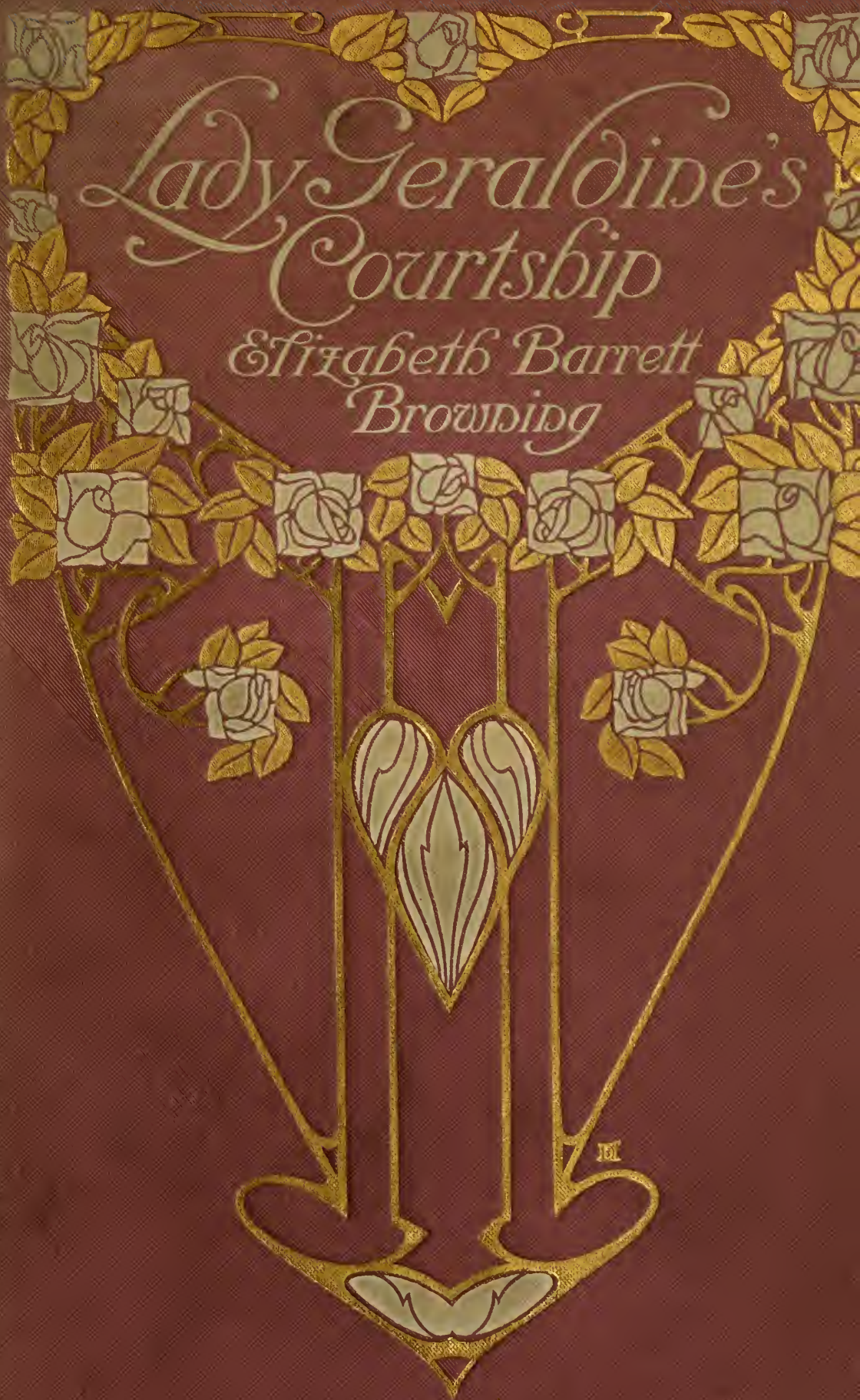


*Lady Geraldine's  
Courtship*

*Elizabeth Barrett  
Browning*



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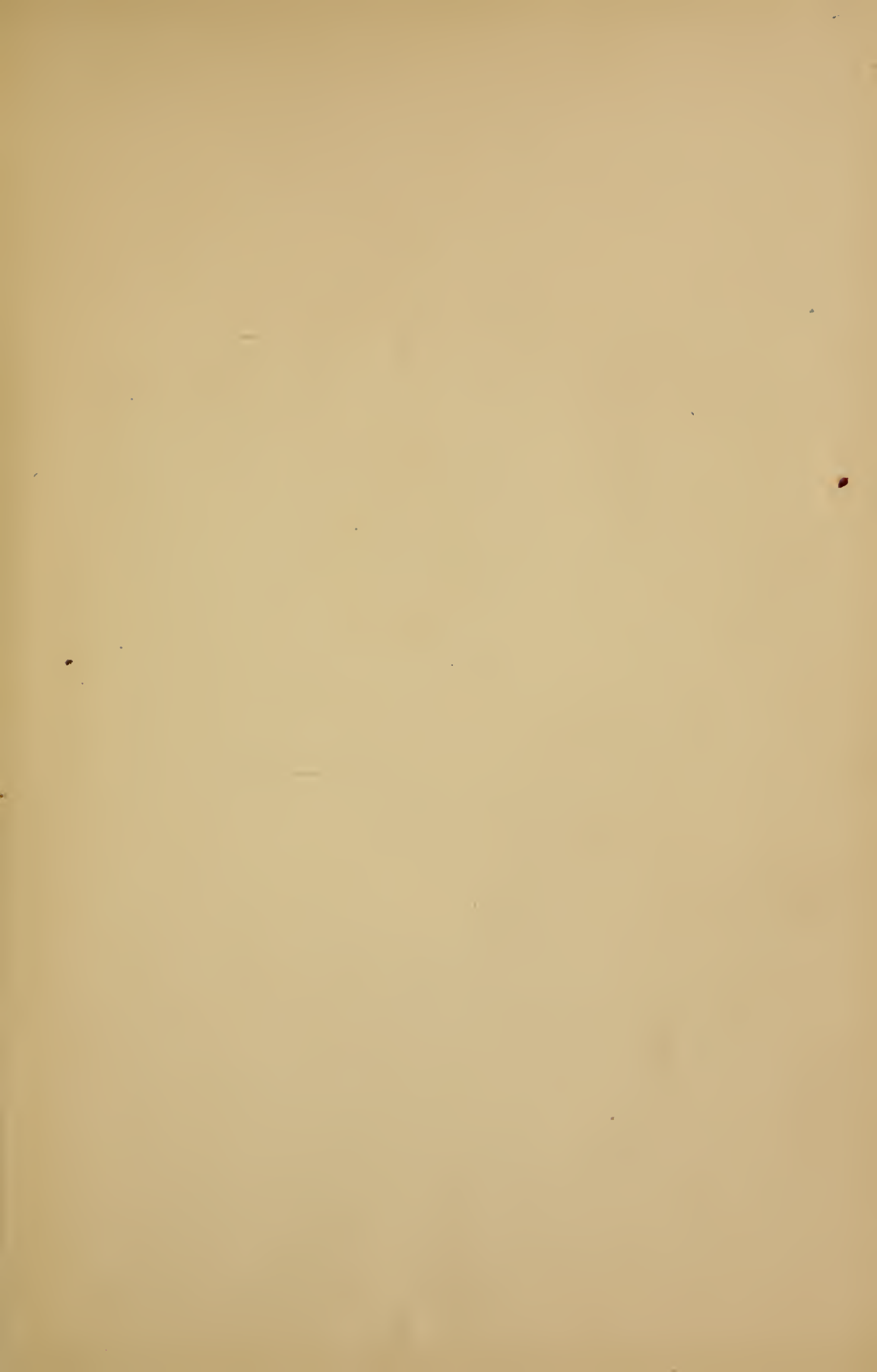


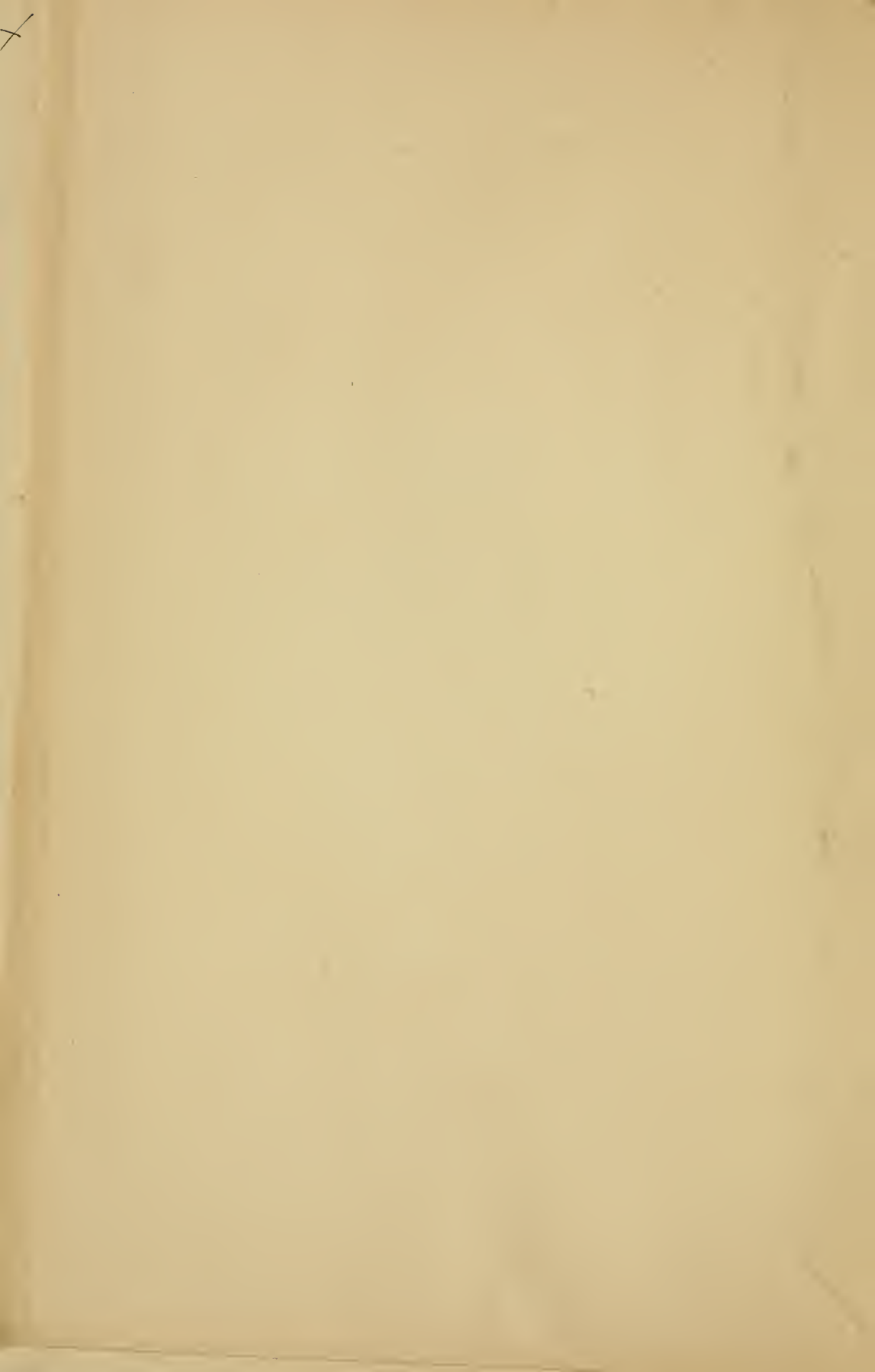
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*Lady Geraldine's Courtship*









LADY GERALDINE.



# Lady Geraldine's Courtship

A ROMANCE OF THE AGE

By

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

ILLUSTRATIONS BY G. C. WILMSHURST, AND  
DECORATIONS BY FRANKLIN BOOTH

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SCENE

A POET WRITES TO HIS FRIEND



PLACE

A ROOM IN WYCOMBE HALL




TIME

LATE IN THE EVENING







*PART I*  
THE LETTER



**D**EAR my friend and fellow-  
student, I would lean my  
spirit o'er you!

Down the purple of this  
chamber tears should scarcely run  
at will.

I am humbled who was humble. Friend,  
I bow my head before you :  
You should lead me to my peasants ;  
but their faces are too still.

TO HERE'S a lady, an earl's  
daughter,— she is  
proud and she is noble,  
And she treads the crim-  
son carpet, and she breathes the  
perfumed air,  
And a kingly blood sends glances up,  
her princely eye to trouble,  
And the shadow of a monarch's crown  
is softened in her hair.

**S** HE has halls among the  
woodlands, she has castles  
by the breakers,  
She has farms and she has  
manors, she can threaten and command,  
And the palpitating engines snort in  
steam across her acres,  
As they mark upon the blasted heaven  
the measure of the land.

TO HERE are none of England's  
daughters who can show  
a prouder presence ;

Upon princely suitors pray-  
ing, she has looked in her dis-  
dain.

She was sprung of English nobles, I was  
born of English peasants :

What was *I* that I should love her,  
save for competence to pain !

**I** WAS only a poor poet,  
made for singing at her  
casement,

As the finches or the thrush-  
es, while she thought of other  
things.

Oh, she walked so high above me, she  
appeared to my abasement,  
In her lovely silken murmur, like an  
angel clad in wings!

**Q** ANY vassals bow before her  
as her carriage sweeps  
their doorways;

She has blest their little  
children, as a priest or queen were  
she:

Far too tender, or too cruel far, her  
smile upon the poor was,

For I thought it was the same smile  
which she used to smile on *me*.



**S** HE has voters in the commons, she has lovers in the palace,  
And of all the fair court-ladies, few have jewels half as fine;  
Oft the prince has named her beauty  
'twixt the red wine and the chalice:  
Oh, and what was *I* to love her? my beloved, my Geraldine!

VIII

YET I could not choose but  
love her: I was born to  
poet-uses,—

To love all things set  
above me, all of good and all of  
fair.

Nymphs of mountain, not of valley, we  
are wont to call the Muses;  
And, in nympholeptic climbing, poets  
pass from mount to star.

**A**ND because I was a poet,  
and because the public  
praised me,  
With a critical deduction for  
the modern writer's fault,  
I could sit at rich men's tables, though  
the courtesies that raised me  
Still suggested clear between us the pale  
spectrum of the salt.

**A**ND they praised me in her presence: “Will your book appear this summer?”

Then, returning to each other—“Yes, our plans are for the moors;”

Then, with whisper dropped behind me—“There he is! the latest comer. Oh, she only likes his verses! what is over, she endures.



“There are none of England’s daughters who can show a prouder presence.”



**Q** UITE low-born, self-educated! somewhat gifted, though, by nature,  
And we make a point of asking him,—of being very kind.  
You may speak, he does not hear you; and, besides, he writes no satire:  
All these serpents kept by charmers leave the natural sting behind.”

**I** GREW scornfuller, grew  
colder, as I stood up  
there among them,  
Till, as frost intense will burn  
you, the cold scorning scorched my  
brow ;

When a sudden silver speaking, gravely  
cadenced, over-rung them,  
And a sudden silken stirring touched  
my inner nature through.



**I** LOOKED upward and  
beheld her: with a calm  
and regnant spirit,  
Slowly round she swept her  
eyelids, and said clear before them  
all,

“Have you such superfluous honor, sir,  
that, able to confer it,  
You will come down, Mister Bertram,  
as my guest to Wycombe Hall?”

**H**ERE she paused: she had  
been paler at the first  
word of her speaking,  
But, because a silence fol-  
lowed it, blushed somewhat, as for  
shame,

Then, as scorning her own feeling, re-  
sumed calmly, "I am seeking  
More distinction than these gentlemen  
think worthy of my claim.

**N**E'ERTHELESS, you see,  
I seek it; not because I  
am a woman,"

(Here her smile sprang like  
a fountain, and so, overflowed her  
mouth),

“But because my woods in Sussex have  
some purple shades at gloaming  
Which are worthy of a king in state, or  
poet in his youth.

**I** INVITE you, Mister Bertram, to no scene for worldly speeches,—  
Sir, I scarce should dare,—  
but only where God asked the thrushes first ;  
And if *you* will sing beside them, in the covert of my beeches,  
I will thank you for the woodlands, for the human world at worst.”

**T**HEN she smiled around right  
childly, then she gazed  
around right queenly,  
And I bowed—I could  
not answer; alternated light and  
gloom,  
While, as one who quells the lions,  
with a steady eye, serenely,  
She, with level, fronting eyelids, passed  
out stately from the room.

XVIII

O H, the blessèd woods of  
Sussex! I can hear them  
still around me,

With their leafy tide of  
greenery still rippling up the  
wind.

Oh, the cursèd woods of Sussex! where  
the hunter's arrow found me  
When a fair face and a tender voice  
had made me mad and blind!

**I**N that ancient hall of Wy-  
combe thronged the  
numerous guests invited,  
And the lovely London  
ladies trod the floors with gliding  
feet ;  
And their voices, low with fashion, not  
with feeling, softly freighted  
All the air about the windows with  
elastic laughters sweet.

**E**OR at eve the open win-  
dows flung their light  
out on the terrace,  
Which the floating orbs of  
curtains did with gradual shadow  
sweep,  
While the swans upon the river, fed at  
morning by the heiress,  
Trembled downward through their  
snowy wings at music in their sleep.



**A**ND there evermore was  
music, both of instrument  
and singing,  
Till the finches of the  
shrubberies grew restless in the  
dark ;  
But the cedars stood up motionless, each  
in a moonlight-ringing,  
And the deer, half in the glimmer,  
strewed the hollows of the park.

**A**ND though sometimes she  
would bind me with her  
silver-corded speeches  
To commix my words and  
laughter with the converse and the  
jest,  
Oft I sat apart, and, gazing on the  
river through the beeches,  
Heard, as pure the swans swam down  
it, her pure voice o'erfloat the rest.

**I**N the morning, horn of  
    huntsman, hoof of steed,  
    and laugh of rider,  
    Spread out cheery from the  
courtyard till we lost them in the  
hills ;  
While herself and other ladies, and her  
    sutors left beside her,  
Went a-wandering up the gardens,  
    through the laurels and abeles.

THUS, her foot upon the  
new-mown grass, bare-  
headed, with the flowing  
Of the virginal white vest-  
ure gathered closely to her throat,  
And the golden ringlets in her neck just  
quicken'd by her going,  
And appearing to breathe sun for air,  
and doubting if to float,—

**W**ITH a bunch of dewy maple  
which her right hand  
held above her,  
And which trembled, a  
green shadow, in betwixt her and  
the skies,  
As she turned her face in going, thus,  
she drew me on to love her,  
And to worship the divineness of the  
smile hid in her eyes.

**F**OR her eyes alone smile  
constantly; her lips have  
serious sweetness,  
And her front is calm;  
the dimple rarely ripples on the  
cheek;  
But her deep blue eyes smile constantly,  
as if they in discreetness  
Kept the secret of a happy dream she  
did not care to speak.

ᵀ HUS she drew me, the first  
morning, out across into  
the garden,

And I walked among her  
noble friends, and could not keep  
behind.

Spake she unto all and unto me, “Be-  
hold, I am the warden  
Of the song-birds in these lindens, which  
are cages to their mind.

**B**UT within this swarded  
circle into which the  
lime-walk brings us,  
Whence the beeches, round-  
ed greenly, stand away in reverent  
fear,  
I will let no music enter, saving what  
the fountain sings us,  
Which the lilies round the basin may  
seem pure enough to hear.



XXIX

**T**HE live air that waves the  
lilies waves the slender  
jet of water,  
Like a holy thought sent  
feebly up from soul of fasting  
saint :

Whereby lies a marble Silence sleeping  
(Lough the sculptor wrought her,)  
So asleep she is forgetting to say 'Hush!'  
—a fancy quaint.

xxx



**Q**ARK how heavy white her  
eyelids! not a dream  
between them lingers;  
And the left hand's index  
droppeth from the lips upon the  
cheek;

While the right hand, with the symbol-  
rose held slack within the fingers,  
Has fallen backward in the basin, — yet  
this Silence will not speak!

WHAT the essential meaning  
growing may exceed the  
special symbol,

Is the thought as I con-  
ceive it: it applies more high and  
low.

Our true noblemen will often through  
right nobleness grow humble,  
And assert an inward honor by denying  
outward show."

**D**AY, your Silence," said I,  
"truly, holds her sym-  
bol-rose but slackly ;  
Yet *she holds it*, or would  
scarcely be a Silence to our ken :  
And your nobles wear their ermine on  
the outside, or walk blackly  
In the presence of the social law as  
mere ignoble men.

XXXIII

**L**ET the poets dream such  
dreaming! madam, in  
these British islands  
'Tis the substance that wanes  
ever, 'tis the symbol that exceeds.  
Soon we shall have nought but symbol;  
and, for statues like this Silence,  
Shall accept the rose's image—in an-  
other case, the weed's."

**N**OT so quickly," she retorted:  
"I confess, where'er you  
go, you

Find for things, names—  
shows for actions, and pure gold  
for honor clear:

But, when all is run to symbol in the  
social, I will throw you

The world's book which now reads dry-  
ly, and sit down with Silence here."



“Near the statue’s white reposing and both bathed in sunny air.”





**H**ALF in playfulness she spoke,  
I thought, and half in  
indignation:

Friends who listened,  
laughed her words off, while her  
lovers deemed her fair,—

A fair woman, flushed with feeling, in  
her noble-lighted station

Near the statue's white reposing and  
both bathed in sunny air!

**W**ITH the trees round, not so  
distant but you heard  
their vernal murmur,  
And beheld in light and  
shadow the leaves in and outward  
move,  
And the little fountain leaping toward  
the sun-heart to be warmer,  
Then recoiling in a tremble from the  
too much light above.

'T IS a picture for remembrance.  
And thus, morning after  
morning,  
Did I follow as she drew  
me by the spirit to her feet.  
Why, her greyhound followed also! dogs  
—we both were dogs for scorn-  
ing—  
To be sent back when she pleased it and  
her path lay through the wheat.

XXXVIII

**A**ND thus, morning after morn-  
ing, spite of vows, and  
spite of sorrow,

Did I follow at her draw-  
ing, while the week-days passed  
along,

Just to feed the swans this noontide, or  
to see the fawns to-morrow,

Or to teach the hillside echo some sweet  
Tuscan in a song.

**H**Y; for sometimes on the hill-  
side, while we sate down  
in the gowans,  
With the forest green be-  
hind us, and its shadow cast be-  
fore,  
And the river running under, and across  
it, from the rowans,  
A brown partridge whirring near us till  
we felt the air it bore,—

☉ HERE, obedient to her pray-  
ing, did I read aloud the  
poems

Made to Tuscan flutes, or  
instruments more various of our  
own;

Read the pastoral parts of Spenser, or  
the subtle interflowings

Found in Petrarch's sonnets—here's the  
book, the leaf is folded down!

**O**R at times a modern volume,  
Wordsworth's solemn-  
thoughted idyl,  
Howitt's ballad-verse, or  
Tennyson's enchanted revery,  
Or from Browning some "Pomegran-  
ate," which, if cut deep down the  
middle,  
Shows a heart within blood-tinctured, of  
a veined humanity.

**O** R at times I read there  
hoarsely some new poem  
of my making:

Poets ever fail in reading  
their own verses to their worth;  
For the echo in you breaks upon the  
words which you are speaking,  
And the chariot-wheels jar in the gate  
through which you drive them  
forth.



**A**FTER, when we were grown  
tired of books, the silence  
round us flinging  
A slow arm of sweet com-  
pression, felt with beatings at the  
breast,  
She would break out on a sudden in a  
gush of woodland singing,  
Like a child's emotion in a god,—a naiad  
tired of rest.

XLIV

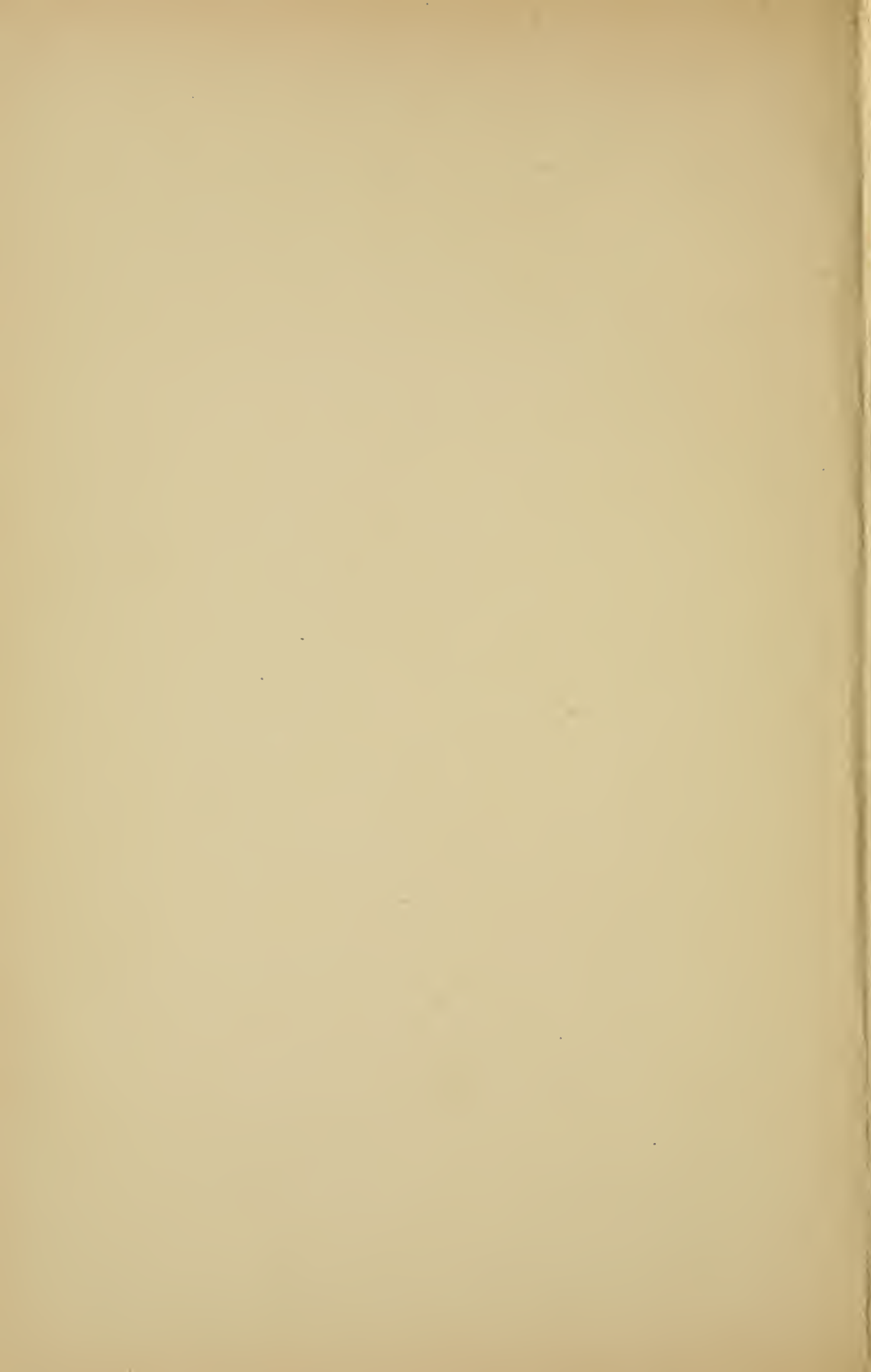
O H, to see or hear her sing-  
ing! scarce I know which  
is divinest,

For her looks sing, too—she  
modulates her gestures on the tune,  
And her mouth stirs with the song, like  
song; and, when the notes are  
finest,

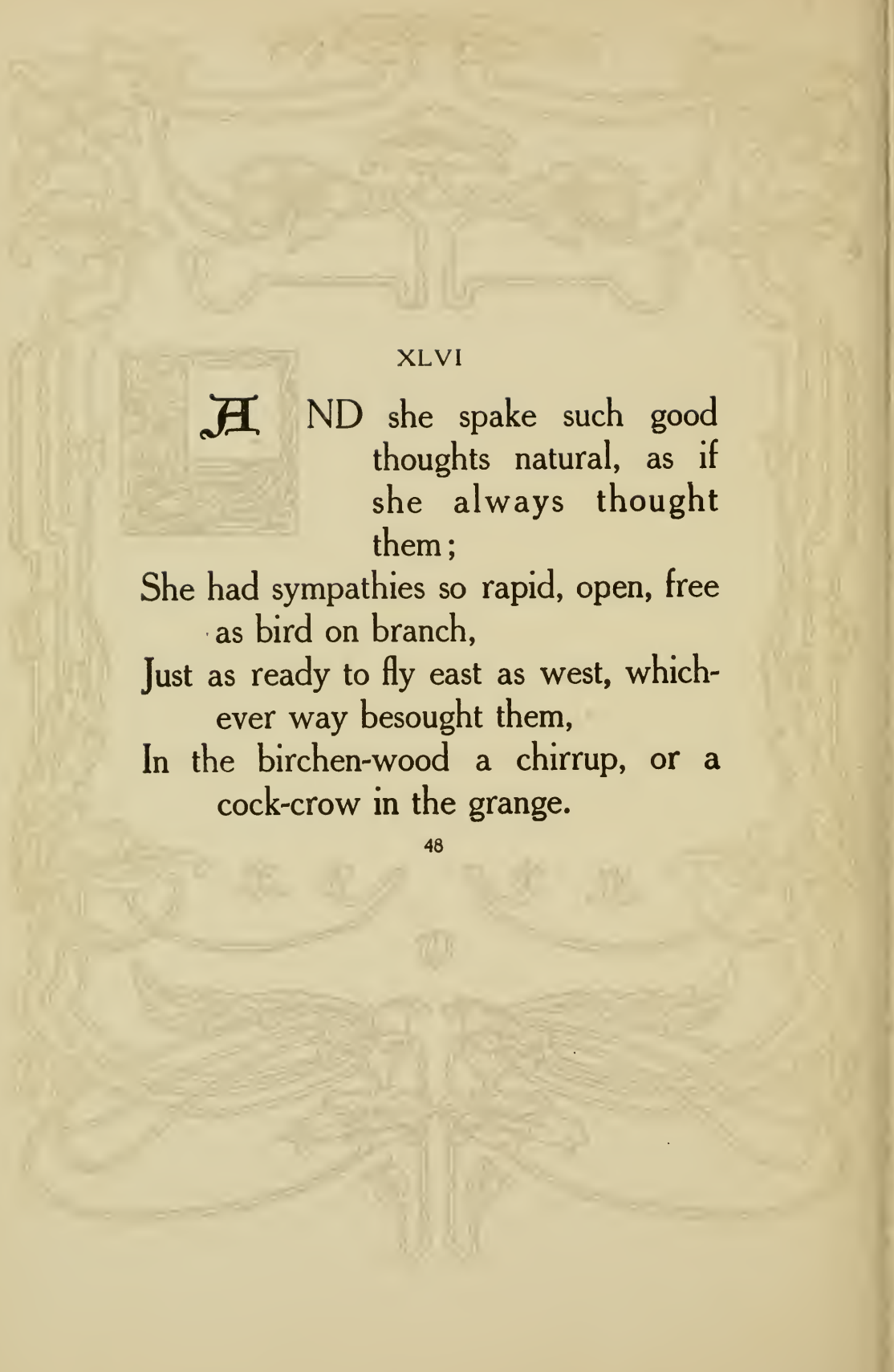
'Tis the eyes that shoot out vocal light,  
and seem to swell them on.



“Oh, to see or hear her singing!”



**T**HEN we talked—oh, how  
we talked! her voice, so  
cadenced in the talking,  
Made another singing—of  
the soul! a music without bars:  
While the leafy sounds of woodlands,  
humming round where we were  
walking,  
Brought interposition worthy-sweet, as  
skies about the stars.



**A**ND she spake such good  
thoughts natural, as if  
she always thought  
them;

She had sympathies so rapid, open, free  
as bird on branch,

Just as ready to fly east as west, which-  
ever way besought them,

In the birchen-wood a chirrup, or a  
cock-crow in the grange.

XLVII

**I**N her utmost lightness there  
is truth, and often she  
speaks lightly,  
Has a grace in being gay  
which even mournful souls ap-  
prove ;  
For the root of some grave earnest thought  
is understruck so rightly  
As to justify the foliage and the waving  
flowers above.

XLVIII

**A**ND she talked on—*we* talked,  
rather! upon all things,  
—substance, shadow,  
Of the sheep that browsed  
the grasses, of the reapers in the  
corn,  
Of the little children from the schools,  
seen winding through the meadow,  
Of the poor rich world beyond them,  
still kept poorer by its scorn.



XLIX

**S** O of men, and so of let-  
ters—books are men of  
higher stature,  
And the only men that speak  
aloud for future times to hear;  
So of mankind in the abstract, which  
grows slowly into nature,  
Yet will lift the cry of “progress,” as  
it trod from sphere to sphere.

L

**A**ND her custom was to praise  
me when I said, "The  
age culls simples,

With a broad clown's back  
turned broadly to the glory of the  
stars.

We are gods by our own reck'ning, and  
may well shut up the temples,  
And wield on, amid the incense-steam,  
the thunder of our cars.

**E**OR we throw out acclama-  
tions of self-thanking,  
self-admiring,

With, at every mile run  
faster, 'Oh, the wondrous, won-  
drous age!'

Little thinking if we work our SOULS as  
nobly as our iron,

Or if angels will commend us at the goal  
of pilgrimage.

Ω HY, what *is* this patient entrance into Nature's deep resources

But the child's most gradual learning to walk upright without bane?

When we drive out from the cloud of steam majestic white horses,  
Are we greater than the first men who led black ones by the mane?

**I**F we trod the deeps of ocean,  
if we struck the stars in  
rising,  
If we wrapped the globe  
intensely with one hot electric  
breath,  
'Twere but power within our tether, no  
new spirit-power comprising,  
And in life we were not greater men,  
nor bolder men in death."

**S** HE was patient with my  
talking; and I loved her,  
loved her certes

As I loved all heavenly  
objects, with uplifted eyes and  
hands;

As I loved pure inspirations, loved the  
graces, loved the virtues,

In a Love content with writing his own  
name on desert sands.

**O** R at least I thought so, purely;  
thought no idiot hope  
was raising  
Any crown to crown Love's  
silence, silent Love that sate alone.  
Out, alas! the stag is like me,—he that  
tries to go on grazing  
With the great deep gun-wound in  
his neck, then reels with sudden  
moan.

**I**T was thus I reeled. I told  
you that her hand had  
many suitors ;  
But she smiles them down  
imperially, as Venus did the  
waves,  
And with such a gracious coldness, that  
they cannot press their futures  
On the present of her courtesy, which  
yieldingly enslaves.



**A**ND this morning, as I sat  
alone within the inner  
chamber

With the great saloon be-  
yond it, lost in pleasant thought  
serene,

For I had been reading Camöens, that  
poem, you remember,  
Which his lady's eyes are praised in as  
the sweetest ever seen.

**A**ND the book lay open; and  
my thought flew from it,  
taking from it

A vibration and impulsion  
to an end beyond its own,  
As the branch of a green osier, when a  
child would overcome it,  
Springs up freely from his claspings, and  
goes swinging in the sun.

**A**S I mused I heard a murmur :  
it grew deep as it grew  
longer,

Speakers, using earnest lan-  
guage—"Lady Geraldine, you  
*would!*"

And I heard a voice that pleaded ever  
on in accents stronger,

As a sense of reason gave it power to  
make its rhetoric good.

WELL I knew that voice: it  
was an earl's, of soul  
that matched his sta-  
tion,—

Soul completed into lordship, might and  
right read on his brow;

Very finely courteous: far too proud to  
doubt his domination

Of the common people, he atones for  
grandeur by a bow.

**H**IGH straight forehead, nose  
of eagle, cold blue eyes  
of less expression  
Than resistance, coldly cast-  
ing off the looks of other men,  
As steel, arrows; unelastic lips, which  
seem to taste possession,  
And be cautious lest the common air  
should injure or distrain.

**F**OR the rest, accomplished,  
upright, ay, and stand-  
ing by his order .

With a bearing not un-  
graceful; fond of art and letters,  
too;

Just a good man made a proud man,—  
as the sandy rocks that border  
A wild coast, by circumstances, in a  
regnant ebb and flow.

**T**HUS, I knew that voice, I  
heard it, and I could not  
help the hearkening:  
In the room I stood up  
blindly, and my burning heart  
within  
Seemed to seethe and fuse my senses till  
they ran on all sides darkening,  
And scorched, weighed like melted metal  
round my feet that stood therein.

LXIV

**A**ND that voice, I heard it  
pleading, for love's sake,  
for wealth, position,  
For the sake of liberal uses,  
and great actions to be done—  
And she interrupted gently, "Nay, my  
lord, the old tradition  
Of your Normans, by some worthier  
hand than mine is, should be won."



**A** H, that white hand!" he  
said quickly; and in his  
he either drew it  
Or attempted, for with grav-  
ity and instance she replied,  
"Nay, indeed, my lord, this talk is vain,  
and we had best eschew it,  
And pass on, like friends, to other points  
less easy to decide."

W HAT he said again, I know  
not: it is likely that his  
trouble

Worked his pride up to the  
surface, for she answered in slow  
scorn,

“And your lordship judges rightly.  
Whom I marry, shall be noble,  
Ay, and wealthy. I shall never blush  
to think how he was born.”

↳ HERE I maddened. Her  
words stung me. Life  
swept through me into  
fever,  
And my soul sprang up astonished,—  
sprang full-statured in an hour.  
Know you what it is when anguish with  
apocalyptic NEVER  
To a Pythian height dilates you, and  
despair sublimes to power?

**F**ROM my brain the soul-  
wings budded, waved a  
flame about my body,  
Whence conventions coiled  
to ashes. I felt self-drawn out, as  
man,  
From amalgamate false natures, and I  
saw the skies grow ruddy  
With the deepening feet of angels, and  
I knew what spirits can.

LXIX

**I** WAS mad, inspired, say  
either! (anguish worketh  
inspiration)

Was a man or beast—per-  
haps so, for the tiger roars when  
speared;

And I walked on step by step along the  
level of my passion—

Oh, my soul! and passed the doorway  
to her face, and never feared.

**H**E had left her, peradventure,  
when my footstep proved  
my coming;

But for *her*—she half arose,  
then sate, grew scarlet, and grew  
pale.

Oh, she trembled! 'tis so always with a  
worldly man or woman

In the presence of true spirits: what else  
*can* they do but quail?

O H! she fluttered like a tame  
bird in among its forest  
brothers

Far too strong for it; then  
drooping, bowed her face upon her  
hands;

And I spake out wildly, fiercely, brutal  
truths of her and others:

*I*, she planted in the desert, swathed her,  
windlike, with my sands.

I PLUCKED up her social  
fictions, bloody-rooted,  
though leaf-verdant,  
Trod them down with words  
of shaming,—all the purple and the  
gold,  
All the “landed stakes” and lordships,  
—all that spirits pure and ardent  
Are cast out of love and honor because  
chancing not to hold.





“And I spake out wildly, fiercely.”



**F**OR myself I do not argue,"  
said I, "though I love  
you, madam,

But for better souls that  
nearer to the height of yours have  
trod:

And this age shows, to my thinking, still  
more infidels to Adam,  
Than, directly by profession, simple in-  
fidels to God.

Y ET, O God!" I said, "O  
grave!" I said, "O moth-  
er's heart and bosom!

With whom first and last  
are equal, saint and corpse and lit-  
tle child,

We are fools to your deductions in these  
figments of heart closing;

We are traitors to your causes in these  
sympathies defiled.

LEARN more reverence,  
madam, not for rank or  
wealth, *that* needs no  
learning,—

*That* comes quickly, quick as sin does,  
ay, and culminates to sin,—

But for Adam's seed, MAN! Trust me,  
'tis a clay above your scorning,  
With God's image stamped upon it, and  
God's kindling breath within.

W HAT right have you, madam,  
gazing in your palace  
mirror daily,

Getting so by heart your  
beauty which all others must  
adore,

While you draw the golden ringlets  
down your fingers, to vow gayly  
You will wed no man that's only good  
to God, and nothing more?

LXXVII

W HY, what right have you,  
made fair by that same  
God, the sweetest  
woman

Of all women he has fashioned, with  
your lovely spirit-face,  
Which would seem too near to vanish,  
if its smile were not so human,  
And your voice of holy sweetness, turn-  
ing common words to grace,

W HAT right *can* you have,  
God's other works to  
scorn, despise, revile  
them,

In the gross, as mere men, broadly, not  
as *noble* men, forsooth;

As mere pariahs of the outer world, for-  
bidden to assoil them

In the hope of living, dying, near that  
sweetness of your mouth?



**H**AVE you any answer, mad-  
am? If my spirit were  
less earthly,  
If its instrument were gifted  
with a better silver string,  
I would kneel down where I stand, and  
say, 'Behold me! I am worthy  
Of thy loving, for I love thee. I am  
worthy as a king.'

LXXX

AS it is, your ermined pride  
I swear, shall feel this  
stain upon her,  
That I, poor, weak, tost  
with passion, scorned by me and  
you again,  
Love you, madam, dare to love you, to  
my grief and your dishonor,  
To my endless desolation, and your im-  
potent disdain."

**Q**UORE mad words like these,  
—mere madness! friend,  
I need not write them  
fuller,

For I hear my hot soul dropping on the  
lines in showers of tears.

Oh, a woman! friend, a woman! why,  
a beast had scarce been duller

Than roar bestial loud complaints against  
the shining of the spheres.

**B**UT at last there came a  
pause. I stood all vi-  
brating with thunder  
Which my soul had used.  
The silence drew her face up like  
a call.

Could you guess what word she uttered?  
She looked up, as if in wonder,  
With tears beaded on her lashes, and  
said, "Bertram!" it was all.

**I** F she had cursed me,—and  
she might have,—or if  
even, with queenly bear-  
ing

Which at need is used by women, she  
had risen up and said,

“Sir, you are my guest, and therefore I  
have given you a full hearing:

Now, beseech you, choose a name ex-  
acting somewhat less, instead,”

LXXXIV

I HAD borne it: but that  
“Bertram”—why, it lies  
there on the paper,  
A mere word, without her  
accent, and you cannot judge the  
weight  
Of the calm which crushed my passion.  
I seemed drowning in a vapor,  
And her gentleness destroyed me, whom  
her scorn made desolate.

LXXXV

**S**O, struck backward and ex-  
hausted by that inward  
flow of passion,  
Which had rushed on, spar-  
ing nothing, into forms of abstract  
truth,  
By a logic agonizing through unseemly  
demonstration,  
And by youth's own anguish turning  
grimly gray the hairs of youth,

**B**Y the sense accursed and  
instant, that, if even I  
spake wisely,  
I spake basely—using truth,  
if what I spake indeed was true,  
To avenge wrong on a woman—*her*, who  
sate there weighing nicely  
A poor manhood's worth, found guilty  
of such deeds as I could do!—



**B**Y such wrong and woe ex-  
hausted—what I suffered  
and occasioned,  
As a wild horse through  
a city runs with lightning in his  
eyes,  
And then dashing at a church's cold and  
passive wall, impassioned,  
Strikes the death into his burning brain,  
and blindly drops and dies—

LXXXVIII

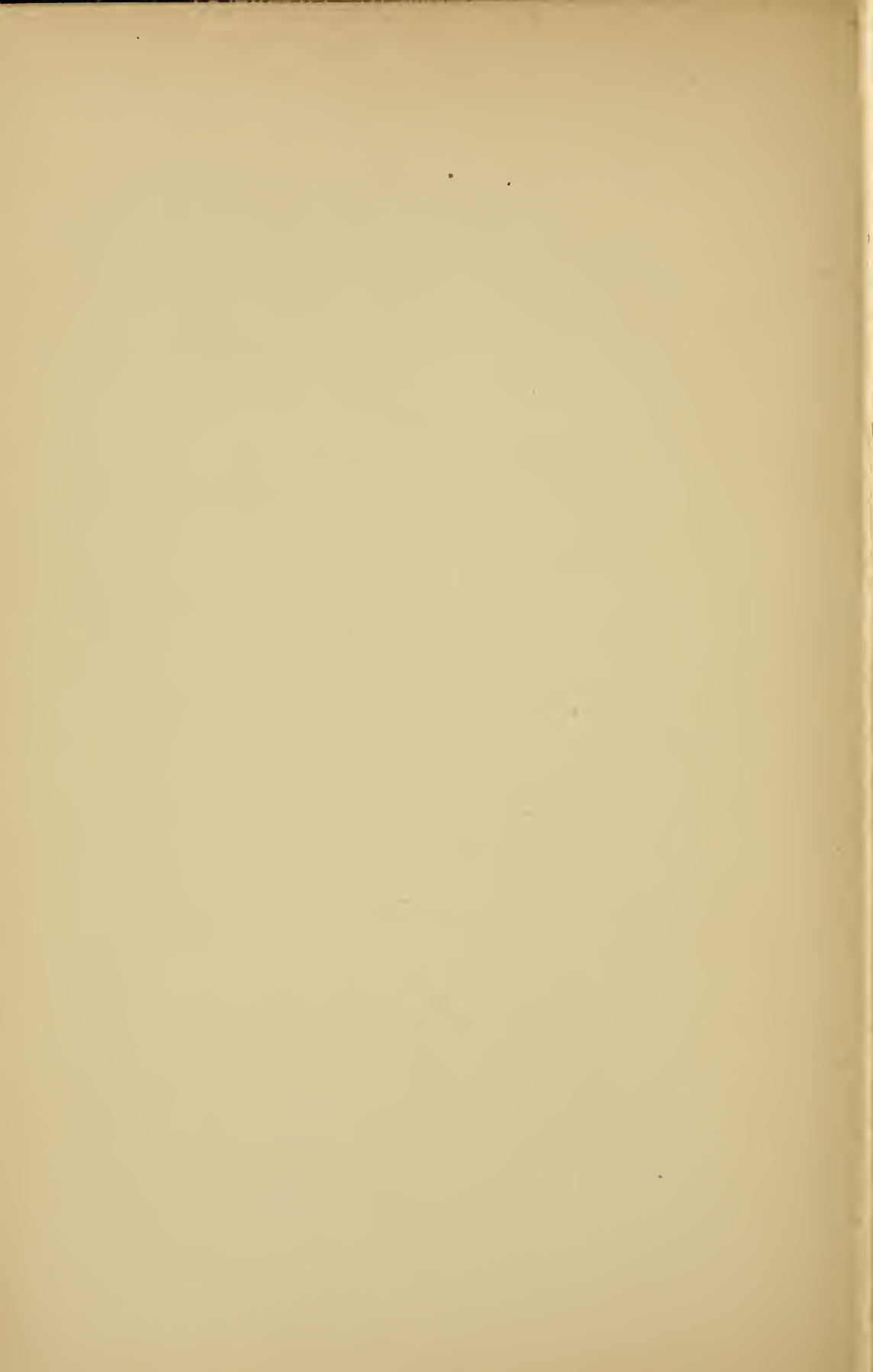
**S** O I fell, struck down before  
her—do you blame me,  
friend, for weakness?

'Twas my strength of pas-  
sion slew me—fell before her like  
a stone;

Fast the dreadful world rolled from me  
on its roaring wheels of blackness:  
When the light came, I was lying in this  
chamber, and alone.



“So I fell, struck down before her.”



LXXXIX

**O** H, of course she charged her  
lackeys to bear out the  
sickly burden,

And to cast it from her  
scornful sight, but not *beyond* the  
gate;

She is too kind to be cruel, and too  
haughty not to pardon

Such a man as I: 'twere something to be  
level to her hate.

**B**UT for me—you now are  
conscious why, my  
friend, I write this letter,  
How my life is read all  
backward, and the charm of life  
undone.

I shall leave her house at dawn,—I would  
to-night, if I were better,—  
And I charge my soul to hold my body  
strengthened for the sun.

W HEN the sun has dyed the  
oriel, I depart, with no  
last gazes,  
No weak moanings (one  
word only, left in writing for her  
hands),  
Out of reach of all derision, and some  
unavailing praises,  
To make front against this anguish in  
the far and foreign lands.

**B** LAME me not. I would  
not squander life in grief  
—I am abstemious.

I but nurse my spirit's falcon  
that its wing may soar again.

There's no room for tears of weakness  
in the blind eyes of a Phemius:  
Into work the poet kneads them, and he  
does not die *till then*.



*PART II*  
CONCLUSION



**B**ERTRAM finished the last  
pages, while along the  
silence ever,  
Still in hot and heavy splashes,  
fell the tears on every leaf.  
Having ended, he leans backward in his  
chair, with lips that quiver  
From the deep unspoken, ay, and deep  
unwritten, thoughts of grief.

**S** OH! How still the lady  
standeth! 'Tis a dream,  
—a dream of mercies!  
'Twixt the purple lattice-  
curtains how she standeth still and  
pale!  
'Tis a vision, sure, of mercies sent to  
soften his self curses,  
Sent to sweep a patient quiet o'er the  
tossing of his wail.



“’Tis a dream – a dream of mercies!”



“YES,” he said, “now throbbing through me, are ye eyes that did undo me?—

Shining eyes, like antique jewels set in  
Parian statue-stone!

Underneath that calm white forehead  
are ye ever burning torrid  
O'er the desolate sand-desert of my  
heart and life undone?”

WITH a murmurous stir un-  
certain, in the air the  
purple curtain  
Swelleth in and swelleth  
out around her motionless pale  
brows,  
While the gliding of the river sends a  
rippling noise forever  
Through the open casement whitened by  
the moonlight's slant repose.



**S** AID he, "Vision of a lady,  
stand there silent, stand  
there steady!

Now I see it plainly, plainly,  
now I cannot hope or doubt—  
There, the brows of mild repression;  
there, the lips of silent passion,  
Curvèd like an archer's bow to send the  
bitter arrows out."

**E**VER, evermore the while,  
in a slow silence she  
kept smiling,  
And approached him slowly,  
slowly, in a gliding, measured  
pace,  
With her two white hands extended, as  
if praying one offended,  
And a look of supplication gazing earnest  
in his face.

**S** AID he, "Wake me by no  
gesture, sound of breath,  
or stir of vesture!

Let the blessèd apparition  
melt not yet to its divine!

No approaching—hush, no breathing, or  
my heart must swoon to death in  
The too utter life thou bringest, O thou  
dream of Geraldine!"

VIII

EVER, evermore the while,  
in a slow silence she  
kept smiling;  
But the tears ran over lightly  
from her eyes, and tenderly:—  
“Dost thou, Bertram, truly love me?  
Is no woman far above me  
Found more worthy of thy poet-heart  
than such a one as *I*?”

**S** AID he, "I would dream so  
ever, like the flowing of  
that river,

Flowing ever in a shadow  
greenly onward to the sea!

So, thou vision of all sweetness, princely  
to a full completeness,

Would my heart and life flow onward,  
deathward, through this dream of  
THEE!"

x

EVER, evermore the while,  
in a slow silence she  
kept smiling,

While the silver tears ran  
faster down the blushing of her  
cheeks;

Then, with both her hands infolding both  
of his, she softly told him,  
“Bertram, if I say I love thee, . . . 'tis  
the vision only speaks.”



“‘Bertram, if I say I love thee, . . . ’tis the vision only speaks.’”





**S** OFTENED, quickened to  
 adore her, on his knee  
 he fell before her;

And she whispered low in  
 triumph, "It shall be as I have  
 sworn.

Very rich he is in virtues, very noble,—  
 noble certes;

And I shall not blush in knowing that  
 men call him lowly born."



(1)







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