the speechless love
Waits answer ere I rise and go my way."

Whereupon, yet one other time the name.

To end she looks the large deliberate look,
Even prolongs it somewhat; then the soul
Bursts forth in a clear laugh that lengthens on,
On, till — thinned, softened, silvered, one might say
The bitter runnel hides itself in sand,

Moistens the hard gray grimly comic speech.
"Ay — give the baffled angler even yet
His supreme triumph as he hales to shore
A second time the fish once 'scaped from hook —
So artfully has new bait hidden old
Blood-imbrued iron! Ay, no barb's beneath
The gilded minnow here! You bid break trust,
This time, with who trusts me, — not simply bid
Me trust you, me who ruined but myself,
In trusting but myself! Since, thanks to you,
I know the feel of sin and shame, — be sure,
I shall obey you and impose them both
On one who happens to be ignorant
Although my husband — for the lure is love,
Your love! Try other tackle, fisher-friend!
Repentance, expiation, hopes and fears,
What you had been, may yet be, would I but
Prove helpmate to my hero — one and all
These silks and worsteds round the hook, seduce
Hardly the late torn throat and mangled tongue.
Pack up, I pray, the whole assortment prompt!

Who wonders at variety of wile
In the Arch-cheat? You are the Adversary!
Your fate is of your choosing: have your choice.
Wander the world, — God has some end to serve,
Ere he suppress you! He waits: I endure,
But interpose no finger-tip, forsooth,
To stop your passage to the pit. Enough
That I am stable, uninvolved by you
In the rush downward: free I gaze and fixed;
Your smiles, your tears, prayers, curses move alike
My crowned contempt. You kneel? Prostrate yourself!
To earth, and would the whole world saw you there!"

Whereupon — "All right!" carelessly begins
Somebody from outside, who mounts the stair,
And sends his voice for herald of approach:
Half in half out the doorway as the door
Gives way to push.

"Old fellow, all's no good!
The train's your portion! Lay the blame on me!

I'm no diplomatist, and Bismarck's self
Had hardly braved the awful Aunt at broach
Of proposition — so has world-repute
Preceded the illustrious stranger? Ah!" —

Quick the voice changes to astonishment,
Then horror, as the youth stops, sees, and knows.

The man who knelt starts up from kneeling, stands
Moving no muscle, and confronts the stare.

The lady's proud pale queenliness of scorn
Buries with one red outbreak throat and brow —
Then her great eyes that turned so quick, become
Intenser: quail at gaze, not they indeed!

V.

It is the young man shatters silence first.

"Well, my lord — for indeed my lord you are,
I little guessed how rightly — this last proof
Of lordship-paramount confounds too much
My simple head-piece! Let's see how we stand
Each to the other! how we stood i' the game
Of life an hour ago, — the magpies, stile,
And oak-tree witnessed. Truth exchanged for truth —
My lord confessed his four-years-old affair —
How he seduced and then forsook the girl
Who married somebody and left him sad.
My pitiful experience was — I loved
A girl whose gown's hem had I dared to touch
My finger would have failed me, palsy-fixed;

She left me, sad enough, to marry — whom?
A better man, — then possibly not you!
How does the game stand? Who is who and what
Is what, o' the board now, since an hour went by?
My lord's '*seduced, forsaken, sacrificed*' —
Starts up, my lord's familiar instrument,
Associate and accomplice, mistress-slave —
Shares his adventure, follows on the sly,
— Ay, and since 'bag and baggage' is a phrase —
Baggage lay hid in carpet-bag belike,
Was but unpadlocked when occasion came
For holding council, since my back was turned,
On how invent ten thousand pounds which, paid,
Would lure the winner to lose twenty more,
Beside refunding these! Why else allow
The fool to gain them? So displays herself
The lady whom my heart believed — oh laugh!
Noble and pure: whom my heart loved at once,
And who at once did speak truth when she said
'*I am not mine now but another's*' — thus
Being that other's! Devil's marriage, eh?

'*My lie weds thine till lucre us do part?*'
But pity me the snobbish simpleton,
You two aristocratic tip-top swells
At swindling? Quits, I cry! Decamp content
With skin I'm peeled of: do not strip bones bare —
As that you could, I have no doubt at all!
O you two rare ones! Male and female, Sir!
The male there smirked this morning, '*Come, my boy* —
Out with it! You've been crossed in love, I think:
I recognize the lover's hangdog look;
Make a clean breast and match my confidence,
For, I'll be frank, I too have had my fling,
Am punished for my fault, and smart enough!
Where now the victim hides her head, God knows!'
Here loomed her head, life-large, the devil knew!
Look out, Salvini! Here's your man, your match!
He and I sat applauding, stall by stall,
Last Monday — '*Here's Othello*' was our word,
'*But where's Iago?*' Where? Why, there! And now
The fellow-artist, female specimen —
Oh, lady, you must needs describe yourself!

He's great in art, but you — how greater still
— (If I can rightly, out of all I learned,
Apply one bit of Latin that assures
'*Art means just art's concealment*') — tower yourself
For he stands plainly visible henceforth —
Liar and scamp: while you, in artistry
Prove so consummate — or I prove perhaps
So absolute an ass — that — either way —
You still do seem to me who worshipped you,
And see you take the homage of this man,
Your master, who played slave and knelt, no doubt,
Before a mistress in his very craft . . .
Well, take the fact, I nor believe my eyes,
Nor trust my understanding! Still you seem
Noble and pure as when we had the talk
Under the tower, beneath the trees, that day.
And there's the key explains the secret: down
He knelt to ask your leave to rise a grade
I' the mystery of humbug: well he may!
For how you beat him! Half an hour ago,
I held your master for my best of friends;

And now I hate him! Four years since, you seemed
My heart's one love: well, and you so remain!
What's he to you in craft?"

She looks him through.

"My friend, 'tis just that friendship have its turn —
Interrogate thus me whom one, of foes
The worst, has questioned and is answered by.
Take you as frank an answer! answers both
Begin alike so far, divergent soon
World-wide — I own superiority
Over you, over him. As him I searched,
So do you stand seen through and through by me
Who, this time, proud, report your crystal shrines
A dew-drop, plain as amber prisons round
A spider in the hollow heart his house!
Nowise are you that thing my fancy feared
When out you stepped on me, a minute since,
— This man's confederate! no, you step not thus
Obsequiously at beck and call to help

At need some second scheme, and supplement
Guile by force, use my shame to pinion me
From struggle and escape! I fancied that!
Forgive me! Only by strange chance, — most strange
In even this strange world, — you enter now,
Obtain your knowledge. Me you have not wronged
Who never wronged you — least of all, my friend,
That day beneath the College tower and trees,
When I refused to say, — '*not friend but, love!*'
Had I been found as free as air when first
We met, I scarcely could have loved you. No —
For where was that in you which claimed return
Of love? My eyes were all too weak to probe
This other's seeming, but that seeming loved
The soul in me, and lied — I know too late!
While your truth was truth: and I knew at once
My power was just my beauty — bear the word —
As I must bear, of all my qualities,
To name the poorest one that serves my soul
And simulates myself! So much in me
You loved, I know: the something that's beneath

Heard not your call, — uncalled, no answer comes!
For, since in every love, or soon or late
Soul must awake and seek out soul for soul,
Yours, overlooking mine then, would, some day,
Take flight to find some other; so it proved —
Missing me, you were ready for this man.
I apprehend the whole relation: his —
The soul wherein you saw your type of worth
At once, true object of your tribute. Well
Might I refuse such half-heart's homage! Love
Divining, had assured you I no more
Stand his participant in infamy
Than you — I need no love to recognize
As simply dupe and nowise fellow-cheat!
Therefore accept one last friend's-word, — your friend's,
All men's friend, save a felon's. Ravel out
The bad embroilment howsoe'er you may,
Distribute as it please you praise or blame
To me — so you but fling this mockery far —
Renounce this rag-and-feather hero-sham,
This poodle clipt to pattern, lion-like!

Throw him his thousands back, and lay to heart
The lesson I was sent, — if man discerned
Ever God's message, — just to teach. I judge —
Far to another issue than could dream
Your cousin, — younger, fairer, as befits —
Who summoned me to judgment's exercise.
I find you, save in folly, innocent.
And in my verdict lies your fate ; at choice
Of mine your cousin takes or leaves you. '*Take!*'
I bid her — for you tremble back to truth!
She turns the scale, — one touch of the pure hand
Shall so press down, imprison past relapse
Further vibration 'twixt veracity —
That's honest solid earth — and falsehood, theft
And air, that's one illusive emptiness!
That reptile capture you? I conquered him:
You saw him cower before me! Have no fear
He shall offend you further! Spare to spurn —
Safe let him slink hence till some subtler Eve
Than I, anticipate the snake — bruise head
Ere he bruise heel — or, warier than the first,

Some Adam purge earth's garden of its pest
Before the slayer spoil the Tree of Life!

"You! Leave this youth, as he leaves you, as I
Leave each! There's caution surely extant yet
Though conscience in you were too vain a claim.
Hence quickly! Keep the cash, but leave unsoiled
The heart I rescue and would lay to heal
Beside another's! Never let her know
How near came taint of your companionship!"

"Ah" — draws a long breath with a new strange look
The man she interpellates — soul a-stir
Under its covert, as, beneath the dust,
A coppery sparkle all at once denotes
The hid snake has conceived a purpose.

"Ah —
Innocence should be crowned with ignorance?
Desirable indeed, but difficult!
As if yourself, now, had not glorified

Your helpmate by imparting him a hint
Of how a monster made the victim bleed
Ere crook and courage saved her — hint, I say, —
Not the whole horror, — that were needless risk, —
But just such inkling, fancy of the fact,
As should suffice to qualify henceforth
The shepherd, when another lamb would stray,
For warning '*Ware the wolf!*' No doubt at all,
Silence is generosity, — keeps wolf
Unhunted by flock's warder! Excellent,
Did — generous to me, mean — just to him!
But, screening the deceiver, lamb were found
Outraging the deceitless! So, — he knows!
And yet, unharmed I breathe — perchance, repent —
Thanks to the mercifully-politic!"

"Ignorance is not innocence but sin —
Witness your own ignoring after-pangs
Pursue the plague-infected. Merciful
Am I? Perhaps! the more contempt, the less
Hatred; and who so worthy of contempt

As you that rest assured I cooled the spot
I could not cure, by poisoning, forsooth,
Whose hand I pressed there? Understand for once
That, sick, of all the pains corroding me,
This burnt the last and nowise least — the need
Of simulating soundness. I resolved —
No matter how the struggle tasked weak flesh —
To hide the truth away as in a grave
From — most of all — my husband: he nor knows
Nor ever shall be made to know your part,
My part, the devil's part, — I trust, God's part
In the foul matter. Saved, I yearn to save
And not destroy: and what destruction like
The abolishing of faith in him, that's faith
In me as pure and true? Acquaint some child
Who takes yon tree into his confidence,
That, where he sleeps now, was a murder done,
And that the grass which grows so thick, he thinks,
Only to pillow him is product just
Of what lies festering beneath! 'Tis God
Must bear such secrets and disclose them. Man?

The miserable thing I have become
By dread acquaintance with my secret — *you* —
That thing had he become by learning *me* —
The miserable, whom his ignorance
Would wrongly call the wicked: ignorance
Being, I hold, sin ever, small or great.
No, he knows nothing!"

"He and I alike
Are bound to you for such discreetness, then.
What if our talk should terminate awhile?
Here is a gentleman to satisfy,
Settle accounts with, pay ten thousand pounds
Before we part — as, by his face, I fear,
Results from your appearance on the scene.
Grant me a minute's parley with my friend
Which scarce admits of a third personage!
The room from which you made your entry first
So opportunely — still untenanted —
What if you please return there? Just a word
To my young friend first — then, a word to you,

And you depart to fan away each fly
From who, grass-pillowed, sleeps so sound at home!"

"So the old truth comes back! A wholesome change,—
At last the altered eye, the rightful tone!
But even to the truth that drops disguise
And stands forth grinning malice which but now
Whined so contritely — I refuse assent
Just as to malice. I, once gone, come back?
No, my lord! I enjoy the privilege
Of being absolutely loosed from you
Too much — the knowledge that your power is null
Which was omnipotent. A word of mouth,
A wink of eye would have detained me once,
Body and soul your slave; and now, thank God,
Your fawningest of prayers, your frightfullest
Of curses — neither would avail to turn
My footstep for a moment!"

"Prayer, then, tries
No such adventure. Let us cast about

For something novel in expedient: take
Command, — what say you? I profess myself
One fertile in resource. Commanding, then,
I bid — not only wait there, but return
Here, where I want you! Disobey and — good!
On your own head the peril!"

"Come!" breaks in
The boy with his good glowing face. "Shut up!
None of this sort of thing while I stand here
— Not to stand that! No bullying, I beg!
I also am to leave you presently,
And never more set eyes upon your face —
You won't mind that much; but — I tell you frank —
I do mind having to remember this
For your last word and deed — my friend who were!
Bully a woman you have ruined, eh?
Do you know, — I give credit all at once
To all those stories everybody told
And nobody but I would disbelieve:
They all seem likely now, — nay, certain, sure!

I dare say you did cheat at cards that night
The row was at the Club: '*sauter la coupe*' —
That was your 'cut,' for which your friends 'cut' you
While I, the booby, 'cut' — acquaintanceship
With who so much as laughed when I said '*luck!*'
I dare say you had bets against the horse
They doctored at the Derby; little doubt,
That fellow with the sister found you shirk
His challenge, and did kick you like a ball,
Just as the story went about! Enough:
It only serves to show how well advised,
Madam, you were in bidding such a fool
As I, go hang. You see how the mere sight
And sound of you suffice to tumble down
Conviction topsy-turvy: no, — that's false, —
There's no unknowing what one knows; and yet
Such is my folly that, in gratitude
For . . . well, I'm stupid; but you seemed to wish
I should know gently what I know, should slip
Softly from old to new, not break my neck
Between beliefs of what you were and are.

Well then, for just the sake of such a wish
To cut no worse a figure than needs must
In even eyes like mine, I'd sacrifice
Body and soul! But don't think danger — pray! —
Menaces either! He do harm to us?
Let me say 'us' this one time! You'd allow
I lent perhaps my hand to rid your ear
Of some cur's yelping — hand that, fortified,
Into the bargain, with a horsewhip? Oh,
One crack and you shall see how curs decamp!
My lord, you know your losses and my gains.
Pay me my money at the proper time!
If cash be not forthcoming, — well, yourself
Have taught me, and tried often, I'll engage,
The proper course: I post you at the Club,
Pillory the defaulter. Crack, to-day,
Shall, slash, to-morrow, slice through flesh and bone!
There, Madam, you need mind no cur, I think!"

"Ah, what a gain to have an apt no less
Than grateful scholar! Nay, he brings to mind

My knowledge till he puts me to the blush,
So long has it lain rusty! Post my name!
That were indeed a wheal from whipcord! Whew!
I wonder now if I could rummage out —
— Just to match weapons — some old scorpion-scourge!
Madam, you hear my pupil, may applaud
His triumph o'er the master. I — no more
Bully, since I'm forbidden: but entreat —
Wait and return — for my sake, no! but just
To save your own defender, should he chance
Get thwacked through awkward flourish of his thong.
And what if — since all waiting's weary work —
I help the time pass 'twixt your exit now
And entry then? for — pastime proper — here's
The very thing, the Album, verse and prose
To make the laughing minutes launch away!
Each of us must contribute. I'll begin —
'*Hail calm acclivity, salubrious spot!*'
I'm confident I beat the bard, — for why?
My young friend owns me an Iago — him
Confessed, among the other qualities,

A ready rhymer. Oh, he rhymed! Here goes!
— Something to end with '*horsewhip!*' No, that rhyme
Beats me; there's '*cowslip*,' '*boltsprit*,' nothing else!
So, Tennyson take my benison, — verse for bard,
Prose suits the gambler's book best! Dared and
done!"

Wherewith he dips pen, writes a line or two,
Closes and clasps the cover, gives the book,
Bowing the while, to her who hesitates,
Turns half away, turns round again, at last
Takes it as you touch carrion, then retires.
The door shuts fast the couple.

VI.

With a change
Of his whole manner, opens out at once
The Adversary.

"Now, my friend, for you!
You who, protected late, aggressive grown,
Brandish, it seems, a weapon I must 'ware!
Plain speech in me becomes respectable
Therefore, because courageous; plainly, then —
(Have lash well loose, hold handle tight and light!)
Throughout my life's experience, you indulged
Yourself and friend by passing in review
So courteously but now, I vainly search
To find one record of a specimen
So perfect of the pure and simple fool

As this you furnish me. Ingratitude
I lump with folly, — all's one lot, — so — fool!
Did I seek you, or you seek me? Seek? sneak
For service to, and service you would style —
And did style — godlike, scarce an hour ago!
Fool, there again, yet not precisely there
First-rate in folly: since the hand you kissed
Did pick you from the kennel, did plant firm
Your footstep on the pathway, did persuade
Your awkward shamble to true gait and pace,
Fit for the world you walk in. Once a-strut
On that firm pavement which your cowardice
Was for renouncing as a pitfall, next
Came need to clear your brains of their conceit
They cleverly could distinguish who was who,
Whatever folk might tramp the thoroughfare.
Men, now — familiarly you read them off,
Each phiz at first sight! O you had an eye!
Who couched it? made you disappoint each fox
Eager to strip my gosling of his fluff
So golden as he cackled 'Goose trusts lamb?'

'*Ay, but I saved you — wolf defeated fox* —
Wanting to pick your bones myself?' then, wolf
Has got the worst of it with goose for once.
I, penniless, pay you ten thousand pounds
(— No gesture, pray! I pay ere I depart!)
And how you turn advantage to account
Here's the example! Have I proved so wrong
In my peremptory '*debt must be discharged?*'
O you laughed lovelily, were loath to leave
The old friend out at elbows — pooh, a thing
Not to be thought of! I must keep my cash,
And you forget your generosity!
Ha ha, I took your measure when I laughed
My laugh to that! First quarrel — nay, first faint
Pretence at taking umbrage — '*Down with debt,*
Both interest and principal! — The Club,
Exposure and expulsion! — stamp me out!'
That's the magnanimous magnificent
Renunciation of advantage! Well,
But whence and why did you take umbrage, Sir?
Because your master, having made you know

Somewhat of men, was minded to advance,
Expound you women, still a mystery!
My pupil pottered with a cloud on brow,
A clod in breast: had loved, and vainly loved:
Whence blight and blackness, just for all the world
As Byron used to teach us boys. Thought I —
'*Quick rid him of that rubbish! Clear the cloud,*
And set the heart a-pulsing!' — heart, this time:
'Twas nothing but the head I doctored late
For ignorance of Man; now heart's to dose,
Palsied by over-palpitation due
To woman-worship — so, to work at once
On first avowal of the patient's ache!
This morning you described your malady, —
How you dared love a piece of virtue — lost
To reason, as the upshot showed: for scorn
Fitly repaid your stupid arrogance;
And, parting, you went two ways, she resumed
Her path — perfection, while forlorn you paced
The world that's made for beasts like you and me.
My remedy was — tell the fool the truth!

Your paragon of purity had plumped
Into these arms at their first outspread —'*fallen*
My victim,' she prefers to turn the phrase —
And, in exchange for that frank confidence,
Asked for my whole life present and to come —
Marriage: a thing uncovenanted for!
Never so much as put in question! Life —
Implied by marriage — throw that trifle in
And round the bargain off, no otherwise
Than if, when we played cards, because you won
My money you should also want my head!
That, I demurred to: we but played '*for love*' —
She won my love; had she proposed for stakes
'*Marriage*,' — why, that's for whist, a wiser game.
Whereat she raved at me, as losers will,
And went her way. So far the story's known,
The remedy's applied, no farther — which
Here's the sick man's first *honorarium* for —
Posting his medicine-monger at the Club!
That being, Sir, the whole you mean my fee —
In gratitude for such munificence

I'm bound in common honesty to spare
No droplet of the draught: so, — pinch your nose,
Pull no wry faces! — drain it to the dregs!
I say, '*She went off*' — '*went off*,' *you subjoin*,
'*Since not to wedded bliss, as I supposed*,
Sure to some convent: solitude and peace
Help her to hide the shame from mortal view,
With prayer and fasting.' No, my sapient Sir!
Far wiselier, straightway she betook herself
To a prize-portent from the donkey-show
Of leathern long-ears that compete for palm
In clerical absurdity: since he,
Good ass, nor practises the shaving-trick,
The candle-crotchet, nonsense which repays
When you've young ladies congregant, — but schools
The poor, — toils, moils and grinds the mill, nor means
To stop and munch one thistle in this life
Till next life smother him with roses: just
The parson for her purpose! Him she stroked
Over the muzzle; into mouth with bit,
And on to back with saddle, — there he stood,

The serviceable beast who heard, believed
And meekly bowed him to the burden, — borne
Off in a canter to seclusion — ay,
The lady's lost! But had a friend of mine
— While friend he was — imparted his sad case
To sympathizing counsellor, full soon
One cloud at least had vanished from his brow.
'*Don't fear!*' had followed reassuringly —
'*The lost will in due time turn up again,*
Probably just when, weary of the world,
You think of nothing less than settling-down
To country life and golden days, beside
A dearest best and brightest virtuousest
Wife: who needs no more hope to hold her own
Against the naughty-and-repentant — no,
Than water-gruel against Roman punch!'
And as I prophesied, it proves! My youth, —
Just at the happy moment when, subdued
To spooniness, he finds that youth fleets fast,
That town-life tires, that men should drop boy's-play,
That property, position have, no doubt,

Their exigency with their privilege,
And if the wealthy wed with wealth, how dire
The double duty! — in, behold, there beams
Our long-lost lady, form and face complete!
And where's my moralizing pupil now,
Had not his master missed a train by chance?
But, by your side instead of whirled away,
How have I spoiled scene, stopped catastrophe,
Struck flat the stage-effect I know by heart!
Sudden and strange the meeting — improvised?
Bless you, the last event she hoped or dreamed!
But rude sharp stroke will crush out fire from flint —
Assuredly from flesh. *''Tis you?'* *'Myself!'*
'Changed?' *'Changeless!'* *'Then, what's earth to me?'* *'To me*
What's heaven?' *'So, — thine!'* *'And thine!'* *'And likewise mine!'*
Had laughed '*Amen*' the devil, but for me
Whose intermeddling hinders this hot haste,
And bids you, ere concluding contract, pause —
Ponder one lesson more, then sign and seal

At leisure and at pleasure, — lesson's price
Being, if you have skill to estimate,
— How say you? — I'm discharged my debt in full!
Since paid you stand, to farthing uttermost,
Unless I fare like that black majesty
A friend of mine had visit from last Spring.
Coasting along the Cape-side, he's becalmed
Off an unchartered bay, a novel town
Untouched at by the trader: here's a chance.
Out paddles straight the king in his canoe,
Comes over bulwark, says he means to buy
Ship's cargo — being rich and having brought
A treasure ample for the purpose. See!
Four dragons, stalwart blackies, guard the same
Wrapped round and round: its hulls, a multitude, —
Palm-leaf and cocoa-mat and goat's-hair cloth
All duly braced about with bark and board, —
Suggest how brave, 'neath coat, must kernel be!
At length the peeling is accomplished, plain
The casket opens out its core, and lo
— A bran new British silver sixpence — bid

That's ample for the Bank, — thinks majesty!
You are the Captain; call my sixpence cracked
Or copper; '*what I've said is calumny;*
The lady's spotless!' Then, I'll prove my words,
Or make you prove them true as truth — yourself,
Here, on the instant! I'll not mince my speech,
Things at this issue. When she enters, then,
Make love to her! No talk of marriage now —
The point-blank bare proposal! Pick no phrase —
Prevent all misconception! Soon you'll see
How different the tactics when she deals
With an instructed man, no longer boy
Who blushes like a booby. Woman's wit!
Because you have instruction, blush no more!
Such your five minutes' profit by my pains,
'Tis simply now — demand and be possessed!
Which means — you may possess — may strip the tree
Of fruit desirable to make one wise!
More I nor wish nor want: your act's your act,
My teaching is but — there's the fruit to pluck,
Or let alone at pleasure. Next advance

In knowledge were beyond you! Don't expect
I bid a novice — pluck, suck, send sky-high
Such fruit, once taught that neither crab nor sloe
Falls readier prey to who but robs a hedge,
Than this gold apple to my Hercules.
Were you no novice but proficient — then,
Then, truly, I might prompt you — Touch and taste,
Try flavor and be tired as soon as I!
Toss on the prize to greedy mouths agape,
Betake yours, sobered as the satiate grow,
To wise man's solid meal of house and land,
Consols and cousin! but my boy, my boy,
Such lore's above you! Here's the lady back!
So, Madam, you have conned the Album-page
And come to thank its last contributor?
How kind and condescending! I retire
A moment, lest I spoil the interview,
And mar my own endeavor to make friends —
You with him, him with you, and both with me!
If I succeed — permit me to inquire

Five minutes hence! Friends bid good-by, you know."

And out he goes.

VII.

She, face, form, bearing, one
Superb composure —

"He has told you all?
Yes, he has told you all, your silence says —
What gives him, as he thinks, the mastery
Over my body and my soul! — has told
That instance, even, of their servitude
He now exacts of me? A silent blush!
That's well, though better would white ignorance
Beseem your brow, undesecrate before —
Ay, when I left you! I too learn at last
— Hideously learned as I seemed so late —
What sin may swell to. Yes, — I needed learn
That, when my prophet's rod became the snake

I fled from, it would, one day, swallow up
— Incorporate whatever serpentine
Falsehood and treason and unmanliness
Beslime earth's pavement: such the power of Hell,
And so beginning, ends no otherwise
The Adversary! I was ignorant,
Blameworthy — if you will; but blame I take
Nowise upon me as I ask myself
— *You* — how can you, whose soul I seemed to read
The limpid eyes through, have declined so deep
Even with him for consort? I revolve
Much memory, pry into the looks and words
Of that day's walk beneath the College wall,
And nowhere can distinguish, in what gleams
Only pure marble through my dusky past,
A dubious cranny where such poison-seed
Might harbor, nourish what should yield to-day
This dread ingredient for the cup I drink.
Did not I recognize and honor truth
In seeming? — take your truth and for return,
Give you my truth, a no less precious gift?

You loved me: I believed you. I replied
— How could I other? '*I was not my own.*'
— No longer had the eyes to see, the ears
To hear, the mind to judge, since heart and soul
Now were another's. My own right in me,
For well or ill, consigned away — my face
Fronted the honest path, deflection whence
Had shamed me in the furtive backward look
At the late bargain — fit such chapman's phrase! —
As though — less hasty and more provident —
Waiting had brought advantage. Not for me,
The chapman's chance! Yet while thus much was true,
I spared you — as I knew you then — one more
Concluding word which, truth no less, seemed best
Buried away forever. Take it now
Its power to pain is past! Four years — that day —
Those limes that make the College avenue!
I would that — friend and foe — by miracle,
I had, that moment, seen into the heart
Of either, as I now am taught to see!

I do believe I should have straight assumed
My proper function, and sustained a soul,
— Not aimed at being just sustained myself
By some man's soul — the weaker woman's-want
So had I missed the momentary thrill
Of finding me in presence of a god,
But gained the god's own feeling when he gives
Such thrill to what turns life from death before.
'*Gods many and Lords many*,' says the Book:
You would have yielded up your soul to me
— Not to the false god who has burned its clay
In his own image. I had shed my love
Like Spring dew on the clod all flowery thence,
Not sent up a wild vapor to the sun
That drinks and then disperses. Both of us
Blameworthy, — I first meet my punishment —
And not so hard to bear. I breathe again!
Forth from those arms' enwinding leprosy
At last I struggle — uncontaminate:
Why must I leave *you* pressing to the breast
That's all one plague-spot? Did you love me once?

Then take love's last and best return! I think
Womanliness means only motherhood;
All love begins and ends there, — roams enough,
But, having run the circle, rests at home.
Why is your expiation yet to make?
Pull shame with your own hands from your own head
Now, — never wait the slow envelopment
Submitted to by unelastic age!
One fierce throe frees the sapling: flake on flake
Lull till they leave the oak snow-stupefied.
Your heart retains its vital warmth — or why
That blushing reassurance? Blush, young blood!
Break from beneath this icy premature
Captivity of wickedness — I warn
Back, in God's name! No fresh encroachment here!
This May breaks all to bud — no Winter now!
Friend, we are both forgiven! Sin no more!
I am past sin now, so shall you become!
Meanwhile I testify that, lying once,
My foe lied ever, most lied last of all.
He, waking, whispered to your sense asleep

The wicked counsel, — and assent might seem;
But, roused, your healthy indignation breaks
The idle dream-pact. You would die — not dare
Confirm your dream-resolve, — nay, find the word
That fits the deed to bear the light of day!
Say I have justly judged you! then farewell
To blushing — nay, it ends in smiles, not tears!
Why tears now? I have justly judged, thank God!"

He does not blush boy-like, but the man speaks out,
— Makes the due effort to surmount himself.

"I don't know what he wrote — how should I? Nor
How he could read my purpose which, it seems,
He chose to somehow write — mistakenly
Or else for mischief's sake. I scarce believe
My purpose put before you fair and plain
Would need annoy so much; but there's my luck —
From first to last I blunder. Still, one more
Turn at the target, try to speak my thought!
Since he could guess my purpose, won't you read

Right what he set down wrong? He said — let's
think!
Ay, so! — he did begin by telling heaps
Of tales about you. Now, you see — suppose
Any one told me — my own mother died
Before I knew her — told me — to his cost! —
Such tales about my own dead mother: why,
You would not wonder surely if I knew,
By nothing but my own heart's help, he lied,
Would you? No reason's wanted in the case.
So with you! In they burnt on me, his tales,
Much as when madhouse-inmates crowd around,
Make captive any visitor and scream
All sorts of stories of their keeper — he's
Both dwarf and giant, vulture, wolf, dog, cat,
Serpent and scorpion, yet man all the same;
Sane people soon see through the gibberish!
I just made out, you somehow lived somewhere
A life of shame — I can't distinguish more —
Married or single — how, don't matter much:
Shame which himself had caused — that point was
clear,

That fact confessed — that thing to hold and keep.
Oh, and he added some absurdity
— That you were here to make me — ha, ha, ha! —
Still love you, still of mind to die for you,
Ha, ha — as if that needed mighty pains!
Now, foolish as . . . but never mind myself
— What I am, what I am not, in the eye
Of the world, is what I never cared for much.
Fool then or no fool, not one single word
In the whole string of lies did I believe,
But this — this only — if I choke, who minds? —
I believe somehow in your purity
Perfect as ever! Else what use is God?
He is God, and work miracles He can!
Then, what shall I do? Quite as clear, my course!
They've got a thing they call their Labyrinth
I' the garden yonder; and my cousin played
A pretty trick once, led and lost me deep
Inside the briery maze of hedge round hedge;
And there might I be staying now, stock-still,
But that I laughing bade eyes follow nose

And so straight pushed my path through let and stop
And soon was out in the open, face all scratched,
But well behind my back the prison-bars
In sorry plight enough, I promise you!
So here: I won my way to truth through lies —
Said, as I saw light, — if her shame be shame
I'll rescue and redeem her, — shame's no shame?
Then, I'll avenge, protect — redeem myself
The stupidest of sinners! Here I stand!
Dear, — let me once dare call you so, — you said
Thus ought you to have done, four years ago,
Such things and such! Ay, dear, and what ought I?
You were revealed to me: where's gratitude,
Where's memory even, where the gain of you
Discernible in my low after-life
Of fancied consolation? why, no horse
Once fed on corn, will, missing corn, go munch
Mere thistles like a donkey! I missed you,
And in your place found — him, made him my love,
Ay, did I, — by this token, that he taught
So much beast-nature that I meant . . . God knows

Whether I bow me to the dust enough! . . .
To marry — yes, my cousin here! I hope
That was a master-stroke! Take heart of hers,
And give her hand of mine with no more heart
Than now you see upon this brow I strike!
What atom of a heart do I retain
Not all yours? Dear, you know it! Easily
May she accord me pardon when I place
My brow beneath her foot, if foot so deign,
Since uttermost indignity is spared —
Mere marriage and no love! And all this time
Not one word to the purpose! Are you free?
Only wait! only let me serve — deserve
Where you appoint and how you see the good!
I have the will — perhaps the power — at least
Means that have power against the world. For time —
Take my whole life for your experiment!
If you are bound — in marriage, say — why, still,
Still, sure, there's something for a friend to do,
Outside? A mere well-wisher, understand!
I'll sit, my life long, at your gate, you know,

Swing it wide open to let you and him
Pass freely, — and you need not look, much less
Fling me a '*Thank you — are you there, old friend?*'
Don't say that even: I should drop like shot!
So I feel now at least: some day, who knows?
After no end of weeks and months and years
You might smile '*I believe you did your best!*'
And that shall make my heart leap — leap such leap
As lands the feet in Heaven to wait you there!
Ah, there's just one thing more! How pale you look!
Why? Are you angry? If there's, after all,
Worst come to worst — if still there somehow be
The shame — I said was no shame, — none, I swear! —
In that case, if my hand and what it holds, —
My name, — might be your safeguard now — at once —
Why, here's the hand — you have the heart! Of course —
No cheat, no binding you, because I'm bound,
To let me off probation by one day,
Week, month, year, lifetime! Prove as you propose!
Here's the hand with the name to take or leave!

That's all — and no great piece of news, I hope!"

"Give me the hand, then!" she cries hastily.
"Quick, now! I hear his footstep!"

Hand in hand
The couple face him as he enters, stops
Short, stands surprised a moment, laughs away
Surprise, resumes the much-experienced man.

"So, you accept him?"

"Till us death do part!"

"No longer? Come, that's right and rational!
I fancied there was power in common sense,
But did not know it worked thus promptly. Well —
At last each understands the other, then?
Each drops disguise, then? So, at supper-time
These masquerading people doff their gear,
Grand Turk his pompous turban, Quakeress

Her stiff-starched bib and tucker, — make-believe
That only bothers when, ball-business done,
Nature demands champagne and *mayonnaise.*
Just so has each of us sage three abjured
His and her moral pet particular
Pretension to superiority,
And, cheek by jowl, we henceforth munch and joke!
Go, happy pair, paternally dismissed
To live and die together — for a month,
Discretion can award no more! Depart
From whatsoe'er the calm sweet solitude
Selected — Paris not improbably —
At month's end, when the honeycomb's left wax,
— You, daughter, with a pocketful of gold
Enough to find your village boys and girls
In duffel cloaks and hobnailed shoes from May
To — what's the phrase? — Christmas-come-never-mas!
You, son and heir of mine, shall re-appear
Ere Spring-time, that's the ring-time, lose one leaf,
And — not without regretful smack of lip
The while you wipe it free of honey-smear —

Marry the cousin, play the magistrate,
Stand for the county, prove perfection's pink —
Master of hounds, gay-coated dine — nor die
Sooner than needs of gout, obesity,
And sons at Christ Church! As for me, — ah me,
I abdicate — retire on my success,
Four years well occupied in teaching youth
— My son and daughter the exemplary!
Time for me to retire now, having placed
Proud on their pedestal the pair: in turn,
Let them do homage to their master! You, —
Well, your flushed cheek and flashing eye proclaim
Sufficiently your gratitude: you paid
The *honorarium*, the ten thousand pounds
To purpose, did you not? I told you so!
And you, — but, bless me, why so pale — so faint
At influx of good fortune? Certainly,
No matter how or why or whose the fault,
I save your life — save it, nor less nor more!
You blindly were resolved to welcome death
In that black boor-and-bumpkin-haunted hole

Of his, the prig with all the preachments! *You*
Installed as nurse and matron to the crones
And wenches, while there lay a world outside
Like Paris (which again I recommend)
In company and guidance of — first, this,
Then — all in good time — some new friend as fit —
What if I were to say, some fresh myself,
As I once figured? Each dog has his day,
And mine's at sunset: what should old dog do
But eye young litters' frisky puppyhood?
O I shall watch this beauty and this youth
Frisk it in brilliance! But don't fear! Discreet,
I shall pretend to no more recognize
My quondam pupils than the doctor nods
When certain old acquaintances may cross
His path in Park, or sit down prim beside
His plate at dinner-table: tip nor wink
Scares patients he has put, for reason good,
Under restriction, — maybe, talked sometimes
Of douche or horsewhip to, — for why? because
The gentleman would crazily declare

His best friend was — Iago! Ay, and worse —
The lady, all at once grown lunatic,
In suicidal monomania vowed,
To save her soul, she had needs end herself!
They're cured now, both, and I tell nobody.
Why don't you speak? Nay, speechless, each of you
Can spare, — without unclasping plighted troth, —
At least one hand to shake! Left-hands will do —
Yours first, my daughter! Ah, it guards — it gripes
The precious Album fast — and prudently!
As well obliterate the record there
On page the last: allow me tear the leaf!
Pray, now! And afterward, to make amends,
What if all three of us contribute each
A line to that prelusive fragment, — help
The embarrassed bard who broke out to break down
Dumbfoundered at such unforeseen success?
'*Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot*'
You begin — *place aux dames!* — I'll prompt you then!
'*Here do I take the good the gods allot!*'
Next you, sir? What, still sulky? Sing, O Muse!

'*Here does my lord in full discharge his shot!*'
Now for the crowning flourish! mine shall be" . . .

"Nothing to match your first effusion, mar
What was, is, shall remain your masterpiece!
Authorship has the alteration-itch!
No, I protest against erasure. Read,
My friend!" (she gasps out). "Read and quickly read
'*Before us death do part*,' what made you mine
And made me yours — the marriage-license here!
Decide if he is like to mend the same!"

And so the lady, white to ghastliness,
Manages somehow to display the page
With left hand only, while the right retains
The other hand, the young man's, — dreaming-drunk
He, with this drench of stupefying stuff,
Eyes, wide, mouth open, — half the idiot's stare
And half the prophet's insight, — holding tight,
All the same, by his one fact in the world —
The lady's right hand: he but seems to read —

Does not, for certain; yet, how understand
Unless he reads?

So, understand he does,
For certain. Slowly, word by word, *she* reads
Aloud that license — or that warrant, say.

'One against two — and two that urge their odds
To uttermost — I needs must try resource!
Madam, I laid me prostrate, bade you spurn
Body and soul: you spurned and safely spurned
So you had spared me the superfluous taunt
"Prostration means no power to stand erect,
Stand, trampling on who trampled — prostrate now!"
So, with my other fool-foe; I was fain
Let the boy touch me with the buttoned foil,
And him the infection gains, he too must needs
Catch up the butcher's cleaver. Be it so!
Since play turns earnest, here's my serious fence.
He loves you; he demands your love: both know
What love means in my language. Love him then!

Pursuant to a pact, love pays my debt:
Therefore, deliver me from him, thereby
Likewise delivering from me yourself!
For, hesitate — much more, refuse consent —
I tell the whole truth to your husband. Flat
Cards lie on table, in our gamester-phrase!
Consent — you stop my mouth, the only way.'

"I did well, trusting instinct: knew your hand
Had never joined with his in fellowship
Over this pact of infamy. You known —
As he was known through every nerve of me.
Therefore I '*stopped his mouth the only way*'
But *my* way! none was left for you, my friend —
The loyal — near, the loved one! No — no — no!
Threaten? Chastise? The coward would but quail.
Conquer who can the cunning of the snake!
Stamp out his slimy strength from tail to head,
And still you leave vibration of the tongue.
His malice had redoubled — not on me
Who, myself, choose my own refining fire —

But on poor unsuspicious innocence ;
And, — victim, — to turn executioner
Also — that feat effected, forky tongue
Had done indeed its office ! Once snake's '*mouth*'
Thus '*open*' — how could mortal '*stop it*' ?"

"So !"

A tiger-flash — yell, spring, and scream : halloo !
Death's out and on him, has and holds him — ugh !
But *ne trucidet coram populo*
Juvenis senem ! Right the Horatian rule !

There, see how soon a quiet comes to pass !

VIII.

The youth is somehow by the lady's side.
His right-hand grasps her right-hand once again.
Both gaze on the dead body. Hers the word.

"And that was good but useless. Had I lived
The danger was to dread; but, dying now —
Himself would hardly become talkative,
Since talk no more means torture. Fools — what fools
These wicked men are! Had I borne four years,
Four years of weeks and months and days and nights,
Inured me to the consciousness of life
Coiled round by his life, with the tongue to ply, —
But that I bore about me, for prompt use
At urgent need, the thing that '*stops the mouth*'
And stays the venom? Since such need was now

Or never, — how should use not follow need?
Bear witness for me, I withdraw from life
By virtue of the license — warrant, say,
That blackens yet this Album — white again,
Thanks still to my one friend who tears the page!
Now, let me write the line of supplement,
As counselled by my foe there: '*each a line!*'

And she does falteringly write to end.

'*I die now through the villain who lies dead,*
Righteously slain. He would have outraged me,
So, my defender slew him. God protect
The right! Where wrong lay, I bear witness now.
Let man believe me, whose last breath is spent
In blessing my defender from my soul!'

And so ends the Inn Album.

As she dies,
Begins outside a voice that sounds like song,

And is indeed half song though meant for speech
Muttered in time to motion — stir of heart
That unsubduably must bubble forth
To match the fawn-step as it mounts the stair.

"All's ended and all's over! Verdict found
'*Not guilty*' — prisoner forthwith set free,
Mid cheers the Court pretends to disregard!
Now Portia, now for Daniel, late severe,
At last appeased, benignant! '*This young man* —
Hem — has the young man's foibles but no fault.
He's virgin soil — a friend must cultivate.
I think no plant called 'love' grows wild — a friend
May introduce, and name the bloom, the fruit!'
Here somebody dares wave a handkerchief —
She'll want to hide her face with presently!
Good-by then! '*Cigno fedel, cigno fedel,*
Addio!' Now, was ever such mistake —
Ever such foolish ugly omen? Pshaw!
Wagner, beside! '*Amo te solo, te*
Solo amai!' That's worth fifty such!

But, mum, the grave face at the opened door!"

And so the good gay girl, with eyes and cheeks
Diamond and damask, — cheeks so white erewhile
Because of a vague fancy, idle fear
Chased on reflection! — pausing, taps discreet;
And then, to give herself a countenance,
Before she comes upon the pair inside,
Loud — the oft-quoted, long-laughed-over-line —
"'*Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot!*'
Open the door!"

No: let the curtain fall!