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THE POETICAL WORKS

OF

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*IN A BALCONY—*

*DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.*

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IN A BALCONY.

BAGNI DI LUCCA, 1853.

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## IN A BALCONY.

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CONSTANCE *and* NORBERT.

*Nor.* Now !

*Con.* Not now !

*Nor.* Give me them again, those hands—

Put them upon my forehead, how it throbs !

Press them before my eyes, the fire comes through !

You cruellest, you dearest in the world,

Let me ! The Queen must grant whate'er I ask—

How can I gain you and not ask the Queen ?

There she stays waiting for me, here stand you ;

Some time or other this was to be asked ;

Now is the one time—what I ask, I gain :

Let me ask now, love !

*Con.* Do, and ruin us !

*Nor.* Let it be now, love ! All my soul breaks forth.

How I do love you ! Give my love its way !

A man can have but one life and one death,

One heaven, one hell. Let me fulfil my fate—

Grant me my heaven now ! Let me know you mine,

Prove you mine, write my name upon your brow,

Hold you and have you, and then die away  
If God please, with completion in my soul !

*Con.* I am not yours then ? How content this man !  
I am not his—who change into himself,  
Have passed into his heart and beat its beats,  
Who give my hands to him, my eyes, my hair,  
Give all that was of me away to him—  
So well, that now, my spirit turned his own,  
Takes part with him against the woman here,  
Bids him not stumble at so mere a straw  
As caring that the world be cognisant  
How he loves her and how she worships him.  
You have this woman, not as yet that world.  
Go on, I bid, nor stop to care for me  
By saving what I cease to care about,  
The courtly name and pride of circumstance—  
The name you 'll pick up and be cumbered with  
Just for the poor parade's sake, nothing more ;  
Just that the world may slip from under you—  
Just that the world may cry “ So much for him—  
“ The man predestined to the heap of crowns :  
“ There goes his chance of winning one, at least ! ”

*Nor.* The world !

*Con.* You love it ! Love me quite as well,  
And see if I shall pray for this in vain !  
Why must you ponder what it knows or thinks ?

*Nor.* You pray for—what, in vain ?

*Con.* Oh my heart's heart,  
How I do love you, Norbert ! That is right :

But listen, or I take my hands away !  
 You say, " let it be now : " you would go now  
 And tell the Queen, perhaps six steps from us,  
 You love me—so you do, thank God !

*Nor.*

Thank God !

*Con.* Yes, Norbert,—but you fain would tell your  
 love,

And, what succeeds the telling, ask of her  
 My hand. Now take this rose and look at it,  
 Listening to me. You are the minister,  
 The Queen's first favourite, nor without a cause.  
 To-night completes your wonderful year's-work  
 (This palace-feast is held to celebrate)  
 Made memorable by her life's success,  
 The junction of two crowns, on her sole head,  
 Her house had only dreamed of anciently :  
 That this mere dream is grown a stable truth,  
 To-night's feast makes authentic. Whose the praise ?  
 Whose genius, patience, energy, achieved  
 What turned the many heads and broke the hearts ?  
 You are the fate, your minute 's in the heaven.  
 Next comes the Queen's turn. " Name your own  
 reward ! "

With leave to clench the past, chain the to-come,  
 Put out an arm and touch and take the sun  
 And fix it ever full-faced on your earth,  
 Possess yourself supremely of her life,—  
 You choose the single thing she will not grant ;  
 Nay, very declaration of which choice

Will turn the scale and neutralize your work :

At best she will forgive you, if she can.

You think I 'll let you choose—her cousin's hand ?

*Nor.* Wait. First, do you retain your old belief  
The Queen is generous,—nay, is just ?

*Con.*

There, there !

So men make women love them, while they know  
No more of women's hearts than . . . look you here,  
You that are just and generous beside,  
Make it your own case ! For example now,  
I 'll say—I let you kiss me, hold my hands—  
Why ? do you know why ? I 'll instruct you, then—  
The kiss, because you have a name at court,  
This hand and this, that you may shut in each  
A jewel, if you please to pick up such.

That 's horrible ? Apply it to the Queen—  
Suppose I am the Queen to whom you speak.

“ I was a nameless man ; you needed me :

“ Why did I proffer you my aid ? there stood

“ A certain pretty cousin at your side.

“ Why did I make such common cause with you ?

“ Access to her had not been easy else.

“ You give my labours here abundant praise ?

“ 'Faith, labour, which she overlooked, grew play.

“ How shall your gratitude discharge itself ?

“ Give me her hand ! ”

*Nor.*

And still I urge the same.

Is the Queen just ? just—generous or no !

*Con.* Yes, just. You love a rose ; no harm in that :

But was it for the rose's sake or mine  
You put it in your bosom? mine, you said—  
Then, mine you still must say or else be false.  
You told the Queen you served her for herself;  
If so, to serve her was to serve yourself,  
She thinks, for all your unbelieving face!  
I know her. In the hall, six steps from us,  
One sees the twenty pictures; there's a life  
Better than life, and yet no life at all.  
Conceive her born in such a magic dome,  
Pictures all round her! why, she sees the world,  
Can recognize its given things and facts,  
The fight of giants or the feast of gods,  
Sages in senate, beauties at the bath,  
Chaces and battles, the whole earth's display,  
Landscape and sea-piece, down to flowers and fruit—  
And who shall question that she knows them all,  
In better semblance than the things outside?  
Yet bring into the silent gallery  
Some live thing to contrast in breath and blood,  
Some lion, with the painted lion there—  
You think she'll understand composedly?  
—Say, "that's his fellow in the hunting-piece  
"Yonder, I've turned to praise a hundred times?"  
Not so. Her knowledge of our actual earth,  
Its hopes and fears, concerns and sympathies,  
Must be too far, too mediate, too unreal.  
The real exists for us outside, not her:  
How should it, with that life in these four walls,





She cannot love ; what do I want with rule ?  
When first I saw your face a year ago  
I knew my life's good, my soul heard one voice—  
“ The woman yonder, there 's no use of life  
“ But just to obtain her ! heap earth's woes in one  
“ And bear them—make a pile of all earth's joys  
“ And spurn them, as they help or help not this ;  
“ Only, obtain her ! ”—how was it to be ?  
I found you were the cousin of the Queen ;  
I must then serve the Queen to get to you.  
No other way. Suppose there had been one,  
And I, by saying prayers to some white star  
With promise of my body and my soul,  
Might gain you,—should I pray the star or no ?  
Instead, there was the Queen to serve ! I served,  
Helped, did what other servants failed to do.  
Neither she sought nor I declared my end.  
Her good is hers, my recompense be mine,  
I therefore name you as that recompense.  
She dreamed that such a thing could never be ?  
Let her wake now. She thinks there was more cause  
In love of power, high fame, pure loyalty ?  
Perhaps she fancies men wear out their lives  
Chasing such shades. Then, I 've a fancy too ;  
I worked because I want you with my soul :  
I therefore ask your hand. Let it be now !

*Con.* Had I not loved you from the very first,  
Were I not yours, could we not steal out thus  
So wickedly, so wildly, and so well,

You might become impatient. What 's conceived  
Of us without here, by the folks within?  
Where are you now? immersed in cares of state—  
Where am I now?—intent on festal robes—  
We two, embracing under death's spread hand!  
What was this thought for, what that scruple of yours  
Which broke the council up?—to bring about  
One minute's meeting in the corridor!  
And then the sudden sleights, strange secrecies,  
Complots inscrutable, deep telegraphs,  
Long-planned chance-meetings, hazards of a look,  
“Does she know? does she not know? saved or lost?”  
A year of this compression's ecstasy  
All goes for nothing! you would give this up  
For the old way, the open way, the world's,  
His way who beats, and his who sells his wife!  
What tempts you?—their notorious happiness,  
That you are ashamed of ours? The best you'll gain  
Will be—the Queen grants all that you require,  
Concedes the cousin, rids herself of you  
And me at once, and gives us ample leave  
To live like our five hundred happy friends.  
The world will show us with officious hand  
Our chamber-entry and stand sentinel,  
Where we so oft have stolen across its traps!  
Get the world's warrant, ring the falcons' feet,  
And make it duty to be bold and swift,  
Which long ago was nature. Have it so!  
We never hawked by rights till flung from fist?

Oh, the man's thought! no woman's such a fool.

*Nor.* Yes, the man's thought and my thought, which is more—

One made to love you, let the world take note!  
Have I done worthy work? be love's the praise,  
Though hampered by restrictions, barred against  
By set forms, blinded by forced secrecies!  
Set free my love, and see what love can do  
Shown in my life—what work will spring from that!  
The world is used to have its business done  
On other grounds, find great effects produced  
For power's sake, fame's sake, motives in men's mouth.  
So, good: but let my low ground shame their high!  
Truth is the strong thing. Let man's life be true!  
And love's the truth of mine. Time prove the rest!  
I choose to wear you stamped all over me,  
Your name upon my forehead and my breast,  
You, from the sword's blade to the ribbon's edge,  
That men may see, all over, you in me—  
That pale loves may die out of their pretence  
In face of mine, shames thrown on love fall off.  
Permit this, Constance! Love has been so long  
Subdued in me, eating me through and through,  
That now 't is all of me and must have way.  
Think of my work, that chaos of intrigues,  
Those hopes and fears, surprises and delays,  
That long endeavour, earnest, patient, slow,  
Trembling at last to its assured result—  
Then think of this revulsion! I resume

Life after death, (it is no less than life,  
 After such long unlovely labouring days)  
 And liberate to beauty life's great need  
 Of the beautiful, which, while it prompted work,  
 Suppressed itself erewhile. This eve 's the time,  
 This eve intense with yon first trembling star  
 We seem to pant and reach ; scarce aught between  
 The earth that rises and the heaven that bends ;  
 All nature self-abandoned, every tree  
 Flung as it will, pursuing its own thoughts  
 And fixed so, every flower and every weed,  
 No pride, no shame, no victory, no defeat ;  
 All under God, each measured by itself.  
 These statues round us stand abrupt, distinct,  
 The strong in strength, the weak in weakness fixed,  
 The Muse for ever wedded to her lyre,  
 The Nymph to her fawn, the Silence to her rose :  
 See God's approval on his universe !  
 Let us do so—aspire to live as these  
 In harmony with truth, ourselves being true !  
 Take the first way, and let the second come !  
 My first is to possess myself of you ;  
 The music sets the march-step—forward, then !  
 And there 's the Queen, I go to claim you of,  
 The world to witness, wonder and applaud.  
 Our flower of life breaks open. No delay !

*Con.* And so shall we be ruined, both of us.  
 Norbert, I know her to the skin and bone :  
 You do not know her, were not born to it,

To feel what she can see or cannot see.  
 Love, she is generous,—ay, despite your smile,  
 Generous as you are : for, in that thin frame  
 Pain-twisted, punctured through and through with  
     cares,  
 There lived a lavish soul until it starved  
 Debarred all healthy food. Look to the soul—  
 Pity that, stoop to that, ere you begin  
 (The true man's way) on justice and your rights,  
 Exactions and acquittance of the past !  
 Begin so—see what justice she will deal !  
 We women hate a debt as men a gift.  
 Suppose her some poor keeper of a school  
 Whose business is to sit thro' summer months  
 And dole out children leave to go and play,  
 Herself superior to such lightness—she  
 In the arm-chair's state and pædagogic pomp,  
 To the life, the laughter, sun and youth outside :  
 We wonder such a face looks black on us ?  
 I do not bid you wake her tenderness,  
 (That were vain truly—none is left to wake)  
 But, let her think her justice is engaged  
 To take the shape of tenderness, and mark  
 If she 'll not coldly pay its warmest need !  
 Does she love me, I ask you ? not a whit :  
 Yet, thinking that her justice was engaged  
 To help a kinswoman, she took me up—  
 Did more on that bare ground than other loves  
 Would do on greater argument. For me,

I have no equivalent of such cold kind  
To pay her with, but love alone to give  
If I give anything. I give her love :  
I feel I ought to help her, and I will.  
So, for her sake, as yours, I tell you twice  
That women hate a debt as men a gift.  
If I were you, I could obtain this grace—  
Could lay the whole I did to love's account,  
Nor yet be very false as courtiers go—  
Declaring my success was recompense ;  
It would be so, in fact : what were it else ?  
And then, once loose her generosity,—  
Oh, how I see it ! then, were I but you  
To turn it, let it seem to move itself,  
And make it offer what I really take,  
Accepting just, in the poor cousin's hand,  
Her value as the next thing to the Queen's—  
Since none loves Queens directly, none dares that,  
And a thing's shadow or a name's mere echo  
Suffices those who miss the name and thing !  
You pick up just a ribbon she has worn,  
To keep in proof how near her breath you came.  
Say, I 'm so near I seem a piece of her—  
Ask for me that way—(oh, you understand)  
You 'd find the same gift yielded with a grace,  
Which, if you make the least show to extort . . .  
—You 'll see ! and when you have ruined both of us,  
Dissertate on the Queen's ingratitude !  
*Nor.* Then, if I turn it that way, you consent ?

'T is not my way ; I have more hope in truth :  
Still, if you won't have truth—why, this indeed,  
Were scarcely false, as I 'd express the sense.  
Will you remain here ?

*Con.* O best heart of mine,  
How I have loved you ! then, you take my way ?  
Are mine as you have been her minister,  
Work out my thought, give it effect for me,  
Paint plain my poor conceit and make it serve ?  
I owe that withered woman everything—  
Life, fortune, you, remember ! Take my part—  
Help me to pay her ! Stand upon your rights ?  
You, with my rose, my hands, my heart on you ?  
Your rights are mine—you have no rights but mine.

*Nor.* Remain here. How you know me !

*Con.* Ah, but still——

[*He breaks from her : she remains. Dance-music  
from within.*]

*Enter the QUEEN.*

*Queen.* Constance ? She is here as he said. Speak  
quick !

Is it so ? Is it true or false ? One word ?

*Con.* True.

*Queen.* Mercifullest Mother, thanks to thee !

*Con.* Madam ?

*Queen.* I love you, Constance, from my soul.

Now say once more, with any words you will,  
'T is true, all true, as true as that I speak.

*Con.* Why should you doubt it ?

*Queen.* Ah, why doubt ? why doubt ?

Dear, make me see it ! Do you see it so ?  
None see themselves ; another sees them best.  
You say " why doubt it ? "—you see him and me.  
It is because the Mother has such grace  
That if we had but faith—wherein we fail—  
Whate'er we yearn for would be granted us ;  
Howbeit we let our whims prescribe despair,  
Our very fancies thwart and cramp our will,  
And so, accepting life, abjure ourselves.  
Constance, I had abjured the hope of love  
And being loved, as truly as yon palm  
The hope of seeing Egypt from that plot.

*Con.* Heaven !

*Queen.* But it was so, Constance, it was so !

Men say—or do men say it ? fancies say—  
" Stop here, your life is set, you are grown old.  
" Too late—no love for you, too late for love—  
" Leave love to girls. Be queen : let Constance love ! "  
One takes the hint—half meets it like a child,  
Ashamed at any feelings that oppose.  
" Oh love, true, never think of love again !  
" I am a queen : I rule, not love, indeed."  
So it goes on ; so a face grows like this,  
Hair like this hair, poor arms as lean as these,  
Till,—nay, it does not end so, I thank God !



*Con.* I cannot understand—

*Queen.* The happier you !

Constance, I know not how it is with men :

For women (I am a woman now like you)

There is no good of life but love—but love !

What else looks good, is some shade flung from love ;

Love gilds it, gives it worth. Be warned by me,

Never you cheat yourself one instant ! Love,

Give love, ask only love, and leave the rest !

O Constance, how I love you !

*Con.* I love you.

*Queen.* I do believe that all is come through you.

I took you to my heart to keep it warm

When the last chance of love seemed dead in me ;

I thought your fresh youth warmed my withered heart.

Oh, I am very old now, am I not ?

Not so ! it is true and it shall be true !

*Con.* Tell it me : let me judge if true or false.

*Queen.* Ah, but I fear you ! you will look at me

And say, “ she ’s old, she ’s grown unlovely quite

“ Who ne’er was beauteous : men want beauty still.”

Well, so I feared—the curse ! so I felt sure !

*Con.* Be calm. And now you feel not sure, you say ?

*Queen.* Constance, he came,—the coming was not  
strange—

Do not I stand and see men come and go ?

I turned a half-look from my pedestal

Where I grow marble—“ one young man the more !

“ He will love some one ; that is nought to me :

“ What would he with my marble stateliness ?”  
Yet this seemed somewhat worse than heretofore ;  
The man more gracious, youthful, like a god,  
And I still older, with less flesh to change—  
We two those dear extremes that long to touch.  
It seemed still harder when he first began  
Absorbed to labour at the state-affairs  
The old way for the old end—interest.  
Oh, to live with a thousand beating hearts  
Around you, swift eyes, serviceable hands,  
Professing they ’ve no care but for your cause,  
Thought but to help you, love but for yourself,  
And you the marble statue all the time  
They praise and point at as preferred to life,  
Yet leave for the first breathing woman’s cheek,  
First dancer’s, gipsy’s or street baladine’s !  
Why, how I have ground my teeth to hear men’s speech  
Stifled for fear it should alarm my ear,  
Their gait subdued lest step should startle me,  
Their eyes declined, such queendom to respect,  
Their hands alert, such treasure to preserve,  
While not a man of them broke rank and spoke,  
Or wrote me a vulgar letter all of love, .  
Or caught my hand and pressed it like a hand !  
There have been moments, if the sentinel  
Lowering his halbert to salute the queen,  
Had flung it brutally and clasped my knees,  
I would have stooped and kissed him with my soul.  
*Con.* Who could have comprehended ?

*Queen.*

Ay, who—who?

Why, no one, Constance, but this one who did.  
Not they, not you, not I. Even now perhaps  
It comes too late—would you but tell the truth.

*Con.* I wait to tell it.

*Queen.*

Well, you see, he came,

Outfaced the others, did a work this year  
Exceeds in value all was ever done,  
You know—it is not I who say it—all  
Say it. And so (a second pang and worse)  
I grew aware not only of what he did,  
But why so wondrously. Oh, never work  
Like his was done for work's ignoble sake—  
It must have finer aims to lure it on!  
I felt, I saw, he loved—loved somebody.  
And Constance, my dear Constance, do you know,  
I did believe this while 't was you he loved.

*Con.* Me, madam?

*Queen.*

It did seem to me, your face

Met him where'er he looked : and whom but you  
Was such a man to love? . It seemed to me,  
You saw he loved you, and approved the love,  
And so you both were in intelligence.  
You could not loiter in the garden, step  
Into this balcony, but I straight was stung  
And forced to understand. It seemed so true,  
So right, so beautiful, so like you both,  
That all this work should have been done by him  
Not for the vulgar hope of recompense,

But that at last—suppose, some night like this—  
 Borne on to claim his due reward of me,  
 He might say, “Give her hand and pay me so.”  
 And I (O Constance, you shall love me now !)  
 I thought, surmounting all the bitterness,  
 —“And he shall have it. I will make her blest,  
 “My flower of youth, my woman’s self that was,  
 “My happiest woman’s self that might have been !  
 “These two shall have their joy and leave me here.”  
 Yes—yes !

*Con.* Thanks !

*Queen.* And the word was on my lips  
 When he burst in upon me. I looked to hear  
 A mere calm statement of his just desire  
 For payment of his labour. When—O heaven,  
 How can I tell you? cloud was on my eyes  
 And thunder in my ears at that first word  
 Which told ’t was love of me, of me, did all—  
 He loved me—from the first step to the last,  
 Loved me !

*Con.* You did not hear . . . you thought he spoke  
 Of love? what if you should mistake?

*Queen.* No, no—  
 No mistake ! Ha, there shall be no mistake !  
 He had not dared to hint the love he felt—  
 You were my reflex—(how I understood !)  
 He said you were the ribbon I had worn,  
 He kissed my hand, he looked into my eyes,  
 And love, love was the end of every phrase.

Love is begun ; this much is come to pass :  
 The rest is easy. Constance, I am yours !  
 I will learn, I will place my life on you,  
 But teach me how to keep what I have won !  
 Am I so old ? This hair was early grey ;  
 But joy ere now has brought hair brown again,  
 And joy will bring the cheek's red back, I feel.  
 I could sing once too ; that was in my youth.  
 Still, when men paint me, they declare me . . . yes,  
 Beautiful—for the last French painter did !  
 I know they flatter somewhat ; you are frank—  
 I trust you. How I loved you from the first !  
 Some queens would hardly seek a cousin out  
 And set her by their side to take the eye :  
 I must have felt that good would come from you.  
 I am not generous—like him—like you !  
 But he is not your lover after all :  
 It was not you he looked at. Saw you him ?  
 You have not been mistaking words or looks ?  
 He said you were the reflex of myself.  
 And yet he is not such a paragon  
 To you, to younger women who may choose  
 Among a thousand Norberts. Speak the truth !  
 You know you never named his name to me—  
 You know, I cannot give him up—ah God,  
 Not up now, even to you !

*Con.* . . . Then calm yourself.

*Queen.* See, I am old—look here, you happy girl,  
 I will not play the fool, deceive myself ;

'T is all gone : put your cheek beside my cheek—  
Ah, what a contrast does the moon behold !  
But then I set my life upon one chance,  
The last chance and the best—am *I* not left,  
My soul, myself? All women love great men  
If young or old ; it is in all the tales :  
Young beauties love old poets who can love—  
Why should not he, the poems in my soul,  
The love, the passionate faith, the sacrifice,  
The constancy? I throw them at his feet.  
Who cares to see the fountain's very shape,  
And whether it be a Triton's or a Nymph's  
That pours the foam, makes rainbows all around?  
You could not praise indeed the empty conch ;  
But I 'll pour floods of love and hide myself.  
How I will love him ! Cannot men love love?  
Who was a queen and loved a poet once  
Humpbacked, a dwarf? ah, women can do that !  
Well, but men too ; at least, they tell you so.  
They love so many women in their youth,  
And even in age they all love whom they please ;  
And yet the best of them confide to friends  
That 't is not beauty makes the lasting love—  
They spend a day with such and tire the next :  
They like soul,—well then, they like phantasy,  
Novelty even. Let us confess the truth,  
Horrible though it be, that prejudice,  
Prescription . . . curses ! they will love a queen.  
They will, they do : and will not, does not—he?

*Con.* How can he? You are wedded: 't is a name  
 We know, but still a bond. Your rank remains,  
 His rank remains. How can he, nobly souled  
 As you believe and I incline to think,  
 Aspire to be your favourite, shame and all?

*Queen.* Hear her! There, there now—could she love  
 like me?

What did I say of smooth-cheeked youth and grace?  
 See all it does or could do! so, youth loves!  
 Oh, tell him, Constance, you could never do  
 What I will—you, it was not born in! I  
 Will drive these difficulties far and fast  
 As yonder mists curdling before the moon.  
 I'll use my light too, gloriously retrieve  
 My youth from its enforced calamity,  
 Dissolve that hateful marriage, and be his,  
 His own in the eyes alike of God and man.

*Con.* You will do—dare do . . . pause on what you  
 say!

*Queen.* Hear her! I thank you, sweet, for that surprise.  
 You have the fair face: for the soul, see mine!  
 I have the strong soul: let me teach you, here.  
 I think I have borne enough and long enough,  
 And patiently enough, the world remarks,  
 To have my own way now, unblamed by all.  
 It does so happen (I rejoice for it)  
 This most unhopèd-for issue cuts the knot.  
 There's not a better way of settling claims  
 Than this; God sends the accident express:

And were it for my subjects' good, no more,  
 'T were best thus ordered. I am thankful now,  
 Mute, passive, acquiescent. I receive,  
 And bless God simply, or should almost fear  
 To walk so smoothly to my ends at last.  
 Why, how I baffle obstacles, spurn fate!  
 How strong I am! Could Norbert see me now!

*Con.* Let me consider. It is all too strange.

*Queen.* You, Constance, learn of me; do you, like  
 me!

You are young, beautiful: my own, best girl,  
 You will have many lovers, and love one—  
 Light hair, not hair like Norbert's, to suit yours,  
 And taller than he is, for yourself are tall.  
 Love him, like me! Give all away to him;  
 Think never of yourself; throw by your pride,  
 Hope, fear,—your own good as you saw it once,  
 And love him simply for his very self.  
 Remember, I (and what am I to you?)  
 Would give up all for one, leave throne, lose life,  
 Do all but just unlove him! He loves me.

*Con.* He shall.

*Queen.* You, step inside my inmost heart!  
 Give me your own heart: let us have one heart!  
 I'll come to you for counsel; "this he says,  
 "This he does; what should this amount to, pray?  
 "Beseech you, change it into current coin!  
 "Is that worth kisses? Shall I please him there?"  
 And then we'll speak in turn of you—what else?



Your love, according to your beauty's worth,  
 For you shall have some noble love, all gold :  
 Whom choose you ? we will get him at your choice.  
 —Constance, I leave you. Just a minute since,  
 I felt as I must die or be alone  
 Breathing my soul into an ear like yours :  
 Now, I would face the world with my new life,  
 With my new crown. I 'll walk around the rooms,  
 And then come back and tell you how it feels.  
 How soon a smile of God can change the world !  
 How we are made for happiness—how work  
 Grows play, adversity a winning fight !  
 True, I have lost so many years : what then ?  
 Many remain : God has been very good.  
 You, stay here ! 'T is as different from dreams,  
 From the mind's cold calm estimate of bliss,  
 As these stone statues from the flesh and blood.  
 The comfort thou hast caused mankind, God's moon !

[*She goes out, leaving CONSTANCE. Dance-music from within.*]

NORBERT *enters.*

*Nor.* Well ? we have but one minute and one word !

*Con.* I am yours, Norbert !

*Nor.* Yes, mine.

*Con.* Not till now !

You were mine. Now I give myself to you.

*Nor.* Constance ?

*Con.* Your own ! I know the thriftier way  
 Of giving—haply, 't is the wiser way.

Meaning to give a treasure, I might dole  
 Coin after coin out (each, as that were all,  
 With a new largess still at each despair).  
 And force you keep in sight the deed, preserve  
 Exhaustless till the end my part and yours,  
 My giving and your taking ; both our joys  
 Dying together. Is it the wiser way ?  
 I choose the simpler ; I give all at once.  
 Know what you have to trust to, trade upon !  
 Use it, abuse it,—anything but think  
 Hereafter, “ Had I known she loved me so,  
 “ And what my means, I might have thriven with it.”  
 This is your means. I give you all myself.

*Nor.* I take you and thank God.

*Con.* Look on through years !

We cannot kiss, a second day like this ;  
 Else were this earth, no earth.

*Nor.* With this day's heat

We shall go on through years of cold.

*Con.* So, best !

—I try to see those years—I think I see.  
 You walk quick and new warmth comes ; you look back  
 And lay all to the first glow—not sit down  
 For ever brooding on a day like this  
 While seeing the embers whiten and love die.  
 Yes, love lives best in its effect ; and mine,  
 Full in its own life, yearns to live in yours.

*Nor.* Just so. I take and know you all at once.  
 Your soul is disengaged so easily,

Your face is there, I know you ; give me time,  
 Let me be proud and think you shall know me.  
 My soul is slower : in a life I roll  
 The minute out whereto you condense yours—  
 The whole slow circle round you I must move,  
 To be just you. I look to a long life  
 To decompose this minute, prove its worth.  
 'T is the sparks' long succession one by one  
 Shall show you, in the end, what fire was crammed  
 In that mere stone you struck : how could you know,  
 If it lay ever unproved in your sight,  
 As now my heart lies ? your own warmth would hide  
 Its coldness, were it cold.

*Con.* But how prove, how ?

*Nor.* Prove in my life, you ask ?

*Con.* Quick, Norbert—how ?

*Nor.* That 's easy told. I count life just a stuff  
 To try the soul's strength on, educe the man.  
 Who keeps one end in view makes all things serve.  
 As with the body—he who hurls a lance  
 Or heaps up stone on stone, shows strength alike,  
 So I will seize and use all means to prove,  
 And show this soul of mine, you crown as yours,  
 And justify us both.

*Con.* Could you write books,  
 Paint pictures ! One sits down in poverty  
 And writes or paints, with pity for the rich.

*Nor.* And loves one's painting and one's writing, then,  
 And not one's mistress ! All is best, believe,

And we best as no other than we are.  
 We live, and they experiment on life—  
 Those poets, painters, all who stand aloof  
 To overlook the farther. Let us be  
 The thing they look at! I might take your face  
 And write of it and paint it—to what end?  
 For whom? what pale dictatress in the air  
 Feeds, smiling sadly, her fine ghost-like form  
 With earth's real blood and breath, the beauteous life  
 She makes despised for ever? You are mine,  
 Made for me, not for others in the world,  
 Nor yet for that which I should call my art,  
 The cold calm power to see how fair you look.  
 I come to you; I leave you not, to write  
 Or paint. You are, I am: let Rubens there  
 Paint us!

*Con.* So, best!

*Nor.* I understand your soul.

You live, and rightly sympathize with life,  
 With action, power, success. This way is straight;  
 And time were short beside, to let me change  
 The craft my childhood learnt: my craft shall serve.  
 Men set me here to subjugate, enclose,  
 Manure their barren lives, and force the fruit  
 First for themselves, and afterward for me  
 In the due tithe; the task of some one man,  
 Through ways of work appointed by themselves.  
 I am not bid create—they see no star  
 Transfiguring my brow to warrant that—

But bind in one and carry out their wills.  
 So I began : to-night sees how I end.  
 What if it see, too, my first outbreak here  
 Amid the warmth, surprise and sympathy,  
 And instincts of the heart that teach the head ?  
 What if the people have discerned at length  
 The dawn of the next nature, the new man  
 Whose will they venture in the place of theirs,  
 And who, they trust, shall find them out new ways  
 To heights as new which yet he only sees ?  
 I felt it when you kissed me. See this Queen,  
 This people—in our phrase, this mass of men—  
 See how the mass lies passive to my hand  
 And how my hand is plastic, and you by  
 To make the muscles iron ! Oh, an end  
 Shall crown this issue as this crowns the first !  
 My will be on this people ! then, the strain,  
 The grappling of the potter with his clay,  
 The long uncertain struggle,—the success  
 And consummation of the spirit-work,  
 Some vase shaped to the curl of the god's lip,  
 While rounded fair for lower men to see  
 The Graces in a dance all recognise  
 With turbulent applause and laughs of heart !  
 So triumph ever shall renew itself ;  
 Ever shall end in efforts higher yet,  
 Ever begin . . .

*Con.* I ever helping ?

*Nor.* Thus !

[As he embraces her, the QUEEN enters.]

*Con.* Hist, madam ! So I have performed my part.  
You see your gratitude's true decency,  
Norbert? A little slow in seeing it !  
Begin, to end the sooner ! What 's a kiss ?

*Nor.* Constance ?

*Con.* Why, must I teach it you again ?  
You want a witness to your dulness, sir ?  
What was I saying these ten minutes long ?  
Then I repeat—when some young handsome man  
Like you has acted out a part like yours,  
Is pleased to fall in love with one beyond,  
So very far beyond him, as he says—  
So hopelessly in love, that but to speak  
Would prove him mad,—he thinks judiciously,  
And makes some insignificant good soul,  
Like me, his friend, adviser, confidant,  
And very stalking-horse to cover him  
In following after what he dares not face—  
When his end 's gained—(sir, do you understand ?)  
When she, he dares not face, has loved him first,  
—May I not say so, madam ?—tops his hope,  
And overpasses so his wildest dream,  
With glad consent of all, and most of her  
The confidant who brought the same about—  
Why, in the moment when such joy explodes,  
I do hold that the merest gentleman  
Will not start rudely from the stalking-horse,  
Dismiss it with a “ There, enough of you ! ”

Forget it, show his back unmannerly ;  
 But like a liberal heart will rather turn  
 And say, " A tingling time of hope was ours ;  
 " Betwixt the fears and falterings, we two lived  
 " A chanceful time in waiting for the prize :  
 " The confidant, the Constance, served not ill.  
 " And though I shall forget her in due time,  
 " Her use being answered now, as reason bids,  
 " Nay as herself bids from her heart of hearts,—  
 " Still, she has rights, the first thanks go to her,  
 " The first good praise goes to the prosperous tool,  
 " And the first—which is the last—rewarding kiss."

*Nor.* Constance, it is a dream—ah, see, you smile !

*Con.* So, now his part being properly performed,  
 Madam, I turn to you and finish mine  
 As duly ; I do justice in my turn.  
 Yes, madam, he has loved you—long and well ;  
 He could not hope to tell you so—'t was I  
 Who served to prove your soul accessible,  
 I led his thoughts on, drew them to their place  
 When else they had wandered out into despair,  
 And kept love constant toward its natural aim.  
 Enough, my part is played ; you stoop half-way  
 And meet us royally and spare our fears :  
 'T is like yourself. He thanks you, so do I.  
 Take him—with my full heart ! my work is praised  
 By what comes of it. Be you happy, both !  
 Yourself—the only one on earth who can—  
 Do all for him, much more than a mere heart

Which though warm is not useful in its warmth  
 As the silk vesture of a queen ! fold that  
 Around him gently, tenderly. For him—  
 For him,—he knows his own part !

*Nor.*

Have you done ?

I take the jest at last. Should I speak now ?  
 Was yours the wager, Constance, foolish child,  
 Or did you but accept it ? Well—at least  
 You lose by it.

*Con.*

Nay, madam, 't is your turn !

Restrain him still from speech a little more,  
 And make him happier and more confident !  
 Pity him, madam, he is timid yet !  
 Mark, Norbert ! Do not shrink now ! Here I yield  
 My whole right in you to the Queen, observe !  
 With her go put in practice the great schemes  
 You teem with, follow the career else closed—  
 Be all you cannot be except by her !  
 Behold her !—Madam, say for pity's sake  
 Anything—frankly say you love him ! Else  
 He 'll not believe it : there 's more earnest in  
 His fear than you conceive : I know the man !

*Nor.* I know the woman somewhat, and confess  
 I thought she had jested better : she begins  
 To overcharge her part. I gravely wait  
 Your pleasure, madam : where is my reward ?

*Queen.* Norbert, this wild girl (whom I recognise  
 Scarce more than you do, in her fancy-fit,  
 Eccentric speech and variable mirth,



Not very wise perhaps and somewhat bold,  
 Yet suitable, the whole night's work being strange)  
 —May still be right : I may do well to speak  
 And make authentic what appears a dream  
 To even myself. For, what she says, is true :  
 Yes, Norbert—what you spoke just now of love,  
 Devotion, stirred no novel sense in me,  
 But justified a warmth felt long before.  
 Yes, from the first—I loved you, I shall say :  
 Strange ! but I do grow stronger, now 't is said.  
 Your courage helps mine : you did well to speak  
 To-night, the night that crowns your twelvemonths' toil :  
 But still I had not waited to discern  
 Your heart so long, believe me ! From the first  
 The source of so much zeal was almost plain,  
 In absence even of your own words just now  
 Which opened out the truth. 'T is very strange,  
 But takes a happy ending—in your love  
 Which mine meets : be it so ! as you choose me,  
 So I choose you.

*Nor.*                      And worthily you choose.

I will not be unworthy your esteem,  
 No, madam. I do love you ; I will meet  
 Your nature, now I know it. This was well.  
 I see,—you dare and you are justified :  
 But none had ventured such experiment,  
 Less versed than you in nobleness of heart,  
 Less confident of finding such in me.  
 I joy that thus you test me ere you grant

The dearest richest beauteousest and best  
 Of women to my arms : 't is like yourself.  
 So—back again into my part's set words—  
 Devotion to the uttermost is yours,  
 But no, you cannot, madam, even you,  
 Create in me the love our Constance does.  
 Or—something truer to the tragic phrase—  
 Not yon magnolia-bell superb with scent  
 Invites a certain insect—that 's myself—  
 But the small eye-flower nearer to the ground.  
 I take this lady.

*Con.* Stay—not hers, the trap—  
 Stay, Norbert—that mistake were worst of all !  
 He is too cunning, madam ! It was I,  
 I, Norbert, who . . . .

*Nor.* You, was it, Constance ? Then,  
 But for the grace of this divinest hour  
 Which gives me you, I might not pardon here !  
 I am the Queen's ; she only knows my brain :  
 She may experiment therefore on my heart  
 And I instruct her too by the result.  
 But you, sweet, you who know me, who so long  
 Have told my heart-beats over, held my life  
 In those white hands of yours,—it is not well !

*Con.* Tush ! I have said it, did I not say it all ?  
 The life, for her—the heart-beats, for her sake !

*Nor.* Enough ! my cheek grows red, I think. Your  
 test ?

There 's not the meanest woman in the world,

Not she I least could love in all the world,  
 Whom, did she love me, did love prove itself,  
 I dared insult as you insult me now.  
 Constance, I could say, if it must be said,  
 "Take back the soul you offer, I keep mine!"  
 But—"Take the soul still quivering on your hand,  
 "The soul so offered, which I cannot use,  
 "And, please you, give it to some playful friend,  
 "For—what 's the trifle he requites me with?"  
 I, tempt a woman, to amuse a man,  
 That two may mock her heart if it succumb?  
 No: fearing God and standing 'neath his heaven,  
 I would not dare insult a woman so,  
 Were she the meanest woman in the world,  
 And he, I cared to please, ten emperors!

*Con.* Norbert!

*Nor.* I love once as I live but once.

What case is this to think or talk about?  
 I love you. Would it mend the case at all  
 Should such a step as this kill love in me?  
 Your part were done: account to God for it!  
 But mine—could murdered love get up again,  
 And kneel to whom you please to designate,  
 And make you mirth? It is too horrible.  
 You did not know this, Constance? now you know  
 That body and soul have each one life, but one:  
 And here 's my love, here, living, at your feet.

*Con.* See the Queen! Norbert—this one more last  
 word—

If thus you have taken jest for earnest—thus  
Loved me in earnest . . .

*Nor.* Ah, no jest holds here !

Where is the laughter in which jests break up,  
And what this horror that grows palpable ?  
Madam—why grasp you thus the balcony ?  
Have I done ill ? Have I not spoken the truth ?  
How could I other ? Was it not your test,  
To try me, and what my love for Constance meant ?  
Madam, your royal soul itself approves,  
The first, that I should choose thus ! so one takes  
A beggar,—asks him, what would buy his child ?  
And then approves the expected laugh of scorn  
Returned as something noble from the rags.  
Speak, Constance, I 'm the beggar ! Ha, what 's this ?  
You two glare each at each like panthers now.  
Constance, the world fades ; only you stand there !  
You did not, in to-night's wild whirl of things,  
Sell me—your soul of souls, for any price ?  
No—no—'t is easy to believe in you !  
Was it your love's mad trial to o'ertop  
Mine by this vain self-sacrifice ? well, still—  
Though I should curse, I love you. I am love  
And cannot change : love's self is at your feet !

[*The QUEEN goes out.*]

*Con.* Feel my heart ; let it die against your own !

*Nor.* Against my own. Explain not ; let this be !

This is life's height.

*Con.* Yours, yours, yours !

*Nor.*

You and I—

Why care by what meanders we are here  
 In the centre of the labyrinth? Men have died  
 Trying to find this place, which we have found.

*Con.* Found, found!*Nor.*

Sweet, never fear what she can do!

We are past harm now.

*Con.*

On the breast of God.

I thought of men—as if you were a man.

Tempting him with a crown!

*Nor.*

This must end here:

It is too perfect.

*Con.*

There's the music stopped.

What measured heavy tread? It is one blaze

About me and within me.

*Nor.*

Oh, some death

Will run its sudden finger round this spark

And sever us from the rest!

*Con.*

And so do well.

Now the doors open.

*Nor.*

'T is the guard comes.

*Con.*

Kiss!



DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

LONDON, 1864.





# JAMES LEE'S WIFE.

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## I.

JAMES LEE'S WIFE SPEAKS AT THE WINDOW.

### I.

AH, love, but a day,  
And the world has changed !  
The sun 's away,  
And the bird estranged ;  
The wind has dropped,  
And the sky 's deranged :  
Summer has stopped.

### II.

Look in my eyes !  
Wilt thou change too ?  
Should I fear surprise ?  
Shall I find aught new  
In the old and dear,  
In the good and true,  
With the changing year ?

## III.

Thou art a man,  
But I am thy love.  
For the lake, its swan ;  
For the dell, its dove ;  
And for thee—(oh, haste !)  
Me, to bend above,  
Me, to hold embraced.

---

## II.

## BY THE FIRESIDE.

## I.

Is all our fire of shipwreck wood,  
Oak and pine ?  
Oh, for the ills half-understood,  
The dim dead woe  
Long ago  
Befallen this bitter coast of France !  
Well, poor sailors took their chance ;  
I take mine.

## II.

A ruddy shaft our fire must shoot  
 O'er the sea :  
 Do sailors eye the casement—mute  
 Drenched and stark,  
 From their bark—  
 And envy, gnash their teeth for hate  
 O' the warm safe house and happy freight  
 —Thee and me ?

## III.

God help you, sailors, at your need !  
 Spare the curse !  
 For some ships, safe in port indeed,  
 Rot and rust,  
 Run to dust,  
 All through worms i' the wood, which crept,  
 Gnawed our hearts out while we slept :  
 That is worse.

## IV.

Who lived here before us two ?  
 Old-world pairs.  
 Did a woman ever—would I knew !—  
 Watch the man  
 With whom began  
 Love's voyage full-sail,—(now, gnash your teeth !)  
 When planks start, open hell beneath  
 Unawares ?

## III.

## IN THE DOORWAY.

## I.

The swallow has set her six young on the rail,  
And looks sea-ward :  
The water 's in stripes like a snake, olive-pale  
To the leeward,—  
On the weather-side, black, spotted white with the wind :  
“ Good fortune departs, and disaster 's behind,”—  
Hark, the wind with its wants and its infinite wail !

## II.

Our fig-tree, that leaned for the saltness, has furred  
Her five fingers,  
Each leaf like a hand opened wide to the world  
Where there lingers  
No glint of the gold, Summer sent for her sake :  
How the vines writhe in rows, each impaled on its stake !  
My heart shrivels up and my spirit shrinks curled.

## III.

Yet here are we two ; we have love, house enough,  
With the field there,  
This house of four rooms, that field red and rough,  
Though it yield there,  
For the rabbit that robs, scarce a blade or a bent ;  
If a magpie alight now, it seems an event ;  
And they both will be gone at November's rebuff.

## IV.

But why must cold spread ? but wherefore bring change  
To the spirit,  
God meant should mate his with an infinite range,  
And inherit  
His power to put life in the darkness and cold ?  
Oh, live and love worthily, bear and be bold !  
Whom Summer made friends of, let Winter estrange !

---

## IV.

## ALONG THE BEACH.

## I.

I WILL be quiet and talk with you,  
And reason why you are wrong.  
You wanted my love—is that much true?  
And so I did love, so I do :  
What has come of it all along ?

## II

I took you—how could I otherwise ?  
For a world to me, and more ;  
For all, love greatens and glorifies  
Till God 's a-glow, to the loving eyes,  
In what was mere earth before.

## III.

Yes, earth—yes, mere ignoble earth !  
Now do I mis-state, mistake ?  
Do I wrong your weakness and call it worth ?  
Expect all harvest, dread no dearth,  
Seal my sense up for your sake ?

## IV.

Oh, love, love, no, love ! not so, indeed !

You were just weak earth, I knew :  
With much in you waste, with many a weed,  
And plenty of passions run to seed,  
But a little good grain too.

## v.

And such as you were, I took you for mine :

Did not you find me yours,  
To watch the olive and wait the vine,  
And wonder when rivers of oil and wine  
Would flow, as the Book assures ?

## VI.

Well, and if none of these good things came,  
What did the failure prove ?

The man was my whole world, all the same,  
With his flowers to praise or his weeds to blame,  
And, either or both, to love.

## VII.

Yet this turns now to a fault—there ! there !

That I do love, watch too long,  
And wait too well, and weary and wear ;  
And 't is all an old story, and my despair  
Fit subject for some new song :

## VIII.

“ How the light, light love, he has wings to fly  
 “ At suspicion of a bond :  
 “ My wisdom has bidden your pleasure good-bye,  
 “ Which will turn up next in a laughing eye,  
 “ And why should you look beyond ? ”

---

## V.

## ON THE CLIFF.

## I.

I LEANED on the turf,  
 I looked at a rock  
 Left dry by the surf ;  
 For the turf, to call it grass were to mock :  
 Dead to the roots, so deep was done  
 The work of the summer sun.

## II.

And the rock lay flat  
 As an anvil's face :  
 No iron like that !



Baked dry ; of a weed, of a shell, no trace :  
Sunshine outside, but ice at the core,  
Death's altar by the lone shore.

## III.

On the turf, sprang gay  
With his films of blue,  
No cricket, I'll say,  
But a warhorse, barded and chanfroned too,  
The gift of a quixote-mage to his knight,  
Real fairy, with wings all right.

## IV.

On the rock, they scorch  
Like a drop of fire  
From a brandished torch,  
Fall two red fans of a butterfly :  
No turf, no rock, in their ugly stead,  
See, wonderful blue and red !

## V.

Is it not so  
With the minds of men ?  
The level and low,  
The burnt and bare, in themselves ; but then  
With such a blue and red grace, not theirs,  
Love settling unawares !

## VI.

## READING A BOOK, UNDER THE CLIFF.

## I.

“ STILL ailing, Wind? Wilt be appeased or no?

“ Which needs the other’s office, thou or I?

“ Dost want to be disburthened of a woe,

“ And can, in truth, my voice untie

“ Its links, and let it go?

## II.

“ Art thou a dumb, wronged thing that would be righted,

“ Entrusting thus thy cause to me? Forbear!

“ No tongue can mend such pleadings; faith, requited

“ With falsehood,—love, at last aware

“ Of scorn,—hopes, early blighted,—

## III.

“ We have them; but I know not any tone

“ So fit as thine to falter forth a sorrow:

“ Dost think men would go mad without a moan,

“ If they knew any way to borrow

“ A pathos like thy own?

## IV.

“ Which sigh wouldst mock, of all the sighs? The one  
“ So long escaping from lips starved and blue,  
“ That lasts while on her pallet-bed the nun  
“ Stretches her length ; her foot comes through  
“ The straw she shivers on ;

## V.

“ You had not thought she was so tall : and spent,  
“ Her shrunk lids open, her lean fingers shut  
“ Close, close, their sharp and livid nails indent  
“ The clammy palm ; then all is mute :  
“ That way, the spirit went.

## VI.

“ Or wouldst thou rather that I understand  
“ Thy will to help me?—like the dog I found  
“ Once, pacing sad this solitary strand,  
“ Who would not take my food, poor hound,  
“ But whined and licked my hand.”

---

## VII.

All this, and more, comes from some young man's pride  
 Of power to see,—in failure and mistake,  
 Relinquishment, disgrace, on every side,—  
 Merely examples for his sake,  
 Helps to his path untried :

## VIII.

Instances he must—simply recognize?  
 Oh, more than so!—must, with a learner's zeal,  
 Make doubly prominent, twice emphasize,  
 By added touches that reveal  
 The god in babe's disguise.

## IX.

Oh, he knows what defeat means, and the rest!  
 Himself the undefeated that shall be:  
 Failure, disgrace, he flings them you to test,—  
 His triumph, in eternity  
 Too plainly manifest!

## X.

Whence, judge if he learn forthwith what the wind  
 Means in its moaning—by the happy prompt  
 Instinctive way of youth, I mean; for kind  
 Calm years, exacting their accompt  
 Of pain, mature the mind:

## XI.

And some midsummer morning, at the lull  
Just about daybreak, as he looks across  
A sparkling foreign country, wonderful  
To the sea's edge for gloom and gloss,  
Next minute must annul,—

## XII.

Then, when the wind begins among the vines,  
So low, so low, what shall it say but this?  
“Here is the change beginning, here the lines  
“Circumscribe beauty, set to bliss  
“The limit time assigns.”

## XIII.

Nothing can be as it has been before ;  
Better, so call it, only not the same.  
To draw one beauty into our hearts' core,  
And keep it changeless ! such our claim ;  
So answered,—Never more !

## XIV.

Simple ? Why this is the old woe o' the world ;  
Tune, to whose rise and fall we live and die.  
Rise with it, then ! Rejoice that man is hurled  
From change to change unceasingly.  
His soul's wings never furred !

## XV.

That's a new question ; still replies the fact,  
Nothing endures : the wind moans, saying so ;  
We moan in acquiescence : there's life's pact,  
Perhaps probation—do *I* know ?  
God does : endure his act !

## XVI.

Only, for man, how bitter not to grave  
On his soul's hands' palms one fair good wise thing  
Just as he grasped it ! For himself, death's wave ;  
While time first washes—ah, the sting !—  
O'er all he'd sink to save.

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## VII.

## AMONG THE ROCKS.

## I.

OH, good gigantic smile o' the brown old earth,  
This autumn morning ! How he sets his bones  
To bask i' the sun, and thrusts out knees and feet  
For the ripple to run over in its mirth ;  
Listening the while, where on the heap of stones  
The white breast of the sea-lark twitters sweet.

## II.

That is the doctrine, simple, ancient, true ;  
Such is life's trial, as old earth smiles and knows.  
If you loved only what were worth your love,  
Love were clear gain, and wholly well for you :  
Make the low nature better by your throes !  
Give earth yourself, go up for gain above !

## VIII.

## BESIDE THE DRAWING-BOARD.

## I.

“ As like as a Hand to another Hand ! ”

Whoever said that foolish thing,  
 Could not have studied to understand  
 The counsels of God in fashioning,  
 Out of the infinite love of his heart,  
 This Hand, whose beauty I praise, apart  
 From the world of wonder left to praise,  
 If I tried to learn the other ways  
 Of love, in its skill, or love, in its power.

“ As like as a Hand to another Hand : ”

Who said that, never took his stand,  
 Found and followed, like me, an hour,  
 The beauty in this,—how free, how fine  
 To fear, almost,—of the limit-line !  
 As I looked at this, and learned and drew,  
 Drew and learned, and looked again,  
 While fast the happy minutes flew,  
 Its beauty mounted into my brain,  
 And a fancy seized me ; I was fain  
 To efface my work, begin anew,  
 Kiss what before I only drew ;



Ay, laying the red chalk 'twixt my lips,  
With soul to help if the mere lips failed,  
I kissed all right where the drawing ailed,  
Kissed fast the grace that somehow slips  
Still from one's soulless finger-tips.

## II.

'T is a clay cast, the perfect thing,  
From Hand live once, dead long ago :  
Princess-like it wears the ring  
To fancy's eye, by which we know  
That here at length a master found  
His match, a proud lone soul its mate,  
As soaring genius sank to ground  
And pencil could not emulate  
The beauty in this,—how free, how fine  
To fear almost !—of the limit-line.  
Long ago the god, like me  
The worm, learned, each in our degree :  
Looked and loved, learned and drew,  
Drew and learned and loved again,  
While fast the happy minutes flew,  
Till beauty mounted into his brain  
And on the finger which outvied  
His art he placed the ring that 's there,  
Still by fancy's eye descried,  
In token of a marriage rare :  
For him on earth, his art's despair,  
For him in heaven, his soul's fit bride.

## III.

Little girl with the poor coarse hand  
     I turned from to a cold clay cast—  
 I have my lesson, understand  
     The worth of flesh and blood at last !  
 Nothing but beauty in a Hand ?  
     Because he could not change the hue,  
     Mend the lines and make them true  
 To this which met his soul's demand,—  
     Would Da Vinci turn from you ?  
 I hear him laugh my woes to scorn—  
 “ The fool forsooth is all forlorn  
 “ Because the beauty, she thinks best,  
 “ Lived long ago or was never born,—  
 “ Because no beauty bears the test  
 “ In this rough peasant Hand ! Confessed  
 “ ‘ Art is null and study void ! ’  
 “ So sayest thou ? So said not I,  
 “ Who threw the faulty pencil by,  
 “ And years instead of hours employed,  
 “ Learning the veritable use  
 “ Of flesh and bone and nerve beneath  
 “ Lines and hue of the outer sheath,  
 “ If haply I might reproduce  
 “ One motive of the mechanism,  
 “ Flesh and bone and nerve that make  
 “ The poorest coarsest human hand  
 “ An object worthy to be scanned

“ A whole life long for their sole sake.  
“ Shall earth and the cramped moment-space  
“ Yield the heavenly crowning grace?  
“ Now the parts and then the whole !  
“ Who art thou, with stinted soul  
“ And stunted body, thus to cry  
“ ‘ I love,—shall that be life’s strait dole ?  
“ ‘ I must live beloved or die !’  
“ This peasant hand that spins the wool  
“ And bakes the bread, why lives it on,  
“ Poor and coarse with beauty gone,—  
“ What use survives the beauty ? Fool !”

Go, little girl with the poor coarse hand !  
I have my lesson, shall understand.

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IX.

ON DECK.

I.

THERE is nothing to remember in me,  
Nothing I ever said with a grace,  
Nothing I did that you care to see,  
Nothing I was that deserves a place  
In your mind, now I leave you, set you free.

## II.

Conceded ! In turn, concede to me,  
Such things have been as a mutual flame.  
Your soul 's locked fast ; but, love for a key,  
You might let it loose, till I grew the same  
In your eyes, as in mine you stand : strange plea !

## III.

For then, then, what would it matter to me  
That I was the harsh, ill-favoured one ?  
We both should be like as pea and pea ;  
It was ever so since the world begun :  
So, let me proceed with my reverie.

## IV.

How strange it were if you had all me,  
As I have all you in my heart and brain,  
You, whose least word brought gloom or glee,  
Who never lifted the hand in vain  
Will hold mine yet, from over the sea !

## V.

Strange, if a face, when you thought of me,  
Rose like your own face present now,  
With eyes as dear in their due degree,  
Much such a mouth, and as bright a brow,  
Till you saw yourself, while you cried " 'Tis She ! "

## VI.

Well, you may, you must, set down to me  
Love that was life, life that was love ;  
A tenure of breath at your lips' decree,  
A passion to stand as your thoughts approve,  
A rapture to fall where your foot might be.

## VII.

But did one touch of such love for me  
Come in a word or a look of yours,  
Whose words and looks will, circling, flee  
Round me and round while life endures,—  
Could I fancy " As I feel, thus feels He ;"

## VIII.

Why, fade you might to a thing like me,  
And your hair grow these coarse hanks of hair,  
Your skin, this bark of a gnarled tree,—  
You might turn myself !—should I know or care,  
When I should be dead of joy, James Lee ?

# GOLD HAIR :

A STORY OF PORNIC.

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## I.

OH, the beautiful girl, too white,  
Who lived at Pornic, down by the sea,  
Just where the sea and the Loire unite !  
And a boasted name in Brittany  
She bore, which I will not write.

## II.

Too white, for the flower of life is red ;  
Her flesh was the soft seraphic screen  
Of a soul that is meant (her parents said)  
To just see earth, and hardly be seen,  
And blossom in heaven instead.

## III.

Yet earth saw one thing, one how fair !  
One grace that grew to its full on earth :  
Smiles might be sparse on her cheek so spare,  
And her waist want half a girdle's girth,  
But she had her great gold hair.

## IV.

Hair, such a wonder of flix and floss,  
Freshness and fragrance—floods of it, too !  
Gold, did I say? Nay, gold 's mere dross :  
Here, Life smiled, “ Think what I meant to do ! ”  
And Love sighed, “ Fancy, my loss ! ”

## V.

So, when she died, it was scarce more strange  
Than that, when some delicate evening dies,  
And you follow its spent sun's pallid range,  
There 's a shoot of colour startles the skies  
With sudden, violent change,—

## VI.

That, while the breath was nearly to seek,  
As they put the little cross to her lips,  
She changed ; a spot came out on her cheek,  
A spark from her eye in mid-eclipse,  
And she broke forth, “ I must speak ! ”

## VII.

“ Not my hair ! ” made the girl her moan—  
“ All the rest is gone or to go ;  
“ But the last, last grace, my all, my own,  
“ Let it stay in the grave, that the ghosts may know !  
“ Leave my poor gold hair alone ! ”

## VIII.

The passion thus vented, dead lay she ;  
Her parents sobbed their worst on that,  
All friends joined in, nor observed degree :  
For indeed the hair was to wonder at,  
As it spread—not flowing free,

## IX.

But curled around her brow, like a crown,  
And coiled beside her cheeks, like a cap,  
And calmed about her neck—ay, down  
To her breast, pressed flat, without a gap  
I' the gold, it reached her gown.

## X.

All kissed that face, like a silver wedge  
Mid the yellow wealth, nor disturbed its hair :  
E'en the priest allowed death's privilege,  
As he planted the crucifix with care  
On her breast, 'twixt edge and edge.

## XI.

And thus was she buried, inviolate  
Of body and soul, in the very space  
By the altar ; keeping saintly state  
In Pornic church, for her pride of race,  
Pure life and piteous fate.



## XII.

And in after-time would your fresh tear fall,  
Though your mouth might twitch with a dubious smile,  
As they told you of gold both robe and pall,  
How she prayed them leave it alone awhile,  
So it never was touched at all.

## XIII.

Years flew ; this legend grew at last  
The life of the lady ; all she had done,  
All been, in the memories fading fast  
Of lover and friend, was summed in one  
Sentence survivors passed :

## XIV.

To wit, she was meant for heaven, not earth ;  
Had turned an angel before the time :  
Yet, since she was mortal, in such dearth  
Of frailty, all you could count a crime  
Was—she knew her gold hair's worth.

## XV.

At little pleasant Pornic church,  
It chanced, the pavement wanted repair,  
Was taken to pieces : left in the lurch,  
A certain sacred space lay bare,  
And the boys began research.

## XVI.

'T was the space where our sires would lay a saint,  
 A benefactor,—a bishop, suppose,  
 A baron with armour-adornments quaint,  
 Dame with chased ring and jewelled rose,  
 Things sanctity saves from taint ;

## XVII.

So we come to find them in after-days  
 When the corpse is presumed to have done with gauds  
 Of use to the living, in many ways :  
 For the boys get pelf, and the town applauds,  
 And the church deserves the praise.

## XVIII.

They grubbed with a will : and at length—*O cor*  
*Humanum, pectora cæca*, and the rest !—  
 They found—no gaud they were prying for,  
 No ring, no rose, but—who would have guessed ?—  
 A double Louis-d'or !

## XIX.

Here was a case for the priest : he heard,  
 Marked, inwardly digested, laid  
 Finger on nose, smiled, “A little bird  
 “Chirps in my ear :” then, “Bring a spade,  
 “Dig deeper !”—he gave the word.

## XX.

And lo, when they came to the coffin-lid,  
 Or rotten planks which composed it once,  
 Why, there lay the girl's skull wedged amid  
 A mint of money, it served for the nonce  
 To hold in its hair-heaps hid !

## XXI.

Hid there? Why? Could the girl be wont  
 (She the stainless soul) to treasure up  
 Money, earth's trash and heaven's affront?  
 Had a spider found out the communion-cup,  
 Was a toad in the christening-font?

## XXII.

Truth is truth : too true it was.  
 Gold ! She hoarded and hugged it first,  
 Longed for it, leaned o'er it, loved it—alas—  
 Till the humour grew to a head and burst,  
 And she cried, at the final pass,—

## XXIII.

“ Talk not of God, my heart is stone !  
 “ Nor lover nor friend—be gold for both !  
 “ Gold I lack ; and, my all, my own,  
 “ It shall hide in my hair. I scarce die loth  
 “ If they let my hair alone !”

## XXIV.

Louis-d'ors, some six times five,  
 And duly double, every piece.  
 Now, do you see? With the priest to shrive,  
 With parents preventing her soul's release  
 By kisses that kept alive,—

## XXV.

With heaven's gold gates about to ope,  
 With friends' praise, gold-like, lingering still,  
 An instinct had bidden the girl's hand grope  
 For gold, the true sort—"Gold in heaven, if you will ;  
 " But I keep earth's too, I hope."

## XXVI.

Enough! The priest took the grave's grim yield :  
 The parents, they eyed that price of sin  
 As if *thirty pieces* lay revealed  
 On the place *to bury strangers in*,  
 The hideous Potter's Field.

## XXVII.

But the priest bethought him : " ' Milk that 's spilt '  
 " —You know the adage! Watch and pray!  
 " Saints tumble to earth with so slight a tilt!  
 " It would build a new altar; that, we may!"  
 And the altar therewith was built.

## XXVIII.

Why I deliver this horrible verse?

As the text of a sermon, which now I preach :  
Evil or good may be better or worse

In the human heart, but the mixture of each  
Is a marvel and a curse.

## XXIX.

The candid incline to surmise of late

That the Christian faith may be false, I find ;  
For our Essays-and-Reviews' debate

Begins to tell on the public mind,  
And Colenso's words have weight :

## XXX.

I still, to suppose it true, for my part,

See reasons and reasons ; this, to begin :  
'T is the faith that launched point-blank her dart  
At the head of a lie—taught Original Sin,  
The Corruption of Man's Heart.

## THE WORST OF IT.

---

### I.

WOULD it were I had been false, not you !  
I that am nothing, not you that are all :  
I, never the worse for a touch or two  
On my speckled hide ; not you, the pride  
Of the day, my swan, that a first fleck's fall  
On her wonder of white must unswan, undo !

### II.

I had dipped in life's struggle, and out again,  
Bore specks of it here, there, easy to see,  
When I found my swan and the cure was plain ;  
The dull turned bright as I caught your white  
On my bosom : you saved me—saved in vain  
If you ruined yourself, and all through me !

## III.

Yes, all through the speckled beast that I am,  
Who taught you to stoop ; you gave me yourself,  
And bound your soul by the vows that damn :  
Since on better thought you break, as you ought,  
Vows—words, no angel set down, some elf  
Mistook,—for an oath, an epigram !

## IV.

Yes, might I judge you, here were my heart,  
And a hundred its like, to treat as you pleased !  
I choose to be yours, for my proper part,  
Yours, leave or take, or mar me or make ;  
If I acquiesce, why should you be teased  
With the conscience-prick and the memory-smart ?

## V.

But what will God say ? Oh, my sweet,  
Think, and be sorry you did this thing !  
Though earth were unworthy to feel your feet,  
There 's a heaven above may deserve your love :  
Should you forfeit heaven for a snapt gold ring  
And a promise broke, were it just or meet ?

## VI.

And I to have tempted you ! I, who tried  
Your soul, no doubt, till it sank ! Unwise,  
I loved, and was lowly, loved and aspired,  
Loved, grieving or glad, till I made you mad,  
And you meant to have hated and despised—  
Whereas, you deceived me nor inquired !

## VII.

She, ruined ? How ? No heaven for her ?  
Crowns to give, and none for the brow  
That looked like marble and smelt like myrrh ?  
Shall the robe be worn, and the palm-branch borne,  
And she go graceless, she graced now  
Beyond all saints, as themselves aver ?

## VIII.

Hardly ! That must be understood !  
The earth is your place of penance, then ;  
And what will it prove ? I desire your good,  
But, plot as I may, I can find no way  
How a blow should fall, such as falls on men,  
Nor prove too much for your womanhood.



## IX.

It will come, I suspect, at the end of life,  
When you walk alone, and review the past ;  
And I, who so long shall have done with strife,  
And journeyed my stage and earned my wage  
And retired as was right,—I am called at last  
When the devil stabs you, to lend the knife.

## X.

He stabs for the minute of trivial wrong,  
Nor the other hours are able to save,  
The happy, that lasted my whole life long :  
For a promise broke, not for first words spoke,  
The true, the only, that turn my grave  
To a blaze of joy and a crash of song.

## XI.

Witness beforehand ! Off I trip  
On a safe path gay through the flowers you flung :  
My very name made great by your lip,  
And my heart a-glow with the good I know  
Of a perfect year when we both were young,  
And I tasted the angels' fellowship.

## XII.

And witness, moreover . . . Ah, but wait !

I spy the loop whence an arrow shoots !

It may be for yourself, when you meditate,

That you grieve—for slain ruth, murdered truth :

“ Though falsehood escape in the end, what boots ?

“ How truth would have triumphed !”—you sigh too late.

## XIII.

Ay, who would have triumphed like you, I say !

Well, it is lost now ; well, you must bear,

Abide and grow fit for a better day :

You should hardly grudge, could I be your judge !

But hush ! For you, can be no despair :

There 's amends : 'tis a secret : hope and pray !

## XIV.

For I was true at least—oh, true enough !

And, dear, truth is not as good as it seems !

Commend me to conscience ! Idle stuff !

Much help is in mine, as I mope and pine,

And skulk through day, and scowl in my dreams

At my swan's obtaining the crow's rebuff.

## XV.

Men tell me of truth now—"False!" I cry :  
Of beauty—"A mask, friend! Look beneath!"  
We take our own method, the devil and I,  
With pleasant and fair and wise and rare :  
And the best we wish to what lives, is—death ;  
Which even in wishing, perhaps we lie !

## XVI.

Far better commit a fault and have done—  
As you, dear!—for ever ; and choose the pure,  
And look where the healing waters run,  
And strive and strain to be good again,  
And a place in the other world ensure,  
All glass and gold, with God for its sun.

## XVII.

Misery! What shall I say or do ?  
I cannot advise, or, at least, persuade :  
Most like, you are glad you deceived me—rue  
No whit of the wrong : you endured too long,  
Have done no evil and want no aid,  
Will live the old life out and chance the new.

## XVIII.

And your sentence is written all the same,  
And I can do nothing,—pray, perhaps :  
But somehow the world pursues its game,  
If I pray, if I curse,—for better or worse :  
And my faith is torn to a thousand scraps,  
And my heart feels ice while my words breathe flame.

## XIX.

Dear, I look from my hiding-place.  
Are you still so fair? Have you still the eyes?  
Be happy! Add but the other grace,  
Be good! Why want what the angels vaunt?  
I knew you once: but in Paradise,  
If we meet, I will pass nor turn my face.

# DÎS ALITER VISUM;

OR,

LE BYRON DE NOS JOURS.

---

I.

STOP, let me have the truth of that !

Is that all true? I say, the day  
Ten years ago when both of us  
Met on a morning, friends—as thus  
We meet this evening, friends or what?—

II.

Did you—because I took your arm  
And sillily smiled, “ A mass of brass  
“ That sea looks, blazing underneath !”  
While up the cliff-road edged with heath,  
We took the turns nor came to harm—

## III.

Did you consider “ Now makes twice  
 “ That I have seen her, walked and talked  
 “ With this poor pretty thoughtful thing,  
 “ Whose worth I weigh : she tries to sing ;  
 “ Draws, hopes in time the eye grows nice ;

## IV.

“ Reads verse and thinks she understands ;  
 “ Loves all, at any rate, that 's great,  
 “ Good, beautiful ; but much as we  
 “ Down at the bath-house love the sea,  
 “ Who breathe its salt and bruise its sands :

## V.

“ While . . do but follow the fishing-gull  
 “ That flaps and floats from wave to cave !  
 “ There 's the sea-lover, fair my friend !  
 “ What then ? Be patient, mark and mend !  
 “ Had you the making of your scull ?”

## VI.

And did you, when we faced the church  
 With spire and sad slate roof, aloof  
 From human fellowship so far,  
 Where a few graveyard crosses are,  
 And garlands for the swallows' perch,—

VII.

Did you determine, as we stepped  
O'er the lone stone fence, " Let me get  
" Her for myself, and what 's the earth  
" With all its art, verse, music, worth—  
" Compared with love, found, gained, and kept ?

VIII.

" Schumann 's our music-maker now ;  
" Has his march-movement youth and mouth ?  
" Ingres 's the modern man that paints ;  
" Which will lean on me, of his saints ?  
" Heine for songs ; for kisses, how ?

IX.

And did you, when we entered, reached  
The votive frigate, soft aloft  
Riding on air this hundred years,  
Safe-smiling at old hopes and fears,—  
Did you draw profit while she preached ?

X.

Resolving, " Fools we wise men grow !  
" Yes, I could easily blurt out curt  
" Some question that might find reply  
" As prompt in her stopped lips, dropped eye,  
" And rush of red to cheek and brow :

## XI.

“ Thus were a match made, sure and fast,  
 “ ’Mid the blue weed-flowers round the mound  
 “ Where, issuing, we shall stand and stay  
 “ For one more look at baths and bay,  
 “ Sands, sea-gulls, and the old church last—

## XII.

“ A match ’twixt me, bent, wigged and lamed,  
 “ Famous, however, for verse and worse,  
 “ Sure of the Fortieth spare Arm-chair  
 “ When gout and glory seat me there,  
 “ So, one whose love-freaks pass unblamed,—

## XIII.

“ And this young beauty, round and sound  
 “ As a mountain-apple, youth and truth  
 “ With loves and doves, at all events  
 “ With money in the Three per Cents ;  
 “ Whose choice of me would seem profound :—

## XIV.

“ She might take me as I take her.  
 “ Perfect the hour would pass, alas !  
 “ Climb high, love high, what matter? Still,  
 “ Feet, feelings, must descend the hill :  
 “ An hour’s perfection can’t recur.



XV.

“ Then follows Paris and full time  
“ For both to reason : ‘ Thus with us !’  
“ She ’ll sigh, ‘ Thus girls give body and soul  
“ ‘ At first word, think they gain the goal,  
“ ‘ When ’t is the starting-place they climb !

XVI.

“ ‘ My friend makes verse and gets renown ;  
“ ‘ Have they all fifty years, his peers ?  
“ ‘ He knows the world, firm, quiet and gay ;  
“ ‘ Boys will become as much one day :  
“ ‘ They ’re fools ; he cheats, with beard less brown.

XVII.

“ ‘ For boys say, *Love me or I die !*  
“ ‘ He did not say, *The truth is, youth*  
“ ‘ *I want, who am old and know too much ;*  
“ ‘ *I’d catch youth : lend me sight and touch !*  
“ ‘ *Drop heart’s blood where life’s wheels grate dry !*

XVIII.

“ While I should make rejoinder ”—(then  
It was, no doubt, you ceased that least  
Light pressure of my arm in yours)  
“ ‘ I can conceive of cheaper cures  
“ ‘ For a yawning-fit o’er books and men.

## XIX.

“ ‘ What? All I am, was, and might be,  
 “ ‘ All, books taught, art brought, life’s whole strife,  
 “ ‘ Painful results since precious, just  
 “ ‘ Were fitly exchanged, in wise disgust,  
 “ ‘ For two cheeks freshened by youth and sea?

## XX.

“ ‘ All for a nosegay!—what came first;  
 “ ‘ With fields on flower, untried each side;  
 “ ‘ I rally, need my books and men,  
 “ ‘ And find a nosegay:’ drop it, then,  
 “ No match yet made for best or worst!”

## XXI.

That ended me. You judged the porch  
 We left by, Norman; took our look  
 At sea and sky; wondered so few  
 Find out the place for air and view;  
 Remarked the sun began to scorch;

## XXII.

Descended; soon regained the baths,  
 And then, good bye! Years ten since then:  
 Ten years! We meet: you tell me, now,  
 By a window-seat for that cliff-brow,  
 On carpet-stripes for those sand-paths.

XXIII.

Now I may speak : you fool, for all  
Your lore ! WHO made things plain in vain ?  
What was the sea for ? What, the grey  
Sad church, that solitary day,  
Crosses and graves and swallows' call ?

XXIV.

Was there nought better than to enjoy ?  
No feat which, done, would make time break,  
And let us pent-up creatures through  
Into eternity, our due ?  
No forcing earth teach heaven's employ ?

XXV.

No wise beginning, here and now,  
What cannot grow complete (earth's feat)  
And heaven must finish, there and then ?  
No tasting earth's true food for men,  
Its sweet in sad, its sad in sweet ?

XXVI.

No grasping at love, gaining a share  
O' the sole spark from God's life at strife  
With death, so, sure of range above  
The limits here ? For us and love,  
Failure ; but, when God fails, despair.

## XXVII.

This you call wisdom? Thus you add  
Good unto good again, in vain?  
You loved, with body worn and weak;  
I loved, with faculties to seek:  
Were both loves worthless since ill-clad?

## XXVIII.

Let the mere star-fish in his vault  
Crawl in a wash of weed, indeed,  
Rose-jacynth to the finger-tips:  
He, whole in body and soul, outstrips  
Man, found with either in default.

## XXIX.

But what's whole, can increase no more,  
Is dwarfed and dies, since here's its sphere.  
The devil laughed at you in his sleeve!  
You knew not? That I well believe;  
Or you had saved two souls: nay, four.

## XXX.

For Stephanie sprained last night her wrist,  
Ankle or something. "Pooh," cry you?  
At any rate she danced, all say,  
Vilely; her vogue has had its day.  
Here comes my husband from his whist.

## T O O L A T E .

---

### I.

HERE was I with my arm and heart  
And brain, all yours for a word, a want  
Put into a look—just a look, your part,—  
While mine, to repay it . . . vainest vaunt,  
Were the woman, that 's dead, alive to hear,  
Had her lover, that 's lost, love's proof to show !  
But I cannot show it ; you cannot speak  
From the churchyard neither, miles removed,  
Though I feel by a pulse within my cheek,  
Which stabs and stops, that the woman I loved  
Needs help in her grave and finds none near,  
Wants warmth from the heart which sends it—so !

### II.

Did I speak once angrily, all the drear days  
You lived, you woman I loved so well,  
Who married the other? Blame or praise,  
Where was the use then? Time would tell,  
And the end declare what man for you,  
What woman for me was the choice of God.

But, Edith dead ! no doubting more !  
 I used to sit and look at my life  
 As it rippled and ran till, right before,  
 A great stone stopped it : oh, the strife  
 Of waves at the stone some devil threw  
 In my life's midcurrent, thwarting God !

## III.

But either I thought, " They may churn and chide  
 " Awhile, my waves which came for their joy  
 " And found this horrible stone full-tide :  
 " Yet I see just a thread escape, deploy  
 " Through the evening-country, silent and safe,  
 " And it suffers no more till it finds the sea."  
 Or else I would think, " Perhaps some night  
 " When new things happen, a meteor-ball  
 " May slip through the sky in a line of light,  
 " And earth breathe hard, and landmarks fall,  
 " And my waves no longer champ nor chafe,  
 " Since a stone will have rolled from its place : let be !"

## IV.

But, dead ! All 's done with : wait who may,  
 Watch and wear and wonder who will.  
 Oh, my whole life that ends to-day !  
 Oh, my soul's sentence, sounding still,  
 " The woman is dead, that was none of his ;  
 " And the man, that was none of hers, may go !"

There 's only the past left : worry that !

Wreak, like a bull, on the empty coat,  
Rage, its late wearer is laughing at !

Tear the collar to rags, having missed his throat ;  
Strike stupidly on—" This, this and this,

" Where I would that a bosom received the blow !"

## v.

I ought to have done more : once my speech,  
And once your answer, and there, the end,  
And Edith was henceforth out of reach !

Why, men do more to deserve a friend,  
Be rid of a foe, get rich, grow wise,

Nor, folding their arms, stare fate in the face.  
Why, better even have burst like a thief

'And borne you away to a rock for us two,  
In a moment's horror, bright, bloody and brief,  
Then changed to myself again—" I slew

" Myself in that moment ; a ruffian lies

" Somewhere : your slave, see, born in his place !"

## vi.

What did the other do ? You be judge !

Look at us, Edith ! Here are we both !  
Give him his six whole years : I grudge

None of the life with you, nay, I loathe  
Myself that I grudged his start in advance  
Of me who could overtake and pass.

But, as if he loved you ! No, not he,  
 Nor anyone else in the world, 't is plain :  
 Who ever heard that another, free  
 As I, young, prosperous, sound and sane,  
 Poured life out, proffered it—" Half a glance  
 " Of those eyes of yours and I drop the glass !"

## VII.

Handsome, were you ? 'Tis more than they held,  
 More than they said ; I was 'ware and watched :  
 I was the 'scapegrace, this rat belled  
 The cat, this fool got his whiskers scratched :  
 The others ? No head that was turned, no heart  
 Broken, my lady, assure yourself !  
 Each soon made his mind up ; so and so  
 Married a dancer, such and such  
 Stole his friend's wife, stagnated slow,  
 Or maundered, unable to do as much,  
 And muttered of peace where he had no part :  
 While, hid in the closet, laid on the shelf,—

## VIII.

On the whole, you were let alone, I think !  
 So, you looked to the other, who acquiesced ;  
 My rival, the proud man,—prize your pink  
 Of poets ! A poet he was ! I 've guessed :  
 He rhymed you his rubbish nobody read,  
 Loved you and doved you—did not I laugh !



There was a prize ! But we both were tried  
 Oh, heart of mine, marked broad with her mark,  
*Tekel*, found wanting, set aside,  
 Scorned ! See, I bleed these tears in the dark  
 Till comfort come and the last be bled :  
 He ? He is tagging your epitaph.

## IX.

If it would only come over again !  
 —Time to be patient with me, and probe  
 This heart till you punctured the proper vein,  
 Just to learn what blood is : twitch the robe  
 From that blank lay-figure your fancy draped,  
 Prick the leathern heart till the—verses spirt !  
 And late it was easy ; late, you walked  
 Where a friend might meet you ; Edith's name  
 Arose to one's lip if one laughed or talked ;  
 If I heard good news, you heard the same ;  
 When I woke, I knew that your breath escaped ;  
 I could bide my time, keep alive, alert.

## X.

And' alive I shall keep and long, you will see !  
 I knew a man, was kicked like a dog  
 From gutter to cesspool ; what cared he  
 So long as he picked from the filth his prog ?  
 He saw youth, beauty and genius die,  
 And jollily lived to his hundredth year.

But I will live otherwise : none of such life !  
 At once I begin as I mean to end.  
 Go on with the world, get gold in its strife,  
 Give your spouse the slip and betray your friend !  
 There are two who decline, a woman and I,  
 And enjoy our death in the darkness here.

## XI.

I liked that way you had with your curls  
 Wound to a ball in a net behind :  
 Your cheek was chaste as a quaker-girl's,  
 And your mouth—there was never, to my mind,  
 Such a funny mouth, for it would not shut ;  
 And the dented chin too—what a chin !  
 There were certain ways when you spoke, some words  
 That you know you never could pronounce :  
 You were thin, however ; like a bird's  
 Your hand seemed—some would say, the pounce  
 Of a scaly-footed hawk—all but !  
 The world was right when it called you thin.

## XII.

But I turn my back on the world : I take  
 Your hand, and kneel, and lay to my lips.  
 Bid me live, Edith ! Let me slake  
 Thirst at your presence ! Fear no slips !  
 'T is your slave shall pay, while his soul endures,  
 Full due, love's whole debt, *summum jus*.

My queen shall have high observance, planned  
Courtship made perfect, no least line  
Crossed without warrant. There you stand,  
Warm too, and white too : would this wine  
Had washed all over that body of yours,  
Ere I drank it, and you down with it, thus !

## ABT VOGLER.

(AFTER HE HAS BEEN EXTEMPORIZING UPON THE MUSICAL  
INSTRUMENT OF HIS INVENTION.)

---

### I.

WOULD that the structure brave, the manifold music I  
build,

Bidding my organ obey, calling its keys to their work,  
Claiming each slave of the sound, at a touch, as when  
Solomon willed

Armies of angels that soár, legions of demons that lurk,  
Man, brute, reptile, fly,—alien of end and of aim,

Adverse, each from the other heaven-high, hell-deep  
removed,—

Should rush into sight at once as he named the ineffable  
Name,

And pile him a palace straight, to pleasure the princess  
he loved !

## II

Would it might tarry like his, the beautiful building of  
mine,

This which my keys in a crowd pressed and importuned  
to raise !

Ah, one and all, how they helped, would dispart now and  
now combine,

Zealous to hasten the work, heighten their master his  
praise !

And one would bury his brow with a blind plunge down  
to hell,

Burrow awhile and build, broad on the roots of things,  
Then up again swim into sight, having based me my  
palace well,

Founded it, fearless of flame, flat on the nether springs.

## III.

And another would mount and march, like the excellent  
minion he was,

Ay, another and yet another, one crowd but with many  
a crest,

Raising my rampired walls of gold as transparent as glass,

Eager to do and die, yield each his place to the rest :

For higher still and higher (as a runner tips with fire,

When a great illumination surprises a festal night—

Outlining round and round Rome's dome from space to  
spire)

Up, the pinnaced glory reached, and the pride of my  
soul was in sight.

## IV.

In sight? Not half! for it seemed, it was certain, to  
match man's birth,  
Nature in turn conceived, obeying an impulse as I;  
And the emulous heaven yearned down, made effort to  
reach the earth,  
As the earth had done her best, in my passion, to  
scale the sky:  
Novel splendours burst forth, grew familiar and dwelt  
with mine,  
Not a point nor peak but found and fixed its wandering  
star;  
Meteor-moons, balls of blaze: and they did not pale nor  
pine,  
For earth had attained to heaven, there was no more  
near nor far.

## V.

Nay more; for there wanted not who walked in the glare  
and glow,  
Presences plain in the place; or, fresh from the Pro-  
toplast,  
Furnished for ages to come, when a kindlier wind should  
blow,  
Lured now to begin and live, in a house to their liking  
at last;  
Or else the wonderful Dead who have passed through the  
body and gone,  
But were back once more to breathe in an old world  
worth their new:

What never had been, was now ; what was, as it shall be  
anon ;

And what is,—shall I say, matched both? for I was  
made perfect too.

## VI.

All through my keys that gave their sounds to a wish of  
my soul,

All through my soul that praised as its wish flowed  
visibly forth,

All through music and me! For think, had I painted  
the whole,

Why, there it had stood, to see, nor the process so  
wonder-worth :

Had I written the same, made verse—still, effect proceeds  
from cause,

Ye know why the forms are fair, ye hear how the tale  
is told ;

It is all triumphant art, but art in obedience to laws,

Painter and poet are proud in the artist-list enrolled :—

## VII.

But here is the finger of God, a flash of the will that  
can,

Existent behind all laws, that made them and, lo, they  
are !

And I know not if, save in this, such gift be allowed to  
man,

That out of three sounds he frame, not a fourth sound,  
but a star.

Consider it well: each tone of our scale in itself is  
nought;

It is everywhere in the world—loud, soft, and all is  
said:

Give it to me to use! I mix it with two in my thought  
And, there! Ye have heard and seen: consider and  
bow the head!

## VIII.

Well, it is gone at last, the palace of music I reared;  
Gone! and the good tears start, the praises that come  
too slow;

For one is assured at first, one scarce can say that he  
feared,

That he even gave it a thought, the gone thing was  
to go.

Never to be again! But many more of the kind  
As good, nay, better perchance: is this your comfort  
to me?

To me, who must be saved because I cling with my mind  
To the same, same self, same love, same God: ay,  
what was, shall be.

## IX.

Therefore to whom turn I but to thee, the ineffable  
Name?

Builder and maker, thou, of houses not made with  
hands!

What, have fear of change from thee who art ever the  
same?



Doubt that Thy power can fill the heart that Thy  
power expands ?

There shall never be one lost good ! What was, shall  
live as before ;

The evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound ;  
What was good, shall be good, with, for evil, so much  
good more ;

On the earth the broken arcs ; in the heaven, a perfect  
round.

## x.

All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good, shall  
exist ;

Not its semblance, but itself ; no beauty, nor good,  
nor power

Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for the  
melodist

When eternity affirms the conception of an hour.

The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too  
hard,

The passion that left the ground to lose itself in  
the sky ;

Are music sent up to God by the lover and the bard ;

Enough that he heard it once : we shall hear it by-  
and-by.

## xi.

And what is our failure here but a triumph's evidence

For the fulness of the days ? Have we withered or  
agonized ?

Why else was the pause prolonged but that singing  
might issue thence ?

Why rushed the discords in, but that harmony should  
be prized ?

Sorrow is hard to bear, and doubt is slow to clear,  
Each sufferer says his say, his scheme of the weal  
and woe :

But God has a few of us whom he whispers in the ear ;  
The rest may reason and welcome : 't is we musicians  
know.

## XII.

Well, it is earth with me ; silence resumes her reign :

I will be patient and proud, and soberly acquiesce.

Give me the keys. I feel for the common chord again,

Sliding by semitones, till I sink to the minor,—yes,

And I blunt it into a ninth, and I stand on alien ground,

Surveying awhile the heights I rolled from into the  
deep ;

Which, hark, I have dared and done, for my resting-place  
is found,

The C Major of this life : so, now I will try to sleep.

## RABBI BEN EZRA.

---

### I.

GROW old along with me !  
The best is yet to be,  
The last of life, for which the first was made :  
Our times are in His hand  
Who saith " A whole I planned,  
" Youth shows but half ; trust God : see all, nor be afraid ! "

### II.

Not that, amassing flowers,  
Youth sighed " Which rose make ours,  
" Which lily leave and then as best recall ? "  
Not that, admiring stars,  
It yearned " Nor Jove, nor Mars ;  
" Mine be some figured flame which blends, transcends  
them all ! "

## III.

Not for such hopes and fears  
 Annulling youth's brief years,  
 Do I remonstrate : folly wide the mark !  
 Rather I prize the doubt  
 Low kinds exist without,  
 Finished and finite clods, untroubled by a spark.

## IV.

Poor vaunt of life indeed,  
 Were man but formed to feed  
 On joy, to solely seek and find and feast :  
 Such feasting ended, then  
 As sure an end to men ;  
 Irks care the crop-full bird?    Frets doubt the maw-  
       crammed beast?

## V.

Rejoice we are allied  
 To That which doth provide  
 And not partake, effect and not receive !  
 A spark disturbs our clod ;  
 Nearer we hold of God  
 Who gives, than of His tribes that take, I must  
       believe.

## VI.

Then, welcome each rebuff  
 That turns earth's smoothness rough,  
 Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go !  
 Be our joys three-parts pain !  
 Strive, and hold cheap the strain ;  
 Learn, nor account the pang ; dare, never grudge the  
 throe !

## VII.

For thence,—a paradox  
 Which comforts while it mocks,—  
 Shall life succeed in that it seems to fail :  
 What I aspired to be,  
 And was not, comforts me :  
 A brute I might have been, but would not sink i' the  
 scale.

## VIII.

What is he but a brute  
 Whose flesh hath soul to suit,  
 Whose spirit works lest arms and legs want play ?  
 To man, propose this test—  
 Thy body at its best,  
 How far can that project thy soul on its lone way ?

## IX.

Yet gifts should prove their use :  
I own the Past profuse  
Of power each side, perfection every turn :  
Eyes, ears took in their dole,  
Brain treasured up the whole ;  
Should not the heart beat once “ How good to live and  
learn ? ”

## X.

Not once beat “ Praise be Thine !  
“ I see the whole design,  
“ I, who saw power, see now Love perfect too :  
“ Perfect I call Thy plan :  
“ Thanks that I was a man !  
“ Maker, remake, complete,—I trust what Thou shalt  
do ! ”

## XI.

For pleasant is this flesh ;  
Our soul, in its rose-mesh  
Pulled ever to the earth, still yearns for rest :  
Would we some prize might hold  
To match those manifold  
Possessions of the brute,—gain most, as we did best !

## XII.

Let us not always say  
“ Spite of this flesh to-day  
“ I strove, made head, gained ground upon the whole !”  
As the bird wings and sings,  
Let us cry “ All good things  
“ Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh  
helps soul !”

## XIII.

Therefore I summon age  
To grant youth's heritage,  
Life's struggle having so far reached its term :  
Thence shall I pass, approved  
A man, for aye removed  
From the developed brute ; a God though in the  
germ.

## XIV.

And I shall thereupon  
Take rest, ere I be gone  
Once more on my adventure brave and new :  
Fearless and unperplexed,  
When I wage battle next,  
What weapons to select, what armour to indue.

## xv.

Youth ended, I shall try  
My gain or loss thereby ;  
Leave the fire ashes, what survives is gold :  
And I shall weigh the same,  
Give life its praise or blame :  
Young, all lay in dispute ; I shall know, being old.

## xvi.

For note, when evening shuts,  
A certain moment cuts  
The deed off, calls the glory from the grey :  
A whisper from the west  
Shoots—" Add this to the rest,  
" Take it and try its worth : here dies another day."

## xvii.

So, still within this life,  
Though lifted o'er its strife,  
Let me discern, compare, pronounce at last,  
" This rage was right i' the main,  
" That acquiescence vain :  
" The Future I may face now I have proved the Past."



## XVIII.

For more is not reserved  
To man, with soul just nerved  
To act to-morrow what he learns to-day :  
Here, work enough to watch  
The Master work, and catch  
Hints of the proper craft, tricks of the tool's true play.

## XIX.

As it was better, youth  
Should strive, through acts uncouth,  
Toward making, than repose on aught found made ;  
So, better, age, exempt  
From strife, should know, than tempt  
Further. Thou waitedst age ; wait death nor be afraid !

## XX.

Enough now, if the Right  
And Good and Infinite  
Be named here, as thou callest thy hand thine own,  
With knowledge absolute,  
Subject to no dispute  
From fools that crowded youth, nor let thee feel alone.

## XXI.

Be there, for once and all,  
Severed great minds from small,  
Announced to each his station in the Past !  
Was I, the world arraigned,  
Were they, my soul disdained,  
Right ? Let age speak the truth and give us peace at last !

## XXII.

Now, who shall arbitrate ?  
Ten men love what I hate,  
Shun what I follow, slight what I receive ;  
Ten, who in ears and eyes  
Match me : we all surmise,  
They, this thing, and I, that : whom shall my soul believe ?

## XXIII.

Not on the vulgar mass  
Called "work," must sentence pass,  
Things done, that took the eye and had the price ;  
O'er which, from level stand,  
The low world laid its hand,  
Found straightway to its mind, could value in a trice :

## XXIV.

But all, the world's coarse thumb  
 And finger failed to plumb,  
 So passed in making up the main account ;  
 All instincts immature,  
 All purposes unsure,  
 That weighed not as his work, yet swelled the man's  
 amount :

## XXV.

Thoughts hardly to be packed  
 Into a narrow act,  
 Fancies that broke through language and escaped ;  
 All I could never be,  
 All, men ignored in me,  
 This, I was worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher shaped.

## XXVI.

Ay, note that Potter's wheel,  
 That metaphor ! and feel  
 Why time spins fast, why passive lies our clay,—  
 Thou, to whom fools propound,  
 When the wine makes its round,  
 " Since life fleets, all is change ; the Past gone, seize  
 to-day ! "

## XXVII.

Fool ! All that is, at all,  
Lasts ever, past recall ;  
Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure :  
What entered into thee,  
*That* was, is, and shall be :  
Time's wheel runs back or stops : Potter and clay endure.

## XXVIII.

He fixed thee mid this dance  
Of plastic circumstance,  
This Present, thou, forsooth, wouldst fain arrest :  
Machinery just meant  
To give thy soul its bent,  
Try thee and turn thee forth, sufficiently impressed.

## XXIX.

What though the earlier grooves  
Which ran the laughing loves  
Around thy base, no longer pause and press ?  
What though, about thy rim,  
Scull-things in order grim  
Grow out, in graver mood, obey the sterner stress ?

## XXX.

Look not thou down but up !  
To uses of a cup,  
The festal board, lamp's flash and trumpet's peal,  
The new wine's foaming flow,  
The Master's lips a-glow !  
Thou, heaven's consummate cup, what needst thou with  
earth's wheel ?

## XXXI.

But I need, now as then,  
Thee, God, who moulded men ;  
And since, not even while the whirl was worst,  
Did I,—to the wheel of life  
With shapes and colours rife,  
Bound dizzily,—mistake my end, to slake Thy thirst :

## XXXII.

So, take and use Thy work !  
Amend what flaws may lurk,  
What strain o' the stuff, what warpings past the aim !  
My times be in Thy hand !  
Perfect the cup as planned !  
Let age approve of youth, and death complete the same !

## A DEATH IN THE DESERT.

---

[SUPPOSED of Pamphylax the Antiochene :  
It is a parchment, of my rolls the fifth,  
Hath three skins glued together, is all Greek,  
And goeth from *Epsilon* down to *Mu* :  
Lies second in the surnamed Chosen Chest,  
Stained and conserved with juice of terebinth,  
Covered with cloth of hair, and lettered *Xi*,  
From Xanthus, my wife's uncle, now at peace :  
*Mu* and *Epsilon* stand for my own name,  
I may not write it, but I make a cross  
To show I wait His coming, with the rest,  
And leave off here : beginneth Pamphylax.]

I said, " If one should wet his lips with wine,  
" And slip the broadest plantain-leaf we find,  
" Or else the lappet of a linen robe,  
" Into the water-vessel, lay it right,  
" And cool his forehead just above the eyes,

“ The while a brother, kneeling either side,  
“ Should chafe each hand and try to make it warm,—  
“ He is not so far gone but he might speak.”

This did not happen in the outer cave,  
Nor in the secret chamber of the rock,  
Where, sixty days since the decree was out,  
We had him, bedded on a camel-skin,  
And waited for his dying all the while ;  
But in the midmost grotto : since noon's light  
Reached there a little, and we would not lose  
The last of what might happen on his face.

I at the head, and Xanthus at the feet,  
With Valens and the Boy, had lifted him,  
And brought him from the chamber in the depths,  
And laid him in the light where we might see :  
For certain smiles began about his mouth,  
And his lids moved, presageful of the end.

Beyond, and half way up the mouth o' the cave,  
The Bactrian convert, having his desire,  
Kept watch, and made pretence to graze a goat  
That gave us milk, on rags of various herb,  
Plantain and quitch, the rocks' shade keeps alive :  
So that if any thief or soldier passed,  
(Because the persecution was aware)  
Yielding the goat up promptly with his life,  
Such man might pass on, joyful at a prize,

Nor care to pry into the cool o' the cave.  
Outside was all noon and the burning blue.

“ Here is wine,” answered Xanthus,—dropped a drop ;  
I stooped and placed the lap of cloth aright,  
Then chafed his right hand, and the Boy his left :  
But Valens had bethought him, and produced  
And broke a ball of nard, and made perfume.  
Only, he did—not so much wake, as—turn  
And smile a little, as a sleeper does  
If any dear one call him, touch his face—  
And smiles and loves, but will not be disturbed.

Then Xanthus said a prayer, but still he slept :  
It is the Xanthus that escaped to Rome,  
Was burned, and could not write the chronicle.

Then the Boy sprang up from his knees, and ran,  
Stung by the splendour of a sudden thought,  
And fetched the seventh plate of graven lead  
Out of the secret chamber, found a place,  
Pressing with finger on the deeper dints,  
And spoke, as 'twere his mouth proclaiming first,  
“ I am the Resurrection and the Life.”

Whereat he opened his eyes wide at once,  
And sat up of himself, and looked at us ;  
And thenceforth nobody pronounced a word :  
Only, outside, the Bactrian cried his cry



Like the lone desert-bird that wears the ruff,  
As signal we were safe, from time to time.

First he said, " If a friend declared to me,  
" This my son Valens, this my other son,  
" Were James and Peter,—nay, declared as well  
" This lad was very John,—I could believe !  
" —Could, for a moment, doubtlessly believe ;  
" So is myself withdrawn into my depths,  
" The soul retreated from the perished brain  
" Whence it was wont to feel and use the world  
" Through these dull members, done with long ago.  
" Yet I myself remain ; I feel myself :  
" And there is nothing lost. Let be, awhile !"

[This is the doctrine he was wont to teach,  
How divers persons witness in each man,  
Three souls which make up one soul : first, to wit,  
A soul of each and all the bodily parts,  
Seated therein, which works, and is what Does,  
And has the use of earth, and ends the man  
Downward : but, tending upward for advice,  
Grows into, and again is grown into  
By the next soul, which, seated in the brain,  
Useth the first with its collected use,  
And feeleth, thinketh, willeth,—is what Knows ;  
Which, duly tending upward in its turn,  
Grows into, and again is grown into  
By the last soul, that uses both the first,

Subsisting whether they assist or no,  
 And, constituting man's self, is what Is—  
 And leans upon the former, makes it play,  
 As that played off the first : and, tending up,  
 Holds, is upheld by, God, and ends the man  
 Upward in that dread point of intercourse,  
 Nor needs a place, for it returns to Him.  
 What Does, what Knows, what Is ; three souls, one man.  
 I give the glossa of Theotypas.]

And then, “ A stick, once fire from end to end ;  
 “ Now, ashes save the tip that holds a spark !  
 “ Yet, blow the spark, it runs back, spreads itself  
 “ A little where the fire was : thus I urge  
 “ The soul that served me, till it task once more  
 “ What ashes of my brain have kept their shape,  
 “ And these make effort on the last o' the flesh,  
 “ Trying to taste again the truth of things—”  
 (He smiled)—“ their very superficial truth ;  
 “ As that ye are my sons, that it is long  
 “ Since James and Peter had release by death,  
 “ And I am only he, your brother John,  
 “ Who saw and heard, and could remember all.  
 “ Remember all ! It is not much to say.  
 “ What if the truth broke on me from above  
 “ As once and oft-times ? Such might hap again :  
 “ Doubtlessly He might stand in presence here,  
 “ With head wool-white, eyes, flame, and feet like brass,  
 “ The sword and the seven stars, as I have seen—

- “ I who now shudder only and surmise  
“ ‘ How did your brother bear that sight and live?’  
  
“ If I live yet, it is for good, more love  
“ Through me to men : be nought but ashes here  
“ That keep awhile my semblance, who was John,—  
“ Still, when they scatter, there is left on earth  
“ No one alive who knew (consider this !)  
“ —Saw with his eyes and handled with his hands  
“ That which was from the first, the Word of Life.  
“ How will it be when none more saith ‘ I saw?’  
  
“ Such ever was love’s way : to rise, it stoops.  
“ Since I, whom Christ’s mouth taught, was bidden teach,  
“ I went, for many years, about the world,  
“ Saying ‘ It was so ; so I heard and saw,’  
“ Speaking as the case asked : and men believed.  
“ Afterward came the message to myself  
“ In Patmos isle ; I was not bidden teach,  
“ But simply listen, take a book and write,  
“ Nor set down other than the given word,  
“ With nothing left to my arbitrament  
“ To choose or change : I wrote, and men believed.  
“ Then, for my time grew brief, no message more,  
“ No call to write again, I found a way,  
“ And, reasoning from my knowledge, merely taught  
“ Men should, for love’s sake, in love’s strength, believe  
“ Or I would pen a letter to a friend  
“ And urge the same as friend, nor less nor more :

“ Friends said I reasoned rightly, and believed.  
“ But at the last, why, I seemed left alive  
“ Like a sea-jelly weak on Patmos strand,  
“ To tell dry sea-beach gazers how I fared  
“ When there was mid-sea, and the mighty things ;  
“ Left to repeat, ‘ I saw, I heard, I knew,’  
“ And go all over the old ground again,  
“ With Antichrist already in the world,  
“ And many Antichrists, who answered prompt  
“ ‘ Am I not Jasper as thyself art John ?  
“ ‘ Nay, young, whereas through age thou mayest forget :  
“ ‘ Wherefore, explain, or how shall we believe ? ’  
“ I never thought to call down fire on such,  
“ Or, as in wonderful and early days,  
“ Pick up the scorpion, tread the serpent dumb ;  
“ But patient stated much of the Lord’s life  
“ Forgotten or misdelivered, and let it work :  
“ Since much that at the first, in deed and word,  
“ Lay simply and sufficiently exposed,  
“ Had grown (or else my soul was grown to match,  
“ Fed through such years, familiar with such light,  
“ Guarded and guided still to see and speak)  
“ Of new significance and fresh result ;  
“ What first were guessed as points, I now knew stars,  
“ And named them in the Gospel I have writ.  
“ For men said, ‘ It is getting long ago : ’  
“ ‘ Where is the promise of His coming ? ’—asked  
“ These young ones in their strength, as loth to wait,  
“ Of me who, when their sires were born, was old.

“ I, for I loved them, answered, joyfully,  
 “ Since I was there, and helpful in my age ;  
 “ And, in the main, I think such men believed.  
 “ Finally, thus endeavouring, I fell sick,  
 “ Ye brought me here, and I supposed the end,  
 “ And went to sleep with one thought that, at least,  
 “ Though the whole earth should lie in wickedness,  
 “ We had the truth, might leave the rest to God.  
 “ Yet now I wake in such decrepitude  
 “ As I had slidden down and fallen afar,  
 “ Past even the presence of my former self,  
 “ Grasping the while for stay at facts which snap,  
 “ Till I am found away from my own world,  
 “ Feeling for foot-hold through a blank profound,  
 “ Along with unborn people in strange lands,  
 “ Who say—I hear said or conceive they say—  
 “ ‘ Was John at all, and did he say he saw ?  
 “ ‘ Assure us, ere we ask what he might see !’

“ And how shall I assure them? Can they share  
 “ —They, who have flesh, a veil of youth and strength  
 “ About each spirit, that needs must bide its time,  
 “ Living and learning still as years assist  
 “ Which wear the thickness thin, and let man see—  
 “ With me who hardly am withheld at all,  
 “ But shudderingly, scarce a shred between,  
 “ Lie bare to the universal prick of light?  
 “ Is it for nothing we grow old and weak,  
 “ We whom God loves? When pain ends, gain ends too.

“ To me, that story—ay, that Life and Death  
“ Of which I wrote ‘it was’—to me, it is ;  
“ —Is, here and now : I apprehend nought else.  
“ Is not God now i’ the world His power first made ?  
“ Is not His love at issue still with sin,  
“ Visibly when a wrong is done on earth ?  
“ Love, wrong, and pain, what see I else around ?  
“ Yea, and the Resurrection and Uprise  
“ To the right hand of the throne—what is it beside,  
“ When such truth, breaking bounds, o’erfloods my soul,  
“ And, as I saw the sin and death, even so  
“ See I the need yet transiency of both,  
“ The good and glory consummated thence ?  
“ I saw the Power ; I see the Love, once weak,  
“ Resume the Power : and in this word ‘ I see,’  
“ Lo, there is recognized the Spirit of both  
“ That moving o’er the spirit of man, unblinds  
“ His eye and bids him look. These are, I see ;  
“ But ye, the children, His beloved ones too,  
“ Ye need,—as I should use an optic glass  
“ I wondered at erewhile, somewhere i’ the world,  
“ It had been given a crafty smith to make ;  
“ A tube, he turned on objects brought too close,  
“ Lying confusedly insubordinate  
“ For the unassisted eye to master once :  
“ Look through his tube, at distance now they lay,  
“ Become succinct, distinct, so small, so clear !  
“ Just thus, ye needs must apprehend what truth  
“ I see, reduced to plain historic fact,

“ Diminished into clearness, proved a point  
“ And far away : ye would withdraw your sense  
“ From out eternity, strain it upon time,  
“ Then stand before that fact, that Life and Death,  
“ Stay there at gaze, till it dispart, dispread,  
“ As though a star should open out, all sides,  
“ And grow the world on you, as it is my world.

“ For life, with all it yields of joy and woe,  
“ And hope and fear,—believe the aged friend,—  
“ Is just our chance o’ the prize of learning love,  
“ How love might be, hath been indeed, and is ;  
“ And that we hold thenceforth to the uttermost  
“ Such prize despite the envy of the world,  
“ And, having gained truth, keep truth : that is all.  
“ But see the double way wherein we are led,  
“ How the soul learns diversely from the flesh !  
“ With flesh, that hath so little time to stay,  
“ And yields mere basement for the soul’s emprise,  
“ Expect prompt teaching. Helpful was the light,  
“ And warmth was cherishing and food was choice  
“ To every man’s flesh, thousand years ago,  
“ As now to yours and mine ; the body sprang  
“ At once to the height, and stayed : but the soul,—no !  
“ Since sages who, this noontide, meditate  
“ In Rome or Athens, may descry some point  
“ Of the eternal power, hid yestereve ;  
“ And as thereby the power’s whole mass extends,  
“ So much extends the æther floating o’er,

“ The love that tops the might, the Christ in God.  
“ Then, as new lessons shall be learned in these  
“ Till earth’s work stop and useless time run out,  
“ So duly, daily, needs provision be  
“ For keeping the soul’s prowess possible,  
“ Building new barriers as the old decay,  
“ Saving us from evasion of life’s proof,  
“ Putting the question ever, ‘ Does God love,  
“ ‘ And will ye hold that truth against the world !’  
“ Ye know there needs no second proof with good  
“ Gained for our flesh from any earthly source :  
“ We might go freezing, ages,—give us fire,  
“ Thereafter we judge fire at its full worth,  
“ And guard it safe through every chance, ye know !  
“ That fable of Prometheus and his theft,  
“ How mortals gained Jove’s fiery flower, grows old  
“ (I have been used to hear the pagans own)  
“ And out of mind ; but fire, howe’er its birth,  
“ Here is it, precious to the sophist now  
“ Who laughs the myth of Æschylus to scorn,  
“ As precious to those satyrs of his play,  
“ Who touched it in gay wonder at the thing.  
“ While were it so with the soul,—this gift of truth  
“ Once grasped, were this our soul’s gain safe, and sure  
“ To prosper as the body’s gain is wont,—  
“ Why, man’s probation would conclude, his earth  
“ Crumble ; for he both reasons and decides,  
“ Weighs first, then chooses : will he give up fire  
“ For gold or purple once he knows its worth ?



- “ Could he give Christ up were His worth as plain ?  
“ Therefore, I say, to test man, the proofs shift,  
“ Nor may he grasp that fact like other fact,  
“ And straightway in his life acknowledge it,  
“ As, say, the indubitable bliss of fire.  
“ Sigh ye, ‘ It had been easier once than now ? ’  
“ To give you answer I am left alive ;  
“ Look at me who was present from the first !  
“ Ye know what things I saw ; then came a test,  
“ My first, befitting me who so had seen :  
“ ‘ Forsake the Christ thou sawest transfigured, Him  
“ ‘ Who trod the sea and brought the dead to life ?  
“ ‘ What should wring this from thee ! ’—ye laugh and ask.  
“ What wrung it ? Even a torchlight and a noise,  
“ The sudden Roman faces, violent hands,  
“ And fear of what the Jews might do ! Just that,  
“ And it is written, ‘ I forsook and fled : ’  
“ There was my trial, and it ended thus.  
“ Ay, but my soul had gained its truth, could grow :  
“ Another year or two,—what little child,  
“ What tender woman that had seen no least  
“ Of all my sights, but barely heard them told,  
“ Who did not clasp the cross with a light laugh,  
“ Or wrap the burning robe round, thanking God ?  
“ Well, was-truth safe for ever, then ? Not so.  
“ Already had begun the silent work  
“ Whereby truth, deadened of its absolute blaze,  
“ Might need love’s eye to pierce the o’erstretched doubt ;  
“ Teachers were busy, whispering ‘ All is true

“ ‘ As the aged ones report ; but youth can reach  
 “ ‘ Where age gropes dimly, weak with stir and strain,  
 “ ‘ And the full doctrine slumbers till to-day.’  
 “ Thus, what the Roman’s lowered spear was found,  
 “ A bar to me who touched and handled truth,  
 “ Now proved the glozing of some new shrewd tongue,  
 “ This Ebion, this Cerinthus or their mates,  
 “ Till imminent was the outcry ‘ Save our Christ !’  
 “ Whereon I stated much of the Lord’s life  
 “ Forgotten or misdelivered, and let it work.  
 “ Such work done, as it will be, what comes next ?  
 “ What do I hear say, or conceive men say,  
 “ ‘ Was John at all, and did he say he saw ?  
 “ ‘ Assure us, ere we ask what he might see !’

“ Is this indeed a burthen for late days,  
 “ And may I help to bear it with you all,  
 “ Using my weakness which becomes your strength ?  
 “ For if a babe were born inside this grot,  
 “ Grew to a boy here, heard us praise the sun,  
 “ Yet had but yon sole glimmer in light’s place,—  
 “ One loving him and wishful he should learn,  
 “ Would much rejoice himself was blinded first  
 “ Month by month here, so made to understand  
 “ How eyes, born darkling, apprehend amiss :  
 “ I think I could explain to such a child  
 “ There was more glow outside than gleams he caught,  
 “ Ay, nor need urge ‘ I saw it, so believe !’  
 “ It is a heavy burthen you shall bear

“ In latter days, new lands, or old grown strange,  
“ Left without me, which must be very soon.  
“ What is the doubt, my brothers? Quick with it !  
“ I see you stand conversing, each new face,  
“ Either in fields, of yellow summer eves,  
“ On islets yet unnamed amid the sea ;  
“ Or pace for shelter 'neath a portico  
“ Out of the crowd in some enormous town  
“ Where now the larks sing in a solitude ;  
“ Or muse upon blank heaps of stone and sand  
“ Idly conjectured to be Ephesus :  
“ And no one asks his fellow any more  
“ ‘ Where is the promise of His coming?’ but  
“ ‘ Was He revealed in any of His lives,  
“ ‘ As Power, as Love, as Influencing Soul?’  
  
“ Quick, for time presses, tell the whole mind out,  
“ And let us ask and answer and be saved !  
“ My book speaks on, because it cannot pass ;  
“ One listens quietly, nor scoffs but pleads  
“ ‘ Here is a tale of things done ages since ;  
“ ‘ What truth was ever told the second day?  
“ ‘ Wonders, that would prove doctrine, go for nought.  
“ ‘ Remains the doctrine, love ; well, we must love,  
“ ‘ And what we love most, power and love in one,  
“ ‘ Let us acknowledge on the record here,  
“ ‘ Accepting these in Christ: must Christ then be?  
“ ‘ Has He been? Did not we ourselves make Him?  
“ ‘ Our mind receives but what it holds, no more.

“ ‘ First of the love, then ; we acknowledge Christ—  
 “ ‘ A proof we comprehend His love, a proof  
 “ ‘ We had such love already in ourselves,  
 “ ‘ Knew first what else we should not recognize.  
 “ ‘ ’T is mere projection from man’s inmost mind,  
 “ ‘ And, what he loves, thus falls reflected back,  
 “ ‘ Becomes accounted somewhat out of him ;  
 “ ‘ He throws it up in air, it drops down earth’s,  
 “ ‘ With shape, name, story added, man’s old way.  
 “ ‘ How prove you Christ came otherwise at least ?  
 “ ‘ Next try the power : He made and rules the world :  
 “ ‘ Certes there is a world once made, now ruled,  
 “ ‘ Unless things have been ever as we see.  
 “ ‘ Our sires declared a charioteer’s yoked steeds  
 “ ‘ Brought the sun up the east and down the west,  
 “ ‘ Which only of itself now rises, sets,  
 “ ‘ As if a hand impelled it and a will,—  
 “ ‘ Thus they long thought, they who had will and hands :  
 “ ‘ But the new question’s whisper is distinct,  
 “ ‘ Wherefore must all force needs be like ourselves ?  
 “ ‘ We have the hands, the will ; what made and drives  
 “ ‘ The sun is force, is law, is named, not known,  
 “ ‘ While will and love we do know ; marks of these,  
 “ ‘ Eye-witnesses attest, so books declare—  
 “ ‘ As that, to punish or reward our race,  
 “ ‘ The sun at undue times arose or set  
 “ ‘ Or else stood still : what do not men affirm ?  
 “ ‘ But earth requires as urgently reward  
 “ ‘ Or punishment to-day as years ago,

“ ‘ And none expects the sun will interpose :  
“ ‘ Therefore it was mere passion and mistake,  
“ ‘ Or erring zeal for right, which changed the truth.  
“ ‘ Go back, far, farther, to the birth of things ;  
“ ‘ Ever the will, the intelligence, the love,  
“ ‘ Man’s !—which he gives, supposing he but finds,  
“ ‘ As late he gave head, body, hands and feet,  
“ ‘ To help these in what forms he called his gods.  
“ ‘ First, Jove’s brow, Juno’s eyes were swept away,  
“ ‘ But Jove’s wrath, Juno’s pride continued long ;  
“ ‘ As last, will, power, and love discarded these,  
“ ‘ So law in turn discards power, love, and will.  
“ ‘ What proveth God is otherwise at least ?  
“ ‘ All else, projection from the mind of man !’

“ ‘ Nay, do not give me wine, for I am strong,  
“ ‘ But place my gospel where I put my hands.

“ ‘ I say that man was made to grow, not stop ;  
“ ‘ That help, he needed once, and needs no more,  
“ ‘ Having grown up but an inch by, is withdrawn :  
“ ‘ For he hath new needs, and new helps to these.  
“ ‘ This imports solely, man should mount on each  
“ ‘ New height in view ; the help whereby he mounts,  
“ ‘ The ladder-rung his foot has left, may fall,  
“ ‘ Since all things suffer change save God the Truth.  
“ ‘ Man apprehends Him newly at each stage  
“ ‘ Whereat earth’s ladder drops, its service done ;  
“ ‘ And nothing shall prove twice what once was proved.

“ You stick a garden-plot with ordered twigs  
 “ To show inside lie germs of herbs unborn,  
 “ And check the careless step would spoil their birth ;  
 “ But when herbs wave, the guardian twigs may go,  
 “ Since should ye doubt of virtues, question kinds,  
 “ It is no longer for old twigs ye look,  
 “ Which proved once underneath lay store of seed,  
 “ But to the herb’s self, by what light ye boast,  
 “ For what fruit’s signs are. This book’s fruit is plain,  
 “ Nor miracles need prove it any more.  
 “ Doth the fruit show? Then miracles bade ’ware  
 “ At first of root and stem, saved both till now  
 “ From trampling ox, rough boar and wanton goat.  
 “ What? Was man made a wheelwork to wind up,  
 “ And be discharged, and straight wound up anew?  
 “ No !—grown, his growth lasts ; taught, he ne’er forgets :  
 “ May learn a thousand things, not twice the same.

“ This might be pagan teaching : now hear mine.

“ I say, that as the babe, you feed awhile,  
 “ Becomes a boy and fit to feed himself,  
 “ So, minds at first must be spoon-fed with truth :  
 “ When they can eat, babe’s nurture is withdrawn.  
 “ I fed the babe whether it would or no :  
 “ I bid the boy or feed himself or starve.  
 “ I cried once, ‘ That ye may believe in Christ,  
 “ ‘ Behold this blind man shall receive his sight !’  
 “ I cry now, ‘ Urgest thou, *for I am shrewd*

- “ ‘ *And smile at stories how John’s word could cure—*  
“ ‘ *Repeat that miracle and take my faith ?* ’  
“ I say, that miracle was duly wrought  
“ When, save for it, no faith was possible.  
“ Whether a change were wrought i’ the shows o’ the world,  
“ Whether the change came from our minds which see  
“ Of the shows o’ the world so much as and no more  
“ Than God wills for His purpose,—(what do I  
“ See now, suppose you, there where you see rock  
“ Round us?)—I know not ; such was the effect,  
“ So faith grew, making void more miracles  
“ Because too much : they would compel, not help.  
“ I say, the acknowledgment of God in Christ  
“ Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee  
“ All questions in the earth and out of it,  
“ And has so far advanced thee to be wise.  
“ Wouldst thou unprove this to re-prove the proved ?  
“ In life’s mere minute, with power to use that proof,  
“ Leave knowledge and revert to how it sprung ?  
“ Thou hast it ; use it and forthwith, or die !  
“ For I say, this is death and the sole death,  
“ When a man’s loss comes to him from his gain,  
“ Darkness from light, from knowledge ignorance,  
“ And lack of love from love made manifest ;  
“ A lamp’s death when, replete with oil, it chokes ;  
“ A stomach’s when, surcharged with food, it starves.  
“ With ignorance was surety of a cure.  
“ When man, appalled at nature, questioned first

- “ ‘ What if there lurk a might behind this might ? ’  
 “ He needed satisfaction God could give,  
 “ And did give, as ye have the written word :  
 “ But when he finds might still redouble might,  
 “ Yet asks, ‘ Since all is might, what use of will ? ’  
 “ — Will, the one source of might,—he being man  
 “ With a man’s will and a man’s might, to teach  
 “ In little how the two combine in large,—  
 “ That man has turned round on himself and stands,  
 “ Which in the course of nature is, to die.
- “ And when man questioned, ‘ What if there be love  
 “ ‘ Behind the will and might, as real as they ? ’—  
 “ He needed satisfaction God could give,  
 “ And did give, as ye have the written word :  
 “ But when, beholding that love everywhere,  
 “ He reasons, ‘ Since such love is everywhere,  
 “ ‘ And since ourselves can love and would be loved,  
 “ ‘ We ourselves make the love, and Christ was not,’—  
 “ How shall ye help this man who knows himself,  
 “ That he must love and would be loved again,  
 “ Yet, owning his own love that proveth Christ,  
 “ Rejecteth Christ through very need of Him ?  
 “ The lamp o’erswims with oil, the stomach flags  
 “ Loaded with nurture, and that man’s soul dies.
- “ If he rejoin, ‘ But this was all the while  
 “ ‘ A trick ; the fault was, first of all, in thee,  
 “ ‘ Thy story of the places, names and dates,



“ ‘ Where, when and how the ultimate truth had rise,  
 “ ‘ —Thy prior truth, at last discovered none,  
 “ ‘ Whence now the second suffers detriment.  
 “ ‘ What good of giving knowledge if, because  
 “ ‘ Of the manner of the gift, its profit fail?  
 “ ‘ And why refuse what modicum of help  
 “ ‘ Had stopped the after-doubt, impossible  
 “ ‘ I’ the face of truth—truth absolute, uniform?  
 “ ‘ Why must I hit of this and miss of that,  
 “ ‘ Distinguish just as I be weak or strong,  
 “ ‘ And not ask of thee and have answer prompt,  
 “ ‘ Was this once, was it not once?—then and now  
 “ ‘ And evermore, plain truth from man to man.  
 “ ‘ Is John’s procedure just the heathen bard’s?  
 “ ‘ Put question of his famous play again  
 “ ‘ How for the ephemerals’ sake, Jove’s fire was filched,  
 “ ‘ And carried in a cane and brought to earth:  
 “ ‘ *The fact is in the fable, cry the wise,*  
 “ ‘ *Mortals obtained the boon, so much is fact,*  
 “ ‘ *Though fire be spirit and produced on earth.*  
 “ ‘ As with the Titan’s, so now with thy tale:  
 “ ‘ Why breed in us perplexity, mistake,  
 “ ‘ Nor tell the whole truth in the proper words?’  
  
 “ I answer, Have ye yet to argue out  
 “ The very primal thesis, plainest law,  
 “ —Man is not God but hath God’s end to serve,  
 “ A master to obey, a course to take,  
 “ Somewhat to cast off, somewhat to become?

- “ Grant this, then man must pass from old to new,  
“ From vain to real, from mistake to fact,  
“ From what once seemed good, to what now proves  
    best.
- “ How could man have progression otherwise?  
“ Before the point was mooted ‘ What is God?’  
“ No savage man inquired ‘ What am myself?’  
“ Much less replied, ‘ First, last, and best of things.’  
“ Man takes that title now if he believes  
“ Might can exist with neither will nor love,  
“ In God’s case—what he names now Nature’s Law—  
“ While in himself he recognises love  
“ No less than might and will : and rightly takes.  
“ Since if man prove the sole existent thing  
“ Where these combine, whatever their degree,  
“ However weak the might or will or love,  
“ So they be found there, put in evidence,—  
“ He is as surely higher in the scale  
“ Than any might with neither love nor will,  
“ As life, apparent in the poorest midge,  
“ (When the faint dust-speck flits, ye guess its wing)  
“ Is marvellous beyond dead Atlas’ self :  
“ I give such to the midge for resting-place !  
“ Thus, man proves best and highest—God, in fine,  
“ And thus the victory leads but to defeat,  
“ The gain to loss, best rise to the worst fall,  
“ His life becomes impossible, which is death.
- “ But if, appealing thence, he cower, avouch

“ He is mere man, and in humility  
“ Neither may know God nor mistake himself ;  
“ I point to the immediate consequence  
“ And say, by such confession straight he falls  
“ Into man’s place, a thing nor God nor beast,  
“ Made to know that he can know and not more :  
“ Lower than God who knows all and can all,  
“ Higher than beasts which know and can so far  
“ As each beast’s limit, perfect to an end,  
“ Nor conscious that they know, nor craving more ;  
“ While man knows partly but conceives beside,  
“ Creeps ever on from fancies to the fact,  
“ And in this striving, this converting air  
“ Into a solid he may grasp and use,  
“ Finds progress, man’s distinctive mark alone,  
“ Not God’s, and not the beasts’ : God is, they are,  
“ Man partly is and wholly hopes to be.  
“ Such progress could no more attend his soul  
“ Were all it struggles after found at first  
“ And guesses changed to knowledge absolute,  
“ Than motion wait his body, were all else  
“ Than it the solid earth on every side,  
“ Where now through space he moves from rest to rest.  
“ Man, therefore, thus conditioned, must expect  
“ He could not, what he knows now, know at first ;  
“ What he considers that he knows to-day,  
“ Come but to-morrow, he will find misknown ;  
“ Getting increase of knowledge, since he learns  
“ Because he lives, which is to be a man,

- “ Set to instruct himself by his past self :  
“ First, like the brute, obliged by facts to learn,  
“ Next, as man may, obliged by his own mind,  
“ Bent, habit, nature, knowledge turned to law.  
“ God’s gift was that man should conceive of truth  
“ And yearn to gain it, catching at mistake,  
“ As midway help till he reach fact indeed.  
“ The statuary ere he mould a shape  
“ Boasts a like gift, the shape’s idea, and next  
“ The aspiration to produce the same ;  
“ So, taking clay, he calls his shape thereout,  
“ Cries ever ‘ Now I have the thing I see : ’  
“ Yet all the while goes changing what was wrought,  
“ From falsehood like the truth, to truth itself.  
“ How were it had he cried ‘ I see no face,  
“ ‘ No breast, no feet i’ the ineffectual clay ? ’  
“ Rather commend him that he clapped his hands,  
“ And laughed ‘ It is my shape and lives again ! ’  
“ Enjoyed the falsehood, touched it on to truth,  
“ Until yourselves applaud the flesh indeed  
“ In what is still flesh-imitating clay.  
“ Right in you, right in him, such way be man’s !  
“ God only makes the live shape at a jet.  
“ Will ye renounce this pact of creatureship ?  
“ The pattern on the Mount subsists no more,  
“ Seemed awhile, then returned to nothingness ;  
“ But copies, Moses strove to make thereby,  
“ Serve still and are replaced as time requires :  
“ By these, make newest vessels, reach the type !

“ If ye demur, this judgment on your head,  
“ Never to reach the ultimate, angels’ law,  
“ Indulging every instinct of the soul  
“ There where law, life, joy, impulse are one thing !

“ Such is the burthen of the latest time.  
“ I have survived to hear it with my ears,  
“ Answer it with my lips : does this suffice ?  
“ For if there be a further woe than such,  
“ Wherein my brothers struggling need a hand,  
“ So long as any pulse is left in mine,  
“ May I be absent even longer yet,  
“ Plucking the blind ones back from the abyss,  
“ Though I should tarry a new hundred years ! ”

But he was dead : ’twas about noon, the day  
Somewhat declining : we five buried him  
That eve, and then, dividing, went five ways,  
And I, disguised, returned to Ephesus.

By this, the cave’s mouth must be filled with sand.  
Valens is lost, I know not of his trace ;  
The Bactrian was but a wild childish man,  
And could not write nor speak, but only loved :  
So, lest the memory of this go quite,  
Seeing that I to-morrow fight the beasts,  
I tell the same to Phœbas, whom believe !  
For many look again to find that face,  
Beloved John’s to whom I ministered,

Somewhere in life about the world ; they err :  
 Either mistaking what was darkly spoke  
 At ending of his book, as he relates,  
 Or misconceiving somewhat of this speech  
 Scattered from mouth to mouth, as I suppose.  
 Believe ye will not see him any more  
 About the world with his divine regard !  
 For all was as I say, and now the man  
 Lies as he lay once, breast to breast with God.

---

[Cerinthus read and mused ; one added this :

“ If Christ, as thou affirmest, be of men  
 “ Mere man, the first and best but nothing more,—  
 “ Account Him, for reward of what He was,  
 “ Now and for ever, wretchedest of all.  
 “ For see ; Himself conceived of life as love,  
 “ Conceived of love as what must enter in,  
 “ Fill up, make one with His each soul He loved :  
 “ Thus much for man’s joy, all men’s joy for Him.  
 “ Well, He is gone, thou sayest, to fit reward.  
 “ But by this time are many souls set free,  
 “ And very many still retained alive :  
 “ Nay, should His coming be delayed awhile,  
 “ Say, ten years longer (twelve years, some compute)  
 “ See if, for every finger of thy hands,  
 “ There be not found, that day the world shall end,  
 “ Hundreds of souls, each holding by Christ’s word

“ That He will grow incorporate with all,  
“ With me as Pamphylax, with him as John,  
“ Groom for each bride ! Can a mere man do this ?  
“ Yet Christ saith, this He lived and died to do.  
“ Call Christ, then, the illimitable God,  
“ Or lost !”

But 'twas Cerinthus that is lost.]

# CALIBAN UPON SETEBOS ;

OR,

NATURAL THEOLOGY IN THE ISLAND.

---

[WILL sprawl, now that the heat of day is best,  
Flat on his belly in the pit's much mire,  
With elbows wide, fists clenched to prop his chin ;  
And, while he kicks both feet in the cool slush,  
And feels about his spine small eft-things course,  
Run in and out each arm, and make him laugh ;  
And while above his head a pompion-plant,  
Coating the cave-top as a brow its eye,  
Creeps down to touch and tickle hair and beard,  
And now a flower drops with a bee inside,  
And now a fruit to snap at, catch and crunch,—  
He looks out o'er yon sea which sunbeams cross  
And recross till they weave a spider-web,  
(Meshes of fire, some great fish breaks at times)  
And talks to his own self, howe'er he please,  
Touching that other, whom his dam called God.  
Because to talk about Him, vexes—ha,



Could He but know ! and time to vex is now,  
 When talk is safer than in winter-time.  
 Moreover Prosper and Miranda sleep  
 In confidence he drudges at their task,  
 And it is good to cheat the pair, and gibe,  
 Letting the rank tongue blossom into speech.]

Setebos, Setebos, and Setebos !

'Thinketh, He dwelleth i' the cold o' the moon.

'Thinketh He made it, with the sun to match,  
 But not the stars ; the stars came otherwise ;  
 Only made clouds, winds, meteors, such as that :  
 Also this isle, what lives and grows thereon,  
 And snaky sea which rounds and ends the same.

'Thinketh, it came of being ill at ease :  
 He hated that He cannot change His cold,  
 Nor cure its ache. 'Hath spied an icy fish  
 That longed to 'scape the rock-stream where she lived,  
 And thaw herself within the lukewarm brine  
 O' the lazy sea her stream thrusts far amid,  
 A crystal spike 'twixt two warm walls of wave ;  
 Only she ever sickened, found repulse  
 At the other kind of water, not her life,  
 (Green-dense and dim-delicious, bred o' the sun)  
 Flounced back from bliss she was not born to breathe,  
 And in her old bounds buried her despair,  
 Hating and loving warmth alike : so He.

'Thinketh, He made thereat the sun, this isle,  
Trees and the fowls here, beast and creeping thing.  
Yon otter, sleek-wet, black, lithe as a leech ;  
Yon auk, one fire-eye in a ball of foam,  
That floats and feeds ; a certain badger brown  
He hath watched hunt with that slant white-wedge eye  
By moonlight ; and the pie with the long tongue  
That pricks deep into oakwarts for a worm,  
And says a plain word when she finds her prize,  
But will not eat the ants ; the ants themselves  
That build a wall of seeds and settled stalks  
About their hole—He made all these and more,  
Made all we see, and us, in spite : how else ?  
He could not, Himself, make a second self  
To be His mate ; as well have made Himself.  
He would not make what He mislikes or slights,  
An eyesore to Him, or not worth His pains :  
But did, in envy, listlessness or sport,  
Make what Himself would fain, in a manner, be—  
Weaker in most points, stronger in a few,  
Worthy, and yet mere playthings all the while,  
Things He admires and mocks too,—that is it.  
Because, so brave, so better though they be,  
It nothing skills if He begin to plague.  
Look now, I melt a gourd-fruit into mash,  
Add honeycomb and pods, I have perceived,  
Which bite like finches when they bill and kiss,—  
Then, when froth rises bladdery, drink up all,  
Quick, quick, till maggots scamper through my brain ;

And throw me on my back i' the seeded thyme,  
 And wanton, wishing I were born a bird.  
 Put case, unable to be what I wish,  
 I yet could make a live bird out of clay :  
 Would not I take clay, pinch my Caliban  
 Able to fly?—for, there, see, he hath wings,  
 And great comb like the hoopoe's to admire,  
 And there, a sting to do his foes offence,  
 There, and I will that he begin to live,  
 Fly to yon rock-top, nip me off the horns  
 Of grigs high up that make the merry din,  
 Saucy through their veined wings, and mind me not.  
 In which feat, if his leg snapped, brittle clay,  
 And he lay stupid-like,—why, I should laugh ;  
 And if he, spying me, should fall to weep,  
 Beseech me to be good, repair his wrong,  
 Bid his poor leg smart less or grow again,—  
 Well, as the chance were, this might take or else  
 Not take my fancy : I might hear his cry,  
 And give the manikin three legs for one,  
 Or pluck the other off, leave him like an egg,  
 And lessoned he was mine and merely clay.  
 Were this no pleasure, lying in the thyme,  
 Drinking the mash, with brain become alive,  
 Making and marring clay at will? So He.

'Thinketh, such shows nor right nor wrong in Him,  
 Nor kind, nor cruel : He is strong and Lord.

'Am strong myself compared to yonder crabs

That march now from the mountain to the sea ;  
 'Let twenty pass, and stone the twenty-first,  
 Loving not, hating not, just choosing so.  
 'Say, the first straggler that boasts purple spots  
 Shall join the file, one pincer twisted off ;  
 'Say, This bruised fellow shall receive a worm,  
 And two worms he whose nippers end in red ;  
 As it likes me each time, I do : so He.

Well then, 'supposeth He is good i' the main,  
 Placable if His mind and ways were guessed,  
 But rougher than His handiwork, be sure !  
 Oh, He hath made things worthier than Himself,  
 And envieth that, so helped, such things do more  
 Than He who made them ! What consoles but this ?  
 That they, unless through Him, do nought at all,  
 And must submit : what other use in things ?  
 'Hath cut a pipe of pithless elder-joint  
 That, blown through, gives exact the scream o' the jay  
 When from her wing you twitch the feathers blue :  
 Sound this, and little birds that hate the jay  
 Flock within stone's throw, glad their foe is hurt :  
 Put case such pipe could prattle and boast forsooth  
 " I catch the birds, I am the crafty thing,  
 " I make the cry my maker cannot make  
 " With his great round mouth ; he must blow through  
     mine !"  
 Would not I smash it with my foot ? So He.

But wherefore rough, why cold and ill at ease ?  
Aha, that is a question ! Ask, for that,  
What knows,—the something over Setebos  
That made Him, or He, may be, found and fought,  
Worsted, drove off and did to nothing, perchance.  
There may be something quiet o'er His head,  
Out of His reach, that feels nor joy nor grief,  
Since both derive from weakness in some way.  
I joy because the quails come ; would not joy  
Could I bring quails here when I have a mind :  
This Quiet, all it hath a mind to, doth.  
'Esteemeth stars the outposts of its couch,  
But never spends much thought nor care that way.  
It may look up, work up,—the worse for those  
It works on ! 'Careth but for Setebos  
The many-handed as a cuttle-fish,  
Who, making Himself feared through what He does,  
Looks up, first, and perceives he cannot soar  
To what is quiet and hath happy life ;  
Next looks down here, and out of very spite  
Makes this a bauble-world to ape yon real,  
These good things to match those as hips do grapes.  
'T is solace making baubles, ay, and sport.  
Himself peeped late, eyed Prosper at his books  
Careless and lofty, lord now of the isle :  
Vexed, 'stitched a book of broad leaves, arrow-shaped,  
Wrote thereon, he knows what, prodigious words ;  
Has peeled a wand and called it by a name ;  
Weareth at whiles for an enchanter's robe

The eyed skin of a supple oncelot ;  
 And hath an ounce sleeker than youngling mole,  
 A four-legged serpent he makes cower and couch,  
 Now snarl, now hold its breath and mind his eye,  
 And saith she is Miranda and my wife :  
 'Keeps for his Ariel a tall pouch-bill crane  
 He bids go wade for fish and straight disgorge ;  
 Also a sea-beast, lumpish, which he snared,  
 Blinded the eyes of, and brought somewhat tame,  
 And split its toe-webs, and now pens the drudge  
 In a hole o' the rock and calls him Caliban ;  
 A bitter heart that bides its time and bites.  
 'Plays thus at being Prosper in a way,  
 Taketh his mirth with make-believes : so He.

His dam held that the Quiet made all things  
 Which Setebos vexed only : 'holds not so.  
 Who made them weak, meant weakness He might vex.  
 Had He meant other, while His hand was in,  
 Why not make horny eyes no thorn could prick,  
 Or plate my scalp with bone against the snow,  
 Or overscale my flesh 'neath joint and joint,  
 Like an orc's armour? Ay,—so spoil His sport !  
 He is the One now : only He doth all.

'Saith, He may like, perchance, what profits Him.  
 Ay, himself loves what does him good ; but why ?  
 'Gets good no otherwise. This blinded beast  
 Loves whoso places flesh-meat on his nose,

But, had he eyes, would want no help, but hate  
Or love, just as it liked him: He hath eyes.  
Also it pleaseth Setebos to work,  
Use all His hands, and exercise much craft,  
By no means for the love of what is worked.  
'Tasteth, himself, no finer good i' the world  
When all goes right, in this safe summer-time,  
And he wants little, hungers, aches not much,  
Than trying what to do with wit and strength.  
'Falls to make something: 'piled yon pile of turfs,  
And squared and stuck there squares of soft white chalk,  
And, with a fish-tooth, scratched a moon on each,  
And set up endwise certain spikes of tree,  
And crowned the whole with a sloth's skull a-top,  
Found dead i' the woods, too hard for one to kill.  
No use at all i' the work, for work's sole sake;  
'Shall some day knock it down again: so He.

'Saith He is terrible: watch His feats in proof!  
One hurricane will spoil six good months' hope.  
He hath a spite against me, that I know,  
Just as He favours Prosper, who knows why?  
So it is, all the same, as well I find.

'Wove wattles half the winter, fenced them firm  
With stone and stake to stop she-tortoises  
Crawling to lay their eggs here: well, one wave,  
Feeling the foot of Him upon its neck,  
Gaped as a snake does, lolled out its large tongue,  
And licked the whole labour flat: so much for spite

'Saw a ball flame down late (yonder it lies)  
 Where, half an hour before, I slept i' the shade :  
 Often they scatter sparkles : there is force !  
 'Dug up a newt He may have envied once  
 And turned to stone, shut up inside a stone.  
 Please Him and hinder this ?—What Prosper does ?  
 Aha, if He would tell me how ! Not He !  
 There is the sport : discover how or die !  
 All need not die, for of the things o' the isle  
 Some flee afar, some dive, some run up trees ;  
 Those at His mercy,—why, they please Him most  
 When . . when . . well, never try the same way twice !  
 Repeat what act has pleased, He may grow wroth.  
 You must not know His ways, and play Him off,  
 Sure of the issue. 'Doth the like himself :  
 'Spareth a squirrel that it nothing fears  
 But steals the nut from underneath my thumb,  
 And when I threat, bites stoutly in defence :  
 'Spareth an urchin that, contrariwise,  
 Curles up into a ball, pretending death  
 For fright at my approach : the two ways please.  
 But what would move my choler more than this,  
 That either creature counted on its life  
 To-morrow and next day and all days to come,  
 Saying forsooth in the inmost of its heart,  
 " Because he did so yesterday with me,  
 " And otherwise with such another brute,  
 " So must he do henceforth and always."—Ay ?  
 'Would teach the reasoning couple what " must " means !



'Doth as he likes, or wherefore Lord? So He.

'Conceiveth all things will continue thus,  
And we shall have to live in fear of Him  
So long as He lives, keeps His strength : no change,  
If He have done His best, make no new world  
To please Him more, so leave off watching this,—  
If He surprise not even the Quiet's self  
Some strange day,—or, suppose, grow into it  
As grubs grow butterflies : else, here are we,  
And there is He, and nowhere help at all.

'Believeth with the life, the pain shall stop.  
His dam held different, that after death  
He both plagued enemies and feasted friends :  
Idly ! He doth His worst in this our life,  
Giving just respite lest we die through pain,  
Saving last pain for worst,—with which, an end.  
Meanwhile, the best way to escape His ire  
Is, not to seem too happy. 'Sees, himself,  
Yonder two flies, with purple films and pink,  
Bask on the pompion-bell above : kills both.  
'Sees two black painful beetles roll their ball  
On head and tail as if to save their lives :  
Moves them the stick away they strive to clear.

Even so, 'would have Him misconceive, suppose  
This Caliban strives hard and ails no less,  
And always, above all else, envies Him ;

Wherefore he mainly dances on dark nights,  
 Moans in the sun, gets under holes to laugh,  
 And never speaks his mind save housed as now :  
 Outside, 'groans, curses. If He caught me here,  
 O'erheard this speech, and asked " What chucklest at ? "  
 'Would, to appease Him, cut a finger off,  
 Or of my three kid yearlings burn the best,  
 Or let the toothsome apples rot on tree,  
 Or push my tame beast for the orc to taste :  
 While myself lit a fire, and made a song  
 And sung it, "*What I hate, be consecrate*  
 "*To celebrate Thee and Thy state, no mate*  
 "*For Thee ; what see for envy in poor me ? "*  
 Hoping the while, since evils sometimes mend,  
 Warts rub away and sores are cured with slime,  
 That some strange day, will either the Quiet catch  
 And conquer Setebos, or likelier He  
 Decrepit may doze, doze, as good as die.

---

[What, what? A curtain o'er the world at once !  
 Crickets stop hissing ; not a bird—or, yes,  
 There scuds His raven that hath told Him all !  
 It was fool's play, this prattling ! Ha The wind  
 Shoulders the pillared dust, death's house o' the move,  
 And fast invading fires begin ! White blaze—  
 A tree's head snaps—and there, there, there, there,  
 there,

His thunder follows ! Fool to gibe at Him !  
Lo ! 'Lieth flat and loveth Setebos !  
'Maketh his teeth meet through his upper lip,  
Will let those quails fly, will not eat this month  
One little mess of whelks, so he may 'scape !]

## CONFESSIONS.

---

### I.

WHAT is he buzzing in my ears?

“ Now that I come to die,

“ Do I view the world as a vale of tears?”

Ah, reverend sir, not I!

### II.

What I viewed there once, what I view again

Where the physic bottles stand

On the table's edge,—is a suburb lane,

With a wall to my bedside hand.

### III.

That lane sloped, much as the bottles do,

From a house you could descry

O'er the garden-wall: is the curtain blue

Or green to a healthy eye?

### IV.

To mine, it serves for the old June weather

Blue above lane and wall;

And that farthest bottle labelled “ Ether ”

Is the house o'er-topping all.

## v.

At a terrace, somewhat near the stopper,  
 There watched for me, one June,  
 A girl: I know, sir, it 's improper,  
 My poor mind 's out of tune.

## vi.

Only, there was a way . . you crept  
 Close by the side, to dodge  
 Eyes in the house, two eyes except:  
 They styled their house "The Lodge."

## vii.

What right had a lounge up their lane?  
 But, by creeping very close,  
 With the good wall's help,—their eyes might strain  
 And stretch themselves to Oes,

## viii.

Yet never catch her and me together,  
 As she left the attic, there,  
 By the rim of the bottle labelled "Ether,"  
 And stole from stair to stair,

## ix.

And stood by the rose-wreathed gate. Alas,  
 We loved, sir—used to meet:  
 How sad and bad and mad it was—  
 But then, how it was sweet!

## MAY AND DEATH.

---

### I.

I WISH that when you died last May,  
Charles, there had died along with you  
Three parts of spring's delightful things ;  
Ay, and, for me, the fourth part too.

### II.

A foolish thought, and worse, perhaps !  
There must be many a pair of friends  
Who, arm in arm, deserve the warm  
Moon-births and the long evening-ends.

### III.

So, for their sake, be May still May !  
Let their new time, as mine of old,  
Do all it did for me : I bid  
Sweet sights and sounds throng manifold.

### IV.

Only, one little sight, one plant,  
Woods have in May, that starts up green  
Save a sole streak which, so to speak,  
Is spring's blood, spilt its leaves between,—

v.

That, they might spare ; a certain wood  
Might miss the plant ; their loss were small :  
But I,—whene'er the leaf grows there,  
Its drop comes from my heart, that 's all.

---

## DEAF AND DUMB.

A GROUP BY WOOLNER.

---

ONLY the prism's obstruction shows aright  
The secret of a sunbeam, breaks its light  
Into the jewelled bow from blankest white ;  
So may a glory from defect arise :  
Only by Deafness may the vexed Love wreak  
Its insuppressive sense on brow and cheek,  
Only by Dumbness adequately speak  
As favoured mouth could never, through the eyes.

## P R O S P I C E .

---

FEAR death?—to feel the fog in my throat,  
The mist in my face,  
When the snows begin, and the blasts denote  
I am nearing the place,  
The power of the night, the press of the storm,  
The post of the foe ;  
Where he stands, the Arch Fear in a visible form,  
Yet the strong man must go :  
For the journey is done and the summit attained,  
And the barriers fall,  
Though a battle 's to fight ere the guerdon be gained,  
The reward of it all.  
I was ever a fighter, so—one fight more,  
The best and the last !  
I would hate that death bandaged my eyes, and forbore,  
And bade me creep past.  
No ! let me taste the whole of it, fare like my peers  
The heroes of old,  
Bear the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's arrears  
Of pain, darkness and cold.



For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,  
The black minute 's at end,  
And the elements' rage, the fiend-voices that rave,  
Shall dwindle, shall blend,  
Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,  
Then a light, then thy breast,  
O thou soul of my soul ! I shall clasp thee again,  
And with God be the rest !

---

## EURYDICE TO ORPHEUS.

A PICTURE BY LEIGHTON.

---

BUT give them me, the mouth, the eyes, the brow !  
Let them once more absorb me ! One look now  
Will lap me round for ever, not to pass  
Out of its light, though darkness lie beyond :  
Hold me but safe again within the bond  
Of one immortal look ! All woe that was,  
Forgotten, and all terror that may be,  
Defied,—no past is mine, no future : look at me !

## YOUTH AND ART.

---

### I.

It once might have been, once only :  
We lodged in a street together,  
You, a sparrow on the housetop lonely,  
I, a lone she-bird of his feather.

### II.

Your trade was with sticks and clay,  
You thumbed, thrust, patted and polished,  
Then laughed " They will see some day  
" Smith made, and Gibson demolished."

### III.

My business was song, song, song ;  
I chirped, cheeped, trilled and twittered,  
" Kate Brown 's on the boards ere long,  
" And Grisi's existence embittered !"

### IV.

I earned no more by a warble  
Than you by a sketch in plaster ;  
You wanted a piece of marble,  
I needed a music-master.

## V.

We studied hard in our styles,  
 Chipped each at a crust like Hindoos,  
 For air, looked out on the tiles,  
 For fun, watched each other's windows.

## VI.

You lounged, like a boy of the South,  
 Cap and blouse—nay, a bit of beard too ;  
 Or you got it, rubbing your mouth  
 With fingers the clay adhered to.

## VII.

And I—soon managed to find  
 Weak points in the flower-fence facing,  
 Was forced to put up a blind  
 And be safe in my corset-lacing.

## VIII.

No harm ! It was not my fault  
 If you never turned your eyes' tail up  
 As I shook upon E *in alt.*,  
 Or ran the chromatic scale up :

## IX.

For spring bade the sparrows pair,  
 And the boys and girls gave guesses,  
 And stalls in our street looked rare  
 With bulrush and watercresses.

## X.

Why did not you pinch a flower  
In a pellet of clay and fling it?  
Why did not I put a power  
Or thanks in a look, or sing it?

## XI.

I did look, sharp as a lynx,  
(And yet the memory rankles)  
When models arrived, some minx  
Tripped up-stairs, she and her ankles.

## XII.

But I think I gave you as good!  
“That foreign fellow,—who can know  
“How she pays, in a playful mood,  
“For his tuning her that piano?”

## XIII.

Could you say so, and never say  
“Suppose we join hands and fortunes,  
“And I fetch her from over the way,  
“Her, piano, and long tunes and short tunes?”

## XIV.

No, no: you would not be rash,  
Nor I rasher and something over:  
You've to settle yet Gibson's hash,  
And Grisi yet lives in clover.

## XV.

But you meet the Prince at the Board,  
I 'm queen myself at *bals-paré*,  
I 've married a rich old lord,  
And you 're dubbed knight and an R.A.

## XVI.

Each life unfulfilled, you see ;  
It hangs still, patchy and scrappy :  
We have not sighed deep, laughed free,  
Starved, feasted, despaired,—been happy.

## XVII.

And nobody calls you a dunce,  
And people suppose me clever :  
This could but have happened once,  
And we missed it, lost it for ever.

## A F A C E .

---

IF one could have that little head of hers  
Painted upon a background of pale gold,  
Such as the Tuscan's early art prefers !  
No shade encroaching on the matchless mould  
Of those two lips, which should be opening soft  
In the pure profile ; not as when she laughs,  
For that spoils all : but rather as if aloft  
Yon hyacinth, she loves so, leaned its staff's  
Burthen of honey-coloured buds to kiss  
And capture 'twixt the lips apart for this.  
Then her lithe neck, three fingers might surround,  
How it should waver on the pale gold ground  
Up to the fruit-shaped, perfect chin it lifts !  
I know, Correggio loves to mass, in rifts  
Of heaven, his angel faces, orb on orb  
Breaking its outline, burning shades absorb :  
But these are only massed there, I should think,  
Waiting to see some wonder momentarily  
Grow out, stand full, fade slow against the sky  
(That 's the pale ground you 'd see this sweet face by),  
All heaven, meanwhile, condensed into one eye  
Which fears to lose the wonder, should it wink.

## A L I K E N E S S .

---

SOME people hang portraits up  
In a room where they dine or sup :  
And the wife clinks tea-things under,  
And her cousin, he stirs his cup,  
Asks, " Who was the lady, I wonder ? "  
" 'T is a daub John bought at a sale,"  
Quoth the wife,—looks black as thunder :  
" What a shade beneath her nose !  
" Snuff-taking, I suppose,—"  
Adds the cousin, while John's corns ail.

Or else, there 's no wife in the case,  
But the portrait 's queen of the place,  
Alone mid the other spoils  
Of youth,—masks, gloves and foils,  
And pipe-sticks, rose, cherry-tree, jasmine,  
And the long whip, the tandem-lasher,  
And the cast from a fist (" not, alas ! mine,  
" But my master's, the Tipton Slasher ")  
And the cards where pistol-balls mark ace,  
And a satin shoe used for cigar-case,  
And the chamois-horns (" shot in the Chablais ")

And prints—Rarey drumming on Cruiser,  
 And Sayers, our champion, the bruiser,  
 And the little edition of Rabelais :  
 Where a friend, with both hands in his pockets,  
 May saunter up close to examine it,  
 And remark a good deal of Jane Lamb in it,  
 “ But the eyes are half out of their sockets ;  
 “ That hair ’s not so bad, where the gloss is,  
 “ But they ’ve made the girl’s nose a proboscis :  
 “ Jane Lamb, that we danced with at Vichy !  
 “ What, is not she Jane ? Then, who is she ? ”

All that I own is a print,  
 An etching, a mezzotint ;  
 ’Tis a study, a fancy, a fiction,  
 Yet a fact (take my conviction)  
 Because it has more than a hint  
 Of a certain face, I never  
 Saw elsewhere touch or trace of  
 In women I ’ve seen the face of :  
 Just an etching, and, so far, clever.

I keep my prints, an imbroglio,  
 Fifty in one portfolio.  
 When somebody tries my claret,  
 We turn round chairs to the fire,  
 Chirp over days in a garret,  
 Chuckle o’er increase of salary,  
 Taste the good fruits of our leisure,



Talk about pencil and lyre,  
And the National Portrait Gallery :  
Then I exhibit my treasure.  
After we 've turned over twenty,  
And the debt of wonder my crony owes  
Is paid to my Marc Antonios,  
He stops me—" *Festina lentè !*  
" What 's that sweet thing there, the etching?"  
How my waistcoat-strings want stretching,  
How my cheeks grow red as tomatos,  
How my heart leaps ! But hearts, after leaps, ache.

" By the by, you must take, for a keepsake,  
" That other, you praised, of Volpato's."  
The fool ! would he try a flight further and say—  
He never saw, never before to-day,  
What was able to take his breath away,  
A face to lose youth for, to occupy age  
With the dream of, meet death with,—why, I'll not engage  
But that, half in a rapture and half in a rage,  
I should toss him the thing's self—" 'Tis only a duplicate,  
" A thing of no value ! Take it, I supplicate !"

## MR. SLUDGE, "THE MEDIUM."

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Now, do n't sir! Do n't expose me! Just this once!  
This was the first and only time, I 'll swear,—  
Look at me,—see, I kneel,—the only time,  
I swear, I ever cheated,—yes, by the soul  
Of Her who hears—(your sainted mother, sir!)  
All, except this last accident, was truth—  
This little kind of slip!—and even this,  
It was your own wine, sir, the good champagne,  
(I took it for Catawba, you 're so kind)  
Which put the folly in my head!

“Get up?”

You still inflict on me that terrible face?  
You show no mercy?—Not for Her dear sake,  
The sainted spirit's, whose soft breath even now  
Blows on my cheek—(do n't you feel something, sir?)  
You 'll tell?

Go tell, then! Who the devil cares  
What such a rowdy chooses to . . .

Aie—aie—aie !

Please, sir ! your thumbs are through my windpipe, sir !  
Ch—ch !

Well, sir, I hope you 've done it now !

Oh Lord ! I little thought, sir, yesterday,  
When your departed mother spoke those words  
Of peace through me, and moved you, sir, so much,  
You gave me—(very kind it was of you)  
These shirt-studs—(better take them back again,  
Please, sir)—yes, little did I think so soon  
A trifle of trick, all through a glass too much  
Of his own champagne, would change my best of friends  
Into an angry gentleman !

Though, 't was wrong.

I do n't contest the point ; your anger 's just :  
Whatever put such folly in my head,  
I know 't was wicked of me. There 's a thick  
Dusk undeveloped spirit (I 've observed)  
Owes me a grudge—a negro's, I should say,  
Or else an Irish emigrant's ; yourself  
Explained the case so well last Sunday, sir,  
When we had summoned Franklin to clear up  
A point about those shares in the telegraph :  
Ay, and he swore . . or might it be Tom Paine ? . .  
Thumping the table close by where I crouched.  
He 'd do me soon a mischief : that 's come true !

Why, now your face clears! I was sure it would!  
 Then, this one time . . . do n't take your hand away,  
 Through yours I surely kiss your mother's hand . . .  
 You 'll promise to forgive me?—or, at least,  
 Tell nobody of this? Consider, sir!  
 What harm can mercy do? Would but the shade  
 Of the venerable dead—one just vouchsafe  
 A rap or tip! What bit of paper 's here?  
 Suppose we take a pencil, let her write,  
 Make the least sign, she urges on her child  
 Forgiveness? There now! Eh? Oh! 'T was your  
     foot,  
 And not a natural creak, sir?

Answer, then!

Once, twice, thrice . . . see, I 'm waiting to say "thrice!"  
 All to no use? No sort of hope for me?  
 It 's all to post to Greeley's newspaper?

What? If I told you all about the tricks?  
 Upon my soul!—the whole truth, and nought else,  
 And how there 's been some falsehood—for your part,  
 Will you engage to pay my passage out,  
 And hold your tongue until I 'm safe on board?  
 England 's the place, not Boston—no offence!  
 I see what makes you hesitate: do n't fear!  
 I mean to change my trade and cheat no more,  
 Yes, this time really it 's upon my soul!  
 Be my salvation!—under Heaven, of course.

I 'll tell some queer things. Sixty Vs must do.  
A trifle, though, to start with ! We 'll refer  
The question to this table ?

How you 're changed !

Then split the difference ; thirty more, we 'll say.  
Ay, but you leave my presents ! Else I 'll swear  
'T was all through those : you wanted yours again,  
So, picked a quarrel with me, to get them back !  
Tread on a worm, it turns, sir ! If I turn,  
Your fault ! 'T is you 'll have forced me ! Who 's  
obliged

To give up life yet try no self-defence ?  
At all events, I 'll run the risk. Eh ?

Done !

May I sit, sir ? This dear old table, now !  
Please, sir, a parting egg-nogg and cigar !  
I 've been so happy with you ! Nice stuffed chairs,  
And sympathetic sideboards ; what an end  
To all the instructive evenings ! (It 's alight.)  
Well, nothing lasts, as Bacon came and said.  
Here goes,—but keep your temper, or I 'll scream !

Fol-lol-the-rido-liddle-iddle-ol !

You see, sir, it 's your own fault more than mine ;  
It 's all your fault, you curious gentlefolk !  
You 're prigs,—excuse me,—like to look so spry,  
So clever, while you cling by half a claw

To the perch whereon you puff yourselves at roost,  
 Such piece of self-conceit as serves for perch  
 Because you chose it, so it must be safe.  
 Oh, otherwise you 're sharp enough! You spy  
 Who slips, who slides, who holds by help of wing,  
 Wanting real foothold,—who can't keep upright  
 On the other perch, your neighbour chose, not you :  
 There 's no outwitting you respecting him !  
 For instance, men love money—that, you know—  
 And what men do to gain it : well, suppose  
 A poor lad, say a help's son in your house,  
 Listening at keyholes, hears the company  
 Talk grand of dollars, V-notes, and so forth,  
 How hard they are to get, how good to hold,  
 How much they buy,—if, suddenly, in pops he—  
 “ *I've got a V-note !*”—what do you say to him ?  
 What 's your first word which follows your last kick ?  
 “ Where did you steal it, rascal ?” That 's because  
 He finds you, fain would fool you, off your perch,  
 Not on the special piece of nonsense, sir,  
 Elected your parade-ground : let him try  
 Lies to the end of the list,—“ He picked it up,  
 “ His cousin died and left it him by will,  
 “ The President flung it to him, riding by,  
 “ An actress trucked it for a curl of his hair,  
 “ He dreamed of luck and found his shoe enriched,  
 “ He dug up clay, and out of clay made gold”—  
 How would you treat such possibilities ?  
 Would not you, prompt, investigate the case

With cow-hide? "Lies, lies, lies," you 'd shout: and why?

Which of the stories might not prove mere truth?  
This last, perhaps, that clay was turned to coin!  
Let 's see, now, give him me to speak for him!  
How many of your rare philosophers,  
In plaguy books I 've had to dip into,  
Believed gold could be made thus, saw it made  
And made it? Oh, with such philosophers  
You 're on your best behaviour! While the lad—  
With him, in a trice, you settle likelihoods,  
Nor doubt a moment how he got his prize:  
In his case, you hear, judge and execute,  
All in a breath: so would most men of sense.

But let the same lad hear you talk as grand  
At the same keyhole, you and company,  
Of signs and wonders, the invisible world;  
How wisdom scouts our vulgar unbelief  
More than our vulgarest incredulity;  
How good men have desired to see a ghost,  
What Johnson used to say, what Wesley did,  
Mother Goose thought, and fiddle-diddle-dee:—  
If he then break in with, "Sir, *I* saw a ghost!"  
Ah, the ways change! He finds you perched and prim;  
It 's a conceit of yours that ghosts may be:  
There 's no talk now of cow-hide. "Tell it out!  
"Do n't fear us! Take your time and recollect!  
"Sit down first: try a glass of wine, my boy!

“ And, David, (is not that your Christian name ?)  
 “ Of all things, should this happen twice—it may—  
 “ Be sure, while fresh in mind, you let us know ! ”  
 Does the boy blunder, blurt out this, blab that,  
 Break down in the other, as beginners will ?  
 All ’s candour, all ’s considerateness—“ No haste !  
 “ Pause and collect yourself ! We understand !  
 “ That ’s the bad memory, or the natural shock,  
 “ Or the unexplained *phenomena* ! ”

Egad,

The boy takes heart of grace ; finds, never fear,  
 The readiest way to ope your own heart wide,  
 Show—what I call your peacock-perch, pet post  
 To strut, and spread the tail, and squawk upon !  
 “ Just as you thought, much as you might expect !  
 “ There be more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,” . . .  
 And so on. Shall not David take the hint,  
 Grow bolder, stroke you down at quickened rate ?  
 If he ruffle a feather, it ’s “ Gently, patiently !  
 “ Manifestations are so weak at first !  
 “ Doubting, moreover, kills them, cuts all short,  
 “ Cures with a vengeance ! ”

There, sir, that ’s your style !  
 You and your boy—such pains bestowed on him,  
 Or any headpiece of the average worth,  
 To teach, say, Greek, would perfect him apace,  
 Make him a Person (“ Porson ? ” thank you, sir !)



Much more, proficient in the art of lies.  
 You never leave the lesson ! Fire alight,  
 Catch you permitting it to die ! You 've friends ;  
 There 's no withholding knowledge,—least from those  
 Apt to look elsewhere for their souls' supply :  
 Why should not you parade your lawful prize ?  
 Who finds a picture, digs a medal up,  
 Hits on a first edition,—he henceforth  
 Gives it his name, grows notable : how much more,  
 Who ferrets out a "medium?" "David 's yours,  
 "You highly-favoured man? Then, pity souls  
 "Less privileged ! Allow us share your luck !"  
 So, David holds the circle, rules the roast,  
 Narrates the vision, peeps in the glass ball,  
 Sets to the spirit-writing, hears the raps,  
 As the case may be.

Now mark ! To be precise—  
 Though I say, "lies" all these, at this first stage,  
 'Tis just for science' sake : I call such grubs  
 By the name of what they 'll turn to, dragonflies.  
 Strictly, it 's what good people style untruth ;  
 But yet, so far, not quite the full-grown thing :  
 It 's fancying, fable-making, nonsense-work—  
 What never meant to be so very bad—  
 The knack of story-telling, brightening up  
 Each dull old bit of fact that drops its shine.  
 One does see somewhat when one shuts one's eyes,  
 If only spots and streaks ; tables do tip

In the oddest way of themselves : and pens, good Lord,  
 Who knows if you drive them or they drive you?  
 'Tis but a foot in the water and out again ;  
 Not that duck-under which decides your dive.  
 Note this, for it 's important : listen why.

I 'll prove, you push on David till he dives  
 And ends the shivering. Here 's your circle, now :  
 Two-thirds of them, with heads like you their host,  
 Turn up their eyes, and cry, as you expect,  
 " Lord, who 'd have thought it ! " But there 's always one  
 Looks wise, compassionately smiles, submits  
 " Of your veracity no kind of doubt,  
 " But—do you feel so certain of that boy's?  
 " Really, I wonder ! I confess myself  
 " More chary of my faith ! " That's galling, sir !  
 What, he the investigator, he the sage,  
 When all 's done ? Then, you just have shut your eyes,  
 Opened your mouth, and gulped down David whole,  
 You ! Terrible were such catastrophe !  
 So, evidence is redoubled, doubled again,  
 And doubled besides ; once more, " He heard, we heard,  
 " You and they heard, your mother and your wife,  
 " Your children and the stranger in your gates :  
 " Did they or did they not ? " So much for him,  
 The black sheep, guest without the wedding-garb,  
 And doubting Thomas ! Now 's your turn to crow :  
 " He 's kind to think you such a fool : Sludge cheats ?  
 " Leave you alone to take precautions ! "

Straight

The rest join chorus. Thomas stands abashed,  
 Sips silent some such beverage as this,  
 Considers if it be harder, shutting eyes  
 And gulping David in good fellowship,  
 Than going elsewhere, getting, in exchange,  
 With no egg-nogg to lubricate the food,  
 Some just as tough a morsel. Over the way,  
 Holds Captain Sparks his court: is it better there?  
 Have not you hunting-stories, scalping-scenes,  
 And Mexican War exploits to swallow plump  
 If you'd be free of the stove-side, rocking-chair,  
 And trio of affable daughters?

Doubt succumbs!

Victory! All your circle's yours again!  
 Out of the clubbing of submissive wits,  
 David's performance rounds, each chink gets patched,  
 Every protrusion of a point's filed fine,  
 All's fit to set a-rolling round the world,  
 And then return to David finally,  
 Lies seven-feet thick about his first half-inch.  
 Here's a choice birth of the supernatural,  
 Poor David's pledged to! You've employed no tool  
 That laws exclaim at, save the devil's own,  
 Yet screwed him into henceforth gulling you  
 To the top of your bent,—all out of one half-lie!

You hold, if there's one half or a hundredth part  
 Of a lie, that's his fault,—his be the penalty!

I dare say ! You 'd prove firmer in his place ?  
You 'd find the courage,—that first flurry over,  
That mild bit of romancing-work at end,—  
To interpose with “ It gets serious, this ;  
“ Must stop here. Sir, I saw no ghost at all.  
“ Inform your friends I made . . well, fools of them,  
“ And found you ready made. I 've lived in clover  
“ These three weeks : take it out in kicks of me !”  
I doubt it. Ask your conscience ! Let me know,  
Twelve months hence, with how few embellishments  
You 've told almighty Boston of this passage  
Of arms between us, your first taste of the foil  
From Sludge who could not fence, sir ! Sludge, your boy !  
I lied, sir,—there ! I got up from my gorge  
On offal in the gutter, and preferred  
Your canvass-backs : I took their carver's size,  
Measured his modicum of intelligence,  
Tickled him on the cockles of his heart  
With a raven feather, and next week found myself  
Sweet and clean, dining daintily, dizen'd smart,  
Set on a stool buttressed by ladies' knees,  
Every soft smiler calling me her pet,  
Encouraging my story to uncoil  
And creep out from its hole, inch after inch,  
“ How last night, I no sooner snug in bed,  
“ Tucked up, just as they left me,—than came raps !  
“ While a light whisked ” . . “ Shaped somewhat like a  
star ? ”  
“ Well, like some sort of stars, ma'am.”—“ So we thought !

" And any voice? Not yet? Try hard, next time,  
 " If you can't hear a voice ; we think you may :  
 " At least, the Pennsylvanian ' mediums ' did."  
 Oh, next time comes the voice ! " Just as we hoped !"  
 Are not the hoppers proud now, pleased, profuse  
 Of the natural acknowledgment ?

Of course !

So, off we push, illy-oh-yo, trim the boat,  
 On we sweep with a cataract ahead,  
 We 're midway to the Horse-shoe : stop, who can,  
 The dance of bubbles gay about our prow !  
 Experiences become worth waiting for,  
 Spirits now speak up, tell their inmost mind,  
 And compliment the " medium " properly,  
 Concern themselves about his Sunday coat,  
 See rings on his hand with pleasure. Ask yourself  
 How you 'd receive a course of treats like these !  
 Why, take the quietest hack and stall him up,  
 Cram him with corn a month, then out with him  
 Among his mates on a bright April morn,  
 With the turf to tread ; see if you find or no  
 A caper in him, if he bucks or bolts !  
 Much more a youth whose fancies sprout as rank  
 As toadstool-clump from melon-bed. 'Tis soon,  
 " Sirrah, you spirit, come, go, fetch and carry,  
 " Read, write, rap, rub-a-dub, and hang yourself !"  
 I 'm spared all further trouble ; all 's arranged ;  
 Your circle does my business ; I may rave

Like an epileptic dervish in the books,  
 Foam, fling myself flat, rend my clothes to shreds ;  
 No matter : lovers, friends and countrymen  
 Will lay down spiritual laws, read wrong things right  
 By the rule of reverse. If Francis Verulam  
 Styles himself Bacon, spells the name beside  
 With a *y* and a *k*, says he drew breath in York,  
 Gave up the ghost in Wales when Cromwell reigned,  
 (As, sir, we somewhat fear he was apt to say,  
 Before I found the useful book that knows)  
 Why, what harm 's done? The circle smiles apace,  
 " It was not Bacon, after all, do you see !  
 " We understand ; the trick 's but natural :  
 " Such spirits' individuality  
 " Is hard to put in evidence : they incline  
 " To gibe and jeer, these undeveloped sorts.  
 " You see, their world 's much like a jail broke loose,  
 " While this of ours remains shut, bolted, barred,  
 " With a single window to it. Sludge, our friend,  
 " Serves as this window, whether thin or thick,  
 " Or stained or stainless ; he 's the medium-pane  
 " Through which, to see us and be seen, they peep :  
 " They crowd each other, hustle for a chance,  
 " Tread on their neighbour's kibes, play tricks enough !  
 " Does Bacon, tired of waiting, swerve aside ?  
 " Up in his place jumps Barnum—' I 'm your man,  
 " ' I 'll answer you for Bacon !' Try once more !"

Or else it 's—" What 's a 'medium?' He 's a means,

" Good, bad, indifferent, still the only means  
 " Spirits can speak by ; he may misconceive,  
 " Stutter and stammer,—he 's their Sludge and drudge,  
 " Take him or leave him ; they must hold their peace,  
 " Or else, put up with having knowledge strained  
 " To half-expression through his ignorance.  
 " Suppose, the spirit Beethoven wants to shed  
 " New music he 's brimful of ; why, he turns  
 " The handle of this organ, grinds with Sludge,  
 " And what he poured in at the mouth o' the mill  
 " As a Thirty-third Sonata, (fancy now !)  
 " Comes from the hopper as bran-new Sludge, nought else,  
 " The Shakers' Hymn in G, with a natural F,  
 " Or the ' Stars and Stripes ' set to consecutive fourths."

Sir, where 's the scrape you did not help me through,  
 You that are wise ? And for the fools, the folk  
 Who came to see,—the guests, (observe that word !)  
 Pray do you find guests criticize your wine,  
 Your furniture, your grammar, or your nose ?  
 Then, why your " medium ? " What 's the difference ?  
 Prove your madeira red-ink and gamboge,—  
 Your Sludge, a cheat—then, somebody 's a goose  
 For vaunting both as genuine. " Guests ! " Don't fear !  
 They 'll make a wry face, nor too much of that,  
 And leave you in your glory.

" No, sometimes  
 " They doubt and say as much ! " Ay, doubt they do !

And what 's the consequence? "Of course they  
doubt"—

(You triumph) "that explains the hitch at once!

"Doubt posed our 'medium,' puddled his pure mind;

"He gave them back their rubbish: pitch chaff in,

"Could flour come out o' the honest mill?" So, prompt

Applaud the faithful: cases flock in point,

"How, when a mocker willed a 'medium' once

"Should name a spirit James whose name was George,

"'James' cried the 'medium,'—'t was the test of truth!"

In short, a hit proves much, a miss proves more.

Does this convince? The better: does it fail?

Time for the double-shotted broadside, then—

The grand means, last resource. Look black and big!

"You style us idiots, therefore—why stop short?

"Accomplices in rascality: this we hear

"In our own house, from our invited guest

"Found brave enough to outrage a poor boy

"Exposed by our good faith! Have you been heard?

"Now, then, hear us; one man's not quite worth twelve.

"You see a cheat? Here's some twelve see an ass:

"Excuse me if I calculate: good day!"

Out slinks the sceptic, all the laughs explode,

Sludge waves his hat in triumph!

Or—he don't.

There's something in real truth (explain who can!)

One casts a wistful eye at, like the horse

Who mopes beneath stuffed hay-racks and won't munch



Because he spies a corn-bag : hang that truth,  
 It spoils all dainties proffered in its place !  
 I 've felt at times when, cockered, cossetted  
 And coddled by the aforesaid company,  
 Bidden enjoy their bullying,—never fear,  
 But o'er their shoulders spit at the flying man,—  
 I 've felt a child ; only, a fractious child  
 That, dandled soft by nurse, aunt, grandmother,  
 Who keep him from the kennel, sun and wind,  
 Good fun and wholesome mud,—enjoined be sweet,  
 And comely and superior,—eyes askance .  
 The ragged sons of the gutter at their game,  
 Fain would be down with them i' the thick of the filth,  
 Making dirt-pies, laughing free, speaking plain,  
 And calling granny the grey old cat she is.  
 I 've felt a spite, I say, at you, at them,  
 Huggings and humbug—gnashed my teeth to mark  
 A decent dog pass ! It 's too bad, I say,  
 Ruining a soul so !

But what 's "so," what 's fixed,  
 Where may one stop ? Nowhere ! The cheating 's  
 nursed

Out of the lying, softly and surely spun  
 To just your length, sir ! I 'd stop soon enough :  
 But you 're for progress. "All old, nothing new ?"  
 "Only the usual talking through the mouth,  
 "Or writing by the hand ? I own, I thought  
 "This would develop, grow demonstrable,

“ Make doubt absurd, give figures we might see,  
 “ Flowers we might touch. There ’s no one doubts you,  
     Sludge !  
 “ You dream the dreams, you see the spiritual sights,  
 “ The speeches come in your head, beyond dispute.  
 “ Still, for the sceptics’ sake, to stop all mouths,  
 “ We want some outward manifestation !—well,  
 “ The Pennsylvanians gained such ; why not Sludge ?  
 “ He may improve with time !”

Ay, that he may !

He sees his lot : there ’s no avoiding fate.

’T is a trifle at first. “ Eh, David ? Did you hear ?

“ You jogged the table, your foot caused the squeak,

“ This time you ’re . . . joking, are you not, my boy ?”

“ N-n-no !”—and I ’m done for, bought and sold hence-  
     forth.

The old good easy jog-trot way, the . . . eh ?

The . . . not so very false, as falsehood goes,

The spinning out and drawing fine, you know,—

Really mere novel-writing of a sort,

Acting, or improvising, make-believe,

Surely not downright cheaterly,—any how,

’T is done with and my lot cast ; Cheat ’s my name :

The fatal dash of brandy in your tea

Has settled what you ’ll have the souchong’s smack :

The caddy gives way to the dram-bottle.

Then, it ’s so cruel easy ! Oh, those tricks

That can't be tricks, those feats by sleight of hand,  
Clearly no common conjuror's!—no, indeed!  
A conjuror? Choose me any craft in the world  
A man puts hand to; and with six months' pains,  
I'll play you twenty tricks miraculous  
To people untaught the trade: have you seen glass  
    blown,  
Pipes pierced? Why, just this biscuit that I chip,  
Did you ever watch a baker toss one flat  
To the oven? Try and do it! Take my word,  
Practise but half as much, while limbs are lithe,  
To turn, shove, tilt a table, crack your joints,  
Manage your feet, dispose your hands aright,  
Work wires that twitch the curtains, play the glove  
At end of your slipper,—then put out the lights  
And . . . there, there, all you want you'll get, I hope!  
I found it slip, easy as an old shoe.

Now, lights on table again! I've done my part,  
You take my place while I give thanks and rest.  
"Well, Judge Humgruffin, what's your verdict, sir?"  
"You, hardest head in the United States,—  
"Did you detect a cheat here? Wait! Let's see!  
"Just an experiment first, for candour's sake!  
"I'll try and cheat you, Judge! The table tilts:  
"Is it I that move it? Write! I'll press your hand:  
"Cry when I push, or guide your pencil, Judge!"  
Sludge still triumphant! "That a rap, indeed?"  
"That, the real writing? Very like a whale!"

“ Then, if, sir, you—a most distinguished man,  
 “ And, were the Judge not here, I ’d say, . . no matter !  
 “ Well, sir, if you fail, you can’t take us in,—  
 “ There ’s little fear that Sludge will !”

Won’t he, ma’am ?

But what if our distinguished host, like Sludge,  
 Bade God bear witness that he played no trick,  
 While you believed that what produced the raps  
 Was just a certain child who died, you know,  
 And whose last breath you thought your lips had felt ?  
 Eh ? That ’s a capital point, ma’am : Sludge begins  
 At your entreaty with your dearest dead,  
 The little voice set lispng once again,  
 The tiny hand made feel for yours once more,  
 The poor lost image brought back, plain as dreams,  
 Which image, if a word had chanced recall,  
 The customary cloud would cross your eyes,  
 Your heart return the old tick, pay its pang !  
 A right mood for investigation, this !  
 One ’s at one ’s ease with Saul and Jonathan,  
 Pompey and Cæsar : but one’s own lost child . . .  
 I wonder, when you heard the first cold drop  
 From the spadeful at the grave-side, felt you free  
 To investigate who twitched your funeral scarf  
 Or brushed your flounces ? Then, it came of course,  
 You should be stunned and stupid ; then, (how else ?)  
 Your breath stopped with your blood, your brain struck  
 work.

But now, such causes fail of such effects,  
 All 's changed,—the little voice begins afresh,  
 Yet you, calm, consequent, can test and try  
 And touch the truth. "Tests? Didn't the creature tell  
 " Its nurse's name, and say it lived six years,  
 " And rode a rocking-horse? Enough of tests!  
 " Sludge never could learn that!"

He could not, eh?

You compliment him. "Could not?" Speak for yourself!  
 I'd like to know the man I ever saw  
 Once,—never mind where, how, why, when,—once saw,  
 Of whom I do not keep some matter in mind  
 He'd swear I "could not" know, sagacious soul!  
 What? Do you live in this world's blow of blacks,  
 Palaver, gossipry, a single hour  
 Nor find one smut has settled on your nose,  
 Of a smut's worth, no more, no less?—one fact  
 Out of the drift of facts, whereby you learn  
 What some one was, somewhere, somewhen, somewhy?  
 You don't tell folk—"See what has stuck to me!  
 " Judge Humgruffin, our most distinguished man,  
 " Your uncle was a tailor, and your wife  
 " Thought to have married Miggs, missed him, hit you!"—  
 Do you, sir, though you see him twice a-week?  
 "No," you reply, "what use retailing it?  
 "Why should I?" But, you see, one day you *should*,  
 Because one day there's much use,—when this fact  
 Brings you the Judge upon both gouty knees

Before the supernatural ; proves that Sludge  
Knows, as you say, a thing he "could not" know :  
Will not Sludge thenceforth keep an outstretched face,  
The way the wind drives ?

"Could not !" Look you now,  
I 'll tell you a story ! There 's a whiskered chap,  
A foreigner, that teaches music here  
And gets his bread,—knowing no better way :  
He says, the fellow who informed of him  
And made him fly his country and fall West,  
Was a hunchback cobbler, sat, stitched soles and sang,  
In some outlandish place, the city Rome,  
In a cellar by their Broadway, all day long ;  
Never asked questions, stopped to listen or look,  
Nor lifted nose from lapstone ; let the world  
Roll round his three-legged stool, and news run in  
The ears he hardly seemed to keep pricked up.  
Well, that man went on Sundays, touched his pay,  
And took his praise from government, you see ;  
For something like two dollars every week,  
He 'd engage tell you some one little thing  
Of some one man, which led to many more,  
(Because one truth leads right to the world's end,)  
And make you that man's master—when he dined  
And on what dish, where walked to keep his health  
And to what street. His trade was, throwing thus  
His sense out, like an anteater's long tongue,  
Soft, innocent, warm, moist, impassible,

And when 't was crusted o'er with creatures—slick,  
Their juice enriched his palate. "Could not Sludge!"

I'll go yet a step further, and maintain,  
Once the imposture plunged its proper depth  
In the rotten of your natures, all of you,—  
(If one 's not mad nor drunk, and hardly then)  
It 's impossible to cheat—that 's, be found out!  
Go tell your brotherhood this first slip of mine,  
All to-day's tale, how you detected Sludge,  
Behaved unpleasantly, till he was fain confess,  
And so has come to grief! You 'll find, I think,  
Why Sludge still snaps his fingers in your face.  
There now, you 've told them! What 's their prompt  
reply?

"Sir, did that youth confess he had cheated me,  
"I'd disbelieve him. He may cheat at times;  
"That 's in the 'medium'-nature, thus they 're made,  
"Vain and vindictive, cowards, prone to scratch.  
"And so all cats are; still, a cat 's the beast  
"You coax the strange electric sparks from out,  
"By rubbing back its fur; not so a dog,  
"Nor lion, nor lamb: 't is the cat's nature, sir!  
"Why not the dog's? Ask God, who made them beasts!  
"D' ye think the sound, the nicely-balanced man  
"(Like me"—aside)—"like you yourself,"—(aloud)  
"—He 's stuff to make a 'medium?' Bless your soul,  
"'Tis these hysteric, hybrid half-and-halves,  
"Equivocal, worthless vermin yield the fire!

" We must take such as we find them, 'ware their tricks,  
 " Wanting their service. Sir, Sludge took in you—  
 " How, I can't say, not being there to watch :  
 " He was tried, was tempted by your easiness,—  
 " He did not take in me ! "

Thank you for Sludge !

I 'm to be grateful to such patrons, eh,  
 When what you hear 's my best word ? 'Tis a challenge ;  
 " Snap at all strangers, half-tamed prairie-dog,  
 " So you cower duly at your keeper's nod !  
 " Cat, show what claws were made for, muffling them  
 " Only to me ! Cheat others if you can,  
 " Me, if you dare ! " And, my wise sir, I dared—  
 Did cheat you first, made you cheat others next,  
 And had the help of your vaunted manliness  
 To bully the incredulous. You used me ?  
 Have not I used you, taken full revenge,  
 Persuaded folk they knew not their own name,  
 And straight they 'd own the error ! Who was the fool  
 When, to an awe-struck wide-eyed open-mouthed  
 Circle of sages, Sludge would introduce  
 Milton composing baby-rhymes, and Locke  
 Reasoning in gibberish, Homer writing Greek  
 In noughts and crosses, Asaph setting psalms  
 To crotchet and quaver ? I 've made a spirit squeak  
 In sham voice for a minute, then outbroke  
 Bold in my own, defying the imbeciles—  
 Have copied some ghost's pothooks, half a page,



Then ended with my own scrawl undisguised.

"All right! The ghost was merely using Sludge,

"Suiting itself from his imperfect stock!"

Don't talk of gratitude to me! For what?

For being treated as a showman's ape,

Encouraged to be wicked and make sport,

Fret or sulk, grin or whimper, any mood

So long as the ape be in it and no man—

Because a nut pays every mood alike.

Curse your superior, superintending sort,

Who, since you hate smoke, send up boys that climb

To cure your chimney, bid a "medium" lie

To sweep you truth down! Curse your women too,

Your insolent wives and daughters, that fire up

Or faint away if a male hand squeeze theirs,

Yet, to encourage Sludge, may play with Sludge

As only a "medium," only the kind of thing

They must humour, fondle . . . oh, to misconceive

Were too preposterous! But I've paid them out!

They've had their wish—called for the naked truth,

And in she tripped, sat down and bade them stare:

They had to blush a little and forgive!

"The fact is, children talk so; in next world

"All our conventions are reversed,—perhaps

"Made light of: something like old prints, my dear!

"The Judge has one, he brought from Italy,

"A metropolis in the background,—o'er a bridge,

"A team of trotting roadsters,—cheerful groups

"Of wayside travellers, peasants at their work,

“ And, full in front, quite unconcerned, why not ?  
“ Three nymphs conversing with a cavalier,  
“ And never a rag among them : ‘ fine,’ folk cry—  
“ And heavenly manners seem not much unlike !  
“ Let Sludge go on ; we ’ll fancy it ’s in print !”  
If such as came for wool, sir, went home shorn,  
Where is the wrong I did them ? ’Twas their choice ;  
They tried the adventure, ran the risk, tossed up  
And lost, as some one ’s sure to do in games ;  
They fancied I was made to lose,—smoked glass  
Useful to spy the sun through, spare their eyes :  
And had I proved a red-hot iron plate  
They thought to pierce, and, for their pains, grew blind,  
Whose were the fault but theirs ? While, as things go,  
Their loss amounts to gain, the more ’s the shame !  
They ’ve had their peep into the spirit-world,  
And all this world may know it ! They ’ve fed fat  
Their self-conceit which else had starved : what chance  
Save this, of cackling o’er a golden egg  
And compassing distinction from the flock,  
Friends of a feather ? Well, they paid for it,  
And not prodigiously ; the price o’ the play,  
Not counting certain pleasant interludes,  
Was scarce a vulgar play’s worth. When you buy  
The actor’s talent, do you dare propose  
For his soul beside ? Whereas, my soul you buy !  
Sludge acts Macbeth, obliged to be Macbeth,  
Or you ’ll not hear his first word ! Just go through  
That slight formality, swear himself ’s the Thane,

And thenceforth he may strut and fret his hour,  
Spout, spawl, or spin his target, no one cares !  
Why hadn't I leave to play tricks, Sludge as Sludge ?  
Enough of it all ! I 've wiped out scores with you—  
Vented your fustian, let myself be streaked  
Like tom-fool with your ochre and carmine,  
Worn patchwork your respectable fingers sewed  
To metamorphose somebody,—yes, I 've earned  
My wages, swallowed down my bread of shame,  
And shake the crumbs off—where but in your face ?

As for religion—why, I served it, sir !  
I'll stick to that ! With my *phenomena*  
I laid the atheist sprawling on his back,  
Propped up Saint Paul, or, at least, Swedenborg !  
In fact, it 's just the proper way to baulk  
These troublesome fellows—liars, one and all,  
Are not these sceptics ? Well, to baffle them,  
No use in being squeamish : lie yourself !  
Erect your buttress just as wide o' the line,  
Your side, as they 've built up the wall on theirs ;  
Where both meet, midway in a point, is truth,  
High overhead : so, take your room, pile bricks,  
Lie ! Oh, there 's titillation in all shame !  
What snow may lose in white, it gains in rose !  
Miss Stokes turns—Rahab,—nor a bad exchange !  
Glory be on her, for the good she wrought,  
Breeding belief anew 'neath ribs of death,  
Brow-beating now the unabashed before,

Ridding us of their whole life's gathered straws  
By a live coal from the altar ! Why, of old,  
Great men spent years and years in writing books  
To prove we 've souls, and hardly proved it then :  
Miss Stokes with her live coal, for you and me !  
Surely, to this good issue, all was fair—  
Not only fondling Sludge, but, even suppose  
He let escape some spice of knavery,—well,  
In wisely being blind to it ! Don't you praise  
Nelson for setting spy-glass to blind eye  
And saying . . what was it—that he could not see  
The signal he was bothered ? Ay, indeed !

I 'll go beyond : there 's a real love of a lie,  
Liars find ready-made for lies they make,  
As hand for glove, or tongue for sugar-plum.  
At best, 't is never pure and full belief ;  
Those furthest in the quagmire,—don't suppose  
They strayed there with no warning, got no chance  
Of a filth-speck in their face, which they clenched  
teeth,  
Bent brow against ! Be sure they had their doubts,  
And fears, and fairest challenges to try  
The floor o' the seeming solid sand ! But no !  
Their faith was pledged, acquaintance too apprised,  
All but the last step ventured, kerchiefs waved,  
And Sludge called “ pet : ” 't was easier marching on  
To the promised land ; join those who, Thursday next  
Meant to meet Shakespeare ; better follow Sludge—

Prudent, oh sure!—on the alert how else?  
 But making for the mid-bog, all the same!  
 To hear your outcries, one would think I caught  
 Miss Stokes by the scuff o' the neck, and pitched her flat,  
 Foolish-face-foremost! Hear these simpletons,  
 That 's all I beg, before my work 's begun,  
 Before I 've touched them with my finger-tip!  
 Thus they await me (do but listen, now!  
 It 's reasoning, this is,—I can't imitate  
 The baby voice, though) "In so many tales  
 "Must be some truth, truth though a pin-point big,  
 "Yet, some: a single man 's deceived, perhaps—  
 "Hardly, a thousand: to suppose one cheat  
 "Can gull all these, were more miraculous far  
 "Than aught we should confess a miracle"—  
 And so on. Then the Judge sums up—(it 's rare)—  
 Bids you respect the authorities that leap  
 To the judgment-seat at once,—why don't you note  
 The limpid nature, the unblemished life,  
 The spotless honour, indisputable sense  
 Of the first upstart with his story? What—  
 Outrage a boy on whom you ne'er till now  
 Set eyes, because he finds raps trouble him?

Fools, these are: ay, and how of their opposites  
 Who never did, at bottom of their hearts,  
 Believe for a moment?—Men emasculate,  
 Blank of belief, who played, as eunuchs use,  
 With superstition safely,—cold of blood,

Who saw what made for them in the mystery,  
 Took their occasion, and supported Sludge  
 —As proselytes? No, thank you, far too shrewd!  
 —But promisers of fair play, encouragers  
 Of the claimant; who in candour needs must hoist  
 Sludge up on Mars' Hill, get speech out of Sludge  
 To carry off, criticize, and cant about!  
 Did n't Athens treat Saint Paul so?—at any rate,  
 It's "a new thing," philosophy fumbles at.  
 Then there's the other picker out of pearl  
 From dung heaps,—ay, your literary man,  
 Who draws on his kid gloves to deal with Sludge  
 Daintily and discreetly,—shakes a dust  
 Of the doctrine, flavours thence, he well knows how,  
 The narrative or the novel,—half-believes,  
 All for the book's sake, and the public's stare,  
 And the cash that's God's sole solid in this world!  
 Look at him! Try to be too bold, too gross  
 For the master! Not you! He's the man for muck;  
 Shovel it forth, full-splash, he'll smooth your brown  
 Into artistic richness, never fear!  
 Find him the crude stuff; when you recognise  
 Your lie again, you'll doff your hat to it,  
 Dressed out for company! "For company,"  
 I say, since there's the relish of success:  
 Let all pay due respect, call the lie truth,  
 Save the soft silent smirking gentleman  
 Who ushered in the stranger: you must sigh  
 "How melancholy, he, the only one

" Fails to perceive the bearing of the truth  
 " Himself gave birth to !—There 's the triumph's smack !  
 That man would choose to see the whole world roll  
 I' the slime o' the slough, so he might touch the tip  
 Of his brush with what I call the best of browns—  
 Tint ghost-tales, spirit-stories, past the power  
 Of the outworn umber and bistre !

Yet I think

There 's a more hateful form of foolery—  
 The social sage's, Solomon of saloons  
 And philosophic diner-out, the fribble  
 Who wants a doctrine for a chopping-block  
 To try the edge of his faculty upon,  
 Prove how much common sense he 'll hack and hew  
 In the critical minute 'twixt the soup and fish !  
 These were my patrons : these, and the like of them  
 Who, rising in my soul now, sicken it,—  
 These I have injured ! Gratitude to these ?  
 The gratitude, forsooth, of a prostitute  
 To the greenhorn and the bully—friends of hers,  
 From the wag that wants the queer jokes for his club,  
 To the snuff-box-decorator, honest man,  
 Who just was at his wits' end where to find  
 So genial a Pasiphae ! All and each  
 Pay, compliment, protect from the police,  
 And how she hates them for their pains, like me !  
 So much for my remorse at thanklessness  
 Toward a deserving public !

But, for God ?

Ay, that's a question ! Well, sir, since you press—  
 (How you do teaze the whole thing out of me !  
 I don't mean you, you know, when I say "them :"  
 Hate you, indeed ! But that Miss Stokes, that Judge !  
 Enough, enough—with sugar : thank you, sir !)  
 Now for it, then ! Will you believe me, though ?  
 You've heard what I confess ; I don't unsay  
 A single word : I cheated when I could,  
 Rapped with my toe-joints, set sham hands at work,  
 Wrote down names weak in sympathetic ink,  
 Rubbed odic lights with ends of phosphor-match,  
 And all the rest ; believe that : believe this,  
 By the same token, though it seem to set  
 The crooked straight again, unsay the said,  
 Stick up what I've thrown down ; I can't help that :  
 It's truth ! I somehow vomit truth to-day.  
 This trade of mine—I don't know, can't be sure  
 But there was something in it, tricks and all !  
 Really, I want to light up my own mind.  
 They were tricks,—true, but what I mean to add  
 Is also true. First,—don't it strike you, sir ?  
 Go back to the beginning,—the first fact  
 We're taught is, there's a world beside this world,  
 With spirits, not mankind, for tenantry ;  
 That much within that world once sojourned here,  
 That all upon this world will visit there,  
 And therefore that we, bodily here below,  
 Must have exactly such an interest



In learning what may be the ways o' the world  
 Above us, as the disembodied folk  
 Have (by all analogic likelihood)  
 In watching how things go in the old world  
 With us, their sons, successors, and what not.  
 Oh, yes, with added powers probably,  
 Fit for the novel state,—old loves grown pure,  
 Old interests understood aright,—they watch !  
 Eyes to see, ears to hear, and hands to help,  
 Proportionate to advancement : they 're ahead,  
 That 's all—do what we do, but noblier done—  
 Use plate, whereas we eat our meals off delf,  
 (To use a figure.)

Concede that, and I ask

Next what may be the mode of intercourse  
 Between us meh here, and those once-men there ?  
 First comes the Bible's speech ; then, history—  
 With the supernatural element,—you know—  
 All that we sucked in with our mothers' milk,  
 Grew up with, got inside of us at last,  
 Till it 's found bone of bone and flesh of flesh.  
 See now, we start with the miraculous,  
 And know it used to be, at all events :  
 What 's the first step we take, and can't but take,  
 In arguing from the known to the obscure ?  
 Why this : " What was before, may be to-day.  
 " Since Samuel's ghost appeared to Saul,—of course  
 " My brother's spirit may appear to me."

Go tell your teacher that ! What's his reply ?  
 What brings a shade of doubt for the first time  
 O'er his brow late so luminous with faith ?

“ Such things have been,” says he, “ and there's no  
 doubt

“ Such things may be : but I advise mistrust

“ Of eyes, ears, stomach, and, more than all, your brain,

“ Unless it be of your great-grandmother,

“ Whenever they propose a ghost to you !”

The end is, there's a composition struck ;

'T is settled, we've some way of intercourse

Just as in Saul's time ; only, different :

How, when and where, precisely,—find it out !

I want to know, then, what's so natural

As that a person born into this world

And seized on by such teaching, should begin

With firm expectancy and a frank look-out

For his own allotment, his especial share

In the secret,—his particular ghost, in fine ?

I mean, a person born to look that way,

Since natures differ : take the painter-sort,

One man lives fifty years in ignorance

Whether grass be green or red,—“ No kind of eye

“ For colour,” say you ; while another picks

And puts away even pebbles, when a child,

Because of bluish spots and pinky veins—

“ Give him forthwith a paint-box !” Just the same

Was I born . . . “ medium,” you won't let me say,—

Well, seer of the supernatural

Everywhen, everyhow and everywhere,—  
Will that do?

I and all such boys of course  
Started with the same stock of bible-truth ;  
Only,—what in the rest you style their sense,  
Instinct, blind reasoning but imperative,  
This, betimes, taught them the old world had one law  
And ours another : " New world, new laws," cried they :  
" None but old laws, seen everywhere at work,"  
Cried I, and by their help explained my life  
The Jews' way, still a working way to me.  
Ghosts made the noises, fairies waved the lights,  
Or Santaclaus slid down on New Year's Eve  
And stuffed with cakes the stocking at my bed,  
Changed the worn shoes, rubbed clean the fingered slate  
Of the sum that came to grief the day before.

This could not last long : soon enough I found  
Who had worked wonders thus, and to what end :  
But did I find all easy, like my mates ?  
Henceforth no supernatural any more ?  
Not a whit : what projects the billiard-balls ?  
" A cue," you answer : " Yes, a cue," said I ;  
" But what hand, off the cushion, moved the cue ?  
" What unseen agency, outside the world,  
" Prompted its puppets to do this and that,  
" Put cakes and shoes and slates into their mind,  
" These mothers and aunts, nay even schoolmasters ?"

Thus high I sprang, and there have settled since.  
 Just so I reason, in sober earnest still,  
 About the greater godsend, what you call  
 The serious gains and losses of my life.  
 What do I know or care about your world  
 Which either is or seems to be? This snap  
 Of my fingers, sir! My care is for myself;  
 Myself am whole and sole reality  
 Inside a raree-show and a market-mob  
 Gathered about it: that's the use of things.  
 'Tis easy saying they serve vast purposes,  
 Advantage their grand selves; be it true or false,  
 Each thing may have two uses. What's a star?  
 A world, or a world's sun: doesn't it serve  
 As taper also, time-piece, weather-glass,  
 And almanac? Are stars not set for signs  
 When we should shear our sheep, sow corn, prune trees?  
 The Bible says so.

Well, I add one use  
 To all the acknowledged uses, and declare  
 If I spy Charles's Wain at twelve to-night,  
 It warns me, "Go, nor lose another day,  
 "And have your hair cut, Sludge!" You laugh: and why?  
 Were such a sign too hard for God to give?  
 No: but Sludge seems too little for such grace:  
 Thank you, sir! So you think, so does not Sludge!  
 When you and good men gape at Providence,  
 Go into history and bid us mark

Not merely powder-plots prevented, crowns  
Kept on kings' heads by miracle enough,  
But private mercies—oh, you 've told me, sir,  
Of such interpositions! How yourself  
Once, missing on a memorable day  
Your handkerchief—just setting out, you know,—  
You must return to fetch it, lost the train,  
And saved your precious self from what befell  
The thirty-three whom Providence forgot.  
You tell, and ask me what I think of this?  
Well, sir, I think then, since you needs must know,  
What matter had you and Boston city to boot  
Sailed skyward, like burnt onion-peelings? Much  
To you, no doubt: for me—undoubtedly  
The cutting of my hair concerns me more,  
Because, however sad the truth may seem,  
Sludge is of all-importance to himself.  
You set apart that day in every year  
For special thanksgiving, were a heathen else:  
Well, I who cannot boast the like escape,  
Suppose I said "I don't thank Providence  
"For my part, owing it no gratitude?"  
"Nay, but you owe as much"—you 'd tutor me,  
"You, every man alive, for blessings gained  
"In every hour of the day, could you but know!  
"I saw my crowning mercy: all have such,  
"Could they but see!" Well, sir, why don't they see?  
"Because they won't look,—or perhaps, they can't."  
Then, sir, suppose I can, and will, and do

Look, microscopically as is right,  
Into each hour with its infinitude  
Of influences at work to profit Sludge?  
For that 's the case : I 've sharpened up my sight  
To spy a providence in the fire's going out,  
The kettle's boiling, the dime's sticking fast  
Despite the hole i' the pocket. Call such facts  
Fancies, too petty a work for Providence,  
And those same thanks which you exact from me,  
Prove too prodigious payment : thanks for what,  
If nothing guards and guides us little men ?  
No, no, sir ! You must put away your pride,  
Resolve to let Sludge into partnership !  
I live by signs and omens : looked at the roof  
Where the pigeons settle—" If the further bird,  
" The white, takes wing first, I 'll confess when thrashed ;  
" Not, if the blue does"—so I said to myself  
Last week, lest you should take me by surprise :  
Off flapped the white,—and I 'm confessing, sir !  
Perhaps 'tis Providence's whim and way  
With only me, in the world : how can you tell ?  
" Because unlikely !" Was it likelier, now,  
That this our one out of all worlds beside,  
The what-d'you-call-'em millions, should be just  
Precisely chosen to make Adam for,  
And the rest o' the tale ? Yet the tale 's true, you know :  
Such undeserving clod was graced so once ;  
Why not graced likewise undeserving Sludge ?  
Are we merit-mongers, flaunt we filthy rags ?

All you can bring against my privilege  
Is, that another way was taken with you,—  
Which I don't question. It 's pure grace, my luck.  
I 'm broken to the way of nods and winks,  
And need no formal summoning. You 've a help ;  
Holloa his name or whistle, clap your hands,  
Stamp with your foot or pull the bell : all 's one,  
He understands you want him, here he comes.  
Just so, I come at the knocking : you, sir, wait  
The tongue of the bell, nor stir before you catch  
Reason's clear tingle, nature's clapper brisk,  
Or that traditional peal was wont to cheer  
Your mother's face turned heavenward : short of these  
There 's no authentic intimation, eh ?  
Well, when you hear, you 'll answer them, start up  
And stride into the presence, top of toe,  
And there find Sludge beforehand, Sludge that sprung  
At noise o' the knuckle on the partition-wall !  
I think myself the more religious man.  
Religion 's all or nothing ; it 's no mere smile  
Of contentment, sigh of aspiration, sir—  
No quality of the fineliter-tempered clay  
Like its whiteness or its lightness ; rather, stuff  
Of the very stuff, life of life, self of self.  
I tell you, men won't notice ; when they do,  
They 'll understand. I notice nothing else,  
I 'm eyes, ears, mouth of me, one gaze and gape,  
Nothing eludes me, everything's a hint,  
Handle and help. It 's all absurd, and yet

There 's something in it all, I know : how much ?  
 No answer ! What does that prove ? Man 's still man,  
 Still meant for a poor blundering piece of work  
 When all 's done ; but, if somewhat 's done, like this,  
 Or not done, is the case the same ? Suppose  
 I blunder in my guess at the true sense  
 Of the knuckle-summons, nine times out of ten,—  
 What if the tenth guess happen to be right ?  
 If the tenth shovel-load of powdered quartz  
 Yield me the nugget ? I gather, crush, sift all,  
 Pass o'er the failure, pounce on the success.  
 To give you a notion, now—(let who wins, laugh !)  
 When first I see a man, what do I first ?  
 Why, count the letters which make up his name,  
 And as their number chances, even or odd,  
 Arrive at my conclusion, trim my course :  
 Hiram H. Horsefall is your honoured name,  
 And have n't I found a patron, sir, in you ?  
 " Shall I cheat this stranger ? " I take apple-pips,  
 Stick one in either *canthus* of my eye,  
 And if the left drops first—(your left, sir, stuck)  
 I 'm warned, I let the trick alone this time.  
 You, sir, who smile, superior to such trash,  
 You judge of character by other rules :  
 Don't your rules sometimes fail you ? Pray, what rule  
 Have you judged Sludge by hitherto ?

Oh, be sure,

You, everybody blunders, just as I,



In simpler things than these by far ! For see :  
I knew two farmers,—one, a wiseacre  
Who studied seasons, rummaged almanacs,  
Quoted the dew-point, registered the frost,  
And then declared, for outcome of his pains,  
Next summer must be dampish : 't was a drought.  
His neighbour prophesied such drought would fall,  
Saved hay and corn, made cent. per cent. thereby,  
And proved a sage indeed : how came his lore ?  
Because one brindled heifer, late in March,  
Stiffened her tail of evenings, and somehow  
He got into his head that drought was meant !  
I don't expect all men can do as much :  
Such kissing goes by favour. You must take  
A certain turn of mind for this,—a twist  
I' the flesh, as well. Be lazily alive,  
Open-mouthed, like my friend the anteater,  
Letting all nature's loosely-guarded motes  
Settle and, slick, be swallowed ! Think yourself  
The one i' the world, the one for whom the world  
Was made, expect it tickling at your mouth !  
Then will the swarm of busy buzzing flies,  
Clouds of coincidence, break egg-shell, thrive,  
Breed, multiply, and bring you food enough.

I can't pretend to mind your smiling, sir !  
Oh, what you mean is this ! Such intimate way,  
Close converse, frank exchange of offices,  
Strict sympathy of the immeasurably great

With the infinitely small, betokened here  
 By a course of signs and omens, raps and sparks,—  
 How does it suit the dread traditional text  
 Of the “Great and Terrible Name?” Shall the Heaven  
     of Heavens  
 Stoop to such child’s-play?

Please sir, go with me

A moment, and I ’ll try to answer you.  
 The “*Magnum et terribile*” (is that right?)  
 Well, folk began with this in the early day ;  
 And all the acts they recognized in proof  
 Were thunders, lightnings, earthquakes, whirlwinds, dealt  
 Indisputably on men whose death they caused.  
 There, and there only, folk saw Providence  
 At work,—and seeing it, ’twas right enough  
 All heads should tremble, hands wring hands amain,  
 And knees knock hard together at the breath  
 Of the Name’s first letter ; why, the Jews, I ’m told,  
 Won’t write it down, no, to this very hour,  
 Nor speak aloud : you know best if ’t be so.  
 Each ague-fit of fear at end, they crept  
 (Because somehow people once born must live)  
 Out of the sound, sight, swing and sway of the Name,  
 Into a corner, the dark rest of the world,  
 And safe space where as yet no fear had reached ;  
 ’T was there they looked about them, breathed again,  
 And felt indeed at home, as we might say.  
 The current of common things, the daily life,

This had their due contempt ; no Name pursued  
Man from the mountain-top where fires abide,  
To his particular mouse-hole at its foot  
Where he ate, drank, digested, lived in short :  
Such was man's vulgar business, far too small  
To be worth thunder : " small," folk kept on, " small,"  
With much complacency in those great days !  
A mote of sand, you know, a blade of grass—  
What was so despicable as mere grass,  
Except perhaps the life of the worm or fly  
Which fed there? These were " small" and men were  
great.

Well, sir, the old way 's altered somewhat since,  
And the world wears another aspect now :  
Somebody turns our spyglass round, or else  
Puts a new lens in it : grass, worm, fly grow big :  
We find great things are made of little things,  
And little things go lessening till at last  
Comes God behind them. Talk of mountains now?  
We talk of mould that heaps the mountain, mites  
That throng the mould, and God that makes the mites.  
The Name comes close behind a stomach-cyst,  
The simplest of creations, just a sac  
That 's mouth, heart, legs and belly at once, yet lives  
And feels, and could do neither, we conclude,  
If simplified still further one degree :  
The small becomes the dreadful and immense !  
Lightning, forsooth? No word more upon that !  
A tin-foil bottle, a strip of greasy silk,

With a bit of wire and knob of brass, and there's  
Your dollar's-worth of lightning! But the cyst—  
The life of the least of the little things?

No, no!

Preachers and teachers try another tack,  
Come near the truth this time: they put aside  
Thunder and lightning: "That's mistake," they cry,  
"Thunderbolts fall for neither fright nor sport,  
"But do appreciable good, like tides,  
"Changes of the wind, and other natural facts—  
" 'Good' meaning good to man, his body or soul.  
"Mediate, immediate, all things minister  
"To man,—that's settled: be our future text  
" 'We are His children!'" So, they now harangue  
About the intention, the contrivance, all  
That keeps up an incessant play of love,—  
See the Bridgewater book.

Amen to it!

Well, sir, I put this question: I'm a child?  
I lose no time, but take you at your word:  
How shall I act a child's part properly?  
Your sainted mother, sir,—used you to live  
With such a thought as this a-worrying you?  
"She has it in her power to throttle me,  
"Or stab or poison: she may turn me out,  
"Or lock me in,—nor stop at this, to-day,  
"But cut me off to-morrow from the estate

"I look for"—(long may you enjoy it, sir!)  
"In brief, she may unchild the child I am."  
You never had such crotchets? Nor have I!  
Who, frank confessing childship from the first,  
Cannot both fear and take my ease at once,  
So, don't fear,—know what might be, well enough,  
But know too, child-like, that it will not be,  
At least in my case, mine, the son and heir  
Of the kingdom, as yourself proclaim my style.  
But do you fancy I stop short at this?  
Wonder if suit and service, sons and heirs  
Needs must expect, I dare pretend<sup>##</sup> to find?  
If, looking for signs proper to such an one,  
I straight perceive them irresistible?  
Concede that homage is a son's plain right,  
And, never mind the nods and raps and winks,  
'T is the pure obvious supernatural  
Steps forward, does its duty: why, of course!  
I have presentiments; my dreams come true:  
I fancy a friend stands whistling all in white  
Blithe as a boblink, and he's dead I learn.  
I take dislike to a dog my favourite long,  
And sell him; he goes mad next week and snaps.  
I guess that stranger will turn up to-day  
I have not seen these three years; there's his knock.  
I wager "sixty peaches on that tree!"—  
That I pick up a dollar in my walk,  
That your wife's brother's cousin's name was George—  
And win on all points. Oh, you wince at this?

You 'd fain distinguish between gift and gift,  
 Washington's oracle and Sludge's itch  
 O' the elbow when at whist he ought to trump?  
 With Sludge it 's too absurd? *Fine, draw the line  
 Somewhere, but, sir, your somewhere is not mine!*

Bless us, I 'm turning poet! It 's time to end.  
 How you have drawn me out, sir! All I ask  
 Is—am I heir or not heir? If I 'm he,  
 Then, sir, remember, that same personage  
 (To judge by what we read in the newspaper)  
 Requires, beside one nobleman in gold  
 To carry up and down his coronet,  
 Another servant, probably a duke,  
 To hold egg-nogg in readiness: why want  
 Attendance, sir, when helps in his-father's house  
 Abound, I 'd like to know?

Enough of talk!

My fault is that I tell too plain a truth.  
 Why, which of those who say they disbelieve,  
 Your clever people, but has dreamed his dream,  
 Caught his coincidence, stumbled on his fact  
 He can't explain, (he 'll tell you smilingly)  
 Which he 's too much of a philosopher  
 To count as supernatural, indeed,  
 So calls a puzzle and problem, proud of it:  
 Bidding you still be on your guard, you know,  
 Because one fact don't make a system stand,

Nor prove this an occasional escape  
Of spirit beneath the matter : that 's the way !  
Just so wild Indians picked up, piece by piece,  
The fact in California, the fine gold  
That underlay the gravel—hoarded these,  
But never made a system stand, nor dug !  
So wise men hold out in each hollowed palm  
A handful of experience, sparkling fact  
They can't explain ; and since their rest of life  
Is all explainable, what proof in this ?  
Whereas I take the fact, the grain of gold,  
And fling away the dirty rest of life,  
And add this grain to the grain each fool has found  
Of the million other such philosophers,—  
Till I see gold, all gold and only gold,  
Truth questionless though unexplainable,  
And the miraculous proved the commonplace !  
The other fools believed in mud, no doubt—  
Failed to know gold they saw : was that so strange ?  
Are all men born to play Bach's fiddle-fugues,  
" Time " with the foil in carte, jump their own height,  
Cut the mutton with the broadsword, skate a five,  
Make the red hazard with the cue, clip nails  
While swimming, in five minutes row a mile,  
Pull themselves three feet up with the left arm,  
Do sums of fifty figures in their head,  
And so on, by the scores of instances ?  
The Sludge with luck, who sees the spiritual facts,  
His fellows strive and fail to see, may rank

With these, and share the advantage.

Ay, but share

The drawback ! Think it over by yourself ;  
 I have not heart, sir, and the fire 's gone grey.  
 Defect somewhere compensates for success,  
 Everyone knows that. Oh, we 're equals, sir !  
 The big-legged fellow has a little arm  
 And a less brain, though big legs win the race :  
 Do you suppose I 'scape the common lot ?  
 Say, I was born with flesh so sensitive,  
 Soul so alert, that, practice helping both,  
 I guess what 's going on outside the veil,  
 Just as a prisoned crane feels pairing-time  
 In the islands where his kind are, so must fall  
 To capering by himself some shiny night,  
 As if your back-yard were a plot of spice—  
 Thus am I 'ware of the spirit-world : while you,  
 Blind as a beetle that way,—for amends,  
 Why, you can double fist and floor me, sir !  
 Ride that hot hardmouthed horrid horse of yours,  
 Laugh while it lightens, play with the great dog,  
 Speak your mind though it vex some friend to hear,  
 Never brag, never bluster, never blush,—  
 In short, you 've pluck, when I 'm a coward—there !  
 I know it, I can't help it,—folly or no,  
 I 'm paralyzed, my hand 's no more a hand,  
 Nor my head, a head, in danger : you can smile  
 And change the pipe in your cheek. Your gift 's not mine



Would you swap for mine? No! but you 'd add my gift  
 To yours: I dare say! I too sigh at times,  
 Wish I were stouter, could tell truth nor flinch,  
 Kept cool when threatened, did not mind so much  
 Being dressed gaily, making strangers stare,  
 Eating nice things; when I 'd amuse myself,  
 I shut my eyes and fancy in my brain,  
 I 'm—now the President, now, Jenny Lind,  
 Now, Emerson, now, the Benicia Boy—  
 With all the civilized world a-wondering  
 And worshipping. I know it 's folly and worse;  
 I feel such tricks sap, honeycomb the soul:  
 But I can't cure myself,—despond, despair,  
 And then, hey, presto, there 's a turn of the wheel,  
 Under comes uppermost, fate makes full amends;  
 Sludge knows and sees and hears a hundred things  
 You all are blind to,—I 've my taste of truth,  
 Likewise my touch of falsehood,—vice no doubt,  
 But you 've your vices also: I 'm content.

What, sir? You won't shake hands? "Because I cheat!  
 "You 've found me out in cheating!" That 's enough  
 To make an apostle swear! Why, when I cheat,  
*Mean to cheat, do cheat, and am caught in the act,*  
*Are you, or rather, am I sure of the fact?*

(There 's verse again, but I 'm inspired somehow.)

Well then I 'm not sure! I may be, perhaps,  
 Free as a babe from cheating: how it began,  
 My gift,—no matter; what 'tis got to be

In the end now, that 's the question : answer that !  
Had I seen, perhaps, what hand was holding mine,  
Leading me whither, I had died of fright,  
So, I was made believe I led myself.  
If I should lay a six-inch plank from roof  
To roof, you would not cross the street, one step,  
Even at your mother's summons : but, being shrewd,  
If I paste paper on each side of the plank  
And swear 'tis solid pavement, why, you 'll cross  
Humming a tune the while, in ignorance  
Beacon Street stretches a hundred feet below :  
I walked thus, took the paper-cheat for stone.  
Some impulse made me set a thing on the move  
Which, started once, ran really by itself ;  
Beer flows thus, suck the siphon ; toss the kite,  
It takes the wind and floats of its own force.  
Don't let truth's lump rot stagnant for the lack  
Of a timely helpful lie to leaven it !  
Put a chalk-egg beneath the clucking hen,  
She 'll lay a real one, laudably deceived,  
Daily for weeks to come. I 've told my lie,  
And seen truth follow, marvels none of mine ;  
All was not cheating, sir, I 'm positive !  
I don't know if I move your hand sometimes  
When the spontaneous writing spreads so far,  
If my knee lifts the table all that height,  
Why the inkstand don't fall off the desk a-tilt,  
Why the accordion plays a prettier waltz  
Than I can pick out on the piano-forte,

Why I speak so much more than I intend,  
 Describe so many things I never saw.  
 I tell you, sir, in one sense, I believe  
 Nothing at all,—that everybody can,  
 Will, and does cheat : but in another sense  
 I 'm ready to believe my very self—  
 That every cheat 's inspired, and every lie  
 Quick with a germ of truth.

You ask perhaps

Why I should condescend to trick at all  
 If I know a way without it? This is why!  
 There 's a strange secret sweet self-sacrifice  
 In any desecration of one 's soul  
 To a worthy end,—isn't it Herodotus  
 (I wish I could read Latin!) who describes  
 The single gift of the land's virginity,  
 Demanded in those old Egyptian rites,  
 (I 've but a hazy notion—help me, sir!)  
 For one purpose in the world, one day in a life,  
 One hour in a day—thereafter, purity,  
 And a veil thrown o' er the past for evermore!  
 Well now, they understood a many things  
 Down by Nile city, or wherever it was!  
 I 've always vowed, after the minute's lie,  
 And the good end's gain,—truth should be mine hence-  
 forth.

This goes to the root of the matter, sir,—this plain  
 Plump fact : accept it and unlock with it

The wards of many a puzzle !

Or, finally,

Why should I set so fine a gloss on things ?  
 What need I care ? I cheat in self-defence,  
 And there 's my answer to a world of cheats !  
 Cheat ? To be sure, sir ! What 's the world worth else ?  
 Who takes it as he finds, and thanks his stars ?  
 Don't it want trimming, turning, furbishing up  
 And polishing over ? Your so-styled great men,  
 Do they accept one truth as truth is found,  
 Or try their skill at tinkering ? What 's your world ?  
 Here are you born, who are, I 'll say at once,  
 One of the luckiest whether in head and heart,  
 Body and soul, or all that helps the same.  
 Well, now, look back : what faculty of yours  
 Came to its full, had ample justice done  
 By growing when rain fell, biding its time,  
 Solidifying growth when earth was dead,  
 Spiring up, broadening wide, in seasons due ?  
 Never ! You shot up and frost nipped you off,  
 Settled to sleep when sunshine bade you sprout ;  
 One faculty thwarted its fellow : at the end,  
 All you boast is, " I had proved a topping tree  
 In other climes "—yet this was the right clime  
 Had you foreknown the seasons. ' Young, you 've force  
 Wasted like well-streams : old,—oh, then indeed,  
 Behold a labyrinth of hydraulic pipes  
 Through which you 'd play off wondrous waterwork ;

Only, no water left to feed their play !  
Young,—you 've a hope, an aim, a love ; it 's tossed  
And crossed and lost : you struggle on, some spark  
Shut in your heart against the puffs around,  
'Through cold and pain ; these in due time subside,  
Now then for age's triumph, the hoarded light  
You mean to loose on the altered face of things,—  
Up with it on the tripod ! It 's extinct.  
Spend your life's remnant asking, which was best,  
Light smothered up that never peeped forth once,  
Or the cold cresset with full leave to shine ?  
Well, accept this too,—seek the fruit of it  
Not in enjoyment, proved a dream on earth,  
But knowledge, useful for a second chance,  
Another life,—you 've lost this world—you 've gained  
Its knowledge for the next.—What knowledge, sir,  
Except that you know nothing ? Nay, you doubt  
Whether 'twere better have made you man or brute,  
If aught be true, if good and evil clash.  
No foul, no fair, no inside, no outside,  
There 's your world !

Give it me ! I slap it brisk  
With harlequin's pasteboard sceptre : what 's it now ?  
Changed like a rock-flat, rough with rusty weed,  
At first wash-over of the returning wave !  
All the dry dead impracticable stuff  
Starts into life and light again ; this world  
Pervaded by the influx from the next.

I cheat, and what 's the happy consequence?  
You find full justice straightway dealt you out,  
Each want supplied, each ignorance set at ease,  
Each folly fooled. No life-long labour now  
As the price of worse than nothing! No mere film  
Holding you chained in iron, as it seems,  
Against the outstretch of your very arms  
And legs in the sunshine moralists forbid!  
What would you have? Just speak and, there, you see!  
You 're supplemented, made a whole at last,  
Bacon advises, Shakespeare writes you songs,  
And Mary Queen of Scots embraces you.  
Thus it goes on, not quite like life perhaps,  
But so near, that the very difference piques,  
Shows that e'en better than this best will be—  
This passing entertainment in a hut  
Whose bare walls take your taste since, one stage more,  
And you arrive at the palace: all half real,  
And you, to suit it, less than real beside,  
In a dream, lethargic kind of death in life,  
That helps the interchange of natures, flesh  
Transfused by souls, and such souls! Oh, 'tis choice!  
And if at whiles the bubble, blown too thin,  
Seem nigh on bursting,—if you nearly see  
The real world through the false,—what *do* you see?  
Is the old so ruined? You find you 're in a flock  
Of the youthful, earnest, passionate—genius, beauty,  
Rank and wealth also, if you care for these,  
And all depose their natural rights, hail you,

(That 's me, sir) as their mate and yoke-fellow,  
Participate in Sludgehood—nay, grow mine,  
I veritably possess them—banish doubt,  
And reticence and modesty alike !  
Why, here 's the Golden Age, old Paradise  
Or new Eutopia ! Here is life indeed,  
And the world well won now, yours for the first time !

And all this might be, may be, and with good help  
Of a little lying shall be : so, Sludge lies !  
Why, he 's at worst your poet who sings how Greeks  
That never were, in Troy which never was,  
Did this or the other impossible great thing !  
He 's Lowell—it 's a world, you smile and say,  
Of his own invention—wondrous Longfellow,  
Surprising Hawthorne ! Sludge does more than they,  
And acts the books they write : the more his praise !

But why do I mount to poets? Take plain prose—  
Dealers in common sense, set these at work,  
What can they do without their helpful lies?  
Each states the law and fact and face of the thing  
Just as he 'd have them, finds what he thinks fit,  
Is blind to what missuits him, just records  
What makes his case out, quite ignores the rest.  
It 's a History of the World, the Lizard Age,  
The Early Indians, the Old Country War,  
Jerome Napoleon, whatsoever you please,  
All as the author wants it. Such a scribe

You pay and praise for putting life in stones,  
 Fire into fog, making the past your world.  
 There 's plenty of " How did you contrive to grasp  
 " The thread which led you through this labyrinth?  
 " How build such solid fabric out of air?  
 " How on so slight foundation found this tale,  
 " Biography, narrative?" or, in other words,  
 " How many lies did it require to make  
 " The portly truth you here present us with?"  
 " Oh," quoth the penman, purring at your praise,  
 " 'T is fancy all ; no particle of fact :  
 " I was poor and threadbare when I wrote that book  
 " ' Bliss in the Golden City.' I, at Thebes?  
 " We writers paint out of our heads, you see !"  
 " —Ah, the more wonderful the gift in you,  
 " The more creativeness and godlike craft !"  
 But I, do I present you with my piece,  
 It 's " What, Sludge? When my sainted mother spoke  
 " The verses Lady Jane Grey last composed  
 " About the rosy bower in the seventh heaven  
 " Where she and Queen Elizabeth keep house,—  
 " You made the raps? 'T was your invention that?  
 " Cur, slave and devil !"—eight fingers and two thumbs  
 Stuck in my throat !

Well, if the marks seem gone,  
 'T is because stiffish cock-tail, taken in time,  
 Is better for a bruise than arnica.



There, sir ! I bear no malice : 't is n't in me.  
 I know I acted wrongly : still, I 've tried  
 What I could say in my excuse,—to show  
 The devil 's not all devil . . . I do n't pretend,  
 An angel, much less such a gentleman  
 As you, sir ! And I 've lost you, lost myself,  
 Lost all, l-l-l- . . . .

No—are you in earnest, sir ?

O, yours, sir, is an angel's part ! I know  
 What prejudice must be, what the common course  
 Men take to soothe their ruffled self-conceit :  
 Only you rise superior to it all !  
 No, sir, it don't hurt much ; it 's speaking long  
 That makes me choke a little : the marks will go !  
 What ? Twenty V-notes more, and outfit too,  
 And not a word to Greeley ? One—one kiss  
 Of the hand that saves me ! You 'll not let me speak  
 I well know, and I 've lost the right, too true !  
 But I must say, sir, if She hears (she does)  
 Your sainted . . . Well, sir,—be it so ! That 's, I think,  
 My bed-room candle. Good night ! Bl-l-less you, sir !

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R-r-r, you brute-beast and blackguard ! Cowardly  
 scamp !

I only wish I dared burn down the house  
 And spoil your sniggering ! Oh, what, you 're the man ?  
 You 're satisfied at last ? You 've found out Sludge ?

We 'll see that presently : my turn, sir, next !  
I too can tell my story : brute,—do you hear?—  
You throttled your sainted mother, that old hag,  
In just such a fit of passion : no, it was . . .  
To get this house of hers, and many a note  
Like these . . . I 'll pocket them, however . . . five,  
Ten, fifteen . . . ay, you gave her throat the twist,  
Or else you poisoned her ! Confound the cuss !  
Where was my head ? I ought to have prophesied  
He 'll die in a year and join her : that 's the way.

I don't know where my head is : what had I done ?  
How did it all go ? I said he poisoned her,  
And hoped he 'd have grace given him to repent,  
Whereon he picked this quarrel, bullied me  
And called me cheat : I thrashed him,—who could help ?  
He howled for mercy, prayed me on his knees  
To cut and run and save him from disgrace :  
I do so, and once off, he slanders me.  
An end of him ! Begin elsewhere anew !  
Boston 's a hole, the herring-pond is wide,  
V-notes are something, liberty still more.  
Beside, is he the only fool in the world ?

## APPARENT FAILURE.

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“ We shall soon lose a celebrated building.”

*Paris Newspaper.*

### I.

No, for I 'll save it ! Seven years since,  
I passed through Paris, stopped a day  
To see the baptism of your Prince ;  
Saw, made my bow, and went my way :  
Walking the heat and headache off,  
I took the Seine-side, you surmise,  
Thought of the Congress, Gortschakoff,  
Cavour's appeal and Buol's replies,  
So sauntered till—what met my eyes ?

### II.

Only the Doric little Morgue !  
The dead-house where you show your drowned :  
Petrarch's Vaucluse makes proud the Sorgue,  
Your Morgue has made the Seine renowned.  
One pays one's debt in such a case ;  
I plucked up heart and entered,—stalked,  
Keeping a tolerable face  
Compared with some whose cheeks were chalked :  
Let them ! No Briton 's to be baulked !

## III.

First came the silent gazers ; next,  
 A screen of glass, we 're thankful for ;  
 Last, the sight's self, the sermon's text,  
 The three men who did most abhor  
 Their life in Paris yesterday,  
 So killed themselves : and now, enthroned  
 Each on his copper couch, they lay  
 Fronting me, waiting to be owned.  
 I thought, and think, their sin 's atoned.

## IV.

Poor men, God made, and all for that !  
 The reverence struck me ; o'er each head  
 Religiously was hung its hat,  
 Each coat dripped by the owner's bed,  
 Sacred from touch : each had his berth,  
 His bounds, his proper place of rest,  
 Who last night tenanted on earth  
 Some arch, where twelve such slept abreast,—  
 Unless the plain asphalte seemed best.

## V.

How did it happen, my poor boy ?  
 You wanted to be Buonaparte  
 And have the Tuileries for toy,  
 And could not, so it broke your heart ?

You, old one by his side, I judge,  
 Were, red as blood, a socialist,  
 A leveller ! Does the Empire grudge  
 You 've gained what no Republic missed ?  
 Be quiet, and unclench your fist !

## VI.

And this—why, he was red in vain,  
 Or black,—poor fellow that is blue !  
 What fancy was it, turned your brain ?  
 Oh, women were the prize for you !  
 Money gets women, cards and dice  
 Get money, and ill-luck gets just  
 The copper couch and one clear nice  
 Cool squirt of water o'er your bust,  
 The right thing to extinguish lust !

## VII.

It 's wiser being good than bad ;  
 It 's safer being meek than fierce :  
 It 's fitter being sane than mad.  
 My own hope is, a sun will pierce  
 The thickest cloud earth ever stretched ;  
 That, after Last, returns the First,  
 Though a wide compass round be fetched ;  
 That what began best, can't end worst,  
 Nor what God blessed once, prove accurst.

## EPILOGUE.

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FIRST SPEAKER, *as David.*

I.

On the first of the Feast of Feasts,  
The Dedication Day,  
When the Levites joined the Priests  
At the Altar in robed array,  
Gave signal to sound and say,—

II.

When the thousands, rear and van,  
Swarming with one accord,  
Became as a single man,  
(Look, gesture, thought and word)  
In praising and thanking the Lord,—

III.

When the singers lift up their voice,  
And the trumpets made endeavour,  
Sounding, "In God rejoice!"  
Saying, "In Him rejoice  
"Whose mercy endureth for ever!"—

## IV.

Then the Temple filled with a cloud,  
 Even the House of the Lord ;  
 Porch bent and pillar bowed :  
 For the presence of the Lord,  
 In the glory of His cloud,  
 Had filled the House of the Lord.

SECOND SPEAKER, *as Renan.*

Gone now ! All gone across the dark so far,  
 Sharpening fast, shuddering ever, shutting still,  
 Dwindling into the distance, dies that star  
 Which came, stood, opened once ! We gazed our fill  
 With upturned faces on as real a Face  
 That, stooping from grave music and mild fire,  
 Took in our homage, made a visible place  
 Through many a depth of glory, gyre on gyre,  
 For the dim human tribute. Was this true ?  
 Could man indeed avail, mere praise of his,  
 To help by rapture God's own rapture too,  
 Thrill with a heart's red tinge that pure pale bliss ?  
 Why did it end ? Who failed to beat the breast,  
 And shriek, and throw the arms protesting wide,  
 When a first shadow showed the star addressed  
 Itself to motion, and on either side  
 The rims contracted as the rays retired ;  
 The music, like a fountain's sickening pulse,

Subsided on itself ; awhile transpired  
Some vestige of a Face no pangs convulse,  
No prayers retard ; then even this was gone,  
Lost in the night at last. We, lone and left  
Silent through centuries, ever and anon  
Venture to probe again the vault bereft  
Of all now save the lesser lights, a mist  
Of multitudinous points, yet suns, men say—  
And this leaps ruby, this lurks amethyst,  
But where may hide what came and loved our clay ?  
How shall the sage detect in yon expanse  
The star which chose to stoop and stay for us ?  
Unroll the records ! Hailed ye such advance  
Indeed, and did your hope vanish thus ?  
Watchers of twilight, is the worst averred ?  
We shall not look up, know ourselves are seen,  
Speak, and be sure that we again are heard,  
Acting or suffering, have the disk's serene  
Reflect our life, absorb an earthly flame,  
Nor doubt that, were mankind inert and numb,  
Its core had never crimsoned all the same,  
Nor, missing ours, its music fallen dumb ?  
Oh, dread succession to a dizzy post,  
Sad sway of sceptre whose mere touch appals,  
Ghastly dethronement, cursed by those the most  
On whose repugnant brow the crown next falls !



## THIRD SPEAKER.

## I.

Witless alike of will and way divine,  
How heaven's high with earth's low should intertwine !  
Friends, I have seen through your eyes : now use mine !

## II.

Take the least man of all mankind, as I ;  
Look at his head and heart, find how and why  
He differs from his fellows utterly :

## III.

Then, like me, watch when nature by degrees  
Grows alive round him, as in Arctic seas  
(They said of old) the instinctive water flees

## IV.

Toward some elected point of central rock,  
As though, for its sake only, roamed the flock  
Of waves about the waste : awhile they mock

## V.

With radiance caught for the occasion,—hues  
Of blackest hell now, now such reds and blues  
As only heaven could fitly interfuse,—

## VI.

The mimic monarch of the whirlpool, king  
O' the current for a minute : then they wring  
Up by the roots and oversweep the thing,

## VII.

And hasten off, to play again elsewhere  
The same part, choose another peak as bare,  
They find and flatter, feast and finish there.

## VIII.

When you see what I tell you,—nature dance  
About each man of us, retire, advance,  
As though the pageant's end were to enhance

## IX.

His worth, and—once the life, his product, gained—  
Roll away elsewhere, keep the strife sustained,  
And show thus real, a thing the North but feigned,—

## X.

When you acknowledge that one world could do  
All the diverse work, old yet ever new,  
Divide us, each from other, me from you,—

## XI.

Why, where 's the need of Temple, when the walls  
O' the world are that? What use of swells and falls  
From Levites' choir, Priests' cries, and trumpet-calls?

## XII.

That one Face, far from vanish, rather grows,  
Or decomposes but to recompose,  
Become my universe that feels and knows!

END OF VOL. VI.



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