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Lucile

by Owen Meredith

August, 1999 [Etext #1852]

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LUCILE

by Owen Meredith

"Why, let the stricken deer go weep.  
The hart ungalled play:  
For some must watch, while some must sleep;  
Thus runs the world away."

Hamlet.

DEDICATION.

TO MY FATHER.

I dedicate to you a work, which is submitted to the public with a diffidence and hesitation proportioned to the novelty of the effort it represents. For in this poem I have abandoned those forms of verse with which I had most familiarized my thoughts, and have endeavored to follow a path on which I could discover no footprints before me, either to guide or to warn.

There is a moment of profound discouragement which succeeds to prolonged effort; when, the labor which has become a habit having ceased, we miss the sustaining sense of its companionship, and stand, with a feeling of strangeness and embarrassment, before the abrupt and naked result. As regards myself, in the present instance, the force of all such sensations is increased by the circumstances to which I have referred. And in this moment of discouragement and doubt, my heart instinctively turns to you, from whom it has so often sought, from whom it has never failed to receive, support.

I do not inscribe to you this book because it contains anything that is worthy of the beloved and honored name with which I thus seek to associate it; nor yet because I would avail myself of a vulgar pretext to display in public an affection that is best honored by the silence which it renders sacred.

Feelings only such as those with which, in days when there existed for me no critic less gentle than yourself, I brought to you my childish manuscripts; feelings only such as those which have, in later years, associated with your heart all that has moved or occupied my own,--lead me once more to seek assurance from the grasp of that hand which has hitherto been my guide and comfort through the life I owe to you.

And as in childhood, when existence had no toil beyond the day's simple lesson, no ambition beyond the neighboring approval of the night, I brought to you the morning's task for the evening's

sanction, so now I bring to you this self-appointed taskwork of  
maturer years; less confident indeed of your approval, but not less  
confident of your love; and anxious only to realize your presence  
between myself and the public, and to mingle with those severer  
voices to whose final sentence I submit my work the beloved and  
gracious accents of your own.

OWEN MEREDITH.

LUCILE

PART I.

CANTO I.

I.

LETTER FROM THE COMTESSE DE NEVERS TO LORD ALFRED VARGRAVE.

"I hear from Bigorre you are there. I am told  
You are going to marry Miss Darcy. Of old,  
So long since you may have forgotten it now  
(When we parted as friends, soon mere strangers to grow),  
Your last words recorded a pledge--what you will--  
A promise--the time is now come to fulfil.  
The letters I ask you, my lord, to return,  
I desire to receive from your hand. You discern  
My reasons, which, therefore, I need not explain.  
The distance to Luchon is short. I remain  
A month in these mountains. Miss Darcy, perchance,  
Will forego one brief page from the summer romance  
Of her courtship, and spare you one day from your place  
At her feet, in the light of her fair English face.  
I desire nothing more, and trust you will feel  
I desire nothing much.

"Your friend always,  
"LUCILE."

II.

Now in May Fair, of course,--in the fair month of May--  
When life is abundant, and busy, and gay:  
When the markets of London are noisy about  
Young ladies, and strawberries,--"only just out;"

Fresh strawberries sold under all the house-eaves,  
And young ladies on sale for the strawberry-leaves:  
When cards, invitations, and three-cornered notes  
Fly about like white butterflies--gay little motes  
In the sunbeam of Fashion; and even Blue Books  
Take a heavy-wing'd flight, and grow busy as rooks;  
And the postman (that Genius, indifferent and stern,  
Who shakes out even-handed to all, from his urn,  
Those lots which so often decide if our day  
Shall be fretful and anxious, or joyous and gay)  
Brings, each morning, more letters of one sort or other  
Than Cadmus, himself, put together, to bother  
The heads of Hellenes;--I say, in the season  
Of Fair May, in May Fair, there can be no reason  
Why, when quietly munching your dry toast and butter,  
Your nerves should be suddenly thrown in a flutter  
At the sight of a neat little letter, address'd  
In a woman's handwriting, containing, half guess'd,  
An odor of violets faint as the Spring,  
And coquettishly seal'd with a small signet-ring.  
But in Autumn, the season of sombre reflection,  
When a damp day, at breakfast, begins with dejection;  
Far from London and Paris, and ill at one's ease,  
Away in the heart of the blue Pyrenees,  
Where a call from the doctor, a stroll to the bath,  
A ride through the hills on a hack like a lath,  
A cigar, a French novel, a tedious flirtation,  
Are all a man finds for his day's occupation,  
The whole case, believe me, is totally changed,  
And a letter may alter the plans we arranged  
Over-night, for the slaughter of time--a wild beast,  
Which, though classified yet by no naturalist,  
Abounds in these mountains, more hard to ensnare,  
And more mischievous, too, than the Lynx or the Bear.

III.

I marvel less, therefore, that, having already  
Torn open this note, with a hand most unsteady,  
Lord Alfred was startled.

                  The month is September;  
Time, morning; the scene at Bigorre; (pray remember  
These facts, gentle reader, because I intend  
To fling all the unities by at the end.)  
He walk'd to the window. The morning was chill:  
The brown woods were crisp'd in the cold on the hill:  
The sole thing abroad in the streets was the wind:  
And the straws on the gust, like the thoughts in his mind,  
Rose, and eddied around and around, as tho' teasing  
Each other. The prospect, in truth, was unpleasing:  
And Lord Alfred, whilst moodily gazing around it,



To himself more than once (vex'd in soul) sigh'd  
. . . . "Confound it!"

IV.

What the thoughts were which led to this bad interjection,  
Sir, or madam, I leave to your future detection;  
For whatever they were, they were burst in upon,  
As the door was burst through, by my lord's Cousin John.

COUSIN JOHN.

A fool, Alfred, a fool, a most motley fool!

LORD ALFRED.

Who?

JOHN.

The man who has anything better to do;  
And yet so far forgets himself, so far degrades  
His position as Man, to this worst of all trades,  
Which even a well-brought-up ape were above,  
To travel about with a woman in love,--  
Unless she's in love with himself.

ALFRED.

Indeed! why  
Are you here then, dear Jack?

JOHN.

Can't you guess it?

ALFRED.

Not I.

JOHN.

Because I HAVE nothing that's better to do.  
I had rather be bored, my dear Alfred, by you,  
On the whole (I must own), than be bored by myself.  
That perverse, imperturbable, golden-hair'd elf--  
Your Will-o'-the-wisp--that has led you and me  
Such a dance through these hills--

ALFRED.

Who, Matilda?

JOHN.

Yes! she,  
Of course! who but she could contrive so to keep  
One's eyes, and one's feet too, from falling asleep  
For even one half-hour of the long twenty-four?

ALFRED.

What's the matter?

JOHN.

Why, she is--a matter, the more  
I consider about it, the more it demands  
An attention it does not deserve; and expands  
Beyond the dimensions which ev'n crinoline,  
When possess'd by a fair face, and saucy Eighteen,  
Is entitled to take in this very small star,  
Already too crowded, as I think, by far.  
You read Malthus and Sadler?

ALFRED.

Of course.

JOHN.

To what use,  
When you countenance, calmly, such monstrous abuse  
Of one mere human creature's legitimate space  
In this world? Mars, Apollo, Virorum! the case  
Wholly passes my patience.

ALFRED.

My own is worse tried.

JOHN.

Yours, Alfred?

ALFRED.

Read this, if you doubt, and decide,

JOHN (reading the letter).

"I hear from Bigorre you are there. I am told  
You are going to marry Miss Darcy. Of old--"  
What is this?

ALFRED.

Read it on to the end, and you'll know.

JOHN (continues reading).

"When we parted, your last words recorded a vow--  
What you will" . . .

Hang it! this smells all over, I swear,  
Of adventurers and violets. Was it your hair  
You promised a lock of?

ALFRED.

Read on. You'll discern.

JOHN (continues).

"Those letters I ask you, my lord, to return." . . .  
Humph! . . . Letters! . . . the matter is worse than I guess'd;  
I have my misgivings--

ALFRED.

Well, read out the rest,  
And advise.

JOHN.

Eh? . . . Where was I?  
(continues.)

"Miss Darcy, perchance,  
Will forego one brief page from the summer romance  
Of her courtship." . . .

Egad! a romance, for my part,  
I'd forego every page of, and not break my heart!

ALFRED.

Continue.

JOHN (reading).

"And spare you one day from your place  
At her feet." . . .

Pray forgive me the passing grimace.  
I wish you had MY place!  
(reads)

"I trust you will feel  
I desire nothing much. Your friend," . . .

Bless me! "Lucile?"  
The Countess de Nevers?

ALFRED.

Yes.

JOHN.

What will you do?

ALFRED.

You ask me just what I would rather ask you.

JOHN.

You can't go.

ALFRED

I must.

JOHN.

And Matilda?

ALFRED.

Oh, that

You must manage!

JOHN.

Must I? I decline it, though, flat.

In an hour the horses will be at the door,  
And Matilda is now in her habit. Before  
I have finished my breakfast, of course I receive  
A message for "dear Cousin John!" . . . I must leave  
At the jeweller's the bracelet which YOU broke last night;  
I must call for the music. "Dear Alfred is right:  
The black shawl looks best: WILL I change it? Of course  
I can just stop, in passing, to order the horse.  
Then Beau has the mumps, or St. Hubert knows what;  
WILL I see the dog-doctor?" Hang Beau! I will NOT.

ALFRED.

Tush, tush! this is serious.

JOHN.

It is.

ALFRED.

Very well,

You must think--

JOHN.

What excuse will you make, tho'?

ALFRED.

Oh, tell

Mrs. Darcy that . . . lend me your wits, Jack! . . . The deuce!

Can you not stretch your genius to fit a friend's use?

Excuses are clothes which, when ask'd unawares,

Good Breeding to Naked Necessity spares,

You must have a whole wardrobe, no doubt.

JOHN.

My dear fellow,

Matilda is jealous, you know, as Othello.

ALFRED.

You joke.

JOHN.

I am serious. Why go to Luchon?

ALFRED.

Don't ask me. I have not a choice, my dear John.

Besides, shall I own a strange sort of desire,

Before I extinguish forever the fire

Of youth and romance, in whose shadowy light

Hope whisper'd her first fairy tales, to excite

The last spark, till it rise, and fade far in that dawn

Of my days where the twilights of life were first drawn

By the rosy, reluctant auroras of Love;

In short, from the dead Past the gravestone to move;

Of the years long departed forever to take

One last look, one final farewell; to awake

The Heroic of youth from the Hades of joy,

And once more be, though but for an hour, Jack--a boy!

JOHN.

You had better go hang yourself.

ALFRED.

No! were it but

To make sure that the Past from the Future is shut,  
It were worth the step back. Do you think we should live  
With the living so lightly, and learn to survive  
That wild moment in which to the grave and its gloom  
We consign'd our heart's best, if the doors of the tomb  
Were not lock'd with a key which Fate keeps for our sake?  
If the dead could return or the corpses awake?

JOHN.

Nonsense!

ALFRED.

Not wholly. The man who gets up  
A fill'd guest from the banquet, and drains off his cup,  
Sees the last lamp extinguish'd with cheerfulness, goes  
Well contented to bed, and enjoys its repose.  
But he who hath supp'd at the tables of kings,  
And yet starved in the sight of luxurious things;  
Who hath watch'd the wine flow, by himself but half tasted;  
Heard the music, and yet miss'd the tune; who hath wasted  
One part of life's grand possibilities--friend,  
That man will bear with him, be sure, to the end,  
A blighted experience, a rancor within:  
You may call it a virtue, I call it a sin.

JOHN.

I see you remember the cynical story  
Of that wicked old piece Experience--a hoary  
Lothario, whom dying, the priest by his bed  
(Knowing well the unprincipled life he had led,  
And observing, with no small amount of surprise,  
Resignation and calm in the old sinner's eyes)  
Ask'd if he had nothing that weigh'd on his mind:  
"Well, . . . no," . . . says Lothario, "I think not. I find,  
On reviewing my life, which in most things was pleasant,  
I never neglected, when once it was present,  
An occasion of pleasing myself. On the whole,  
I have naught to regret;" . . . and so, smiling, his soul  
Took its flight from this world.

ALFRED.

Well, Regret or Remorse,  
Which is best?

JOHN.

Why, Regret.

ALFRED.

No; Remorse, Jack, of course:

For the one is related, be sure, to the other.  
Regret is a spiteful old maid: but her brother,  
Remorse, though a widower certainly, yet  
HAS been wed to young Pleasure. Dear Jack, hang Regret!

JOHN.

Bref! you mean, then, to go?

ALFRED.

Bref! I do.

JOHN.

One word . . . stay!

Are you really in love with Matilda?

ALFRED.

Love, eh?

What a question! Of course.

JOHN.

WERE you really in love

With Madame de Nevers?

ALFRED.

What; Lucile? No, by Jove,

Never REALLY.

JOHN.

She's pretty?

ALFRED.

Decidedly so.

At least, so she was, some ten summers ago.  
As soft, and as sallow as Autumn--with hair  
Neither black, nor yet brown, but that tinge which the air  
Takes at eve in September, when night lingers lone  
Through a vineyard, from beams of a slow-setting sun.  
Eyes--the wistful gazelle's; the fine foot of a fairy;  
And a hand fit a fay's wand to wave,--white and airy;  
A voice soft and sweet as a tune that one knows.  
Something in her there was, set you thinking of those  
Strange backgrounds of Raphael . . . that hectic and deep  
Brief twilight in which southern suns fall asleep.

JOHN.

Coquette?

ALFRED.

Not at all. 'Twas her one fault. Not she!  
I had loved her the better, had she less loved me.  
The heart of a man's like that delicate weed  
Which requires to be trampled on, boldly indeed,  
Ere it give forth the fragrance you wish to extract.  
'Tis a simile, trust me, if not new, exact.

JOHN.

Women change so.

ALFRED.

Of course.

JOHN.

And, unless rumor errs,  
I believe, that last year, the Comtesse de Nevers\*  
Was at Baden the rage--held an absolute court  
Of devoted adorers, and really made sport  
Of her subjects.

\* O Shakespeare! how couldst thou ask "What's in a name?"

'Tis the devil's in it, when a bard has to frame  
English rhymes for alliance with names that are French:  
And in these rhymes of mine, well I know that I trench  
All too far on that license which critics refuse,  
With just right, to accord to a well-brought-up Muse.  
Yet, tho' faulty the union, in many a line,  
'Twixt my British-born verse and my French heroine,  
Since, however auspiciously wedded they be,  
There is many a pair that yet cannot agree,  
Your forgiveness for this pair, the author invites,  
Whom necessity, not inclination, unites.

ALFRED.

Indeed!

JOHN.

When she broke off with you  
Her engagement, her heart did not break with it?



ALFRED.

Pooh!

Pray would you have had her dress always in black,  
And shut herself up in a convent, dear Jack?  
Besides, 'twas my fault the engagement was broken.

JOHN.

Most likely. How was it?

ALFRED.

The tale is soon spoken.

She bored me. I show'd it. She saw it. What next?  
She reproach'd. I retorted. Of course she was vex'd.  
I was vex'd that she was so. She sulk'd. So did I.  
If I ask'd her to sing, she look'd ready to cry.  
I was contrite, submissive. She soften'd. I harden'd.  
At noon I was banish'd. At eve I was pardon'd.  
She said I had no heart. I said she had no reason.  
I swore she talk'd nonsense. She sobb'd I talk'd treason.  
In short, my dear fellow, 'twas time, as you see,  
Things should come to a crisis, and finish. 'Twas she  
By whom to that crisis the matter was brought.  
She released me. I linger'd. I linger'd, she thought,  
With too sullen an aspect. This gave me, of course,  
The occasion to fly in a rage, mount my horse,  
And declare myself uncomprehended. And so  
We parted. The rest of the story you know.

JOHN.

No, indeed.

ALFRED.

Well, we parted. Of course we could not  
Continue to meet, as before, in one spot.  
You conceive it was awkward? Even Don Ferdinando  
Can do, you remember, no more than he can do.  
I think that I acted exceedingly well,  
Considering the time when this rupture befell,  
For Paris was charming just then. It deranged  
All my plans for the winter. I ask'd to be changed--  
Wrote for Naples, then vacant--obtain'd it--and so  
Join'd my new post at once; but scarce reach'd it, when lo!  
My first news from Paris informs me Lucile  
Is ill, and in danger. Conceive what I feel.  
I fly back. I find her recover'd, but yet  
Looking pale. I am seized with a contrite regret;  
I ask to renew the engagement.

JOHN.

And she?

ALFRED.

Reflects, but declines. We part, swearing to be  
Friends ever, friends only. All that sort of thing!  
We each keep our letters . . . a portrait . . . a ring . . .  
With a pledge to return them whenever the one  
Or the other shall call for them back.

JOHN.

Pray go on.

ALFRED.

My story is finish'd. Of course I enjoin  
On Lucile all those thousand good maxims we coin  
To supply the grim deficit found in our days,  
When love leaves them bankrupt. I preach. She obeys.  
She goes out in the world; takes to dancing once more--  
A pleasure she rarely indulged in before.  
I go back to my post, and collect (I must own  
'Tis a taste I had never before, my dear John)  
Antiques and small Elzevirs. Heigho! now, Jack,  
You know all.

JOHN (after a pause).

You are really resolved to go. back?

ALFRED.

Eh, where?

JOHN.

To that worst of all places--the past.  
You remember Lot's wife?

ALFRED.

'Twas a promise when last  
We parted. My honor is pledged to it.

JOHN.

Well,  
What is it you wish me to do?

ALFRED.

                          You must tell  
Matilda, I meant to have call'd--to leave word--  
To explain--but the time was so pressing--

JOHN.

                          My lord,  
Your lordship's obedient! I really can't do . . .

ALFRED.

You wish then to break off my marriage?

JOHN.

                          No, no!  
But indeed I can't see why yourself you need take  
These letters.

ALFRED.

                          Not see? would you have me, then, break  
A promise my honor is pledged to?

JOHN (humming).

                          "Off, off  
And away! said the stranger" . . .

ALFRED.

                          Oh, good! oh, you scoff!

JOHN.

At what, my dear Alfred?

ALFRED.

                          At all things!

JOHN.

                          Indeed?

ALFRED.

Yes; I see that your heart is as dry as a reed:  
That the dew of your youth is rubb'd off you: I see  
You have no feeling left in you, even for me!  
At honor you jest; you are cold as a stone  
To the warm voice of friendship. Belief you have none;

You have lost faith in all things. You carry a blight  
About with you everywhere. Yes, at the sight  
Of such callous indifference, who could be calm?  
I must leave you at once, Jack, or else the last balm  
That is left me in Gilead you'll turn into gall.  
Heartless, cold, unconcern'd . . .

JOHN.

Have you done? Is that all?

Well, then, listen to me! I presume when you made  
up your mind to propose to Miss Darcy, you weigh'd  
All the drawbacks against the equivalent gains,  
Ere you finally settled the point. What remains  
But to stick to your choice? You want money: 'tis here.  
A settled position: 'tis yours. A career:  
You secure it. A wife, young, and pretty as rich,  
Whom all men will envy you. Why must you itch  
To be running away, on the eve of all this,  
To a woman whom never for once did you miss  
All these years since you left her? Who knows what may hap?  
This letter--to ME--is a palpable trap.  
The woman has changed since you knew her. Perchance  
She yet seeks to renew her youth's broken romance.  
When women begin to feel youth and their beauty  
Slip from them, they count it a sort of a duty  
To let nothing else slip away unsecured  
Which these, while they lasted, might once have procured.  
Lucile's a coquette to the end of her fingers,  
I will stake my last farthing. Perhaps the wish lingers  
To recall the once reckless, indifferent lover  
To the feet he has left; let intrigue now recover  
What truth could not keep. 'Twere a vengeance, no doubt--  
A triumph;--but why must YOU bring it about?  
You are risking the substance of all that you schemed  
To obtain; and for what? some mad dream you have dream'd.

ALFRED.

But there's nothing to risk. You exaggerate, Jack,  
You mistake. In three days, at the most, I am back.

JOHN.

Ay, but how? . . . discontented, unsettled, upset,  
Bearing with you a comfortless twinge of regret.  
Preoccupied, sulky, and likely enough  
To make your betroth'd break off all in a huff.  
Three days, do you say? But in three days who knows  
What may happen? I don't, nor do you, I suppose.

V.

Of all the good things in this good world around us,  
The one most abundantly furnish'd and found us,  
And which, for that reason, we least care about,  
And can best spare our friends, is good counsel, no doubt.  
But advice, when 'tis sought from a friend (though civility  
May forbid to avow it), means mere liability  
In the bill we already have drawn on Remorse,  
Which we deem that a true friend is bound to indorse.  
A mere lecture on debt from that friend is a bore.  
Thus, the better his cousin's advice was, the more  
Alfred Vargrave with angry resentment opposed it.  
And, having the worst of the contest, he closed it  
With so firm a resolve his bad ground to maintain,  
That, sadly perceiving resistance was vain,  
And argument fruitless, the amiable Jack  
Came to terms and assisted his cousin to pack  
A slender valise (the one small condescension  
Which his final remonstrance obtain'd), whose dimension  
Excluded large outfits; and, cursing his stars, he  
Shook hands with his friend and return'd to Miss Darcy.

VI.

Lord Alfred, when last to the window he turn'd,  
Ere he lock'd up and quitted his chamber, discern'd  
Matilda ride by, with her cheek beaming bright  
In what Virgil has call'd, "Youth's purpureal light"  
(I like the expression, and can't find a better).  
He sigh'd as he look'd at her. Did he regret her?  
In her habit and hat, with her glad golden hair,  
As airy and blithe as a blithe bird in air,  
And her arch rosy lips, and her eager blue eyes,  
With her little impertinent look of surprise,  
And her round youthful figure, and fair neck, below  
The dark drooping feather, as radiant as snow,--  
I can only declare, that if I had the chance  
Of passing three days in the exquisite glance  
Of those eyes, or caressing the hand that now petted  
That fine English mare, I should much have regretted  
Whatever might lose me one little half-hour  
Of a pastime so pleasant, when once in my power.  
For, if one drop of milk from the bright Milky Way  
Could turn into a woman, 'twould look, I dare say,  
Not more fresh than Matilda was looking that day.

VII.

But, whatever the feeling that prompted the sigh  
With which Alfred Vargrave now watched her ride by,  
I can only affirm that, in watching her ride,  
As he turned from the window he certainly sigh'd.

## CANTO II.

I.

LETTER FROM LORD ALFRED VARGRAVE TO THE COMTESSE DE NEVERS.

BIGORRE, TUESDAY.

"Your note, Madam, reach'd me to-day, at Bigorre,  
And commands (need I add?) my obedience. Before  
The night I shall be at Luchon--where a line,  
If sent to Duval's, the hotel where I dine,  
Will find me, awaiting your orders. Receive  
My respects.

"Yours sincerely,

"A. VARGRAVE.

"I leave

In an hour."

II.

In an hour from the time he wrote this  
Alfred Vargrave, in tracking a mountain abyss,  
Gave the rein to his steed and his thoughts, and pursued,  
In pursuing his course through the blue solitude,  
The reflections that journey gave rise to.

And

(Because, without some such precaution, I fear  
You might fail to distinguish, them each from the rest  
Of the world they belong to; whose captives are drest,  
As our convicts, precisely the same one and all,  
While the coat cut for Peter is pass'd on to Paul)  
I resolve, one by one, when I pick from the mass  
The persons I want, as before you they pass,  
To label them broadly in plain black and white  
On the backs of them. Therefore whilst yet he's in sight,  
I first label my hero.

III.

The age is gone o'er  
When a man may in all things be all. We have more  
Painters, poets, musicians, and artists, no doubt,  
Than the great Cinquecento gave birth to; but out  
Of a million of mere dilettanti, when, when  
Will a new LEONARDO arise on our ken?  
He is gone with the age which begat him. Our own  
Is too vast, and too complex, for one man alone  
To embody its purpose, and hold it shut close  
In the palm of his hand. There were giants in those  
Irreclaimable days; but in these days of ours,  
In dividing the work, we distribute the powers.  
Yet a dwarf on a dead giant's shoulders sees more  
Than the 'live giant's eyesight availed to explore;  
And in life's lengthen'd alphabet what used to be  
To our sires X Y Z is to us A B C.  
A Vanini is roasted alive for his pains,  
But a Bacon comes after and picks up his brains.  
A Bruno is angrily seized by the throttle  
And hunted about by thy ghost, Aristotle,  
Till a More or Lavater step into his place:  
Then the world turns and makes an admiring grimace.  
Once the men were so great and so few, they appear,  
Through a distant Olympian atmosphere,  
Like vast Caryatids upholding the age.  
Now the men are so many and small, disengage  
One man from the million to mark him, next moment  
The crowd sweeps him hurriedly out of your comment;  
And since we seek vainly (to praise in our songs)  
'Mid our fellows the size which to heroes belongs,  
We take the whole age for a hero, in want  
Of a better; and still, in its favor, descant  
On the strength and the beauty which, failing to find  
In any one man, we ascribe to mankind.

IV.

Alfred Vargrave was one of those men who achieve  
So little, because of the much they conceive:  
With irresolute finger he knock'd at each one  
Of the doorways of life, and abided in none.  
His course, by each star that would cross it, was set,  
And whatever he did he was sure to regret.  
That target, discuss'd by the travellers of old,  
Which to one appear'd argent, to one appear'd gold,  
To him, ever lingering on Doubt's dizzy margent,  
Appear'd in one moment both golden and argent.  
The man who seeks one thing in life, and but one,  
May hope to achieve it before life be done;  
But he who seeks all things, wherever he goes,  
Only reaps from the hopes which around him he sows

A harvest of barren regrets. And the worm  
That crawls on in the dust to the definite term  
Of its creeping existence, and sees nothing more  
Than the path it pursues till its creeping be o'er,  
In its limited vision, is happier far  
Than the Half-Sage, whose course, fix'd by no friendly star  
Is by each star distracted in turn, and who knows  
Each will still be as distant wherever he goes.

V.

Both brilliant and brittle, both bold and unstable,  
Indecisive yet keen, Alfred Vargrave seem'd able  
To dazzle, but not to illumine mankind.  
A vigorous, various, versatile mind;  
A character wavering, fitful, uncertain,  
As the shadow that shakes o'er a luminous curtain,  
Vague, flitting, but on it forever impressing  
The shape of some substance at which you stand guessing:  
When you said, "All is worthless and weak here," behold!  
Into sight on a sudden there seem'd to unfold  
Great outlines of strenuous truth in the man:  
When you said, "This is genius," the outlines grew wan,  
And his life, though in all things so gifted and skill'd,  
Was, at best, but a promise which nothing fulfill'd.

VI.

In the budding of youth, ere wild winds can deflower  
The shut leaves of man's life, round the germ of his power  
Yet folded, his life had been earnest. Alas!  
In that life one occasion, one moment, there was  
When this earnestness might, with the life-sap of youth,  
Lusty fruitage have borne in his manhood's full growth;  
But it found him too soon, when his nature was still  
The delicate toy of too pliant a will,  
The boisterous wind of the world to resist,  
Or the frost of the world's wintry wisdom.

He miss'd

That occasion, too rathe in its advent.

Since then,

He had made it a law, in his commerce with men,  
That intensity in him, which only left sore  
The heart it disturb'd, to repel and ignore.  
And thus, as some Prince by his subjects deposed,  
Whose strength he, by seeking to crush it, disclosed,  
In resigning the power he lack'd power to support  
Turns his back upon courts, with a sneer at the court,  
In his converse this man for self-comfort appeal'd



To a cynic denial of all he conceal'd  
 In the instincts and feelings belied by his words.  
 Words, however, are things: and the man who accords  
 To his language the license to outrage his soul,  
 Is controll'd by the words he disdains to control.  
 And, therefore, he seem'd in the deeds of each day  
 The light code proclaim'd on his lips to obey;  
 And, the slave of each whim, follow'd wilfully aught  
 That perchance fool'd the fancy, or flatter'd the thought.  
 Yet, indeed, deep within him, the spirits of truth,  
 Vast, vague aspirations, the powers of his youth,  
 Lived and breathed, and made moan--stirr'd themselves--strove to start  
 Into deeds--though deposed, in that Hades, his heart.  
 Like those antique Theogonies ruin'd and hurl'd,  
 Under clefts of the hills, which, convulsing the world,  
 Heaved, in earthquake, their heads the rent caverns above,  
 To trouble at times in the light court of Jove  
 All its frivolous gods, with an undefined awe,  
 Of wrong'd rebel powers that own'd not their law.  
 For his sake, I am fain to believe that, if born  
 To some lowlier rank (from the world's languid scorn  
 Secured by the world's stern resistance) where strife,  
 Strife and toil, and not pleasure, gave purpose to life,  
 He possibly might have contrived to attain  
 Not eminence only, but worth. So, again,  
 Had he been of his own house the first-born, each gift  
 Of a mind many-gifted had gone to uplift  
 A great name by a name's greatest uses.

But there

He stood isolated, opposed, as it were,  
 To life's great realities; part of no plan;  
 And if ever a nobler and happier man  
 He might hope to become, that alone could be when  
 With all that is real in life and in men  
 What was real in him should have been reconciled;  
 When each influence now from experience exiled  
 Should have seized on his being, combined with his nature,  
 And form'd as by fusion, a new human creature:  
 As when those airy elements viewless to sight  
 (The amalgam of which, if our science be right,  
 The germ of this populous planet doth fold)  
 Unite in the glass of the chemist, behold!  
 Where a void seem'd before, there a substance appears,  
 From the fusion of forces whence issued the spheres!

VII.

But the permanent cause why his life fail'd and miss'd  
 The full value of life was,--where man should resist  
 The world, which man's genius is call'd to command,  
 He gave way, less from lack of the power to withstand,

Than from lack of the resolute will to retain  
Those strongholds of life which the world strives to gain.  
Let this character go in the old-fashion'd way,  
With the moral thereof tightly tack'd to it. Say--  
"Let any man once show the world that he feels  
Afraid of its bark, and 'twill fly at his heels:  
Let him fearlessly face it, 'twill leave him alone:  
But 'twill fawn at his feet if he flings it a bone."

VIII.

The moon of September, now half at the full,  
Was unfolding from darkness and dreamland the lull  
Of the quiet blue air, where the many-faced hills  
Watch'd, well-pleas'd, their fair slaves, the light, foam-footed rills,  
Dance and sing down the steep marble stairs of their courts,  
And gracefully fashion a thousand sweet sports,  
Lord Alfred (by this on his journeying far)  
Was pensively puffing his Lopez cigar,  
And brokenly humming an old opera strain,  
And thinking, perchance, of those castles in Spain  
Which that long rocky barrier hid from his sight;  
When suddenly, out of the neighboring night,  
A horseman emerged from a fold of the hill,  
And so startled his steed that was winding at will  
Up the thin dizzy strip of a pathway which led  
O'er the mountain--the reins on its neck, and its head  
Hanging lazily forward--that, but for a hand  
Light and ready, yet firm, in familiar command,  
Both rider and horse might have been in a trice  
Hurl'd horribly over the grim precipice.

IX.

As soon as the moment's alarm had subsided,  
And the oath with which nothing can find unprovided  
A thoroughbred Englishman, safely exploded,  
Lord Alfred unbent (as Apollo his bow did  
Now and then) his erectness; and looking, not ruder  
Than such inroad would warrant, survey'd the intruder,  
Whose arrival so nearly cut short in his glory  
My hero, and finished abruptly this story.

X.

The stranger, a man of his own age or less,  
Well mounted, and simple though rich in his dress,

Wore his beard and mustache in the fashion of France.  
His face, which was pale, gather'd force from the glance  
Of a pair of dark, vivid, and eloquent eyes.  
With a gest of apology, touch'd with surprise,  
He lifted his hat, bow'd and courteously made  
Some excuse in such well-cadenced French as betray'd,  
At the first word he spoke, the Parisian.

XI.

I swear

I have wander'd about in the world everywhere;  
From many strange mouths have heard many strange tongues;  
Strain'd with many strange idioms my lips and my lungs;  
Walk'd in many a far land, regretting my own;  
In many a language groaned many a groan;  
And have often had reason to curse those wild fellows  
Who built the high house at which Heaven turn'd jealous,  
Making human audacity stumble and stammer  
When seized by the throat in the hard gripe of Grammar.  
But the language of languages dearest to me  
Is that in which once, O ma toute cherie,  
When, together, we bent o'er your nosegay for hours,  
You explain'd what was silently said by the flowers,  
And, selecting the sweetest of all, sent a flame  
Through my heart, as, in laughing, you murmur'd  
Je t'aime.

XII.

The Italians have voices like peacocks; the Spanish  
Smell, I fancy, of garlic; the Swedish and Danish  
Have something too Runic, too rough and unshod, in  
Their accents for mouths not descended from Odin;  
German gives me a cold in the head, sets me wheezing  
And coughing; and Russian is nothing but sneezing;  
But, by Belus and Babel! I never have heard,  
And I never shall hear (I well know it), one word  
Of that delicate idiom of Paris without  
Feeling morally sure, beyond question or doubt,  
By the wild way in which my heart inwardly flutter'd  
That my heart's native tongue to my heart had been utter'd  
And whene'er I hear French spoken as I approve  
I feel myself quietly falling in love.

XIII.

Lord Alfred, on hearing the stranger, appeased  
By a something, an accent, a cadence, which pleased  
His ear with that pledge of good breeding which tells  
At once of the world in whose fellowship dwells  
The speaker that owns it, was glad to remark  
In the horseman a man one might meet after dark  
Without fear.

And thus, not disagreeably impress'd,  
As it seem'd, with each other, the two men abreast  
Rode on slowly a moment.

XIV.

STRANGER.

I see, Sir, you are  
A smoker. Allow me!

ALFRED.

Pray take a cigar.

STRANGER.

Many thanks! . . . Such cigars are a luxury here.  
Do you go to Luchon?

ALFRED.

Yes; and you?

STRANGER.

Yes. I fear,  
Since our road is the same, that our journey must be  
Somewhat closer than is our acquaintance. You see  
How narrow the path is. I'm tempted to ask  
Your permission to finish (no difficult task!)  
The cigar you have given me (really a prize!)  
In your company.

ALFRED.

Charm'd, Sir, to find your road lies  
In the way of my own inclinations! Indeed  
The dream of your nation I find in this weed.  
In the distant Savannahs a talisman grows  
That makes all men brothers that use it . . . who knows?  
That blaze which erewhile from the Boulevart out-broke,  
It has ended where wisdom begins, Sir,--in smoke.  
Messieurs Lopez (whatever your publicists write)

Have done more in their way human kind to unite,  
Perchance, than ten Prudhons.

STRANGER.

Yes. Ah, what a scene!

ALFRED.

Humph! Nature is here too pretentious. Her mien  
Is too haughty. One likes to be coax'd, not compell'd,  
To the notice such beauty resents if withheld.  
She seems to be saying too plainly, "Admire me!"  
And I answer, "Yes, madam, I do: but you tire me."

STRANGER.

That sunset, just now though . . .

ALFRED.

A very old trick!

One would think that the sun by this time must be sick  
Of blushing at what, by this time, he must know  
Too well to be shocked by--this world.

STRANGER.

Ah, 'tis so

With us all. 'Tis the sinner that best knew the world  
At Twenty, whose lip is, at sixty, most curl'd  
With disdain of its follies. You stay at Luchon?

ALFRED.

A day or two only.

STRANGER.

The season is done.

ALFRED.

Already?

STRANGER.

'Twas shorter this year than the last.  
Folly soon wears her shoes out. She dances so fast  
We are all of us tired.

ALFRED.

You know the place well?

STRANGER.

I have been there two seasons.

ALFRED.

Pray who is the Belle  
Of the Baths at this moment?

STRANGER.

The same who has been  
The belle of all places in which she is seen;  
The belle of all Paris last winter; last spring  
The belle of all Baden.

ALFRED.

An uncommon thing!

STRANGER.

Sir, an uncommon beauty! . . . I rather should say  
An uncommon character. Truly, each day  
One meets women whose beauty is equal to hers,  
But none with the charm of Lucile de Nevers.

ALFRED.

Madame de Nevers!

STRANGER.

Do you know her?

ALFRED.

I know  
Or, rather, I knew her--a long time ago.  
I almost forget . . .

STRANGER.

What a wit! what a grace  
In her language! her movements! what play in her face!  
And yet what a sadness she seems to conceal!

ALFRED.

You speak like a lover.

STRANGER.

I speak as I feel,  
But not like a lover. What interests me so  
In Lucile, at the same time forbids me, I know,  
To give to that interest, whate'er the sensation,  
The name we men give to an hour's admiration,  
A night's passing passion, an actress's eyes,  
A dancing girl's ankles, a fine lady's sighs.

ALFRED.

Yes, I quite comprehend. But this sadness--this shade  
Which you speak of? . . . it almost would make me afraid  
Your gay countrymen, Sir, less adroit must have grown,  
Since when, as a stripling, at Paris, I own  
I found in them terrible rivals,--if yet  
They have all lack'd the skill to console this regret  
(If regret be the word I should use), or fulfil  
This desire (if desire be the word), which seems still  
To endure unappeased. For I take it for granted,  
From all that you say, that the will was not wanted.

XV.

The stranger replied, not without irritation:  
"I have heard that an Englishman--one of your nation  
I presume--and if so, I must beg you, indeed,  
To excuse the contempt which I . . ."

ALFRED.

Pray, Sir, proceed  
With your tale. My compatriot, what was his crime?

STRANGER.

Oh, nothing! His folly was not so sublime  
As to merit that term. If I blamed him just now,  
It was not for the sin, but the silliness.

ALFRED.

How?

STRANGER.

I own I hate Botany. Still, . . . dmit,  
Although I myself have no passion for it,  
And do not understand, yet I cannot despise

The cold man of science, who walks with his eyes  
All alert through a garden of flowers, and strips  
The lilies' gold tongues, and the roses' red lips,  
With a ruthless dissection; since he, I suppose,  
Has some purpose beyond the mere mischief he does.  
But the stupid and mischievous boy, that uproots  
The exotics, and tramples the tender young shoots,  
For a boy's brutal pastime, and only because  
He knows no distinction 'twixt heartsease and haws,--  
One would wish, for the sake of each nursling so nipp'd,  
To catch the young rascal and have him well whipp'd!

ALFRED.

Some compatriot of mine, do I then understand,  
With a cold Northern heart, and a rude English hand,  
Has injured your Rosebud of France?

STRANGER.

Sir, I know

But little, or nothing. Yet some faces show  
The last act of a tragedy in their regard:  
Though the first scenes be wanting, it yet is not hard  
To divine, more or less, what the plot may have been,  
And what sort of actors have pass'd o'er the scene.  
And whenever I gaze on the face of Lucile,  
With its pensive and passionless languor, I feel  
That some feeling hath burnt there . . . burnt out, and burnt up  
Health and hope. So you feel when you gaze down the cup  
Of extinguish'd volcanoes: you judge of the fire  
Once there, by the ravage you see;--the desire,  
By the apathy left in its wake, and that sense  
Of a moral, immovable, mute impotence.

ALFRED.

Humph! . . . I see you have finished, at last, your cigar;  
Can I offer another?

STRANGER.

No, thank you. We are  
Not two miles from Luchon.

ALFRED.

You know the road well?

STRANGER.

I have often been over it.



XVI.

Here a pause fell  
On their converse. Still musingly on, side by side,  
In the moonlight, the two men continued to ride  
Down the dim mountain pathway. But each for the rest  
Of their journey, although they still rode on abreast,  
Continued to follow in silence the train  
Of the different feelings that haunted his brain;  
And each, as though roused from a deep reverie,  
Almost shouted, descending the mountain, to see  
Burst at once on the moonlight the silvery Baths,  
The long lime-tree alley, the dark gleaming paths,  
With the lamps twinkling through them--the quaint wooden roofs--  
The little white houses.

The clatter of hoofs,  
And the music of wandering bands, up the walls  
Of the steep hanging hill, at remote intervals  
Reached them, cross'd by the sound of the clacking of whips,  
And here and there, faintly, through serpentine slips  
Of verdant rose-gardens deep-sheltered with screens  
Of airy acacias and dark evergreens,  
They could mark the white dresses and catch the light songs  
Of the lovely Parisians that wander'd in throngs,  
Led by Laughter and Love through the old eventide  
Down the dream-haunted valley, or up the hillside.

XVII.

At length, at the door of the inn l'HERISSON,  
Pray go there, if ever you go to Luchon!)  
The two horsemen, well pleased to have reached it, alighted  
And exchanged their last greetings.

The Frenchman invited  
Lord Alfred to dinner. Lord Alfred declined.  
He had letters to write, and felt tired. So he dined  
In his own rooms that night.

With an unquiet eye  
He watched his companion depart; nor knew why,  
Beyond all accountable reason or measure,  
He felt in his breast such a sovran displeasure.  
"The fellow's good looking," he murmur'd at last,  
"And yet not a coxcomb." Some ghost of the past  
Vex'd him still.

"If he love her," he thought, "let him win her."  
Then he turn'd to the future--and order'd his dinner.

XVIII.

O hour of all hours, the most bless'd upon earth,  
Blessed hour of our dinners!

The land of his birth;

The face of his first love; the bills that he owes;  
The twaddle of friends and the venom of foes;  
The sermon he heard when to church he last went;  
The money he borrow'd, the money he spent;--  
All of these things, a man, I believe, may forget,  
And not be the worse for forgetting; but yet  
Never, never, oh never! earth's luckiest sinner  
Hath unpunish'd forgotten the hour of his dinner!  
Indigestion, that conscience of every bad stomach,  
Shall relentlessly gnaw and pursue him with some ache  
Or some pain; and trouble, remorseless, his best ease,  
As the Furies once troubled the sleep of Orestes.

XIX.

We may live without poetry, music, and art:  
We may live without conscience, and live without heart;  
We may live without friends; we may live without books;  
But civilized man cannot live without cooks.  
He may live without books,--what is knowledge but grieving?  
He may live without hope,--what is hope but deceiving?  
He may live without love,--what is passion but pining?  
But where is the man that can live without dining?

XX.

Lord Alfred found, waiting his coming, a note  
From Lucile.

"Your last letter has reach'd me," she wrote.

"This evening, alas! I must go to the ball,  
And shall not be at home till too late for your call;  
But to-morrow, at any rate, sans faute, at One  
You will find me at home, and will find me alone.  
Meanwhile, let me thank you sincerely, milord,  
For the honor with which you adhere to your word.  
Yes, I thank you, Lord Alfred! To-morrow then.

"L."

XXI.

I find myself terribly puzzled to tell  
The feelings with which Alfred Vargrave flung down  
This note, as he pour'd out his wine. I must own

That I think he, himself, could have hardly explain'd  
Those feelings exactly.

"Yes, yes," as he drain'd  
The glass down, he mutter'd, "Jack's right, after all.  
The coquette!"

"Does milord mean to go to the ball?"  
Ask'd the waiter, who linger'd.

"Perhaps. I don't know.  
You may keep me a ticket, in case I should go."

XXII.

Oh, better, no doubt, is a dinner of herbs,  
When season'd by love, which no rancor disturbs,  
And sweeten'd by all that is sweetest in life,  
Than turbot, bisque, ortolans, eaten in strife!  
But if, out of humor, and hungry, alone,  
A man should sit down to a dinner, each one  
Of the dishes of which the cook chooses to spoil  
With a horrible mixture of garlic and oil,  
The chances are ten against one, I must own,  
He gets up as ill-temper'd as when he sat down.  
And if any reader this fact to dispute is  
Disposed, I say . . . "Allium edat cicutis  
Nocentius!"

Over the fruit and the wine  
Undisturb'd the wasp settled. The evening was fine.  
Lord Alfred his chair by the window had set,  
And languidly lighted his small cigarette.  
The window was open. The warm air without  
Waved the flame of the candles. The moths were about.  
In the gloom he sat gloomy.

XXIII.

Gay sounds from below  
Floated up like faint echoes of joys long ago,  
And night deepen'd apace; through the dark avenues  
The lamps twinkled bright; and by threes and by twos,  
The idlers of Luchon were strolling at will,  
As Lord Alfred could see from the cool window-sill,  
Where his gaze, as he languidly turn'd it, fell o'er  
His late travelling companion, now passing before  
The inn, at the window of which he still sat,  
In full toilet,--boots varnish'd, and snowy cravat,  
Gayly smoothing and buttoning a yellow kid glove,  
As he turned down the avenue.

Watching above,  
From his window, the stranger, who stopp'd as he walk'd

To mix with those groups, and now nodded, now talk'd,  
To the young Paris dandies, Lord Alfred discern'd,  
By the way hats were lifted, and glances were turn'd,  
That this unknown acquaintance, now bound for the hall,  
Was a person of rank or of fashion; for all  
Whom he bow'd to in passing, or stopped with and chatter'd,  
Walk'd on with a look which implied . . . "I feel flatter'd!"

XXIV.

His form was soon lost in the distance and gloom.

XXV.

Lord Alfred still sat by himself in his room.  
He had finish'd, one after the other, a dozen  
Or more cigarettes. He had thought of his cousin;  
He had thought of Matilda, and thought of Lucile:  
He had thought about many things; thought a great deal  
Of himself, of his past life, his future, his present:  
He had thought of the moon, neither full moon nor crescent;  
Of the gay world, so sad! life, so sweet and so sour!  
He had thought, too, of glory, and fortune, and power:  
Thought of love, and the country, and sympathy, and  
A poet's asylum in some distant land:  
Thought of man in the abstract, and woman, no doubt,  
In particular; also he had thought much about  
His digestion, his debts, and his dinner: and last,  
He thought that the night would be stupidly pass'd  
If he thought any more of such matters at all:  
So he rose and resolved to set out for the ball.

XXVI.

I believe, ere he finish'd his tardy toilet,  
That Lord Alfred had spoil'd, and flung by in a pet,  
Half a dozen white neckcloths, and look'd for the nonce  
Twenty times in the glass, if he look'd in it once.  
I believe that he split up, in drawing them on,  
Three pair of pale lavender gloves, one by one.  
And this is the reason, no doubt, that at last,  
When he reach'd the Casino, although he walk'd fast,  
He heard, as he hurriedly enter'd the door,  
The church clock strike Twelve.

XXVII.

The last waltz was just o'er.  
The chaperons and dancers were all in a flutter.  
A crowd block'd the door: and a buzz and a mutter  
Went about in the room as a young man, whose face  
Lord Alfred had seen ere he enter'd that place,  
But a few hours ago, through the perfumed and warm  
Flowery porch, with a lady that lean'd on his arm  
Like a queen in a fable of old fairy days,  
Left the ballroom.

XXVIII.

The hubbub of comment and praise  
Reach'd Lord Alfred as just then he enter'd.  
"Ma foi!"  
Said a Frenchman beside him, . . . "That lucky Luvois  
Has obtained all the gifts of the gods . . . rank and wealth,  
And good looks, and then such inexhaustible health!  
He that hath shall have more; and this truth, I surmise,  
Is the cause why, to-night, by the beautiful eyes  
Of la charmante Lucile more distinguish'd than all,  
He so gayly goes off with the belle of the ball."  
"Is it true," asked a lady aggressively fat,  
Who, fierce as a female Leviathan, sat  
By another that look'd like a needle, all steel  
And tenuity--"Luvois will marry Lucile?"  
The needle seem'd jerk'd by a virulent twitch,  
As though it were bent upon driving a stitch  
Through somebody's character.

"Madam," replied,  
Interposing, a young man who sat by their side,  
And was languidly fanning his face with his hat,  
"I am ready to bet my new Tilbury that,  
If Luvois has proposed, the Comtesse has refused."  
The fat and thin ladies were highly amused.  
"Refused! . . . what! a young Duke, not thirty, my dear,  
With at least half a million (what is it?) a year!"  
"That may be," said a third; "yet I know some time since  
Castelmar was refused, though as rich, and a Prince.  
But Luvois, who was never before in his life  
In love with a woman who was not a wife,  
Is now certainly serious."

XXIX.

The music once more  
Recommenced.

XXX.

Said Lord Alfred, "This ball is a bore!"  
And return'd to the inn, somewhat worse than before.

XXXI.

There, whilst musing he lean'd the dark valley above,  
Through the warm land were wand'ring the spirits of love.  
A soft breeze in the white window drapery stirr'd;  
In the blossom'd acacia the lone cricket chirr'd;  
The scent of the roses fell faint o'er the night,  
And the moon on the mountain was dreaming in light.  
Repose, and yet rapture! that pensive wild nature  
Impregnate with passion in each breathing feature!  
A stone's throw from thence, through the large lime-trees peep'd  
In a garden of roses, a white chalet, steep'd  
In the moonbeams. The windows oped down to the lawn;  
The casements were open; the curtains were drawn;  
Lights stream'd from the inside; and with them the sound  
Of music and song. In the garden, around  
A table with fruits, wine, tea, ices, there set,  
Half a dozen young men and young women were met.  
Light, laughter, and voices, and music all stream'd  
Through the quiet-leaved limes. At the window there seem'd  
For one moment the outline, familiar and fair,  
Of a white dress, white neck, and soft dusky hair,  
Which Lord Alfred remember'd . . . a moment or so  
It hover'd, then pass'd into shadow; and slow  
The soft notes, from a tender piano upflung,  
Floated forth, and a voice unforgotten thus sung:--

"Hear a song that was born in the land of my birth!  
The anchors are lifted, the fair ship is free,  
And the shout of the mariners floats in its mirth  
'Twixt the light in the sky and the light on the sea.

"And this ship is a world. She is freighted with souls,  
She is freighted with merchandise: proudly she sails  
With the Labor that stores, and the Will that controls  
The gold in the ingots, the silk in the bales.

"From the gardens of Pleasure where reddens the rose,  
And the scent of the cedar is faint on the air,  
Past the harbors of Traffic, sublimely she goes,  
Man's hopes o'er the world of the waters to bear!

"Where the cheer from the harbors of Traffic is heard,  
Where the gardens of Pleasure fade fast on the sight,  
O'er the rose, o'er the cedar, there passes a bird;  
'Tis the Paradise Bird, never known to alight.

"And that bird, bright and bold as a poet's desire,  
Roams her own native heavens, the realms of her birth.  
There she soars like a seraph, she shines like a fire,  
And her plumage hath never been sullied by earth.

"And the mariners greet her; there's song on each lip,  
For that bird of good omen, and joy in each eye.  
And the ship and the bird, and the bird and the ship,  
Together go forth over ocean and sky.

"Fast, fast fades the land! far the rose-gardens flee,  
And far fleet the harbors. In regions unknown  
The ship is alone on a desert of sea,  
And the bird in a desert of sky is alone.

"In those regions unknown, o'er that desert of air,  
Down that desert of waters--tremendous in wrath--  
The storm-wind Euroclydon leaps from his lair,  
And cleaves, thro' the waves of the ocean, his path.

"And the bird in the cloud, and the ship on the wave,  
Overtaken, are beaten about by wild gales;  
And the mariners all rush their cargo to save,  
Of the gold in the ingots, the silk in the bales.

"Lo! a wonder, which never before hath been heard,  
For it never before hath been given to sight;  
On the ship bath descended the Paradise Bird,  
The Paradise Bird, never known to alight!

"The bird which the mariners bless'd, when each lip  
Had a song for the omen that gladden'd each eye;  
The bright bird for shelter hath flown to the ship  
From the wrath on the sea and the wrath in the sky.

"But the mariners heed not the bird any more.  
They are felling the masts--they are cutting the sails;  
Some are working, some weeping, and some wrangling o'er  
Their gold in the ingots, their silk in the bales.

"Souls of men are on board; wealth of man in the hold;  
And the storm-wind Euroclydon sweeps to his prey;  
And who heeds the bird? 'Save the silk and the gold!'  
And the bird from her shelter the gust sweeps away!

"Poor Paradise Bird! on her lone flight once more  
Back again in the wake of the wind she is driven--  
To be 'whelmed in the storm, or above it to soar,

And, if rescued from ocean, to vanish in heaven!

"And the ship rides the waters and weathers the gales:

From the haven she nears the rejoicing is heard.

All hands are at work on the ingots, the bales,

Save a child sitting lonely, who misses--the bird!"

### CANTO III.

#### I.

With stout iron shoes be my Pegasus shod!

For my road is a rough one: flint, stubble, and clod,

Blue clay, and black quagmire, brambles no few,

And I gallop up-hill, now.

There's terror that's true

In that tale of a youth who, one night at a revel,

Amidst music and mirth lured and wiled by some devil,

Follow'd ever one mask through the mad masquerade,

Till, pursued to some chamber deserted ('tis said),

He unmasked, with a kiss, the strange lady, and stood

Face to face with a Thing not of flesh nor of blood.

In this Mask of the Passions, call'd Life, there's no human

Emotion, though mask'd, or in man or in woman,

But, when faced and unmask'd, it will leave us at last

Struck by some supernatural aspect aghast.

For truth is appalling and eldritch, as seen

By this world's artificial lamplights and we screen

From our sight the strange vision that troubles our life.

Alas! why is Genius forever at strife

With the world, which, despite the world's self, it ennobles?

Why is it that Genius perplexes and troubles

And offends the effete life it comes to renew?

'Tis the terror of truth! 'tis that Genius is true!

#### II.

Lucile de Nevers (if her riddle I read)

Was a woman of genius: whose genius, indeed,

With her life was at war. Once, but once, in that life

The chance had been hers to escape from this strife

In herself; finding peace in the life of another

From the passionate wants she, in hers, failed to smother.

But the chance fell too soon, when the crude restless power

Which had been to her nature so fatal a dower,

Only wearied the man it yet haunted and thrall'd;

And that moment, once lost, had been never recall'd.



Yet it left her heart sore: and, to shelter her heart  
From approach, she then sought, in that delicate art  
Of concealment, those thousand adroit strategies  
Of feminine wit, which repel while they please,  
A weapon, at once, and a shield to conceal  
And defend all that women can earnestly feel.  
Thus, striving her instincts to hide and repress,  
She felt frighten'd at times by her very success:  
She pined for the hill-tops, the clouds, and the stars:  
Golden wires may annoy us as much as steel bars  
If they keep us behind prison windows: impassion'd  
Her heart rose and burst the light cage she had fashion'd  
Out of glittering trifles around it.

#### Unknown

To herself, all her instincts, without hesitation,  
Embraced the idea of self-immolation.  
The strong spirit in her, had her life been but blended  
With some man's whose heart had her own comprehended,  
All its wealth at his feet would have lavishly thrown.  
For him she had struggled and striven alone;  
For him had aspired; in him had transfused  
All the gladness and grace of her nature; and used  
For him only the spells of its delicate power:  
Like the ministering fairy that brings from her bower  
To some maze all the treasures, whose use the fond elf,  
More enrich'd by her love, disregards for herself.  
But standing apart, as she ever had done,  
And her genius, which needed a vent, finding none  
In the broad fields of action thrown wide to man's power,  
She unconsciously made it her bulwark and tower,  
And built in it her refuge, whence lightly she hurl'd  
Her contempt at the fashions and forms of the world.

And the permanent cause why she now miss'd and fail'd  
That firm hold upon life she so keenly assail'd,  
Was, in all those diurnal occasions that place  
Say--the world and the woman opposed face to face,  
Where the woman must yield, she, refusing to stir,  
Offended the world, which in turn wounded her.

As before, in the old-fashion'd manner, I fit  
To this character, also, its moral: to wit,  
Say--the world is a nettle; disturb it, it stings:  
Grasp it firmly, it stings not. On one of two things,  
If you would not be stung, it behoves you to settle  
Avoid it, or crush it. She crush'd not the nettle;  
For she could not; nor would she avoid it: she tried  
With the weak hand of woman to thrust it aside,  
And it stung her. A woman is too slight a thing  
To trample the world without feeling its sting.

III.

One lodges but simply at Luchon; yet, thanks  
To the season that changes forever the banks  
Of the blossoming mountains, and shifts the light cloud  
O'er the valley, and hushes or rouses the loud  
Wind that wails in the pines, or creeps murmuring down  
The dark evergreen slopes to the slumbering town,  
And the torrent that falls, faintly heard from afar,  
And the blue-bells that purple the dapple-gray scaur,  
One sees with each month of the many-faced year  
A thousand sweet changes of beauty appear.  
The chalet where dwelt the Comtesse de Nevers  
Rested half up the base of a mountain of firs,  
In a garden of roses, reveal'd to the road,  
Yet withdrawn from its noise: 'twas a peaceful abode.  
And the walls, and the roofs, with their gables like hoods  
Which the monks wear, were built of sweet resinous woods.  
The sunlight of noon, as Lord Alfred ascended  
The steep garden paths, every odor had blended  
Of the ardent carnations, and faint heliotropes,  
With the balms floated down from the dark wooded slopes:  
A light breeze at the window was playing about,  
And the white curtains floated, now in, and now out.  
The house was all hush'd when he rang at the door,  
Which was open'd to him in a moment, or more,  
By an old nodding negress, whose sable head shined  
In the sun like a cocoa-nut polished in Ind,  
'Neath the snowy foulard which about it was wound.

IV.

Lord Alfred sprang forward at once, with a bound.  
He remembered the nurse of Lucile. The old dame,  
Whose teeth and whose eyes used to beam when he came,  
With a boy's eager step, in the blithe days of yore,  
To pass, unannounced, her young mistress's door.  
The old woman had fondled Lucile on her knee  
When she left, as an infant, far over the sea,  
In India, the tomb of a mother, unknown,  
To pine, a pale flow'ret, in great Paris town.  
She had sooth'd the child's sobs on her breast, when she read  
The letter that told her, her father was dead.  
An astute, shrewd adventurer, who, like Ulysses,  
Had studied men, cities, laws, wars, the abysses  
Of statecraft, with varying fortunes, was he.  
He had wander'd the world through, by land and by sea,  
And knew it in most of its phases. Strong will,  
Subtle tact, and soft manners, had given him skill  
To conciliate Fortune, and courage to brave

Her displeasure. Thrice shipwreck'd, and cast by the wave  
On his own quick resources, they rarely had fail'd  
His command: often baffled, he ever prevail'd,  
In his combat with fate: to-day flatter'd and fed  
By monarchs, to-morrow in search of mere bread  
The offspring of times trouble-haunted, he came  
Of a family ruin'd, yet noble in name.  
He lost sight of his fortune, at twenty, in France,  
And, half statesman, half soldier, and wholly Freelance,  
Had wander'd in search of it, over the world  
Into India.

But scarce had the nomad unfurl'd  
His wandering tent at Mysore, in the smile  
Of a Rajah (whose court he controll'd for a while,  
And whose council he prompted and govern'd by stealth);  
Scarce, indeed, had he wedded an Indian of wealth,  
Who died giving birth to this daughter, before  
He was borne to the tomb of his wife at Mysore.  
His fortune, which fell to his orphan, perchance  
Had secured her a home with his sister in France,  
A lone woman, the last of the race left. Lucile  
Neither felt, nor affected, the wish to conceal  
The half-Eastern blood, which appear'd to bequeath  
(Reveal'd now and then, though but rarely, beneath  
That outward repose that concealed it in her)  
A something half wild to her strange character.  
The nurse with the orphan, awhile broken-hearted,  
At the door of a convent in Paris had parted.  
But later, once more, with her mistress she tarried,  
When the girl, by that grim maiden aunt, had been married  
To a dreary old Count, who had sullenly died,  
With no claim on her tears--she had wept as a bride.  
Said Lord Alfred, "Your mistress expects me."

The crone  
Oped the drawing-room door, and there left him alone.

V.

O'er the soft atmosphere of this temple of grace  
Rested silence and perfume. No sound reach'd the place.  
In the white curtains waver'd the delicate shade  
Of the heaving acacias, through which the breeze play'd.  
O'er the smooth wooden floor, polished dark as a glass,  
Fragrant white Indian matting allowed you to pass.  
In light olive baskets, by window and door,  
Some hung from the ceiling, some crowding the floor,  
Rich wild flowers pluck'd by Lucile from the hill,  
Seem'd the room with their passionate presence to fill:  
Blue aconite, hid in white roses, reposed;

The deep belladonna its vermeil disclosed;  
And the frail saponaire, and the tender blue-bell,  
And the purple valerian,--each child of the fell  
And the solitude flourish'd, fed fair from the source  
Of waters the huntsman scarce heeds in his course  
Where the chamois and izard, with delicate hoof,  
Pause or flit through the pinnacled silence aloof.

VI.

Here you felt, by the sense of its beauty reposed,  
That you stood in a shrine of sweet thoughts. Half unclosed  
In the light slept the flowers; all was pure and at rest;  
All peaceful; all modest; all seem'd self-possess'd,  
And aware of the silence. No vestige nor trace  
Of a young woman's coquetry troubled the place.  
He stood by the window. A cloud pass'd the sun.  
A light breeze uplifted the leaves, one by one.  
Just then Lucile enter'd the room, undiscern'd  
By Lord Alfred, whose face to the window was turned,  
In a strange revery.

The time was, when Lucile,  
In beholding that man, could not help but reveal  
The rapture, the fear, which wrench'd out every nerve  
In the heart of the girl from the woman's reserve.  
And now--she gazed at him, calm, smiling,--perchance  
Indifferent.

VII.

Indifferently turning his glance,  
Alfred Vargrave encounter'd that gaze unaware.  
O'er a bodice snow-white stream'd her soft dusky hair:  
A rose-bud half blown in her hand; in her eyes  
A half-pensive smile.

A sharp cry of surprise  
Escaped from his lips: some unknown agitation.  
An invincible trouble, a strange palpitation,  
Confused his ingenious and frivolous wit;  
Overtook, and entangled, and paralyzed it.  
That wit so complacent and docile, that ever  
Lightly came at the call of the lightest endeavor,  
Ready coin'd, and availably current as gold,  
Which, secure of its value, so fluently roll'd  
In free circulation from hand on to hand  
For the usage of all, at a moment's command;  
For once it rebell'd, it was mute and unstirr'd,  
And he looked at Lucile without speaking a word.

VIII.

Perhaps what so troubled him was, that the face  
On whose features he gazed had no more than a trace  
Of the face his remembrance had imaged for years.  
Yes! the face he remember'd was faded with tears:  
Grief had famish'd the figure, and dimmed the dark eyes,  
And starved the pale lips, too acquainted with sighs,  
And that tender, and gracious, and fond coquetterie  
Of a woman who knows her least ribbon to be  
Something dear to the lips that so warmly caress  
Every sacred detail of her exquisite dress,  
In the careless toilet of Lucile--then too sad  
To care aught to her changeable beauty to add--  
Lord Alfred had never admired before!  
Alas! poor Lucile, in those weak days of yore,  
Had neglected herself, never heeding, or thinking  
(While the blossom and bloom of her beauty were shrinking)  
That sorrow can beautify only the heart--  
Not the face--of a woman; and can but impart  
Its endearment to one that has suffer'd. In truth  
Grief hath beauty for grief; but gay youth loves gay youth.

IX.

The woman that now met, unshrinking his gaze,  
Seem'd to bask in the silent but sumptuous haze  
Of that soft second summer, more ripe than the first,  
Which returns when the bud to the blossom hath burst  
In despite of the stormiest April. Lucile  
Had acquired that matchless unconscious appeal  
To the homage which none but a churl would withhold--  
That caressing and exquisite grace--never bold,  
Ever present--which just a few women possess.  
From a healthful repose, undisturb'd by the stress  
Of unquiet emotions, her soft cheek had drawn  
A freshness as pure as the twilight of dawn.  
Her figure, though slight, had revived everywhere  
The luxurious proportions of youth; and her hair--  
Once shorn as an offering to passionate love--  
Now floated or rested redundant above  
Her airy pure forehead and throat; gather'd loose  
Under which, by one violet knot, the profuse  
Milk-white folds of a cool modest garment reposed,  
Rippled faint by the breast they half hid, half disclosed,  
And her simple attire thus in all things reveal'd  
The fine art which so artfully all things conceal'd.

X.

Lord Alfred, who never conceived that Lucile  
Could have look'd so enchanting, felt tempted to kneel  
At her feet, and her pardon with passion implore;  
But the calm smile that met him sufficed to restore  
The pride and the bitterness needed to meet  
The occasion with dignity due and discreet.

XI.

"Madam,"--thus he began with a voice reassured,--  
"You see that your latest command has secured  
My immediate obedience--presuming I may  
Consider my freedom restored from this day."--  
"I had thought," said Lucile, with a smile gay yet sad,  
"That your freedom from me not a fetter has had.  
Indeed! . . . in my chains have you rested till now?  
I had not so flattered myself, I avow!"  
"For Heaven's sake, Madam," Lord Alfred replied,  
"Do not jest! has the moment no sadness?" he sigh'd.  
"'Tis an ancient tradition," she answer'd, "a tale  
Often told--a position too sure to prevail  
In the end of all legends of love. If we wrote,  
When we first love, foreseeing that hour yet remote,  
Wherein of necessity each would recall  
From the other the poor foolish records of all  
Those emotions, whose pain, when recorded, seem'd bliss,  
Should we write as we wrote? But one thinks not of this!  
At Twenty (who does not at Twenty?) we write  
Believing eternal the frail vows we plight;  
And we smile with a confident pity, above  
The vulgar results of all poor human love:  
For we deem, with that vanity common to youth,  
Because what we feel in our bosoms, in truth,  
Is novel to us--that 'tis novel to earth,  
And will prove the exception, in duration and worth,  
To the great law to which all on earth must incline.  
The error was noble, the vanity fine!  
Shall we blame it because we survive it? ah, no;  
'Twas the youth of our youth, my lord, is it not so?"

XII.

Lord Alfred was mute. He remember'd her yet  
A child--the weak sport of each moment's regret,  
Blindly yielding herself to the errors of life,

The deceptions of youth, and borne down by the strife  
And the tumult of passion; the tremulous toy  
Of each transient emotion of grief or of joy.  
But to watch her pronounce the death-warrant of all  
The illusions of life--lift, unflinching, the pall  
From the bier of the dead Past--that woman so fair,  
And so young, yet her own self-survivor; who there  
Traced her life's epitaph with a finger so cold!  
'Twas a picture that pain'd his self-love to behold.  
He himself knew--none better--the things to be said  
Upon subjects like this. Yet he bow'd down his head:  
And as thus, with a trouble he could not command,  
He paused, crumpling the letters he held in his hand,  
"You know me enough," she continued, "or what  
I would say is, you yet recollect (do you not,  
Lord Alfred?) enough of my nature, to know  
That these pledges of what was perhaps long ago  
A foolish affection, I do not recall  
From those motives of prudence which actuate all  
Or most women when their love ceases. Indeed,  
If you have such a doubt, to dispel it I need  
But remind you that ten years these letters have rested  
Unreclaim'd in your hands." A reproach seem'd suggested  
By these words. To meet it, Lord Alfred look'd up  
(His gaze had been fix'd on a blue Sevres cup  
With a look of profound connoisseurship--a smile  
Of singular interest and care, all this while.)  
He look'd up, and look'd long in the face of Lucile,  
To mark if that face by a sign would reveal  
At the thought of Miss Darcy the least jealous pain.  
He look'd keenly and long, yet he look'd there in vain.  
"You are generous, Madam," he murmur'd at last,  
And into his voice a light irony pass'd.  
He had look'd for reproaches, and fully arranged  
His forces. But straightway the enemy changed  
The position.

XIII.

"Come!" gayly Lucile interposed,  
With a smile whose divinely deep sweetness disclosed  
Some depth in her nature he never had known,  
While she tenderly laid her light hand on his own,  
"Do not think I abuse the occasion. We gain  
Justice, judgment, with years, or else years are in vain.  
From me not a single reproach can you hear.  
I have sinn'd to myself--to the world--nay, I fear  
To you chiefly. The woman who loves should, indeed,  
Be the friend of the man that she loves. She should heed  
Not her selfish and often mistaken desires,  
But his interest whose fate her own interest inspires;

And rather than seek to allure, for her sake,  
His life down the turbulent, fanciful wake  
Of impossible destinies, use all her art  
That his place in the world find its place in her heart.  
I, alas!--I perceived not this truth till too late;  
I tormented your youth, I have darken'd your fate.  
Forgive me the ill I have done for the sake  
Of its long expiation!"

XIV.

Lord Alfred, awake,  
Seem'd to wander from dream on to dream. In that seat  
Where he sat as a criminal, ready to meet  
His accuser, he found himself turn'd by some change,  
As surprising and all unexpected as strange,  
To the judge from whose mercy indulgence was sought.  
All the world's foolish pride in that moment was naught;  
He felt all his plausible theories posed;  
And, thrill'd by the beauty of nature disclosed  
In the pathos of all he had witness'd, his head  
He bow'd, and faint words self-reproachfully said,  
As he lifted her hand to his lips. 'Twas a hand  
White, delicate, dimpled, warm, languid, and bland.  
The hand of a woman is often, in youth,  
Somewhat rough, somewhat red, somewhat graceless, in truth;  
Does its beauty refine, as its pulses grow calm,  
Or as Sorrow has cross'd the life-line in the palm?

XV.

The more that he look'd, that he listen'd, the more  
He discover'd perfections unnoticed before.  
Less salient than once, less poetic, perchance,  
This woman who thus had survived the romance  
That had made him its hero, and breathed him its sighs,  
Seem'd more charming a thousand times o'er to his eyes.  
Together they talk'd of the years since when last  
They parted, contrasting the present, the past.  
Yet no memory marr'd their light converse. Lucile  
Question'd much, with the interest a sister might feel,  
Of Lord Alfred's new life,--of Miss Darcy--her face,  
Her temper, accomplishments--pausing to trace  
The advantage derived from a hymen so fit.  
Of herself, she recounted with humor and wit  
Her journeys, her daily employments, the lands  
She had seen, and the books she had read, and the hands  
She had shaken.

In all that she said there appear'd



An amiable irony. Laughing, she rear'd  
The temple of reason, with ever a touch  
Of light scorn at her work, reveal'd only so much  
As their gleams, in the thyrsus that Bacchanals bear,  
Through the blooms of a garland the point of a spear.  
But above, and beneath, and beyond all of this,  
To that soul, whose experience had paralyzed bliss,  
A benignant indulgence, to all things resign'd,  
A justice, a sweetness, a meekness of mind,  
Gave a luminous beauty, as tender and faint  
And serene as the halo encircling a saint.

XVI.

Unobserved by Lord Alfred the time fled by.  
To each novel sensation spontaneously  
He abandon'd himself with that ardor so strange  
Which belongs to a mind grown accustom'd to change.  
He sought, with well-practised and delicate art,  
To surprise from Lucile the true state of her heart;  
But his efforts were vain, and the woman, as ever,  
More adroit than the man, baffled every endeavor.  
When he deem'd he had touch'd on some chord in her being,  
At the touch it dissolved, and was gone. Ever fleeing  
As ever he near it advanced, when he thought  
To have seized, and proceeded to analyze aught  
Of the moral existence, the absolute soul,  
Light as vapor the phantom escaped his control.

XVII.

From the hall, on a sudden, a sharp ring was heard.  
In the passage without a quick footstep there stirr'd;  
At the door knock'd the negress, and thrust in her head,  
"The Duke de Luvois had just enter'd," she said,  
"And insisted"--

"The Duke!" cried Lucile (as she spoke,  
The Duke's step, approaching, a light echo woke).  
"Say I do not receive till the evening. Explain,"  
As she glanced at Lord Alfred, she added again,  
"I have business of private importance."

There came  
O'er Lord Alfred at once, at the sound of that name,  
An invincible sense of vexation. He turn'd  
To Lucile, and he fancied he faintly discern'd  
On her face an indefinite look of confusion.  
On his mind instantaneously flash'd the conclusion  
That his presence had caused it.

He said, with a sneer

Which he could not repress, "Let not ME interfere  
With the claims on your time, lady! when you are free  
From more pleasant engagements, allow me to see  
And to wait on you later."

The words were not said  
Ere he wish'd to recall them. He bitterly read  
The mistake he had made in Lucile's flashing eye.  
Inclining her head as in haughty reply,  
More reproachful perchance than all utter'd rebuke,  
She said merely, resuming her seat, "Tell the Duke  
He may enter."

And vex'd with his own words and hers,  
Alfred Vargrave bow'd low to Lucile de Nevers,  
Pass'd the casement and enter'd the garden. Before  
His shadow was fled the Duke stood at the door.

XVIII.

When left to his thoughts in the garden alone,  
Alfred Vargrave stood, strange to himself. With dull tone  
Of importance, through cities of rose and carnation,  
Went the bee on his business from station to station.  
The minute mirth of summer was shrill all around;  
Its incessant small voices like stings seem'd to sound  
On his sore angry sense. He stood grieving the hot  
Solid sun with his shadow, nor stirr'd from the spot.  
The last look of Lucile still bewilder'd, perplex'd,  
And reproach'd him. The Duke's visit goaded and vex'd.  
He had not yet given the letters. Again  
He must visit Lucile. He resolved to remain  
Where he was till the Duke went. In short, he would stay,  
Were it only to know when the Duke went away.  
But just as he form'd this resolve, he perceived  
Approaching towards him, between the thick-leaved  
And luxuriant laurels, Lucile and the Duke.  
Thus surprised, his first thought was to seek for some nook  
Whence he might, unobserved, from the garden retreat.  
They had not yet seen him. The sound of their feet  
And their voices had warn'd him in time. They were walking  
Towards him. The Duke (a true Frenchman) was talking  
With the action of Talma. He saw at a glance  
That they barr'd the sole path to the gateway. No chance  
Of escape save in instant concealment! Deep-dipp'd  
In thick foliage, an arbor stood near. In he slipp'd,  
Saved from sight, as in front of that ambush they pass'd,  
Still conversing. Beneath a laburnum at last  
They paused, and sat down on a bench in the shade,  
So close that he could not but hear what they said.

XIX.

LUCILE.

Duke, I scarcely conceive . . .

LUVOIS.

Ah! forgive! . . . I desired  
So deeply to see you to-day. You retired  
So early last night from the ball . . . this whole week  
I have seen you pale, silent, preoccupied . . . speak,  
Speak, Lucile, and forgive me! . . . I know that I am  
A rash fool--but I love you! I love you, Madame.  
More than language can say! Do not deem, O Lucile,  
That the love I no longer have strength to conceal  
Is a passing caprice! It is strange to my nature,  
It has made me, unknown to myself, a new creature.  
I implore you to sanction and save the new life  
Which I lay at your feet with this prayer--Be my wife  
Stoop, and raise me!

Lord Alfred could scarcely restrain  
The sudden, acute pang of anger and pain  
With which he had heard this. As though to some wind  
The leaves of the hush'd, windless laurels behind  
The two thus in converse were suddenly stirr'd.  
The sound half betrayed him. They started. He heard  
The low voice of Lucile; but so faint was its tone  
That her answer escaped him.

Luvois hurried on,  
As though in remonstrance with what had been spoken.  
"Nay, I know it, Lucile! but your heart was not broken  
By the trial in which all its fibres were proved.  
Love, perchance, you mistrust, yet you need to be loved.  
You mistake your own feelings. I fear you mistake  
What so ill I interpret, those feelings which make  
Words like these vague and feeble. Whatever your heart  
May have suffer'd of yore, this can only impart  
A pity profound to the love which I feel.  
Hush! hush! I know all. Tell me nothing, Lucile."  
"You know all, Duke?" she said; "well then, know that, in truth,  
I have learn'd from the rude lesson taught to my youth  
From my own heart to shelter my life; to mistrust  
The heart of another. We are what we must,  
And not what we would be. I know that one hour  
Assures not another. The will and the power  
Are diverse."

"O madam!" he answer'd, "you fence  
With a feeling you know to be true and intense.  
'Tis not MY life, Lucile, that I plead for alone:  
If your nature I know, 'tis no less for your own.  
That nature will prey on itself; it was made  
To influence others. Consider," he said,

"That genius craves power--what scope for it here?  
Gifts less noble to ME give command of that sphere  
In which genius IS power. Such gifts you despise?  
But you do not disdain what such gifts realize!  
I offer you, Lady, a name not unknown--  
A fortune which worthless, without you, is grown--  
All my life at your feet I lay down--at your feet  
A heart which for you, and you only, can beat."

LUCILE.

That heart, Duke, that life--I respect both. The name  
And position you offer, and all that you claim  
In behalf of their nobler employment, I feel  
To deserve what, in turn, I now ask you--

LUVOIS.

Lucile!

LUCILE.

I ask you to leave me--

LUVOIS.

You do not reject?

LUCILE.

I ask you to leave me the time to reflect.

LUVOIS.

You ask me?

LUCILE.

--The time to reflect.

LUVOIS.

Say--One word!

May I hope?

The reply of Lucile was not heard  
By Lord Alfred; for just then she rose, and moved on.  
The Duke bow'd his lips o'er her hand, and was gone.

XX.

Not a sound save the birds in the bushes. And when

Alfred Vargrave reel'd forth to the sunlight again,  
He just saw the white robe of the woman recede  
As she entered the house.

Scarcely conscious indeed  
Of his steps, he too follow'd, and enter'd.

XXI.

He enter'd

Unnoticed; Lucile never stirr'd: so concentrated  
And wholly absorb'd in her thoughts she appear'd.  
Her back to the window was turn'd. As he near'd  
The sofa, her face from the glass was reflected.  
Her dark eyes were fix'd on the ground. Pale, dejected,  
And lost in profound meditation she seem'd.  
Softly, silently, over her droop'd shoulders stream'd  
The afternoon sunlight. The cry of alarm  
And surprise which escaped her, as now on her arm  
Alfred Vargrave let fall a hand icily cold  
And clammy as death, all too cruelly told  
How far he had been from her thoughts.

XXII.

All his cheek

Was disturb'd with the effort it cost him to speak.  
"It was not my fault. I have heard all," he said.  
"Now the letters--and farewell, Lucile! When you wed  
May--"

The sentence broke short, like a weapon that snaps  
When the weight of a man is upon it.

"Perhaps,"

Said Lucile (her sole answer reveal'd in the flush  
Of quick color which up to her brow seem'd to rush  
In reply to those few broken words), "this farewell  
Is our last, Alfred Vargrave, in life. Who can tell?  
Let us part without bitterness. Here are your letters.  
Be assured I retain you no more in my fetters!"--  
She laughed, as she said this, a little sad laugh,  
And stretched out her hand with the letters. And half  
Wroth to feel his wrath rise, and unable to trust  
His own powers of restraint, in his bosom he thrust  
The packet she gave, with a short angry sigh,  
Bow'd his head, and departed without a reply.

XXIII.

And Lucile was alone. And the men of the world  
Were gone back to the world. And the world's self was furl'd  
Far away from the heart of the woman. Her hand  
Droop'd, and from it, unloosed from their frail silken band,  
Fell those early love-letters, strewn, scatter'd, and shed  
At her feet--life's lost blossoms! Dejected, her head  
On her bosom was bow'd. Her gaze vaguely stray'd o'er  
Those strewn records of passionate moments no more.  
From each page to her sight leapt some words that belied  
The composure with which she that day had denied  
Every claim on her heart to those poor perish'd years.  
They avenged themselves now, and she burst into tears.

#### CANTO IV.

##### I.

#### LETTER FROM COUSIN JOHN TO COUSIN ALFRED.

"BIGORRE, THURSDAY.

"Time up, you rascal! Come back, or be hang'd.  
Matilda grows peevish. Her mother harangued  
For a whole hour this morning about you. The deuce!  
What on earth can I say to you?--nothing's of use.  
And the blame of the whole of your shocking behavior  
Falls on ME, sir! Come back,--do you hear?--or I leave your  
Affairs, and, abjure you forever. Come back  
To your anxious betroth'd; and perplexed  
"COUSIN JACK."

##### II.

Alfred needed, in truth, no entreaties from John  
To increase his impatience to fly from Luchon.  
All the place was now fraught with sensations of pain  
Which, whilst in it, he strove to escape from in vain.  
A wild instinct warn'd him to fly from a place  
Where he felt that some fatal event, swift of pace,  
Was approaching his life. In despite his endeavor  
To think of Matilda, her image forever  
Was effaced from his fancy by that of Lucile.  
From the ground which he stood on he felt himself reel.  
Scared, alarm'd by those feelings to which, on the day  
Just before, all his heart had so soon given way,  
When he caught, with a strange sense of fear, for assistance,  
And what was, till then, the great fact in existence,  
'Twas a phantom he grasp'd.

III.

Having sent for his guide,  
He order'd his horse, and determin'd to ride  
Back forthwith to Bigorre.

Then, the guide, who well knew  
Every haunt of those hills, said the wild lake of Oo  
Lay a league from Luchon; and suggested a track  
By the lake to Bigorre, which, transversing the back  
Of the mountain, avoided a circuit between  
Two long valleys; and thinking, "Perchance change of scene  
May create change of thought," Alfred Vargrave agreed,  
Mounted horse, and set forth to Bigorre at full speed.

IV.

His guide rode beside him.

The king of the guides!  
The gallant Bernard! ever boldly he rides,  
Ever gayly he sings! For to him, from of old,  
The hills have confided their secrets, and told  
Where the white partridge lies, and the cock o' the woods;  
Where the izard flits fine through the cold solitudes;  
Where the bear lurks perdu; and the lynx on his prey  
At nightfall descends, when the mountains are gray;  
Where the sassafras blooms, and the bluebell is born,  
And the wild rhododendron first reddens at morn;  
Where the source of the waters is fine as a thread;  
How the storm on the wild Maladetta is spread;  
Where the thunder is hoarded, the snows lie asleep,  
Whence the torrents are fed, and the cataracts leap;  
And, familiarly known in the hamlets, the vales  
Have whisper'd to him all their thousand love-tales;  
He has laugh'd with the girls, he has leap'd with the boys;  
Ever blithe, ever bold, ever boon, he enjoys  
An existence untroubled by envy or strife,  
While he feeds on the dews and the juices of life.  
And so lightly he sings, and so gayly he rides,  
For BERNARD LE SAUTEUR is the king of all guides!

V.

But Bernard found, that day, neither song nor love-tale,  
Nor adventure, nor laughter, nor legend avail  
To arouse from his deep and profound reverie  
Him that silent beside him rode fast as could be.

VI.

Ascending the mountain they slacken'd their pace,  
And the marvellous prospect each moment changed face.  
The breezy and pure inspirations of morn  
Breathed about them. The scarp'd ravaged mountains, all worn  
By the torrents, whose course they watch'd faintly meander,  
Were alive with the diamonded shy salamander.  
They paused o'er the bosom of purple abysses,  
And wound through a region of green wildernesses;  
The waters went whirling above and around,  
The forests hung heap'd in their shadows profound.  
Here the Larboust, and there Aventin, Castellon,  
Which the Demon of Tempest, descending upon,  
Had wasted with fire, and the peaceful Cazeaux  
They mark'd; and far down in the sunshine below,  
Half dipp'd in a valley of airiest blue,  
The white happy homes of the valley of Oo,  
Where the age is yet golden.

And high overhead

The wrecks of the combat of Titans were spread.  
Red granite, and quartz; in the alchemic sun,  
Fused their splendors of crimson and crystal in one;  
And deep in the moss gleam'd the delicate shells,  
And the dew linger'd fresh in the heavy harebells;  
The large violet burn'd; the campanula blue;  
And Autumn's own flower, the saffron, peer'd through  
The red-berried brambles and thick sassafras;  
And fragrant with thyme was the delicate grass;  
And high up, and higher, and highest of all,  
The secular phantom of snow!

O'er the wall

Of a gray sunless glen gaping drowsy below,  
That aerial spectre, reveal'd in the glow  
Of the great golden dawn, hovers faint on the eye  
And appears to grow in, and grow out of, the sky  
And plays with the fancy, and baffles the sight.  
Only reach'd by the vast rosy ripple of light,  
And the cool star of eve, the Imperial Thing,  
Half unreal, like some mythological king  
That dominates all in a fable of old,  
Takes command of a valley as fair to behold  
As aught in old fables; and, seen or unseen,  
Dwells aloof over all, in the vast and serene  
Sacred sky, where the footsteps of spirits are furl'd  
'Mid the clouds beyond which spreads the infinite world  
Of man's last aspirations, unfathom'd, untrod,  
Save by Even and Morn, and the angels of God.

VII.



Meanwhile, as they journey'd, that serpentine road,  
Now abruptly reversed, unexpectedly show'd  
A gay cavalcade some few feet in advance.  
Alfred Vargrave's heart beat; for he saw at a glance  
The slight form of Lucile in the midst. His next look  
Show'd him, joyously ambling beside her, the Duke  
The rest of the troop which had thus caught his ken  
He knew not, nor noticed them (women and men).  
They were laughing and talking together. Soon after  
His sudden appearance suspended their laughter.

VIII.

"You here! . . . I imagined you far on your way  
To Bigorre!" . . . said Lucile. "What has caused you to stay?"  
"I AM on my way to Bigorre," he replied,  
"But since MY way would seem to be YOURS, let me ride  
For one moment beside you." And then, with a stoop  
At her ear, . . . "and forgive me!"

IX.

By this time the troop  
Had regather'd its numbers.  
Lucile was as pale  
As the cloud 'neath their feet, on its way to the vale.  
The Duke had observed it, nor quitted her side,  
For even one moment, the whole of the ride.  
Alfred smiled, as he thought, "he is jealous of her!"  
And the thought of this jealousy added a spur  
To his firm resolution and effort to please.  
He talk'd much; was witty, and quite at his ease.

X.

After noontide, the clouds, which had traversed the east  
Half the day, gather'd closer, and rose and increased.  
The air changed and chill'd. As though out of the ground,  
There ran up the trees a confused hissing sound,  
And the wind rose. The guides sniff'd, like chamois, the air,  
And look'd at each other, and halted, and there  
Unbuckled the cloaks from the saddles. The white  
Aspens rustled, and turn'd up their frail leaves in fright.  
All announced the approach of the tempest.

Erelong,

Thick darkness descended the mountains among,  
And a vivid, vindictive, and serpentine flash  
Gored the darkness, and shore it across with a gash.  
The rain fell in large heavy drops. And anon  
Broke the thunder.

The horses took fright, every one.  
The Duke's in a moment was far out of sight.  
The guides whoop'd. The band was obliged to alight;  
And, dispersed up the perilous pathway, walk'd blind  
To the darkness before from the darkness behind.

XI.

And the Storm is abroad in the mountains!  
He fills  
The crouch'd hollows and all the oracular hills  
With dread voices of power. A roused million or more  
Of wild echoes reluctantly rise from their hoar  
Immemorial ambush, and roll in the wake  
Of the cloud, whose reflection leaves vivid the lake.  
And the wind, that wild robber, for plunder descends  
From invisible lands, o'er those black mountain ends;  
He howls as he hounds down his prey; and his lash  
Tears the hair of the timorous wan mountain-ash,  
That clings to the rocks, with her garments all torn,  
Like a woman in fear; then he blows his hoarse horn  
And is off, the fierce guide of destruction and terror,  
Up the desolate heights, 'mid an intricate error  
Of mountain and mist.

XII.

There is war in the skies!  
Lo! the black-winged legions of tempest arise  
O'er those sharp splinter'd rocks that are gleaming below  
In the soft light, so fair and so fatal, as though  
Some seraph burn'd through them, the thunderbolt searching  
Which the black cloud unbosom'd just now. Lo! the lurching  
And shivering pine-trees, like phantoms, that seem  
To waver above, in the dark; and yon stream,  
How it hurries and roars, on its way to the white  
And paralyzed lake there, appall'd at the sight  
of the things seen in heaven!

XIII.

Through the darkness and awe

That had gather'd around him, Lord Alfred now saw,  
Reveal'd in the fierce and evanishing glare  
Of the lightning that momentarily pulsed through the air  
A woman alone on a shelf of the hill,  
With her cheek coldly propp'd on her hand,--and as still  
As the rock that she sat on, which beetled above  
The black lake beneath her.

All terror, all love

Added speed to the instinct with which he rush'd on.  
For one moment the blue lightning swathed the whole stone  
In its lurid embrace: like the sleek dazzling snake  
That encircles a sorceress, charm'd for her sake  
And lull'd by her loveliness; fawning, it play'd  
And caressingly twined round the feet and the head  
Of the woman who sat there, undaunted and calm  
As the soul of that solitude, listing the psalm  
Of the plangent and laboring tempests roll slow  
From the caldron of midnight and vapor below.  
Next moment from bastion to bastion, all round,  
Of the siege-circled mountains, there tumbled the sound  
Of the battering thunder's indefinite peal,  
And Lord Alfred had sprung to the feet of Lucile.

XIV.

She started. Once more, with its flickering wand,  
The lightning approach'd her. In terror, her hand  
Alfred Vargrave had seized within his; and he felt  
The light fingers, that coldly and lingeringly dwelt  
In the grasp of his own, tremble faintly.

"See! see!

Where the whirlwind hath stricken and strangled yon tree!"  
She exclaim'd, . . . "like the passion that brings on its breath,  
To the being it embraces, destruction and death!  
Alfred Vargrave, the lightning is round you!"

"Lucile!

I hear--I see--naught but yourself. I can feel  
Nothing here but your presence. My pride fights in vain  
With the truth that leaps from me. We two meet again  
'Neath yon terrible heaven that is watching above  
To avenge if I lie when I swear that I love,--  
And beneath yonder terrible heaven, at your feet,  
I humble my head and my heart. I entreat  
Your pardon, Lucile, for the past--I implore  
For the future your mercy--implore it with more  
Of passion than prayer ever breathed. By the power  
Which invisibly touches us both in this hour,  
By the rights I have o'er you, Lucile, I demand--"  
"The rights!" . . . said Lucile, and drew from him her hand.

"Yes, the rights! for what greater to man may belong

Than the right to repair in the future the wrong  
To the past? and the wrong I have done you, of yore,  
Hath bequeath'd to me all the sad right to restore,  
To retrieve, to amend! I, who injured your life,  
Urge the right to repair it, Lucile! Be my wife,  
My guide, my good angel, my all upon earth,  
And accept, for the sake of what yet may give worth  
To my life, its contrition!"

XV.

He paused, for there came  
O'er the cheek of Lucile a swift flush like the flame  
That illumined at moments the darkness o'erhead.  
With a voice faint and marr'd by emotion, she said,  
"And your pledge to another?"

XVI.

"Hush, hush!" he exclaim'd,  
"My honor will live where my love lives, unshamed.  
'Twere poor honor indeed, to another to give  
That life of which YOU keep the heart. Could I live  
In the light of those young eyes, suppressing a lie?  
Alas, no! YOUR hand holds my whole destiny.  
I can never recall what my lips have avow'd;  
In your love lies whatever can render me proud.  
For the great crime of all my existence hath been  
To have known you in vain. And the duty best seen,  
And most hallow'd--the duty most sacred and sweet,  
Is that which hath led me, Lucile, to your feet.  
O speak! and restore me the blessing I lost  
When I lost you--my pearl of all pearls beyond cost!  
And restore to your own life its youth, and restore  
The vision, the rapture, the passion of yore!  
Ere our brows had been dimm'd in the dust of the world,  
When our souls their white wings yet exulting unfurl'd!  
For your eyes rest no more on the unquiet man,  
The wild star of whose course its pale orbit outran,  
Whom the formless indefinite future of youth,  
With its lying allurements, distracted. In truth  
I have wearily wander'd the world, and I feel  
That the least of your lovely regards, O Lucile,  
Is worth all the world can afford, and the dream  
Which, though follow'd forever, forever doth seem  
As fleeting, and distant, and dim, as of yore  
When it brooded in twilight, at dawn, on the shore  
Of life's untraversed ocean! I know the sole path  
To repose, which my desolate destiny hath,

Is the path by whose course to your feet I return.  
And who else, O Lucile, will so truly discern,  
And so deeply revere, all the passionate strength,  
The sublimity in you, as he whom at length  
These have saved from himself, for the truth they reveal  
To his worship?"

XVII.

She spoke not; but Alfred could feel  
The light hand and arm, that upon him reposed,  
Thrill and tremble. Those dark eyes of hers were half closed.  
But, under their languid mysterious fringe,  
A passionate softness was beaming. One tinge  
Of faint inward fire flush'd transparently through  
The delicate, pallid, and pure olive hue  
Of the cheek, half averted and droop'd. The rich bosom  
Heaved, as when in the heart of a ruffled rose-blossom  
A bee is imprison'd and struggles.

XVIII.

Meanwhile

The sun, in his setting, sent up the last smile  
Of his power, to baffle the storm. And, behold!  
O'er the mountains embattled, his armies, all gold,  
Rose and rested: while far up the dim airy crags,  
Its artillery silenced, its banners in rags,  
The rear of the tempest its sullen retreat  
Drew off slowly, receding in silence, to meet  
The powers of the night, which, now gathering afar,  
Had already sent forward one bright, signal star  
The curls of her soft and luxuriant hair,  
From the dark riding-hat, which Lucile used to wear,  
Had escaped; and Lord Alfred now cover'd with kisses  
The redolent warmth of those long falling tresses.  
Neither he, nor Lucile, felt the rain, which not yet  
Had ceased falling around them; when, splash'd, drench'd, and wet,  
The Duc de Luvois down the rough mountain course  
Approached them as fast as the road, and his horse,  
Which was limping, would suffer. The beast had just now  
Lost his footing, and over the perilous brow  
Of the storm-haunted mountain his master had thrown;  
But the Duke, who was agile, had leap'd to a stone,  
And the horse, being bred to the instinct which fills  
The breast of the wild mountaineer in these hills,  
Had scrambled again to his feet; and now master  
And horse bore about them the signs of disaster,  
As they heavily footed their way through the mist,

The horse with his shoulder, the Duke with his wrist,  
Bruised and bleeding.

XIX.

    If ever your feet, like my own,  
O reader, have traversed these mountains alone,  
Have you felt your identity shrink and contract  
At the sound of the distant and dim cataract,  
In the presence of nature's immensities? Say,  
Have you hung o'er the torrent, bedew'd with its spray,  
And, leaving the rock-way, contorted and roll'd,  
Like a huge couchant Typhon, fold heaped over fold,  
Track'd the summits from which every step that you tread  
Rolls the loose stones, with thunder below, to the bed  
Of invisible waters, whose mistical sound  
Fills with awful suggestions the dizzy profound?  
And, laboring onwards, at last through a break  
In the walls of the world, burst at once on the lake?  
If you have, this description I might have withheld.  
You remember how strangely your bosom has swell'd  
At the vision reveal'd. On the overwork'd soil  
Of this planet, enjoyment is sharpen'd by toil;  
And one seems, by the pain of ascending the height,  
To have conquer'd a claim of that wonderful sight.

XX.

Hail, virginal daughter of cold Espingo!  
Hail, Naiad, whose realm is the cloud and the snow;  
For o'er thee the angels have whiten'd their wings,  
And the thirst of the seraphs is quench'd at thy springs.  
What hand hath, in heaven, upheld thine expanse?  
When the breath of creation first fashion'd fair France,  
Did the Spirit of Ill, in his downthrow appalling,  
Bruise the world, and thus hollow thy basin while falling?  
Ere the mammoth was born hath some monster unnamed  
The base of thy mountainous pedestal framed?  
And later, when Power to Beauty was wed,  
Did some delicate fairy embroider thy bed  
With the fragile valerian and wild columbine?

XXI.

But thy secret thou keepest, and I will keep mine;  
For once gazing on thee, it flash'd on my soul,  
All that secret! I saw in a vision the whole

Vast design of the ages; what was and shall be!  
Hands unseen raised the veil of a great mystery  
For one moment. I saw, and I heard; and my heart  
Bore witness within me to infinite art,  
In infinite power proving infinite love;  
Caught the great choral chant, mark'd the dread pageant move--  
The divine Whence and Whither of life! But, O daughter  
Of Oo, not more safe in the deep silent water  
Is thy secret, than mine in my heart. Even so.  
What I then saw and heard, the world never shall know.

XXII.

The dimness of eve o'er the valleys had closed,  
The rain had ceased falling, the mountains reposed.  
The stars had enkindled in luminous courses  
Their slow-sliding lamps, when, remounting their horses,  
The riders retraversed that mighty serration  
Of rock-work. Thus left to its own desolation,  
The lake, from whose glimmering limits the last  
Transient pomp of the pageants of sunset had pass'd,  
Drew into its bosom the darkness, and only  
Admitted within it one image--a lonely  
And tremulous phantom of flickering light  
That follow'd the mystical moon through the night.

XXIII.

It was late when o'er Luchon at last they descended.  
To her chalet, in silence, Lord Alfred attended  
Lucile. As they parted, she whispered him low,  
"You have made to me, Alfred, an offer I know  
All the worth of, believe me. I cannot reply  
Without time for reflection. Good night!--not good by."  
"Alas! 'tis the very same answer you made  
To the Duc de Luvois but a day since," he said.  
"No, Alfred! the very same, no," she replied.  
Her voice shook. "If you love me, obey me. Abide  
My answer to-morrow."

XXIV.

Alas, Cousin Jack!  
You Cassandra in breeches and boots! turn your back  
To the ruins of Troy. Prophet, seek not for glory  
Amongst thine own people.  
I follow my story.

CANTO V.

I.

Up!--forth again, Pegasus!--"Many's the slip,"  
Hath the proverb well said, "'twixt the cup and the lip!"  
How blest should we be, have I often conceived,  
Had we really achieved what we nearly achieved!  
We but catch at the skirts of the thing we would be,  
And fall back on the lap of a false destiny.  
So it will be, so has been, since this world began!  
And the happiest, noblest, and best part of man  
Is the part which he never hath fully play'd out:  
For the first and last word in life's volume is--

Doubt.

The face of the most fair to our vision allow'd  
Is the face we encounter and lose in the crowd.  
The thought that most thrills our existence is one  
Which, before we can frame it in language, is gone.  
O Horace! the rustic still rests by the river,  
But the river flows on, and flows past him forever!  
Who can sit down, and say . . . "What I will be, I will"?  
Who stand up, and affirm . . . "What I was, I am still"?  
Who is that must not, if question'd, say . . . . .

"What

I would have remain'd or become, I am not"?  
We are ever behind, or beyond, or beside  
Our intrinsic existence. Forever at hide  
And seek with our souls. Not in Hades alone  
Doth Sisyphus roll, ever frustrate, the stone,  
Do the Danaids ply, ever vainly, the sieve.  
Tasks as futile does earth to its denizens give.  
Yet there's none so unhappy, but what he hath been  
Just about to be happy, at some time, I ween;  
And none so beguiled and defrauded by chance,  
But what once in his life, some minute circumstance  
Would have fully sufficed to secure him the bliss  
Which, missing it then, he forever must miss.  
And to most of us, ere we go down to the grave,  
Life, relenting, accords the good gift we would have;  
But, as though by some strange imperfection in fate,  
The good gift, when it comes, comes a moment too late.  
The Future's great veil our breath fitfully flaps,  
And behind it broods ever the mighty Perhaps.  
Yet! there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip;  
But while o'er the brim of life's beaker I dip,  
Though the cup may next moment be shatter'd, the wine  
Spilt, one deep health I'll pledge, and that health shall be thine,



O being of beauty and bliss! seen and known  
In the deeps of my soul, and possess'd there alone!  
My days know thee not; and my lips name thee never.  
Thy place in my poor life is vacant forever.  
We have met: we have parted. No more is recorded  
In my annals on earth. This alone was afforded  
To the man whom men know me, or deem me, to be.  
But, far down, in the depth of my life's mystery,  
(Like the siren that under the deep ocean dwells,  
Whom the wind as it wails, and the wave as it swells,  
Cannot stir in the calm of her coralline halls,  
'Mid the world's adamantine and dim pedestals;  
At whose feet sit the sylphs and sea fairies; for whom  
The almondine glimmers, the soft samphires bloom)--  
Thou abidest and reignest forever, O Queen  
Of that better world which thou swayest unseen!  
My one perfect mistress! my all things in all!  
Thee by no vulgar name known to men do I call;  
For the Seraphs have named thee to me in my sleep,  
And that name is a secret I sacredly keep.  
But, wherever this nature of mine is most fair,  
And its thoughts are the purest--belov'd, thou art there!  
And whatever is noblest in aught that I do,  
Is done to exalt and to worship thee too.  
The world gave thee not to me, no! and the world  
Cannot take thee away from me now. I have furl'd  
The wings of my spirit above thy bright head;  
At thy feet are my soul's immortalities spread.  
Thou mightest have been to me much. Thou art more.  
And in silence I worship, in darkness adore.  
If life be not that which without us we find--  
Chance, accident, merely--but rather the mind,  
And the soul which, within us, surviveth these things,  
If our real existence have truly its springs  
Less in that which we do than in that which we feel,  
Not in vain do I worship, not hopeless I kneel!  
For then, though I name thee not mistress or wife,  
Thou art mine--and mine only,--O life of my life!  
And though many's the slip 'twixt the cup and the lip,  
Yet while o'er the brim of life's beaker I dip,  
While there's life on the lip, while there's warmth in the wine,  
One deep health I'll pledge, and that health shall be thine!

II.

This world, on whose peaceable breast we repose  
Unconvulsed by alarm, once confused in the throes  
Of a tumult divine, sea and land, moist and dry,  
And in fiery fusion commix'd earth and sky.  
Time cool'd it, and calm'd it, and taught it to go  
The round of its orbit in peace, long ago.

The wind changeth and whirleth continually:  
All the rivers run down and run into the sea:  
The wind whirleth about, and is presently still'd:  
All the rivers run down, yet the sea is not fill'd:  
The sun goeth forth from his chambers; the sun  
Ariseth, and lo! he descendeth anon.  
All returns to its place. Use and Habit are powers  
Far stronger than Passion, in this world of ours.  
The great laws of life readjust their infraction,  
And to every emotion appoint a reaction.

III.

Alfred Vargrave had time, after leaving Lucile,  
To review the rash step he had taken, and feel  
What the world would have call'd "his erroneous position."  
Thought obtruded its claim, and enforced recognition:  
Like a creditor who, when the gloss is worn out  
On the coat which we once wore with pleasure, no doubt,  
Sends us in his account for the garment we bought.  
Ev'ry spendthrift to passion is debtor to thought.

IV.

He felt ill at ease with himself. He could feel  
Little doubt what the answer would be from Lucile.  
Her eyes, when they parted--her voice, when they met,  
Still enraptured his heart, which they haunted. And yet,  
Though, exulting, he deem'd himself loved, where he loved,  
Through his mind a vague self-accusation there moved.  
O'er his fancy, when fancy was fairest, would rise  
The infantine face of Matilda, with eyes  
So sad, so reproachful, so cruelly kind,  
That his heart fail'd within him. In vain did he find  
A thousand just reasons for what he had done;  
The vision that troubled him would not be gone.  
In vain did he say to himself, and with truth,  
"Matilda has beauty, and fortune, and youth;  
And her heart is too young to have deeply involved  
All its hopes in the tie which must now be dissolved.  
'Twere a false sense of honor in me to suppress  
The sad truth which I owe it to her to confess.  
And what reason have I to presume this poor life  
Of my own, with its languid and frivolous strife,  
And without what alone might endear it to her,  
Were a boon all so precious, indeed, to confer,  
Its withdrawal can wrong her?

It is not as though

I were bound to some poor village maiden, I know,

Unto whose simple heart mine were all upon earth,  
Or to whose simple fortunes mine own could give worth.  
Matilda, in all the world's gifts, will not miss  
Aught that I could procure her. 'Tis best as it is!"

V.

In vain did he say to himself, "When I came  
To this fatal spot, I had nothing to blame  
Or reproach myself for, in the thoughts of my heart.  
I could not foresee that its pulses would start  
Into such strange emotion on seeing once more  
A woman I left with indifference before.  
I believed, and with honest conviction believed,  
In my love for Matilda. I never conceived  
That another could shake it. I deem'd I had done  
With the wild heart of youth, and looked hopefully on  
To the soberer manhood, the worthier life,  
Which I sought in the love that I vow'd to my wife.  
Poor child! she shall learn the whole truth. She shall know  
What I knew not myself but a few days ago.  
The world will console her--her pride will support--  
Her youth will renew its emotions. In short,  
There is nothing in me that Matilda will miss  
When once we have parted. 'Tis best as it is!"

VI.

But in vain did he reason and argue. Alas!  
He yet felt unconvinced that 'T'WAS best as it was.  
Out of reach of all reason, forever would rise  
That infantine face of Matilda, with eyes  
So sad, so reproachful, so cruelly kind,  
That they harrow'd his heart and distracted his mind.

VII.

And then, when he turned from these thoughts to Lucile,  
Though his heart rose enraptured he could not but feel  
A vague sense of awe of her nature. Behind  
All the beauty of heart, and the graces of mind,  
Which he saw and revered in her, something unknown  
And unseen in that nature still troubled his own.  
He felt that Lucile penetrated and prized  
Whatever was noblest and best, though disguised,  
In himself; but he did not feel sure that he knew,  
Or completely possess'd, what, half hidden from view,

Remained lofty and lonely in HER.

Then, her life,

So untamed and so free! would she yield as a wife  
Independence, long claimed as a woman? Her name  
So link'd by the world with that spurious fame  
Which the beauty and wit of a woman assert,  
In some measure, alas! to her own loss and hurt  
In the serious thoughts of a man! . . . This reflection  
O'er the love which he felt cast a shade of dejection,  
From which he forever escaped to the thought  
Doubt could reach not . . . "I love her, and all else is naught!"

VIII.

His hand trembled strangely in breaking the seal  
Of the letter which reach'd him at last from Lucile.  
At the sight of the very first words that he read,  
That letter dropp'd down from his hand like the dead  
Leaf in autumn, that, falling, leaves naked and bare  
A desolate tree in a wide wintry air.  
He pass'd his hand hurriedly over his eyes,  
Bewilder'd, incredulous. Angry surprise  
And dismay, in one sharp moan, broke from him. Anon  
He picked up the page, and read rapidly on.

IX.

THE COMTESSE DE NEVERS TO LORD ALFRED VARGRAVE:

"No, Alfred!

If over the present, when last  
We two met, rose the glamour and mist of the past,  
It hath now rolled away, and our two paths are plain,  
And those two paths divide us.

"That hand which again

Mine one moment has clasp'd as the hand of a brother,  
That hand and your honor are pledged to another!  
Forgive, Alfred Vargrave, forgive me, if yet  
For that moment (now past!) I have made you forget  
What was due to yourself and that other one. Yes,  
Mine the fault, and be mine the repentance. Not less,  
In now owning this fault, Alfred, let me own, too,  
I foresaw not the sorrow involved in it.

"True,

That meeting, which hath been so fatal, I sought,  
I alone! But oh! deem not it was with the thought  
Of your heart to regain, or the past to awaken.  
No! believe me, it was with the firm and unshaken  
Conviction, at least, that our meeting would be

Without peril to YOU, although haply to me  
The salvation of all my existence.

"I own,

When the rumor first reach'd me, which lightly made known  
To the world your engagement, my heart and my mind  
Suffer'd torture intense. It was cruel to find  
That so much of the life of my life, half unknown  
To myself, had been silently settled on one  
Upon whom but to think it would soon be a crime.  
Then I said to myself, 'From the thralldom which time  
Hath not weaken'd there rests but one hope of escape.  
That image which Fancy seems ever to shape  
From the solitude left round the ruins of yore,  
Is a phantom. The Being I loved is no more.  
What I hear in the silence, and see in the lone  
Void of life, is the young hero born of my own  
Perish'd youth: and his image, serene and sublime  
In my heart rests unconscious of change and of time,  
Could I see it but once more, as time and as change  
Have made it, a thing unfamiliar and strange,  
See, indeed, that the Being I loved in my youth  
Is no more, and what rests now is only, in truth,  
The hard pupil of life and the world: then, oh, then,  
I should wake from a dream, and my life be again  
Reconciled to the world; and, released from regret,  
Take the lot fate accords to my choice.'

"So we met.

But the danger I did not foresee has occur'd:  
The danger, alas, to yourself! I have err'd.  
But happy for both that this error hath been  
Discover'd as soon as the danger was seen!  
We meet, Alfred Vargrave, no more. I, indeed,  
Shall be far from Luchon when this letter you read.  
My course is decided; my path I discern:  
Doubt is over; my future is fix'd now.

"Return,

O return to the young living love! Whence, alas!  
If, one moment, you wander'd, think only it was  
More deeply to bury the past love.

"And, oh!

Believe, Alfred Vargrave, that I, where I go  
On my far distant pathway through life, shall rejoice  
To treasure in memory all that your voice  
Has avow'd to me, all in which others have clothed  
To my fancy with beauty and worth your betrothed!  
In the fair morning light, in the orient dew  
Of that young life, now yours, can you fail to renew  
All the noble and pure aspirations, the truth,  
The freshness, the faith, of your own earnest youth?  
Yes! YOU will be happy. I, too, in the bliss  
I foresee for you, I shall be happy. And this  
Proves me worthy your friendship. And so--let it prove  
That I cannot--I do not respond to your love.

Yes, indeed! be convinced that I could not (no, no,  
Never, never!) have render'd you happy. And so,  
Rest assured that, if false to the vows you have plighted,  
You would have endured, when the first brief, excited  
Emotion was o'er, not alone the remorse  
Of honor, but also (to render it worse)  
Disappointed affection.

"Yes, Alfred; you start?

But think! if the world was too much in your heart,  
And too little in mine, when we parted ten years  
Ere this last fatal meeting, that time (ay, and tears!)  
Have but deepen'd the old demarcations which then  
Placed our natures asunder; and we two again,  
As we then were, would still have been strangely at strife.  
In that self-independence which is to my life  
Its necessity now, as it once was its pride,  
Had our course through the world been henceforth side by side,  
I should have revolted forever, and shock'd  
Your respect for the world's plausibilities, mock'd,  
Without meaning to do so, and outraged, all those  
Social creeds which you live by.

"Oh! do not suppose

That I blame you. Perhaps it is you that are right.  
Best, then, all as it is!

"Deem these words life's Good-night

To the hope of a moment: no more! If there fell  
Any tear on this page, 'twas a friend's.

"So farewell

To the past--and to you, Alfred Vargrave.

"LUCILE."

X.

So ended that letter.

The room seem'd to reel

Round and round in the mist that was scorching his eyes  
With a fiery dew. Grief, resentment, surprise,  
Half choked him; each word he had read, as it smote  
Down some hope, rose and grasped like a hand at his throat,  
To stifle and strangle him.

Gasping already

For relief from himself, with a footstep unsteady,  
He pass'd from his chamber. He felt both oppress'd  
And excited. The letter he thrust in his breast,  
And, in search of fresh air and of solitude, pass'd  
The long lime-trees of Luchon. His footsteps at last  
Reach'd a bare narrow heath by the skirts of a wood:  
It was sombre and silent, and suited his mood.  
By a mineral spring, long unused, now unknown,  
Stood a small ruin'd abbey. He reach'd it, sat down  
On a fragment of stone, 'mid the wild weed and thistle,

And read over again that perplexing epistle.

XI.

In re-reading that letter, there roll'd from his mind  
The raw mist of resentment which first made him blind  
To the pathos breath'd through it. Tears rose in his eyes,  
And a hope sweet and strange in his heart seem'd to rise.  
The truth which he saw not the first time he read  
That letter, he now saw--that each word betray'd  
The love which the writer had sought to conceal.  
His love was received not, he could not but feel,  
For one reason alone,--that his love was not free.  
True! free yet he was not: but could he not be  
Free erelong, free as air to revoke that farewell,  
And to sanction his own hopes? he had but to tell  
The truth to Matilda, and she were the first  
To release him: he had but to wait at the worst.  
Matilda's relations would probably snatch  
Any pretext, with pleasure, to break off a match  
In which they had yielded, alone at the whim  
Of their spoil'd child, a languid approval to him.  
She herself, careless child! was her love for him aught  
Save the first joyous fancy succeeding the thought  
She last gave to her doll? was she able to feel  
Such a love as the love he divined in Lucile?  
He would seek her, obtain his release, and, oh! then  
He had but to fly to Lucile, and again  
Claim the love which his heart would be free to command.  
But to press on Lucile any claim to her hand,  
Or even to seek, or to see, her before  
He could say, "I am free! free, Lucile, to implore  
That great blessing on life you alone can confer,"  
'Twere dishonor in him, 'twould be insult to her.  
Thus still with the letter outspread on his knee  
He follow'd so fondly his own revery,  
That he felt not the angry regard of a man  
Fix'd upon him; he saw not a face stern and wan  
Turn'd towards him; he heard not a footstep that pass'd  
And repass'd the lone spot where he stood, till at last  
A hoarse voice aroused him.

                    He look'd up and saw,  
On the bare heath before him, the Duc de Luvois.

XII.

With aggressive ironical tones, and a look  
Of concentrated insolent challenge, the Duke  
Address'd to Lord Alfred some sneering allusion

To "the doubtless sublime reveries his intrusion  
Had, he fear'd, interrupted. Milord would do better,  
He fancied, however, to fold up a letter  
The writing of which was too well known, in fact,  
His remark as he pass'd to have failed to attract."

XIII.

It was obvious to Alfred the Frenchman was bent  
Upon picking a quarrel! and doubtless 'twas meant  
From HIM to provoke it by sneers such as these.  
A moment sufficed his quick instinct to seize  
The position. He felt that he could not expose  
His own name, or Lucile's, or Matilda's, to those  
Idle tongues that would bring down upon him the ban  
Of the world, if he now were to fight with this man.  
And indeed, when he look'd in the Duke's haggard face,  
He was pain'd by the change there he could not but trace.  
And he almost felt pity.

He therefore put by  
Each remark from the Duke with some careless reply,  
And coldly, but courteously, waving away  
The ill-humor the Duke seem'd resolved to display,  
Rose, and turn'd, with a stern salutation, aside.

XIV.

Then the Duke put himself in the path, made one stride  
In advance, raised a hand, fix'd upon him his eyes,  
And said . . .

"Hold, Lord Alfred! Away with disguise!  
I will own that I sought you, a moment ago,  
To fix on you a quarrel. I still can do so  
Upon any excuse. I prefer to be frank.  
I admit not a rival in fortune or rank  
To the hand of a woman, whatever be hers  
Or her suitor's. I love the Comtesse de Nevers.  
I believed, ere you cross'd me, and still have the right  
To believe, that she would have been mine. To her sight  
You return, and the woman is suddenly changed.  
You step in between us: her heart is estranged.  
You! who now are betrothed to another, I know:  
You! whose name with Lucile's nearly ten years ago  
Was coupled by ties which you broke: you! the man  
I reproach'd on the day our acquaintance began.  
You! that left her so lightly,--I cannot believe  
That you love, as I love, her; nor can I conceive  
You, indeed, have the right so to love her.

Milord,



I will not thus tamely concede at your word,  
What, a few days ago, I believed to be mine!  
I shall yet persevere: I shall yet be, in fine,  
A rival you dare not despise. It is plain  
That to settle this contest there can but remain  
One way--need I say what it is?"

XV.

Not unmoved

With regretful respect for the earnestness proved  
By the speech he had heard, Alfred Vargrave replied  
In words which he trusted might yet turn aside  
The quarrel from which he felt bound to abstain,  
And, with stately urbanity, strove to explain  
To the Duke that he too (a fair rival at worst!)  
Had not been accepted.

XVI.

"Accepted! say first  
Are you free to have offer'd?"  
Lord Alfred was mute.

XVII.

"Ah, you dare not reply!" cried the Duke. "Why dispute,  
Why palter with me? You are silent! and why?  
Because, in your conscience, you cannot deny  
'Twas from vanity, wanton and cruel withal,  
And the wish an ascendancy lost to recall,  
That you stepp'd in between me and her. If, milord,  
You be really sincere, I ask only one word.  
Say at once you renounce her. At once, on my part,  
I will ask your forgiveness with all truth of heart,  
And there CAN be no quarrel between us. Say on!"  
Lord Alfred grew gall'd and impatient. This tone  
Roused a strong irritation he could not repress.  
"You have not the right, sir," he said, "and still less  
The power, to make terms and conditions with me.  
I refuse to reply."

XVIII.

As diviners may see



XXI.

It was now Alfred's turn to feel roused and enraged.  
But Lucile to himself was not pledged or engaged  
By aught that could sanction resentment. He said  
Not a word, but turn'd round, took the letter, and read . . .

THE COMTESSE DE NEVERS TO THE DUC DE LUVOIS.

"SAINT SAVIOUR.

"Your letter, which follow'd me here, makes me stay  
Till I see you again. With no moment's delay  
I entreat, I conjure you, by all that you feel  
Or profess, to come to me directly.

"LUCILE."

XXII.

"Your letter!" He then had been writing to her!  
Coldly shrugging his shoulders, Lord Alfred said, "Sir,  
Do not let me detain you!"  
The Duke smiled and bow'd;  
Placed the note in his bosom; address'd, half aloud,  
A few words to the messenger, . . . "Say your despatch  
Will be answer'd ere nightfall;" then glanced at his watch,  
And turn'd back to the Baths.

XXIII.

Alfred Vargrave stood still,  
Torn, distracted in heart, and divided in will.  
He turn'd to Lucile's farewell letter to him.  
And read over her words; rising tears made them dim:  
"Doubt is over; my future is fix'd now," they said.  
"My course is decided." Her course? what! to wed  
With this insolent rival! With that thought there shot  
Through his heart an acute jealous anguish. But not  
Even thus could his clear worldly sense quite excuse  
Those strange words to the Duke. She was free to refuse  
Himself, free the Duke to accept, it was true:  
Even then, though, this eager and strange rendezvous,  
How imprudent! To some unfrequented lone inn,  
And so late (for the night was about to begin)--  
She, companionless there!--had she bidden that man?  
A fear, vague, and formless, and horrible, ran

Through his heart.

XXIV.

At that moment he look'd up, and saw,  
Riding fast through the forest, the Duc de Luvois,  
Who waved his hand to him, and sped out of sight.  
The day was descending. He felt 'twould be night  
Ere that man reached Saint Saviour.

XXV.

He walk'd on, but not  
Back toward Luchon: he walk'd on, but knew not in what  
Direction, nor yet with what object, indeed,  
He was walking, but still he walk'd on without heed.

XXVI.

The day had been sullen; but, towards his decline,  
The sun sent a stream of wild light up the pine.  
Darkly denting the red light reveal'd at its back,  
The old ruin'd abbey rose roofless and black.  
The spring that yet oozed through the moss-paven floor  
Had suggested, no doubt, to the monks there, of yore,  
The sight of that refuge where back to its God  
How many a heart, now at rest 'neath the sod,  
Had borne from the world all the same wild unrest  
That now prey'd on his own!

XXVII.

By the thoughts in his breast  
With varying impulse divided and torn,  
He traversed the scant heath, and reach'd the forlorn  
Autumn woodland, in which but a short while ago  
He had seen the Duke rapidly enter; and so  
He too enter'd. The light waned around him, and pass'd  
Into darkness. The wrathful, red Occident cast  
One glare of vindictive inquiry behind,  
As the last light of day from the high wood declined,  
And the great forest sigh'd its farewell to the beam,  
And far off on the stillness the voice of the stream  
Fell faintly.

XXVIII.

O Nature, how fair is thy face,  
And how light is thy heart, and how friendless thy grace!  
Thou false mistress of man! thou dost sport with him lightly  
In his hours of ease and enjoyment; and brightly  
Dost thou smile to his smile; to his joys thou inclinest,  
But his sorrows, thou knowest them not, nor divinest.  
While he woos, thou art wanton; thou lettest him love thee;  
But thou art not his friend, for his grief cannot move thee;  
And at last, when he sickens and dies, what dost thou?  
All as gay are thy garments, as careless thy brow,  
And thou laughest and toyest with any new comer,  
Not a tear more for winter, a smile less for summer!  
Hast thou never an anguish to heave the heart under  
That fair breast of thine, O thou feminine wonder!  
For all those--the young, and the fair, and the strong,  
Who have loved thee, and lived with thee gayly and long,  
And who now on thy bosom lie dead? and their deeds  
And their days are forgotten! O hast thou no weeds  
And not one year of mourning,--one out of the many  
That deck thy new bridals forever,--nor any  
Regrets for thy lost loves, conceal'd from the new,  
O thou widow of earth's generations? Go to!  
If the sea and the night wind know aught of these things,  
They do not reveal it. We are not thy kings.

CANTO VI.

I.

"The huntsman has ridden too far on the chase,  
And eldrich, and eerie, and strange is the place!  
The castle betokens a date long gone by.  
He crosses the courtyard with curious eye:  
He wanders from chamber to chamber, and yet  
From strangeness to strangeness his footsteps are set;  
And the whole place grows wilder and wilder, and less  
Like aught seen before. Each in obsolete dress,  
Strange portraits regard him with looks of surprise,  
Strange forms from the arras start forth to his eyes;  
Strange epigraphs, blazon'd, burn out of the wall:  
The spell of a wizard is over it all.  
In her chamber, enchanted, the Princess is sleeping  
The sleep which for centuries she has been keeping.  
If she smile in her sleep, it must be to some lover  
Whose lost golden locks the long grasses now cover:

If she moan in her dream, it must be to deplore  
Some grief which the world cares to hear of no more.  
But how fair is her forehead, how calm seems her cheek!  
And how sweet must that voice be, if once she would speak!  
He looks and he loves her; but knows he (not he!)  
The clew to unravel this old mystery?  
And he stoops to those shut lips. The shapes on the wall,  
The mute men in armor around him, and all  
The weird figures frown, as though striving to say,  
'Halt! invade not the Past, reckless child of Today!  
And give not, O madman! the heart in thy breast  
To a phantom, the soul of whose sense is possess'd  
By an Age not thine own!'

"But unconscious is he,  
And he heeds not the warning, he cares not to see  
Aught but ONE form before him!

"Rash, wild words are o'er,  
And the vision is vanish'd from sight evermore!  
And the gray morning sees, as it drearily moves  
O'er a land long deserted, a madman that roves  
Through a ruin, and seeks to recapture a dream.  
Lost to life and its uses, withdrawn from the scheme  
Of man's waking existence, he wanders apart."  
And this is an old fairy-tale of the heart.  
It is told in all lands, in a different tongue;  
Told with tears by the old, heard with smiles by the young.  
And the tale to each heart unto which it is known  
Has a different sense. It has puzzled my own.

II.

Eugene de Luvois was a man who, in part  
From strong physical health, and that vigor of heart  
Which physical health gives, and partly, perchance,  
From a generous vanity native to France,  
With the heart of a hunter, whatever the quarry,  
Pursued it, too hotly impatient to tarry  
Or turn, till he took it. His trophies were trifles:  
But trifler he was not. When rose-leaves it rifles,  
No less than when oak-trees it ruins, the wind  
Its pleasure pursues with impetuous mind.  
Both Eugene de Luvois and Lord Alfred had been  
Men of pleasure: but men's pleasant vices, which, seen  
Floating faint in the sunshine of Alfred's soft mood,  
Seem'd amiable foibles, by Luvois pursued  
With impetuous passion, seemed semi-Satanic.  
Half pleased you see brooks play with pebbles; in panic  
You watch them whirl'd down by the torrent.

In truth,  
To the sacred political creed of his youth  
The century which he was born to denied

All realization. Its generous pride  
To degenerate protest on all things was sunk;  
Its principles each to a prejudice shrunk.  
Down the path of a life that led nowhere he trod,  
Where his whims were his guides, and his will was his god,  
And his pastime his purpose.

From boyhood possess'd  
Of inherited wealth, he had learned to invest  
Both his wealth and those passions wealth frees from the cage  
Which penury locks, in each vice of an age  
All the virtues of which, by the creed he revered,  
Were to him illegitimate.

Thus, he appear'd  
To the world what the world chose to have him appear,--  
The frivolous tyrant of Fashion, a mere  
Reformer in coats, cards, and carriages! Still  
'Twas the vigor of nature, and tension of will,  
That found for the first time--perhaps for the last--  
In Lucile what they lacked yet to free from the Past,  
Force, and faith, in the Future.

And so, in his mind,  
To the anguish of losing the woman was join'd  
The terror of missing his life's destination,  
Which in her had its mystical representation.

III.

And truly, the thought of it, scaring him, pass'd  
O'er his heart, while he now through the twilight rode fast  
As a shade from the wing of some great bird obscene  
In a wide silent land may be suddenly seen,  
Darkening over the sands, where it startles and scares  
Some traveller stray'd in the waste unawares,  
So that thought more than once darken'd over his heart  
For a moment, and rapidly seem'd to depart.  
Fast and furious he rode through the thickets which rose  
Up the shaggy hillside: and the quarrelling crows  
Clang'd above him, and clustering down the dim air  
Dropp'd into the dark woods. By fits here and there  
Shepherd fires faintly gleam'd from the valleys. Oh, how  
He envied the wings of each wild bird, as now  
He urged the steed over the dizzy ascent  
Of the mountain! Behind him a murmur was sent  
From the torrent--before him a sound from the tracts  
Of the woodlands that waved o'er the wild cataracts,  
And the loose earth and loose stones roll'd momentarily down  
From the hoofs of his steed to abysses unknown.  
The red day had fallen beneath the black woods,  
And the Powers of the night through the vast solitudes  
Walk'd abroad and conversed with each other. The trees  
Were in sound and in motion, and mutter'd like seas

In Elfland. The road through the forest was hollow'd.  
On he sped through the darkness, as though he were follow'd  
Fast, fast by the Erl King!

The wild wizard-work

Of the forest at last open'd sharp, o'er the fork  
Of a savage ravine, and behind the black stems  
Of the last trees, whose leaves in the light gleam'd like gems,  
Broke the broad moon above the voluminous  
Rock-chaos,--the Hecate of that Tartarus!  
With his horse reeking white, he at last reach'd the door  
Of a small mountain inn, on the brow of a hoar  
Craggy promontory, o'er a fissure as grim,  
Through which, ever roaring, there leap'd o'er the limb  
Of the rent rock a torrent of water, from sight,  
Into pools that were feeding the roots of the night.  
A balcony hung o'er the water. Above  
In a glimmering casement a shade seem'd to move.  
At the door the old negress was nodding her head  
As he reach'd it. "My mistress awaits you," she said.  
And up the rude stairway of creaking pine rafter  
He follow'd her silent. A few moments after,  
His heart almost stunned him, his head seem'd to reel,  
For a door closed--Luvois was alone with Lucile.

IV.

In a gray travelling dress, her dark hair unconfined  
Streaming o'er it, and tossed now and then by the wind  
From the lattice, that waved the dull flame in a spire  
From a brass lamp before her--a faint hectic fire  
On her cheek, to her eyes lent the lustre of fever:  
They seem'd to have wept themselves wider than ever,  
Those dark eyes--so dark and so deep!

"You relent?"

And your plans have been changed by the letter I sent?"  
There his voice sank, borne down by a strong inward strife.

LUCILE.

Your letter! yes, Duke. For it threaten'd man's life--  
Woman's honor.

Luvois.

The last, madam, NOT?

LUCILE.

Both. I glance

At your own words; blush, son of the knighthood of France,  
As I read them! You say, in this letter . . .



"I know

Why now you refuse me: 'tis (is it not so?)  
For the man who has trifled before, wantonly,  
And now trifles again with the heart you deny  
To myself. But he shall not! By man's last wild law,  
I will seize on the right (the right, Duc de Luvois!)  
To avenge for you, woman, the past, and to give  
To the future its freedom. That man shalt not live  
To make you as wretched as you have made me!"

LUVOIS.

Well, madam, in those words what words do you see  
That threatens the honor of woman?

LUCILE.

See! . . . what,

What word, do you ask? Every word! would you not,  
Had I taken your hand thus, have felt that your name  
Was soil'd and dishonor'd by more than mere shame  
If the woman that bore it had first been the cause  
Of the crime which in these words is menaced? You pause!  
Woman's honor, you ask? Is there, sir, no dishonor  
In the smile of a woman, when men, gazing on her,  
Can shudder, and say, "In that smile is a grave"?  
No! you can have no cause, Duke, for no right you have  
In the contest you menace. That contest but draws  
Every right into ruin. By all human laws  
Of man's heart I forbid it, by all sanctities  
Of man's social honor!

The Duke droop'd his eyes.

"I obey you," he said, "but let woman beware  
How she plays fast and loose thus with human despair,  
And the storm in man's heart. Madam, yours was the right,  
When you saw that I hoped, to extinguish hope quite.  
But you should from the first have done this, for I feel  
That you knew from the first that I loved you."

Lucile

This sudden reproach seem'd to startle.

She raised

A slow, wistful regard to his features, and gazed  
On them silent awhile. His own looks were downcast.  
Through her heart, whence its first wild alarm was now pass'd,  
Pity crept, and perhaps o'er her conscience a tear,  
Falling softly, awoke it.

However severe,

Were they unjust, these sudden upbraidings, to her?  
Had she lightly misconstrued this man's character,  
Which had seem'd, even when most impassion'd it seem'd,  
Too self-conscious to lose all in love? Had she deem'd  
That this airy, gay, insolent man of the world,  
So proud of the place the world gave him, held furl'd

In his bosom no passion which once shaken wide  
Might tug, till it snapped, that erect lofty pride?  
Were those elements in him, which once roused to strife  
Overthrow a whole nature, and change a whole life?  
There are two kinds of strength. One, the strength of the river  
Which through continents pushes its pathway forever  
To fling its fond heart in the sea; if it lose  
This, the aim of its life, it is lost to its use,  
It goes mad, is diffused into deluge, and dies.  
The other, the strength of the sea; which supplies  
Its deep life from mysterious sources, and draws  
The river's life into its own life, by laws  
Which it heeds not. The difference in each case is this:  
The river is lost, if the ocean it miss;  
If the sea miss the river, what matter? The sea  
Is the sea still, forever. Its deep heart will be  
Self-sufficing, unconscious of loss as of yore;  
Its sources are infinite; still to the shore,  
With no diminution of pride, it will say,  
"I am here; I, the sea! stand aside, and make way!"  
Was his love, then, the love of the river? and she,  
Had she taken that love for the love of the sea?

V.

At that thought, from her aspect whatever had been  
Stern or haughty departed; and, humble in mien,  
She approach'd him and brokenly murmur'd, as though  
To herself more than him, "Was I wrong? is it so?  
Hear me, Duke! you must feel that, whatever you deem  
Your right to reproach me in this, your esteem  
I may claim on ONE ground--I at least am sincere.  
You say that to me from the first it was clear  
That you loved me. But what if this knowledge were known  
At a moment in life when I felt most alone,  
And least able to be so? a moment, in fact,  
When I strove from one haunting regret to retract  
And emancipate life, and once more to fulfil  
Woman's destinies, duties, and hopes? would you still  
So bitterly blame me, Eugene de Luvois,  
If I hoped to see all this, or deem'd that I saw  
For a moment the promise of this in the plighted  
Affection of one who, in nature, united  
So much that from others affection might claim,  
If only affection were free? Do you blame  
The hope of that moment? I deem'd my heart free  
From all, saving sorrow. I deem'd that in me  
There was yet strength to mould it once more to my will,  
To uplift it once more to my hope. Do you still  
Blame me, Duke, that I did not then bid you refrain  
From hope? alas! I too then hoped!"

LUVOIS.

Oh, again,  
Yet again, say that thrice blessed word! say, Lucile,  
That you then deign'd to hope--

LUCILE.

Yes! to hope I could feel,  
And could give to you, that without which all else given  
Were but to deceive, and to injure you even:--  
A heart free from thoughts of another. Say, then,  
Do you blame that one hope?

LUVOIS.

O Lucile!

"Say again,"

She resumed, gazing down, and with faltering tone,  
"Do you blame me that, when I at last had to own  
To my heart that the hope it had cherish'd was o'er,  
And forever, I said to you then, 'Hope no more'?  
I myself hoped no more!"

With but ill-suppressed wrath

The Duke answer'd . . . "What, then! he recrosses your path,  
This man, and you have but to see him, despite  
Of his troth to another, to take back that light  
Worthless heart to your own, which he wrong'd years ago!"  
Lucile faintly, brokenly murmur'd . . . "No! no!  
'Tis not that--but alas!--but I cannot conceal  
That I have not forgotten the past--but I feel  
That I cannot accept all these gifts on your part,--  
In return for what . . . ah, Duke, what is it? . . . a heart  
Which is only a ruin!"

With words warm and wild,

"Though a ruin it be, trust me yet to rebuild  
And restore it," Luvois cried; "though ruin'd it be,  
Since so dear is that ruin, ah, yield it to me!"  
He approach'd her. She shrank back. The grief in her eyes  
Answer'd, "No!"

An emotion more fierce seem'd to rise

And to break into flame, as though fired by the light  
Of that look, in his heart. He exclaim'd, "Am I right?  
You reject ME! Accept HIM?"

"I have not done so,"

She said firmly. He hoarsely resumed, "Not yet--no!  
But can you with accents as firm promise me  
That you will not accept him?"

"Accept? Is he free?

Free to offer?" she said.

"You evade me, Lucile,"

He replied; "ah, you will not avow what you feel!"

He might make himself free? Oh, you blush--turn away!  
Dare you openly look in my face, lady, say!  
While you deign to reply to one question from me?  
I may hope not, you tell me: but tell me, may he?  
What! silent? I alter my question. If quite  
Freed in faith from this troth, might he hope then?"  
He might,"

She said softly.

VI.

Those two whisper'd words, in his breast,  
As he heard them, in one maddening moment releast  
All that's evil and fierce in man's nature, to crush  
And extinguish in man all that's good. In the rush  
Of wild jealousy, all the fierce passions that waste  
And darken and devastate intellect, chased  
From its realm human reason. The wild animal  
In the bosom of man was set free. And of all  
Human passions the fiercest, fierce jealousy, fierce  
As the fire, and more wild than the whirlwind, to pierce  
And to rend, rush'd upon him; fierce jealousy, swell'd  
By all passions bred from it, and ever impell'd  
To involve all things else in the anguish within it,  
And on others inflict its own pangs!

At that minute

What pass'd through his mind, who shall say? who may tell  
The dark thoughts of man's heart, which the red glare of hell  
Can illumine alone?

He stared wildly around

That lone place, so lonely! That silence! no sound  
Reach'd that room, through the dark evening air, save drear  
Drip and roar of the cataract ceaseless and near!  
It was midnight all round on the weird silent weather;  
Deep midnight in him! They two,--alone and together,  
Himself and that woman defenceless before him!  
The triumph and bliss of his rival flash'd o'er him.  
The abyss of his own black despair seem'd to ope  
At his feet, with that awful exclusion of hope  
Which Dante read over the city of doom.  
All the Tarquin pass'd into his soul in the gloom,  
And uttering words he dared never recall,  
Words of insult and menace, he thunder'd down all  
The brew'd storm-cloud within him: its flashes scorch'd blind  
His own senses. His spirit was driven on the wind  
Of a reckless emotion beyond his control;  
A torrent seem'd loosen'd within him. His soul  
Surged up from that caldron of passion that hiss'd  
And seeth'd in his heart.

VII.

He had thrown, and had miss'd  
His last stake.

VIII.

For, transfigured, she rose from the place  
Where he rested o'erawed: a saint's scorn on her face;  
Such a dread vade retro was written in light  
On her forehead, the fiend would himself, at that sight,  
Have sunk back abash'd to perdition. I know  
If Lucretia at Tarquin but once had looked so,  
She had needed no dagger next morning.

She rose

And swept to the door, like that phantom the snows  
Feel at nightfall sweep o'er them, when daylight is gone,  
And Caucasus is with the moon all alone.  
There she paused; and, as though from immeasurable,  
Insurpassable distance, she murmur'd--

"Farewell!

We, alas! have mistaken each other. Once more  
Illusion, to-night, in my lifetime is o'er.  
Duc de Luvois, adieu!"

From the heart-breaking gloom  
Of that vacant, reproachful, and desolate room,  
He felt she was gone--gone forever!

IX.

No word,

The sharpest that ever was edged like a sword,  
Could have pierced to his heart with such keen accusation  
As the silence, the sudden profound isolation,  
In which he remain'd.

"O return; I repent!"

He exclaimed; but no sound through the stillness was sent,  
Save the roar of the water, in answer to him,  
And the beetle that, sleeping, yet humm'd her night-hymn:  
An indistinct anthem, that troubled the air  
With a searching, and wistful, and questioning prayer.  
"Return," sung the wandering insect. The roar  
Of the waters replied, "Nevermore! nevermore!"  
He walked to the window. The spray on his brow  
Was flung cold from the whirlpools of water below;  
The frail wooden balcony shook in the sound  
Of the torrent. The mountains gloom'd sullenly round.  
A candle one ray from a closed casement flung.

O'er the dim balustrade all bewilder'd he hung,  
Vaguely watching the broken and shimmering blink  
Of the stars on the veering and vitreous brink  
Of that snake-like prone column of water; and listing  
Aloof o'er the languors of air the persisting  
Sharp horn of the gray gnat. Before he relinquish'd  
His unconscious employment, that light was extinguish'd.  
Wheels at last, from the inn door aroused him. He ran  
Down the stairs; reached the door--just to see her depart.  
Down the mountain the carriage was speeding.

X.

#### His heart

Peal'd the knell of its last hope. He rush'd on; but whither  
He knew not--on, into the dark cloudy weather--  
The midnight--the mountains--on, over the shelf  
Of the precipice--on, still--away from himself!  
Till exhausted, he sank 'mid the dead leaves and moss  
At the mouth of the forest. A glimmering cross  
Of gray stone stood for prayer by the woodside. He sank  
Prayerless, powerless, down at its base, 'mid the dank  
Weeds and grasses; his face hid amongst them. He knew  
That the night had divided his whole life in two.  
Behind him a past that was over forever:  
Before him a future devoid of endeavor  
And purpose. He felt a remorse for the one,  
Of the other a fear. What remain'd to be done?  
Whither now should he turn? Turn again, as before,  
To his old easy, careless existence of yore  
He could not. He felt that for better or worse  
A change had pass'd o'er him; an angry remorse  
Of his own frantic failure and error had marr'd  
Such a refuge forever. The future seem'd barr'd  
By the corpse of a dead hope o'er which he must tread  
To attain it. Life's wilderness round him was spread,  
What clew there to cling by?

#### He clung by a name

To a dynasty fallen forever. He came  
Of an old princely house, true through change to the race  
And the sword of Saint Louis--a faith 'twere disgrace  
To relinquish, and folly to live for! Nor less  
Was his ancient religion (once potent to bless  
Or to ban; and the crozier his ancestors kneel'd  
To adore, when they fought for the Cross, in hard field  
With the Crescent) become, ere it reach'd him, tradition;  
A mere faded badge of a social position;  
A thing to retain and say nothing about,  
Lest, if used, it should draw degradation from doubt.  
Thus, the first time he sought them, the creeds of his youth  
Wholly fail'd the strong needs of his manhood, in truth!

And beyond them, what region of refuge? what field  
For employment, this civilized age, did it yield,  
In that civilized land? or to thought? or to action?  
Blind deliriums, bewilder'd and endless distraction!  
Not even a desert, not even the cell  
Of a hermit to flee to, wherein he might quell  
The wild devil-instincts which now, unrepent,  
Ran riot through that ruin'd world in his breast.

XI.

So he lay there, like Lucifer, fresh from the sight  
Of a heaven scaled and lost; in the wide arms of night  
O'er the howling abysses of nothingness! There  
As he lay, Nature's deep voice was teaching him prayer;  
But what had he to pray to?

The winds in the woods,  
The voices abroad o'er those vast solitudes,  
Were in commune all round with the invisible  
Power that walk'd the dim world by Himself at that hour.  
But their language he had not yet learn'd--in despite  
Of the much he HAD learn'd--or forgotten it quite,  
With its once native accents. Alas! what had he  
To add to that deep-toned sublime symphony  
Of thanksgiving? . . . A fiery finger was still  
Scorching into his heart some dread sentence. His will,  
Like a wind that is put to no purpose, was wild  
At its work of destruction within him. The child  
Of an infidel age, he had been his own god,  
His own devil.

He sat on the damp mountain sod,  
and stared sullenly up at the dark sky.

The clouds  
Had heap'd themselves over the bare west in crowds  
Of misshapen, incongruous potents. A green  
Streak of dreary, cold, luminous ether, between  
The base of their black barricades, and the ridge  
Of the grim world, gleam'd ghastly, as under some bridge,  
Cyclop-sized, in a city of ruins o'erthrown  
By sieges forgotten, some river, unknown  
And unnamed, widens on into desolate lands.  
While he gazed, that cloud-city invisible hands  
Dismantled and rent; and reveal'd, through a loop  
In the breach'd dark, the blemish'd and half-broken hoop  
Of the moon, which soon silently sank; and anon  
The whole supernatural pageant was gone.  
The wide night, discomforted, conscious of loss,  
Darken'd round him. One object alone--that gray cross--  
Glimmer'd faint on the dark. Gazing up, he descried,  
Through the void air, its desolate arms outstretch'd, wide,  
As though to embrace him.

He turn'd from the sight,  
Set his face to the darkness, and fled.

XII.

When the light  
Of the dawn grayly flicker'd and glared on the spent  
Wearied ends of the night, like a hope that is sent  
To the need of some grief when its need is the sorest,  
He was sullenly riding across the dark forest  
Toward Luchon.

Thus riding, with eyes of defiance  
Set against the young day, as disclaiming alliance  
With aught that the day brings to man, he perceived  
Faintly, suddenly, fleetingly, through the damp-leaved  
Autumn branches that put forth gaunt arms on his way,  
The face of a man pale and wistful, and gray  
With the gray glare of morning. Eugene de Luvois,  
With the sense of a strange second sight, when he saw  
That phantom-like face, could at once recognize,  
By the sole instinct now left to guide him, the eyes  
Of his rival, though fleeting the vision and dim,  
With a stern sad inquiry fix'd keenly on him,  
And, to meet it, a lie leap'd at once to his own;  
A lie born of that lying darkness now grown  
Over all in his nature! He answer'd that gaze  
With a look which, if ever a man's look conveys  
More intensely than words what a man means convey'd  
Beyond doubt in its smile an announcement which said,  
"I have triumph'd. The question your eyes would imply  
Comes too late, Alfred Vargrave!"

And so he rode by,  
And rode on, and rode gayly, and rode out of sight,  
Leaving that look behind him to rankle and bite.

XIII.

And it bit, and it rankled.

XIV.

Lord Alfred, scarce knowing,  
Or choosing, or heeding the way he was going,  
By one wild hope impell'd, by one wild fear pursued,  
And led by one instinct, which seem'd to exclude  
From his mind every human sensation, save one  
The torture of doubt--had stray'd moodily on,



Down the highway deserted, that evening in which  
With the Duke he had parted; stray'd on, through rich  
Haze of sunset, or into the gradual night,  
Which darken'd, unnoticed, the land from his sight,  
Toward Saint Saviour; nor did the changed aspect of all  
The wild scenery around him avail to recall  
To his senses their normal perceptions, until,  
As he stood on the black shaggy brow of the hill  
At the mouth of the forest, the moon, which had hung  
Two dark hours in a cloud, slipp'd on fire from among  
The rent vapors, and sunk o'er the ridge of the world.  
Then he lifted his eyes, and saw round him unfur'd,  
In one moment of splendor, the leagues of dark trees,  
And the long rocky line of the wild Pyrenees.  
And he knew by the milestone scored rough on the face  
Of the bare rock, he was but two hours from the place  
Where Lucile and Luvois must have met. This same track  
The Duke must have traversed, perforce, to get back  
To Luchon; not yet then the Duke had returned!  
He listen'd, he look'd up the dark, but discern'd  
Not a trace, not a sound of a horse by the way.  
He knew that the night was approaching to day.  
He resolved to proceed to Saint Saviour. The morn,  
Which, at last, through the forest broke chill and forlorn,  
Reveal'd to him, riding toward Luchon, the Duke.  
'Twas then that the two men exchanged look for look.

XV.

And the Duke's rankled in him.

XVI.

He rush'd on. He tore  
His path through the thicket. He reach'd the inn door,  
Roused the yet drowsing porter, reluctant to rise,  
And inquired for the Countess. The man rubb'd his eyes,  
The Countess was gone. And the Duke?

The man stared

A sleepy inquiry.

With accents that scared

The man's dull sense awake, "He, the stranger," he cried,  
"Who had been there that night!"

The man grinn'd and replied,

With a vacant intelligence, "He, oh ay, ay!  
He went after the lady."

No further reply

Could he give. Alfred Vargrave demanded no more,  
Flung a coin to the man, and so turn'd from the door.

"What! the Duke, then, the night in that lone inn had pass'd?  
In that lone inn--with her!" Was that look he had cast  
When they met in the forest, that look which remain'd  
On his mind with its terrible smile, thus explain'd?

XVII.

The day was half turn'd to the evening, before  
He re-entered Luchon, with a heart sick and sore.  
In the midst of a light crowd of babblers, his look,  
By their voices attracted, distinguished the Duke,  
Gay, insolent, noisy, with eyes sparkling bright,  
With laughter, shrill, airy, continuous.

Right

Through the throng Alfred Vargrave, with swift sombre stride,  
Glided on. The Duke noticed him, turn'd, stepp'd aside,  
And, cordially grasping his hand, whisper'd low,  
"O, how right have you been! There can never be--no,  
Never--any more contest between us! Milord,  
Let us henceforth be friends!"

Having utter'd that word,

He turn'd lightly round on his heel, and again  
His gay laughter was heard, echoed loud by that train  
Of his young imitators.

Lord Alfred stood still,

Rooted, stunn'd, to the spot. He felt weary and ill,  
Out of heart with his own heart, and sick to the soul  
With a dull, stifling anguish he could not control.  
Does he hear in a dream, through the buzz of the crowd,  
The Duke's blithe associates, babbling aloud  
Some comment upon his gay humor that day?  
He never was gayer: what makes him so gay?  
'Tis, no doubt, say the flatterers, flattering in tune,  
Some vestal whose virtue no tongue dare impugn  
Has at last found a Mars--who, of course, shall be nameless,  
That vestal that yields to Mars ONLY is blameless!  
Hark! hears he a name which, thus syllabled, stirs  
All his heart into tumult? . . . Lucile de Nevers  
With the Duke's coupled gayly, in some laughing, light,  
Free allusion? Not so as might give him the right  
To turn fiercely round on the speaker, but yet  
To a trite and irreverent compliment set!

XVIII.

Slowly, slowly, usurping that place in his soul  
Where the thought of Lucile was enshrined, did there roll  
Back again, back again, on its smooth downward course  
O'er his nature, with gather'd momentum and force,

THE WORLD.

XIX.

"No!" he mutter'd, "she cannot have sinn'd!  
True! women there are (self-named women of mind!)  
Who love rather liberty--liberty, yes!  
To choose and to leave--than the legalized stress  
Of the lovingest marriage. But she--is she so?  
I will not believe it. Lucile! O no, no!  
Not Lucile!

"But the world? and, ah, what would it say?  
O the look of that man, and his laughter, to-day!  
The gossip's light question! the slanderous jest!  
She is right! no, we could not be happy. 'Tis best  
As it is. I will write to her--write, O my heart!  
And accept her farewell. OUR farewell! must we part--  
Part thus, then--forever, Lucile? Is it so?  
Yes! I feel it. We could not be happy, I know.  
'Twas a dream! we must waken!"

XX.

With head bow'd, as though  
By the weight of the heart's resignation, and slow  
Moody footsteps, he turned to his inn.  
Drawn apart  
From the gate, in the courtyard, and ready to start,  
Postboys mounted, portmanteaus packed up and made fast,  
A travelling-carriage, unnoticed, he pass'd.  
He order'd his horse to be ready anon:  
Sent, and paid, for the reckoning, and slowly pass'd on,  
And ascended the staircase, and enter'd his room.  
It was twilight. The chamber was dark in the gloom  
Of the evening. He listlessly kindled a light  
On the mantel-piece; there a large card caught his sight--  
A large card, a stout card, well-printed and plain,  
Nothing flourishing, flimsy, affected, or vain.  
It gave a respectable look to the slab  
That it lay on. The name was--

SIR RIDLEY MACNAB.

Full familiar to him was the name that he saw,  
For 'twas that of his own future uncle-in-law.  
Mrs. Darcy's rich brother, the banker, well known  
As wearing the longest philacteried gown  
Of all the rich Pharisees England can boast of,  
A shrewd Puritan Scot, whose sharp wits made the most of

This world and the next; having largely invested  
Not only where treasure is never molested  
By thieves, moth, or rust; but on this earthly ball  
Where interest was high, and security small.  
Of mankind there was never a theory yet  
Not by some individual instance upset:  
And so to that sorrowful verse of the Psalm  
Which declares that the wicked expand like the palm  
In a world where the righteous are stunted and pent,  
A cheering exception did Ridley present.  
Like the worthy of Uz, Heaven prosper'd his piety.  
The leader of every religious society,  
Christian knowledge he labor'd t though life to promote  
With personal profit, and knew how to quote  
Both the Stocks and the Scripture, with equal advantage  
To himself and admiring friends, in this Cant-Age.

XXI.

Whilst over this card Alfred vacantly brooded,  
A waiter his head through the doorway protruded;  
"Sir Ridley MacNab with Milord wish'd to speak."  
Alfred Vargrave could feel there were tears on his cheek;  
He brushed them away with a gesture of pride.  
He glanced at the glass; when his own face he eyed,  
He was scared by its pallor. Inclining his head,  
He with tones calm, unshaken, and silvery, said,  
"Sir Ridley may enter."

                    In three minutes more  
That benign apparition appeared at the door.  
Sir Ridley, released for a while from the cares  
Of business, and minded to breathe the pure airs  
Of the blue Pyrenees, and enjoy his release,  
In company there with his sister and niece,  
Found himself now at Luchon--distributing tracts,  
Sowing seed by the way, and collecting new facts  
For Exeter Hall; he was starting that night  
For Bigorre: he had heard, to his cordial delight,  
That Lord Alfred was there, and, himself, setting out  
For the same destination: impatient, no doubt!  
Here some commonplace compliments as to "the marriage  
Through his speech trickled softly, like honey: his carriage  
Was ready. A storm seem'd to threaten the weather;  
If his young friend agreed, why not travel together?  
With a footstep uncertain and restless, a frown  
Of perplexity, during this speech, up and down  
Alfred Vargrave was striding; but, after a pause  
And a slight hesitation, the which seem'd to cause  
Some surprise to Sir Ridley, he answer'd--"My dear  
Sir Ridley, allow me a few moments here--  
Half an hour at the most--to conclude an affair

Of a nature so urgent as hardly to spare  
My presence (which brought me, indeed, to this spot),  
Before I accept your kind offer."

"Why not?"

Said Sir Ridley, and smiled. Alfred Vargrave, before  
Sir Ridley observed it, had pass'd through the door.  
A few moments later, with footsteps revealing  
Intense agitation of uncontrol'd feeling,  
He was rapidly pacing the garden below.  
What pass'd through his mind then is more than I know.  
But before one half-hour into darkness had fled,  
In the courtyard he stood with Sir Ridley. His tread  
Was firm and composed. Not a sign on his face  
Betrayed there the least agitation. "The place  
You so kindly have offer'd," he said, "I accept."  
And he stretch'd out his hand. The two travellers stepp'd  
Smiling into the carriage.

And thus, out of sight,

They drove down the dark road, and into the night.

XXII.

Sir Ridley was one of those wise men who, so far  
As their power of saying it goes, say with Zophar,  
"We, no doubt, are the people, and wisdom shall die with us!"  
Though of wisdom like theirs there is no small supply with us.  
Side by side in the carriage ensconced, the two men  
Began to converse somewhat drowsily, when  
Alfred suddenly thought--"Here's a man of ripe age,  
At my side, by his fellows reputed as sage,  
Who looks happy, and therefore who must have been wise;  
Suppose I with caution reveal to his eyes  
Some few of the reasons which make me believe  
That I neither am happy nor wise? 'twould relieve  
And enlighten, perchance, my own darkness and doubt."  
For which purpose a feeler he softly put out.  
It was snapp'd up at once.

"What is truth? "jesting Pilate

Ask'd, and pass'd from the question at once with a smile at  
Its utter futility. Had he address'd it  
To Ridley MacNab, he at least had confess'd it  
Admitted discussion! and certainly no man  
Could more promptly have answer'd the sceptical Roman  
Than Ridley. Hear some street astronomer talk!  
Grant him two or three hearers, a morsel of chalk,  
And forthwith on the pavement he'll sketch you the scheme  
Of the heavens. Then hear him enlarge on his theme!  
Not afraid of La Place, nor of Arago, he!  
He'll prove you the whole plan in plain A B C.  
Here's your sun--call him A; B's the moon; it is clear  
How the rest of the alphabet brings up the rear

Of the planets. Now ask Arago, ask La Place,  
(Your sages, who speak with the heavens face to face!)  
Their science in plain A B C to accord  
To your point-blank inquiry, my friends! not a word  
Will you get for your pains from their sad lips. Alas!  
Not a drop from the bottle that's quite full will pass.  
'Tis the half-empty vessel that freest emits  
The water that's in it. 'Tis thus with men's wits;  
Or at least with their knowledge. A man's capability  
Of imparting to others a truth with facility  
Is proportion'd forever with painful exactness  
To the portable nature, the vulgar compactness,  
The minuteness in size, or the lightness in weight,  
Of the truth he imparts. So small coins circulate  
More freely than large ones. A beggar asks alms,  
And we fling him a sixpence, nor feel any qualms;  
But if every street charity shook an investment,  
Or each beggar to clothe we must strip off a vestment,  
The length of the process would limit the act;  
And therefore the truth that's summ'd up in a tract  
Is most lightly dispensed.

As for Alfred, indeed,

On what spoonfuls of truth he was suffer'd to feed  
By Sir Ridley, I know not. This only I know,  
That the two men thus talking continued to go  
Onward somehow, together--on into the night--  
The midnight--in which they escape from our sight.

XXIII.

And meanwhile a world had been changed in its place,  
And those glittering chains that o'er blue balmy space  
Hang the blessing of darkness, had drawn out of sight  
To solace unseen hemispheres, the soft night;  
And the dew of the dayspring benignly descended,  
And the fair morn to all things new sanction extended,  
In the smile of the East. And the lark soaring on,  
Lost in light, shook the dawn with a song from the sun.  
And the world laugh'd.

It wanted but two rosy hours

From the noon, when they pass'd through the thick passion flowers  
Of the little wild garden that dimpled before  
The small house where their carriage now stopp'd at Bigorre.  
And more fair than the flowers, more fresh than the dew,  
With her white morning robe flitting joyously through  
The dark shrubs with which the soft hillside was clothed,  
Alfred Vargrave perceived, where he paused, his betrothed.  
Matilda sprang to him, at once, with a face  
Of such sunny sweetness, such gladness, such grace,  
And radiant confidence, childlike delight,  
That his whole heart upbraided itself at that sight.

And he murmur'd, or sigh'd, "O, how could I have stray'd  
From this sweet child, or suffer'd in aught to invade  
Her young claim on my life, though it were for an hour,  
The thought of another?"

"Look up, my sweet flower!"

He whisper'd her softly, "my heart unto thee  
Is return'd, as returns to the rose the wild bee!"

"And will wander no more?" laughed Matilda.

"No more,"

He repeated. And, low to himself, "Yes, 'tis o'er!  
My course, too, is decided, Lucile! Was I blind  
To have dream'd that these clever Frenchwomen of mind  
Could satisfy simply a plain English heart,  
Or sympathize with it?"

XXIV.

And here the first part  
Of the drama is over. The curtain falls furl'd  
On the actors within it--the Heart, and the World.  
Woo'd and wooer have play'd with the riddle of life,--  
Have they solved it?

Appear! answer, Husband and Wife.

XXV.

Yet, ere bidding farewell to Lucile de Nevers,  
Hear her own heart's farewell in this letter of hers.

THE COMTESSE DE NEVERS TO A FRIEND IN INDIA.

"Once more, O my friend, to your arms and your heart,  
And the places of old . . . never, never to part!  
Once more to the palm, and the fountain! Once more  
To the land of my birth, and the deep skies of yore  
From the cities of Europe, pursued by the fret  
Of their turmoil wherever my footsteps are set;  
From the children that cry for the birth, and behold,  
There is no strength to bear them--old Time is SO old!  
From the world's weary masters, that come upon earth  
Sapp'd and mined by the fever they bear from their birth:  
From the men of small stature, mere parts of a crowd,  
Born too late, when the strength of the world hath been bow'd;  
Back,--back to the Orient, from whose sunbright womb  
Sprang the giants which now are no more, in the bloom  
And the beauty of times that are faded forever!  
To the palms! to the tombs! to the still Sacred River!  
Where I too, the child of a day that is done,  
First leaped into life, and look'd up at the sun,

Back again, back again, to the hill-tops of home  
I come, O my friend, my consoler, I come!  
Are the three intense stars, that we watch'd night by night  
Burning broad on the band of Orion, as bright?  
Are the large Indian moons as serene as of old,  
When, as children, we gather'd the moonbeams for gold?  
Do you yet recollect me, my friend? Do you still  
Remember the free games we play'd on the hill,  
'Mid those huge stones up-heav'd, where we recklessly trod  
O'er the old ruin'd fane of the old ruin'd god?  
How he frown'd while around him we carelessly play'd!  
That frown on my life ever after hath stay'd,  
Like the shade of a solemn experience upcast  
From some vague supernatural grief in the past.  
For the poor god, in pain, more than anger, he frown'd,  
To perceive that our youth, though so fleeting, had found,  
In its transient and ignorant gladness, the bliss  
Which his science divine seem'd divinely to miss.  
Alas! you may haply remember me yet  
The free child, whose glad childhood myself I forget.  
I come--a sad woman, defrauded of rest:  
I bear to you only a laboring breast:  
My heart is a storm-beaten ark, wildly hurl'd  
O'er the whirlpools of time, with the wrecks of a world:  
The dove from my bosom hath flown far away:  
It is flown and returns not, though many a day  
Have I watch'd from the windows of life for its coming.  
Friend, I sigh for repose, I am weary of roaming.  
I know not what Ararat rises for me  
Far away, o'er the waves of the wandering sea:  
I know not what rainbow may yet, from far hills,  
Lift the promise of hope, the cessation of ills:  
But a voice, like the voice of my youth, in my breast  
Wakes and whispers me on--to the East! to the East!  
Shall I find the child's heart that I left there? or find  
The lost youth I recall with its pure peace of mind?  
Alas! who shall number the drops of the rain?  
Or give to the dead leaves their greenness again?  
Who shall seal up the caverns the earthquake hath rent?  
Who shall bring forth the winds that within them are pent?  
To a voice who shall render an image? or who  
From the heats of the noontide shall gather the dew?  
I have burn'd out within me the fuel of life.  
Wherefore lingers the flame? Rest is sweet after strife.  
I would sleep for a while. I am weary.

"My friend,

I had meant in these lines to regather, and send  
To our old home, my life's scatter'd links. But 'tis vain!  
Each attempt seems to shatter the chaplet again;  
Only fit now for fingers like mine to run o'er,  
Who return, a recluse, to those cloisters of yore  
Whence too far I have wander'd.

"How many long years



Does it seem to me now since the quick, scorching tears,  
While I wrote to you, splash'd out a girl's premature  
Moans of pain at what women in silence endure!  
To your eyes, friend of mine, and to your eyes alone,  
That now long-faded page of my life hath been shown  
Which recorded my heart's birth, and death, as you know,  
Many years since,--how many!

"A few months ago

I seem'd reading it backward, that page! Why explain  
Whence or how? The old dream of my life rose again.  
The old superstition! the idol of old!  
It is over. The leaf trodden down in the mould  
Is not to the forest more lost than to me  
That emotion. I bury it here by the sea  
Which will bear me anon far away from the shore  
Of a land which my footsteps will visit no more.  
And a heart's requiescat I write on that grave.  
Hark! the sigh of the wind, and the sound of the wave,  
Seem like voices of spirits that whisper me home!  
I come, O you whispering voices, I come!  
My friend, ask me nothing.

"Receive me alone

As a Santon receives to his dwelling of stone  
In silence some pilgrim the midnight may bring:  
It may be an angel that, weary of wing,  
Hath paused in his flight from some city of doom,  
Or only a wayfarer stray'd in the gloom.  
This only I know: that in Europe at least  
Lives the craft or the power that must master our East.  
Wherefore strive where the gods must themselves yield at last?  
Both they and their altars pass by with the Past.  
The gods of the household Time thrust from the shelf;  
And I seem as unreal and weird to myself  
As those idols of old.

"Other times, other men,

Other men, other passions!

"So be it! yet again

I turned to my birthplace, the birthplace of morn,  
And the light of those lands where the great sun is born!  
Spread your arms, O my friend! on your breast let me feel  
The repose which hath fled from my own.

"Your LUCILE."

PART II.

CANTO I.

I.

Hail, Muse! But each Muse by this time has, I know,  
Been used up, and Apollo has bent his own bow  
All too long; so I leave unassaulted the portal  
Of Olympus, and only invoke here a mortal.

Hail, Murray!--not Lindley,--but Murray and Son.  
Hail, omniscient, beneficent, great Two-in-One!  
In Albermarle Street may thy temple long stand!  
Long enlighten'd and led by thine erudite hand,  
May each novice in science nomadic unravel  
Statistical mazes of modernized travel!  
May each inn-keeper knave long thy judgment revere,  
And the postboys of Europe regard thee with fear;  
While they feel, in the silence of baffled extortion,  
That knowledge is power! Long, long, like that portion  
Of the national soil which the Greek exile took  
In his baggage wherever he went, may thy book  
Cheer each poor British pilgrim, who trusts to thy wit  
Not to pay through his nose just for following it!  
May'st thou long, O instructor! preside o'er his way,  
And teach him alike what to praise and to pay!  
Thee, pursuing this pathway of song, once again  
I invoke, lest, unskill'd, I should wander in vain.  
To my call be propitious, nor, churlish, refuse  
Thy great accents to lend to the lips of my Muse;  
For I sing of the Naiads who dwell 'mid the stems  
Of the green linden-trees by the waters of Ems.  
Yes! thy spirit descends upon mine, O John Murray!  
And I start--with thy book--for the Baths in a hurry.

II.

"At Coblenz a bridge of boats crosses the Rhine;  
And from thence the road, winding by Ehrenbreitstein,  
Passes over the frontier of Nassua.

("N. B.

No custom-house here since the Zollverein." See  
Murray, paragraph 30.)

"The route, at each turn,  
Here the lover of nature allows to discern,  
In varying prospect, a rich wooded dale:  
The vine and acacia-tree mostly prevail  
In the foliage observable here: and, moreover,  
The soil is carbonic. The road, under cover  
Of the grape-clad and mountainous upland that hems  
Round this beautiful spot, brings the traveller to--"EMS.  
A Schnellpost from Frankfort arrives every day.  
At the Kurhaus (the old Ducal mansion) you pay  
Eight florins for lodgings. A Restaurateur  
Is attach'd to the place; but most travellers prefer

(Including, indeed, many persons of note)  
To dine at the usual-priced table d'hote.  
Through the town runs the Lahn, the steep green banks of which  
Two rows of white picturesque houses enrich;  
And between the high road and the river is laid  
Out a sort of a garden, call'd 'THE Promenade.'  
Female visitors here, who may make up their mind  
To ascend to the top of these mountains, will find  
On the banks of the stream, saddled all the day long,  
Troops of donkeys--sure-footed--proverbially strong;"  
And the traveller at Ems may remark, as he passes,  
Here, as elsewhere, the women run after the asses.

III.

'Mid the world's weary denizens bound for these springs  
In the month when the merle on the maple-bough sings,  
Pursued to the place from dissimilar paths  
By a similar sickness, there came to the Baths  
Four sufferers--each stricken deep through the heart,  
Or the head, by the self-same invisible dart  
Of the arrow that flieth unheard in the noon,  
From the sickness that walketh unseen in the moon,  
Through this great lazaretto of life, wherein each  
Infects with his own sores the next within reach.  
First of these were a young English husband and wife,  
Grown weary ere half through the journey of life.  
O Nature, say where, thou gray mother of earth,  
Is the strength of thy youth? that thy womb brings to birth  
Only old men to-day! On the winds, as of old,  
Thy voice in its accent is joyous and bold;  
Thy forests are green as of yore; and thine oceans  
Yet move in the might of their ancient emotions:  
But man--thy last birth and thy best--is no more  
Life's free lord, that look'd up to the starlight of yore,  
With the faith on the brow, and the fire in the eyes,  
The firm foot on the earth, the high heart in the skies;  
But a gray-headed infant, defrauded of youth,  
Born too late or too early.

The lady, in truth,

Was young, fair, and gentle; and never was given  
To more heavenly eyes the pure azure of heaven.  
Never yet did the sun touch to ripples of gold  
Tresses brighter than those which her soft hand unroll'd  
From her noble and innocent brow, when she rose,  
An Aurora, at dawn, from her balmy repose,  
And into the mirror the bloom and the blush  
Of her beauty broke, glowing; like light in a gush  
From the sunrise in summer.

Love, roaming, shall meet

But rarely a nature more sound or more sweet--

Eyes brighter--brows whiter--a figure more fair--  
Or lovelier lengths of more radiant hair--  
Than thine, Lady Alfred! And here I aver  
(May those that have seen thee declare if I err)  
That not all the oysters in Britain contain  
A pearl pure as thou art.

Let some one explain,--  
Who may know more than I of the intimate life  
Of the pearl with the oyster,--why yet in his wife,  
In despite of her beauty--and most when he felt  
His soul to the sense of her loveliness melt--  
Lord Alfred miss'd something he sought for: indeed,  
The more that he miss'd it the greater the need;  
Till it seem'd to himself he could willingly spare  
All the charms that he found for the one charm not there.

IV.

For the blessings Life lends us, it strictly demands  
The worth of their full usufruct at our hands.  
And the value of all things exists, not indeed  
In themselves, but man's use of them, feeding man's need.  
Alfred Vargrave, in wedding with beauty and youth,  
Had embraced both Ambition and Wealth. Yet in truth  
Unfulfill'd the ambition, and sterile the wealth  
(In a life paralyzed by a moral ill-health),  
Had remain'd, while the beauty and youth, unredeem'd  
From a vague disappointment at all things, but seem'd  
Day by day to reproach him in silence for all  
That lost youth in himself they had fail'd to recall.  
No career had he follow'd, no object obtain'd  
In the world by those worldly advantages gain'd  
From nuptials beyond which once seem'd to appear,  
Lit by love, the broad path of a brilliant career.  
All that glitter'd and gleam'd through the moonlight of youth  
With a glory so fair, now that manhood in truth  
Grasp'd and gather'd it, seem'd like that false fairy gold  
Which leaves in the hand only moss, leaves, and mould!

V.

Fairy gold! moss and leaves! and the young Fairy Bride?  
Lived there yet fairy-lands in the face at his side?  
Say, O friend, if at evening thou ever hast watch'd  
Some pale and impalpable vapor, detach'd  
From the dim and disconsolate earth, rise and fall  
O'er the light of a sweet serene star, until all  
The chill'd splendor reluctantly waned in the deep  
Of its own native heaven? Even so seem'd to creep

O'er that fair and ethereal face, day by day,  
While the radiant vermeil, subsiding away,  
Hid its light in the heart, the faint gradual veil  
Of a sadness unconscious.

The lady grew pale

As silent her lord grew: and both, as they eyed  
Each the other askance, turn'd, and secretly sigh'd.  
Ah, wise friend, what avails all experience can give?  
True, we know what life is--but, alas! do we live?  
The grammar of life we have gotten by heart,  
But life's self we have made a dead language--an art,  
Not a voice. Could we speak it, but once, as 'twas spoken  
When the silence of passion the first time was broken!  
Cuvier knew the world better than Adam, no doubt;  
But the last man, at best, was but learned about  
What the first, without learning, ENJOYED. What art thou  
To the man of to-day, O Leviathan, now?  
A science. What wert thou to him that from ocean  
First beheld thee appear? A surprise,--an emotion!  
When life leaps in the veins, when it beats in the heart,  
When it thrills as it fills every animate part,  
Where lurks it? how works it? . . . We scarcely detect it.  
But life goes: the heart dies: haste, O leech, and dissect it!  
This accursed aesthetical, ethical age  
Hath so finger'd life's hornbook, so blurr'd every page,  
That the old glad romance, the gay chivalrous story  
With its fables of faery, its legends of glory,  
Is turn'd to a tedious instruction, not new  
To the children that read it insipidly through.  
We know too much of Love ere we love. We can trace  
Nothing new, unexpected, or strange in his face  
When we see it at last. 'Tis the same little Cupid,  
With the same dimpled cheek, and the smile almost stupid,  
We have seen in our pictures, and stuck on our shelves,  
And copied a hundred times over, ourselves,  
And wherever we turn, and whatever we do,  
Still, that horrible sense of the *deja connu!*

VI.

Perchance 'twas the fault of the life that they led;  
Perchance 'twas the fault of the novels they read;  
Perchance 'twas a fault in themselves; I am bound not  
To say: this I know--that these two creatures found not  
In each other some sign they expected to find  
Of a something unnamed in the heart or the mind;  
And, missing it, each felt a right to complain  
Of a sadness which each found no word to explain.  
Whatever it was, the world noticed not it  
In the light-hearted beauty, the light-hearted wit.  
Still, as once with the actors in Greece, 'tis the case,

Each must speak to the crowd with a mask on his face.  
Praise follow'd Matilda wherever she went,  
She was flatter'd. Can flattery purchase content?  
Yes. While to its voice for a moment she listen'd,  
The young cheek still bloom'd and the soft eyes still glisten'd;  
And her lord, when, like one of those light vivid things  
That glide down the gauzes of summer with wings  
Of rapturous radiance, unconscious she moved  
Through that buzz of inferior creatures, which proved  
Her beauty, their envy, one moment forgot,  
'Mid the many charms there, the one charm that was not:  
And when o'er her beauty enraptured he bow'd,  
(As they turn'd to each other, each flush'd from the crowd,)  
And murmur'd those praises which yet seem'd more dear  
Than the praises of others had grown to her ear,  
She, too, ceased awhile her own fate to regret:  
"Yes! . . . he loves me," she sigh'd; "this is love, then--and YET!"

#### VII.

Ah, that YET! fatal word! 'tis the moral of all  
Thought and felt, seen or done, in this world since the Fall!  
It stands at the end of each sentence we learn;  
It flits in the vista of all we discern;  
It leads us, forever and ever, away  
To find in to-morrow what flies with to-day.  
'Twas the same little fatal and mystical word  
That now, like a mirage, led my lady and lord  
To the waters of Ems from the waters of Marah;  
Drooping Pilgrims in Fashion's blank, arid Sahara!

#### VIII.

At the same time, pursued by a spell much the same,  
To these waters two other worn pilgrims there came:  
One a man, one a woman: just now, at the latter,  
As the Reader I mean by and by to look at her  
And judge for himself, I will not even glance.

#### IX.

Of the self-crown'd young kings of the Fashion in France  
Whose resplendent regalia so dazzled the sight,  
Whose horse was so perfect, whose boots were so bright,  
Who so hail'd in the salon, so mark'd in the Bois,  
Who so welcomed by all, as Eugene de Luvois?  
Of all the smooth-brow'd premature debauchees

In that town of all towns, where Debauchery sees  
On the forehead of youth her mark everywhere graven,--  
In Paris I mean,--where the streets are all paven  
By those two fiends whom Milton saw bridging the way  
From Hell to this planet,--who, haughty and gay,  
The free rebel of life, bound or led by no law,  
Walk'd that causeway as bold as Eugene de Luvois?  
Yes! he march'd through the great masquerade, loud of tongue,  
Bold of brow: but the motley he mask'd in, it hung  
So loose, trail'd so wide, and appear'd to impede  
So strangely at times the vex'd effort at speed,  
That a keen eye might guess it was made--not for him,  
But some brawler more stalwart of stature and limb.  
That it irk'd him, in truth, you at times could divine,  
For when low was the music, and spilt was the wine,  
He would clutch at the garment, as though it oppress'd  
And stifled some impulse that choked in his breast.

X.

What! he, . . . the light sport of his frivolous ease!  
Was he, too, a prey to a mortal disease?  
My friend, hear a parable: ponder it well:  
For a moral there is in the tale that I tell.  
One evening I sat in the Palais Royal,  
And there, while I laugh'd at Grassot and Arnal,  
My eye fell on the face of a man at my side;  
Every time that he laugh'd I observed that he sigh'd,  
As though vex'd to be pleased. I remark'd that he sat  
Ill at ease on his seat, and kept twirling his hat  
In his hand, with a look of unquiet abstraction.  
I inquired the cause of his dissatisfaction.  
"Sir," he said, "if what vexes me here you would know,  
Learn that, passing this way some few half-hours ago,  
I walk'd into the Francais, to look at Rachel.  
(Sir, that woman in Phedre is a miracle!)--Well,  
I ask'd for a box: they were occupied all:  
For a seat in the balcony: all taken! a stall:  
Taken too: the whole house was as full as could be,--  
Not a hole for a rat! I had just time to see  
The lady I love tete-a-tete with a friend  
In a box out of reach at the opposite end:  
Then the crowd push'd me out. What was left me to do?  
I tried for the tragedy . . . que voulez-vous?  
Every place for the tragedy book'd! . . . mon ami.  
The farce was close by: . . . at the farce me voici.  
The piece is a new one: and Grassot plays well:  
There is drollery, too, in that fellow Ravel:  
And Hyacinth's nose is superb: . . . yet I meant  
My evening elsewhere, and not thus to have spent.  
Fate orders these things by her will, not by ours!

Sir, mankind is the sport of invisible powers."

I once met the Duc de Luvois for a moment;  
And I mark'd, when his features I fix'd in my comment,  
O'er those features the same vague disquietude stray  
I had seen on the face of my friend at the play;  
And I thought that he too, very probably, spent  
His evenings not wholly as first he had meant.

XI.

O source of the holiest joys we inherit,  
O Sorrow, thou solemn, invisible spirit!  
Ill fares it with man when, through life's desert sand,  
Grown impatient too soon for the long-promised land,  
He turns from the worship of thee, as thou art,  
An expressless and imageless truth in the heart,  
And takes of the jewels of Egypt, the pelf  
And the gold of the Godless, to make to himself  
A gaudy, idolatrous image of thee,  
And then bows to the sound of the cymbal the knee.  
The sorrows we make to ourselves are false gods:  
Like the prophets of Baal, our bosoms with rods  
We may smite, we may gash at our hearts till they bleed,  
But these idols are blind, deaf, and dumb to our need.  
The land is athirst, and cries out! . . . 'tis in vain;  
The great blessing of Heaven descends not in rain.

XII.

It was night; and the lamps were beginning to gleam  
Through the long linden-trees, folded each in his dream,  
From that building which looks like a temple . . . and is  
The Temple of--Health? Nay, but enter! I wis  
That never the rosy-hued deity knew  
One votary out of that sallow-cheek'd crew  
Of Courlanders, Wallacs, Greeks, affable Russians,  
Explosive Parisians, potato-faced Prussians;  
Jews--Hamburgers chiefly;--pure patriots,--Suabians;--  
"Cappadocians and Elamites, Cretes and Arabians,  
And the dwellers in Pontus" . . . My muse will not weary  
More lines with the list of them . . . cur fremuere?  
What is it they murmur, and mutter, and hum?  
Into what Pandemonium is Pentecost come?  
Oh, what is the name of the god at whose fane  
Every nation is mix'd in so motley a train?  
What weird Kabala lies on those tables outspread?  
To what oracle turns with attention each head?  
What holds these pale worshippers each so devout,



And what are those hierophants busied about?

XIII.

Here passes, repasses, and flits to and fro,  
And rolls without ceasing the great Yes and No:  
Round this altar alternate the weird Passions dance,  
And the God worshipp'd here is the old God of Chance.  
Through the wide-open doors of the distant saloon  
Flute, hautboy, and fiddle are squeaking in tune;  
And an indistinct music forever is roll'd,  
That mixes and chimes with the chink of the gold,  
From a vision, that flits in a luminous haze,  
Of figures forever eluding the gaze;  
It fleets through the doorway, it gleams on the glass,  
And the weird words pursue it--Rouge, Impair, et Passe!  
Like a sound borne in sleep through such dreams as encumber  
With haggard emotions the wild wicked slumber  
Of some witch when she seeks, through a nightmare, to grab at  
The hot hoof of the fiend, on her way to the Sabbat.

XIV.

The Duc de Luvois and Lord Alfred had met  
Some few evenings ago (for the season as yet  
Was but young) in this selfsame Pavilion of Chance.  
The idler from England, the idler from France,  
Shook hands, each, of course, with much cordial pleasure:  
An acquaintance at Ems is to most men a treasure,  
And they both were too well-bred in aught to betray  
One discourteous remembrance of things pass'd away.  
'Twas a sight that was pleasant, indeed, to be seen,  
These friends exchange greetings;--the men who had been  
Foes so nearly in days that were past.

This, no doubt,

Is why, on the night I am speaking about,  
My Lord Alfred sat down by himself at roulette,  
Without one suspicion his bosom to fret,  
Although he had left, with his pleasant French friend,  
Matilda, half vex'd, at the room's farthest end.

XV.

Lord Alfred his combat with Fortune began  
With a few modest thalers--away they all ran--  
The reserve follow'd fast in the rear. As his purse  
Grew lighter his spirits grew sensibly worse.

One needs not a Bacon to find a cause for it:  
'Tis an old law in physics--Natura abhorret  
Vacuum--and my lord, as he watch'd his last crown  
Tumble into the bank, turn'd away with a frown  
Which the brows of Napoleon himself might have deck'd  
On that day of all days when an empire was wreck'd  
On thy plain, Waterloo, and he witness'd the last  
Of his favorite Guard cut to pieces, aghast!  
Just then Alfred felt, he could scarcely tell why,  
Within him the sudden strange sense that some eye  
Had long been intently regarding him there,--  
That some gaze was upon him too searching to bear.  
He rose and look'd up. Was it fact? Was it fable?  
Was it dream? Was it waking? Across the green table,  
That face, with its features so fatally known--  
Those eyes, whose deep gaze answer'd strangely his own  
What was it? Some ghost from its grave come again?  
Some cheat of a feverish, fanciful brain?  
Or was it herself with those deep eyes of hers,  
And that face unforgotten?--Lucile de Nevers!

XVI.

Ah, well that pale woman a phantom might seem,  
Who appear'd to herself but the dream of a dream!  
'Neath those features so calm, that fair forehead so hush'd,  
That pale cheek forever by passion unflush'd,  
There yawn'd an insatiate void, and there heaved  
A tumult of restless regrets unrelieved.  
The brief noon of beauty was passing away,  
And the chill of the twilight fell, silent and gray,  
O'er that deep, self-perceived isolation of soul.  
And now, as all around her the dim evening stole,  
With its weird desolations, she inwardly grieved  
For the want of that tender assurance received  
From the warmth of a whisper, the glance of an eye,  
Which should say, or should look, "Fear thou naught,--I am by!"  
And thus, through that lonely and self-fix'd existence,  
Crept a vague sense of silence, and horror, and distance:  
A strange sort of faint-footed fear,--like a mouse  
That comes out, when 'tis dark, in some old ducal house  
Long deserted, where no one the creature can scare,  
And the forms on the arras are all that move there.

In Rome,--in the Forum,--there open'd one night  
A gulf. All the augurs turn'd pale at the sight.  
In this omen the anger of Heaven they read.  
Men consulted the gods: then the oracle said:--  
"Ever open this gulf shall endure, till at last  
That which Rome hath most precious within it be cast."  
The Romans threw in it their corn and their stuff,

But the gulf yawn'd as wide. Rome seem'd likely enough  
To be ruin'd ere this rent in her heart she could choke.  
Then Curtius, revering the oracle, spoke:  
"O Quirites! to this Heaven's question is come:  
What to Rome is most precious? The manhood of Rome."  
He plunged, and the gulf closed.

The tale is not new;  
But the moral applies many ways, and is true.  
How, for hearts rent in twain, shall the curse be destroy'd?  
'Tis a warm human one that must fill up the void.  
Through many a heart runs the rent in the fable;  
But who to discover a Curtius is able?

XVII.

Back she came from her long hiding-place, at the source  
Of the sunrise; where, fair in their fabulous course,  
Run the rivers of Eden: an exile again,  
To the cities of Europe--the scenes, and the men,  
And the life, and the ways, she had left: still oppress'd  
With the same hungry heart, and unpeaceable breast.  
The same, to the same things! The world she had quitted  
With a sigh, with a sigh she re-enter'd. Soon flitted  
Through the salons and clubs, to the great satisfaction  
Of Paris, the news of a novel attraction.  
The enchanting Lucile, the gay Countess, once more,  
To her old friend, the World, had reopen'd her door;  
The World came, and shook hands, and was pleased and amused  
With what the World then went away and abused.  
From the woman's fair fame it in naught could detract:  
'Twas the woman's free genius it vex'd and attack'd  
With a sneer at her freedom of action and speech.  
But its light careless cavils, in truth, could not reach  
The lone heart they aim'd at. Her tears fell beyond  
The world's limit, to feel that the world could respond  
To that heart's deepest, innermost yearning, in naught,  
'Twas no longer this earth's idle inmates she sought:  
The wit of the woman sufficed to engage  
In the woman's gay court the first men of the age.  
Some had genius; and all, wealth of mind to confer  
On the world: but that wealth was not lavish'd for her.  
For the genius of man, though so human indeed,  
When call'd out to man's help by some great human need,  
The right to a man's chance acquaintance refuses  
To use what it hoards for mankind's nobler uses.  
Genius touches the world at but one point alone  
Of that spacious circumference, never quite known  
To the world; all the infinite number of lines  
That radiate thither a mere point combines,  
But one only,--some central affection apart  
From the reach of the world, in which Genius is Heart,

And love, life's fine centre, includes heart and mind,  
And therefore it was that Lucile sigh'd to find  
Men of genius appear, one and all in her ken,  
When they stoop'd themselves to it, as mere clever men;  
Artists, statesmen, and they in whose works are unfurl'd  
Worlds new-fashioned for man, as mere men of the world.  
And so, as alone now she stood, in the sight  
Of the sunset of youth, with her face from the light,  
And watch'd her own shadow grow long at her feet,  
As though stretch'd out, the shade of some OTHER to meet,  
The woman felt homeless and childless: in scorn  
She seem'd mock'd by the voices of children unborn;  
And when from these sombre reflections away  
She turn'd, with a sigh, to that gay world, more gay  
For her presence within it, she knew herself friendless;  
That her path led from peace, and that path appear'd endless!  
That even her beauty had been but a snare,  
And her wit sharpen'd only the edge of despair.

XVIII.

With a face all transfigured and flush'd by surprise,  
Alfred turn'd to Lucile. With those deep searching eyes  
She look'd into his own. Not a word that she said,  
Not a look, not a blush, one emotion betray'd.  
She seem'd to smile through him, at something beyond:  
When she answer'd his questions, she seem'd to respond  
To some voice in herself. With no trouble descried,  
To each troubled inquiry she calmly replied.  
Not so he. At the sight of that face back again  
To his mind came the ghost of a long-stifled pain,  
A remember'd resentment, half check'd by a wild  
And relentful regret like a motherless child  
Softly seeking admittance, with plaintive appeal,  
To the heart which resisted its entrance.

Lucile

And himself thus, however, with freedom allow'd  
To old friends, talking still side by side, left the crowd  
By the crowd unobserved. Not unnoticed, however,  
By the Duke and Matilda. Matilda had never  
Seen her husband's new friend.

She had follow'd by chance,  
Or by instinct, the sudden half-menacing glance  
Which the Duke, when he witness'd their meeting, had turn'd  
On Lucile and Lord Alfred; and, scared, she discern'd  
On his feature the shade of a gloom so profound  
That she shudder'd instinctively. Deaf to the sound  
Of her voice, to some startled inquiry of hers  
He replied not, but murmur'd, "Lucile de Nevers  
Once again then? so be it!" In the mind of that man,  
At that moment, there shaped itself vaguely the plan

Of a purpose malignant and dark, such alone  
(To his own secret heart but imperfectly shown)  
As could spring from the cloudy, fierce chaos of thought  
By which all his nature to tumult was wrought.

XIX.

"So!" he thought, "they meet thus: and reweave the old charm!  
And she hangs on his voice, and she leans on his arm,  
And she heeds me not, seeks me not, recks not of me!  
Oh, what if I show'd her that I, too, can be  
Loved by one--her own rival--more fair and more young?"  
The serpent rose in him; a serpent which, stung,  
Sought to sting.

Each unconscious, indeed, of the eye  
Fix'd upon them, Lucile and my lord saunter'd by,  
In converse which seem'd to be earnest. A smile  
Now and then seem'd to show where their thoughts touch'd. Meanwhile  
The muse of this story, convinced that they need her,  
To the Duke and Matilda returns, gentle Reader.

XX.

The Duke with that sort of aggressive false praise  
Which is meant a resentful remonstrance to raise  
From a listener (as sometimes a judge, just before  
He pulls down the black cap, very gently goes o'er  
The case for the prisoner, and deals tenderly  
With the man he is minded to hang by and by),  
Had referr'd to Lucile, and then stopp'd to detect  
In the face of Matilda the growing effect  
Of the words he had dropp'd. There's no weapon that slays  
Its victim so surely (if well aim'd) as praise.  
Thus, a pause on their converse had fallen: and now  
Each was silent, preoccupied; thoughtful.

You know

There are moments when silence, prolong'd and unbroken,  
More expressive may be than all words ever spoken.  
It is when the heart has an instinct of what  
In the heart of another is passing. And that  
In the heart of Matilda, what was it? Whence came  
To her cheek on a sudden that tremulous flame?  
What weighed down her head?

All your eye could discover  
Was the fact that Matilda was troubled. Moreover  
That trouble the Duke's presence seem'd to renew.  
She, however, broke silence, the first of the two.  
The Duke was too prudent to shatter the spell  
Of a silence which suited his purpose so well.

She was plucking the leaves from a pale blush rose blossom  
Which had fall'n from the nosegay she wore in her bosom.  
"This poor flower," she said, "seems it not out of place  
In this hot, lamplit air, with its fresh, fragile grace?"  
She bent her head low as she spoke. With a smile  
The Duke watch'd her caressing the leaves all the while,  
And continued on his side the silence. He knew  
This would force his companion their talk to renew  
At the point that he wish'd; and Matilda divined  
The significant pause with new trouble of mind.  
She lifted one moment her head; but her look  
Encounter'd the ardent regard of the Duke,  
And dropp'd back on her flowret abash'd. Then, still seeking  
The assurance she fancied she show'd him by speaking,  
She conceived herself safe in adopting again  
The theme she should most have avoided just then.

XXI.

"Duke," she said, . . . and she felt, as she spoke, her cheek burn'd,  
"You know, then, this . . . lady?"  
"Too well!" he return'd.

MATILDA.

True; you drew with emotion her portrait just now.

LUVOIS.

With emotion?

MATILDA.

Yes, yes! you described her, I know,  
As possess'd of a charm all unrivall'd.

LUVOIS.

Alas!

You mistook me completely! You, madam, surpass  
This lady as moonlight does lamplight; as youth  
Surpasses its best imitations; as truth  
The fairest of falsehood surpasses; as nature  
Surpasses art's masterpiece; ay, as the creature  
Fresh and pure in its native adornment surpasses  
All the charms got by heart at the world's looking-glasses!  
"Yet you said,"--she continued with some trepidation,  
"That you quite comprehended" . . . a slight hesitation  
Shook the sentence, . . . "a passion so strong as" . . .

LUVOIS.

"True, true!

But not in a man that had once look'd at you.  
Nor can I conceive, or excuse, or" . . .

Hush, hush!"

She broke in, all more fair for one innocent blush.  
"Between man and woman these things differ so!  
It may be that the world pardons . . . (how should I know?)  
In you what it visits on us; or 'tis true,  
It may be that we women are better than you."

LUVOIS.

Who denies it? Yet, madam, once more you mistake.  
The world, in its judgment, some difference may make  
'Twi'x the man and the woman, so far as respects  
Its social enchantments; but not as affects  
The one sentiment which it were easy to prove,  
Is the sole law we look to the moment we love.

MATILDA.

That may be. Yet I think I should be less severe.  
Although so inexperienced in such things, I fear  
I have learn'd that the heart cannot always repress  
Or account for the feelings which sway it.

"Yes! yes!

That is too true, indeed!" . . . the Duke sigh'd.

And again

For one moment in silence continued the twain.

XXII.

At length the Duke slowly, as though he had needed  
All this time to repress his emotions, proceeded:  
"And yet! . . . what avails, then, to woman the gift  
Of a beauty like yours, if it cannot uplift  
Her heart from the reach of one doubt, one despair,  
One pang of wrong'd love, to which women less fair  
Are exposed, when they love?"

With a quick change of tone,

As though by resentment impell'd he went on:--  
"The name that you bear, it is whisper'd, you took  
From love, not convention. Well, lady, . . . that look  
So excited, so keen, on the face you must know  
Throughout all its expressions--that rapturous glow,  
Those eloquent features--significant eyes--  
Which that pale woman sees, yet betrays no surprise,"  
(He pointed his hand, as he spoke, to the door,  
Fixing with it Lucile and Lord Alfred) . . . "before,  
Have you ever once seen what just now you may view

In that face so familiar? . . . no, lady, 'tis new.  
Young, lovely, and loving, no doubt, as you are,  
Are you loved?" . . .

XXIII.

He look'd at her--paused--felt if thus far  
The ground held yet. The ardor with which he had spoken,  
This close, rapid question, thus suddenly broken,  
Inspired in Matilda a vague sense of fear,  
As though some indefinite danger were near.  
With composure, however, at once she replied:--  
"Tis three years since the day when I first was a bride,  
And my husband I never had cause to suspect;  
Nor ever have stoop'd, sir, such cause to detect.  
Yet if in his looks or his acts I should see--  
See, or fancy--some moment's oblivion of me,  
I trust that I too should forget it,--for you  
Must have seen that my heart is my husband's."

The hue

On her cheek, with the effort wherewith to the Duke  
She had uttered this vague and half-frightened rebuke,  
Was white as the rose in her hand. The last word  
Seem'd to die on her lip, and could scarcely be heard.  
There was silence again.

A great step had been made

By the Duke in the words he that evening had said.  
There, half drown'd by the music, Matilda, that night,  
Had listen'd--long listen'd--no doubt, in despite  
Of herself, to a voice she should never have heard,  
And her heart by that voice had been troubled and stirr'd.  
And so having suffer'd in silence his eye  
To fathom her own, he resumed, with a sigh:

XXIV.

"Will you suffer me, lady, your thoughts to invade  
By disclosing my own? The position," he said,  
"In which we so strangely seem placed may excuse  
The frankness and force of the words which I use.  
You say that your heart is your husband's: You say  
That you love him. You think so, of course, lady . . . nay,  
Such a love, I admit, were a merit, no doubt.  
But, trust me, no true love there can be without  
Its dread penalty--jealousy.

"Well, do not start!

Until now,--either thanks to a singular art  
Of supreme self-control, you have held them all down  
Unreveal'd in your heart,--or you never have known



Even one of those fierce irresistible pangs  
 Which deep passion engenders; that anguish which hangs  
 On the heart like a nightmare, by jealousy bred.  
 But if, lady, the love you describe, in the bed  
 Of a blissful security thus hath reposed  
 Undisturb'd, with mild eyelids on happiness closed,  
 Were it not to expose to a peril unjust,  
 And most cruel, that happy repose you so trust,  
 To meet, to receive, and, indeed, it may be,  
 For how long I know not, continue to see  
 A woman whose place rivals yours in the life  
 And the heart which not only your title of wife,  
 But also (forgive me!) your beauty alone,  
 Should have made wholly yours?--You, who gave all your own!  
 Reflect!--'tis the peace of existence you stake  
 On the turn of a die. And for whose--for his sake?  
 While you witness this woman, the false point of view  
 From which she must now be regarded by you  
 Will exaggerate to you, whatever they be,  
 The charms I admit she possesses. To me  
 They are trivial indeed; yet to your eyes, I fear  
 And foresee, they will true and intrinsic appear.  
 Self-unconscious, and sweetly unable to guess  
 How more lovely by far is the grace you possess,  
 You will wrong your own beauty. The graces of art,  
 You will take for the natural charm of the heart;  
 Studied manners, the brilliant and bold repartee,  
 Will too soon in that fatal comparison be  
 To your fancy more fair than the sweet timid sense  
 Which, in shrinking, betrays its own best eloquence.  
 O then, lady, then, you will feel in your heart  
 The poisonous pain of a fierce jealous dart!  
 While you see her, yourself you no longer will see,--  
 You will hear her, and hear not yourself,--you will be  
 Unhappy; unhappy, because you will deem  
 Your own power less great than her power will seem.  
 And I shall not be by your side, day by day,  
 In despite of your noble displeasure, to say  
 'You are fairer than she, as the star is more fair  
 Than the diamond, the brightest that beauty can wear'"

XXV.

This appeal, both by looks and by language, increased  
 The trouble Matilda felt grow in her breast.  
 Still she spoke with what calmness she could--

"Sir, the while

I thank you," she said, with a faint scornful smile,  
 "For your fervor in painting my fancied distress:  
 Allow me the right some surprise to express  
 At the zeal you betray in disclosing to me

The possible depth of my own misery."  
"That zeal would not startle you, madam," he said,  
"Could you read in my heart, as myself I have read,  
The peculiar interest which causes that zeal--"

Matilda her terror no more could conceal.  
"Duke," she answer'd in accents short, cold and severe,  
As she rose from her seat, "I continue to hear;  
But permit me to say, I no more understand."  
"Forgive!" with a nervous appeal of the hand,  
And a well-feign'd confusion of voice and of look,  
"Forgive, oh, forgive me!" at once cried the Duke  
"I forgot that you know me so slightly. Your leave  
I entreat (from your anger those words to retrieve)  
For one moment to speak of myself,--for I think  
That you wrong me--"

His voice, as in pain, seem'd to sink  
And tears in his eyes, as he lifted them, glisten'd.

XXVI.

Matilda, despite of herself, sat and listen'd.

XXVII.

"Beneath an exterior which seems, and may be,  
Worldly, frivolous, careless, my heart hides in me,"  
He continued, "a sorrow which draws me to side  
With all things that suffer. Nay, laugh not," he cried,  
"At so strange an avowal.

"I seek at a ball,  
For instance,--the beauty admired by all?  
No! some plain, insignificant creature, who sits  
Scorn'd of course by the beauties, and shunn'd by the wits.  
All the world is accusom'd to wound, or neglect,  
Or oppress, claims my heart and commands my respect.  
No Quixote, I do not affect to belong,  
I admit, to those charter'd redressers of wrong;  
But I seek to console, where I can. 'Tis a part  
Not brilliant, I own, yet its joys bring no smart."  
These trite words, from the tone which he gave them, received  
An appearance of truth which might well be believed  
By a heart shrewder yet than Matilda's.

And so

He continued . . . "O lady! alas, could you know  
What injustice and wrong in this world I have seen!  
How many a woman, believed to have been  
Without a regret, I have known turn aside  
To burst into heartbroken tears undescried!

On how many a lip have I witness'd the smile  
Which but hid what was breaking the poor heart the while!"  
Said Matilda, "Your life, it would seem, then, must be  
One long act of devotion"

"Perhaps so," said he;

"But at least that devotion small merit can boast,  
For one day may yet come,--if ONE day at the most,--  
When, perceiving at last all the difference--how great!--  
Twixt the heart that neglects, and the heart that can wait,  
Twixt the natures that pity, the natures that pain,  
Some woman, that else might have pass'd in disdain  
Or indifference by me,--in passing that day  
Might pause with a word or a smile to repay  
This devotion,--and then" . . .

XXVIII.

To Matilda's relief

At that moment her husband approach'd.

With some grief

I must own that her welcome, perchance, was express'd  
The more eagerly just for one twinge in her breast  
Of a conscience disturb'd, and her smile not less warm,  
Though she saw the Comtesse de Nevers on his arm.  
The Duke turn'd and adjusted his collar.

Thought he,

"Good! the gods fight my battle to-night. I foresee  
That the family doctor's the part I must play.  
Very well! but the patients my visits shall pay."  
Lord Alfred presented Lucile to his wife;  
And Matilda, repressing with effort the strife  
Of emotions which made her voice shake, murmur'd low  
Some faint, troubled greeting. The Duke, with a bow  
Which betoken'd a distant defiance, replied  
To Lucile's startled cry, as surprised she descried  
Her former gay wooer. Anon, with the grace  
Of that kindness which seeks to win kindness, her place  
She assumed by Matilda, unconscious, perchance,  
Or resolved not to notice the half-frighten'd glance,  
That follow'd that movement.

The Duke to his feet

Arose; and, in silence, relinquish'd his seat.  
One must own that the moment was awkward for all  
But nevertheless, before long, the strange thrall  
Of Lucile's gracious tact was by every one felt,  
And from each the reserve seem'd, reluctant, to melt;  
Thus, conversing together, the whole of the four  
Thro' the crowd saunter'd smiling.

XXIX.

Approaching the door,  
Eugene de Luvois, who had fallen behind,  
By Lucile, after some hesitation, was join'd.  
With a gesture of gentle and kindly appeal,  
Which appear'd to imply, without words, "Let us feel  
That the friendship between us in years that are fled,  
Has survived one mad moment forgotten," she said:  
"You remain, Duke, at Ems?"

He turn'd on her a look  
Of frigid, resentful, and sullen rebuke;  
And then, with a more than significant glance  
At Matilda, maliciously answer'd, "Perchance.  
I have here an attraction. And you?" he return'd.  
Lucile's eyes had follow'd his own, and discern'd  
The boast they implied.

He repeated, "And you?"  
And, still watching Matilda, she answer'd, "I too."  
And he thought, as with that word she left him, she sigh'd.  
The next moment her place she resumed by the side  
Of Matilda; and they soon shook hands at the gate  
Of the selfsame hotel.

XXX.

One depress'd, one elate,  
The Duke and Lord Alfred again, thro' the glooms  
Of the thick linden alley, return'd to the Rooms.  
His cigar each had lighted, a moment before,  
At the inn, as they turn'd, arm-in-arm, from the door.  
Ems cigars do not cheer a man's spirits, experto  
(Me miserum quoties!) crede Roberto.  
In silence, awhile, they walk'd onward.  
At last  
The Duke's thoughts to language half consciously pass'd.

LUVOIS.

Once more! yet once more!

ALFRED.

What?

LUVOIS.

We meet her, once more,  
The woman for whom we two madmen of yore  
(Laugh, mon cher Alfred, laugh!) were about to destroy  
Each other!

ALFRED.

It is not with laughter that I  
Raise the ghost of that once troubled time. Say! can you  
Recall it with coolness and quietude now?

LUVOIS.

Now? yes! I, mon cher, am a true Parisien:  
Now, the red revolution, the tocsin, and then  
The dance and the play. I am now at the play.

ALFRED.

At the play, are you now? Then perchance I now may  
Presume, Duke, to ask you what, ever until  
Such a moment, I waited . . .

LUVOIS.

Oh! ask what you will.  
Franc jeu! on the table my cards I spread out.  
Ask!

ALFRED.

Duke, you were called to a meeting (no doubt  
You remember it yet) with Lucile. It was night  
When you went; and before you return'd it was light.  
We met: you accosted me then with a brow  
Bright with triumph: your words (you remember them now!)  
Were "Let us be friends!"

LUVOIS.

Well?

ALFRED.

How then, after that  
Can you and she meet as acquaintances?

LUVOIS.

What!  
Did she not then, herself, the Comtesse de Nevers,  
Solve your riddle to-night with those soft lips of hers?

ALFRED.

In our converse to-night we avoided the past.  
But the question I ask should be answer'd at last:

By you, if you will; if you will not, by her.

LUVOIS.

Indeed? but that question, milord, can it stir  
Such an interest in you, if your passion be o'er?

ALFRED.

Yes. Esteem may remain, although love be no more.  
Lucile ask'd me, this night, to my wife (understand,  
To MY WIFE!) to present her. I did so. Her hand  
Has clasp'd that of Matilda. We gentlemen owe  
Respect to the name that is ours: and, if so,  
To the woman that bears it a twofold respect.  
Answer, Duc de Luvois! Did Lucile then reject  
The proffer you made of your hand and your name?  
Or did you on her love then relinquish a claim  
Urged before? I ask bluntly this question, because  
My title to do so is clear by the laws  
That all gentlemen honor. Make only one sign  
That you know of Lucile de Nevers aught, in fine,  
For which, if your own virgin sister were by,  
From Lucile you would shield her acquaintance, and I  
And Matilda leave Ems on the morrow.

XXXI.

#### The Duke

Hesitated and paused. He could tell, by the look  
Of the man at his side, that he meant what he said,  
And there flash'd in a moment these thoughts through his head:  
"Leave Ems! would that suit me? no! that were again  
To mar all. And besides, if I do not explain,  
She herself will . . . et puis, il a raison: on est  
Gentilhomme avant tout!" He replied therefore,

"Nay!

Madame de Nevers had rejected me. I,  
In those days, I was mad; and in some mad reply  
I threatened the life of the rival to whom  
That rejection was due, I was led to presume.  
She fear'd for his life; and the letter which then  
She wrote me, I show'd you; we met: and again  
My hand was refused, and my love was denied,  
And the glance you mistook was the vizard which Pride  
Lends to Humiliation.

"And so," half in jest,

He went on, "in this best world, 'tis all for the best;  
You are wedded (bless'd Englishman!) wedded to one  
Whose past can be called into question by none:  
And I (fickle Frenchman!) can still laugh to feel

I am lord of myself; and the Mode: and Lucile  
Still shines from her pedestal, frigid and fair  
As yon German moon o'er the linden-tops there!  
A Dian in marble that scorns any troth  
With the little love gods, whom I thank for us both,  
While she smiles from her lonely Olympus apart,  
That her arrows are marble as well as her heart.  
Stay at Ems, Alfred Vargrave!"

XXXII.

The Duke, with a smile,  
Turn'd and enter'd the Rooms which, thus talking, meanwhile,  
They had reach'd.

XXXIII.

Alfred Vargrave strode on (overthrown  
Heart and mind!) in the darkness bewilder'd, alone:  
"And so," to himself did he mutter, "and so  
'Twas to rescue my life, gentle spirit! and, oh,  
For this did I doubt her? . . . a light word--a look--  
The mistake of a moment! . . . for this I forsook--  
For this? Pardon, pardon, Lucile! O Lucile!"  
Thought and memory rang, like a funeral peal,  
Weary changes on one dirge-like note through his brain,  
As he stray'd down the darkness.

XXXIV.

Re-entering again  
The Casino, the Duke smiled. He turned to roulette,  
And sat down, and play'd fast, and lost largely, and yet  
He still smiled: night deepen'd: he play'd his last number:  
Went home: and soon slept: and still smil'd in his slumber.

XXXV.

In his desolate Maxims, La Rochefoucauld wrote,  
"In the grief or mischance of a friend you may note,  
There is something which always gives pleasure."

Alas!

That reflection fell short of the truth as it was.  
La Rochefoucauld might have as truly set down--  
"No misfortune, but what some one turns to his own

Advantage its mischief: no sorrow, but of it  
There ever is somebody ready to profit:  
No affliction without its stock-jobbers, who all  
Gamble, speculate, play on the rise and the fall  
Of another man's heart, and make traffic in it."  
Burn thy book, O La Rochefoucauld!

Fool! one man's wit  
All men's selfishness how should it fathom?

O sage,  
Dost thou satirize Nature?  
She laughs at thy page.

## CANTO II.

### I.

COUSIN JOHN TO COUSIN ALFRED.

LONDON, 18--

"My dear Alfred,

Your last letters put me in pain.

This contempt of existence, this listless disdain  
Of your own life,--its joys and its duties,--the deuce  
Take my wits if they find for it half an excuse!  
I wish that some Frenchman would shoot off your leg,  
And compel you to stump through the world on a peg.  
I wish that you had, like myself (more's the pity!),  
To sit seven hours on this cursed committee.  
I wish that you knew, sir, how salt is the bread  
Of another--(what is it that Dante has said?)  
And the trouble of other men's stairs. In a word,  
I wish fate had some real affliction conferr'd  
On your whimsical self, that, at least, you had cause  
For neglecting life's duties, and damning its laws!  
This pressure against all the purpose of life,  
This self-ebullition, and ferment, and strife,  
Betoken'd, I grant that it may be in truth,  
The richness and strength of the new wine of youth.  
But if, when the wine should have mellow'd with time,  
Being bottled and binn'd, to a flavor sublime,  
It retains the same acrid, incongruous taste,  
Why, the sooner to throw it away that we haste  
The better, I take it. And this vice of snarling,  
Self-love's little lapdog, the overfed darling  
Of a hypochondriacal fancy appears,  
To my thinking, at least, in a man of your years,  
At the midnight of manhood with plenty to do,  
And every incentive for doing it too,



With the duties of life just sufficiently pressing  
For prayer, and of joys more than most men for blessing;  
With a pretty young wife, and a pretty full purse,  
Like poltroonery, puerile truly, or worse!  
I wish I could get you at least to agree  
To take life as it is, and consider with me,  
If it be not all smiles, that it is not all sneers;  
It admits honest laughter, and needs honest tears.  
Do you think none have known but yourself all the pain  
Of hopes that retreat, and regrets that remain?  
And all the wide distance fate fixes, no doubt,  
'Twixt the life that's within, and the life that's without?  
What one of us finds the world just as he likes?  
Or gets what he wants when he wants it? Or strikes  
Without missing the thing that he strikes at the first?  
Or walks without stumbling? Or quenches his thirst  
At one draught? Bah! I tell you! I, bachelor John,  
Have had griefs of my own. But what then? I push on  
All the faster perchance that I yet feel the pain  
Of my last fall, albeit I may stumble again.  
God means every man to be happy, be sure.  
He sends us no sorrows that have not some cure.  
Our duty down here is to do, not to know.  
Live as though life were earnest, and life will be so.  
Let each moment, like Time's last ambassador, come:  
It will wait to deliver its message; and some  
Sort of answer it merits. It is not the deed  
A man does, but the way that he does it, should plead  
For the man's compensation in doing it.

"Here,

My next neighbor's a man with twelve thousand a year,  
Who deems that life has not a pastime more pleasant  
Than to follow a fox, or to slaughter a pheasant.  
Yet this fellow goes through a contested election,  
Lives in London, and sits, like the soul of dejection,  
All the day through upon a committee, and late  
To the last, every night, through the dreary debate,  
As though he were getting each speaker by heart,  
Though amongst them he never presumes to take part.  
One asks himself why, without murmur or question,  
He foregoes all his tastes, and destroys his digestion,  
For a labor of which the result seems so small.  
'The man is ambitious,' you say. Not at all.  
He has just sense enough to be fully aware  
That he never can hope to be Premier, or share  
The renown of a Tully;--or even to hold  
A subordinate office. He is not so bold  
As to fancy the House for ten minutes would bear  
With patience his modest opinions to hear.  
'But he wants something!'

"What! with twelve thousand a year?

What could Government give him would be half so dear  
To his heart as a walk with a dog and a gun

Through his own pheasant woods, or a capital run?  
'No; but vanity fills out the emptiest brain;  
The man would be more than his neighbor, 'tis plain;  
And the drudgery drearily gone through in town  
Is more than repaid by provincial renown.  
Enough if some Marchioness, lively and loose,  
Shall have eyed him with passing complaisance; the goose,  
If the Fashion to him open one of its doors,  
As proud as a sultan returns to his boors.'  
Wrong again! if you think so,

"For, primo; my friend  
Is the head of a family known from one end  
Of his shire to the other as the oldest; and therefore  
He despises fine lords and fine ladies. HE care for  
A peerage? no truly! Secondo; he rarely  
Or never goes out: dines at Bellamy's sparely,  
And abhors what you call the gay world.

"Then, I ask,  
What inspires, and consoles, such a self-imposed task  
As the life of this man,--but the sense of its duty?  
And I swear that the eyes of the haughtiest beauty  
Have never inspired in my soul that intense,  
Reverential, and loving, and absolute sense  
Of heart-felt admiration I feel for this man,  
As I see him beside me;--there, wearing the wan  
London daylight away, on his humdrum committee;  
So unconscious of all that awakens my pity,  
And wonder--and worship, I might say?

"To me  
There seems something nobler than genius to be  
In that dull patient labor no genius relieves,  
That absence of all joy which yet never grieves;  
The humility of it! the grandeur withal!  
The sublimity of it! And yet, should you call  
The man's own very slow apprehension to this,  
He would ask, with a stare, what sublimity is!  
His work is the duty to which he was born;  
He accepts it, without ostentation or scorn:  
And this man is no uncommon type (I thank Heaven!)  
Of this land's common men. In all other lands, even  
The type's self is wanting. Perchance, 'tis the reason  
That Government oscillates ever 'twixt treason  
And tyranny elsewhere.

"I wander away  
Too far, though, from what I was wishing to say.  
You, for instance, read Plato. You know that the soul  
Is immortal; and put this in rhyme, on the whole,  
Very well, with sublime illustration. Man's heart  
Is a mystery, doubtless. You trace it in art:--  
The Greek Psyche,--that's beauty,--the perfect ideal.  
But then comes the imperfect, perfectible real,  
With its pain'd aspiration and strife. In those pale  
Ill-drawn virgins of Giotto you see it prevail.

You have studied all this. Then, the universe, too,  
Is not a mere house to be lived in, for you.  
Geology opens the mind. So you know  
Something also of strata and fossils; these show  
The bases of cosmical structure: some mention  
Of the nebulous theory demands your attention;  
And so on.

"In short, it is clear the interior  
Of your brain, my dear Alfred, is vastly superior  
In fibre, and fulness, and function, and fire,  
To that of my poor parliamentary squire;  
But your life leaves upon me (forgive me this heat  
Due to friendship) the sense of a thing incomplete.  
You fly high. But what is it, in truth, you fly at?  
My mind is not satisfied quite as to that.  
An old illustration's as good as a new,  
Provided the old illustration be true.  
We are children. Mere kites are the fancies we fly,  
Though we marvel to see them ascending so high;  
Things slight in themselves,--long-tail'd toys, and no more:  
What is it that makes the kite steadily soar  
Through the realms where the cloud and the whirlwind have birth  
But the tie that attaches the kite to the earth?  
I remember the lessons of childhood, you see,  
And the hornbook I learn'd on my poor mother's knee.  
In truth, I suspect little else do we learn  
From this great book of life, which so shrewdly we turn,  
Saving how to apply, with a good or bad grace,  
What we learn'd in the hornbook of childhood.

"Your case

Is exactly in point.

"Fly your kite, if you please,  
Out of sight: let it go where it will, on the breeze;  
But cut not the one thread by which it is bound,  
Be it never so high, to this poor human ground.  
No man is the absolute lord of his life.  
You, my friend, have a home, and a sweet and dear wife.  
If I often have sigh'd by my own silent fire,  
With the sense of a sometimes recurring desire  
For a voice sweet and low, or a face fond and fair,  
Some dull winter evening to solace and share  
With the love which the world its good children allows  
To shake hands with,--in short, a legitimate spouse,  
This thought has consoled me: 'At least I have given  
For my own good behavior no hostage to heaven.'  
You have, though. Forget it not! faith, if you do,  
I would rather break stones on a road than be you.  
If any man wilfully injured, or led  
That little girl wrong, I would sit on his head,  
Even though you yourself were the sinner!

"And this

Leads me back (do not take it, dear cousin, amiss!)  
To the matter I meant to have mention'd at once,

But these thoughts put it out of my head for the nonce.  
Of all the preposterous humbugs and shams,  
Of all the old wolves ever taken for lambs,  
The wolf best received by the flock he devours  
Is that uncle-in-law, my dear Alfred, of yours.  
At least, this has long been my unsettled conviction,  
And I almost would venture at once the prediction  
That before very long--but no matter! I trust,  
For his sake and our own, that I may be unjust.  
But Heaven forgive me, if cautious I am on  
The score of such men as with both God and Mammon  
Seem so shrewdly familiar.

"Neglect not this warning.

There were rumors afloat in the City this morning  
Which I scarce like the sound of. Who knows? would he fleece  
At a pinch, the old hypocrite, even his own niece?  
For the sake of Matilda I cannot importune  
Your attention too early. If all your wife's fortune  
Is yet in the hands of that specious old sinner,  
Who would dice with the devil, and yet rise up winner,  
I say, lose no time! get it out of the grab  
Of her trustee and uncle, Sir Ridley McNab.  
I trust those deposits, at least, are drawn out,  
And safe at this moment from danger or doubt.  
A wink is as good as a nod to the wise.  
Verbum sap. I admit nothing yet justifies  
My mistrust; but I have in my own mind a notion  
That old Ridley's white waistcoat, and airs of devotion,  
Have long been the only ostensible capital  
On which he does business. If so, time must sap it all,  
Sooner or later. Look sharp. Do not wait,  
Draw at once. In a fortnight it may be too late.  
I admit I know nothing. I can but suspect;  
I give you my notions. Form yours and reflect.  
My love to Matilda. Her mother looks well.  
I saw her last week. I have nothing to tell  
Worth your hearing. We think that the Government here  
Will not last our next session. Fitz Funk is a peer,  
You will see by the Times. There are symptoms which show  
That the ministers now are preparing to go,  
And finish their feast of the loaves and the fishes.  
It is evident that they are clearing the dishes,  
And cramming their pockets with bonbons. Your news  
Will be always acceptable. Vere, of the Blues,  
Has bolted with Lady Selina. And so  
You have met with that hot-headed Frenchman? I know  
That the man is a sad mauvais sujet. Take care  
Of Matilda. I wish I could join you both there;  
But before I am free, you are sure to be gone.  
Good-by, my dear fellow. Yours, anxiously,  
JOHN."



Their blue hours would this gay little colony pass.  
The men loved to smoke, and the women to bring,  
Undeterr'd by tobacco, their work there, and sing  
Or converse, till the dew fell, and homeward the bee  
Floated, heavy with honey. Towards eve there was tea  
(A luxury due to Matilda), and ice,  
Fruit and coffee. [Greek text omitted]!  
Such an evening it was, while Matilda presided  
O'er the rustic arrangements thus daily provided,  
With the Duke, and a small German Prince with a thick head,  
And an old Russian Countess both witty and wicked,  
And two Austrian Colonels,--that Alfred, who yet  
Was lounging alone with his last cigarette,  
Saw Lucile de Nevers by herself pacing slow  
'Neath the shade of the cool linden-trees to and fro,  
And joining her, cried, "Thank the good stars, we meet!  
I have so much to say to you!"

"Yes? . . . "with her sweet  
Serene voice, she replied to him. . . . "Yes? and I too  
Was wishing, indeed, to say somewhat to you."  
She was paler just then than her wont was. The sound  
Of her voice had within it a sadness profound.  
"You are ill?" he exclaim'd.

"No!" she hurriedly said.

"No, no!"

"You alarm me!"

She droop'd down her head.

"If your thoughts have of late sought, or cared, to divine  
The purpose of what has been passing in mine,  
My farewell can scarcely alarm you."

ALFRED.

Lucile!

Your farewell! you go!

LUCILE.

Yes, Lord Alfred.

ALFRED.

Reveal

The cause of this sudden unkindness.

LUCILE.

Unkind?

ALFRED.

Yes! what else is this parting?

LUCILE.

No, no! are you blind?

Look into your own heart and home. Can you see  
No reason for this, save unkindness in me?  
Look into the eyes of your wife--those true eyes,  
Too pure and too honest in aught to disguise  
The sweet soul shining through them.

ALFRED.

Lucile! (first and last

Be the word, if you will!) let me speak of the past.  
I know now, alas! though I know it too late,  
What pass'd at that meeting which settled my fate.  
Nay, nay, interrupt me not yet! let it be!  
I but say what is due to yourself--due to me,  
And must say it.

He rushed incoherently on,  
Describing how, lately, the truth he had known,  
To explain how, and whence, he had wrong'd her before,  
All the complicate coil wound about him of yore,  
All the hopes that had flown with the faith that was fled,  
"And then, O Lucile, what was left me," he said,  
"When my life was defrauded of you, but to take  
That life, as 'twas left, and endeavor to make  
Unobserved by another, the void which remain'd  
Unconceal'd to myself? If I have not attain'd,  
I have striven. One word of unkindness has never  
Pass'd my lips to Matilda. Her least wish has ever  
Received my submission. And if, of a truth,  
I have fail'd to renew what I felt in my youth,  
I at least have been loyal to what I DO feel,  
Respect, duty, honor, affection. Lucile,  
I speak not of love now, nor love's long regret:  
I would not offend you, nor dare I forget  
The ties that are round me. But may there not be  
A friendship yet hallow'd between you and me?  
May we not be yet friends--friends the dearest?"

"Alas!"

She replied, "for one moment, perchance, did it pass  
Through my own heart, that dream which forever hath brought  
To those who indulge it in innocent thought  
So fatal an evil awaking! But no.  
For in lives such as ours are, the Dream-tree would grow  
On the borders of Hades: beyond it, what lies?  
The wheel of Ixion, alas! and the cries  
Of the lost and tormented. Departed, for us,  
Are the days when with innocence we could discuss  
Dreams like these. Fled, indeed, are the dreams of my life!  
Oh trust me, the best friend you have is your wife.  
And I--in that pure child's pure virtue, I bow  
To the beauty of virtue. I felt on my brow

Not one blush when I first took her hand. With no blush  
Shall I clasp it to-night, when I leave you.

"Hush! hush!

I would say what I wish'd to have said when you came.  
Do not think that years leave us and find us the same!  
The woman you knew long ago, long ago,  
Is no more. You yourself have within you, I know,  
The germ of a joy in the years yet to be,  
Whereby the past years will bear fruit. As for me,  
I go my own way,--onward, upward!

"O yet,

Let me thank you for that which ennobled regret  
When it came, as it beautified hope ere it fled,--  
The love I once felt for you. True, it is dead,  
But it is not corrupted. I too have at last  
Lived to learn that love is not--such love as is past,  
Such love as youth dreams of at least--the sole part  
Of life, which is able to fill up the heart;  
Even that of a woman.

"Between you and me

Heaven fixes a gulf, over which you must see  
That our guardian angels can bear us no more.  
We each of us stand on an opposite shore.  
Trust a woman's opinion for once. Women learn,  
By an instinct men never attain, to discern  
Each other's true natures. Matilda is fair,  
Matilda is young--see her now, sitting there!--  
How tenderly fashion'd--(oh, is she not? say,)  
To love and be loved!"

IV.

He turn'd sharply away--

"Matilda is young, and Matilda is fair;  
Of all that you tell me pray deem me aware;  
But Matilda's a statue, Matilda's a child;  
Matilda loves not--"

Lucile quietly smiled

As she answer'd him--"Yesterday, all that you say  
Might be true; it is false, wholly false, though, today."  
"How?--what mean you?"

"I mean that to-day," she replied,

"The statue with life has become vivified:  
I mean that the child to a woman has grown:  
And that woman is jealous."

"What, she!" with a tone

Of ironical wonder, he answer'd--what, she!  
She jealous!--Matilda!--of whom, pray?--not me!"  
"My lord, you deceive yourself; no one but you  
Is she jealous of. Trust me. And thank Heaven, too,  
That so lately this passion within her hath grown.



For who shall declare, if for months she had known  
What for days she has known all too keenly, I fear,  
That knowledge perchance might have cost you more dear?"

"Explain! explain, madam!" he cried, in surprise;  
And terror and anger enkindled his eyes.  
"How blind are you men!" she replied. "Can you doubt  
That a woman, young, fair, and neglected--"

"Speak out!"

He gasp'd with emotion. "Lucile! you mean--what!  
Do you doubt her fidelity?"

"Certainly not.

Listen to me, my friend. What I wish to explain  
Is so hard to shape forth. I could almost refrain  
From touching a subject so fragile. However,  
Bear with me awhile, if I frankly endeavor  
To invade for one moment your innermost life.  
Your honor, Lord Alfred, and that of your wife,  
Are dear to me,--most dear! And I am convinced  
That you rashly are risking that honor."

He winced,

And turn'd pale, as she spoke.

She had aim'd at his heart,  
And she saw, by his sudden and terrified start,  
That her aim had not miss'd.

"Stay, Lucile!" he exclaim'd,

"What in truth do you mean by these words, vaguely framed  
To alarm me? Matilda?--my wife?--do you know?"--

"I know that your wife is as spotless as snow.  
But I know not how far your continued neglect  
Her nature, as well as her heart, might affect.  
Till at last, by degrees, that serene atmosphere  
Of her unconscious purity, faint and yet dear,  
Like the indistinct golden and vaporous fleece  
Which surrounded and hid the celestials in Greece  
From the glances of men, would disperse and depart  
At the sighs of a sick and delirious heart,--  
For jealousy is to a woman, be sure,  
A disease heal'd too oft by a criminal cure;  
And the heart left too long to its ravage in time  
May find weakness in virtue, reprisal in crime."

V.

"Such thoughts could have never," he falter'd, "I know,  
Reach'd the heart of Matilda."

"Matilda? oh no!

But reflect! when such thoughts do not come of themselves  
To the heart of a woman neglected, like elves  
That seek lonely places,--there rarely is wanting

Some voice at her side, with an evil enchanting  
To conjure them to her."

"O lady, beware!

At this moment, around me I search everywhere  
For a clue to your words"--

"You mistake them," she said,  
Half fearing, indeed, the effect they had made.

"I was putting a mere hypothetical case."

With a long look of trouble he gazed in her face.

"Woe to him, . . ." he exclaim'd . . . "woe to him that shall feel

Such a hope! for I swear, if he did but reveal

One glimpse,--it should be the last hope of his life!"

The clench'd hand and bent eyebrow betoken'd the strife

She had roused in his heart.

"You forget," she began,

"That you menace yourself. You yourself are the man

That is guilty. Alas! must it ever be so?

Do we stand in our own light, wherever we go,

And fight our own shadows forever? O think!

The trial from which you, the stronger ones, shrink,

You ask woman, the weaker one, still to endure;

You bid her be true to the laws you abjure;

To abide by the ties you yourselves rend asunder,

With the force that has fail'd you; and that too, when under

The assumption of rights which to her you refuse,

The immunity claim'd for yourselves you abuse!

Where the contract exists, it involves obligation

To both husband and wife, in an equal relation.

You unloose, in asserting your own liberty,

A knot, which, unloosed, leaves another as free.

Then, O Alfred! be juster at heart: and thank Heaven

That Heaven to your wife such a nature has given

That you have not wherewith to reproach her, albeit

You have cause to reproach your own self, could you see it!"

VI.

In the silence that follow'd the last word she said,

In the heave of his chest, and the droop of his head,

Poor Lucile mark'd her words had sufficed to impart

A new germ of motion and life to that heart

Of which he himself had so recently spoken

As dead to emotion--exhausted, or broken!

New fears would awaken new hopes in his life.

In the husband indifferent no more to the wife

She already, as she had foreseen, could discover

That Matilda had gain'd at her hands, a new lover.

So after some moments of silence, whose spell

They both felt, she extended her hand to him. . . .

VII.

"Well?"

VIII.

"Lucile," he replied, as that soft quiet hand  
In his own he clasp'd warmly, "I both understand  
And obey you."

"Thank Heaven!" she murmur'd.

"O yet,

One word, I beseech you! I cannot forget,"  
He exclaim'd, "we are parting for life. You have shown  
My pathway to me: but say, what is your own?"  
The calmness with which until then she had spoken  
In a moment seem'd strangely and suddenly broken.  
She turn'd from him nervously, hurriedly.

"Nay,

I know not," she murmur'd, "I follow the way  
Heaven leads me; I cannot foresee to what end.  
I know only that far, far away it must tend  
From all places in which we have met, or might meet.  
Far away!--onward upward!"

A smile strange and sweet

As the incense that rises from some sacred cup  
And mixes with music, stole forth, and breathed up  
Her whole face, with those words.

"Wheresoever it be,

May all gentlest angels attend you!" sighed he,  
"And bear my heart's blessing wherever you are!"  
And her hand, with emotion, he kiss'd.

IX.

From afar

That kiss was, alas! by Matilda beheld.  
With far other emotions: her young bosom swell'd,  
And her young cheek with anger was crimson'd.

The Duke

Adroitly attracted towards it her look  
By a faint but significant smile.

X.

Much ill-construed,

Renown'd Bishop Berkeley has fully, for one, strew'd  
With arguments page upon page to teach folks

That the world they inhabit is only a hoax.  
But it surely is hard, since we can't do without them,  
That our senses should make us so oft wish to doubt them!

### CANTO III.

#### I.

When first the red savage call'd Man strode, a king,  
Through the wilds of creation--the very first thing  
That his naked intelligence taught him to feel  
Was the shame of himself; and the wish to conceal  
Was the first step in art. From the apron which Eve  
In Eden sat down out of fig-leaves to weave,  
To the furbelow'd flounce and the broad crinoline  
Of my lady--you all know of course whom I mean--  
This art of concealment has greatly increas'd.  
A whole world lies cryptic in each human breast;  
And that drama of passions as old as the hills,  
Which the moral of all men in each man fulfils,  
Is only reveal'd now and then to our eyes  
In the newspaper-files and the courts of assize.

#### II.

In the group seen so lately in sunlight assembled,  
'Mid those walks over which the laburnum-bough trembled,  
And the deep-bosom'd lilac, emparadising  
The haunts where the blackbird and thrush flit and sing,  
The keenest eye could but have seen, and seen only,  
A circle of friends, minded not to leave lonely  
The bird on the bough, or the bee on the blossom;  
Conversing at ease in the garden's green bosom,  
Like those who, when Florence was yet in her glories,  
Cheated death and kill'd time with Boccaccian stories.  
But at length the long twilight more deeply grew shaded,  
And the fair night the rosy horizon invaded.  
And the bee in the blossom, the bird on the bough,  
Through the shadowy garden were slumbering now.  
The trees only, o'er every unvisited walk,  
Began on a sudden to whisper and talk.  
And, as each little sprightly and garrulous leaf  
Woke up with an evident sense of relief,  
They all seem'd to be saying . . . "Once more we're alone,  
And, thank Heaven, those tiresome people are gone!"

III.

Through the deep blue concave of the luminous air,  
Large, loving, and languid, the stars here and there,  
Like the eyes of shy passionate women, look'd down  
O'er the dim world whose sole tender light was their own,  
When Matilda, alone, from her chamber descended,  
And enter'd the garden, unseen, unattended.  
Her forehead was aching and parch'd, and her breast  
By a vague inexpressible sadness oppress'd:  
A sadness which led her, she scarcely knew how,  
And she scarcely knew why . . . (save, indeed, that just now  
The house, out of which with a gasp she had fled  
Half stifled, seem'd ready to sink on her head) . . .  
Out into the night air, the silence, the bright  
Boundless starlight, the cool isolation of night!  
Her husband that day had look'd once in her face,  
And press'd both her hands in a silent embrace,  
And reproachfully noticed her recent dejection  
With a smile of kind wonder and tacit affection.  
He, of late so indifferent and listless! . . . at last  
Was he startled and awed by the change which had pass'd  
O'er the once radiant face of his young wife? Whence came  
That long look of solicitous fondness? . . . the same  
Look and language of quiet affection--the look  
And the language, alas! which so often she took  
For pure love in the simple repose of its purity--  
Her own heart thus lull'd to a fatal security!  
Ha! would he deceive her again by this kindness?  
Had she been, then, O fool! in her innocent blindness,  
The sport of transparent illusion? ah folly!  
And that feeling, so tranquil, so happy, so holy,  
She had taken, till then, in the heart, not alone  
Of her husband, but also, indeed, in her own,  
For true love, nothing else, after all, did it prove  
But a friendship profanely familiar?

"And love? . . .

What was love, then? . . . not calm, not secure--scarcely kind,  
But in one, all intensest emotions combined:  
Life and death: pain and rapture?"

Thus wandering astray,

Led by doubt, through the darkness she wander'd away.  
All silently crossing, recrossing the night.  
With faint, meteoric, miraculous light,  
The swift-shooting stars through the infinite burn'd,  
And into the infinite ever return'd.  
And silently o'er the obscure and unknown  
In the heart of Matilda there darted and shone  
Thoughts, enkindling like meteors the deeps, to expire,  
Leaving traces behind them of tremulous fire.

IV.

She enter'd that arbor of lilacs, in which  
The dark air with odors hung heavy and rich,  
Like a soul that grows faint with desire.

'Twas the place  
In which she so lately had sat face to face,  
With her husband,--and her, the pale stranger detested  
Whose presence her heart like a plague had infested.  
The whole spot with evil remembrance was haunted.  
Through the darkness there rose on the heart which it daunted,  
Each dreary detail of that desolate day,  
So full, and yet so incomplete. Far away  
The acacias were muttering, like mischievous elves,  
The whole story over again to themselves,  
Each word,--and each word was a wound! By degrees  
Her memory mingled its voice with the trees.

V.

Like the whisper Eve heard, when she paused by the root  
Of the sad tree of knowledge, and gazed on its fruit,  
To the heart of Matilda the trees seem'd to hiss  
Wild instructions, revealing man's last right, which is  
The right of reprisals.

An image uncertain,  
And vague, dimly shaped itself forth on the curtain  
Of the darkness around her. It came, and it went;  
Through her senses a faint sense of peril it sent:  
It pass'd and repass'd her; it went and it came,  
Forever returning; forever the same;  
And forever more clearly defined; till her eyes  
In that outline obscure could at last recognize  
The man to whose image, the more and the more  
That her heart, now aroused from its calm sleep of yore,  
From her husband detach'd itself slowly, with pain.  
Her thoughts had return'd, and return'd to, again,  
As though by some secret indefinite law,--  
The vigilant Frenchman--Eugene de Luvois!

VI.

A light sound behind her. She trembled. By some  
Night-witchcraft her vision a fact had become.  
On a sudden she felt, without turning to view,  
That a man was approaching behind her. She knew  
By the fluttering pulse which she could not restrain,  
And the quick-beating heart, that this man was Eugene.

Her first instinct was flight; but she felt her slight foot  
As heavy as though to the soil it had root.  
And the Duke's voice retain'd her, like fear in a dream.

VII.

"Ah, lady! in life there are meetings which seem  
Like a fate. Dare I think like a sympathy too?  
Yet what else can I bless for this vision of you?  
Alone with my thoughts, on this starlighted lawn,  
By an instinct resistless, I felt myself drawn  
To revisit the memories left in the place  
Where so lately this evening I look'd in your face.  
And I find,--you, yourself,--my own dream!  
"Can there be  
In this world one thought common to you and to me?  
If so, . . . I, who deem'd but a moment ago  
My heart uncompanion'd, save only by woe,  
Should indeed be more bless'd than I dare to believe--  
--Ah, but ONE word, but one from your lips to receive" . . .  
Interrupting him quickly, she murmur'd, "I sought,  
Here, a moment of solitude, silence, and thought,  
Which I needed." . . .

"Lives solitude only for one?  
Must its charm by my presence so soon be undone?  
Ah, cannot two share it? What needs it for this?--  
The same thought in both hearts,--be it sorrow or bliss;  
If my heart be the reflex of yours, lady--you,  
Are you not yet alone,--even though we be two?"

"For that," . . . said Matilda, . . . "needs were, you should read  
What I have in my heart" . . .

"Think you, lady, indeed,  
You are yet of that age when a woman conceals  
In her heart so completely whatever she feels  
From the heart of the man whom it interests to know  
And find out what that feeling may be? Ah, not so,  
Lady Alfred? Forgive me that in it I look,  
But I read in your heart as I read in a book."

"Well, Duke! and what read you within it? unless  
It be, of a truth, a profound weariness,  
And some sadness?"

"No doubt. To all facts there are laws.  
The effect has its cause, and I mount to the cause."

VIII.

Matilda shrank back; for she suddenly found

That a finger was press'd on the yet bleeding wound  
She, herself, had but that day perceived in her breast.

"You are sad," . . . said the Duke (and that finger yet press'd  
With a cruel persistence the wound it made bleed)--  
"You are sad, Lady Alfred, because the first need  
Of a young and a beautiful woman is to be  
Beloved, and to love. You are sad: for you see  
That you are not beloved, as you deem'd that you were:  
You are sad: for that knowledge hath left you aware  
That you have not yet loved, though you thought that you had.  
"Yes, yes! . . . you are sad--because knowledge is sad!"

He could not have read more profoundly her heart.  
"What gave you," she cried, with a terrified start,  
"Such strange power?"  
"To read in your thoughts?" he exclaim'd  
"O lady,--a love, deep, profound--be it blamed  
Or rejected,--a love, true, intense--such, at least,  
As you, and you only, could wake in my breast!"

"Hush, hush! . . . I beseech you . . . for pity!" she gasp'd,  
Snatching hurriedly from him the hand he had clasp'd,  
In her effort instinctive to fly from the spot.

"For pity?" . . . he echoed, "for pity! and what  
Is the pity you owe him? his pity for you!  
He, the lord of a life, fresh as new-fallen dew!  
The guardian and guide of a woman, young, fair,  
And matchless! (whose happiness did he not swear  
To cherish through life?) he neglects her--for whom?  
For a fairer than she? No! the rose in the bloom  
Of that beauty which, even when hidd'n, can prevail  
To keep sleepless with song the aroused nightingale,  
Is not fairer; for even in the pure world of flowers  
Her symbol is not, and this pure world of ours  
Has no second Matilda! For whom? Let that pass!  
'Tis not I, 'tis not you, that can name her, alas!  
And I dare not question or judge her. But why,  
Why cherish the cause of your own misery?  
Why think of one, lady, who thinks not of you?  
Why be bound by a chain which himself he breaks through?  
And why, since you have but to stretch forth your hand,  
The love which you need and deserve to command,  
Why shrink? Why repel it?"

"O hush, sir! O hush!"

Cried Matilda, as though her whole heart were one blush.  
"Cease, cease, I conjure you, to trouble my life!  
Is not Alfred your friend? and am I not his wife?"



"And have I not, lady," he answer'd, . . . "respected  
HIS rights as a friend, till himself he neglected  
YOUR rights as a wife? Do you think 'tis alone  
For three days I have loved you? My love may have grown,  
I admit, day by day, since I first felt your eyes,  
In watching their tears, and in sounding your sighs.  
But, O lady! I loved you before I believed  
That your eyes ever wept, or your heart ever grieved.  
Then I deem'd you were happy--I deem'd you possess'd  
All the love you deserved,--and I hid in my breast  
My own love, till this hour--when I could not but feel  
Your grief gave me the right my own grief to reveal!  
I knew, years ago, of the singular power  
Which Lucile o'er your husband possess'd. Till the hour  
In which he revea'd it himself, did I,--say!--  
By a word, or a look, such a secret betray?  
No! no! do me justice. I never have spoken  
Of this poor heart of mine, till all ties he had broken  
Which bound YOUR heart to him. And now--now, that his love  
For another hath left your own heart free to rove,  
What is it,--even now,--that I kneel to implore you?  
Only this, Lady Alfred! . . . to let me adore you  
Unblamed: to have confidence in me: to spend  
On me not one thought, save to think me your friend.  
Let me speak to you,--ah, let me speak to you still!  
Hush to silence my words in your heart if you will.  
I ask no response: I ask only your leave  
To live yet in your life, and to grieve when you grieve!"

X.

"Leave me, leave me!" . . . she gasp'd, with a voice thick and low  
From emotion. "For pity's sake, Duke, let me go!  
I feel that to blame we should both of us be,  
Did I linger."

"To blame? yes, no doubt!" . . . answer'd he,  
"If the love of your husband, in bringing you peace,  
Had forbidden you hope. But he signs your release  
By the hand of another. One moment! but one!  
Who knows when, alas! I may see you alone  
As to-night I have seen you? or when we may meet  
As to-night we have met? when, entranced at your feet,  
As in this blessed hour, I may ever avow  
The thoughts which are pining for utterance now?"  
"Duke! Duke!" . . . she exclaim'd, . . . "for Heaven's sake let me go!  
It is late. In the house they will miss me, I know.  
We must not be seen here together. The night  
Is advancing. I feel overwhelm'd with affright!  
It is time to return to my lord."

"To your lord?"

He repeated, with lingering reproach on the word.  
"To your lord? do you think he awaits you in truth?  
Is he anxiously missing your presence, forsooth?  
Return to your lord! . . . his restraint to renew?  
And hinder the glances which are not for you?  
No, no! . . . at this moment his looks seek the face  
Of another! another is there in your place!  
Another consoles him! another receives  
The soft speech which from silence your absence relieves!"

XI.

"You mistake, sir!" . . . responded a voice, calm, severe,  
And sad, . . . "You mistake, sir! that other is here."  
Eugene and Matilda both started.

"Lucile!"

With a half-stifled scream, as she felt herself reel  
From the place where she stood, cried Matilda.

"Ho, oh!

What! eaves-dropping, madam?" . . . the Duke cried. . . "And so  
You were listening?"

"Say, rather," she said, "that I heard,  
Without wishing to hear it, that infamous word--  
Heard--and therefore reply."

"Belle Comtesse," said the Duke,  
With concentrated wrath in the savage rebuke,  
Which betray'd that he felt himself baffled . . . "you know  
That your place is not HERE."

"Duke," she answer'd him slow,  
"My place is wherever my duty is clear;  
And therefore my place, at this moment, is here.  
O lady, this morning my place was beside  
Your husband, because (as she said this she sigh'd)  
I felt that from folly fast growing to crime--  
The crime of self-blindness--Heaven yet spared me time  
To save for the love of an innocent wife  
All that such love deserved in the heart and the life  
Of the man to whose heart and whose life you alone  
Can with safety confide the pure trust of your own."

She turn'd to Matilda, and lightly laid on her  
Her soft quiet hand . . .

"'Tis, O lady, the honor

Which that man has confided to you, that, in spite  
Of his friend, I now trust I may yet save to-night--  
Save for both of you, lady! for yours I revere;  
Duc de Luvois, what say you?--my place is not here?"

XII.

And, so saying, the hand of Matilda she caught,  
Wound one arm round her waist unresisted and sought  
Gently, softly, to draw her away from the spot.  
The Duke stood confounded, and follow'd them not,  
But not yet the house had they reach'd when Lucile  
Her tender and delicate burden could feel  
Sink and falter beside her. Oh, then she knelt down,  
Flung her arms round Matilda, and press'd to her own  
The poor bosom beating against her.

The moon,

Bright, breathless, and buoyant, and brimful of June,  
Floated up from the hillside, sloped over the vale,  
And poised herself loose in mid-heaven, with one pale,  
Minute, scintilless, and tremulous star  
Swinging under her globe like a wizard-lit car,  
Thus to each of those women revealing the face  
Of the other. Each bore on her features the trace  
Of a vivid emotion. A deep inward shame  
The cheek of Matilda had flooded with flame.  
With her enthusiastic emotion, Lucile  
Trembled visibly yet; for she could not but feel  
That a heavenly hand was upon her that night,  
And it touch'd her pure brow to a heavenly light.  
"In the name of your husband, dear lady," she said,  
"In the name of your mother, take heart! Lift your head,  
For those blushes are noble. Alas! do not trust  
To that maxim of virtue made ashes and dust,  
That the fault of the husband can cancel the wife's.  
Take heart! and take refuge and strength in your life's  
Pure silence,--there, kneel, pray, and hope, weep, and wait!"  
"Saved, Lucile!" sobb'd Matilda, "but saved to what fate?  
Tears, prayers, yes! not hopes."

"Hush!" the sweet voice replied.

"Fool'd away by a fancy, again to your side  
Must your husband return. Doubt not this. And return  
For the love you can give, with the love that you yearn  
To receive, lady. What was it chill'd you both now?  
Not the absence of love, but the ignorance how  
Love is nourish'd by love. Well! henceforth you will prove  
Your heart worthy of love,--since it knows how to love."

XIII.

"What gives you such power over me, that I feel  
Thus drawn to obey you? What are you, Lucile?"  
Sigh'd Matilda, and lifted her eyes to the face  
Of Lucile.

There pass'd suddenly through it the trace  
Of deep sadness; and o'er that fair forehead came down  
A shadow which yet was too sweet for a frown.

"The pupil of sorrow, perchance," . . . she replied.  
"Of sorrow?" Matilda exclaim'd . . . "O confide  
To my heart your affliction. In all you made known  
I should find some instruction, no doubt, for my own!"

"And I some consolation, no doubt; for the tears  
Of another have not flow'd for me many years."

It was then that Matilda herself seized the hand  
Of Lucile in her own, and uplifted her; and  
Thus together they enter'd the house.

XIV.

'Twas the room  
Of Matilda.  
The languid and delicate gloom  
Of a lamp of pure white alabaster, aloft  
From the ceiling suspended, around it slept soft.  
The casement oped into the garden. The pale  
Cool moonlight stream'd through it. One lone nightingale  
Sung aloof in the laurels. And here, side by side,  
Hand in hand, the two women sat down undescried,  
Save by guardian angels.

As when, sparkling yet  
From the rain, that, with drops that are jewels, leaves wet  
The bright head it humbles, a young rose inclines  
To some pale lily near it, the fair vision shines  
As one flower with two faces, in hush'd, tearful speech,  
Like the showery whispers of flowers, each to each  
Link'd, and leaning together, so loving, so fair,  
So united, yet diverse, the two women there  
Look'd, indeed, like two flowers upon one drooping stem,  
In the soft light that tenderly rested on them.  
All that soul said to soul in that chamber, who knows?  
All that heart gain'd from heart?

Leave the lily, the rose,  
Undisturb'd with their secret within them. For who  
To the heart of the floweret can follow the dew?  
A night full of stars! O'er the silence, unseen,  
The footsteps of sentinel angels between  
The dark land and deep sky were moving. You heard  
Pass'd from earth up to heaven the happy watchword  
Which brighten'd the stars as amongst them it fell  
From earth's heart, which it eased . . . "All is well! all is well!"

CANTO IV.

I.

The Poets pour wine; and, when 'tis new, all decry it;  
But, once let it be old, every trifler must try it.  
And Polonius, who praises no wine that's not Massic,  
Complains of my verse, that my verse is not classic.  
And Miss Tilburina, who sings, and not badly,  
My earlier verses, sighs "Commonplace sadly!"

As for you, O Polonius, you vex me but slightly;  
But you, Tilburina, your eyes beam so brightly  
In despite of their languishing looks, on my word,  
That to see you look cross I can scarcely afford.  
Yes! the silliest woman that smiles on a bard  
Better far than Longinus himself can reward  
The appeal to her feelings of which she approves;  
And the critics I most care to please are the Loves.

Alas, friend! what boots it, a stone at his head  
And a brass on his breast,--when a man is once dead?  
Ay! were fame the sole guerdon, poor guerdon were then  
Theirs who, stripping life bare, stand forth models for men.  
The reformer's?--a creed by posterity learnt  
A century after its author is burnt!  
The poet's?--a laurel that hides the bald brow  
It hath blighted! The painter's?--Ask Raphael now  
Which Madonna's authentic! The stateman's?--a name  
For parties to blacken, or boys to declaim!  
The soldier's?--three lines on the cold Abbey pavement!  
Were this all the life of the wise and the brave meant,  
All it ends in, thrice better, Neaera, it were  
Unregarded to sport with thine odorous hair,  
Untroubled to lie at thy feet in the shade  
And be loved, while the roses yet bloom overhead,  
Than to sit by the lone hearth, and think the long thought,  
A severe, sad, blind schoolmaster, envied for naught  
Save the name of John Milton! For all men, indeed,  
Who in some choice edition may graciously read,  
With fair illustration, and erudite note,  
The song which the poet in bitterness wrote,  
Beat the poet, and notably beat him, in this--  
The joy of the genius is theirs, whilst they miss  
The grief of the man: Tasso's song--not his madness!  
Dante's dreams--not his waking to exile and sadness!  
Milton's music--but not Milton's blindness! . . .

Yet rise,

My Milton, and answer, with those noble eyes  
Which the glory of heaven hath blinded to earth!  
Say--the life, in the living it, savors of worth:  
That the deed, in the doing it, reaches its aim:  
That the fact has a value apart from the fame:  
That a deeper delight, in the mere labor, pays

Scorn of lesser delights, and laborious days:  
And Shakespeare, though all Shakespeare's writings were lost,  
And his genius, though never a trace of it crossed  
Posterity's path, not the less would have dwelt  
In the isle with Miranda, with Hamlet have felt  
All that Hamlet hath uttered, and haply where, pure  
On its death-bed, wrong'd Love lay, have moan'd with the Moor!

II.

When Lord Alfred that night to the salon return'd  
He found it deserted. The lamp dimly burn'd  
As though half out of humor to find itself there  
Forced to light for no purpose a room that was bare.  
He sat down by the window alone. Never yet  
Did the heavens a lovelier evening beget  
Since Latona's bright childbed that bore the new moon!  
The dark world lay still, in a sort of sweet swoon,  
Wide open to heaven; and the stars on the stream  
Were trembling like eyes that are loved on the dream  
Of a lover; and all things were glad and at rest  
Save the unquiet heart in his own troubled breast.  
He endeavor'd to think--an unwonted employment,  
Which appear'd to afford him no sort of enjoyment.

III.

"Withdraw into yourself. But, if peace you seek there for,  
Your reception, beforehand, be sure to prepare for,"  
Wrote the tutor of Nero; who wrote, be it said,  
Better far than he acted--but peace to the dead!  
He bled for his pupil: what more could he do?  
But Lord Alfred, when into himself he withdrew,  
Found all there in disorder. For more than an hour  
He sat with his head droop'd like some stubborn flower  
Beaten down by the rush of the rain--with such force  
Did the thick, gushing thoughts hold upon him the course  
Of their sudden descent, rapid, rushing, and dim,  
From the cloud that had darken'd the evening for him.  
At one moment he rose--rose and open'd the door,  
And wistfully look'd down the dark corridor  
Toward the room of Matilda. Anon, with a sigh  
Of an incomplete purpose, he crept quietly  
Back again to his place in a sort of submission  
To doubt, and return'd to his former position,--  
That loose fall of the arms, that dull droop of the face,  
And the eye vaguely fix'd on impalpable space.  
The dream, which till then had been lulling his life,  
As once Circe the winds, had seal'd thought; and his wife

And his home for a time he had quite, like Ulysses,  
Forgotten; but now o'er the troubled abysses  
Of the spirit within him, aeolian, forth leapt  
To their freedom new-found, and resistlessly swept  
All his heart into tumult, the thoughts which had been  
Long pent up in their mystic recesses unseen.

IV.

How long he thus sat there, himself he knew not,  
Till he started, as though he were suddenly shot,  
To the sound of a voice too familiar to doubt,  
Which was making some noise in the passage without.  
A sound English voice; with a round English accent,  
Which the scared German echoes resentfully back sent;  
The complaint of a much disappointed cab-driver  
Mingled with it, demanding some ultimate stiver;  
Then, the heavy and hurried approach of a boot  
Which reveal'd by its sound no diminutive foot:  
And the door was flung suddenly open, and on  
The threshold Lord Alfred by bachelor John  
Was seized in that sort of affectionate rage or  
Frenzy of hugs which some stout Ursa Major  
On some lean Ursa Minor would doubtless bestow  
With a warmth for which only starvation and snow  
Could render one grateful. As soon as he could,  
Lord Alfred contrived to escape, nor be food  
Any more for those somewhat voracious embraces.  
Then the two men sat down and scann'd each other's faces:  
And Alfred could see that his cousin was taken  
With unwonted emotion. The hand that had shaken  
His own trembled somewhat. In truth he descried  
At a glance, something wrong.

V.

"What's the matter?" he cried.

"What have you to tell me?"

JOHN.

What! have you not heard?

ALFRED.

Heard what?

JOHN.

This sad business--

ALFRED.

I? no, not a word.

JOHN.

You received my last letter?

ALFRED.

I think so. If not,

What then?

JOHN.

You have acted upon it?

ALFRED.

On what?

JOHN.

The advice that I gave you--

ALFRED.

Advice?--let me see?

You ALWAYS are giving advice, Jack, to me.  
About Parliament, was it?

JOHN.

Hang Parliament! no,

The Bank, the Bank, Alfred!

ALFRED.

What Bank?

JOHN.

Heavens! I know

You are careless;--but surely you have not forgotten,--  
Or neglected . . . I warn'd you the whole thing was rotten.  
You have drawn those deposits at least?

ALFRED.

No, I meant

To have written to-day; but the note shall be sent



To-morrow, however.

JOHN.

To-morrow? too late!

Too late! oh, what devil bewitch'd you to wait?

ALFRED.

Mercy save us! you don't mean to say . . .

JOHN.

Yes, I do.

ALFRED.

What! Sir Ridley?

JOHN.

Smash'd, broken, blown up, bolted too!

ALFRED.

But his own niece? . . . In Heaven's name, Jack . . .

JOHN.

Oh, I told you

The old hypocritical scoundrel would . . .

ALFRED.

Hold! you

Surely can't mean we are ruin'd?

JOHN.

Sit down!

A fortnight ago a report about town  
Made me most apprehensive. Alas, and alas!  
I at once wrote and warn'd you. Well, now let that pass.  
A run on the Bank about five days ago  
Confirm'd my forebodings too terribly, though.  
I drove down to the city at once; found the door  
Of the Bank close: the Bank had stopp'd payment at four.  
Next morning the failure was known to be fraud:  
Warrant out for McNab: but McNab was abroad:  
Gone--we cannot tell where. I endeavor'd to get  
Information: have learn'd nothing certain as yet--  
Not even the way that old Ridley was gone:  
Or with those securities what he had done:

Or whether they had been already call'd out:  
If they are not, their fate is, I fear, past a doubt.  
Twenty families ruin'd, they say: what was left,--  
Unable to find any clew to the cleft  
The old fox ran to earth in,--but join you as fast  
As I could, my dear Alfred?\*

\*These events, it is needless to say, Mr. Morse,  
Took place when Bad News as yet travell'd by horse;  
Ere the world, like a cockchafer, buzz'd on a wire,  
Or Time was calcined by electrical fire;  
Ere a cable went under the hoary Atlantic,  
Or the word Telegram drove grammarians frantic.

VI.

He stopp'd here, aghast  
At the change in his cousin, the hue of whose face  
Had grown livid; and glassy his eyes fix'd on space.  
"Courage, courage!" . . . said John, . . . "bear the blow like a man!"  
And he caught the cold hand of Lord Alfred. There ran  
Through that hand a quick tremor. "I bear it," he said,  
"But Matilda? the blow is to her!" And his head  
Seem'd forced down, as he said it.

JOHN.

Matilda? Pooh, pooh!  
I half think I know the girl better than you.  
She has courage enough--and to spare. She cares less  
Than most women for luxury, nonsense, and dress.

ALFRED.

The fault has been mine.

JOHN.

Be it yours to repair it:  
If you did not avert, you may help her to bear t.

ALFRED.

I might have averted.

JOHN.

Perhaps so. But now  
There is clearly no use in considering how,  
Or whence, came the mischief. The mischief is here.

Broken shins are not mended by crying--that's clear!  
One has but to rub them, and get up again,  
And push on--and not think too much of the pain.  
And at least it is much that you see that to her  
You owe too much to think of yourself. You must stir  
And arouse yourself Alfred, for her sake. Who knows?  
Something yet may be saved from this wreck. I suppose  
We shall make him disgorge all he can, at the least.

"O Jack, I have been a brute idiot! a beast!  
A fool! I have sinn'd, and to HER I have sinn'd!  
I have been heedless, blind, inexcusably blind!  
And now, in a flash, I see all things!"

As though

To shut out the vision, he bow'd his head low  
On his hands; and the great tears in silence roll'd on  
And fell momentarily, heavily, one after one.  
John felt no desire to find instant relief  
For the trouble he witness'd.

He guess'd, in the grief

Of his cousin, the broken and heartfelt admission  
Of some error demanding a heartfelt contrition:  
Some oblivion perchance which could plead less excuse  
To the heart of a man re-aroused to the use  
Of the conscience God gave him, than simply and merely  
The neglect for which now he was paying so dearly.  
So he rose without speaking, and paced up and down  
The long room, much afflicted, indeed, in his own  
Cordial heart for Matilda.

Thus, silently lost

In his anxious reflections, he cross'd and re-cross'd  
The place where his cousin yet hopelessly hung  
O'er the table; his fingers entwisted among  
The rich curls they were knotting and dragging: and there,  
That sound of all sounds the most painful to hear,  
The sobs of a man! Yet so far in his own  
Kindly thoughts was he plunged, he already had grown  
Unconscious of Alfred.

And so for a space

There was silence between them.

VII.

At last, with sad face

He stopp'd short, and bent on his cousin awhile  
A pain'd sort of wistful, compassionate smile,  
Approach'd him,--stood o'er him,--and suddenly laid  
One hand on his shoulder--

"Where is she?" he said.

Alfred lifted his face all disfigured with tears  
And gazed vacantly at him, like one that appears

In some foreign language to hear himself greeted,  
Unable to answer.

"Where is she?" repeated

His cousin.

He motioned his hand to the door;

"There, I think," he replied. Cousin John said no more,  
And appear'd to relapse to his own cogitations,  
Of which not a gesture vouchsafed indications.  
So again there was silence.

A timepiece at last

Struck the twelve strokes of midnight.

Roused by them, he cast

A half-look to the dial; then quietly threw  
His arm round the neck of his cousin, and drew  
The hands down from his face.

"It is time she should know

What has happen'd," he said, . . . "let us go to her now."  
Alfred started at once to his feet.

Drawn and wan

Though his face, he look'd more than his wont was--a man.  
Strong for once, in his weakness. Uplifted, fill'd through  
With a manly resolve.

If that axiom be true

Of the "Sum quia cogito," I must opine  
That "id sum quod cogito;"--that which, in fine  
A man thinks and feels, with his whole force of thought  
And feeling, the man is himself.

He had fought

With himself, and rose up from his self-overthrow  
The survivor of much which that strife had laid low  
At his feet, as he rose at the name of his wife,  
Lay in ruins the brilliant unrealized life  
Which, though yet unfulfill'd, seem'd till then, in that name,  
To be his, had he claim'd it. The man's dream of fame  
And of power fell shatter'd before him; and only  
There rested the heart of the woman, so lonely  
In all save the love he could give her. The lord  
Of that heart he arose. Blush not, Muse, to record  
That his first thought, and last, at that moment was not  
Of the power and fame that seem'd lost to his lot,  
But the love that was left to it; not of the pelf  
He had cared for, yet squander'd; and not of himself,  
But of her; as he murmur'd,

"One moment, dear Jack!

We have grown up from boyhood together. Our track  
Has been through the same meadows in childhood: in youth  
Through the same silent gateways, to manhood. In truth,  
There is none that can know me as you do; and none  
To whom I more wish to believe myself known.  
Speak the truth; you are not wont to mince it, I know.  
Nor I, shall I shirk it, or shrink from it now.  
In despite of a wanton behavior, in spite  
Of vanity, folly, and pride, Jack, which might

Have turn'd from me many a heart strong and true  
As your own, I have never turn'd round and miss'd YOU  
From my side in one hour of affliction or doubt  
By my own blind and heedless self-will brought about.  
Tell me truth. Do I owe this alone to the sake  
Of those old recollections of boyhood that make  
In your heart yet some clinging and crying appeal  
From a judgment more harsh, which I cannot but feel  
Might have sentenced our friendship to death long ago?  
Or is it . . . (I would I could deem it were so!)  
That, not all overlaid by a listless exterior,  
Your heart has divined in me something superior  
To that which I seem; from my innermost nature  
Not wholly expell'd by the world's usurpature?  
Some instinct of earnestness, truth, or desire  
For truth? Some one spark of the soul's native fire  
Moving under the ashes, and cinders, and dust  
Which life hath heap'd o'er it? Some one fact to trust  
And to hope in? Or by you alone am I deem'd  
The mere frivolous fool I so often have seem'd  
To my own self?"

JOHN.

No, Alfred! you will, I believe,  
Be true, at the last, to what now makes you grieve  
For having belied your true nature so long.  
Necessity is a stern teacher. Be strong!

"Do you think," he resumed, . . . "what I feel while I speak  
Is no more than a transient emotion, as weak  
As these weak tears would seem to betoken it?"

JOHN.

No!

ALFRED.

Thank you, cousin! your hand then. And now I will go  
Alone, Jack. Trust to me.

VIII.

JOHN.

I do. But 'tis late.  
If she sleeps, you'll not wake her?

ALFRED.

No, no! it will wait  
(Poor infant!) too surely, this mission of sorrow;  
If she sleeps, I will not mar her dreams of tomorrow.  
He open'd the door, and pass'd out.  
Cousin John  
Watch'd him wistful, and left him to seek her alone.

IX.

His heart beat so loud when he knock'd at her door,  
He could hear no reply from within. Yet once more  
He knock'd lightly. No answer. The handle he tried:  
The door open'd: he enter'd the room undescried.

X.

No brighter than is that dim circlet of light  
Which enhaloes the moon when rains form on the night,  
The pale lamp an indistinct radiance shed  
Round the chamber, in which at her pure snowy bed  
Matilda was kneeling; so wrapt in deep prayer  
That she knew not her husband stood watching her there.  
With the lamplight the moonlight had mingled a faint  
And unearthly effulgence which seem'd to acquaint  
The whole place with a sense of deep peace made secure  
By the presence of something angelic and pure.  
And not purer some angel Grief carves o'er the tomb  
Where Love lies, than the lady that kneel'd in that gloom.  
She had put off her dress; and she look'd to his eyes  
Like a young soul escaped from its earthly disguise;  
Her fair neck and innocent shoulders were bare,  
And over them rippled her soft golden hair;  
Her simple and slender white bodice unlaced  
Confined not one curve of her delicate waist.  
As the light that, from water reflected, forever,  
Trembles up through the tremulous reeds of a river,  
So the beam of her beauty went trembling in him,  
Through the thoughts it suffused with a sense soft and dim.  
Reproducing itself in the broken and bright  
Lapse and pulse of a million emotions.

That sight

Bow'd his heart, bow'd his knee. Knowing scarce what he did,  
To her side through the chamber he silently slid,  
And knelt down beside her--and pray'd at her side.

XI.

Upstarting, she then for the first time descried  
That her husband was near her; suffused with the blush  
Which came o'er her soft pallid cheek with a gush  
Where the tears sparkled yet.

As a young fawn uncouches,  
Shy with fear from the fern where some hunter approaches,  
She shrank back; he caught her, and circling his arm  
Round her waist, on her brow press'd one kiss long and warm.  
Then her fear changed in impulse; and hiding her face  
On his breast, she hung lock'd in a clinging embrace  
With her soft arms wound heavily round him, as though  
She fear'd, if their clasp was relaxed, he would go:  
Her smooth, naked shoulders, uncared for, convulsed  
By sob after sob, while her bosom yet pulsed  
In its pressure on his, as the effort within it  
Lived and died with each tender tumultuous minute.  
"O Alfred, O Alfred! forgive me," she cried--  
"Forgive me!"

"Forgive you, my poor child!" he sigh'd;  
"But I never have blamed you for aught that I know,  
And I have not one thought that reproaches you now."  
From her arms he unwound himself gently. And so  
He forced her down softly beside him. Below  
The canopy shading their couch, they sat down.  
And he said, clasping firmly her hand in his own,  
"When a proud man, Matilda, has found out at length,  
That he is but a child in the midst of his strength,  
But a fool in his wisdom, to whom can he own  
The weakness which thus to himself hath been shown?  
From whom seek the strength which his need of is sore,  
Although in his pride he might perish, before  
He could plead for the one, or the other avow  
'Mid his intimate friends? Wife of mine, tell me now,  
Do you join me in feeling, in that darken'd hour,  
The sole friend that CAN have the right or the power  
To be at his side, is the woman that shares  
His fate, if he falter; the woman that bears  
The name dear for HER sake, and hallows the life  
She has mingled her own with,--in short, that man's wife?"  
"Yes," murmur'd Matilda, "O yes!"

"Then," he cried,  
"This chamber in which we two sit, side by side,  
(And his arm, as he spoke, seem'd more softly to press her),  
Is now a confessional--you, my confessor!"  
"I?" she falter'd, and timidly lifted her head.  
"Yes! but first answer one other question," he said:  
"When a woman once feels that she is not alone:  
That the heart of another is warm'd by her own;  
That another feels with her whatever she feel  
And halves her existence in woe or in weal;  
That a man, for her sake, will, so long as he lives,  
Live to put forth the strength which the thought of her gives;  
Live to shield her from want, and to share with her sorrow;

Live to solace the day, and provide for the morrow:  
Will that woman feel less than another, O say,  
The loss of what life, sparing this, takes away?  
Will she feel (feeling this), when calamities come,  
That they brighten the heart, though they darken the home?"  
She turn'd, like a soft rainy heav'n, on him  
Eyes that smiled through fresh tears, trustful, tender, and dim.  
"That woman," she murmur'd, "indeed were thrice blest!"  
"Then courage, true wife of my heart!" to his breast  
As he folded and gather'd her closely, he cried.  
"For the refuge, to-night in these arms open'd wide  
To your heart, can be never closed to it again,  
And this room is for both an asylum! For when  
I pass'd through that door, at the door I left there  
A calamity sudden and heavy to bear.  
One step from that threshold, and daily, I fear,  
We must face it henceforth; but it enters not here,  
For that door shuts it out, and admits here alone  
A heart which calamity leaves all your own!"  
She started . . . "Calamity, Alfred, to you?"  
"To both, my poor child, but 'twill bring with it too  
The courage, I trust, to subdue it."

"O speak!

Speak!" she falter'd in tones timid, anxious, and weak.  
"O yet for a moment," he said, "hear me on!  
Matilda, this morn we went forth in the sun,  
Like those children of sunshine, the bright summer flies,  
That sport in the sunbeam, and play through the skies  
While the skies smile, and heed not each other: at last,  
When their sunbeam is gone, and their sky overcast,  
Who recks in what ruin they fold their wet wings?  
So indeed the morn found us,--poor frivolous things!  
Now our sky is o'er cast, and our sunbeam is set,  
And the night brings its darkness around us. Oh yet  
Have we weather'd no storm through those twelve cloudless hours?  
Yes; you, too, have wept!

"While the world was yet ours,  
While its sun was upon us, its incense stream'd to us,  
And its myriad voices of joy seem'd to woo us,  
We stray'd from each other, too far, it may be,  
Nor, wantonly wandering, then did I see  
How deep was my need of thee, dearest, how great  
Was thy claim on my heart and thy share in my fate!  
But, Matilda, an angel was near us, meanwhile,  
Watching o'er us to warn, and to rescue!

"That smile

Which you saw with suspicion, that presence you eyed  
With resentment, an angel's they were at your side  
And at mine; nor perchance is the day all so far,  
When we both in our prayers, when most heartfelt they are,  
May murmur the name of that woman now gone  
From our sight evermore.

"Here, this evening, alone,



I seek your forgiveness, in opening my heart  
Unto yours,--from this clasp be it never to part!  
Matilda, the fortune you brought me is gone,  
But a prize richer far than that fortune has won  
It is yours to confer, and I kneel for that prize,  
'Tis the heart of my wife!" With suffused happy eyes  
She sprang from her seat, flung her arms wide apart,  
And tenderly closing them round him, his heart  
Clasp'd in one close embrace to her bosom; and there  
Droop'd her head on his shoulder; and sobb'd.

Not despair,

Not sorrow, not even the sense of her loss,  
Flow'd in those happy tears, so oblivious she was  
Of all save the sense of her own love! Anon,  
However, his words rush'd back to her. "All gone,  
The fortune you brought me!"

And eyes that were dim

With soft tears she upraised; but those tears were for HIM.  
"Gone! my husband?" she said, "tell me all! see! I need,  
To sober this rapture, so selfish indeed,  
Fuller sense of affliction."

"Poor innocent child!"

He kiss'd her fair forehead, and mournfully smiled,  
As he told her the tale he had heard--something more,  
The gain found in loss of what gain lost of yore.  
"Rest, my heart, and my brain, and my right hand, for you;  
And with these, my Matilda, what may I not do?  
And know not, I knew not myself till this hour,  
Which so sternly reveal'd it, my nature's full power."  
"And I too," she murmur'd, "I too am no more  
The mere infant at heart you have known me before.  
I have suffer'd since then. I have learn'd much in life.  
O take, with the faith I have pledged as a wife,  
The heart I have learn'd as a woman to feel!  
For I--love you, my husband!"

As though to conceal

Less from him, than herself, what that motion express'd,  
She dropp'd her bright head, and hid all on his breast.  
"O lovely as woman, beloved as wife!  
Evening star of my heart, light forever my life!  
If from eyes fix'd too long on this base earth thus far  
You have miss'd your due homage, dear guardian star,  
Believe that, uplifting those eyes unto heaven,  
There I see you, and know you, and bless the light given  
To lead me to life's late achievement; my own,  
My blessing, my treasure, my all things in one!"

XII.

How lovely she look'd in the lovely moonlight,  
That stream'd thro' the pane from the blue balmy night!

How lovely she look'd in her own lovely youth,  
As she clung to his side, full of trust and of truth!  
How lovely to HIM, as he tenderly press'd  
Her young head on his bosom, and sadly caress'd  
The glittering tresses which now shaken loose  
Shower'd gold in his hand, as he smooth'd them!

XIII.

O Muse,

Interpose not one pulse of thine own beating heart  
Twixt these two silent souls! There's a joy beyond art,  
And beyond sound the music it makes in the breast.

XIV.

Here were lovers twice wed, that were happy at least!  
No music, save such as the nightingales sung,  
Breath'd their bridals abroad; and no cresset, up-hung,  
Lit that festival hour, save what soft light was given  
From the pure stars that peopled the deep-purple heaven.  
He open'd the casement: he led her with him,  
Hush'd in heart, to the terrace, dipp'd cool in the dim  
Lustrous gloom of the shadowy laurels. They heard  
Aloof, the invisible, rapturous bird,  
With her wild note bewildering the woodlands: they saw  
Not unheard, afar off, the hill-rivulet draw  
His long ripple of moon-kindled wavelets with cheer  
From the throat of the vale; o'er the dark sapphire sphere  
The mild, multitudinous lights lay asleep,  
Pastured free on the midnight, and bright as the sheep  
Of Apollo in pastoral Thrace; from unknown  
Hollow glooms freshen'd odors around them were blown  
Intermittingly; then the moon dropp'd from their sight,  
Immersed in the mountains, and put out the light  
Which no longer they needed to read on the face  
Of each other life's last revelation.

The place

Slept sumptuous round them; and Nature, that never  
Sleeps, but waking reposes, with patient endeavor  
Continued about them, unheeded, unseen,  
Her old, quiet toil in the heart of the green  
Summer silence, preparing new buds for new blossoms,  
And stealing a finger of change o'er the bosoms  
Of the unconscious woodlands; and Time, that halts not  
His forces, how lovely soever the spot  
Where their march lies--the wary, gray strategist, Time,  
With the armies of Life, lay encamp'd--Grief and Crime,  
Love and Faith, in the darkness unheeded; maturing,

For his great war with man, new surprises; securing  
All outlets, pursuing and pushing his foe  
To his last narrow refuge--the grave.

XV.

Sweetly though  
Smiled the stars like new hopes out of heaven, and sweetly  
Their hearts beat thanksgiving for all things, completely  
Confiding in that yet untrodden existence  
Over which they were pausing. To-morrow, resistance  
And struggle; to-night, Love his hallow'd device  
Hung forth, and proclaim'd his serene armistice.

CANTO V.

I.

When Lucile left Matilda, she sat for long hours  
In her chamber, fatigued by long overwrought powers,  
'Mid the signs of departure, about to turn back  
To her old vacant life, on her old homeless track.  
She felt her heart falter within her. She sat  
Like some poor player, gazing dejectedly at  
The insignia of royalty worn for a night;  
Exhausted, fatigued, with the dazzle and light,  
And the effort of passionate feigning; who thinks  
Of her own meagre, rush-lighted garret, and shrinks  
From the chill of the change that awaits her.

II.

From these  
Oppressive, and comfortless, blank reveries,  
Unable to sleep, she descended the stair  
That led from her room to the garden.

The air,  
With the chill of the dawn, yet unris'n, but at hand,  
Strangely smote on her feverish forehead. The land  
Lay in darkness and change, like a world in its grave:  
No sound, save the voice of the long river wave  
And the crickets that sing all the night!

She stood still,  
Vaguely watching the thin cloud that curl'd on the hill.  
Emotions, long pent in her breast, were at stir,  
And the deeps of the spirit were troubled in her.

Ah, pale woman! what, with that heart-broken look,  
Didst thou read then in nature's weird heart-breaking book?  
Have the wild rains of heaven a father? and who  
Hath in pity begotten the drops of the dew?  
Orion, Arcturus, who pilots them both?  
What leads forth in his season the bright Mazaroth?  
Hath the darkness a dwelling,--save there, in those eyes?  
And what name hath that half-reveal'd hope in the skies?  
Ay, question, and listen! What answer?

The sound

Of the long river wave through its stone-troubled bound,  
And the crickets that sing all the night.

There are hours

Which belong to unknown, supernatural powers,  
Whose sudden and solemn suggestions are all  
That to this race of worms,--stinging creatures, that crawl,  
Lie, and fear, and die daily, beneath their own stings,--  
Can excuse the blind boast of inherited wings.  
When the soul, on the impulse of anguish, hath pass'd  
Beyond anguish, and risen into rapture at last;  
When she traverses nature and space, till she stands  
In the Chamber of Fate; where, through tremulous hands,  
Hum the threads from an old-fashion'd distaff uncurl'd,  
And those three blind old women sit spinning the world.

III.

The dark was blanch'd wan, overhead. One green star  
Was slipping from sight in the pale void afar;  
The spirits of change and of awe, with faint breath,  
Were shifting the midnight, above and beneath.  
The spirits of awe and of change were around  
And about, and upon her.

A dull muffled sound,

And a hand on her hand, like a ghostly surprise,  
And she felt herself fix'd by the hot hollow eyes  
Of the Frenchman before her: those eyes seemed to burn,  
And scorch out the darkness between them, and turn  
Into fire as they fix'd her. He look'd like the shade  
Of a creature by fancy some solitude made,  
And sent forth by the darkness to scare and oppress  
Some soul of a monk in a waste wilderness.

IV.

"At last, then,--at last, and alone,--I and thou,  
Lucile de Nevers, have we met?"

"Hush! I know

Not for me was the tryst. Never mind--it is mine;

And whatever led hither those proud steps of thine,  
They remove not, until we have spoken. My hour  
Is come; and it holds me and thee in its power,  
As the darkness holds both the horizons. 'Tis well!  
The timidest maiden that e'er to the spell  
Of her first lover's vows listen'd, hush'd with delight,  
When soft stars were brightly uphanging the night,  
Never listen'd, I swear, more unquestioningly,  
Than thy fate hath compell'd thee to listen to me!"  
To the sound of his voice, as though out of a dream.  
She appear'd with a start to awaken.

The stream,

When he ceased, took the night with its moaning again,  
Like the voices of spirits departing in pain.  
"Continue," she answer'd, "I listen to hear."  
For a moment he did not reply.

Through the drear

And dim light between them, she saw that his face  
Was disturb'd. To and fro he continued to pace,  
With his arms folded close, and the low restless stride  
Of a panther, in circles around her, first wide.  
Then narrower, nearer, and quicker. At last  
He stood still, and one long look upon her he cast.  
"Lucile, dost thou dare to look into my face?  
Is the sight so repugnant? ha, well! canst thou trace  
One word of thy writing in this wicked scroll,  
With thine own name scrawl'd through it, defacing a soul?"  
In his face there was something so wrathful and wild,  
That the sight of it scared her.

He saw it, and smiled,

And then turn'd him from her, renewing again  
That short restless stride; as though searching in vain  
For the point of some purpose within him.

"Lucile,

You shudder to look in my face: do you feel  
No reproach when you look in your own heart?"

"No, Duke,

In my conscience I do not deserve your rebuke:  
Not yours!" she replied.

"No," he mutter'd again,

"Gentle justice! you first bid Life hope not, and then  
To Despair you say, 'Act not!'"

V.

He watch'd her awhile

With a chill sort of restless and suffering smile.  
They stood by the wall of the garden. The skies,  
Dark, sombre, were troubled with vague prophecies  
Of the dawn yet far distant. The moon had long set,  
And all in a glimmering light, pale, and wet

With the night-dews, the white roses sullenly loom'd  
Round about her. She spoke not. At length he resumed,  
"Wrecked creatures we are! I and thou--one and all!  
Only able to injure each other and fall,  
Soon or late, in that void which ourselves we prepare  
For the souls that we boast of! weak insects we are!  
O heaven! and what has become of them? all  
Those instincts of Eden surviving the Fall:  
That glorious faith in inherited things:  
That sense in the soul of the length of her wings;  
Gone! all gone! and the wail of the night wind sounds human,  
Bemoaning those once nightly visitants! Woman,  
Woman, what hast thou done with my youth? Give again,  
Give me back the young heart that I gave thee . . . in vain!"  
"Duke!" she falter'd.

"Yes, yes!" he went on, "I was not  
Always thus! what I once was, I have not forgot."

VI.

As the wind that heaps sand in a desert, there stirr'd  
Through his voice an emotion that swept every word  
Into one angry wail; as, with feverish change,  
He continued his monologue, fitful and strange.  
"Woe to him in whose nature, once kindled, the torch  
Of Passion burns downward to blacken and scorch!  
But shame, shame and sorrow, O woman, to thee  
Whose hand sow'd the seed of destruction in me!  
Whose lip taught the lesson of falsehood to mine!  
Whose looks made me doubt lies that look'd so divine!  
My soul by thy beauty was slain in its sleep:  
And if tears I mistrust, 'tis that thou too canst weep!  
Well! . . . how utter soever it be, one mistake  
In the love of a man, what more change need it make  
In the steps of his soul through the course love began,  
Than all other mistakes in the life of a man?  
And I said to myself, 'I am young yet: too young  
To have wholly survived my own portion among  
The great needs of man's life, or exhausted its joys;  
What is broken? one only of youth's pleasant toys!  
Shall I be the less welcome, wherever I go,  
For one passion survived? No! the roses will blow  
As of yore, as of yore will the nightingales sing,  
Not less sweetly for one blossom cancell'd from Spring!  
Hast thou loved, O my heart? to thy love yet remains  
All the wide loving-kindness of nature. The plains  
And the hills with each summer their verdure renew.  
Wouldst thou be as they are? do thou then as they do,  
Let the dead sleep in peace. Would the living divine  
Where they slumber? Let only new flowers be the sign!

"Vain! all vain! . . . For when, laughing, the wine I would quaff,  
I remember'd too well all it cost me to laugh.  
Through the revel it was but the old song I heard,  
Through the crowd the old footsteps behind me they stirr'd,  
In the night-wind, the starlight, the murmurs of even,  
In the ardors of earth, and the languors of heaven,  
I could trace nothing more, nothing more through the spheres,  
But the sound of old sobs, and the track of old tears!  
It was with me the night long in dreaming or waking,  
It abided in loathing, when daylight was breaking,  
The burthen of the bitterness in me! Behold,  
All my days were become as a tale that is told.  
And I said to my sight, 'No good thing shalt thou see,  
For the noonday is turned to darkness in me.  
In the house of Oblivion my bed I have made.'  
And I said to the grave, 'Lo, my father!' and said  
To the worm, 'Lo, my sister!' The dust to the dust,  
And one end to the wicked shall be with the just!"

VII.

He ceased, as a wind that wails out on the night  
And moans itself mute. Through the indistinct light  
A voice clear, and tender, and pure with a tone  
Of ineffable pity, replied to his own.  
"And say you, and deem you, that I wreck'd your life?  
Alas! Duc de Luvois, had I been your wife  
By a fraud of the heart which could yield you alone  
For the love in your nature a lie in my own,  
Should I not, in deceiving, have injured you worse?  
Yes, I then should have merited justly your curse,  
For I then should have wrong'd you!"

"Wrong'd! ah, is it so?"

You could never have loved me?"

"Duke!"

"Never? oh, no!"

(He broke into a fierce, angry laugh, as he said)

"Yet, lady, you knew that I loved you: you led  
My love on to lay to its heart, hour by hour,  
All the pale, cruel, beautiful, passionless power  
Shut up in that cold face of yours! was this well?  
But enough! not on you would I vent the wild hell  
Which has grown in my heart. Oh, that man! first and last  
He tramples in triumph my life! he has cast  
His shadow 'twixt me and the sun . . . let it pass!  
My hate yet may find him!"

She murmur'd, "Alas!"

These words, at least, spare me the pain of reply.  
Enough, Duc de Luvois! farewell. I shall try  
To forget every word I have heard, every sight  
That has grieved and appall'd me in this wretched night

Which must witness our final farewell. May you, Duke,  
Never know greater cause your own heart to rebuke  
Than mine thus to wrong and afflict you have had!  
Adieu!"

"Stay, Lucile, stay!" . . . he groaned, "I am mad,  
Brutalized, blind with pain! I know not what I said.  
I mean it not. But" (he moan'd, drooping his head)  
"Forgive me! I--have I so wrong'd you, Lucile?  
I . . . have I . . . forgive me, forgive me!"

"I feel

Only sad, very sad to the soul," she said, "far,  
Far too sad for resentment."

"Yet stand as you are

One moment," he murmur'd. "I think, could I gaze  
Thus awhile on your face, the old innocent days  
Would come back upon me, and this scorching heart  
Free itself in hot tears. Do not, do not depart  
Thus, Lucile! stay one moment. I know why you shrink,  
Why you shudder; I read in your face what you think.  
Do not speak to me of it. And yet, if you will,  
Whatever you say, my own lips shall be still.  
I lied. And the truth, now, could justify nought.  
There are battles, it may be, in which to have fought  
Is more shameful than, simply, to fail. Yet, Lucile,  
Had you help'd me to bear what you forced me to feel--"  
"Could I help you," she murmur'd, "but what can I say  
That your life will respond to?" "My life?" he sigh'd. "Nay,  
My life hath brought forth only evil, and there  
The wild wind hath planted the wild weed: yet ere  
You exclaim, 'Fling the weed to the flames,' think again  
Why the field is so barren. With all other men  
First love, though it perish from life, only goes  
Like the primrose that falls to make way for the rose.  
For a man, at least most men, may love on through life:  
Love in fame; love in knowledge; in work: earth is rife  
With labor, and therefor, with love, for a man.  
If one love fails, another succeeds, and the plan  
Of man's life includes love in all objects! But I?  
All such loves from my life through its whole destiny  
Fate excluded. The love that I gave you, alas!  
Was the sole love that life gave to me. Let that pass!  
It perish'd, and all perish'd with it. Ambition?  
Wealth left nothing to add to my social condition.  
Fame? But fame in itself presupposes some great  
Field wherein to pursue and attain it. The State?  
I, to cringe to an upstart? The Camp? I, to draw  
From its sheath the old sword of the Dukes of Luvois  
To defend usurpation? Books, then? Science, Art?  
But, alas! I was fashion'd for action: my heart,  
Wither'd thing though it be, I should hardly compress  
'Twixt the leaves of a treatise on Statics: life's stress  
Needs scope, not contraction! what rests? to wear out  
At some dark northern court an existence, no doubt,



In wretched and paltry intrigues for a cause  
As hopeless as is my own life! By the laws  
Of a fate I can neither control nor dispute,  
I am what I am!"

VIII.

For a while she was mute.

Then she answer'd, "We are our own fates. Our own deeds  
Are our doomsmen. Man's life was made not for men's creeds  
But men's actions. And, Duc de Luvois, I might say  
That all life attests, that 'the will makes the way.'  
Is the land of our birth less the land of our birth,  
Or its claim the less strong, or its cause the less worth  
Our upholding, because the white lily no more  
Is as sacred as all that it bloom'd for of yore?  
Yet be that as it may be; I cannot perchance  
Judge this matter. I am but a woman, and France  
Has for me simpler duties. Large hope, though, Eugene  
De Luvois, should be yours. There is purpose in pain,  
Otherwise it were devilish. I trust in my soul  
That the great master hand which sweeps over the whole  
Of this deep harp of life, if at moments it stretch  
To shrill tension some one wailing nerve, means to fetch  
Its response the truest, most stringent, and smart,  
Its pathos the purest, from out the wrung heart,  
Whose faculties, flaccid it may be, if less  
Sharply strung, sharply smitten, had fail'd to express  
Just the one note the great final harmony needs.  
And what best proves there's life in a heart?--that it bleeds?  
Grant a cause to remove, grant an end to attain,  
Grant both to be just, and what mercy in pain!  
Cease the sin with the sorrow! See morning begin!  
Pain must burn itself out if not fuel'd by sin.  
There is hope in yon hill-tops, and love in yon light.  
Let hate and despondency die with the night!"

He was moved by her words. As some poor wretch confined  
In cells loud with meaningless laughter, whose mind  
Wanders trackless amidst its own ruins, may hear  
A voice heard long since, silenced many a year,  
And now, 'mid mad ravings recaptured again,  
Singing through the caged lattice a once well-known strain,  
Which brings back his boyhood upon it, until  
The mind's ruin'd crevices graciously fill  
With music and memory, and, as it were,  
The long-troubled spirit grows slowly aware  
Of the mockery round it, and shrinks from each thing  
It once sought,--the poor idiot who pass'd for a king,  
Hard by, with his squalid straw crown, now confess'd  
A madman more painfully mad than the rest.--

So the sound of her voice, as it there wander'd o'er  
His echoing heart, seem'd in part to restore  
The forces of thought: he recaptured the whole  
Of his life by the light which, in passing, her soul  
Reflected on his: he appear'd to awake  
From a dream, and perceived he had dream'd a mistake:  
His spirit was soften'd, yet troubled in him:  
He felt his lips falter, his eyesight grow dim,  
But he murmur'd . . .

"Lucile, not for me that sun's light  
Which reveals--not restores--the wild havoc of night.  
There are some creatures born for the night, not the day.  
Broken-hearted the nightingale hides in the spray,  
And the owl's moody mind in his own hollow tower  
Dwells muffled. Be darkness henceforward my dower.  
Light, be sure, in that darkness there dwells, by which eyes  
Grown familiar with ruins may yet recognize  
Enough desolation."

IX.

"The pride that claims here  
On earth to itself (howsoever severe  
To itself it may be) God's dread office and right  
Of punishing sin, is a sin in heaven's sight,  
And against heaven's service.

"Eugene de Luvois,  
Leave the judgment to Him who alone knows the law.  
Surely no man can be his own judge, least of all  
His own doomsman."

Her words seem'd to fall  
With a weight of tears in them.

He look'd up, and saw  
That sad serene countenance, mournful as law  
And tender as pity, bow'd o'er him: and heard  
In some thicket the matinal chirp of a bird.

X.

"Vulgar natures alone suffer vainly.

"Eugene,"

She continued, "in life we have met once again,  
And once more life parts us. Yon day-spring for me  
Lifts the veil of a future in which it may be  
We shall meet nevermore. Grant, oh grant to me yet  
The belief that it is not in vain we have met!  
I plead for the future. A new horoscope  
I would cast: will you read it? I plead for a hope:  
I plead for a memory; yours, yours alone,

To restore or to spare. Let the hope be your own,  
Be the memory mine.

"Once of yore, when for man  
Faith yet lived, ere this age of the sluggard began,  
Men aroused to the knowledge of evil, fled far  
From the fading rose-gardens of sense, to the war  
With the Pagan, the cave in the desert, and sought  
Not repose, but employment in action or thought,  
Life's strong earnest, in all things! oh, think not of me,  
But yourself! for I plead for your own destiny:  
I plead for your life, with its duties undone,  
With its claims unappeased, and its trophies unwon;  
And in pleading for life's fair fulfilment, I plead  
For all that you miss, and for all that you need."

XI.

Through the calm crystal air, faint and far, as she spoke,  
A clear, chilly chime from a church-turret broke;  
And the sound of her voice, with the sound of the bell,  
On his ear, where he kneel'd, softly, soothingly fell.  
All within him was wild and confused, as within  
A chamber deserted in some roadside inn,  
Where, passing, wild travellers paused, over-night,  
To quaff and carouse; in each socket each light  
Is extinct; crash'd the glasses, and scrawl'd is the wall  
With wild ribald ballads; serenely o'er all,  
For the first time perceived, where the dawn-light creeps faint  
Through the wrecks of that orgy, the face of a saint,  
Seen through some broken frame, appears noting meanwhile  
The ruin all round with a sorrowful smile.  
And he gazed round. The curtains of Darkness half drawn  
Oped behind her; and pure as the pure light of dawn  
She stood, bathed in morning, and seem'd to his eyes  
From their sight to be melting away in the skies  
That expanded around her.

XII.

There pass'd through his head  
A fancy--a vision. That woman was dead  
He had loved long ago--loved and lost! dead to him,  
Dead to all the life left him; but there, in the dim  
Dewy light of the dawn, stood a spirit; 'twas hers;  
And he said to the soul of Lucile de Nevers:  
"O soul to its sources departing away!  
Pray for mine, if one soul for another may pray.  
I to ask have no right, thou to give hast no power,  
One hope to my heart. But in this parting hour

I name not my heart, and I speak not to thine.  
Answer, soul of Lucile, to this dark soul of mine,  
Does not soul owe to soul, what to heart heart denies,  
Hope, when hope is salvation? Behold, in yon skies,  
This wild night is passing away while I speak:  
Lo, above us, the day-spring beginning to break!  
Something wakens within me, and warms to the beam:  
Is it hope that awakens? or do I but dream?  
I know not. It may be, perchance, the first spark  
Of a new light within me to solace the dark  
Unto which I return; or perchance it may be  
The last spark of fires half extinguish'd in me.  
I know not. Thou goest thy way: I my own;  
For good or for evil, I know not. Alone  
This I know; we are parting. I wish'd to say more,  
But no matter! 'twill pass. All between us is o'er.  
Forget the wild words of to-night. 'Twas the pain  
For long years hoarded up, that rush'd from me again.  
I was unjust: forgive me. Spare now to reprove  
Other words, other deeds. It was madness, not love,  
That you thwarted this night. What is done is now done.  
Death remains to avenge it, or life to atone.  
I was madden'd, delirious! I saw you return  
To him--not to me; and I felt my heart burn  
With a fierce thirst for vengeance--and thus . . . let it pass!  
Long thoughts these, and so brief the moments, alas!  
Thou goest thy way, and I mine. I suppose  
'Tis to meet nevermore. Is it not so? Who knows,  
Or who heeds, where the exile from Paradise flies?  
Or what altars of his in the desert may rise?  
Is it not so, Lucile? Well, well! Thus then we part  
Once again, soul from soul, as before heart from heart!"

XIII.

And again clearer far than the chime of a bell,  
That voice on his sense softly, soothingly fell.  
"Our two paths must part us, Eugene; for my own  
Seems no more through that world in which henceforth alone  
You must work out (as now I believe that you will)  
The hope which you speak of. That work I shall still  
(If I live) watch and welcome, and bless far away.  
Doubt not this. But mistake not the thought, if I say  
That the great moral combat between human life  
And each human soul must be single. The strife  
None can share, though by all its results may be known.  
When the soul arms for battle, she goes forth alone.  
I say not, indeed, we shall meet nevermore,  
For I know not. But meet, as we have met of yore,  
I know that we cannot. Perchance we may meet  
By the death-bed, the tomb, in the crowd, in the street,

Or in solitude even, but never again  
Shall we meet from henceforth as we have met, Eugene.  
For we know not the way we are going, nor yet  
Where our two ways may meet, or may cross. Life hath set  
No landmarks before us. But this, this alone,  
I will promise: whatever your path, or my own,  
If, for once in the conflict before you, it chance  
That the Dragon prevail, and with cleft shield, and lance  
Lost or shatter'd, borne down by the stress of the war,  
You falter and hesitate, if from afar  
I, still watching (unknown to yourself, it may be)  
O'er the conflict to which I conjure you, should see  
That my presence could rescue, support you, or guide,  
In the hour of that need I shall be at your side,  
To warn, if you will, or incite, or control;  
And again, once again, we shall meet, soul to soul!"

XIV.

The voice ceased.

He uplifted his eyes.

All alone

He stood on the bare edge of dawn. She was gone,  
Like a star, when up bay after bay of the night,  
Ripples in, wave on wave, the broad ocean of light.  
And at once, in her place was the Sunrise! It rose  
In its sumptuous splendor and solemn repose,  
The supreme revelation of light. Domes of gold,  
Realms of rose, in the Orient! and breathless, and bold,  
While the great gates of heaven roll'd back one by one,  
The bright herald angel stood stern in the sun!  
Thrice holy Eospheros! Light's reign began  
In the heaven, on the earth, in the heart of the man.  
The dawn on the mountains! the dawn everywhere!  
Light! silence! the fresh innovations of air!  
O earth, and O ether! A butterfly breeze  
Floated up, flutter'd down, and poised blithe on the trees.  
Through the revelling woods, o'er the sharp-rippled stream,  
Up the vale slow uncoiling itself out of dream,  
Around the brown meadows, adown the hill-slope,  
The spirits of morning were whispering, "HOPE!"

XV.

He uplifted his eyes. In the place where she stood  
But a moment before, and where now roll'd the flood  
Of the sunrise all golden, he seem'd to behold,  
In the young light of sunrise, an image unfold  
Of his own youth,--its ardors--its promise of fame--

Its ancestral ambition; and France by the name  
Of his sires seem'd to call him. There, hover'd in light,  
That image aloft, o'er the shapeless and bright  
And Aureorean clouds, which themselves seem'd to be  
Brilliant fragments of that golden world, wherein he  
Had once dwelt, a native!

There, rooted and bound  
To the earth, stood the man, gazing at it! Around  
The rims of the sunrise it hover'd and shone  
Transcendent, that type of a youth that was gone;  
And he--as the body may yearn for the soul,  
So he yearn'd to embody that image. His whole  
Heart arose to regain it.

"And is it too late?"

No! for Time is a fiction, and limits not fate.  
Thought alone is eternal. Time thralls it in vain.  
For the thought that springs upward and yearns to regain  
The true source of spirit, there IS no TOO LATE.  
As the stream to its first mountain levels, elate  
In the fountain arises, the spirit in him  
Arose to that image. The image waned dim  
Into heaven; and heavenward with it, to melt  
As it melted, in day's broad expansion, he felt  
With a thrill, sweet and strange, and intense--awed, amazed--  
Something soar and ascend in his soul, as he gazed.

## CANTO VI.

### I.

Man is born on a battle-field. Round him, to rend  
Or resist, the dread Powers he displaces attend,  
By the cradle which Nature, amidst the stern shocks  
That have shatter'd creation, and shapen it, rocks.  
He leaps with a wail into being; and lo!  
His own mother, fierce Nature herself, is his foe.  
Her whirlwinds are roused into wrath o'er his head:  
'Neath his feet roll her earthquakes: her solitudes spread  
To daunt him: her forces dispute his command:  
Her snows fall to freeze him: her suns burn to brand:  
Her seas yawn to engulf him: her rocks rise to crush:  
And the lion and leopard, allied, lurk to rush  
On their startled invader.

In lone Malabar,  
Where the infinite forest spreads breathless and far,  
'Mid the cruel of eye and the stealthy of claw  
(Striped and spotted destroyers!) he sees, pale with awe,  
On the menacing edge of a fiery sky,  
Grim Doorga, blue-limb'd and red-handed, go by,

And the first thing he worships is Terror.

Anon,

Still impell'd by necessity hungrily on,  
He conquers the realms of his own self-reliance,  
And the last cry of fear wakes the first of defiance.  
From the serpent he crushes its poisonous soul;  
Smitten down in his path see the dead lion roll!  
On toward Heaven the son of Alcmena strides high on  
The heads of the Hydra, the spoils of the lion:  
And man, conquering terror, is worshipp'd by man.

A camp has the world been since first it began!  
From his tents sweeps the roving Arabian; at peace,  
A mere wandering shepherd that follows the fleece;  
But, warring his way through a world's destinies,  
Lo from Delhi, from Bagdadt, from Cordova, rise  
Domes of empiry, dower'd with science and art,  
Schools, libraries, forums, the palace, the mart!

New realms to man's soul have been conquer'd. But those  
Forthwith they are peopled for man by new foes!  
The stars keep their secrets, the earth hides her own,  
And bold must the man be that braves the Unknown!  
Not a truth has to art or to science been given,  
But brows have ached for it, and souls toil'd and striven;  
And many have striven, and many have fail'd,  
And many died, slain by the truth they assail'd,  
But when Man hath tamed Nature, asserted his place  
And dominion, behold! he is brought face to face  
With a new foe--himself!

Nor may man on his shield

Ever rest, for his foe is ever afield,  
Danger ever at hand, till the armed Archangel  
Sound o'er him the trump of earth's final evangel.

II.

Silence straightway, stern Muse, the soft cymbals of pleasure,  
Be all bronzen these numbers, and martial the measure!  
Breathe, sonorously breathe, o'er the spirit in me  
One strain, sad and stern, of that deep Epopee  
Which thou, from the fashionless cloud of far time,  
Chantest lonely, when Victory, pale, and sublime  
In the light of the aureole over her head,  
Hears, and heeds not the wound in her heart fresh and red.  
Blown wide by the blare of the clarion, unfold  
The shrill clanging curtains of war!

And behold

A vision!

The antique Heraclean seats;  
And the long Black Sea billow that once bore those fleets,

Which said to the winds, "Be ye, too, Genoese!"  
And the red angry sands of the chafed Cheronese;  
And the two foes of man, War and Winter, allied  
Round the Armies of England and France, side by side  
Enduring and dying (Gaul and Briton abreast!)  
Where the towers of the North fret the skies of the East.

III.

Since that sunrise which rose through the calm linden stems  
O'er Lucile and Eugene, in the garden of Ems,  
Through twenty-five seasons encircling the sun,  
This planet of ours on its pathway hath gone,  
And the fates that I sing of have flowed with the fates  
Of a world, in the red wake of war, round the gates  
Of that doom'd and heroical city, in which  
(Fire crowning the rampart, blood bathing the ditch!),  
At bay, fights the Russian as some hunted bear,  
Whom the huntsmen have hemm'd round at last in his lair.

IV.

A fang'd, arid plain, sapp'd with underground fire,  
Soak'd with snow, torn with shot, mash'd to one gory mire!  
There Fate's iron scale hangs in horrid suspense,  
While those two famished ogres--the Siege, the Defence,  
Face to face, through a vapor froze, dismal, and dun,  
Glare, scenting the breath of each other.

The one

Double-bodied, two-headed--by separate ways  
Winding, serpent-wise, nearer; the other, each day's  
Sullen toil adding size to,--concentrated, solid,  
Indefatigable--the brass-fronted, embodied,  
And audible [Greek text omitted] gone sombrely forth  
To the world from that Autocrat Will of the north!

V.

In the dawn of a moody October, a pale  
Ghostly motionless vapor began to prevail  
Over city and camp; like the garment of death  
Which (is formed by) the face it conceals.

'Twas the breath

War, yet drowsily yawning, began to suspire;  
Wherethrough, here and there, flash'd an eye of red fire,  
And closed, from some rampart beginning to bellow  
Hoarse challenge; replied to anon, through the yellow



And sulphurous twilight: till day reel'd and rock'd  
And roar'd into dark. Then the midnight was mock'd  
With fierce apparitions. Ring'd round by a rain  
Of red fire, and of iron, the murderous plain  
Flared with fitful combustion; where fitfully fell  
Afar off the fatal, disgorged scharpenelle,  
And fired the horizon, and singed the coil'd gloom  
With wings of swift flame round that City of Doom.

VI.

So the day--so the night! So by night, so by day,  
With stern patient pathos, while time wears away,  
In the trench flooded through, in the wind where it wails,  
In the snow where it falls, in the fire where it hails  
Shot and shell--link by link, out of hardship and pain,  
Toil, sickness, endurance, is forged the bronze chain  
Of those terrible siege-lines!

No change to that toil

Save the mine's sudden leap from the treacherous soil.  
Save the midnight attack, save the groans of the maim'd,  
And Death's daily obolus due, whether claim'd  
By man or by nature.

VII.

Time passes. The dumb,  
Bitter, snow-bound, and sullen November is come.  
And its snows have been bathed in the blood of the brave;  
And many a young heart has glutted the grave:  
And on Inkerman yet the wild bramble is gory,  
And those bleak heights henceforth shall be famous in story.

VIII.

The moon, swathed in storm, has long set: through the camp  
No sound save the sentinel's slow sullen tramp,  
The distant explosion, the wild sleety wind,  
That seems searching for something it never can find.  
The midnight is turning: the lamp is nigh spent:  
And, wounded and lone, in a desolate tent  
Lies a young British soldier whose sword . . .

In this place,

However, my Muse is compell'd to retrace  
Her precipitous steps and revert to the past.  
The shock which had suddenly shatter'd at last  
Alfred Vargrave's fantastical holiday nature,

Had sharply drawn forth to his full size and stature  
The real man, conceal'd till that moment beneath  
All he yet had appear'd. From the gay broider'd sheath  
Which a man in his wrath flings aside, even so  
Leaps the keen trenchant steel summon'd forth by a blow.  
And thus loss of fortune gave value to life.  
The wife gain'd a husband, the husband a wife,  
In that home which, though humbled and narrow'd by fate,  
Was enlarged and ennobled by love. Low their state,  
But large their possessions.

Sir Ridley, forgiven

By those he unwittingly brought nearer heaven  
By one fraudulent act, than through all his sleek speech  
The hypocrite brought his own soul, safe from reach  
Of the law, died abroad.

Cousin John, heart and hand,

Purse and person, henceforth (honest man!) took his stand  
By Matilda and Alfred; guest, guardian, and friend  
Of the home he both shared and assured, to the end,  
With his large lively love. Alfred Vargrave meanwhile  
Faced the world's frown, consoled by his wife's faithful smile.  
Late in life he began life in earnest; and still,  
With the tranquil exertion of resolute will,  
Through long, and laborious, and difficult days,  
Out of manifold failure, by wearisome ways,  
Work'd his way through the world; till at last he began  
(Reconciled to the work which mankind claims for man),  
After years of unwitness'd, unwearied endeavor,  
Years impassion'd yet patient, to realize ever  
More clear on the broad stream of current opinion  
The reflex of powers in himself--that dominion  
Which the life of one man, if his life be a truth,  
May assert o'er the life of mankind. Thus, his youth  
In his manhood renew'd, fame and fortune he won  
Working only for home, love, and duty.

One son

Matilda had borne him; but scarce had the boy,  
With all Eton yet fresh in his full heart's frank joy,  
The darling of young soldier comrades, just glanced  
Down the glad dawn of manhood at life, when it chanced  
That a blight sharp and sudden was breath'd o'er the bloom  
Of his joyous and generous years, and the gloom  
Of a grief premature on their fair promise fell:  
No light cloud like those which, for June to dispel,  
Captious April engenders; but deep as his own  
Deep nature. Meanwhile, ere I fully make known  
The cause of this sorrow, I track the event.  
When first a wild war-note through England was sent,  
He, transferring without either token or word,  
To friend, parent, or comrade, a yet virgin sword,  
From a holiday troop, to one bound for the war,  
Had march'd forth, with eyes that saw death in the star  
Whence others sought glory. Thus fighting, he fell

On the red field of Inkerman; found, who can tell  
By what miracle, breathing, though shatter'd, and borne  
To the rear by his comrades, pierced, bleeding, and torn.  
Where for long days and nights, with the wound in his side,  
He lay, dark.

IX.

But a wound deeper far, undescried,  
The young heart was rankling; for there, of a truth,  
In the first earnest faith of a pure pensive youth,  
A love large as life, deep and changeless as death,  
Lay ensheath'd: and that love, ever fretting its sheath,  
The frail scabbard of life pierced and wore through and through.  
There are loves in man's life for which time can renew  
All that time may destroy. Lives there are, though, in love,  
Which cling to one faith, and die with it; nor move,  
Though earthquakes may shatter the shrine.  
Whence or how  
Love laid claim to this young life, it matters not now.

X.

Oh is it a phantom? a dream of the night?  
A vision which fever hath fashion'd to sight?  
The wind wailing ever, with motion uncertain,  
Sways sighingly there the drench'd tent's tattered curtain,  
To and fro, up and down.  
But it is not the wind  
That is lifting it now: and it is not the mind  
That hath moulded that vision.  
A pale woman enters,  
As wan as the lamp's waning light, which concentrates  
Its dull glare upon her. With eyes dim and dimmer  
There, all in a slumberous and shadowy glimmer,  
The sufferer sees that still form floating on,  
And feels faintly aware that he is not alone.  
She is flitting before him. She pauses. She stands  
By his bedside all silent. She lays her white hands  
On the brow of the boy. A light finger is pressing  
Softly, softly the sore wounds: the hot blood-stain'd dressing  
Slips from them. A comforting quietude steals  
Through the rack'd weary frame; and, throughout it, he feels  
The slow sense of a merciful, mild neighborhood.  
Something smooths the toss'd pillow. Beneath a gray hood  
Of rough serge, two intense tender eyes are bent o'er him,  
And thrill through and through him. The sweet form before him,  
It is surely Death's angel Life's last vigil keeping!  
A soft voice says . . . "Sleep!"

And he sleeps: he is sleeping.

XI.

He waked before dawn. Still the vision is there.  
Still that pale woman moves not. A minist'ring care  
Meanwhile has been silently changing and cheering  
The aspect of all things around him.

Revering

Some power unknown, and benignant, he bless'd  
In silence the sense of salvation. And rest  
Having loosen'd the mind's tangled meshes, he faintly  
Sigh'd . . . "Say what thou art, blessed dream of a saintly  
And minist'ring spirit!"

A whisper serene

Slid, softer than silence . . . "The Soeur Seraphine,  
A poor Sister of Charity. Shun to inquire  
Aught further, young soldier. The son of thy sire,  
For the sake of that sire, I reclaim from the grave.  
Thou didst not shun death: shun not life: 'Tis more brave  
To live than to die. Sleep!"

He sleeps: he is sleeping.

XII.

He waken'd again, when the dawn was just steeping  
The skies with chill splendor. And there, never flitting,  
Never flitting, that vision of mercy was sitting.  
As the dawn to the darkness, so life seemed returning  
Slowly, feebly within him. The night-lamp yet burning,  
Made ghastly the glimmering daybreak.

He said,

"If thou be of the living, and not of the dead,  
Sweet minister, pour out yet further the healing  
Of that balmy voice; if it may be, revealing  
Thy mission of mercy; whence art thou?"

"O son

Of Matilda and Alfred, it matters not! One  
Who is not of the living nor yet of the dead:  
To thee, and to others, alive yet" . . . she said . . .  
"So long as there liveth the poor gift in me  
Of this ministration; to them, and to thee,  
Dead in all things beside. A French Nun, whose vocation  
Is now by this bedside. A nun hath no nation.  
Wherever man suffers, or woman may soothe,  
There her land! there her kindred!"

She bent down to smooth

The hot pillow; and added . . . "Yet more than another  
Is thy life dear to me. For thy father, thy mother,

I know them--I know them."

"Oh, can it be? you!

My dearest dear father! my mother! you knew,  
You know them?"

She bowed, half averting her head

In silence.

He brokenly, timidly said,

"Do they know I am thus?"

"Hush!" . . . she smiled, as she drew

From her bosom two letters: and--can it be true?

That beloved and familiar writing!

He burst

Into tears . . . "My poor mother--my father! the worst  
Will have reach'd them!"

"No, no!" she exclaimed, with a smile,

"They know you are living; they know that meanwhile

I am watching beside you. Young soldier, weep not!"

But still on the nun's nursing bosom, the hot

Fever'd brow of the boy weeping wildly is press'd.

There, at last, the young heart sobs itself into rest:

And he hears, as it were between smiling and weeping,

The calm voice say . . . "Sleep!"

And he sleeps, he is sleeping.

XIII.

And day follow'd day. And, as wave follow'd wave,  
With the tide, day by day, life, re-issuing, drave  
Through that young hardy frame novel currents of health.  
Yet some strange obstruction, which life's health by stealth  
Seemed to cherish, impeded life's progress. And still  
A feebleness, less of the frame than the will,  
Clung about the sick man--hid and harbor'd within  
The sad hollow eyes: pinch'd the cheek pale and thin:  
And clothed the wan fingers with languor.

And there,

Day by day, night by night, unremitting in care,  
Unwearied in watching, so cheerful of mien,  
And so gentle of hand, sat the Soeur Seraphine!

XIV.

A strange woman truly! not young; yet her face,  
Wan and worn as it was, bore about it the trace  
Of a beauty which time could not ruin. For the whole  
Quiet cheek, youth's lost bloom left transparent, the soul  
Seemed to fill with its own light, like some sunny fountain  
Everlastingly fed from far off in the mountain  
That pours, in a garden deserted, its streams,

And all the more lovely for loneliness seems.  
So that, watching that face, you could scarce pause to guess  
The years which its calm careworn lines might express,  
Feeling only what suffering with these must have past  
To have perfected there so much sweetness at last.

XV.

Thus, one bronzen evening, when day had put out,  
His brief thrifty fires, and the wind was about,  
The nun, watchful still by the boy, on his own  
Laid a firm quiet hand, and the deep tender tone  
Of her voice moved the silence.

She said . . . "I have heal'd  
These wounds of the body. Why hast thou conceal'd,  
Young soldier, that yet open wound in the heart?  
Wilt thou trust NO hand near it?"

He winced, with a start,  
As of one that is suddenly touched on the spot  
From which every nerve derives suffering.

"What?  
Lies my heart, then, so bare?" he moaned bitterly.

"Nay,"  
With compassionate accents she hastened to say,  
"Do you think that these eyes are with sorrow, young man,  
So all unfamiliar, indeed, as to scan  
Her features, yet know them not?"

"Oh, was it spoken,  
'Go ye forth, heal the sick, lift the low, bind the broken!'  
Of the body alone? Is our mission, then, done,  
When we leave the bruised hearts, if we bind the bruised bone?  
Nay, is not the mission of mercy twofold?  
Whence twofold, perchance, are the powers that we hold  
To fulfil it, of Heaven! For Heaven doth still  
To us, Sisters, it may be, who seek it, send skill  
Won from long intercourse with affliction, and art  
Help'd of Heaven, to bind up the broken of heart.  
Trust to me!" (His two feeble hands in her own  
She drew gently.) "Trust to me!" (she said, with soft tone):  
"I am not so dead in remembrance to all  
I have died to in this world, but what I recall  
Enough of its sorrow, enough of its trial,  
To grieve for both--save from both haply! The dial  
Receives many shades, and each points to the sun.  
The shadows are many, the sunlight is one.  
Life's sorrows still fluctuate: God's love does not.  
And His love is unchanged, when it changes our lot.  
Looking up to this light, which is common to all,  
And down to these shadows, on each side, that fall  
In time's silent circle, so various for each,  
Is it nothing to know that they never can reach

So far, but what light lies beyond them forever?  
Trust to me! Oh, if in this hour I endeavor  
To trace the shade creeping across the young life  
Which, in prayer till this hour, I have watch'd through its strife  
With the shadow of death, 'tis with this faith alone,  
That, in tracing the shade, I shall find out the sun.  
Trust to me!"

She paused: he was weeping. Small need  
Of added appeal, or entreaty, indeed,  
Had those gentle accents to win from his pale  
And parch'd, trembling lips, as it rose, the brief tale  
Of a life's early sorrow. The story is old,  
And in words few as may be shall straightway be told.

XVI.

A few years ago, ere the fair form of Peace  
Was driven from Europe, a young girl--the niece  
Of a French noble, leaving an old Norman pile  
By the wild northern seas, came to dwell for a while  
With a lady allied to her race--an old dame  
Of a threefold legitimate virtue, and name,  
In the Faubourg Saint Germain.

Upon that fair child,  
From childhood, nor father nor mother had smiled.  
One uncle their place in her life had supplied,  
And their place in her heart: she had grown at his side,  
And under his roof-tree, and in his regard,  
From childhood to girlhood.

This fair orphan ward  
Seem'd the sole human creature that lived in the heart  
Of that stern rigid man, or whose smile could impart  
One ray of response to the eyes which, above  
Her fair infant forehead, look'd down with a love  
That seem'd almost stern, so intense was its chill  
Lofty stillness, like sunlight on some lonely hill  
Which is colder and stiller than sunlight elsewhere.

Grass grew in the court-yard; the chambers were bare  
In that ancient mansion; when first the stern tread  
Of its owner awaken'd their echoes long dead:  
Bringing with him this infant (the child of a brother),  
Whom, dying, the hands of a desolate mother  
Had placed on his bosom. 'Twas said--right or wrong--  
That, in the lone mansion, left tenantless long,  
To which, as a stranger, its lord now return'd,  
In years yet recall'd, through loud midnights had burn'd  
The light of wild orgies. Be that false or true,  
Slow and sad was the footstep which now wander'd through  
Those desolate chambers; and calm and severe  
Was the life of their inmate.

Men now saw appear

Every morn at the mass that firm sorrowful face,  
Which seem'd to lock up in a cold iron case  
Tears harden'd to crystal. Yet harsh if he were,  
His severity seem'd to be trebly severe  
In the rule of his own rigid life, which, at least,  
Was benignant to others. The poor parish priest,  
Who lived on his largess, his piety praised.  
The peasant was fed, and the chapel was raised,  
And the cottage was built, by his liberal hand.  
Yet he seem'd in the midst of his good deeds to stand  
A lone, and unloved, and unlovable man.  
There appear'd some inscrutable flaw in the plan  
Of his life, that love fail'd to pass over.

That child

Alone did not fear him, nor shrink from him; smiled  
To his frown, and dispell'd it.

The sweet sportive elf

Seem'd the type of some joy lost, and miss'd, in himself.  
Ever welcome he suffer'd her glad face to glide  
In on hours when to others his door was denied:  
And many a time with a mute moody look  
He would watch her at prattle and play, like a brook  
Whose babble disturbs not the quietest spot,  
But soothes us because we need answer it not.

But few years had pass'd o'er that childhood before  
A change came among them. A letter, which bore  
Sudden consequence with it, one morning was placed  
In the hands of the lord of the chateau. He paced  
To and fro in his chamber a whole night alone  
After reading that letter. At dawn he was gone.  
Weeks pass'd. When he came back again he return'd  
With a tall ancient dame, from whose lips the child learn'd  
That they were of the same race and name. With a face  
Sad and anxious, to this wither'd stock of the race  
He confided the orphan, and left them alone  
In the old lonely house.

In a few days 'twas known,

To the angry surprise of half Paris, that one  
Of the chiefs of that party which, still clinging on  
To the banner that bears the white lilies of France,  
Will fight 'neath no other, nor yet for the chance  
Of restoring their own, had renounced the watchword  
And the creed of his youth in unsheathing his sword,  
For a Fatherland father'd no more (such is fate!)  
By legitimate parents.

And meanwhile, elate

And in no wise disturbed by what Paris might say,  
The new soldier thus wrote to a friend far away:--  
"To the life of inaction farewell! After all,  
Creeds the oldest may crumble, and dynasties fall,  
But the sole grand Legitimacy will endure,



In whatever makes death noble, life strong and pure.  
Freedom! action! . . . the desert to breathe in--the lance  
Of the Arab to follow! I go! vive la France!"

Few and rare were the meetings henceforth, as years fled,  
'Twixt the child and the soldier. The two women led  
Lone lives in the lone house. Meanwhile the child grew  
Into girlhood; and, like a sunbeam, sliding through  
Her green quiet years, changed by gentle degrees  
To the loveliest vision of youth a youth sees  
In his loveliest fancies: as pure as a pearl,  
And as perfect: a noble and innocent girl,  
With eighteen sweet summers dissolved in the light  
Of her lovely and lovable eyes, soft and bright!  
Then her guardian wrote to the dame, . . . "Let Constance  
Go with you to Paris. I trust that in France  
I may be ere the close of the year. I confide  
My life's treasure to you. Let her see, at your side,  
The world which we live in."

To Paris then came  
Constance to abide with that old stately dame  
In that old stately Faubourg.

The young Englishman  
Thus met her. 'Twas there their acquaintance began,  
There it closed. That old miracle, Love-at-first-sight,  
Needs no explanations. The heart reads aright  
Its destiny sometimes. His love neither chidden  
Nor check'd, the young soldier was graciously bidden  
An habitual guest to that house by the dame.  
His own candid graces, the world-honor'd name  
Of his father (in him not dishonor'd) were both  
Fair titles to favor. His love, nothing loath,  
The old lady observed, was return'd by Constance.  
And as the child's uncle his absence from France  
Yet prolong'd, she (thus easing long self-gratulation)  
Wrote to him a lengthen'd and moving narration  
Of the graces and gifts of the young English wooer:  
His father's fair fame; the boy's deference to her;  
His love for Constance,--unaffected, sincere;  
And the girl's love for him, read by her in those clear  
Limpid eyes; then the pleasure with which she awaited  
Her cousin's approval of all she had stated.

At length from that cousin an answer there came,  
Brief, stern; such as stunn'd and astonish'd the dame.

"Let Constance leave Paris with you on the day  
You receive this. Until my return she may stay  
At her convent awhile. If my niece wishes ever  
To behold me again, understand, she will never  
Wed that man.

"You have broken faith with me. Farewell!"  
No appeal from that sentence.

It needs not to tell

The tears of Constance, nor the grief of her lover:  
The dream they had laid out their lives in was over.  
Bravely strove the young soldier to look in the face  
Of a life where invisible hands seemed to trace  
O'er the threshold these words . . . "Hope no more!"

Unreturn'd

Had his love been, the strong manful heart would have spurn'd  
That weakness which suffers a woman to lie  
At the roots of man's life, like a canker, and dry  
And wither the sap of life's purpose. But there  
Lay the bitterer part of the pain! Could he dare  
To forget he was loved? that he grieved not alone?  
Recording a love that drew sorrow upon  
The woman he loved, for himself dare he seek  
Surcease to that sorrow, which thus held him weak,  
Beat him down, and destroy'd him?

News reach'd him indeed,

Through a comrade, who brought him a letter to read  
From the dame who had care of Constance (it was one  
To whom, when at Paris, the boy had been known,  
A Frenchman, and friend of the Faubourg), which said  
That Constance, although never a murmur betray'd  
What she suffer'd, in silence grew paler each day,  
And seem'd visibly drooping and dying away.  
It was then he sought death.

XVII.

Thus the tale ends. 'Twas told

With such broken, passionate words, as unfold  
In glimpses alone, a coil'd grief. Through each pause  
Of its fitful recital, in raw gusty flaws,  
The rain shook the canvas, unheeded; aloof,  
And unheeded, the night-wind around the tent-roof  
At intervals wirbled. And when all was said,  
The sick man, exhausted, droop'd backward his head,  
And fell into a feverish slumber.

Long while

Sat the Soeur Seraphine, in deep thought. The still smile  
That was wont, angel-wise, to inhabit her face  
And made it like heaven, was fled from its place  
In her eyes, on her lips; and a deep sadness there  
Seem'd to darken the lines of long sorrow and care,  
As low to herself she sigh'd . . .

"Hath it, Eugene,

Been so long, then, the struggle? . . . and yet, all in vain!  
Nay, not all in vain! shall the world gain a man,  
And yet Heaven lose a soul? Have I done all I can?  
Soul to soul, did he say? Soul to soul, be it so!

And then--soul of mine, whither? whither?"

XVIII.

Large, slow,  
Silent tears in those deep eyes ascended, and fell.  
"HERE, at least, I have fail'd not" . . . she mused . . . "this is well!"  
She drew from her bosom two letters.

In one,  
A mother's heart, wild with alarm for her son,  
Breathed bitterly forth its despairing appeal.  
"The pledge of a love owed to thee, O Lucile!  
The hope of a home saved by thee--of a heart  
Which hath never since then (thrice endear'd as thou art!)  
Ceased to bless thee, to pray for thee, save! save my son!  
And if not" . . . the letter went brokenly on,  
"Heaven help us!"

Then follow'd, from Alfred, a few  
Blotted heart-broken pages. He mournfully drew,  
With pathos, the picture of that earnest youth,  
So unlike his own; how in beauty and truth  
He had nurtured that nature, so simple and brave!  
And how he had striven his son's youth to save  
From the errors so sadly redeem'd in his own,  
And so deeply repented: how thus, in that son,  
In whose youth he had garner'd his age, he had seem'd  
To be bless'd by a pledge that the past was redeem'd,  
And forgiven. He bitterly went on to speak  
Of the boy's baffled love; in which fate seem'd to break  
Unawares on his dreams with retributive pain,  
And the ghosts of the past rose to scourge back again  
The hopes of the future. To sue for consent  
Pride forbade: and the hope his old foe might relent  
Experience rejected . . . "My life for the boy's!"  
(He exclaim'd); "for I die with my son, if he dies!  
Lucile! Heaven bless you for all you have done!  
Save him, save him, Lucile! save my son! save my son!"

XIX.

"Ay!" murmur'd the Soeur Seraphine . . . "heart to heart!  
THERE, at least, I have fail'd not! Fulfill'd is my part?  
Accomplish'd my mission? One act crowns the whole.  
Do I linger? Nay, be it so, then! . . . Soul to soul!"  
She knelt down, and pray'd. Still the boy slumber'd on,  
Dawn broke. The pale nun from the bedside was gone.

XX.

Meanwhile, 'mid his aides-de-camp, busily bent  
O'er the daily reports, in his well-order'd tent  
There sits a French General--bronzed by the sun  
And sear'd by the sands of Algeria. One  
Who forth from the wars of the wild Kabylee  
Had strangely and rapidly risen to be  
The idol, the darling, the dream and the star  
Of the younger French chivalry: daring in war,  
And wary in council. He enter'd, indeed,  
Late in life (and discarding his Bourbonite creed)  
The Army of France: and had risen, in part  
From a singular aptitude proved for the art  
Of that wild desert warfare of ambush, surprise,  
And stratagem, which to the French camp supplies  
Its subtlest intelligence; partly from chance;  
Partly, too, from a name and position which France  
Was proud to put forward; but mainly, in fact,  
From the prudence to plan, and the daring to act,  
In frequent emergencies startlingly shown,  
To the rank which he now held,--intrepidly won  
With many a wound, trench'd in many a scar,  
From fierce Milianah and Sidi-Sakhdar.

XXI.

All within, and without, that warm tent seems to bear  
Smiling token of provident order and care.  
All about, a well-fed, well-clad soldiery stands  
In groups round the music of mirth-breathing bands.  
In and out of the tent, all day long, to and fro,  
The messengers come and the messengers go,  
Upon missions of mercy, or errands of toil:  
To report how the sapper contends with the soil  
In the terrible trench, how the sick man is faring  
In the hospital tent: and, combining, comparing,  
Constructing, within moves the brain of one man,  
Moving all.

He is bending his brow o'er some plan  
For the hospital service, wise, skilful, humane.  
The officer standing behind him is fain  
To refer to the angel solicitous cares  
Of the Sisters of Charity: one he declares  
To be known through the camp as a seraph of grace;  
He has seen, all have seen her indeed, in each place  
Where suffering is seen, silent, active--the Soeur . . .  
Soeur . . . how do they call her?

"Ay, truly, of her  
I have heard much," the General, musing, replies;  
"And we owe her already (unless rumor lies)  
The lives of not few of our bravest. You mean

Ah, how do they call her? . . . the Soeur--Seraphine  
(Is it not so?). I rarely forget names once heard."

"Yes; the Soeur Seraphine. Her I meant."

"On my word,

I have much wish'd to see her. I fancy I trace,  
In some facts traced to her, something more than the grace  
Of an angel; I mean an acute human mind,  
Ingenious, constructive, intelligent. Find,  
And if possible, let her come to me. We shall,  
I think, aid each other."

"Oui, mon General:

I believe she has lately obtained the permission  
To tend some sick man in the Second Division  
Of our Ally; they say a relation."

"Ay, so?

A relation?"

"'Tis said so."

"The name do you know?"

Non, mon General."

While they spoke yet, there went  
A murmur and stir round the door of the tent.  
"A Sister of Charity craves, in a case  
Of urgent and serious importance, the grace  
Of brief private speech with the General there.  
Will the General speak with her?"

"Bid her declare

Her mission."

"She will not. She craves to be seen  
And be heard."

"Well, her name, then?"

"The Soeur Seraphine."

"Clear the tent. She may enter."

XXII.

The tent has been clear'd,  
The chieftain stroked moodily somewhat his beard,  
A sable long silver'd: and press'd down his brow  
On his hand, heavy vein'd. All his countenance, now  
Unwitness'd, at once fell dejected, and dreary,  
As a curtain let fall by a hand that's grown weary,  
Into puckers and folds. From his lips, unrepress'd,  
Steals th' impatient sigh which reveals in man's breast  
A conflict conceal'd, and experience at strife  
With itself,--the vex'd heart's passing protest on life.  
He turn'd to his papers. He heard the light tread  
Of a faint foot behind him: and, lifting his head,  
Said, "Sit, Holy Sister! your worth is well known  
To the hearts of our soldiers; nor less to my own.  
I have much wish'd to see you. I owe you some thanks;

In the name of all those you have saved to our ranks  
I record them. Sit! Now then, your mission?"

The nun

Paused silent. The General eyed her anon  
More keenly. His aspect grew troubled. A change  
Darken'd over his features. He mutter'd "Strange! strange!  
Any face should so strongly remind me of HER!  
Fool! again the delirium, the dream! does it stir?  
Does it move as of old? Psha!

"Sit, Sister! I wait

Your answer, my time halts but hurriedly. State  
The cause why you seek me."

"The cause? ay, the cause!"

She vaguely repeated. Then, after a pause,--  
As one who, awaked unawares, would put back  
The sleep that forever returns in the track  
Of dreams which, though scared and dispersed, not the less  
Settle back to faint eyelids that yield 'neath their stress,  
Like doves to a pent-house,--a movement she made,  
Less toward him than away from herself; droop'd her head  
And folded her hands on her bosom: long, spare,  
Fatigued, mournful hands! Not a stream of stray hair  
Escaped the pale bands; scarce more pale than the face  
Which they bound and lock'd up in a rigid white case.  
She fix'd her eyes on him. There crept a vague awe  
O'er his sense, such as ghosts cast.

"Eugene de Luvois,

The cause which recalls me again to your side,  
Is a promise that rests unfulfill'd," she replied.  
"I come to fulfil it."

He sprang from the place

Where he sat, press'd his hand, as in doubt, o'er his face;  
And, cautiously feeling each step o'er the ground  
That he trod on (as one who walks fearing the sound  
Of his footstep may startle and scare out of sight  
Some strange sleeping creature on which he would 'light  
Unawares), crept towards her; one heavy hand laid  
On her shoulder in silence; bent o'er her his head,  
Search'd her face with a long look of troubled appeal  
Against doubt: stagger'd backward, and murmur'd . . . "Lucile?  
Thus we meet then? . . . here! . . . thus?"

"Soul to soul, ay,

Eugene,

As I pledged you my word that we should meet again.  
Dead, . . ." she murmur'd, "long dead! all that lived in our lives--  
Thine and mine--saving that which ev'n life's self survives,  
The soul! 'Tis my soul seeks thine own. What may reach  
From my life to thy life (so wide each from each!)  
Save the soul to the soul? To thy soul I would speak.  
May I do so?"

He said (work'd and white was his cheek  
As he raised it), "Speak to me!"

Deep, tender, serene,

And sad was the gaze which the Soeur Seraphine  
Held on him. She spoke.

XXIII.

As some minstrel may fling,  
Preluding the music yet mute in each string,  
A swift hand athwart the hush'd heart of the whole,  
Seeking which note most fitly must first move the soul;  
And, leaving untroubled the deep chords below,  
Move pathetic in numbers remote;--even so  
The voice which was moving the heart of that man  
Far away from its yet voiceless purpose began,  
Far away in the pathos remote of the past;  
Until, through her words, rose before him, at last,  
Bright and dark in their beauty, the hopes that were gone  
Unaccomplish'd from life.

He was mute.

XXIV.

She went on  
And still further down the dim past did she lead  
Each yielding remembrance, far, far off, to feed  
'Mid the pastures of youth, in the twilight of hope,  
And the valleys of boyhood, the fresh-flower'd slope  
Of life's dawning land!

'Tis the heart of a boy,  
With its indistinct, passionate prescience of joy!  
The unproved desire--the unaim'd aspiration--  
The deep conscious life that forestalls consummation  
With ever a flitting delight--one arm's length  
In advance of the august inward impulse.

The strength  
Of the spirit which troubles the seed in the sand  
With the birth of the palm-tree! Let ages expand  
The glorious creature! The ages lie shut  
(Safe, see!) in the seed, at time's signal to put  
Forth their beauty and power, leaf by leaf, layer on layer,  
Till the palm strikes the sun, and stands broad in blue air.  
So the palm in the palm-seed! so, slowly--so, wrought  
Year by year unperceived, hope on hope, thought by thought,  
Trace the growth of the man from its germ in the boy.  
Ah, but Nature, that nurtures, may also destroy!  
Charm the wind and the sun, lest some chance intervene!  
While the leaf's in the bud, while the stem's in the green,  
A light bird bends the branch, a light breeze breaks the bough,  
Which, if spared by the light breeze, the light bird, may grow  
To baffle the tempest, and rock the high nest,

And take both the bird and the breeze to its breast.  
Shall we save a whole forest in sparing one seed?  
Save the man in the boy? in the thought save the deed?  
Let the whirlwind uproot the grown tree, if it can!  
Save the seed from the north wind. So let the grown man  
Face our fate. Spare the man-seed in youth.

He was dumb.

She went one step further.

XXV.

Lo! manhood is come.

And love, the wild song-bird, hath flown to the tree.  
And the whirlwind comes after. Now prove we, and see:  
What shade from the leaf? what support from the branch?  
Spreads the leaf broad and fair? holds the bough strong and staunch?  
There, he saw himself--dark, as he stood on that night,  
The last when they met and they parted: a sight  
For heaven to mourn o'er, for hell to rejoice!  
An ineffable tenderness troubled her voice;  
It grew weak, and a sigh broke it through.

Then he said

(Never looking at her, never lifting his head,  
As though, at his feet, there lay visibly hurl'd  
Those fragments), "It was not a love, 'twas a world,  
'Twas a life that lay ruin'd, Lucile!"

XXVI.

She went on.

"So be it! Perish Babel, arise Babylon!  
From ruins like these rise the fanes that shall last,  
And to build up the future heaven shatters the past."  
"Ay," he moodily murmur'd, "and who cares to scan  
The heart's perish'd world, if the world gains a man?  
From the past to the present, though late, I appeal;  
To the nun Seraphine, from the woman Lucile!"

XXVII.

Lucile! . . . the old name--the old self! silenced long:  
Heard once more! felt once more!

As some soul to the throng  
Of invisible spirits admitted, baptized  
By death to a new name and nature--surprised  
'Mid the songs of the seraphs, hears faintly, and far,  
Some voice from the earth, left below a dim star,



Calling to her forlornly; and (sadd'ning the psalms  
Of the angels, and piercing the Paradise palms!)  
The name borne 'mid earthly beloveds on earth  
Sigh'd above some lone grave in the land of her birth;--  
So that one word . . . Lucile! . . . stirr'd the Soeur Seraphine,  
For a moment. Anon she resumed here serene  
And concentrated calm.

"Let the Nun, then, retrace  
The life of the soldier!" . . . she said, with a face  
That glow'd, gladdening her words.

"To the present I come:  
Leave the Past!"

There her voice rose, and seem'd as when some  
Pale Priestess proclaims from her temple the praise  
Of her hero whose brows she is crowning with bays.  
Step by step did she follow his path from the place  
Where their two paths diverged. Year by year did she trace  
(Familiar with all) his, the soldier's existence.  
Her words were of trial, endurance, resistance;  
Of the leaguer around this besieged world of ours:  
And the same sentinels that ascend the same towers  
And report the same foes, the same fears, the same strife,  
Waged alike to the limits of each human life.  
She went on to speak of the lone moody lord,  
Shut up in his lone moody halls: every word  
Held the weight of a tear: she recorded the good  
He had patiently wrought through a whole neighborhood;  
And the blessing that lived on the lips of the poor,  
By the peasant's hearthstone, or the cottager's door.  
There she paused: and her accents seem'd dipp'd in the hue  
Of his own sombre heart, as the picture she drew  
Of the poor, proud, sad spirit, rejecting love's wages,  
Yet working love's work; reading backwards life's pages  
For penance; and stubbornly, many a time,  
Both missing the moral, and marring the rhyme.  
Then she spoke of the soldier! . . . the man's work and fame,  
The pride of a nation, a world's just acclaim!  
Life's inward approval!

XXVIII.

Her voice reach'd his heart,  
And sank lower. She spoke of herself: how, apart  
And unseen,--far away,--she had watch'd, year by year,  
With how many a blessing, how many a tear,  
And how many a prayer, every stage in the strife:  
Guess'd the thought in the deed: traced the love in the life:  
Bless'd the man in the man's work!

"THY work . . . oh, not mine!  
Thine, Lucile!" . . . he exclaim'd . . . "all the worth of it thine,  
If worth there be in it!"

Her answer convey'd  
His reward, and her own: joy that cannot be said  
Alone by the voice . . . eyes--face--spoke silently:  
All the woman, one grateful emotion!

And she  
A poor Sister of Charity! hers a life spent  
In one silent effort for others! . . .

She bent  
Her divine face above him, and fill'd up his heart  
With the look that glow'd from it.

Then slow, with soft art,  
Fix'd her aim, and moved to it.

XXIX.

He, the soldier humane,  
He, the hero; whose heart hid in glory the pain  
Of a youth disappointed; whose life had made known  
The value of man's life! . . . that youth overthrown  
And retrieved, had it left him no pity for youth  
In another? his own life of strenuous truth  
Accomplish'd in act, had it taught him no care  
For the life of another? . . . oh no! everywhere  
In the camp which she moved through, she came face to face  
With some noble token, some generous trace  
Of his active humanity . . .

"Well," he replied,  
"If it be so?"

"I come from the solemn bedside  
Of a man that is dying," she said. "While we speak,  
A life is in jeopardy."

"Quick then! you seek  
Aid or medicine, or what?"

"'Tis not needed," she said.  
"Medicine? yes, for the mind! 'Tis a heart that needs aid!  
You, Eugene de Luvois, you (and you only) can  
Save the life of this man. Will you save it?"

"What man?  
How? . . . where? . . . can you ask?"

She went rapidly on  
To her object in brief vivid words . . . The young son  
Of Matilda and Alfred--the boy lying there  
Half a mile from that tent door--the father's despair,  
The mother's deep anguish--the pride of the boy  
In the father--the father's one hope and one joy  
In the son:--the son now--wounded, dying! She told  
Of the father's stern struggle with life: the boy's bold,  
Pure, and beautiful nature: the fair life before him  
If that life were but spared . . . yet a word might restore him!  
The boy's broken love for the niece of Eugene!  
Its pathos: the girl's love for him; how, half slain

In his tent, she had found him: won from him the tale;  
Sought to nurse back his life; found her efforts still fail  
Beaten back by a love that was stronger than life;  
Of how bravely till then he had stood in that strife  
Wherein England and France in their best blood, at last,  
Had bathed from remembrance the wounds of the past.  
And shall nations be nobler than men? Are not great  
Men the models of nations? For what is a state  
But the many's confused imitation of one?  
Shall he, the fair hero of France, on the son  
Of his ally seek vengeance, destroying perchance  
An innocent life,--here, when England and France  
Have forgiven the sins of their fathers of yore,  
And baptized a new hope in their sons' recent gore?  
She went on to tell how the boy had clung still  
To life, for the sake of life's uses, until  
From his weak hands the strong effort dropp'd, stricken down  
By the news that the heart of Constance, like his own,  
Was breaking beneath . . .

But there "Hold!" he exclaim'd,  
Interrupting, "Forbear!" . . . his whole face was inflamed  
With the heart's swarthy thunder which yet, while she spoke,  
Had been gathering silent--at last the storm broke  
In grief or in wrath . . .

"'Tis to him, then," he cried, . . .  
Checking suddenly short the tumultuous stride,  
"That I owe these late greetings--for him you are here--  
For his sake you seek me--for him, it is clear,  
You have deign'd at the last to bethink you again  
Of this long-forgotten existence!"

"Eugene!"

"Ha! fool that I was!" . . . he went on, . . . "and just now,  
While you spoke yet, my heart was beginning to grow  
Almost boyish again, almost sure of ONE friend!  
Yet this was the meaning of all--this the end!  
Be it so! There's a sort of slow justice (admit!)  
In this--that the word that man's finger hath writ  
In fire on my heart, I return him at last.  
Let him learn that word--Never!"

"Ah, still to the past

Must the present be vassal?" she said. "In the hour  
We last parted I urged you to put forth the power  
Which I felt to be yours, in the conquest of life.  
Yours, the promise to strive: mine--to watch o'er the strife.  
I foresaw you would conquer; you HAVE conquer'd much,  
Much, indeed, that is noble! I hail it as such,  
And am here to record and applaud it. I saw  
Not the less in your nature, Eugene de Luvois,  
One peril--one point where I feared you would fail  
To subdue that worst foe which a man can assail,--  
Himself: and I promised that, if I should see  
My champion once falter, or bend the brave knee,  
That moment would bring me again to his side.

That moment is come! for that peril was pride,  
And you falter. I plead for yourself, and another,  
For that gentle child without father or mother,  
To whom you are both. I plead, soldier of France,  
For your own nobler nature--and plead for Constance!"  
At the sound of that name he averted his head.  
"Constance! . . . Ay, she enter'd MY lone life" (he said)  
"When its sun was long set; and hung over its night  
Her own starry childhood. I have but that light,  
In the midst of much darkness! Who names me but she  
With titles of love? And what rests there for me  
In the silence of age save the voice of that child?  
The child of my own better life, undefiled!  
My creature, carved out of my heart of hearts!"

"Say,"

Said the Soeur Seraphine--"are you able to lay  
Your hand as a knight on your heart as a man  
And swear that, whatever may happen, you can  
Feel assured for the life you thus cherish?"

"How so?"

He look'd up. "if the boy should die thus?"

"Yes, I know

What your look would imply . . . this sleek stranger forsooth!  
Because on his cheek was the red rose of youth  
The heart of my niece must break for it!"

She cried,

"Nay, but hear me yet further!"

With slow heavy stride,

Unheeding her words, he was pacing the tent,  
He was muttering low to himself as he went.  
Ay, these young things lie safe in our heart just so long  
As their wings are in growing; and when these are strong  
They break it, and farewell! the bird flies!" . . .

The nun

Laid her hand on the soldier, and murmur'd, "The sun  
Is descending, life fleets while we talk thus! oh, yet  
Let this day upon one final victory set,  
And complete a life's conquest!"

He said, "Understand!

If Constance wed the son of this man, by whose hand  
My heart hath been robb'd, she is lost to my life!  
Can her home be my home? Can I claim in the wife  
Of that man's son the child of my age? At her side  
Shall he stand on my hearth? Shall I sue to the bride  
Of . . . enough!

"Ah, and you immemorial halls

Of my Norman forefathers, whose shadow yet falls  
On my fancy, and fuses hope, memory, past,  
Present,--all, in one silence! old trees to the blast  
Of the North Sea repeating the tale of old days,  
Nevermore, nevermore in the wild bosky ways  
Shall I hear through your umbrage ancestral the wind  
Prophecy as of yore, when it shook the deep mind

Of my boyhood, with whispers from out the far years  
Of love, fame, the raptures life cools down with tears!  
Henceforth shall the tread of a Vargrave alone  
Rouse your echoes?"

"O think not," she said, "of the son  
Of the man whom unjustly you hate; only think  
Of this young human creature, that cries from the brink  
Of a grave to your mercy!

"Recall your own words  
(Words my memory mournfully ever records!)  
How with love may be wreck'd a whole life! then, Eugene,  
Look with me (still those words in our ears!) once again  
At this young soldier sinking from life here--dragg'd down  
By the weight of the love in his heart: no renown,  
No fame comforts HIM! nations shout not above  
The lone grave down to which he is bearing the love  
Which life has rejected! Will YOU stand apart?  
You, with such a love's memory deep in your heart!  
You the hero, whose life hath perchance been led on  
Through the deeds it hath wrought to the fame it hath won,  
By recalling the visions and dreams of a youth,  
Such as lies at your door now: who have but, in truth,  
To stretch forth a hand, to speak only one word,  
And by that word you rescue a life!"

He was stirr'd.

Still he sought to put from him the cup, bow'd his face  
on his hand; and anon, as though wishing to chase  
With one angry gesture his own thoughts aside,  
He sprang up, brush'd past her, and bitterly cried,  
"No!--Constance wed a Vargrave!--I cannot consent!"  
Then up rose the Soeur Seraphine.

The low tent

In her sudden uprising, seem'd dwarf'd by the height  
From which those imperial eyes pour'd the light  
Of their deep silent sadness upon him.

No wonder

He felt, as it were, his own stature shrink under  
The compulsion of that grave regard! For between  
The Duc de Luvois and the Soeur Seraphine  
At that moment there rose all the height of one soul  
O'er another; she look'd down on him from the whole  
Lonely length of a life. There were sad nights and days,  
There were long months and years in that heart-searching gaze;  
And her voice, when she spoke, with sharp pathos thrill'd through  
And transfix'd him.

"Eugene de Luvois, but for you,  
I might have been now--not this wandering nun,  
But a mother, a wife--pleading, not for the son  
Of another, but blessing some child of my own,  
His,--the man's that I once loved! . . . Hush! that which is done  
I regret not. I breathe no reproaches. That's best  
Which God sends. 'Twas his will: it is mine. And the rest  
Of that riddle I will not look back to. He reads

In your heart--He that judges of all thoughts and deeds.

With eyes, mine forestall not! This only I say:

You have not the right (read it, you, as you may!)

To say . . . 'I am the wrong'd.'" . . .

"Have I wrong'd thee?--wrong'd THEE!"

He falter'd, "Lucile, ah, Lucile!"

"Nay, not me,"

She murmur'd, "but man! The lone nun standing here  
Has no claim upon earth, and is pass'd from the sphere  
Of earth's wrongs and earth's reparations. But she,  
The dead woman, Lucile, she whose grave is in me,  
Demands from her grave reparation to man,  
Reparation to God. Heed, O heed, while you can,  
This voice from the grave!"

"Hush!" he moan'd, "I obey

The Soeur Seraphine. There, Lucile! let this pay  
Every debt that is due to that grave. Now lead on:  
I follow you, Soeur Seraphine! . . . To the son  
Of Lord Alfred Vargrave . . . and then," . . .

As he spoke

He lifted the tent-door, and down the dun smoke  
Pointed out the dark bastions, with batteries crown'd,  
Of the city beneath them . . .

"Then, THERE, underground,

And valete et plaudite, soon as may be!

Let the old tree go down to the earth--the old tree  
With the worm at its heart! Lay the axe to the root!  
Who will miss the old stump, so we save the young shoot?  
A Vargrave! . . . this pays all . . . Lead on! In the seed  
Save the forest! . . .

I follow . . . forth, forth! where you lead."

XXX.

The day was declining; a day sick and damp.  
In a blank ghostly glare shone the bleak ghostly camp  
Of the English. Alone in his dim, spectral tent  
(Himself the wan spectre of youth), with eyes bent  
On the daylight departing, the sick man was sitting  
Upon his low pallet. These thoughts, vaguely flitting,  
Cross'd the silence between him and death, which seem'd near,  
--"Pain o'erreaches itself, so is balk'd! else, how bear  
This intense and intolerable solitude,  
With its eye on my heart and its hand on my blood?  
Pulse by pulse! Day goes down: yet she comes not again.  
Other suffering, doubtless, where hope is more plain,  
Claims her elsewhere. I die, strange! and scarcely feel sad.  
Oh, to think of Constance THUS, and not to go mad!  
But Death, it would seem, dulls the sense to his own  
Dull doings . . ."

XXXI.

Between those sick eyes and the sun  
A shadow fell thwart.

XXXII.

'Tis the pale nun once more!  
But who stands at her side, mute and dark in the door?  
How oft had he watch'd through the glory and gloom  
Of the battle, with long, longing looks, that dim plume  
Which now (one stray sunbeam upon it) shook, stoop'd  
To where the tent-curtain, dividing, was loop'd!  
How that stern face had haunted and hover'd about  
The dreams it still scared! through what fond fear and doubt  
Had the boy yearn'd in heart to the hero. (What's like  
A boy's love for some famous man?) . . . Oh, to strike  
A wild path through the battle, down striking perchance  
Some rash foeman too near the great soldier of France,  
And so fall in his glorious regard! . . . Oft, how oft,  
Had his heart flash'd this hope out, whilst watching aloft  
The dim battle that plume dance and dart--never seen  
So near till this moment! how eager to glean  
Every stray word, dropp'd through the camp-babble in praise  
Of his hero--each tale of old venturous days  
In the desert! And now . . . could he speak out his heart  
Face to face with that man ere he died!

XXXIII.

With a start  
The sick soldier sprang up: the blood sprang up in him,  
To his throat, and o'erthrew him: he reel'd back: a dim  
Sanguine haze fill'd his eyes; in his ears rose the din  
And rush, as of cataracts loosen'd within,  
Through which he saw faintly, and heard, the pale nun  
(Looking larger than life, where she stood in the sun)  
Point to him and murmur, "Behold!" Then that plume  
Seem'd to wave like a fire, and fade off in the gloom  
Which momentarily put out the world.

XXXIV.

To his side  
Moved the man the boy dreaded yet loved . . . "Ah!" . . . he sigh'd,

"The smooth brow, the fair Vargrave face! and those eyes,  
All the mother's! The old things again!

"Do not rise.

You suffer, young man?"

THE BOY.

Sir, I die.

THE DUKE.

Not so young!

THE BOY.

So young? yes! and yet I have tangled among  
The fray'd warp and woof of this brief life of mine  
Other lives than my own. Could my death but untwine  
The vext skein . . . but it will not. Yes, Duke, young--so young!  
And I knew you not? yet I have done you a wrong  
Irreparable! . . . late, too late to repair.  
If I knew any means . . . but I know none! . . . I swear,  
If this broken fraction of time could extend  
Into infinite lives of atonement, no end  
Would seem too remote for my grief (could that be!)  
To include it! Not too late, however, for me  
To entreat: is it too late for you to forgive?

THE DUKE.

You wrong--my forgiveness--explain.

THE BOY.

Could I live!

Such a very few hours left to life, yet I shrink,  
I falter . . . Yes, Duke, your forgiveness I think  
Should free my soul hence.

Ah! you could not surmise

That a boy's beating heart, burning thoughts, longing eyes  
Were following you evermore (heeded not!)  
While the battle was flowing between us: nor what  
Eager, dubious footsteps at nightfall oft went  
With the wind and the rain, round and round your blind tent,  
Persistent and wild as the wind and the rain,  
Unnoticed as these, weak as these, and as vain!  
Oh, how obdurate then look'd your tent! The waste air  
Grew stern at the gleam which said . . . "Off! he is there!"  
I know not what merciful mystery now  
Brings you here, whence the man whom you see lying low  
Other footsteps (not those!) must soon bear to the grave.  
But death is at hand, and the few words I have  
Yet to speak, I must speak them at once.



Duke, I swear,  
As I lie here, (Death's angel too close not to hear!)  
That I meant not this wrong to you. Duc de Luvois,  
I loved your niece--loved? why, I LOVE her! I saw,  
And, seeing, how could I but love her? I seem'd  
Born to love her. Alas, were that all! Had I dream'd  
Of this love's cruel consequence as it rests now  
Ever fearfully present before me, I vow  
That the secret, unknown, had gone down to the tomb  
Into which I descend . . . Oh why, whilst there was room  
In life left for warning, had no one the heart  
To warn me? Had any one whisper'd . . . "Depart!"  
To the hope the whole world seem'd in league then to nurse!  
Had any one hinted . . . "Beware of the curse  
Which is coming!" There was not a voice raised to tell,  
Not a hand moved to warn from the blow ere it fell,  
And then . . . then the blow fell on BOTH! This is why  
I implore you to pardon that great injury  
Wrought on her, and, through her, wrought on you, Heaven knows  
How unwittingly!

THE DUKE.

Ah! . . . and, young soldier, suppose  
That I came here to seek, not grant, pardon?--

THE BOY.

Of whom?

THE DUKE.

Of yourself.

THE BOY.

Duke, I bear in my heart to the tomb  
No boyish resentment; not one lonely thought  
That honors you not. In all this there is naught  
'Tis for me to forgive.

Every glorious act  
Of your great life starts forward, an eloquent fact,  
To confirm in my boy's heart its faith in your own.  
And have I not hoarded, to ponder upon,  
A hundred great acts from your life? Nay, all these,  
Were they so many lying and false witnesses,  
Does there rest not ONE voice which was never untrue?  
I believe in Constance, Duke, as she does in you!  
In this great world around us, wherever we turn,  
Some grief irremediable we discern;  
And yet--there sits God, calm in Heaven above!  
Do we trust one whit less in his justice or love?  
I judge not.

THE DUKE.

Enough! Hear at last, then, the truth  
Your father and I--foes we were in our youth.  
It matters not why. Yet thus much understand:  
The hope of my youth was sign'd out by his hand.  
I was not of those whom the buffets of fate  
Tame and teach; and my heart buried slain love in hate.  
If your own frank young heart, yet unconscious of all  
Which turns the heart's blood in its springtide to gall,  
And unable to guess even aught that the furrow  
Across these gray brows hides of sin or of sorrow,  
Comprehends not the evil and grief of my life,  
'Twill at least comprehend how intense was the strife  
Which is closed in this act of atonement, whereby  
I seek in the son of my youth's enemy  
The friend of my age. Let the present release  
Here acquitted the past! In the name of my niece,  
Whom for my life in yours as a hostage I give,  
Are you great enough, boy, to forgive me,--and live?

Whilst he spoke thus, a doubtful tumultuous joy  
Chased its fleeting effects o'er the face of the boy:  
As when some stormy moon, in a long cloud confined,  
Struggles outward through shadows, the varying wind  
Alternates, and bursts, self-surprised, from her prison,  
So that slow joy grew clear in his face. He had risen  
To answer the Duke; but strength fail'd every limb;  
A strange, happy feebleness trembled through him.  
With a faint cry of rapturous wonder, he sank  
On the breast of the nun, who stood near.

"Yes, boy! thank

This guardian angel," the Duke said. "I--you,  
We owe all to her. Crown her work. Live! be true  
To your young life's fair promise, and live for her sake!"  
"Yes, Duke: I will live. I MUST live--live to make  
My whole life the answer you claim," the boy said,  
"For joy does not kill!"

Back again the faint head  
Declined on the nun's gentle bosom. She saw  
His lips quiver, and motion'd the Duke to withdraw  
And leave them a moment together.

He eyed

Them both with a wistful regard; turn'd and sigh'd,  
And lifted the tent-door, and pass'd from the tent.

XXXV.

Like a furnace, the fervid, intense occident  
From its hot seething levels a great glare struck up

On the sick metal sky. And, as out of a cup  
Some witch watches boiling wild portents arise,  
Monstrous clouds, mass'd, misshapen, and ting'd with strange dyes,  
Hover'd over the red fume, and changed to weird shapes  
As of snakes, salamanders, efts, lizards, storks, apes,  
Chimeras, and hydras: whilst--ever the same  
In the midst of all these (creatures fused by his flame,  
And changed by his influence!) changeless, as when,  
Ere he lit down to death generations of men,  
O'er that crude and ungainly creation, which there  
With wild shapes this cloud-world seem'd to mimic in air,  
The eye of Heaven's all-judging witness, he shone.  
And shall shine on the ages we reach not--the sun!

XXXVI.

Nature posted her parable thus in the skies,  
And the man's heart bore witness. Life's vapors arise  
And fall, pass and change, group themselves and revolve  
Round the great central life, which is love: these dissolve  
And resume themselves, here assume beauty, there terror;  
And the phantasmagoria of infinite error,  
And endless complexity, lasts but a while;  
Life's self, the immortal, immutable smile  
Of God, on the soul in the deep heart of Heaven  
Lives changeless, unchanged: and our morning and even  
Are earth's alternations, not Heaven's.

XXXVII.

While he yet  
Watched the skies, with this thought in his heart; while he set  
Thus unconsciously all his life forth in his mind,  
Summ'd it up, search'd it out, proved it vapor and wind,  
And embraced the new life which that hour had reveal'd,--  
Love's life, which earth's life had defaced and conceal'd;  
Lucile left the tent and stood by him.

Her tread  
Aroused him; and, turning towards her, he said:  
"O Soeur Seraphine, are you happy?"

"Eugene,  
What is happier than to have hoped not in vain?"  
She answer'd,--"And you?"

"Yes."  
"You do not repent?"

"No."  
"Thank Heaven!" she murmur'd. He musingly bent  
His looks on the sunset, and somewhat apart

Where he stood, sigh'd, as though to his innermost heart,  
"O bless'd are they, amongst whom I was not,  
Whose morning unclouded, without stain or spot,  
Predicts a pure evening; who, sunlike, in light  
Have traversed, unsullied, the world, and set bright!"  
But she in response, "Mark yon ship far away,  
Asleep on the wave, in the last light of day,  
With all its hush'd thunders shut up! Would you know  
A thought which came to me a few days ago,  
Whilst watching those ships? . . . When the great Ship of Life  
Surviving, though shatter'd, the tumult and strife  
Of earth's angry element,--masts broken short,  
Decks drench'd, bulwarks beaten--drives safe into port;  
When the Pilot of Galilee, seen on the strand,  
Stretches over the waters a welcoming hand;  
When, heeding no longer the sea's baffled roar,  
The mariner turns to his rest evermore;  
What will then be the answer the helmsman must give?  
Will it be . . . 'Lo our log-book! Thus once did we live  
In the zones of the South; thus we traversed the seas  
Of the Orient; there dwelt with the Hesperides;  
Thence follow'd the west wind; here, eastward we turn'd;  
The stars fail'd us there; just here land we discern'd  
On our lee; there the storm overtook us at last;  
That day went the bowsprit, the next day the mast;  
There the mermaids came round us, and there we saw bask  
A siren?' The Captain of Port will he ask  
Any one of such questions? I cannot think so!  
But . . . 'What is the last Bill of Health you can show?'  
Not--How fared the soul through the trials she pass'd?  
But--What is the state of that soul at the last?"

"May it be so!" he sigh'd. "There the sun drops, behold!"  
And indeed, whilst he spoke all the purple and gold  
In the west had turn'd ashen, save one fading strip  
Of light that yet gleam'd from the dark nether lip  
Of a long reef of cloud; and o'er sullen ravines  
And ridges the raw damps were hanging white screens  
Of melancholy mist.

"Nunc dimittis?" she said.

"O God of the living! whilst yet 'mid the dead  
And the dying we stand here alive, and thy days  
Returning, admit space for prayer and for praise,  
In both these confirm us!

"The helmsman, Eugene,  
Needs the compass to steer by. Pray always. Again  
We two part: each to work out Heaven's will: you, I trust,  
In the world's ample witness; and I, as I must,  
In secret and silence: you, love, fame, await;  
Me, sorrow and sickness. We meet at one gate  
When all's over. The ways they are many and wide,  
And seldom are two ways the same. Side by side  
May we stand at the same little door when all's done!

The ways they are many, the end it is one.  
He that knocketh shall enter: who asks shall obtain:  
And who seeketh, he findeth. Remember, Eugene!"  
She turn'd to depart.

"Whither? whither?" . . . he said.

She stretch'd forth her hand where, already outspread  
On the darken'd horizon, remotely they saw  
The French camp-fires kindling.  
"See yonder vast host, with its manifold heart  
Made as one man's by one hope! The hope 'tis your part  
To aid towards achievement, to save from reverse  
Mine, through suffering to soothe, and through sickness to nurse.  
I go to my work: you to yours."

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Whilst she spoke,  
On the wide wasting evening there distantly broke  
The low roll of musketry. Straightway, anon,  
From the dim Flag-staff Battery bellow'd a gun.  
"Our chasseurs are at it!" he mutter'd.  
She turn'd,  
Smiled, and pass'd up the twilight.  
He faintly discern'd  
Her form, now and then, on the flat lurid sky  
Rise, and sink, and recede through the mists: by and by  
The vapors closed round, and he saw her no more.

XXXIX.

Nor shall we. For her mission, accomplish'd, is o'er.  
The mission of genius on earth! To uplift,  
Purify, and confirm by its own gracious gift,  
The world, in despite of the world's dull endeavor  
To degrade, and drag down, and oppose it forever.  
The mission of genius: to watch, and to wait,  
To renew, to redeem, and to regenerate.  
The mission of woman on earth! to give birth  
To the mercy of Heaven descending on earth.  
The mission of woman: permitted to bruise  
The head of the serpent, and sweetly infuse,  
Through the sorrow and sin of earth's register'd curse,  
The blessing which mitigates all: born to nurse,  
And to soothe, and to solace, to help and to heal  
The sick world that leans on her. This was Lucile.

XL.

A power hid in pathos: a fire veil'd in cloud:  
Yet still burning outward: a branch which, though bow'd  
By the bird in its passage, springs upward again:  
Through all symbols I search for her sweetness--in vain!  
Judge her love by her life. For our life is but love  
In act. Pure was hers: and the dear God above,  
Who knows what His creatures have need of for life,  
And whose love includes all loves, through much patient strife  
Led her soul into peace. Love, though love may be given  
In vain, is yet lovely. Her own native heaven  
More clearly she mirror'd, as life's troubled dream  
Wore away; and love sigh'd into rest, like a stream  
That breaks its heart over wild rocks toward the shore  
Of the great sea which hushes it up evermore  
With its little wild wailing. No stream from its source  
Flows seaward, how lonely soever its course,  
But what some land is gladden'd. No star ever rose  
And set, without influence somewhere. Who knows  
What earth needs from earth's lowest creature? No life  
Can be pure in its purpose and strong in its strife  
And all life not be purer and stronger thereby.  
The spirits of just men made perfect on high,  
The army of martyrs who stand by the Throne  
And gaze into the face that makes glorious their own,  
Know this, surely, at last. Honest love, honest sorrow,  
Honest work for the day, honest hope for the morrow,  
Are these worth nothing more than the hand they make weary,  
The heart they have sadden'd, the life they leave dreary?  
Hush! the sevenhold heavens to the voice of the Spirit  
Echo: He that o'ercometh shall all things inherit.

XLI.

The moon was, in fire, carried up through the fog;  
The loud fortress bark'd at her like a chained dog.  
The horizon pulsed flame, the air sound. All without,  
War and winter, and twilight, and terror, and doubt;  
All within, light, warmth, calm!

In the twilight, longwhile  
Eugene de Luvois with a deep, thoughtful smile  
Linger'd, looking, and listening, lone by the tent.  
At last he withdrew, and night closed as he went.

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Smiled, and pass'd up the twilight.

He faintly discern'd

Her form, now and then, on the flat lurid sky

Rise, and sink, and recede through the mists: by and by

The vapors closed round, and he saw her no more.

XXXIX.

Nor shall we. For her mission, accomplish'd, is o'er.

The mission of genius on earth! To uplift,

Purify, and confirm by its own gracious gift,

The world, in despite of the world's dull endeavor

To degrade, and drag down, and oppose it forever.

The mission of genius: to watch, and to wait,

To renew, to redeem, and to regenerate.

The mission of woman on earth! to give birth

To the mercy of Heaven descending on earth.

The mission of woman: permitted to bruise

The head of the serpent, and sweetly infuse,

Through the sorrow and sin of earth's register'd curse,

The blessing which mitigates all: born to nurse,

And to soothe, and to solace, to help and to heal

The sick world that leans on her. This was Lucile.

XL.

A power hid in pathos: a fire veil'd in cloud:

Yet still burning outward: a branch which, though bow'd

By the bird in its passage, springs upward again:

Through all symbols I search for her sweetness--in vain!

Judge her love by her life. For our life is but love

In act. Pure was hers: and the dear God above,

Who knows what His creatures have need of for life,

And whose love includes all loves, through much patient strife

Led her soul into peace. Love, though love may be given

In vain, is yet lovely. Her own native heaven

More clearly she mirror'd, as life's troubled dream

Wore away; and love sigh'd into rest, like a stream

That breaks its heart over wild rocks toward the shore

Of the great sea which hushes it up evermore  
With its little wild wailing. No stream from its source  
Flows seaward, how lonely soever its course,  
But what some land is gladden'd. No star ever rose  
And set, without influence somewhere. Who knows  
What earth needs from earth's lowest creature? No life  
Can be pure in its purpose and strong in its strife  
And all life not be purer and stronger thereby.  
The spirits of just men made perfect on high,  
The army of martyrs who stand by the Throne  
And gaze into the face that makes glorious their own,  
Know this, sur