

Portraits

Augusta Webster

Table of Contents

Portraits	1
<u>Augusta Webster</u>	2
<u>MEDEA IN ATHENS</u>	3
<u>* * * * *</u>	7
<u>* * * * *</u>	9
<u>CIRCE</u>	12
<u>THE HAPPIEST GIRL IN THE WORLD</u>	17
<u>A CASTAWAY</u>	23
<u>A SOUL IN PRISON</u>	37
<u>TIRED</u>	42
<u>COMING HOME</u>	51
<u>IN AN ALMSHOUSE</u>	56
<u>AN INVENTOR</u>	66
<u>A DILETTANTE</u>	71
<u>THE MANUSCRIPT OF SAINT ALEXIUS</u>	75

Portraits

Augusta Webster

This page copyright © 2002 Blackmask Online.
<http://www.blackmask.com>

- MEDEA IN ATHENS.
- * * * * *
- * * * * *
- CIRCE.
- THE HAPPIEST GIRL IN THE WORLD.
- A CASTAWAY.
- A SOUL IN PRISON.
- TIRED.
- COMING HOME.
- IN AN ALMSHOUSE.
- AN INVENTOR.
- A DILETTANTE.
- THE MANUSCRIPT OF SAINT ALEXIUS.

MEDEA IN ATHENS.

DEAD is he? Yes, our stranger guest said dead—
said it by noonday, when it seemed a thing
most natural and so indifferent
as if the tale ran that a while ago
there died a man I talked with a chance hour
when he by chance was near me. If I spoke
"Good news for us but ill news for the dead
when the gods sweep a villain down to them,"
'twas the prompt trick of words, like a pat phrase
from some one other's song, found on the lips
and used because 'tis there: for through all day
the news seemed neither good nor ill to me.

And now, when day with all its useless talk
and useless smiles and idiots' prying eyes
that impotently peer into one's life,
when day with all its seemly lying shows
has gone its way and left pleased fools to sleep,
while weary mummers, taking off the mask,
discern that face themselves forgot anon
and, sitting in the lap of sheltering night,
learn their own secrets from her—even now
does it seem either good or ill to me?
No, but mere strange.

And this most strange of all
that I care nothing.

Nay, how wild thought grows.
Meseems one came and told of Jason's death:
but 'twas a dream. Else should I, wondering thus,
reck not of him, nor with the virulent hate
that should be mine against mine enemy,
nor with that weakness which sometimes I feared
should this day make me, not remembering Glaucè,
envy him to death as though he had died mine?

Can he be dead? It were so strange a world
with him not in it.

Dimly I recall
some prophecy a god breathed by my mouth.
It could not err. What was it? For I think;—
it told his death¹.

Has a god come to me?
Is it thou, my Hecate? How know I all?
For I know all as if from long ago:
and I know all beholding instantly.
Is not that he, arisen through the mists?—

Portraits

a lean and haggard man, rough round the eyes,
dull and with no scorn left upon his lip,
decayed out of his goodliness and strength;
a wanned and broken image of a god;
dim counterfeit of Jason, heavily
wearing the name of him and memories.

And lo, he rests with lax and careless limbs
on the loose sandbed wind–heaped round his ship
that rots in sloth like him, and props his head
on a half–buried fallen spar. The sea,
climbing the beach towards him, seethes and frets,
and on the verge two sunned and shadowed clouds
take shapes of notched rock–islands; and his thoughts
drift languid to the steep Symplegades
and the sound of waters crashing at their base.

Su d, wspan eikos, katqanei kakos kakws, Argous kara son leiyaw pepilhmenos. *EUR. Med.* 1386, 7.

And now he speaks out to his loneliness
"I was afraid and careful, but she laughed:
'Love steers' she said: and when the rocks were far,
grey twinkling spots in distance, suddenly
her face grew white, and, looking back to them,
she said, 'Oh love, a god has whispered me
'twere well had we died there, for strange mad woes
are waiting for us in your Greece': and then
she tossed her head back, while her brown hair streamed
gold in the wind and sun, and her face glowed
with daring beauty, 'What of woes', she cried,
'if only they leave time for love enough?'
But what a fire and flush! It took one's breath!"
And then he lay half musing, half adoze,
shadows of me went misty through his sight.

And bye and bye he roused and cried "Oh dolt!
Glaucè was never half so beautiful."
Then under part–closed lids remembering her,
"Poor Glaucè, a sweet face, and yet methinks
she might have wearied me:" and suddenly,
smiting the sand aw whirl with his angry hand,
scorned at himself "What god befooled my wits
to dream my fancy for her yellow curls
and milk–white softness subtle policy?
Wealth and a royal bride: but what beyond?
Medea, with her skills, her presciences,
man's wisdom, woman's craft, her rage of love

MEDEA IN ATHENS.

that gave her to serve me strength next divine,
 Medea would have made me what I would;
 Glaucoè but what she could. I schemed amiss
 and earned the curses the gods send on fools.
 Ruined, ruined! A laughing stock to foes!
 No man so mean but he may pity me;
 no man so wretched but will keep aloof
 lest the curse upon me make him wretcheder.
 Ruined!"

And lo I see him hide his face
 like a man who'll weep with passion: but to him
 the passion comes not, only slow few tears
 of one too weary. And from the great field
 where the boys race he hears their jubilant shout
 hum through the distance, and he sighs "Ah me!
 she might have spared the children, left me them:—
 no sons, no sons to stand about me now
 and prosper me, and tend me bye and bye
 in faltering age, and keep my name on earth
 when I shall be departed out of sight."

And the shout hummed louder forth: and whirring past
 a screaming sea-bird flapped out to the bay,
 and listlessly he watched it dip and rise
 till it skimmed out of sight, so small a speck
 as a mayfly on the brook; and then he said
 "Fly forth, fly forth, bird, fly to fierce Medea
 where by great Ægeus she sits queening it,
 belike a joyful mother of new sons;
 tell her she never loved me as she talked,
 else had no wrong at my hand shewn so great:
 tell her that she breaks oaths more than I broke,
 even so much as she seemed to love most—
 she who fits fondling in a husband's arms
 while I am desolate." And again he said
 "My house is perished with me—ruined, ruined!"

At that he rose and, muttering in his teeth
 still "ruined, ruined," slowly paced the sands:
 then stood and, gazing on the ragged hulk,
 cried "Oh loathed tool of fiends, that, through all storms
 and sundering waters, borest me to Medea,
 rot, rot, accursed thing," and petulant
 pashed at the side—

Lo, lo! I see it part!
 a tottering spar—it parts, it falls, it strikes!
 He is prone on the sand, the blood wells from his brow,
 he moans, he speaks, "Medea's prophecy."
 See he has fainted.

Hush, hush! he has lain
 with death and silence long: now he wakes up—

Portraits

"Where is Medea? Let her bind my head."
Hush, hush! A sigh—a breath—He is dead.

Portraits

* * * * *

Medea!

What, is it thou? What, thou, this whimpering fool,
this kind meek coward! Sick for pity art thou?
Or did the vision scare thee? Out on me!
do I drivel like a slight disconsolate girl
wailing her love?

No, not one foolish tear
that shamed my cheek welled up for any grief
at his so pitiful lone end. The touch
of ancient memories and the woman's trick
of easy weeping took me unawares:
but grief! Why should I grieve?

And yet for this,
that he is dead. He should still pine and dwine,
hungry for his old lost strong food of life
vanished with me, hungry for children's love,
hungry for me. Ever to think of me—
with love, with hate, what care I? hate is love—
Ever to think and long. Oh it was well!
Yea, my new marriage hope has been achieved:
for he **did** count me happy, picture me
happy with Ægeus; he **did** dream of me
as all to Ægeus that I was to him,
and to him nothing; and **did** yearn for me
and know me lost—we two so far apart
as dead and living, I an envied wife
and he alone and childless. Jason, Jason,
come back to earth; live, live for my revenge.

But lo the man is dead: I am forgotten.
Forgotten; something goes from life in that—
as if oneself had died, when the half self
of one's true living time has slipped away
from reach of memories, has ceased to know
that such a woman is.

A wondrous thing
to be so separate having been so near—
near by hate last and once by so strong love.
Would love have kept us near if he had died
in the good days? Tush, I should have died too:
we should have gone together, hand in hand,
and made dusk Hades glorious each to each.

Ah me, if then when through the fitful seas
we saw the great rocks glimmer, and the crew
howled "We are lost! lo the Symplegades!"
too late to shun them, if but then some wave,
our secret friend, had dashed us from our course,

* * * * *

Portraits

sending us to be shivered at the base,
well, well indeed! And yet what say I there?
Ten years together were they not worth cost
of all the anguish? Oh me, how I loved him!
Why did I not die loving him?

Portraits

* * * * *

What thou!

Have the dead no room, or do they drive thee forth
loathing thee near them? Dost thou threaten me?
Why, so I saw thee last, and was not scared:
think not to scare me now; I am no babe
to shiver at an unavailing shade.
Go, go, thou canst not curse me, none will hear:
the gods remember justice. Wrongs! thy wrongs!
the vengeance, ghost! What hast thou to avenge
as I have? Lo, thy meek-eyed Glaucè died,
and thy king-kinsman Creon died: but I,
I live what thou hast made me.

Oh smooth adder,
who with fanged kisses changedst my natural blood
to venom in me, say, didst thou not find me
a grave and simple girl in a still home,
learning my spells for pleasant services
or to make sick beds easier? With me went
the sweet sound of friends' voices praising me:
all faces smiled on me, even lifeless things
seemed glad because of me; and I could smile
to every face, to everything, to trees,
to skies and waters, to the passing herds,
to the small thievish sparrows, to the grass
with sunshine through it, to the weed's bold flowers:
for all things glad and harmless seemed my kin,
and all seemed glad and harmless in the world.
Thou cam'st, and from the day thou, finding me
in Hecate's dim grove to cull my herbs,
didst burn my cheeks with kisses hot and strange,
the curse of thee compelled me. Lo I am
The wretch thou say'st; but wherefore? by whose work?
Who, binding me with dreadful marriage oaths
in the midnight temple, led my treacherous flight
from home and father? Whose voice when I turned,
desperate to save thee, on my own young brother,
my so loved brother, whose voice as I smote
nerved me, cried "Brave Medea"? For whose ends
did I decoy the credulous girls, poor fools,
to slay their father? When have I been base,
when cruel, save for thee, until—Man, man,
wilt thou accuse my guilt? Whose is my guilt?
mine or thine, Jason? Oh, soul of my crimes,
how shall I pardon thee for what I am?

Never. And if, with the poor womanish heart
that for the loving's sake will still love on,
I could let such a past wane as a dream

* * * * *

and turn to thee at waking—turn to thee!
 I, put aside like some slight purchased slave
 who pleased thee and then tired, still turn to thee!—
 yet never, not if thou and I could live
 thousands of years and all thy years were pain
 and all my years were to behold thy pain,
 never could I forgive thee for my boys;
 never could I look on this hand of mine
 that slew them and not hate thee. Childless thou,
 what is thy childlessness to mine? Go, go,
 thou foolish angry ghost, what wrongs hast thou?
 would I could wrong thee more. Come thou sometimes
 and see me happy.

Dost thou mock at me
 with thy cold smiling? Aye, can I not love?
 What then? am I not folded round with love,
 with a life's whole of love? There doth no thought
 come near to Ægeus save what is of me:
 am I no happy wife? And I go proud,
 and treasure him for noblest of the world:
 am I no happy wife?

Dost mock me still?
 My children is it? Are the dead so wise?
 Why, who told thee my transport of despair
 when from the Sun who willed me not to die
 nor creep away, sudden and too late came
 the winged swift car that could have saved them, mine,
 from thee and from their foes? Tush, 'twas best so;
 If they had lived, sometimes thou hadst had hope:
 for thou wouldst still have said "I have two sons,"
 and dreamed perchance they'd bring thee use at last
 and build thy greatness higher: but now, now,
 thou hast died shamed and childless, none to keep
 thy name and memory fresh upon the earth,
 none to make boast of thee "My father did it."

Yea, 'twas best so: my sons, we are avenged.
 Thou, mock me not. What if I have ill dreams
 to see them loathe me, fly from me in dread,
 when I would feed my hungry mouth with kisses?
 what if I moan in tossing fever thirsts,
 crying for them whom I shall have no more,
 here nor among the dead, who never more,
 here nor among the dead, will smile to me
 with young lips prattling "Mother, mother dear"?
 what if I turn sick when the women pass
 that lead their boys, and hate a child's young face?
 what if—

Go, go, thou mind'st me of my sons,
 and then I hate thee worse; go to thy grave
 by which none weeps. I have forgotten thee.

* * * * *

Portraits

CIRCE.

THE sun drops luridly into the west;
 darkness has raised her arms to draw him down
 before the time, not waiting as of wont
 till he has come to her behind the sea;
 and the smooth waves grow sullen in the gloom
 and wear their threatening purple; more and more
 the plain of waters sways and seems to rise
 convexly from its level of the shores;
 and low dull thunder rolls along the beach:
 there will be storm at last, storm, glorious storm.

Oh welcome, welcome, though it rend my bowers,
 scattering my blossomed roses like the dust,
 splitting the shrieking branches, tossing down
 my riotous vines with their young half-tinged grapes
 like small round amethysts or beryls strung
 tumultuously in clusters, though it sate
 its ravenous spite among my goodliest pines
 standing there round and still against the sky
 that makes blue lakes between their sombre tufts,
 or harry from my silvery olive slopes
 some hoary king whose gnarled fantastic limbs
 wear crooked armour of a thousand years;
 though it will hurl high on my flowery shores
 the hostile wave that rives at the poor sward
 and drags it down the slants, that swirls its foam
 over my terraces, shakes their firm blocks
 of great bright marbles into tumbled heaps,
 and makes my preached and mossy labyrinths,
 where the small odorous blossoms grow like stars
 strewn in the milky way, a briny marsh.
 What matter? let it come and bring me change,
 breaking the sickly sweet monotony.

I am too weary of this long bright calm;
 always the same blue sky, always the sea
 the same blue perfect likeness of the sky,
 one rose to match the other that has waned,
 to-morrow's dawn the twin of yesterday's;
 and every night the ceaseless crickets chirp
 the same long joy and the late strain of birds
 repeats their strain of all the even month;
 and changelessly the petty plashing surfs
 bubble their chiming burden round the stones;
 dusk after dusk brings the same languid trance
 upon the shadowy hills, and in the fields

Portraits

the waves of fireflies come and go the same,
making the very flash of light and stir
vex one like dronings of the spinning wheel.

Give me some change. Must life be only sweet,
all honey—pap as babes would have their food?
And, if my heart must always be adrowse
in a hush of stagnant sunshine, give me then
something outside me stirring; let the storm
break up the sluggish beauty, let it fall
beaten below the feet of passionate winds,
and then to—morrow waken jubilant
in a new birth: let me see subtle joy
of anguish and of hopes, of change and growth.

What fate is mine who, far apart from pains
and fears and turmoils of the cross—grained world,
dwell, like a lonely god, in a charmed isle
where I am first and only, and, like one
who should love poisonous savours more than mead,
long for a tempest on me and grow sick
of resting, and divine free carelessness!
Oh me, I am a woman, not a god;
yea, those who tend me even are more than I,
my nymphs who have the souls of flowers and birds
singing and blossoming immortally.

Ah me! these love a day and laugh again,
and loving, laughing, find a full content;
but I know nought of peace, and have not loved.

Where is my love? Does some one cry for me,
not knowing whom he calls? does his soul cry
for mine to grow beside it, grow in it?
does he beseech the gods to give him me,
the one unknown rare woman by whose side
no other woman, thrice as beautiful,
should once seem fair to him; to whose voice heard
in any common tones no sweetest sound
of love made melody on silver lutes,
or singing like Apollo's when the gods
grow pale with happy listening, might be peered
for making music to him; whom once found
there will be no more seeking anything?

Oh love, oh love, oh love, art not yet come
out of the waiting shadows into life?
art not yet come after so many years
that I have longed for thee? Come! I am here.

Not yet. For surely I should feel a sound

CIRCE.

Portraits

of his far answering, if now in the world
he sought me who will seek me—Oh ye gods
will he not seek me? Is it all a dream?
will there be never never such a man?
will there be only these, these bestial things
who wallow in my styes, or mop and mow
among the trees, or munch in pens and byres,
or snarl and filch behind their wattled coops;
these things who had believed that they were men?

Nay but he **will** come. Why am I so fair,
and marvellously minded, and with sight
which flashes suddenly on hidden things,
as the gods see who do not need to look?
why wear I in my eyes that stronger power
than basilisks, whose gaze can only kill,
to draw men's souls to me to live or die
as I would have them? why am I given pride
which yet longs to be broken, and this scorn
cruel and vengeful for the lesser men
who meet the smiles I waste for lack of him
and grow too glad? why am I who I am,
but for the sake of him whom fate will send
one day to be my master utterly,
that he should take me, the desire of all,
whom only he in the world could bow to him?

Oh sunlike glory of pale glittering hairs,
bright as the filmy wires my weavers take
to make me golden gauzes; oh deep eyes,
darker and softer than the bluest dusk
of August violets, darker and deep
like crystal fathomless lakes in summer noons;
oh sad sweet longing smile; oh lips that tempt
my very self to kisses; oh round cheeks,
tenderly radiant with the even flush
of pale smoothed coral; perfect lovely face
answering my gaze from out this fleckless pool;
wonder of glossy shoulders, chiselled limbs;
should I be so your lover as I am,
drinking an exquisite joy to watch you thus
in all a hundred changes through the day,
but that I love you for him till he comes,
but that my beauty means his loving it?

Oh, look! a speck on this side of the sun,
coming—yes, coming with the rising wind
that frays the darkening cloud—wrack on the verge
and in a little while will leap abroad,
spattering the sky with rushing blacknesses,
dashing the hissing mountainous waves at the stars.

CIRCE.

Portraits

'Twill drive me that black speck a shuddering hulk
caught in the buffeting waves, dashed impotent
from ridge to ridge, will drive it in the night
with that dull jarring crash upon the beach,
and the cries for help and the cries of fear and hope.

And then to-morrow they will thoughtfully,
with grave low voices, count their perils up,
and thank the gods for having let them live,
and tell of wives or mothers in their homes,
and children, who would have such loss in them
that they must weep, and may be I weep too,
with fancy of the weepings had they died.
And the next morrow they will feel their ease
and sigh with sleek content, or laugh elate,
tasting delights of rest and revelling,
music and perfumes, joyaunce for the eyes
of rosy faces and luxurious pomps,
the savour of the banquet and the glow
and fragrance of the wine-cup; and they'll talk
how good it is to house in palaces
out of the storms and struggles, and what luck
strewed their good ship on our accessless coast.
Then the next day the beast in them will wake,
and one will strike and bicker, and one swell
with puffed up greatness, and one gibe and strut
in apish pranks, and one will line his sleeve
with pilfered booties, and one snatch the gems
out of the carven goblets as they pass,
one will grow mad with fever of the wine,
and one will sluggishly besot himself,
and one be lewd, and one be gluttonous;
and I shall sickly look, and loathe them all.

Oh my rare cup! my pure and crystal cup,
with not one speck of colour to make false
the passing lights, or flaw to make them swerve!
My cup of Truth! How the lost fools will laugh
and thank me for my boon, as if I gave
some momentary flash of the gods' joy,
to drink where I have drunk and touch the touch
of my lips with their own! Aye, let them touch.

Too cruel am I? And the silly beasts,
crowding around me when I pass their way,
glower on me and, although they love me still,
(with their poor sorts of love such as they could,)
call wrath and vengeance to their humid eyes
to scare me into mercy, or creep near
with piteous fawnings, supplicating bleats.
Too cruel? Did I choose them what they are?

CIRCE.

Portraits

or change them from themselves by poisonous charms?
But any draught, pure water, natural wine,
out of my cup, revealed them to themselves
and to each other. Change? there was no change;
only disguise gone from them unawares:
and had there been one right true man of them
he would have drunk the draught as I had drunk,
and stood unchanged, and looked me in the eyes,
abashing me before him. But these things—
why, which of them has even shown the kind
of some one nobler beast? Pah, yapping wolves
and pitiless stealthy wild-cats, curs and apes
and gorging swine and slinking venomous snakes
all false and ravenous and sensual brutes
that shame the Earth that bore them, these they are.

Lo, lo! the shivering blueness darting forth
on half the heavens, and the forked thin fire
strikes to the sea: and hark, the sudden voice
that rushes through the trees before the storm,
and shuddering of the branches. Yet the sky
is blue against them still, and early stars
glimmer above the pine-tops; and the air
clings faint and motionless around me here.

Another burst of flame—and the black speck
shows in the glare, lashed onwards. It were well
I bade make ready for our guests to-night.

THE HAPPIEST GIRL IN THE WORLD.

A WEEK ago; only a little week:
it seems so much much longer, though that day
is every morning still my yesterday;
as all my life 'twill be my yesterday,
for all my life is morrow to my love.
Oh fortunate morrow! Oh sweet happy love!

A week ago; and I am almost glad
to have him now gone for this little while,
that I may think of him and tell myself
what to be his means, now that I am his,
and know if mine is love enough for him,
and make myself believe it all is true.

A week ago; and it seems like a life,
and I have not yet learned to know myself:
I am so other than I was, so strange,
grown younger and grown older all in one;
and I am not so sad and not so gay;
and I think nothing, only hear him think.

That morning, waking, I remembered him
"Will he be here to-day? he often comes;—
and is it for my sake or to kill time?"
and, wondering "Will he come?" I chose the dress
he seemed to like the best, and hoped for him;
and did not think I could quite love him yet.
And did I love him then with all my heart?
or did I wait until he held my hands
and spoke "Say, shall it be?" and kissed my brow,
and I looked at him and he knew it all?

And did I love him from the day we met?
but I more gladly danced with some one else
who waltzed more smoothly and was merrier:
and did I love him when he first came here?
but I more gladly talked with some one else
whose words were readier and who sought me more.
When did I love him? How did it begin?

The small green spikes of snowdrops in the spring
are there one morning ere you think of them;
still we may tell what morning they pierced up:
June rosebuds stir and open stealthily,
and every new blown rose is a surprise;
still we can date the day when one unclosed:

but how can I tell when my love began?

Oh, was it like the young pale twilight star
that quietly breaks on the vacant sky,
is sudden there and perfect while you watch,
and, though you watch, you have not seen it dawn,
the star that only waited and awoke?

But he knows when he loved me; for he says
the first time we had met he told a friend
"The sweetest dewy daisy of a girl,
but not the solid stuff to make a wife;"
and afterwards the first time he was here,
when I had slipped away into our field
to watch alone for sunset brightening on
and heard them calling me, he says he stood
and saw me come along the coppice walk
beneath the green and sparkling arch of boughs,
and, while he watched the yellow lights that played
with the dim flickering shadows of the leaves
over my yellow hair and soft pale dress,
flitting across me as I flitted through,
he whispered inly, in so many words,
"I see my wife; this is my wife who comes,
and seems to bear the sunlight on with her:"
and that was when he loved me, so he says.

Yet is he quite sure? was it only then?
and had he had no thought which I could feel?
for why was it I knew that he would watch,
and all the while thought in my silly heart,
as I advanced demurely, it was well
I had on the pale dress with sweeping folds
which took the light and shadow tenderly,
and that the sunlights touched my hair and cheek,
because he'd note it all and care for it?

Oh vain and idle poor girl's heart of mine,
content with that coquettish mean content!
He, with his man's straight purpose, thinking "wife,"
and I but that 'twas pleasant to be fair
and that 'twas pleasant he should count me fair.
But oh, to think he should be loving me
and I be no more moved out of myself!
The sunbeams told him, but they told me nought,
except that maybe I was looking well.
And oh had I but known! Why did no bird,
trilling its own sweet lovesong, as I passed,
so musically marvellously glad,
sing one for me too, sing me "It is he,"
sing "Love him," and "You love him: it is he,"

THE HAPPIEST GIRL IN THE WORLD.

that I might then have loved him when he loved,
that one dear moment might be date to both?

And must I not be glad he hid his thought
and did not tell me then, when it was soon
and I should have been startled, and not known
how he is just the one man I can love,
and, only with some pain lest he were pained,
and nothing doubting, should have answered "No."
How strange life is! I should have answered "No."
Oh, can I ever be half glad enough
he is so wise and patient and could wait!

He waited as you wait the reddening fruit
which helplessly is ripening on the tree,
and not because it tries or longs or wills,
only because the sun will shine on it:
but he who waited was himself that sun.

Oh was it worth the waiting? was it worth?
For I am half afraid love is not love,
this love which only makes me rest in him
and be so happy and so confident,
this love which makes me pray for longest days
that I may have them all to use for him,
this love which almost makes me yearn for pain
that I might have borne something for his sake,
this love which I call love, is less than love.
Where are the fires and fevers and the pangs?
where is the anguish of too much delight,
and the delirious madness at a kiss,
the flushing and the paling at a look,
and passionate ecstasy of meeting hands?
where is the eager weariness at time
that will not bate a single measured hour
to speed to us the far-off wedding day?
I am so calm and wondering, like a child
who, led by a firm hand it knows and trusts
along a stranger country beautiful
with a bewildering beauty to new eyes
if they be wise to know what they behold,
finds newness everywhere but no surprise,
and takes the beauty as an outward part
of being led so kindly by the hand.
I am so cold: is mine but a child's heart,
and not a woman's fit for such a man?
Alas am I too cold, am I too dull,
can I not love him as another could?
And oh, if love be fire, what love is mine
that is but like the pale subservient moon
who only asks to be earth's minister?

Portraits

And, oh, if love be whirlwind, what is mine
that is but like a little even brook
which has no aim but flowing to the sea,
and sings for happiness because it flows?

Ah well, I would that I could love him more
and not be only happy as I am;
I would that I could love him to his worth,
with that forgetting all myself in him,
that subtle pain of exquisite excess,
that momentary infinite sharp joy,
I know by books but cannot teach my heart:
and yet I think my love must needs be love,
since he can read me through—oh happy strange,
my thoughts that were my secrets all for me
grown instantly his open easy book!—
since he can read me through, and is content.

And yesterday, when they all went away,
save little Amy with her daisy chains,
and left us in that shadow of tall ferns,
and the child, leaning on me, fell asleep,
and I, tired by the afternoon long walk,
said "I could almost gladly sleep like her,"
did he not answer, drawing down my head,
"Sleep, darling, let me see you rest on me,"
and when the child, awaking, wakened me,
did he not say "Dear, you have made me glad,
for, seeing you so sleeping peacefully,
I feel that you do love me utterly,
no questionings, no regrettings, but at rest."

Oh yes, my good true darling, you spoke well
"No questionings, no regrettings, but at rest:"
what should I question, what should I regret,
now I have you who are my hope and rest?

I am the feathery wind—wafted seed
that flickered idly half a merry morn,
now thrall'd into the rich life—giving earth
to root and bud and waken into leaf
and make it such poor sweetness as I may;
the prisoned seed that never more shall float
the frolic playfellow of summer winds
and mimic the free changeful butterfly;
the prisoned seed that prisoned finds its life
and feels its pulses stir, and grows, and grows.
Oh love, who gathered me into yourself,
oh love, I am at rest in you, and live.

And shall I for so many coming days

THE HAPPIEST GIRL IN THE WORLD.

Portraits

be flower and sweetness to him? Oh pale flower,
grow, grow, and blossom out, and fill the air,
feed on his richness, grow, grow, blossom out,
and fill the air, and be enough for him.

Oh crystal music of the air-borne lark,
so falling, nearer, nearer, from the sky,
are you a message to me of dear hopes?
oh trilling gladness, flying down to earth,
have you brought answer of sweet prophecy?
have you brought answer to the thoughts in me?
Oh happy answer, and oh happy thoughts!
and which is the bird's carol, which my heart's?

My love, my love, my love! And I shall be
so much to him, so almost everything:
and I shall be the friend whom he will trust,
and I shall be the child whom he will teach,
and I shall be the servant he will praise,
and I shall be the mistress he will love,
and I shall be his wife. Oh days to come,
will ye not pass like gentle rhythmic steps
that fall to sweetest music noiselessly?

But I have known the lark's song half sound sad,
and I have seen the lake, which rippled sun,
toss dimmed and purple in a sudden wind;
and let me laugh a moment at my heart
that thinks the summer-time must all be fair,
that thinks the good days always must be good:
yes let me laugh a moment—may be weep.

But no, but no, not laugh; for through my joy
I have been wise enough to know the while
some tears and some long hours are in all lives,
in every promised land some thorn plants grow,
some tangling weeds as well as laden vines:
and no, not weep; for is not my land fair,
my land of promise flushed with fruit and bloom?
and who would weep for fear of scattered thorns?
and very thorns bear oftentimes sweet fruits.

Oh the black storm that breaks across the lake
ruffles the surface, leaves the deeps at rest—
deep in our hearts there always will be rest:
oh summer storms fall sudden as they rose,
the peaceful lake forgets them while they die—
our hearts will always have it summer time.

All rest, all summer time. My love, my love,
I know it will be so; you are so good,

THE HAPPIEST GIRL IN THE WORLD.

Portraits

and I, near you, shall grow at last like you;
and you are tender, patient—oh I know
you will bear with me, help me, smile to me,
and let me make you happy easily;
and I, what happiness could I have more
than that dear labour of a happy wife?
I would not have another. Is it wrong,
and is it selfish that I cannot wish,
that I, who yet so love the clasping hand
and innocent fond eyes of little ones,
I cannot wish that which I sometimes read
is women's dearest wish hid in their love,
to press a baby creature to my breast?
Oh is it wrong? I would be all for him,
not even children coming 'twixt us two
to call me from his service to serve them;
and maybe they would steal too much of love,
for, since I cannot love him now enough,
what would my heart be halved? or would it grow?
But he perhaps would love me something less,
finding me not so always at his side.

Together always, that was what he said;
together always. Oh dear coming days!
O dear dear present days that pass too fast,
although they bring such rainbow morrows on!
that pass so fast, and yet, I know not why,
seem always to encompass so much time.
And I should fear I were too happy now,
and making this poor world too much my Heaven,
but that I feel God nearer and it seems
as if I had learned His love better too.

So late already! The sun dropping down,
and under him the first long line of red—
my truant should be here again by now,
is come maybe. I will not seek him, I;
he would be vain and think I cared too much;
I will wait here, and he shall seek for me,
and I will carelessly—Oh his dear step—
he sees me, he is coming; my own love!

A CASTAWAY.

POOR little diary, with its simple thoughts,
 its good resolves, its "Studied French an hour,"
 "Read Modern History," "Trimmed up my grey hat,"
 "Darned stockings," "Tatted," "Practised my new song,"
 "Went to the daily service," "Took Bess soup,"
 "Went out to tea." Poor simple diary!
 and did I write it? Was I this good girl,
 this budding colourless young rose of home?
 did I so live content in such a life,
 seeing no larger scope, nor asking it,
 than this small constant round—old clothes to mend,
 new clothes to make, then go and say my prayers,
 or carry soup, or take a little walk
 and pick the ragged—robins in the hedge?
 Then for ambition, (was there ever life
 that could forego that?) to improve my mind
 and know French better and sing harder songs;
 for gaiety, to go, in my best white
 well washed and starched and freshened with new bows,
 and take tea out to meet the clergyman.
 No wishes and no cares, almost no hopes,
 only the young girl's hazed and golden dreams
 that veil the Future from her.

So long since:
 and now it seems a jest to talk of me
 as if I could be one with her, of me
 who am me.

And what is that? My looking—glass
 answers it passably; a woman sure,
 no fiend, no slimy thing out of the pools,
 a woman with a ripe and smiling lip
 that has no venom in its touch I think,
 with a white brow on which there is no brand;
 a woman none dare call not beautiful,
 not womanly in every woman's grace.

Aye let me feed upon my beauty thus,
 be glad in it like painters when they see
 at last the face they dreamed but could not find
 look from their canvass on them, triumph in it,
 the dearest thing I have. Why, 'tis my all,
 let me make much of it: is it not this,
 this beauty, my own curse at once and tool
 to snare men's souls—(I know what the good say
 of beauty in such creatures)—is is not this
 that makes me feel myself a woman still,

some little pride, some little—

Here's a jest!

what word will fit the sense but modesty?

A wanton I but modest!

Modest, true;

I'm not drunk in the streets, ply not for hire
at infamous corners with my likenesses
of the humbler kind; yes, modesty's my word—
'twould shape my mouth well too, I think I'll try:
"Sir, Mr What—you—will, Lord Who—knows—what,
my present lover or my next to come,
value me at my worth, fill your purse full,
for I am modest; yes, and honour me
as though your schoolgirl sister or your wife
could let her skirts brush mine or talk of me;
for I am modest."

Well, I flout myself:

but yet, but yet—

Fie, poor fantastic fool,
why do I play the hypocrite alone,
who am no hypocrite with others by?
where should be my "But yet"? I am that thing
called half a dozen dainty names, and none
dainty enough to serve the turn and hide
the one coarse English worst that lurks beneath:
just that, no worse, no better.

And, for me,

I say let no one be above her trade;
I own my kindredship with any drab
who sells herself as I, although she crouch
in fetid garrets and I have a home
all velvet and marqueterie and pastilles,
although she hide her skeleton in rags
and I set fashions and wear cobweb lace:
the difference lies but in my choicer ware,
that I sell beauty and she ugliness;
our traffic's one—I'm no sweet slaver—tongue
to gloze upon it and explain myself
a sort of fractious angel misconceived—
our traffic's one: I own it. And what then?
I know of worse that are called honourable.
Our lawyers, who, with noble eloquence
and virtuous outbursts, lie to hang a man,
or lie to save him, which way goes the fee:
our preachers, gloating on your future hell
for not believing what they doubt themselves:
our doctors, who sort poisons out by chance,
and wonder how they'll answer, and grow rich:
our journalists, whose business is to fib
and juggle truths and falsehoods to and fro:
our tradesmen, who must keep unspotted names

A CASTAWAY.

Portraits

and cheat the least like stealing that they can:
our—all of them, the virtuous worthy men
who feed on the world's follies, vices, wants,
and do their businesses of lies and shams
honestly, reputably, while the world
claps hands and cries "good luck," which of their trades,
their honourable trades, barefaced like mine,
all secrets brazened out, would shew more white?

And whom do I hurt more than they? as much?
The wives? Poor fools, what do I take from them
worth crying for or keeping? If they knew
what their fine husbands look like seen by eyes
that may perceive there are more men than one!
But, if they can, let them just take the pains
to keep them: 'tis not such a mighty task
to pin an idiot to your apron-string;
and wives have an advantage over us,
(the good and blind ones have), the smile or pout
leaves them no secret nausea at odd times.
Oh they could keep their husbands if they cared,
but 'tis an easier life to let them go,
and whimper at it for morality.

Oh! those shrill carping virtues, safely housed
from reach of even a smile that should put red
on a decorous cheek, who rail at us
with such a spiteful scorn and rancourousness,
(which maybe is half envy at the heart),
and boast themselves so measurelessly good
and us so measurelessly unlike them,
what is their wondrous merit that they stay
in comfortable homes whence not a soul
has ever thought of tempting them, and wear
no kisses but a husband's upon lips
there is no other man desires to kiss—
refrain in fact from sin impossible?
How dare they hate us so? what have they done,
what borne, to prove them other than we are?
What right have they to scorn us—glass-case saints,
Dianas under lock and key—what right
more than the well-fed helpless barn-door fowl
to scorn the larcenous wild-birds?

Pshaw, let be!

Scorn or no scorn, what matter for their scorn?
I have outfaced my own—that's harder work.
Aye let their virtuous malice dribble on—
mock snowstorms on the stage—I'm proof long since:
I have looked coolly on my what and why,
and I accept myself.

Oh I'll endorse

A CASTAWAY.

the shamefullest revilings mouthed at me,
 cry "True! Oh perfect picture! Yes, that's I!"
 and add a telling blackness here and there,
 and then dare swear you, every nine of ten,
 my judges and accusers, I'd not change
 my conscience against yours, you who tread out
 your devil's pilgrimage along the roads
 that take in church and chapel, and arrange
 a roundabout and decent way to hell.

Well, mine's a short way and a merry one:
 so says my pious hash of ohs and ahs,
 choice texts and choicer threats, appropriate names,
 (Rahabs and Jezebels), some fierce Tartuffe
 hurled at me through the post. We had rare fun
 over that tract digested with champagne.
 Where is it? where's my rich repertory
 of insults biblical? **'I prey on souls'**—
 only my men have oftenest none I think:
'I snare the simple ones'—but in these days
 there seem to be none simple and none snared,
 and most men have their favourite sinnings planned
 to do them civilly and sensibly:
'I braid my hair'—but braids are out of date:
'I paint my cheeks'—I always wear them pale:
'I—'

Pshaw! the trash is savourless to-day:
 one cannot laugh alone. There, let it burn.
 What, does the windy dullard think one needs
 his wisdom dove-tailed on to Solomon's,
 his threats out-threatening God's, to teach the news
 that those who need not sin have safer souls?
 We know it, but we've bodies to save too;
 and so we earn our living.

Well lit, tract!
 it least you've made me a good leaping blaze.
 Up, up, how the flame shoots! and now 'tis dead.
 Oh proper finish, preaching to the last—
 no such bad omen either; sudden end,
 and no sad withering horrible old age.
 How one would clutch at youth to hold it tight!
 and then to know it gone, to see it gone,
 be taught its absence by harsh, careless looks,
 to live forgotten, solitary, old—
 the cruellest word that ever woman learns.
 Old—that's to be nothing, or to be at best
 a blurred memorial that in better days
 there was a woman once with such a name.
 No, no, I could not bear it: death itself
 shews kinder promise even death itself,
 since it must come one day—

Portraits

Oh this grey gloom!
This rain, rain, rain, what wretched thoughts it brings!
Death: I'll not think of it.

Will no one come?
'Tis dreary work alone.

Why did I read
that silly diary? Now, sing song, ding dong,
come the old vexing echoes back again,
church bells and nursery good-books, back again
upon my shrinking ears that had forgotten—
I hate the useless memories: 'tis fools' work
singing the hacknied dirge of 'better days:'
best take Now kindly, give the past good-bye,
whether it were a better or a worse.

Yes, yes, I listened to the echoes once,
the echoes and the thoughts from the old days.
The worse for me: I lost my richest friend,
and that was all the difference. For the world
would not have that flight known. How they'd roar:
"What! Eulalie, when she refused us all,
'ill' and 'away,' was doing Magdalene,
tears, ashes, and her Bible, and then off
hide her in a Refuge ... for a week!"

A wild whim that, to fancy I could change
my new self for my old, because I wished!
since then, when in my languid days there comes
that craving, like homesickness, to go back
to the good days, the dear old stupid days,
to the quiet and the innocence, I know
'tis a sick fancy and try palliatives.

What is it? You go back to the old home,
and 'tis not **your** home, has no place for you,
and, if it had, you could not fit you in it.
And could I fit me to my former self?
If I had had the wit, like some of us,
to sow my wild-oats into three per cents,
could I not find me shelter in the peace
of some far nook where none of them would come,
nor whisper travel from this scurrilous world,
that gloats and moralizes through its leers,
to blast me with my fashionable shame?
There I might—oh my castle in the clouds!
and where's its rent?—but there, were there a there,
I might again live the grave blameless life
among such simple pleasures, simple cares:
but could they be my pleasures, be my cares?
The blameless life, but never the content—
never. How could I henceforth be content

A CASTAWAY.

in any life but one that sets the brain
in a hot merry fever with its stir?
what would there be in quiet rustic days,
each like the other, full of time to think,
to keep one bold enough to live at all?
Quiet is hell, I say—as if a woman
could bear to sit alone, quiet all day,
and loathe herself, and sicken on her thoughts.

They tried it at the Refuge, and I failed:
I could not bear it. Dreary hideous room,
coarse pittance, prison rules, one might bear these
and keep one's purpose; but so much alone,
and then made faint and weak and fanciful
by change from pampering to half-famishing—
good God, what thoughts come! Only one week more
and 'twould have ended: but in one day more
I must have killed myself. And I loathe death,
the dreadful foul corruption, with who knows
what future after it.

Well, I came back,
Back to my slough. Who says I had my choice?
Could I stay there to die of some mad death?
and if I rambled out into the world,
sinless but penniless, what else were that
but slower death, slow pining shivering death
by misery and hunger? Choice! what choice
of living well or ill? could I have that?
and who would give it me? I think indeed
some kind hand, a woman's—I hate men—
had stretched itself to help me to firm ground,
taken a chance and risked my falling back,
could have gone my way not falling back:
but, let her be all brave, all charitable,
how could she do it? Such a trifling boon,
little work to live by, 'tis not much,
and I might have found will enough to last:
but where's the work? More sempstresses than shirts;
and defter hands at white work than are mine
drop starved at last: dressmakers, milliners,
too many too they say; and then their trades
need skill, apprenticeship. And who so bold
as hire me for their humblest drudgery?
not even for scullery slut; not even, I think,
for governess, although they'd get me cheap.
And after all it would be something hard,
with the marts for decent women overfull,
if I could elbow in and snatch a chance
and oust some good girl so, who then perforce
must come and snatch her chance among our crowd.

Why, if the worthy men who think all's done
 if we'll but come where we can hear them preach,
 could bring us all, or any half of us,
 into their fold, teach all us wandering sheep,
 or only half of us, to stand in rows
 and baa them hymns and moral songs, good lack,
 what would they do with us? what could they do?
 Just think! with were't but half of us on hand
 to find work for ... or husbands. Would they try
 to ship us to the colonies for wives?

Well, well; I know the wise ones talk and talk:
 "Here's cause, here's cure:" "No, here it is and here:"
 and find society to blame, or law,
 the Church, the men, the women, too few schools,
 too many schools, too much, too little taught:
 somewhere or somehow someone is to blame:
 but I say all the fault's with God himself
 who puts too many women in the world.
 We ought to die off reasonably and leave
 as many as the men want, none to waste.
 Here's cause; the woman's superfluity:
 and for the cure, why, if it were the law,
 say, every year, in due percentages,
 balancing them with men as the times need,
 to kill off female infants, 'twould make room;
 and some of us would not have lost too much,
 losing life ere we know what it **can** mean.

The other day I saw a woman weep
 beside her dead child's bed: the little thing
 lay smiling, and the mother wailed half mad,
 shrieking to God to give it back again.
 I could have laughed aloud: the little girl
 living had but her mother's life to live;
 there she lay smiling, and her mother wept
 to know her gone!

My mother would have wept.

Oh mother, mother, did you ever dream,
 you good grave simple mother, you pure soul
 no evil could come nigh, did you once dream
 in all your dying cares for your lone girl
 left to fight out her fortune all alone
 that there would be **this** danger?—for **your** girl,
 taught by you, lapped in a sweet ignorance,
 scarcely more wise of what things sin could be
 than some young child a summer six months old
 where in the north the summer makes a day,
 of what is darkness ... darkness that will come
 to-morrow suddenly. Thank God at least

for this much of my life, that when you died,
that when you kissed me dying, not a thought
of this made sorrow for you, that I too
was pure of even fear.

Oh yes, I thought,
still new in my insipid treadmill life,
(my father so late dead), and hopeful still
here might be something pleasant somewhere in it,
some sudden fairy come, no doubt, to turn
any pumpkin to a chariot, I thought then
that I might plod, and plod, and drum the sounds
of useless facts into unwilling ears,
tease children with dull questions half the day,
then con dull answers in my room at night
ready for next day's questions, mend quill pens
and cut my fingers, add up sums done wrong
and never get them right; teach, teach, and teach—
what I half knew, or not at all—teach, teach
for years, a lifetime—I!

And yet, who knows?
it might have been, for I was patient once,
and willing, and meant well; it might have been
had I but still clung on in my first place—
a safe dull place, where mostly there were smiles
but never merry-makings; where all days
jogged on sedately busy, with no haste;
where all seemed measured out, but margins broad:
a dull home but a peaceful, where I felt
my pupils would be dear young sisters soon,
and felt their mother take me to her heart,
motherly to all lonely harmless things.
But I must have a conscience, must blurt out
my great discovery of my ignorance!
And who required it of me? And who gained?
What did it matter for a more or less
the girls learnt in their schoolbooks, to forget
in their first season? We did well together:
they loved me and I them: but I went off
to housemaid's pay, six crossgrained brats to teach,
wrangles and jangles, doubts, disgrace ... then this;
and they had a perfection found for them,
who has all ladies' learning in her head
abridged and scheduled, speaks five languages,
knows botany and conchology and globes,
draws, paints, plays, sings, embroiders, teaches all
on a patent method never known to fail:
and now they're finished and, I hear, poor things,
are the worst dancers and worst dressers out.
And where's their profit of those prison years
all gone to make them wise in lesson books?
who wants his wife to know weeds' Latin names?

who ever chose a girl for saying dates?
or asked if she had learned to trace a map?

Well, well, the silly rules this silly world
makes about women! This is one of them.
Why must there be pretence of teaching them
what no one ever cares that they should know,
what, grown out of the schoolroom, they cast off
like the schoolroom pinafore, no better fit
for any use of real grown-up life,
for any use to her who seeks or waits
the husband and the home, for any use,
for any shallowest pretence of use,
to her who has them? Do I not know this,
I like my betters, that a woman's life,
her natural life, her good life, her one life,
is in her husband, God on earth to her,
and what she knows and what she can and is
is only good as it brings good to him?

Oh God, do I not know it? I the thing
of shame and rottenness, the animal
that feed men's lusts and prey on them, I, I,
who should not dare to take the name of wife
on my polluted lips, who in the word
hear but my own reviling, I know that.
I could have lived by that rule, how content:
my pleasure to make him some pleasure, pride
to be as he would have me, duty, care,
to fit all to his taste, rule my small sphere
to his intention; then to lean on him,
be guided, tutored, loved—no not that word,
that **loved** which between men and women means
all selfishness, all putrid talk, all lust,
all vanity, all idiocy—not loved
but cared for. I've been loved myself, I think,
some once or twice since my poor mother died,
but **cared for**, never:—that a word for homes,
kind homes, good homes, where simple children come
and ask their mother is this right or wrong,
because they know she's perfect, cannot err;
their father told them so, and he knows all,
being so wise and good and wonderful,
even enough to scold even her at times
and tell her everything she does not know.
Ah the sweet nursery logic!

Fool! thrice fool!

do I hanker after that too? Fancy me
infallible nursery saint, live code of law!
me preaching! teaching innocence to be good!
a mother!

A CASTAWAY.

Yet the baby thing that woke
and wailed an hour or two, and then was dead,
was mine, and had he lived why then my name
would have been mother. But 'twas well he died:
I could have been no mother, I, lost then
beyond his saving. Had he come before
and lived, come to me in the doubtful days
when shame and boldness had not grown one sense,
for his sake, with the courage come of him,
I might have struggled back.

But how? But how?

His father would not then have let me go:
his time had not yet come to make an end
of my 'for ever' with a hireling's fee
and civil light dismissal. None but him
to claim a bit of bread of if I went,
child or no child: would he have given it me?
He! no; he had not done with me. No help,
no help, no help. Some ways can be trodden back,
but never our way, we who one wild day
have given goodbye to what in our deep hearts
the lowest woman still holds best in life,
good name—good name though given by the world
that mouths and garbles with its decent prate,
and wraps it in respectable grave shams,
and patches conscience partly by the rule
of what one's neighbour thinks but something more
by what his eyes are sharp enough to see.
How I could scorn it with its Pharisees,
if it could not scorn me: but yet, but yet—
oh God, if I could look it in the face!

Oh I am wild, am ill, I think, to night:
will no one come and laugh with me? No feast,
no merriment to-night. So long alone!
Will no one come?

At least there's a new dress
to try, and grumble at—they never fit
to one's ideal. Yes, a new rich dress,
with lace like this too, that's a soothing balm
for any fretting woman, cannot fail,
I've heard men say it ... and they know so well
what's in all women's hearts, especially
women like me.

No help! no help! no help!
How could it be? It was too late long since—
even at the first too late. Whose blame is that?
there are some kindly people in the world,
but what can they do? If one hurls oneself
into a quicksand, what can be the end,
but that one sinks and sinks? Cry out for help?

A CASTAWAY.

Ah yes, and, if it came, who is so strong
to strain from the firm ground and lift one out?
And how, so firmly clutching the stretched hand,
as death's pursuing terror bids, even so,
how can one reach firm land, having to foot
the treacherous crumbling soil that slides and gives
and sucks one in again? Impossible path!
No, why waste struggles, I or any one?
what is must be. What then? I, where I am,
sinking and sinking; let the wise pass by
and keep their wisdom for an apter use,
let me sink merrily as I best may.

Only, I think, my brother—I forgot
he stopped his brotherhood some years ago—
but if he had been just so much less good
as to remember mercy. Did he think
how once I was his sister, prizing him
as sisters do, content to learn for him
the lesson girls with brothers all must learn,
to do without?

I have heard girls lament
that doing so without all things one would,
but I saw never aught to murmur at,
for men must be made ready for their work,
and women all have more or less their chance
of husbands to work for them, keep them safe
like summer roses in soft greenhouse air
that never guess 'tis winter out of doors:
no, I saw never aught to murmur at,
content with stinted fare and shabby clothes
and cloistered silent life to save expense,
teaching myself out of my borrowed books,
while he for some one pastime, (needful true
to keep him of his rank, 'twas not his fault),
spent in a month what could have given me
my teachers for a year.

'Twas no one's fault:
for could he be launched forth on the rude sea
of this contentious world and left to find
oars and the boatman's skill by some good chance?
'Twas no one's fault: yet still he might have thought
of our so different youths, and owned at least
'tis pitiful when a mere nerveless girl,
untutored, must put forth upon that sea,
not in the woman's true place, the wife's place,
to trust a husband and be borne along,
but impotent blind pilot to herself.

Merciless, merciless—like the prudent world
that will not have the flawed soul prank itself

A CASTAWAY.

with a hoped second virtue, will not have
the woman fallen once lift up herself
lest she should fall again. Oh how his taunts,
his loathing fierce reproaches, scarred and seared,
like branding iron hissing in a wound!
And it was true—**that** killed me: and I felt
a hideous hopeless shame kill out my heart,
and knew myself for ever that he said,
that which I was—Oh it was true, true, true.

No, not true then. I was not all that then.
Oh, I have drifted on before mad winds
and made ignoble shipwreck, not to-day
could any breeze of heaven prosper me
into the track again, nor any hand
snatch me out of the whirlpool I have reached;
but then?

Nay he judged very well: he knew
repentance was too dear a luxury
for a beggar's buying, knew it earns no bread—
and knew me a too base and nerveless thing
to bear my first fault's sequel and just die.
And how could he have helped me? Held my hand,
owned me for his, fronted the angry world
clothed with my ignominy? Or maybe
taken me to his home to damn him worse?
What did I look for? for what less would serve
that he could do, a man without a purse?
He meant me well, he sent me that five pounds,
much to him then; and, if he bade me work
and never vex him more with news of me,
we both knew him too poor for pensioners.
I see he did his best; I could wish now
sending it back I had professed some thanks.

But there! I was too wretched to be meek:
it seemed to me as if he, every one,
the whole great world, were guilty of my guilt,
abettors and avengers: in my heart
I gibed them back their gibings; I was wild.

I see clear now and know one has one's life
in hand at first to spend or spare or give
like any other coin; spend it or give
or drop it in the mire, can the world see
you get your value for it, or bar back
the hurrying of its marts to grope it up
and give it back to you for better use?
And if you spend or give that is your choice;
and if you let it slip that's your choice too,
you should have held it firmer. Yours the blame,

A CASTAWAY.

and not another's, not the indifferent world's
 which goes on steadily, statistically,
 and count by censuses not separate souls—
 and if it somehow needs to its worst use
 so many lives of women, useless else,
 it buys us of ourselves, we could hold back,
 free all of us to starve, and some of us,
 (those who have done no ill and are in luck),
 to slave their lives out and have food and clothes
 until they grow unserviceably old.

Oh I blame no one—scarcely even myself.
 It was to be: the very good in me
 has always turned to hurt; all I thought right
 at the hot moment, judged of afterwards,
 shows reckless.

Why, look at it, had I taken
 the pay my dead child's father offered me
 for having been its mother, I could then
 have kept life in me, (many have to do it,
 that swarm in the back alleys, on no more,
 cold sometimes, mostly hungry, but they live);
 I could have gained a respite trying it,
 and maybe found at last some humble work
 to eke the pittance out. Not I, forsooth,
 I must have spirit, must have womanly pride,
 must dash back his contemptuous wages, I,
 who had not scorned to earn them, dash them back
 the fiercer that he dared to count our boy
 in my appraising: and yet now I think
 I might have taken it for my dead boy's sake;
 it would have been **his** gift.

But I went forth
 with my fine scorn, and whither did it lead?
 Money's the root of evil do they say?
 money is virtue, strength: money to me
 would then have been repentance: could I live
 upon my idiot's pride?

Well, it fell soon.
 I had prayed Edward might believe me dead,
 and yet I begged of him—That's like me too,
 beg of him and then send him back his alms!
 What if he gave as to a whining wretch
 that holds her hand and lies? I am less to him
 than such a one; her rags do him no wrong,
 but I, I, wrong him merely that I live,
 being his sister. Could I not at least
 have still let him forget me? But 'tis past:
 and naturally he may hope I am long dead.

Good God! to think that we were what we were

A CASTAWAY.

Portraits

one to the other ... and now!

He has done well;
married a sort of heiress, I have heard,
a dapper little madam, dimple cheeked
and dimple brained, who makes him a good wife—
No doubt she'd never own but just to him,
and in a whisper, she can even suspect
that we exist, we other women things:
what would she say if she could learn one day
she has a sister-in-law! So he and I
must stand apart till doomsday.

But the jest,
to think how she would look!—Her fright, poor thing!
The notion!—I could laugh outright or else,
for I feel near it, roll on the ground and sob.

Well, after all, there's not much difference
between the two sometimes.

Was that the bell?
Some one at last, thank goodness. There's a voice,
and that's a pleasure. Whose though? Ah I know.
Why did she come alone, the cackling goose?
why not have brought her sister?—she tells more
and titters less. No matter; half a loaf
is better than no bread.

Oh, is it you?
Most welcome, dear: one gets so moped alone.

A SOUL IN PRISON.

(The Doubter lays aside his book.)

"**ANSWERED** a score of times." Oh, looked for teacher,
 is this all you will teach me? I in the dark
 reaching my hand for you to help me forth
 to the happy sunshine where you stand, "Oh shame,
 to be in the dark there, prisoned!" answer you;
 "there are ledges somewhere there by which strong feet
 might scale to daylight: I would lift you out
 with just a touch, but that your need's so slight;
 for there are ledges." And I grope and strain,
 think I've found footing, and slip baffled back,
 slip, maybe, deeper downwards. "Oh, my guide,
 I find no ledges: help me: say at least
 where they are placed, that I may know to seek."
 But you in anger, "Nay, wild wilful soul,
 thou **will** rot in the dark, God's sunshine here
 at thy prison's very lip: blame not the guide;
 have I not told thee there is footing for thee?"
 and so you leave me, and with even tread
 guide men along the highway ... where, I think,
 they need you less.

Say 'twas my wanton haste,
 or my drowsed languor, my too earthward eyes
 watching for hedge flowers, or my too rapt gaze
 it the mock sunshine of a sky-born cloud,
 that led me, blindling, here: say the black walls
 grew round me while I slept, or that I built
 with ignorant hands a temple for my soul
 to pray in to herself, and that, for want
 of a window heavenwards, a loathsome night
 of mildew and decay festered upon it,
 till the rotted pillars fell and tombed me in:
 let it so be my fault, whichever way,
 must I be left to die? A murderer
 is helped by holy hands to the byway road
 that comes at God through shame; a thief is helped;
 A harlot; a sleek cozener that prays,
 swindles his customers, and gives God thanks,
 and so to bed with prayers. Let them repent,
 lay let them not repent, you'll say "These souls
 may yet be saved, and make a joy in heaven:"
 you are thankful you have found them, you whose charge
 is healing sin. But I, hundreds as I,
 whose sorrow 'tis only to long to know,
 and know too plainly that we know not yet,

we are beyond your mercies. You pass by
 and note the moral of our fate: 'twill point
 a Sunday's sermon ... for we have our use,
 boggarts to placid Christians in their pews—
 "Question not, prove not, lest you grow like these:"
 and then you tell them how we daze ourselves
 on problems now so many times resolved
 that you'll not re—resolve them, how we crave
 new proofs, as once an evil race desired
 new signs and could not see, for stubbornness,
 signs given already.

Proofs enough, you say,
 quote precedent, "Hear Moses and the prophets."
 I know the answer given across the gulf,
 but I know too what Christ did: there were proofs,
 enough for John and Peter, yet He taught
 new proofs and meanings to those doubting two
 who sorrowing walked forth to Emmaus
 and came back joyful.

"They," you'd answer me,
 if you owned my instance, "sorrowed in their doubt,
 and did not wholly doubt, and loved."

Oh, men
 who read the age's heart in library books
 writ by our fathers, this is how you know it!
 Do we say "The old faith is obsolete,
 the world wags all the better, let us laugh,"
 we of to—day? Why will you not divine
 the fathomless sorrow of doubt? why not divine
 the yearning to be lost from it in love?
 And who doubts wholly? That were not to doubt.
 Doubt's to be ignorant, not to deny:
 doubt's to be wistful after perfect faith.
 You will not think that: you come not to us
 to ask of us, who know doubt, what doubt is,
 but one by one you pass the echoes on,
 each of his own pulpit, each of all the pulpits,
 and in the swelling sound can never catch
 the tremulous voice of doubt that wails in the cold:
 you make sham thunder for it, to outpeal
 with your own better thunders.

You wise man
 and worthy, utter honest in your will,
 I love you and I trust you: so I thought
 "Here's one whose love keeps measure to belief
 with onward vigorous feet, one quick of sight
 to catch the clue in scholars' puzzle—knots,
 deft to unweave the coil to one straight thread,
 one strong to grapple vague Protean faith
 and keep her to his heart in one fixed shape
 and living; he comes forward in his strength,

as to a battlefield to answer challenge,
as in a storm to buffet with the waves
for shipwrecked men clutching the frothy crests
and sinking; he is stalwart on my side—
mine, who, untrained and weaponless, have warred
at the powers of unbelief, and am borne down—
mine, who am struggling in the sea for breath."
I looked to you as the sick man in his pain
looks to the doctor whose sharp medicines
have the taste of health behind them, looked to you
for—well, for a boon different from this.
My doctor tells me "Why, quite long ago
they knew your fever (or one very like);
and they knew remedies, you'll find them named
in many ancient writers, let those serve:"
and "Thick on the commons, by the daily roads,
the herbs are growing that give instant strength
to palsied limbs like yours, clear such filmed sight:
you need but eyes to spy them, hands to uproot,
that's all."

All, truly.

Strong accustomed eyes,
strong tutored hands, see for me, reach for me!
But there's a cry like mine rings through the world,
and no help comes. And with slow severing rasp
at our very heart—roots the toothed question grates,
"Do these, who know most, not know anything?"

Oh, teachers, will you teach us? Growing, growing,
like the great river made of little brooks,
our once unrest swells to a smooth despair:
stop us those little brooks; you say you can.
Oh, teachers, teach us, you who have been taught;
learn for us, you who have learned how to learn:
we, jostling, jostled, through the market world
where our work lies, lack breathing space, lack calm,
lack skill, lack tools, lack heart, lack everything,
for your work of the studies. Such roughed minds
we bring to it as when the ploughman tries
his hard unpliant fingers at the pen;
so toil and smudge, then put the blurred scrawl by,
unfinished, till next holiday comes round.
Thus maybe I shall die and the blurred scrawl
be still unfinished, where I try to write
some clear belief, enough to get by heart.

Die still in the dark! Die having lived in the dark!
there's a sort of creeping horror thinking that.
'Tis hard too, for I yearned for light, grew dazed,
not by my sight's unuse and choice of gloom,

A SOUL IN PRISON.

but by too bold a gaze at the sun,
 thinking to apprehend his perfect light
 not darkly through a glass.

Too bold, too bold.

Would I had been appeased with the earth's wont
 of helpful daily sunbeams bringing down
 only so much heaven's light as may be borne—
 heaven's light enough for many a better man
 to see his God by. Well, but it is done:
 never in any day shall I now be
 as if I had not gazed and seen strange lights
 swim amid darknesses against the sky.
 Never: and, when I dream as if I saw,
 'tis dreaming of the sun, and, when I yearn
 in agony to see, still do I yearn,
 not for the sight I had in happier days,
 but for the eagle's strong gaze at the sun.

Ah, well! that's after death, if all be true.
 Nay, but for me, never, if all be true:
 I love not God, because I know Him not,
 I do but long to love Him—long and long
 with an ineffable great pain of void;
 I cannot say I love Him: that not said,
 they of the creeds all tell me I am barred
 from the very hope of knowing.

Maybe so;

for daily I know less. 'Tis the old tale
 of men lost in the mouldy vaults of mines
 or dank crypt cemeteries—lamp puffed out,
 guides, comrades, out of hearing, on and on
 groping and pushing he makes farther way
 from his goal of open daylight. Best to wait
 till some one come to seek him. But the strain
 of such a patience!—and "If no one comes!"
 He cannot wait.

If one could hear a voice,
 "Not yet, not yet: myself have still to find
 what way to guide you forth, but I seek well,
 I have the lamp you lack, I have a chart:
 not yet; but hope." So might one strongly bear
 through the long night, attend with hearkening breath
 for the next word, stir not but as it bade.

Who will so cry to us?

Or is it true

you could come to us, guide us, but you will not?
You say it, and not we, teachers of faith;
 must we believe you? Shall we not more think
 our doubt is consciousness of ignorance,
 your faith unconsciousness of ignorance;
 so you know less than we?

Portraits

My author here,
honest at heart, but has your mind a warp—
the zealot's warp, who takes believed for proved;
the disciple's warp, who takes all heard for proved;
the teacher's warp, who takes all taught for proved,
and cannot think "I know not"? Do you move
one stumbling-block that bars out souls from Heaven?
your back to it, you say, "I see no stone;
'tis a fool's dream, an enemy's false tale
to hinder passengers." And I who lean
broken against the stone?

Well, learned man,
I thank you for your book. 'Tis eloquent,
'tis subtle, resolute; I like the roar
of the big battling phrases, like those frets
of hissing irony—a book to read.
It helps one too—a sort of evidence—
to see so strong a mind so strongly clasped
to creeds whose truth one hopes. What would I more?
'tis a dark world, and no man lights another:
'tis a dark world, and no man sees so plain
as he believes he sees ... excepting those
who are mere blind and know it.

Here's a man
thinks his eyes' stretch can plainly scan out God,
and cannot plainly scan his neighbour's face—
he'll make you a hobgoblin, hoofs and horns,
of a poor cripple shivering at his door
begging a bit of food.

We get no food;
stones, stones: but then he but half sees, he trows
'tis honest bread he gives us.

A blind world.
Light! light! oh God, whose other name is Light,
if—

Ay, ay, always **if**: thought's cursed with **ifs** .
Well, where's my book?—No "ifs" in that, I think;
a readable shrewd book; 'twill win the critics.

TIRED.

NO not to—night, dear child; I cannot go;
 I'm busy, tired; they knew I should not come;
 you do not need me there. Dear, be content,
 and take your pleasure; you shall tell me of it.
 There, go to don your miracles of gauze,
 and come and show yourself a great pink cloud.

So, she has gone with half a discontent;
 but it will die before her curls are shaped,
 and she'll go forth intent on being pleased,
 and take her ponderous pastime like the rest—
 patient delightedly, prepared to talk
 in the right voice for the right length of time
 on any thing that anybody names,
 prepared to listen with the proper calm
 to any song that anybody sings;
 wedged in their chairs, all soberness and smiles,
 one steady sunshine like an August day:
 a band of very placid revellers,
 glad to be there but gladder still to go.
 She like the rest: it seems so strange to me,
 my simple peasant girl, my nature's grace,
 one with the others; my wood violet
 stuck in a formal rose box at a show.

Well, since it makes her happier. True I thought
 the artless girl, come from her cottage home
 knowing no world beyond her village streets,
 come stranger into our elaborate life
 with such a blithe and wondering ignorance
 as a young child's who sees new things all day,
 would learn it my way and would turn to me
 out of the solemn follies "What are these?
 why must we live by drill and laugh by drill;
 may we not be ourselves then, you and I?"
 I thought she would have nestled here by me
 "I cannot feign, and let me stay with you."
 I thought she would have shed about my life
 the unalloyed sweet freshness of the fields
 pure from your cloying fashionable musks:
 but she "will do what other ladies do"—
 my sunburnt Madge I saw, with skirts pinned up,
 carrying her father's dinner where he sat
 to take his noon—day rest beneath the hedge,
 and followed slowly for her clear loud song.

TIRED.

And she did then, she says, as others did
 who were her like. 'Tis logical enough:
 as every woman lives, (tush! as we all,
 following such granted patterns for our souls
 as for our hats and coats), she lived by rules
 how to be as her neighbours, though I, trained
 to my own different code, discerned it not
 (mistaking other laws for lawlessness,
 like raw and hasty travellers): and now
 why should she, in a new world, all unapt
 to judge its judgments, take so much on her
 she did not in her old world, pick and choose
 her pleasures and her tastes, her aims, her faiths,
 breaking her smooth path with the thorny points
 of upstart questions? She is just a bird
 born in a wicker cage and brought away
 into a gilded one: she does not pine
 to make her nest in uncontrolled far woods,
 but, unconceiving freedom, chirrups on,
 content to see her prison bars so bright.

Yes, best for her; and, if not best for me,
 I've my fault in it too: she's logical,
 but what am I, who, having chosen her
 for being all unlike the tutored type,
 next try and mould her to it—chose indeed
 my violet for being not a rose,
 then bade it hold itself as roses do,
 that passers by may note no difference?
 The peasant ways must go, the homely burr,
 the quaint strong English—ancient classic turns
 mixed up with rustic blunders and misuse,
 old grammar shot with daring grammarlessness;
 the village belle's quick pertness, toss of head,
 and shriek of saucy laughter—graces there,
 and which a certain reckless gracefulness,
 half hoydenish, half fawnlike, made in her
 graces in even my eyes ... there; the ease
 of quick companionship; the unsoftened "no's;"
 the ready quarrels, ready makings up;
 all these must go, I would not have her mocked
 among the other women who have learned
 sweet level speech and quiet courtesies—
 and then they jarred upon me like the noise
 of music out of rule, which, heard at first,
 took the fresh ear with novel melody,
 but makes you restless, listened to too long,
 with missing looked for rhythms. So I teach,
 or let her learn, the way to speak, to look,
 to walk, to sit, to dance, to sing, to laugh,
 and then the prized dissimilarity

TIRED.

was outer husk and not essential core:
my wife is just the wife my any friend
selects among my any friend's good girls,
(a duplicate except that here and there
the rendering's faulty or touched in too strong);
my little rugged bit of gold I mined,
cleared from its quartz and dross and pieced for use
with recognized alloy, is minted down
one of a million stamped and current coins.

My poor dear Madge, it half seems treasonous
to let regret touch any thought of you,
loyal and loving to me as you are;
and you are very very dear to me,
I could not spare you, would not change your love
to have the rich ideal of my hope
in any other woman; as you are
I love you, being you. And for the rest,
if I, my theory's too eager fool,
mistook the freedom of blunt ignorance
for one with freedom of the instructed will,
and took yours for a nature made to keep
its hardiness in culture, gaining strength
to be itself more fully; if I looked
for some rare perfectness of natural gifts,
developing not changed, pruned and not dwarfed;
if I believed you would be that to me
so many men have sung by women's names
and known no woman for, where is your fault,
who did but give yourself as you were then,
and with so true a giving? Violet,
whose is the blame if, rooted from your place,
where you grew truly to your natural law,
set by my hand in artificial soil,
bound to unwonted props, whose blame if you
are not quite violet and not quite rose?

She's happy though, I think: she does not bear
the pain of my mistake, and shall not bear;
and she'll not ever guess of a mistake.

Mistake—'tis a hard word. Well let it pass:
it shall not wrong her: for was it in her
or in myself I was mistaken most?
What, I, who have been bold to hurl revolt
at great Queen Bugaboo Society,
did I not teach her suit and service first,
winning when she infringed some useless law?
do I not wince to-day beside the fire
at every word or gesture she shall use
not scheduled in the warrant what to do?

TIRED.

do I not bid her have the table thus,
 assort such viands, use such furniture,
 wear such a stuff at morning, such at night,
 all to the warrant of Queen Bugaboo,
 and feel a something missing when she fails,
 a discord setting all my teeth on edge?
 Why, what a score of small observances;
 mere fashionable tricks, are to my life
 the butter on the bread, without which salve
 the bit's too coarse to swallow; what a score
 of other small observances and tricks,
 worn out of fashion or not yet come in,
 reek worse than garlic to my pampered taste,
 making the wholesomest food too difficult!
 And that which in an ancient yesterday
 was but some great man's humour is to me
 duty by rote to-day. I had not felt
 my own life that punctilious copy-book,
 writ to stock patterns set to all a school,
 I have called usual lives, but my poor Madge
 has unawares informed me of myself.

We can no other; 'tis as natural
 to men to take this artificial kind
 as to the flowers, which, grown in neighbour ranks,
 taste the same winds and feed on the same soil,
 to take inoculation by the bees
 of one another's dyes and be alike
 in new unlikeness to their primal types.
 Our gift is imitation and to share
 the subtle current of all sympathies;
 we breathe each other's thoughts, as in a crowd
 we breathe each other's breaths, unconsciously;
 and if there could be a mere human man
 to singly be creator, make the thing
 which none has hoped for near him, say the things
 which none has thought beside him, were there one
 to be the god we claim in our rash word
original, needs were he such a one
 as we call savage, one apart in woods
 and friendless deserts, planning by himself
 some first instinctive art, or questioning
 blank ignorance and wonder into thoughts.
 And as for us, the men who live in days
 when what the West has whispered finds the East
 across an ocean in a breath of time;
 when the old era's painful manuscripts,
 too choice and rare for less than sage's needs,
 reach the new era changed to daily showers
 of schoolboys' text-books raining from the press;
 when we shake hands with our antipodes

TIRED.

Portraits

for being neighbour to us; when, like streets
of the city where we are burghers, half the world
is our admitted home, the other half
our summer pleasure—grounds outside our walls;
we, who are scholars of all times and lands,
must be content, each several man, to feel
we are no sovereign units each to rule
the small world of himself, but knitted links,
one drawing on the other in a chain—
A bondage say, but have we not its worth,
help, movement, and the chain grows lengthening on
to span the universe? A braggart whim,
were it a possible, if any link,
breaking away from hundreds side by side,
would be a separate spangle.

Yet, alack,
sometimes we links get drawn we know not where,
but think there's mud about us. Still the chain
lies in God's hands, though the sly devil comes
and gives a crooked tug or so at times.

Links in a chain—my metaphor goes well,
convinces me where first I was convinced—
links in a chain, drawing each other on:
but never yet material metaphor
would fit a mind's whole thought, and the hitch comes
where I bid mine good—bye. Links in a chain,
but what of hearts and wills that are in us,
hopes, aims, beliefs? must we go measuring them
Ay "the world says," "so other people think,"
dock our near tastes and natures to the shapes
in common wear, make lay figures of our lives,
as women of their bodies, to be decked
and draped or trimmed and swathed or let go bare
by strict indefinite despots out of sight?
Why, let us have that freedom we accord
inanimate things, to grow each to his kind
and to his best, cattle and servile beasts,
to grow each to his kind and to his best;
but we—oh, monstrous folly—we, designed
each man so much unlike to all men else
as one whole kind of beasts to other kinds,
must train and pattern our reluctant souls
into one liveried sameness!

Oh, I am tired!
tired, tired, of this bland smiling slavery,
monotonous waste of life. And, while we fools
are making curtsies and brave compliments
to our rare century, and, courtierly,
swaddling our strength in trammels of soft silk,
the rotten depths grow rottener. Every day

TIRED.

Portraits

more crime, more pain, more horror. We are good
no doubt, we "better classes"—oh, we boast
our modern virtues in the dead men's teeth
that were our fathers—we are earnest now,
and charitable, and we wash ourselves,
and have a very fair morality;
most well brought up, in fine, of any men
that any age has nurtured, and besides
so equal in our manners and our coats:
and then the classes which, though bettering,
are not quite **better** yet, are the most shrewd,
most apt, most honest, most intelligent,
that ever the world saw yet. True all of it
for aught I know, some of it as I think,
but underneath—great God, how many souls
are born an hour as provender for hell!

Oh horrible days! our goodness growing ripe,
a spreading scent of sweets, but with no power
to disinfect the spreading foulnesses;
and by mere birth-rate vice made multiplex!
From the murk lanes, and from the fetid courts,
and from the shameful dens where poverty
hobnobs with wolfish crime, out of the reek
of lust and filth, out of the festering homes
of pestilence and famine, the hoarse cry
grows multitudinous, the cavernous cry
of shame and ignorance hunger and greed
become despair and devilishness And we
gravely thank God for culture and new lights!

Most horrible days: and we who know the worst,
(or dream it, sitting in our easy chairs,
sorry that all men have not easy chairs,
and would do somewhat, do it all amiss.
We pelt our broad-cast gold into the mire,
then comes a scramble, foul grows fouler yet;
with a Samaritan hand we feed and feed
the daughters of the horseleech, drunkenness
and dissolute idleness, that cry "give, give,"
sucking the lifeblood from our people's heart;
we pension beggars, buy the burglar tools
and the sot gin, and pay the harlot's rent:
societies, committees, vestry rooms,
with fingers in our purses, lavish wealth,
past common counting, to keep up the tale
of pauper legions and bribe new recruits,
sow coin that, like the pestilent dragon's teeth,
bear us a poisonous crop of human harm:
all all endeavours go, like witches' prayers,
backwards against the meaning, and bring down

TIRED.

the counter—curse of blessings that were asked.

What should we do? I know not; but I think
there's moral in a hackneyed classic tale:
when the great gulf still yawned, after the gold
and treasures had been thrown, there came a man
and gave himself, and then the great gulf closed.

But how? how? And I know not; but I think
if the strong pith and freshness of our lives
were not so sucked and dried away, our span
not maimed and dwarfed, our sight not warped untrue,
by eating custom, petty disciplines,
footlight perspectives cramped to suit our stage,
if we were men, not types and portraitures
and imitative shadows, some of us
might learn—

Learn, learn, and if we learned,
saw by what boldness, or what sacrifice,
or what endurance, or what vehemence,
the goal of our beginning might be reached,
the padded skeleton we call the world,
that mumming glib Duessa who usurps
the true world's rule and rights, would trip us up
with half a league of silken barriers
too soft for us to break and breaking us.
Oh, but I know it, I, who time by time,
fierce with the turbulent goodness of my youth,
rushed to the clamorous call of new crusades,
and time by time dropped baffled and worn weak
before a rampart as of dancing pumps,
a wind as if it blew from ladies' fans,
till now I sit a weary man growing old
among the ruins of his purposes,
hopeless of any good to be by him.

Oh, with how full a hope, when morning glowed,
I donned my armour, who at night ride back
foolish and broken! I have set myself
to fight with shadows stronger than a man,
being impalpable and everywhere,
and striking done no hurt but to myself;
and I have ridden at ranks in adamant
and fallen, strained and useless, under foot;
and I have sieged impenetrable walls
and waited day by day till I grew faint;
and never have I triumphed in my cause,
whether it were a great one, or a dream,
a pettish whim, or too divinely large:
for if I strove against contagious ills
cankering the core of us or but at spots

TIRED.

Portraits

that fleck the smooth gloss of our drawingrooms,
and if I rose to claim some wide desire
of general good or but my own escape
from some small prickings of our social gyves,
always I was against the multitude,
against strong Custom's army plodding on,
unconquerable, calm, like a great stream
whose power is that its waters drift one way.

Tired, tired—grown sick of battle and defeat,
lying in harbour, like a man worn out
by storms, and yet not patient of my rest:
how if I went to some kind southern clime
where, as they say, lost in long summer dreams,
the mind grows careless with sun-drunkenness
and sleeps and wakens softly like a child?
Would Madge be over sorry to come out
into free loneliness with me a while?
clear tints and sunshine, glowing seas and skies,
beauty of mountains and of girdled plains,
the strangeness of new peoples, change and rest,
would these atone to her for so much lost
which she counts precious? For she loves that round
of treadmill ceremonies, mimic tasks,
we make our women's lives—Good heavens what work
to set the creatures to, whom we declare
God purposed for companions to us men...
companions to each other only now,
their business but to waste each other's time.
So much to do among us, and we spend
so many human souls on only this!
in petty actress parts in the long game
(grave foolery like children playing school,
setting themselves hard tasks and punishments,)
that lasts till death and is Society:
the sunlight working hours all chopped and chipped
in stray ten minutes by some score of friends
who, grieved their friend's not out, come rustling in
by ones and twos to say the weather's fine;
or paid away, poor soul, on pilgrimage
reciprocally due to tell them so:
each woman owing tax of half her life
as plaything for the others' careless hours,
each woman setting down her foot to hold
her sister tightly to the tethered round,
will she or nill she: all with rights on each
greater than hers ... and I might say than God's,
since He made work the natural food of minds,
cheated of which they dwindle and go dead
like palsied limbs, and gives to each that sense
of beasts, who know their food, to know its work,

TIRED.

choosing the great or little.

But myself,
have I befooled the instinct by warped use?
for is not the fruit rotten I have found
by all my labours; nothing to the world
and to me bitterness? And I forget
the strong joy of endeavour, and the fire
of hope is burned out in me; all grows dull,
rest is not rest and I am sick of toil:
I count the cost, and—

Ready, love, at last?

Why, what a rosy June! A flush of bloom
sparkling with crystal dews—Ah silly one,
you love these muslin roses better far
than those that wear the natural dew of heaven.
I thought you prettier when, the other day,
the children crowned you with the meadow-sweets:
I like to hear you teach them wild flowers' names
and make them love them; but yourself—

What's that?

"The wild flowers in a room's hot stifling glare
would die in half a minute." True enough:
your muslin roses are the wiser wear.
Well, I must see you start. Draw your hood close:
and are you shawled against this east wind's chills?

COMING HOME.

FIVE minutes here, and they must steal two more!
 shameful! Here have I been five mortal years
 and not seen home nor one dear kindred face,
 and these abominable slugs, this guard,
 this driver, porters—what are they about?—
 keep us here motionless, two minutes, three.—
 Aha! at last!

Good! We shall check our minutes;
 we're flying after them, like a mad wind
 chasing the leaves it has tossed on in front.
 Oh glorious wild speed, what giants' play!
 and there are men who tell us poetry
 is dead where railways come! Maybe 'tis true,
 I'm a bad judge, I've had scant reading time
 and little will to read and certainly
 I've not found railways in what verse I know:
 but there's a whizz and whirr as trains go by,
 a bullet-like indomitable rush
 and then all's done, which makes me often think
 one of those men who found out poetry,
 and had to write the things just that they saw,
 would have made some of their fine crashing lines
 that stir one like the marches one knows best,
 and the enemy knows best, with trains in them
 as easily as chariots.

Anyhow
 I've poetry and music too to-day
 in the very clatter: it goes "Home, home, home."

And they'll think that sharp shriek a kinder sound
 than sweetest singing, when it presently
 pierces the quiet of the night and sends
 its eager shrillness on for miles before
 to say I'm no time distant. I can see
 my mother's soft pink cheeks (like roses, pale
 after a June week's blooming,) flush and wan,
 and her lip quiver; I can see the girls,
 restless between the hall door and the clock,
 hear it and hush and lean expectant heads
 to catch the rattle of the coming train;
 my father, sitting pshawing by the fire
 at all the fuss and waiting, half start up,
 dropping his Times, forgetful just so long
 that he is not impatient like the rest,
 the tender foolish women, and, alert
 to hide how he was tempted to fuss too,

reseat himself intent on politics;
 and Hugh—I think Hugh must be there with them,
 on leave out of his parish for a day,
 a truant from the old women and the schools
 to be at home with me for long enough
 to say "God bless you" in—I can see Hugh,
 narrow and straight in his skimp priestly coat,
 pacing the room with slow and even steps,
 and a most patient face, and in his eyes
 that over patience we all know in them
 when he is being extra good and calm.

So little change, they write me: all of them
 with the same faces, scarce a day's mark there—
 except our little Maude who was a child
 and is a woman: little Maude grown tall:
 the little Maude I left half prude half romp,
 who, eager for her grown-up dignities,
 tried to forego her mischiefs and would turn,
 just in their midst, portentously demure
 like a tired sleepy kitten, and to-day
 wears all her womanhood inside her heart
 and has none for her manners—some of it
 for her sweet winsome face though; and a look
 that's in her portrait brings my mother back,
 though she's not like they tell me. I shall see;
 yes I shall see! soon; almost now.

Dear home,
 to think I am so near!

Ah, when I lay
 in the hot thirst and fever of my wound,
 and saw their faces pressing into mine,
 changing and changing, never a one would stay
 so long that I could see it like itself,
 I scarcely hoped for this. And when I felt
 that tiring weakness of my growing strong,
 and was so helpless, and the babyish tears
 would come without a thought to make them come,
 I almost knew this day would never be:
 but, oh my happy fortune, not to die,
 not even to come home among them then,
 with nothing done, a spoiled and worthless wreck
 for them to weep at softly out of sight,
 but to go stoutly to my post again,
 and do my stroke of work as a man should,
 and win them this.

You little dingy cross,
 less precious than my sleeve-links, what a worth
 lies in your worthlessness: there's not a man
 but gladder lays you in his mother's hand,
 or wife's, than he would bring her for his gift

the whole great jewels of an eastern king,
and not a woman but—

My mother, though—
sometimes she was not strong—have I been rash,
too thoughtless of her calm, not telling of it?
No, I'll not wear it on me, as I meant,
to take her first dear kisses in: we'll talk
before I show it—in a day or two—
perhaps to—night.

I know she'll prize it more
that a life saved went to the winning it.
And tenderhearted Ellen will forgive
my part she shudders at in the red deaths
of battle fields a little more for that—
How sad her letters were; I know she thinks
we learn a heathenish passion after blood,
and, as she said, "to throw our lives like dross
back in our Maker's face:" but bye and bye
I'll teach her how it is, and that we fight
for duty, not like either fiends or fools.

They say they are longing for my history,
told by the fire of evenings; all my deeds,
all my escapes; and I must clear their minds
of fifty puzzles of the journalists,
decide what's true, and make them understand
the battles and the marchings: but my deeds
have been to just be one among them all,
doing what we were bidden as we could,
and my escapes must have been like the rest—
one has no time to know them; just that once,
when I was dragging off the fallen boy,
I knew what death was nearest as it missed,
but I've no memory of more escapes
except by being wounded, as they know;
and what can I explain of battle plans
made in the councils, whether kept or not
I cannot tell? I only know my part
and theirs with whom I waited at our post
or dashed on at the word, I could not mark
the swaying of the squadrons, the recoils
and shifting ground and sudden strategies,
and had no duty to be watching them.
No, I shall make them better out in print,
and learn in our snug study what I saw
among the rush and smoke.

No, I come back
no better talker than I was before,
no readier and no deeper, not like Hugh,
and I must use my unaspiring wits
to say things as I see them, going straight;

just as a plain man's life does, tramping on
the way that lies before one, with no **whys**.

No **whys**; ah how that chance word takes me back
to pinafore-time—my father's well-known phrase
"No whying, boy, but do what you are bid."
And once my mother, when first Hugh began
to be so clever, and had found it out
and, pleased at it, perhaps a little pert,
was apt to hit on puzzles, answered him
"our nursery rule was good for afterwards,
spared headaches and spared heartaches, and, well kept,
made the best heroes and best Christians too."
How I can see Hugh looking down to say,
in an odd slow tone, "I will remember that."
And well he has remembered; never a man
went straighter into action than our Hugh;
he knows what side he's on and stands to it:
if I'd a head like his, and wished to change
soldiering for anything, I'd try to learn
a parish parson's work to do it like Hugh.

Will he read prayers to-night? I'd like to hear
my father at it, as it used to be
before we any of us went away—
the old times back again. Oh, all of us
will say our prayers to-night out of glad hearts.
Oh, thank God for the meeting we shall have!

Such joy among us! and the country side
all to be glad for us. Ah well, I fear
there's one will shrink and sadden at my sight
among the welcomes and the happiness,
remembering that her husband was my friend,
and dropped beside me. But I'll go alone—
or maybe with my mother—to her house
and let her have the pain more quietly,
before she sees me in our Sunday pew,
with all the old friends smiling through the prayers
and all but nodding, and a buzzing round
spoilng the parson's reading "Look," and "Look,"
"There's Master Harry come back from the war."

Oh, how my mother's eyes will turn to me,
half unawares, then fix upon her book
that none may see them growing large and moist;
and how my father will look stern and frown,
hiding the treacherous twinkles with the shade
of knitted brows, lest any watching him
should think him moved to have his son by him,
and proud like foolish fathers; but the girls

Portraits

will be all smiles and flutter, and look round
elate as if no other girls before
had had a soldier brother. And old Will,
out of his corner by the vestry door,
will peer and blink and suck his grins in tight,
trying to mind the sermon and not think
what sport he has for me in the preserves.

Plenty of birds this year, my father writes;
we'll see next week, and—There's the long shrill yell!
Home! all but home!

Oh! there, between the trees,
that light, our house—they're waiting for me there.

IN AN ALMSHOUSE.

OH the dear summer evening! How the air
is mellow with the delicate breath of flowers
and wafts of hay scent from the sunburnt swathes:
how the glad song of life comes everywhence,
from thousand harmless voices, from blithe birds
that twitter on incessant sweet good-nights,
from homeward bees that, through the clover tufts,
stray booming, pilfering treasures to the last,
from sleepless crickets clamouring in the grass.
to tell the world they're happy day and night,
from the persistent rooks in their high town,
from sheep in far off meadows: life, life, life,
it is the song they sing, and to my mind
the song is very happy, very good.
My God, I thank thee I have known this life,
although, I doubt not, dying I shall learn
how greater and how happier is death.

Oh beautiful and various earth of ours,
how good God made thee. Ah, I have lost much,
mine is a very grey and dim earth now,
but I can feel and hear and take in so
the joy of present beauty to my soul,
and then I see it there. O strange blurred mists,
that mean the sky to me, my twilight eyes
discern no more than you, but I see more;
I see this gold and glowing sunset spread,
and break the pale blue sky with flashing clouds,
I see the shadows soften on the hills,
and the green summits brighten one by one
and purple in the nightfall one by one.
Oh, seeing can be done without the eyes.

Are those St Mary's church-bells in the town?
How far sound spreads to-night! St Mary's bells,
chiming for evensong. I would the way
were not so over long for feeble limbs,
and that the pathway and the still canal
had not so like a glimmer in the dusk;
for I could gladly feel the peace of prayer
among the others in the quiet church,
with silent graves seen through the open door,
and rustling heard of slowly stirring leaves.
And then 'tis pleasant too to hear the rhythm
of scholars' English and of words in books:
'tis like the voice of some rare foreign tongue

familiar once and loved, that, howso heard,
 takes the glad ear with sweetness of old wont.
 Oh, there's no sermon now so trite and crude
 but makes for me a sort of literature:
 'tis my one echo now from that far world
 where books are read and written, my world once;
 I listen as one listens, note by note,
 to some great symphony one knows by heart,
 played powerlessly, uncertainly, with change
 and thinner chords to suit a learner's hand,
 listening with pleasure part for what there is
 and more for what there should be and what was
 when long ago one used to hear the strain:
 I seem to love words now because they are words.

Not that I'll call our Vicar's sermon words:
 no, no; he loves his God and loves his poor;
 he makes his life one task of doing good;
 can such a man speak idly? What he does
 is proof to what he urges, his week's life
 soul to his Sunday preachings, his shown faith
 the key to his expoundings; one may learn
 from such a man more things than he can teach:
 Alas, the busy patience of his life,
 eager and resolute for little things,
 strenuous on petty labours, which no voice
 shall ever herald past the parish bounds,
 which maybe those who see them do not see,
 and those whose gain they are know not for gain,
 does it not twit me with my languid years
 drifted along expectant of a day
 when all my world should thank me I had waked?
 My world—ah, after all, a lesser one
 than I discerned when I was of it still,
 my world of men who learn and teach and learn,
 and then have only learned and taught and learned—
 my world that has forgotten me, a waif
 floated away from it on too rough tides,
 left spoiled and stranded to drop piece by piece.

Ah me, the difference: I have not known
 what envy means unless I know it now
 when, in my helplessness, sick, blind, and poor,
 past all fulfilling now, with nought fulfilled,
 I see our Vicar, with his cheery look,
 hurried and overladen with small cares,
 glad in his work because it is his work.
 And he'll not envy me my garnered lore,
 stored up for moth and mildew; what to him
 is any wisdom but to work and pray?
 the denizens of our rustic market town,

which ignorant strangers take, and break our hearts,
 or just a village, know no Tübingen,
 have never heard of varying codices,
 love, or love not, the Christ of Luke and John,
 and have no guess of Renan's; to their minds
 belief and unbelief are simplest things,
 mere Yes and No, and God **must** side with Yes,
 as kings must with the loyal. But the love
 that comes of faith and faith that comes of love;
 they can learn those of him and he can teach,
 that plain man, ignorant of philosophies
 but wise enough to do good all the day.
 Ah, why was I too weak for such a life,
 which once I might have chosen? A high life,
 full of most blessed service.

But I thought

it was not my life meant for me by God:
 and now I know not what I should have done,
 only I mourn that I have lived in vain,
 still daily dreaming some completed task
 that never was begun, still waiting force
 of impulse more than mine to waken mine,
 still dimly pondering "Shall I? Can I? How?"
 and waiting to be ready to begin.

Ah tardy useless labourer in the fields,
 who waits to think what weed he shall rout first;
 ah laggard sailor, who will not put out
 till the direct fair wind sets for his port.
 And time will never linger, and the world
 can wait for no man, must have its wants fed
 at the want's birth—cry—soldiers to the gap
 on the hot instant, else no need of you,
 no space for you to stand in. Long long since
 I thought to have been somewhat, to perhaps
 set some regardful honour round my name,
 but surely to receive a destined place,
 a part among the workers: for it seemed
 to have so far utrodden, half alone,
 from peasant lowliness should prelude me
 a future as of one of whom they say
 "so low he was" to show how high he is.
 Dreams, dreams! I never had the pith, the sap,
 the strong aspiring pulses; I was one
 to think, and shiver, by the study fire
 "outside is the cold boisterous sea of life
 where I will plunge to—morrow and snatch pearls,"
 to wait like a late sleeper in the morn,
 that with a drowsy logic lulls himself,
 and chides his tardiness on their delay
 who will not come to tell him it is time.

And yet I did not sleep; no, to my thought
 I always was at school for work to come:
 but these days leave us little schooling time.
 Long since, and when the wisdom of the wise
 was to accept **to live** one with **to learn**,
 and men might find their work for half a life
 in thinking silent, and the other half
 in thinking out aloud, those were my days
 I should have lived in: I came out of date:
 like a reprinted tome of theories
 made reasonably ere the science shaped,
 which, all uncut, stands on the library shelf
 amid new essays on the daily art
 born long since of the science, and men say
 "'Tis learned, curious, looks well on the shelf"
 and take its slighter useful neighbour down,
 so I showed wise and useless to the world.

Wise with the oldworld wisdom grown unapt
 to this changed morrow, for the lesson now
 is to accept **to live** one with **to do**—
 the wisest wisdom plainly in this stir,
 this over crowding, this hot hurrying on,
 that make a tempest of our modern days.
 This anxious age is driven half mad with work,
 it bids us all work, world no need, no room,
 for contemplating sages counting life
 a time allowed for solving problems in
 and its own self a problem to be solved;
 on in the rush, or be swept out of sight,
 on in the rush, and find your place, and work.

'Tis right, 'tis very right; not only ours
 to fit what state God gives us but what times;
 and he who is thrown out in a fierce race
 can hardly chide, "the others ran too fast."
 And, as for me, if I grow old alone,
 hid out of memory of springtime peers,
 and have my roof and food by dead men's alms,
 it is that I have been an alien son,
 a dronish servant careful of his ease,
 to the master—Present, the strong century
 that gave our lives and will have use of them.
 I knew it always, but still while I thought.
 "To—morrow I go forth," the sudden Now
 had gone before I judged it had been there:
 I knew it always, but the stealthy years
 slid on while I was busy at my books,
 and when I, startled, waked and saw it time,
 lo the "Too late" which God has spoken me

in blindness and in sickness.

A strange life;
fair bud, fair blossom, never perfect fruit;
the river that seemed destined to push on
long eager miles among its busy mills,
among its teeming meadows and its towns,
hemmed stagnant by some little feeble dykes,
some trivial sand-mounds barred against its way,
and rounding to an issueless dull pool.

And yet, but for that wondering vague remorse
not to have been one stronger than myself,
I look back very kindly on my life
so changeful yet so still, not sorrowless
and yet not sad; I love to think of it
and tell it to myself like an old tale
dear for its homely long-familiar turns.
Oh, often I, the grey-haired palsied man,
am yet again the child beneath the hedge,
the village urchin, truant to his task,
of scaring crows, to con a dog's-eared book,
stealing his indolent scholar's luxury
by naughty half-hours through the lonely day.
Oh happy child, I never saw my guilt
nor dreamed of trust betrayed and pence ill-earned,
and it was such a joy to learn and pore
and read great words and wonder what they meant,
and sometimes see, as if a faint new star
dawned on one through a dusky gap at night,
a sudden meaning breaking on the doubt:
poor as I was, ill cared for, with no kin
but the sharp stepmother who, good at heart,
for widow's duty called me hers, not love,
and little Grace, the toddling sister thing
she'd not let love me and not let me touch,
who learned to scold me in her sweet babe's lisp
and would not kiss me even when we played,
no friends, no playmates, every way alone,
yet 'twas a happy boyhood; not forlorn
with the thumb'd book for gossip, not forlorn
with all the outdoor world for company.
Oh, many and many a balmy eve like this,
beside my pollard willows by the brook,
I sat and watched the greyness creeping on,
thinking 'twas pity days must end in nights
and one must sleep away so many hours,
losing such sweetness of the summer time.

Dulled wistful eyes, you cannot show me now
the brown-ribbed hill behind whose rounded slope
my village stands among its fields of flax;

IN AN ALMSHOUSE.

last year I still could find it, where to me
 it seemed a smooth dusk cloud against the sky,
 could say "there lies my home," and fancy out
 the well known landmarks, and go step by step
 mind—pilgrimage among the dear old haunts;
 but now the hill and sky are both one haze,
 the dusk cloud's place is lost in larger dusk.
 Well, well, 'tis present to me none the less,
 and I am glad to feel it near in sight
 with its white winding road that, from the top,
 looks on my home, and sudden slants to it.

My home! and now 'tis twenty years and odd
 since I have journeyed down the slanting road
 and seen our envied boasts, the bridge and spire;
 yes, twenty years and odd since the last time,
 and then they called me stranger; yet I feel
 my true home there. Not in my happy town,
 my placid scholar's town of colleges,
 where the smooth river, lagging by its elms,
 bears on its painted breast oriels and towers
 and grey monastic courts made reverend
 with elder learning and historic lives;
 not in my Cornish schoolhouse near the rocks,
 where from the granite headland, with its crown
 of glossy sward and wee white heather bloom
 and rare and southern wildflowers of the moors,
 one looked on the illimitable plain,
 the vague mysterious ocean stretching forth
 into the space and silence of the sky;
 not in the city of the million homes,
 the throbbing heart of England—No, not there,
 how could I find home there? those pent black streets,
 that skyless prison room, where day by day
 my heart and head grew number, day by day
 I and my schoolboys seemed to grow less apt,
 that whirr and whirl of traffic, ceaseless change
 of unknown faces thronging to and fro!
 my life went shrivelling there as if one brought
 some thirsty field plant maimed of half its root
 amid a ball—night glare of flashing lamps.
 And if I, even in this haven nook,
 sheltered out of the cold winds of the world,
 if here on the free hill—side, with the sounds
 of woodland quiet soothing in my ears,
 here where the dear home breezes blow to me
 over the well known meadows, yet have longed,
 like a sick schoolboy for his mother's face,
 to look on my remembered trees and fields,
 to touch them, to feel kin with them again,
 how else could it be with me in the din

the blackness and the crowding?

Oh my heart,
 how faint it grew long ere I grew all faint;
 long ere there came this swift decrepitude
 of too usurping age forestalling time;
 how desolate I felt, like a man wrecked
 on some far island in a burning clime
 where every voice clangs strangely, and all thoughts
 come to him yet more foreign than the words,
 and very kindness wears unhomeliness;
 how in my weariness I grew to loathe
 those prison bars of roofs across the sky.
 Well, when He pleased, God gave me the release,
 gave His good way not mine, I thank Him for it.
 Yes, it is well with me: life grows mere rest—
 I sit apart and am done with the world,
 no hopes, no fears, no changes; I have lost
 all part in aims and duties, like a tool
 blunted with little use I am laid by
 never to serve again; I sit apart
 useless, forgotten, a lone purblind man
 hid in an almshouse—but the rest is good,
 is very peaceful, and I feel God near,
 near as I never knew Him in old days
 when yet I thought I loved Him.

Did I not?

Was it because I did not love Him then
 I could not choose His service? It seems strange:
 they all said I was fit, they urged me to it:
 and there on one hand was my worldly ease
 and (if I **were** fit) service to my God,
 on the other, chance and my poor single strength
 to wrest a pittance from the world's clenched hand:
 yes one might say it had been granted me
 to choose both God and Mammon virtuously:
 and yet I could not—never might my lips
 have spoken the great answers "Christ has called,"
 "The Holy Ghost has moved me." Day by day
 I urged myself, I prayed to hear the call,
 and the call came not. Was it want of love?
 and would my warmer heart have been more brave,
 and known a summons where I did not know?

Ah no, there was no need for such as I,
 who have no ministering gift, no rule on minds.
 Oh, the poor souls had perished which must lean
 on such a pastor; I, who never found
 the teacher's common secret how to write
 the accurate human lore on willing minds,
 how could I teach God's mysteries of love?
 how could I force rebellious hearts to know?

IN AN ALMSHOUSE.

I, who must reason with myself an hour
to cross a room and give a friend good-day,
where were my ready words to greet the poor,
my instant tact, my sympathy, command?
Oh, rather was I one to be content,
to be most happy, cloistered in the peace
of some grey convent where the even hours
go measured out by prayers and each still day
melts stealthily to night and has but seen
change between chapel and the studious cell.
Had such a life been granted by my creed
I could have snatched at it yes, even then
before the silent too delusive hope
died at her careless bidding.

Susan Lee,

you never guessed, I but half knew myself,
how close a part you had of all my life
from the first time my schoolboy heart grew proud
to feel itself beat quicker at a smile.
I loved you patiently, content to dream
what happy fireside future should be ours
if you should ever love me; afterwards
I sorrowed patiently; and in both whiles
lived in my peace as if you had not been:
but yet you always have been part of me,
I cannot think upon my earlier self
and not remember you. It was but chance
that you were near me, following up the brook
for water-cresses, on that birthday morn
of my new life, when, as I basked and read,
the young squire's tutor came and saw my book,
and sat with me beneath my willow tree;
it was but chance that, for your good-girl treat,
you went a twelve miles' journey to your aunt's
and saw the prize-day splendours of our school
where I stood in my class-boy eminence
(a shamefaced hero, conscious of renown,
and bearing such a greatness bashfully),
and that your face, set in a window frame,
was still the one I saw when I looked up;
it was but chance that made your merry voice
the one to greet me first when, all elate
with budding freshman honours of first term,
I came back to our village ... where, good lack,
I found small reverence for my dignities,
and no one turned to watch me as I walked;
it was but chance that I could see you lead
a romping battle, armed with pelts of hay,
against my Gracie and her rival band
the time I got the germ and ringingest lines
of the Greek ode which gained my earliest prize;

Portraits

it was but chance made Grace's letter come,
talking of only you, the selfsame day
I heard my name sound in the topmost list,
the very roll of fame as I thought then—
maybe I thought it too long afterwards,
poor lad, who fancied I had won a race
because I gained a vantage post to start;
yes, chance and only chance so mingles you
with the young promise halos, but you stand
always a star behind them, shining through,
and, though I once was sad because of you,
I have my happy memories of you now.

They said you were not pretty, owed your charm
to choice of ribbons from your father's shop,
but, as for me, I saw not if you wore
too many ribbons or too few, nor sought
what charms you had beyond that one I knew,
the kind and honest look in your grey eyes.

Well, you chose fitlier; and you prosper well,
and I can fancy you in your content,
a busy prudent farmwife all the week
and wearing silk on Sundays when you go
to church among your children, proud to take
your husband's arm ... a man who holds his own
and rents a few more acres every year.

And Grace chose wisely too, the wilful girl
I would have made a lady of—not she,
she would not stay at school, she would not learn
your monkey French, she would not chirp words small
like twittering birds, she would not crotchet lace;
and she would marry sturdy William Ford;
so found some rainy days at first, 'tis true,
but they both took them with a cheery heart,
and now she writes from their far western home
that all goes well with them, and, as for her,
she's happier than a queen the whole day through,
and all the bairns as fresh as buttercups.

'Tis far away, my Gracie, far from me:
I'd like to feel your hand in mine at last,
for I have only you, and, as I think,
you bear a kind heart to me; but that's vain,
there'll be no meeting for us in this world.
But bye and bye, my Gracie, bye and bye.

Aye, there's the answer to one's every want,
one's every doubt, that promise **bye and bye**;
it gives this life a beauty, as the glimpse

IN AN ALMSHOUSE.

Portraits

between near hills of the great open sea
gives to some inland nook among the woods;
it is the full completed melody
the shifting prelude hints at. Life is good,
but most because, in its best perfectness,
it comes like memory of that other life
we have not known, but shall.

What, little one,
my truant playmate, "Mother gives you leave
to come and say good night for half an hour":
well; on my knee—so. Stories must it be?
"The story about Jesus"? Yes, my child,
that is the best one story of our peace;
you'll know that someday, maybe. Now begins...

AN INVENTOR.

NOT yet!

I thought this time 'twas done at last,
the workings perfected, the life in it;
and there's the flaw again, the petty flaw,
the fretting small impossibility
that has to be made possible.

To work!

so many more months lost on a wrong tack;
and months and months may so be lost again,
who knows? until they swell a tale of years
counted by failures. No time to sit down
with folded arms to moan for the spent toil,
for on, on, glide the envious treacherous hours
that bring at last the night when none can work;
and I'll not die with my work unfulfilled.

It **must** perform my thought, it **must** awake,
this soulless whirring thing of springs and wheels,
and be a power among us. Aye, but how?
There it stands facing me, compact, precise,
the nice presentment of my long design,
and what is it? an accurate mockery,
and not my creature. Where's my secret hid,
the little easy secret which, once found,
will shew so palpable that the pleased world
shall presently believe it always knew?
Where is my secret? Oh, my aching brain!
Good God, have all the anxious ponderings,
all the laborious strain of hand and head,
all the night watches, all the stolen days
from fruitfuller tasks, all I have borne and done,
brought me no nearer solving?

Stolen days;

yes, from the little ones and grave pale wife
who should have every hour of mine made coin
to buy them sunshine. Stolen; and they lack all
save the bare needs which only paupers lack:
stolen; and cheerlessly the mother sits
over her dismal blinding stitchery,
and no quick smile of welcome parts her lips,
seeing me come; and quiet at their play
the children crowd, cooped in the unlovely home,
and envy tattered urchins out of doors
their merry life and playground of the streets.

Oh, if it were but my one self to spend!
but to doom them too with me! Never a thought
dawns first into the world but is a curse
on the rash finder; part of heaven's fire
filched to bestow on men, and for your pay
the vulture at your heart.

What should one choose?
or is there choice? A madness comes on you,
whose name is revelation: who has power
to check the passion of it, who in the world?
A revelation, yes; 'tis but a name
for knowledge ... and there perishes free-will,
for every man is slave of what he knows;
it is the soul of him, could you quench that
you leave the mere mechanic animal—
a sentient creature, true, and reasoning,
(because the clockwork in it's made for that),
but, like my creature there, its purport lacked,
so but its own abortive counterfeit.
We have our several purports; some to pace
the accustomed roads and foot down rampant weeds,
bearing mute custom smoothly on her course;
some difficultly to force readier paths,
or hew out passes through the wilderness;
and some belike to find the snuggest place,
and purr beside the fire. Each of his kind;
but can you change your kind? the lion caged
is still a lion, pipes us no lark's trills;
drive forth the useful brood hen from the yard,
she'll never learn the falcon's soar and swoop.
We must abye our natures; if they fit
too crossly to our hap the worse for us,
but who would pray (say such a prayer could serve)
"Let me become some other, not myself"?

And yet, and yet—Oh, why am I assigned
to this long maiming battle? Why to me
this blasting gift, this lightning of the gods
scorching the hand that wields it? why to me?
A lonely man, or dandled in the lap
of comfortable fortune, might with joy
hug the strange serpent blessing; to the one
it has no tooth, for gilded hands make gold
of all they touch, the other is alone,
and has the right to suffer. Not for them
is doubt or dread; but I—Oh little ones
whose unsuspecting eyes pierce me with smiles!
Oh sad and brooding wife whose silent hopes
are all rebukes to mine!

Come, think it out;
traitor to them or traitor to the world;

AN INVENTOR.

is that the choice? Why then, they are my own,
 given in my hand, looking to me for all,
 and, for my destined present to the world,
 being what it is, some one some fortunate day
 will find it, or achieve it; if the world wait...
 well, it has waited. Yet 'twere pitiful
 that still and still, while to a thousand souls
 life's irrecoverable swift to-day
 becomes the futile yesterday, the world
 go beggared of a birthright unaware,
 and, (as if one should slake his thirst with blood
 pricked from his own red veins, while at his hand
 lies the huge hairy nut from whose rough bowl
 he might quaff juicy milk and knows it not),
 spend out so great a wealth of wasted strength
 man upon man given to the imperious
 unnecessary labour. How were that,
 having made my honest bargain with the world
 to serve its easier and accepted needs
 for the due praise and pudding, keeping it,
 like a wise servant, not to lose my place,
 to note the enduring loss, and, adding up
 its various mischiefs, score them as the price
 of my reposeful fortunes? Why, do this,
 and each starved blockhead dribbling out his life
 on the continued toil would be **my** drudge,
 and not one farthest comer of our earth
 where hurrying traffic plies but would have voice
 to reach my ears and twit me guilty to it.
 But then, the wife and children: must they pine
 in the bleak shade of frosty poverty,
 because the man that should have cared for them
 discerned a way to double wealth with wealth
 and glut the maw of rank prosperity?

Traitor to them or traitor to the world:
 a downright question that, and sounds well put,
 and one that begs its answer, since we count
 the nearer duty first to every man;
 but there's another pungent clause to note...
 that's traitor to myself. Has any man
 the right of that? God puts a gift in you—
 to your own hurt, we'll say, but what of that?—
 He puts a gift in you, a seed to grow
 to His fulfilment, germinant with your life,
 and may you crush it out? And, say you do,
 what is your remnant life? an empty husk,
 or balked and blighted stem past hope of bloom.
 Well, make the seed develope otherwise
 and grow to **your** fulfilment wiselier planned:
 but will that prosper? may the thistle say

"Let me blow smooth white lilies," or the wheat
 "Let me be purple with enticing grapes"?
 God says "Be that I bade, or else be nought,"
 and what thing were the man to make **that** choice?
 For me I dare not, were it for their sake,
 and, for their sake, I dare not; could their good
 grow out of my undoing? they with me,
 and I with them, we are so interknit
 that taint in me must canker into them
 and my upholding holds them from the mire:
 and so, as there are higher things than ease,
 we must bear on together they and I.

And it may be to bear is all our part.
 I have outpast the first fantastic hopes
 that fluttered round my project at its birth,
 outgrown them as the learning child outgrows
 the picture A's and B's that lured him on;
 I have forgotten honours, wealth, renown,
 I see no bribe before me but that one,
 my work's fruition. Yes, as we all, who feel
 the dawn of a creative thought, discern
 in the beginning that perfected end
 which haply shall not be, I saw the end;
 and my untried presumptuous eyes, befooled,
 saw it at hand. How round each forward step
 locked the delusive and decoying dreams!
 and I seemed, while I sowed, still hurrying on
 to touch the sudden fruit, the ripe choice fruit
 to be garnered for my dear ones, mine for them:
 but long since I have learned, in weariness,
 in failures, and in toil, to put by dreams,
 to put by hopes, and work, as the bird sings,
 because God planned me for it. For I look
 undazzled on the future, see the clouds,
 and see the sunbeams, several, not one glow:
 I know that I shall find my secret yet
 and make my creature here another power
 to change a world's whole life; but, that achieved,
 whom will the world thank for it? Me perhaps;
 perhaps some other, who, with after touch,
 shall make the springs run easier: I have read
 the lives of men like me who have so sought,
 so found, then been forgotten, while there came
 an apter man, maybe but luckier,
 to add or alter, gave another shape,
 made or displayed it feasible and sure,
 and then the thing was his ... as the rare gem
 is not called his who dug it from the mines,
 but his who cut and set it in a ring.
 It will be as it will be: I dare count

Portraits

no better fortunes mine than from first days
the finders met with, men who, howsoe'er,
seekers and teachers, bring the world new gifts,
too new for any value. Well, so be it:
and now—No, I am over weary now,
and out of heart too: idleness to-night;
to-morrow all shall be begun again.
That lever, now, if—

Am I out of heart?

to work at once then! I'll not go to rest
with the desponding cramp clutching my heart:
a new beginning blots the failure out,
and sets one's thoughts on what's to be achieved,
letting what's lost go by. Come, foolish toy,
that should have been so much, let's see at least
what help you have to give me. Bye and bye
we'll have another like you, **with** the soul.

A DILETTANTE.

GOOD friend, be patient: goes the world awry?
well, can you groove it straight with all your pains?
and, sigh or scold, and, argue or intreat,
what have you done but waste your part of life
on impotent fool's battles with the winds,
that **will** blow as they list in spite of you?

Fie, I am weary of your pettish griefs
against the world that's given, like a child
who whines and pules because his bread's not cake,
because the roses have those ugly thorns
that prick if he's not careful of his hands.
Oh foolish spite: what talk you of the world,
and mean the men and women and the sin?
Oh friend, these all pass by, and God remains:
and God has made a world that pleases Him,
and when He wills then He will better it;
let it suffice us as he wills it now.

Nay, hush and look and listen. For this noon,
this summer noon, replies "but be content,"
speaking in voices of a hundred joys.

For lo, we, lying on this mossy knoll,
tasting the vivid musk of sheltering pines,
and balm of odorous flowers and sweet warm air;
feeling the uncadenced music of slow leaves,
and ripples in the brook athwart its stones,
and birds that call each other in the brakes
with sudden questions and smooth long replies,
the gossip of the incessant grasshoppers,
and the contented hum of laden bees;
we, knowing (with the easy restful eye
that, whichsoever way it turns, is filled
with unexacting beauty) this smooth sky,
blue with our English placid silvery blue,
mottled with little lazy clouds, this stretch
of dappled wealds and green and saffron slopes,
and near us these gnarled elm-trunks barred with gold,
and ruddy pine-boles, where the slumbrous beams
have slipped through the translucent leafy net
to break the shimmering dimness of the wood;
we, who, like licensed truants from light tasks
which lightly can be banished out of mind,
have all ourselves to give to idleness,
were more unreasoning, if we make moan

Portraits

of miseries and toils and barrenness,
than if we sitting at a feast told tales
of famines and for the pity of them starved.

Oh, life is good when, on such summer days,
we linger in the dreamful paradise
that lies at every door where so much space
is left to garner in the languid air
as grass may grow in and some verdurous tree,
and some few yards of blueness and of clouds
may stretch above, making immensity;
when, lost out of our petty unit selves,
the heart grows large in the grave trance of peace,
and all things breathing, growing, are its kin,
and all the fair and blossoming earth is home.

And beauty is our lesson: for, look there,
that exquisite curve and cluster of rich leaves,
emerald and shadow, in that patch of sun,
what is it but a nettle? And that knoll
of woven green, where all fantastic grace
of shaggy stems and lush and trailing shoots
and all a thousand delicate varied tints,
are mingled in a wanton symmetry,
what is it but a thorn and bramble copse?
And that far plain, on which, through all the day,
change still grows lovelier and every cloud
makes different softer dimness, every light
an other-coloured glory, what is it?
a desolate barren waste, marshland and moor.
And in some other moment, when the rain
spurts greyly downwards on the soddening fields,
or the dank, autumn fog veils leaden skies,
or the keen baleful east winds nip the bloom
of frightened spring with bleak and parching chills,
the waste, the thorns, the nettle, each would seem
cursed with the unloveliness of evil things.

So beauty comes and goes: yet beauty is
a message out of Heaven; can it speak
from evil things? I know not; but I know
that waste and thorns and nettle are to-day
teachers of Love, a prospect not to change,
for use, against a fifty miles of corn.
Can we tell good from evil you and I?

Oh, if the men and women of to-day
seem ill or good to us, why, what know we?
to-morrow they, or those who follow them,
will seem another way; and are they changed,
or are the eyes that see them? Let them be;

A DILETTANTE.

Portraits

are we divine that we should judge and rule?
And they are not the world by several selves
but in a gathered whole, and if that whole
drift heavenward or hellward God can see,
not we, who, ants hived in our colonies,
count the world loam or gravel, stocked with flowers
or weeds or cabbages, as we shall find
within our own small ranges, and (being wise
and full of care for all the universe),
wonder, and blame, and theorize, and plan,
by the broad guide of **our** experiences!

'Twere a neat world if levelled by the ants;
no ridges, no rough gaps, all fined and soft.
But I will rather use my antish wits
in smoothing just my cell and at my doors
than join in such heroic enterprise.

Selfish, you call me? callous? Hear a tale.
There was a little shallow brook that ran
between low banks, scarcely a child's leap wide,
feeding a foot or two of bordering grass
and, here and there, some tufts of waterflowers
and cresses, and tall sedge, rushes and reeds;
and, where it bubbled past a poor man's cot,
he and his household came and drank of it,
and all the children loved it for its flowers
and counted it a playmate made for them:
but, not far off, a sandy arid waste
where, when a winged seed rested, or a bird
would drop a grain in passing, and it grew,
it presently must droop and die athirst,
spread its scorched silent leagues to the fierce sun:
and once a learned man came by and saw,
and "lo," said he, "what space for corn to grow,
could we send vivifying moistures here,
while look, this wanton misdirected brook
watering its useless weeds!" so had it turned,
and made a channel for it through the waste:
but its small waters could not feed that drought,
and, in the wide unshadowed plain, it lagged,
and shrank away, sucked upwards of the sun
and downwards of the sands; so the new bed
lay dry, and dry the old; and the parched reeds
grew brown and dwined, the stunted rushes drooped,
the cresses could not root in that slacked soil,
the blossoms and the sedges died away,
the greenness shrivelled from the dusty banks,
the children missed their playmate and the flowers,
and thirsted in hot noon-tides for the draught
grown over precious now their mother went

a half-mile to the well to fill her pails;
and not two ears of corn the more were green.

Tell me, what should I do? I take my life
as I have found it, and the work it brings;
well, and the life is kind, the work is light,
shall I go fret and scorn myself for that?
and must I sally forth to hack and hew
at giants or at windmills, leave the post
I could have filled, the work I could have wrought,
for some magnificent mad enterprise,
some task to lift a mountain, drain a sea,
tread down a Titan, build a pyramid?
No, let me, like a bird bred in the cage,
that, singing its own self to gladness there,
makes some who hear it gladder, take what part
I have been born to, and make joy of it.

Grumbler, what are you muttering in your beard?
"You've a bird-likeness too, to shew me in;
I take life, as a sea-gull takes the sea,
mere skimmingly." I say no otherwise;
'tis a wise bird the sea-gull, does but taste
the hale and briny freshness of the spray:
what would you have me do? plunge in and drown?

Oh chiding friend, I am not of your kind,
you strenuous souls who cannot think you live
unless you feel your limbs, though 'twere by aches:
great boisterous winds you are, who must rush on
and sweep all on your way or drop and die,
but I am only a small fluttering breeze
to coax the roses open: let me be;
perhaps I have my use no less than you.

Ah well! How strange that you and I, who tread
so same a path, perceive it so unlike.
And which sees justly? Maybe both of us:
or maybe one of us is colour-blind,
and sees the tintings blurred, or sees them false,
or does not see, so misses what they shew.
Or likelier each of us is colour-blind,
and sees the world his own way, fit for him:
doubtless we afterwards shall understand
the beauty and the pain are more alike.

THE MANUSCRIPT OF SAINT ALEXIUS.

THERE came a child into the solemn hall
 where great Pope Innocent sat throned and heard
 angry disputings on Free-Will in man,
 Grace, Purity, and the Pelagian creed—
 an ignorantly bold poor child, who stood
 shewing his rags before the Pope's own eyes,
 and bade him come to shrive a beggar man
 he found alone and dying in a shed,
 who sent him for the Pope, "not any else
 but the Pope's self." And Innocent arose
 and hushed the mockers "Surely I will go:
 servant of servants, I." So he went forth
 to where the man lay sleeping into death,
 and blessed him. Then, with a last spurt of life,
 the dying man rose sitting, "Take," he said,
 and placed a written scroll in the Pope's hand,
 and so fell back and died. Thus said the scroll:

ALEXIUS, meanest servant of the Lord,
 son of Euphemianus, senator,
 and of Aglaia, writes his history,
 God willing it, which, if God so shall will,
 shall be revealed when he is fallen asleep.
 Spirit of Truth, Christ, and all saints of Heaven,
 and Mary, perfect dove of guilelessness,
 make his mind clear, that he write utter truth.

That which I was all know: that which I am
 God knows, not I, if I stand near to Him
 because I have not yielded, or, by curse
 of recreant longings, am to Him a wretch
 it needs Such grace to pardon: but I know
 that one day soon I, dead, shall see His face
 with that great pity on it which is ours
 who love Him and have striven and then rest,
 that I shall look on Him and be content.

For what I am, in my last days, to men,
 'tis nothing; scarce a name, and even that
 known to be not my own; a wayside wretch
 battering upon a rich lord's charity
 and praying, (some say like the hypocrites),
 a wayside wretch who, harboured for a night,
 is harboured still, and, idle on the alms,
 prays day and night and night and day, and fears
 lest, even praying, he should suddenly

Portraits

undo his prayer and perish and be great
and rich and happy. Jesu, keep me Thine.

Father and mother, when ye hear of me,
(for I shall choose so sure a messenger
whom God will shew me), when ye hear these words,
and Claudia, whom I dead will dare count mine,
bidding her pray she be Christ's more than mine,
believe I loved you; know it; but, beloved,
you never will know how much till at length
God bids you know all things in the new life.
Alas, you have had little joy of me:
beloved, could I have given drops of blood
in place of your shed tears, the cruellest wounds
had been my perfect joys: but both my love
and your distress needs were my cross to bear.
Forgive me that you sorrowed. And be glad
because you sorrowed and your sorrow was
holy to God, a sacrifice to Him.

Know now, all men who read or hear my words,
that I, Alexius, lived in much delights
of a dear home where they who looked on me
looked with a smile, and where I did but smile
to earn sweet praises as for some good deed:
I was the sunlight to my mother's eyes,
that waked their deepest blueness and warm glow,
I was my father's joy, ambition, boast,
his hope and his fulfilment. It may be
I grew too strong a link betwixt their hearts
and this poor world whose best gifts seemed to them
destined for me, grew, when they looked on Heaven,
a blur upon their sight, too largely near,
as any trivial tiny shape held close
will make eclipse against the eye it fills:
and so, maybe. for their sake, not for mine,
God took me from them, me, their only son,
for whom they prayed, and trebled pious deeds,
and took thought in this life.

I grew by them,
learning all meet for my estate on earth,
but learning more, what they taught more, of God,
and loving most that learning. And at times,
even from childhood, would my heart grow still
and seem to feel Him, hear Him, and I knew,
but not with ears, a voice that spoke no words
yet called me. And, as ignorant children choose
"I will be emperor when I am big,"
my foolish wont was "I will be a saint:"
later, when riper sense brought humbleness,
I said "When I am grown a man, my lot

Shall be with those who vow their lives to Christ."

But, when my father thought my words took shape
of other than boy's prattle, he grew grave,
and answered me "Alexius, thou art young,
and canst not judge of duties; but know this
thine is to serve God, living in the world."

And still the days went on, and still I felt
the silent voice that called me: then I said
"My father, now I am no more a child,
and I can know my heart; give me to God:"
but he replied "God gives no son save thee
to keep our fathers' name alive, and thus
He shews thy place and duty:" and, with tears,
my mother said "God gives no child save thee;
make me not childless." And their words seemed God's
more than my heart's, theirs who had rule on me.

But still my longing grew, and still the voice:
and they both answered "Had God need of thee
to leave thy natural place none else can fill,
there would be signs which none could doubt, nor we
nor thou thyself." And I received that word;
knowing I doubted since they bade me doubt.

And still the days went on, and still the voice
and then my father said "The bride is chosen,
if thou wilt have her; if not, choose thyself."
And more and more I prayed "Give me to God:"
and more and more they urged "Whom gives He us
save thee to keep our name alive? whom else
to stay us from a desolate old age,
and give us children prattling at our knees?"
and more and more they answered "Shew to us
how He has called thee from thy certain path
where He has set thy feet?" Wherefore I said
"I will obey, and will so serve my God
as you have bidden me serve Him, honouring you:"
and they two blessed me, and we were agreed.

And afterwards Euphemianus laughed
"He asks not of the bride; but, boy, art pleased?
'tis thy fair playmate Claudia, fair and good."
I, who asked not because I nothing cared,
was glad in afterthinking: for the girl
lad been my playmate, and of later time
knew her beauty with familiar eyes
and no more feared it than I feared the grace
of useless goddesses perfect in stone,
lingering dishonoured in unholy nooks

where comes no worship more; so that I mused
 "The damsel brings no perilous wedding gift
 of amorous unknown fetters for my soul;
 my soul shall still be spared me, consecrate,
 virgin to God until the better days
 when I may live the life alone with Him:"
 so was I comforted.

But, in the hour
 when all the rite was done and the new bride
 come to her home, I sitting half apart,
 my mother took her fondly by the hand
 and drew her, lagging timidly, to me,
 and spoke "Look up my daughter, look on him:
 Alexius, shall I tell what I have guessed,
 how this girl loves you?" Then she raised her head
 a moment long, and looked: and I grew white,
 and sank back sickly. For I suddenly
 knew that I might know that which men call love.

And through the tedious feast my mind was torn
 with reasonings and repentance. For I said
 "But I may love her," and kept marshalling forth
 such scriptures as should seem to grant it me:
 then would an anguish hurl my fabric down,
 while I discerned that he who has put hand
 upon the plough must never turn again
 to take the joyaunce granted easy lives.
 And bye and bye I stole away and went,
 half conscious, through the darkling garden groves,
 amid the evening silence, till I came
 to a small lonely chapel, little used,
 left open by I know not what new chance,
 where there was patterned out in polished stones
 Peter denying Christ. I hastened in,
 and threw me on the floor, and would have prayed;
 but, in a rush of tears, I fell asleep.

And there I dreamed: meseemed the easy years
 had slipped along, and I sat, pleased and proud,
 among my ruddy children, and I held
 my wife's smooth hand, who but so much had changed
 as to grow fairer in her womanhood;
 and, facing us, a carved and marble Christ
 hung on a Cross and gazed with Its dumb eyes,
 I looking on It: and I turned my head
 to smile to Claudia, and then looked again;
 behold Its right arm moved, and then was still,
 And a low voice came forth "Alexius, come."

And I replied "Oh Lord I am content;
 but lo my father."

Then my father stood,
meseemed, beside me, leading in his hand
a sturdy urchin, copy of himself,
and answered "Son, my ears do hear thee called;
and now I have this son of thine: go forth."

And once again the voice, "Alexius, come."

And I replied "My Lord, I am content;
but lo my mother."

Then my mother stood,
meseemed, beside me, and her arm was wound
round my wife's neck, and clinging to her skirt
a baby boy and girl that teased and played
and clamoured for her kisses: so she stood,
and answered "Son, my ears do hear thee called;
and now this daughter hast thou given me,
and now I have these babes of thine: go forth."

And louder then the voice, "Alexius, come."

And I replied "Dear Lord, I am content;
I come."

Then Claudia's hand grew tight in mine,
and I looked on her face and saw it so
as when my mother bade her look on me,
and I replied "Oh Lord I were content,
but lo my wife."

And still again the voice;
and still again her hand that drew mine back;
and I replied "My wife: I cannot come."

And still again the voice, "Alexius, come,"
loud and in wrath.

And I replied "My wife:
I will not come."

And with that word I woke.

I was in darkness, and the door was locked,
(doubtless while I, asleep or tranced, lay dumb
some one had sought me there and had not found,
and so had gone, unconscious, prisoning me);
I groped my way toward the altar steps,
and thanked my God, and prayed.

When morning broke
I heard without two voices, as it seemed
of holy pilgrims talking, and one said
"The youth Alexius surely has fled forth
to serve God safelier;" the other said
"Then doth he well; for now that better part

shall none take from him, he shall be all God's
and only God's, not father's, mother's, son's,
nor any fond fair woman's." Then they went.

But I was still there prisoned. Day moved on,
and brightened, and then waned, and darkness came,
broken by one white moonbeam, for an hour,
that seemed a promise, and, in that good hope,
I prayed, then slept.

But when morn grew again,
and no deliverance came, but frequent steps,
and voices passing, I grew scared with doubts
if, keeping silence, as from enemies,
and by my silence dying, I should be
self-murdered or God's martyr; and I thought
how, maybe, at the last my fainting voice
should vainly cry too late, and I should pass
with none to give God's comfort. But I thought
"If God wills even that, then let it be."

But when the noon sun glowed I heard a hand
touch at the door, and crouched me in a nook,
and scarce had crouched when Claudia passed by me
with slow steps to the altar: she prayed long;
praying, poor child, to have me given back,
claiming me back of Heaven, as if her right
could equal That right, crying out for me
by loving names, and weeping, that my heart
went out of me towards her, wondering,
and yearned for her. But God was pitiful,
so that I swerved not.

When I heard her vow
to pray there daily, I perceived through her
deliverance should come shortly: and I planned
to stand within the shadow the noon light
threw from a massive column by the door,
and, when she had passed in and hid her face,
get me forth softly.

But the flesh was weak,
and when I waked again the noon beams fell
full on the face of Peter where he wept
repenting; Claudia was already there.

I thought a moment should I not come forth,
and charge her let none know, and go my way;
but, did she give one startled sudden cry,
womanlike, I had been betrayed: and then
I feared her if she wept.

May God forgive
my weak heart then, my weak heart all my days,
which never has been so strong as not feel

always the fall at hand, but then so weak
that some few urgent tears and soft sad words
might, haply might, have bought me from my God.

So she went forth, unconscious: and I prayed
death should not come at night, with none at hand
to minister beside me, and in faith
I laid me down to wait what God should send.

And in a little while she came again,
and sought and found a gold and emerald pin,
(one of the gifts they made me give to her),
dropped from her loosened hair, then, kissing it,
passed out, and, for a moment long, forgot
to make the door fast, turned back to the task,
then, murmuring "Why? For it is better thus,
when whoso wills can enter in and pray,"
left it and went.

Then free, I made my vow
to live unknown, unhonoured, with no ties,
no certain home, no aims, no rights, no name,
an unregarded wanderer, whose steps,
by whichsoever road they passed, but passed
to travel nearer Heaven. And, for a sign,
I made a secret place and hid my ring
under the altar.

You will find it there:
at the right hand a cross upon an A
cut on the floor, so small you must look well,
and near it, at the altar-base, a crack
I found there in the chiselling, (just behind
a cherub's wing), is closed with dust and earth;
there lies the ring. Give it me mine again,
it and my name I take back for my grave,
as I take back my kinsfolk and my friends
to pray and mourn for me and give God thanks.

That done, I got me forth, and saw none nigh,
(the search near home being over, as it seemed),
and with my best poor speed I found a copse
whose green thick tangles hid me: there I lay
till the cool nightfall came and patient stars
watched Earth asleep, as if they prayed for her;
and other eyes saw not save theirs, and those
that look from Heaven, when I came sickly forth
and dragged my limp and failing limbs along.

I made my clothes in tatters; thus I went
and begged food at a convent for my life
that else were flickered out: so they gave food,
and they gave shelter: and at dawn I went,

Portraits

while none who could have known had looked on me,
and, hastening on my journey, followed forth
my fellow—Roman Tiber's seaward strides,
and reached the port. There, as I since have learned,
Euphemianus had left men in wait
while he searched elsewhere: but God ruled all.

A little ship was just launched out to sea,
her heel still caught upon the grating beach,
the men were good and took the pilgrim in
who at the farewell moment called to them,
and, in what while I know not, but it seemed
as short as in a dream are days and years,
I saw my shores grown narrow purple clouds,
and then (for I write truth though shaming me)
I broke into such weeping that the men
felt whiteness in their cheeks, and, marvelling,
sent whispers to and fro, in doubt of me
lest witchcraft held me or my some deep crime
had set a curse demoniac; and they schemed
if they should put back to be rid of me,
but one said "Tush! the youth weeps for his home;
at his age, maybe, some of us could weep;
let him alone."

A rough and grizzled man,
who after, at the haven, came and clapped
a great hand on my shoulder, "Look, my boy,
you keep your secrets safer: for I heard
of a hot hunt after a great man's son,
and when I saw you weep Well go your way,
my tongue shall earn no wages by its blab.
Maybe at your age I should have fled too,
if yoked against my will; but I am old
and preach go home again. Some say she's fair;
and a fair woman, love her or not love,
is a fair woman: but, or fair or foul,
be wise, young sir, be wise; never go starve
because your cake's not candied to your taste."
I said "Kind friend, I have no home to seek;
God gives me not a home till bye and bye,"
and left him. So my pilgrimage began.

But, oh vain heart of man! can this be true
which I remember, that I, plodding on,
whither I did not ask me, as God willed,
undoubting and ungrieving, yea, puffed up
to feel my heart was numb of all regret,
carrying upon my lips (as men will burr
a day long some persistent measured strain)
for refrain—catch "Now all and only God's,"
drew from my bosom, with my crucifix,

Portraits

a withered crumpled weed, a clinging thing
that, green and dainty, new brushed from its root,
with one white flower–speck on it, trailed its sprays
athwart the purple hem of Claudia's veil
the last time in the chapel while she prayed;
it lay upon the floor when she was gone.
A worthless grass, what good was it to me?
and, lo, made fellow with my crucifix!
yet surely I had done it scarce aware,
for now I gazed on it so stupidly
as though a secret hand had placed it there
to set a riddle so, nor could recall
what thought I took it with. But see what snares
I fled from, flying Claudia; suddenly
the thing was at my lips, in such a kiss
as, maybe, lovers kiss on women's mouths,
in such a kiss howbeit as brought forth shame
almost in its own birth. I hurled the weed,
the viperous thing, into the battling surf
that dragged and sucked the booming shingles down,
lashing the beach before a coming storm;
I hurled it forth and went.

It seems to me,
looking back now, as if that made an end.
I think I had no temptings afterwards.
Natheless my grief was bitter many times
remembering home: but that I felt not sin,
because 'twas as a soul among the dead
might sorrow, never wishing to come back.
And Claudia was not of my memories:
scarcely at all: a stray bad dream at night
would bring her to me, make me dream I wept
because I might not love her, but not dream
that I did love; in daytime she came not.

Ten years I wandered: who cares know the whither?
a pilgrim and alone I trod my way,
no man regarding me. Alone with God:
whether in deserts or the throng of towns;
whether upon the mountain–tops, whence earth
shows sometimes so too exquisite for man
as though the devil had leave to fashion it
and cozen us with its beauty; or below,
where in the valleys one beholds the hills
grow nearer Heaven at sunset; or my ears
full of the hymn of waters, where the sea
breaks at one's feet among the rough brown rocks;
whether in pain, in weariness, in fear,
or, thankful, taking comfortable rest;
always alone with God.

So for ten years:

and in the later of them I had peace:
 so for ten years, and then, by what degrees
 I know not, (for the stupor crept like sleep,
 slowly yet sudden on one at the last),
 my peace became a blankness. And one day
 I sought to rouse me, questioning "Where is God?"
 and could not weep because I found him not,
 yea, could not rouse me. And my prayers were words,
 like trite goodmorrrows when two gossips meet
 and never look for answers; and my praise
 was rounded like the song the poet makes
 to one who never lived for him to love.
 I was my Pharisee to cheat myself
 and make myself believe me that God's friend
 I had forgotten what it felt to be.

So, when I saw this plainly, I took thought,
 pondering how it should be that when I pined
 for thirst of human love I loved God more
 and felt His love more near me than when now
 my heart was swept and garnished, void for Him:
 at last I saw my need of quickening pain
 to stir the sluggish soul awake in me,
 and knew I offered nothing to my Lord,
 offering Him that it cost me nought to give;
 what good to turn to Him, "Lord I leave all,"
 if **all** be noway precious?

I arose
 and set my face to Rome, making all haste.

On the forty-seventh day I saw the sun
 droop to the hills behind my father's house,
 and lo, while I toiled up the rude ascent,
 our last slope of the Aventine, there came,
 riding apart and grave, from the far side,
 Euphemianus. When he reached the gate
 he entered not, but seemed to point me out
 to the servitors that followed with his hawks,
 and watched me coming upwards painfully.
 And when he saw me footsore and so spent
 he had compassion: ere my prayer was done,
 "Food, my good lord, and rest, for charity,"
 he bade them take me in.

Six years ago:
 and now I die here. No one bade depart;
 they gave me daily scraps, and let me live
 in the shed for harbouring squalid wanderers
 that sleep a night, and take their alms, and go.

None knew me; who should know me? Gone away,
 past ten years since, a comely petted boy,

and now a half decrepit sickly wretch,
 a lean and shrivelled carcase, the ten years
 writ twenty on my leathery wrinkled face,
 how was I their Alexius? Nay, they looked
 and saw the stranger in the beggar's shed
 they called, for want of name, Old Lazarus.

In the beggar's shed with God: with God again!
 Oh exquisite pain that brought so exquisite joy!
 even by instant peril to be lost
 lo I was saved. Oh blessed exquisite pain!
 my heart awoke, for anguish, and felt God.

I saw my father pass out and pass in;
 sometimes he noted me and spoke a word
 or looked a careless greeting, oftenest not;
 I saw him daily, and I learned his face
 how stern long sorrow made it and how still,
 and, when some days he could not make a smile,
 I heard the servants whisper "Do you see?
 this is his lost son's birthday," or "the day
 his son fled forth," or else "his baptism,"
 "confirming," "going to school," all such home dates
 as parents count who watch their children grow:
 and he was changed, they said, cared not to see
 friends' faces greeting him, nor join in talk,
 but would be solitary; changed, they said,
 since that strange losing of his only child.
 My mother I saw not in the first days,
 for she came never forth, but sat and slept,
 and wakened querulous, and slept again.
 And Claudia tended her: I had not thought
 to find her here; I looked she'd count me dead
 and marry her, ('tis known what women are),
 and was all startled when I saw her first:
 but only for the strangeness, after that
 she was no more to me than I to her,
 she might have smiled to me, or in my sight,
 that dangerous smile and I be no more moved
 than if a babe had laughed as I passed by.

Then a day came, a still and sultry day
 when one might take count of each leaf that stirred
 and think the one shrill grasshopper too loud,
 my mother waked and heard a hymn I sang,
 and took a whim to have the singer brought:
 only a whim, belike, for could my voice
 bring back the stripling's voice she had thought sweet?
 they fetched me, I stood by her: ah my mother!
 and she so changed! nothing of her old self;
 the goodliness, the sweetness, the delight,

gone, waned out from her, as the light of day
was waning from her eyes long dulled by tears.
Ah, could I but have clung about her feet,
crying out "Mother, take thy son again!"
But yet for her it would have been too late.

She talked to me, inconsequent grave talk
like children's, whispered after when I prayed,
and made me sing her hymns, so was content
longer than was her wont, then bade me go
and come again to-morrow: ever since
she calls me every day.

And every day
is Claudia there. More than two thousand days,
and every day I look on Claudia's face
grown wistful and more sweet, and every day
behold her patience, hear her wise grave words,
and better know her all she is.

What then?
Have I not striven? have I not prevailed?

And now death is at hand: some few days more
and I shall lay me down and be at rest.
There will be no farewell at last, I think;
they will not know of me that I lie sick
and pass away; and, even if they knew,
why should they come to close my dying eyes?
the beggar Lazarus can die alone,
as he has lived alone. My mother, though,
will lack me, ask for me, Claudia will send
to bid me hasten, then the word will come
"He died this morning," and she will not weep
but say "Poor wretch: God rest the parted soul,"
and turn to soothe my mother with some wile
to make her never miss me: and may be
Euphemianus will not hear the news,
or will not note it if he ever hears.
So I shall lie in the grave and they not care,
but wait for lost Alexius to come home,
and mourn for him, half hating him for their grief.

Give me fruit, give me fruit, oh Christ give my earned fruit,
for all my sufferings: I have mine for me,
but I claim theirs, give fruit for them I smote.

Have I written wildly? I will cancel nought.
for I have written looking death in face,
thinking God bade me write: and words come so
must stand untouched. But surely this much grace
my Lord hath given me, that they shall know.

Behold, I make this paper, being forced
as by the Spirit, and it comes on me
that God doth choose his highest in the world
to be the beggar's messenger: he first,
and I the last, so thereto he is called;
servant of servants. This, which I have witten,
do I entrust to him, my testament:
some shall learn patience from it and to do
what God bids and not doubt; for all is good,
all happy, if it be to do His will,
the suffering ye may guess, but not the bliss
till ye have tasted it.

And I desire
that, having scanned the scroll, he shall, or then
or later, as seems to his wisdom wise,
deliver all its words to them and her,
my father and my mother and my wife,
(lo, this once in my life I call her so).
I pray Thee, Lord, give the poor words the power
to comfort them and strengthen; and, I pray,
give the words power to strengthen and stir souls
which hear Thee call and pause to count with Thee.

And now, oh Lord, let earth be dim to me,
and Heaven come near mine eyes: the time is short,
and I am fain for thee. Lord Jesus come.

NOW, when Pope Innocent had read the scroll,
he bade one with him enter in the house
and call the lord Euphemianus thither,
and Claudia, and Aglaia. So they came,
Aglaia feebly leaning on the two,
and questioning them who knew not; so they came;
and the Pope pointed them to the dead man,
"Behold, for this is one whom you should know."
Euphemianus gazed and was perplexed:
and the poor purblind mother gazed and peered,
"Old Lazarus? no, yes, old Lazarus;
asleep or dead? Why is it? is he dead?"
but Claudia answered softly "Yes I know;
I knew it;" and then, suddenly, borne down
by one strong gust of passion, flung herself
beside the corpse, her head upon its breast,
her arms clasped straining round it, weeping out.
And Innocent answered the father's eyes,
"This was Alexius, thy long lost son."
But yet the father, stricken dumb, looked doubt:
Aglaia cried "My boy, where is he then?"
and fretfully "This is old Lazarus:
where is my boy? show me Alexius."

Then Innocent bade peace, and read the scroll:
Euphemianus, with his face hid down
between his hands, listened and never stirred;
and Claudia listened, weeping silently;
but Aglaia whispered always "Is it true?
is the tale of Lazarus or of my boy?
I cannot understand." And, when 'twas read,
Euphemianus gazed upon his son,
"Yet did he well?" he said "he was our son,
he was her husband: how could it be well?
for look upon his mother, what she is."
But Claudia rose up tearless, and replied
"Alexius did all well: he knew God called:"
and Innocent, not tearless, raised his hand
and spoke "She answers wisely: he obeyed;
he knew, being a very saint of God:
let us bless God for him." And they all knelt.
But still Aglaia could not understand.