

## III

## BREDFIELD HALL

Lo, an English mansion founded  
In the elder James's reign,  
Quaint and stately, and surrounded  
With a pastoral domain.

With well-timber'd lawn and gardens  
And with many a pleasant mead,  
Skirted by the lofty coverts  
Where the hare and pheasant feed.

Flank'd it is with goodly stables,  
Shelter'd by coeval trees :  
So it lifts its honest gables  
Toward the distant German seas ;

Where it once discern'd the smoke  
Of old sea-battles far away :  
Saw victorious Nelson's topmasts  
Anchoring in Hollesley Bay.

But whatever storm might riot,  
Cannon roar, and trumpet ring,

Still amid these meadows quiet  
Did the yearly violet spring :

Still Heaven's starry hand suspended  
That light balance of the dew,  
That each night on earth descended,  
And each morning rose anew :

And the ancient house stood rearing  
Undisturb'd her chimneys high,  
And her gilded vanes still veering  
Toward each quarter of the sky :

While like wave to wave succeeding  
Through the world of joy and strife,  
Household after household speeding  
Handed on the torch of life :

First, sir Knight in ruff and doublet,  
Arm in arm with stately dame ;  
Then the Cavaliers indignant  
For their monarch brought to shame :

Languid beauties limn'd by Lely ;  
Full-wigg'd Justice of Queen Anne :  
Tory squires who tipp'd freely ;  
And the modern Gentleman :

Here they lived, and here they greeted,  
Maids and matrons, sons and sires,  
Wandering in its walks, or seated  
Round its hospitable fires :

Oft their silken dresses floated  
Gleaming through the pleasure ground :  
Oft dash'd by the scarlet-coated  
Hunter, horse, and dappled hound.

Till the Bell that not in vain  
Had summon'd them to weekly prayer,  
Call'd them one by one again  
To the church — and left them there !

They with all their loves and passions,  
Compliment, and song, and jest,  
Politics, and sports, and fashions,  
Merged in everlasting rest !

So they pass — while thou, old Mansion,  
Markest with unalter'd face  
How like the foliage of thy summers  
Race of man succeeds to race.

To most thou stand'st a record sad,  
But all the sunshine of the year

Could not make thine aspect glad  
To one whose youth is buried here.

In thine ancient rooms and gardens  
Buried — and his own no more  
Than the youth of those old owners,  
Dead two centuries before.

Unto him the fields around thee  
Darken with the days gone by :  
O'er the solemn woods that bound thee  
Ancient sunsets seem to die.

Sighs the selfsame breeze of morning  
Through the cypress as of old ;  
Ever at the Spring's returning  
One same crocus breaks the mould.

Still though 'scaping Time's more savage  
Handywork this pile appears,  
It has not escaped the ravage  
Of the undermining years.

And though each succeeding master,  
Grumbling at the cost to pay,  
Did with coat of paint and plaster  
Hide the wrinkles of decay ;

Yet the secret worm ne'er ceases,  
Nor the mouse behind the wall ;  
Heart of oak will come to pieces,  
And farewell to Bredfield Hall !

“ These verses on his old home were written originally by Fitzgerald as early as 1839, and communicated to Bernard Barton. They were circulated in slightly differing forms among his friends, and probably never received the final touches of his hand, but they contain what, Professor Cowell informs me, were in his own judgment the best lines he had ever written, as shewing real imagination, and it seems better to print them though imperfect. In reply to an old friend, who had heard some of the lines quoted and supposed them to be from Tennyson, he wrote: ‘ I was astonisht to find I had three sheets to fold up ; and now one half “ cheer ” more, only to prevent you wasting any more trouble in looking through Tennyson for those verses — I myself having been puzzled at first to what you alluded by that single line. No : I wrote them along with many others about my old home more than forty years ago, and they recur to me also as I wander about the Garden or the Lawn. Therefore I suppose there is some native force about them, though your referring them to A. T. proves that I was echoing him.’ ” — *Letters and Literary Remains* (1889), Vol. III., pp. 458-461.