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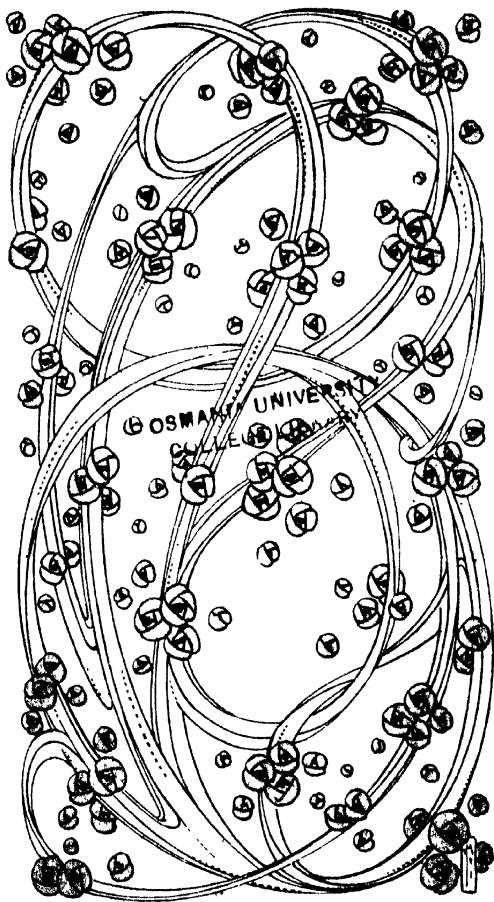
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POEMS BY
ELIZABETH BARRETT
BROWNING

POEMS

By

ELIZABETH BARRETT
BROWNING

With an Introduction by

ALICE MEYNELL

BLACKIE AND SON LIMITED
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Elizabeth Barrett Moulton Barrett, eldest child of a large number, was born in March, 1806, at Coxhoe Hall, Durham. Her childhood was passed in the beautiful western county of Herefordshire; she had a country youth. In later years her health was so broken that she was every winter threatened with death. The drowning of her best-beloved brother off Torquay as she lay ill in her sea-side chamber was a shock and a grief that almost killed her. After years spent in her father's house at Wimpole Street, much in the seclusion of an invalid's room, Elizabeth married Robert Browning, with a secrecy made necessary by her father's anger at any project of marriage for his daughter. The story of the devoted love and most happy marriage of these two poets is known to the world. They lived in Florence, and Mrs. Browning became rashly and sentimentally "patriotic"

on behalf of Italy. There she died, and there she lies buried.

By all consent she is one of the poets of whom all the educated must know something. The company of such poets is large but not innumerable, and to be amongst them was without doubt the ambition of her heart. For in that band there is no separation of sexes, and a writer is admitted an English classic, without that abatement of critical judgment "good for a woman", or that lateral sub-division "a high place amongst women poets". To be deprived of both the honour and the severity to which her work made claim—and to be so deprived not by reason of anything amongst its own qualities—was an injustice Mrs. Browning felt or feared sorely.

In order to secure themselves against the same thing, the two great Georges, George Sand and George Eliot, assumed these famous names, and Charlotte Bronte attempted in a half-hearted way the mystification of "Currer Bell". Mrs. Browning took the more logical ground, that a woman ought to be free to reveal, and indeed to insist upon, her own sex, and yet ought to have equal

judgment upon her literary powers. She wrote distinctively as a woman, whether her subject were art, love, maternity, or the unity of Italy, knowing that she was bringing a complementary power to the representation of human things.

Her poetry has genius. It is abundant and exuberant, precipitate and immoderate; but these are faults of style, and not deficiencies of faculties. When she is gentle she is classic, and all but perfect. In the present collection, while some example of all her powers has a place, the best work is most richly represented. The blank verse, which has almost every fault of form, however rich and even loaded the matter, is omitted. Young readers should study the lovely sonnets from the Portuguese, and "The Sea-Mew", and for impassioned feeling that needed neither spur nor restraint, "Cowper's Grave".

ALICE MEYNELL.

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The Sleep

“He giveth His
belovèd sleep”—
Psalm cxxvii 2



I

Of all the thoughts of God that are
Borne inward unto souls afar,
Along the Psalmist's music deep,
Now tell me if that any is,
For gift or grace, surpassing this—
“He giveth His belovèd, sleep”?

II

What would we give to our beloved?
The hero's heart, to be unmoved,
The poet's star-tuned harp, to sweep,
The patriot's voice, to teach and rouse,
The monarch's crown, to light the brows?—
He giveth His belovèd, sleep.

III

What do we give to our beloved?
A little faith all undisproved,
A little dust to overweep,
And bitter memories to make
The whole earth blasted for our sake.
He giveth His belovèd, sleep.

THE SLEEP

IV

“Sleep soft, beloved!” we sometimes say,
But have no tune to charm away
Sad dreams that through the eyelids creep.
But never doleful dream again
Shall break the happy slumber when
He giveth His beloved, sleep.

V

O earth, so full of dreary noises!
O men, with wailing in your voices!
O delvèd gold, the wailers heap!
O strife, O curse, that o’er it fall!
God strikes a silence through you all,
And giveth His beloved, sleep.

VI

His dews drop mutely on the hill;
His cloud above it saileth still,
Though on its slope men sow and reap.
More softly than the dew is shed,
Or cloud is floated overhead,
He giveth His beloved, sleep.

VII

Ay, men may wonder while they scan
A living, thinking, feeling man
Confirmed in such a rest to keep;

FIVE SLEEP

But angels say, and through the word
I think their happy smile is *heard*—
“He giveth His belovèd, sleep”.

VIII

For me, my heart that erst did go
Most like a tired child at a show,
That sees through tears the mummers leap,
Would now its wearied vision close,
Would childlike on His love repose,
Who giveth His belovèd, sleep.

IX

And, friends, dear friends—when it shall be
That this low breath is gone from me,
And round my bier ye come to weep,
Let One, most loving of you all,
Say, “Not a tear must o’er her fall;”
“He giveth His belovèd, sleep”.

A Sea-side Walk



I

We walked beside the sea
After a day which perished silently
Of its own glory—like the princess weird
Who, combating the Genius, scorched and
seared,
Uttered with burning breath, “Ho! vic-
tory!”
And sank adown an heap of ashes pale.
So runs the Arab tale

II

The sky above us showed
A universal and unmoving cloud,
On which the cliffs permitted us to see
Only the outline of their majesty,
As master-minds when gazed at by the
crowd!
And, shining with a gloom, the water grey
Swang in its moon-taught way.

III

Nor moon, nor stars were out.
They did not dare to tread so soon about,
Though trembling, in the footsteps of the
sun,

A SEA-SIDE WALK

The light was neither night's nor day's,
but one
Which, life-like, had a beauty in its doubt.
And silence's impassioned breathings round
Seemed wandering into sound.

IV

O solemn-beating heart
Of nature! I have knowledge that thou
art
Bound unto man's by cords he cannot
sever—
And, what time they are slackened by him
ever,
So to attest his own supernal part,
Still runneth thy vibration fast and strong
The slackened cord along.

V

For though we never spoke
Of the grey water and the shaded rock,
Dark wave and stone unconsciously were
fused
Into the plaintive speaking that we used
Of absent friends and memories unforsook;
And, had we seen each other's face, we had
Seen haply, each was sad.

The Sea-Mew

AFFECTIONATELY
INSCRIBED TO
M F H



I

How joyously the young sea-mew
Lay dreaming on the waters blue,
Whereon our little bark had thrown
A little shade, the only one,—
But shadows ever man pursue.

II

Familiar with the waves and free
As if their own white foam were he,
His heart upon the heart of ocean
Lay learning all its mystic motion,
And throbbing to the throbbing sea.

III

And such a brightness in his eye,
As if the ocean and the sky
Within him had lit up and nurst
A soul God gave him not at first,
To comprehend their majesty.

THE SEA-MEW

IV

We were not cruel, yet did sunder
His white wing from the blue waves under,
And bound it, while his fearless eyes
Shone up to ours in calm surprise,
As deeming us some ocean wonder!

V

We bore our ocean bird unto
A grassy place, where he might view
The flowers that curtsey to the bees,
The waving of the tall green trees,
The falling of the silver dew.

VI

But flowers of earth were pale to him
Who had seen the rainbow fishes swim;
And when earth's dew around him lay
He thought of ocean's wingèd spray,
And his eye waxèd sad and dim.

VII

The green trees round him only made
A prison with their darksome shade;
And drooped his wing, and mournèd he
For his own boundless glittering sea—
Albeit he knew not they could fade.

THE SEA-MEW

VIII

Then One her gladsome face did bring,
Her gentle voice's murmuring,
In ocean's stead his heart to move
And teach him what was human love—
He thought it a strange, mournful thing.

IX

He lay down in his grief to die,
(First looking to the sea-like sky
That hath no waves!) because, alas!
Our human touch did on him pass,
And with our touch, our agony.

My Doves

"O Weisheit! Da

iststvie cine

Tambur" *Goethe*



My little doves have left a nest
Upon an Indian tree,
Whose leaves fantastic take their rest
Or motion from the sea;
For, ever there, the sea-winds go
With sunlit paces to and fro.

The tropic flowers looked up to it,
The tropic stars looked down,
And there my little doves did sit,
With feathers softly brown,
And glittering eyes that showed their right
To general Nature's deep delight.

And God them taught, at every close
Of murmuring waves beyond,
And green leaves round, to interpose
Their choral voices fond,
Interpreting that love must be
The meaning of the earth and sea.

MY DOVES

Fit ministers! Of living loves,
Theirs hath the calmest fashion,
Their living voice the likest moves
To lifeless intonation,
The lovely monotone of springs
And winds, and such insensate things.

My little doves were ta'en away
From that glad nest of theirs,
Across an ocean rolling grey,
And tempest-clouded airs.
My little doves,—who lately knew
The sky and wave by warmth and blue!

And now, within the city prison,
In mist and chillness pent,
With sudden upward look they listen
For sounds of past content—
For lapse of water, swell of breeze,
Or nut-fruit falling from the trees.

The stir without the glow of passion,
The triumph of the mart,
The gold and silver as they clash on
Man's cold metallic heart—
The roar of wheels, the cry for bread,—
These only sounds are heard instead.

MY DOVES

Yet still, as on my human hand
Their fearless heads they lean,
And almost seem to understand
What human musings mean,
(Their eyes, with such a plaintive shine,
Are fastened upwardly to mine!)

Soft falls their chant as on the nest
Beneath the sunny zone;
For love that stirred it in their breast
Has not aweary grown,
And 'neath the city's shade can keep
The well of music clear and deep.

And love that keeps the music, fills
With pastoral memories;
All echoings from out the hills,
All droppings from the skies,
All flowings from the wave and wind,
Remembered in their chant, I find.

So teach ye me the wisest part,
My little doves! to move
Along the city-ways with heart
Assured by holy love,
And vocal with such songs as own
A fountain to the world unknown.

MY DOVES

'T was hard to sing by Babel's stream—
More hard, in Babel's street!
But if the soulless creatures deem
Their music not unmeet
For sunless walls—let *us* begin,
Who wear immortal wings within!

To me, fair memories belong
Of scenes that used to bless,
For no regret, but present song,
And lasting thankfulness,
And very soon to break away,
Like types, in purer things than they.

I will have hopes that cannot fade,
For flowers the valley yields!
I will have humble thoughts instead
Of silent, dewy fields!
My spirit and my God shall be
My sea-ward hill, my boundless sea.

Consolation



All are not taken; there are left behind
Living Belovèds, tender looks to bring,
And make the daylight still a happy thing,
And tender voices, to make soft the wind.
But if it were not so—if I could find
No love in all the world for comforting,
Nor any path but hollowly did ring,
Where “dust to dust” the love from life
 disjoined,
And if, before those sepulchres unmoving,
I stood alone, (as some forsaken lamb
Goes bleating up the moors in weary
 dearth)
Crying “Where are ye, O my loved and
 loving?” . . .
I know a Voice would sound, “ Daughter,
 I AM.
Can I suffice for HEAVEN, and not for
 earth?”

Cowper's Grave



I

It is a place where poets crowned may feel
the heart's decaying.
It is a place where happy saints may weep
amid their praying.
Yet let the grief and humbleness, as low
as silence, languish:
Earth surely now may give her calm to
whom she gave her anguish.

II

O poets, from a maniac's tongue was
poured the deathless singing!
O Christians, at your cross of hope, a
hopeless hand was clinging!
O men, this man in brotherhood your
weary paths beguiling,
Groaned inly while he taught you peace,
and died while ye were smiling!

COWPER'S GRAVE

III

And now, what time ye all may read
through dimming tears his story,
How discord on the music fell, and dark-
ness on the glory,
And how when, one by one, sweet sounds
and wandering lights departed,
He wore no less a loving face because so
broken-hearted,

IV

He shall be strong to sanctify the poet's
high vocation,
And bow the meekest Christian down in
meeker adoration.
Nor ever shall he be, in praise, by wise or
good forsaken,
Named softly as the household name of
one whom God hath taken.

V

With quiet sadness and no gloom I learn
to think upon him,—
With meekness that is gratefulness to God
whose heaven hath won him,
Who suffered once the madness-cloud to
His own love to blind him,
But gently led the blind along where
breath and bird could find him,

COWPER'S GRAVE

VI

And wrought within his shattered brain
such quick poetic senses
As hills have language for, and stars, har-
monious influences.
The pulse of dew upon the grass, kept his
within its number,
And silent shadows from the trees refreshed
him like a slumber.

VII

Wild timid hares were drawn from woods
to share his home-caresses,
Uplooking to his human eyes with sylvan
tendernesses.
The very world, by God's constraint, from
falsehood's ways removing,
Its women and its men became, beside
him, true and loving.

VIII

And though, in blindness, he remained un-
conscious of that guiding,
And things provided came without the
sweet sense of providing,
He testified this solemn truth, while
phrenzy desolated,
—Nor man nor nature satisfy whom only
God created.

COWPER'S GRAVE

IX

Like a sick child that knoweth not his
mother while she blesses
And drops upon his burning brow the
coolness of her kisses,—
That turns his fevered eyes around—“My
mother! where’s my mother?”—
As if such tender words and deeds could
come from any other!—

X

The fever gone, with leaps of heart he
sees her bending o’er him,
Her face all pale from watchful love, the
unweary love she bore him!—
Thus, woke the poet from the dream his
life’s long fever gave him,
Beneath those deep pathetic Eyes, which
closed in death to save him.

XI

Thus? oh, not *thus!* no type of earth can
image that awaking,
Wherein he scarcely heard the chant of
seraphs, round him breaking,
Or felt the new immortal throb of soul
from body parted,
But felt those eyes alone, and knew,—
“*My Saviour! not deserted!*”

COWPER'S GRAVE

XII

Deserted! Who hath dreamt that when
the cross in darkness rested,
Upon the Victim's hidden face, no love was
manifested?
What frantic hands outstretched have e'er
the atoning drops averted?
What tears have washed them from the
soul, that *one* should be deserted?

XIII

Deserted! God could separate from His
own essence rather;
And Adam's sins *have* swept between the
righteous Son and Father.
Yea, once, Immanuel's orphaned cry His
universe hath shaken—
It went up single, echoless, "My God, I
am forsaken!"

XIV

It went up from the Holy's lips amid His
lost creation,
That, of the lost, no son should use those
words of desolation!
That earth's worst phrenzies, marring hope,
should mar not hope's fruition,
And I, on Cowper's grave, should see his
rapture in a vision.

THE PET-NAME

IV

This name, whoever chance to call,
Perhaps your smile may win.
Nay, do not smile! mine eyelids fall
Over mine eyes, and feel withal
The sudden tears within.

V

Is there a leaf that greenly grows
Where summer meadows bloom,
But gathereth the winter snows,
And changeth to the hue of those
If lasting till they come?

VI

Is there a word, or jest, or game,
But time incrusteth round
With sad associate thoughts the same'
And so to me my very name
Assumes a mournful sound.

VII

My brother gave that name to me
When we were children twain,—
When names acquired baptismally
Were hard to utter, as to see
That life had any pain.

THE PET-NAME

VIII

No shade was on us then, save one
Of chestnuts from the hill—
And through the word our laugh did run
As part thereof. The mirth being done,
He calls me by it still.

IX

Nay, do not smile! I hear in it
What none of you can hear,—
The talk upon the willow seat,
The bird and wind that did repeat
Around, our human cheer.

X

I hear the birthday's noisy bliss,
My sisters' woodland glee,—
My father's praise, I did not miss,
When stooping down he cared to kiss
The poet at his knee,—

XI

And voices, which, to name me, aye
Their tenderest tones were keeping—
To some I never more can say
An answer, till God wipes away
In heaven these drops of weeping.

THE PET-NAME

XII

My name to me a sadness wears,
No murmurs cross my mind.
Now God be thanked for these thick tears.
Which show, of those departed years,
Sweet memories left behind.

XIII

Now God be thanked for years enwrought
With love which softens yet.
Now God be thanked for every thought
Which is so tender it has caught
Earth's guerdon of regret.

XIV

Earth saddens, never shall remove,
Affections purely given;
And e'en that mortal grief shall prove
The immortality of love,
And heighten it with Heaven.

The Soul's Expression



With stammering lips and insufficient
sound

I strive and struggle to deliver right
That music of my nature, day and night
With dream and thought and feeling inter-
wound,

And inly answering all the senses round
With octaves of a mystic depth and height
Which step out grandly to the infinite
From the dark edges of the sensual
ground!

This song of soul I struggle to outbear
Through portals of the sense, sublime and
whole,

And utter all myself into the air.
But if I did it,—as the thunder-roll
Breaks its own cloud, my flesh would
perish there,
Before that dread apocalypse of soul.

Irreparableness



I have been in the meadows all the day
And gathered there the nosegay that you
see,

Singing within myself as a bird or bee
When such do field-work on a morn of
May.

But now I look upon my flowers, decay
Has met them in my hands more fatally
Because more warmly clasped,—and sobs
are free

To come instead of songs. What do you
say,

Sweet counsellors, dear friends? that I
should go

Back straightway to the fields, and gather
more?

Another, sooth, may do it,—but not I!
My heart is very tired, my strength is low,
My hands are full of blossoms plucked
before,

Held dead within them till myself shall die.

Tears



Thank God, bless God, all ye who suffer
not

More grief than ye can weep for. That
is well—

That is light grieving! lighter, none befell,
Since Adam forfeited the primal lot.

Tears! what are tears? The babe weeps
in its cot,

The mother singing,—at her marriage-bell
The bride weeps,—and before the oracle
Of high-faned hills, the poet has forgot
Such moisture on his cheeks. Thank God
for grace,

Ye who weep only! If, as some have
done,

Ye grope tear-blinded in a desert place
And touch but tombs,—look up! those
tears will run

Soon in long rivers down the lifted face,
And leave the vision clear for stars and sun.

Perplexed Music

AFFECTIONATELY

INSCRIBED TO

F. J.



Experience, like a pale musician, holds
A dulcimer of patience in his hand,
Whence harmonies we cannot understand,
Of God's will in His worlds, the strain
unfolds

In sad, perplexed minor. Deathly colds
Fall on us while we hear and countermand
Our sanguine heart back from the fancy-
land

With nightingales in visionary wolds.
We murmur,—“Where is any certain tune
Or measured music, in such notes as
these?”—

But angels, leaning from the golden seat,
Are not so minded; their fine ear hath won
The issue of completed cadences,
And, smiling down the stars, they whisper
—SWEET.

Futurity



And, O belovéd voices, upon which
Ours passionately call, because erelong
Ye brake off in the middle of that song
We sang together softly, to enrich
The poor world with the sense of love,
 and witch
The heart out of things evil,—I am strong,
Knowing ye are not lost for aye among
The hills, with last year's thrush. God
 keeps a niche
In Heaven, to hold our idols: and albeit
He brake them to our faces, and denied
That our close kisses should impair their
 white,—
I know we shall behold them raised, com-
 plete,
The dust swept from their beauty,—
 glorified
New Memnons singing in the great God-
 light.

The Two Sayings



Two sayings of the Holy Scriptures beat
Like pulses in the Church's brow and
breast!

And by them, we find rest in our unrest,
And heart-deep in salt tears, do yet entreat
God's fellowship, as if on heavenly seat.

The first is JESUS WEPT,—whereon is prest
Full many a sobbing face that drops its
best

And sweetest waters on the record sweet:
And one is, where the Christ, denied and
scorned,

LOOKED UPON PETER. Oh, to render plain,
By help of having loved a little and
mourned,

That look of sovran love and sovran pain
Which HE, who could not sin yet suffered,
turned

On him who could reject but not sustain!

The Look



The Saviour looked on Peter. Ay, no
word,
No gesture of reproach! the Heavens serene
Though heavy with armed justice, did not
lean
Their thunders that way! the forsaken
Lord
Looked only, on the traitor. None record
What that look was, none guess; for those
who have seen
Wronged lovers loving through a death-
pang keen,
Or pale-cheeked martyrs smiling to a sword,
Have missed Jehovah at the judgment-call.
And Peter, from the height of blasphemy—
“I never knew this man”—did quail and
fall
As knowing straight THAT GOD,—and
turned free
And went out speechless from the face of
all,
And filled the silence, weeping bitterly.

The Meaning of the Look



I think that look of Christ might seem
to say—

“Thou Peter! art thou then a common
stone

Which I at last must break my heart upon,
For all God’s charge to His high angels
may

Guard my foot better? Did I yesterday
Wash *thy* feet, my beloved, that they
should run

Quick to deny me ’neath the morning sun?
And do thy kisses, like the rest, betray?
The cock crows coldly.—Go, and manifest
A late contrition, but no bootless fear!
For when thy final need is dreariest,
Thou shalt not be denied, as I am here—
My voice, to God and angels, shall attest,
Because I KNOW this man, let him be clear.”

A Thought for a Lonely Death-Bed



INSCRIBED TO MY
FRIEND E. C.

If God compel thee to this destiny,
To die alone,—with none beside thy bed
To ruffle round with sobs thy last word
said,
And mark with tears the pulses ebb from
thee,—
Pray then alone—"O Christ, come ten-
derly!
By Thy forsaken Sonship in the red
Drear wine-press,—by the wilderness out-
spread,—
And the lone garden where Thine agony
Fell bloody from Thy brow,—by all of
those
Permitted desolations, comfort mine!
No earthly friend being near me, interpose
No deathly angel 'twixt my face and
Thine,
But stoop Thyself to gather my life's rose,
And smile away my mortal to Divine!"

Pain in Pleasure



A Thought lay like a flower upon mine
heart,
And drew around it other thoughts like
bees
For multitude and thirst of sweetnesses,—
Whereat rejoicing, I desired the art
Of the Greek whistler, who to wharf and
mart
Could lure those insect swarms from orange-
trees,
That I might hive with me such thoughts,
and please
My soul so, always. Foolish counterpart
Of a weak man's vain wishes! While I
spoke,
The thought I called a flower grew nettle-
rough,
The thoughts, called bees, stung me to
festering.
Oh, entertain (cried Reason, as she woke,)
Your best and gladdest thoughts but long
enough,
And they will all prove sad enough to sting.

**Cheerfulness
taught by
Reason**



I think we are too ready with complaint
In this fair world of God's. Had we no
 hope
Indeed beyond the zenith and the slope
Of yon grey blank of sky, we might grow
 faint
To muse upon eternity's constraint
Round our aspirant souls; but since the
 scope
Must widen early, is it well to droop,
For a few days consumed in loss and taint;
O pusillanimous Heart, be comforted,—
And, like a cheerful traveller, take the road
Singing beside the hedge. What if the
 bread
Be bitter in thine inn, and thou unshod
To meet the flints?—At least it may be said
“Because the way is *short*, I thank thee
 God!”

Exaggeration



We overstate the ills of life, and take
Imagination (given us to bring down
The choirs of singing angels overshadowed
By God's clear glory) down our earth to
rake

The dismal snows instead,—flake following
flake,

To cover all the corn. We walk upon
The shadow of hills across a level thrown,
And pant like climbers. Near the alder
brake

We sigh so loud, the nightingale within
Refuses to sing loud, as else she would.
O brothers! let us leave the shame and sin
Of taking vainly, in a plaintive mood,
The holy name of GRIEF!—holy herein,
That, by the grief of ONE, came all our
good.

The Romaunt of the Page



I

A knight of gallant deeds
And a young page at his side,
From the holy war in Palestine
Did slow and thoughtful ride,
As each were a palmer and told for beads
The dews of the eventide.

II

“O young page,” said the knight,
“A noble page art thou!
Thou fearest not to steep in blood
The curls upon thy brow;
And once in the tent, and twice in the fight,
Didst ward me a mortal blow.”

III

“O brave knight,” said the page,
“Or ere we hither came,
We talked in tent, we talked in field,
Of the bloody battle-game;
But here, below this greenwood bough,
I cannot speak the same.

THE ROMAUNT OF THE PAGE

IV

“Our troop is far behind,
The woodland calm is new;
Our steeds, with slow grass-muffled hoofs,
Tread deep the shadows through;
And in my mind, some blessing kind
Is dropping with the dew.

V

“The woodland calm is pure—
I cannot choose but have
A thought from these, o’ the becchen-trees
Which in our England wave,
And of the little finches fine
Which sang there, while in Palestine
The warrior-hilt we drave.

VI

“Methinks, a moment gone,
I heard my mother pray!
I heard, sir knight, the prayer for *me*
Wherein she passed away;
And I know the Heavens are leaning down
To hear what I shall say.”

VII

The page spake calm and high,
As of no mean degree.
Perhaps he felt in nature’s broad

THE ROMAUNT OF THE PAGE

Full heart, his own was free.
And the knight looked up to his lifted eye,
Then answered smilingly:—

VIII

“Sir page, I pray your grace!
Certes, I meant not so
To cross your pastoral mood, sir page,
With the crook of the battle-bow;
But a knight may speak of a lady's face,
I ween, in any mood or place,
If the grasses die or grow.

IX

“And this I meant to say,—
My lady's face shall shine
As ladies' faces use, to greet
My page from Palestine;
Or, speak she fair or prank she gay,
She is no lady of mine.

X

“And this I meant to fear,—
Her bower may suit thee ill!
For, sooth, in that same field and tent,
Thy *talk* was somewhat still;
And fitter thy hand for my knightly spear,
Than thy tongue for my lady's will.”

THE ROMAUNT OF THE PAGE

XI

Slowly and thankfully

The young page bowed his head:
His large eyes seemed to muse a smile,
Until he blushed instead,
And no lady in her bower pardiè,
Could blush more sudden red.
“Sir Knight,—thy lady’s bower to me
Is suited well,” he said.

XII

Beati, beati, mortui!

From the convent on the sea,
One mile off, or scarce as nigh,
Swells the dirge as clear and high
As if that, over brake and lea,
Bodily the wind did carry
The great altar of Saint Mary,
And the fifty tapers burning o’er it,
And the Lady Abbess dead before it,
And the chanting nuns whom yesterweek
Her voice did charge and bless,—
Chanting steady, chanting meek,
Chanting with a solemn breath
Because that they are thinking less
Upon the dead than upon death!

Beati, beati, mortui!

Now the vision in the sound
Wheelet on the wind around.

THE ROMAUNT OF THE PAGE

Now it sweepeth back, away—
The uplands will not let it stay
To dark the western sun.
Mortui!—away at last,—
Or ere the page's blush is past!
And the knight heard all, and the page
heard none.

XIII

A boon, thou noble knight,
If ever I servèd thee!
Though thou art a knight and I am a page,
Now grant a boon to me;
And tell me sooth, if dark or bright,
If little loved or loved aright
Be the face of thy ladye."

XIV

Gloomily looked the knight;—
"As a son thou hast servèd me,
And would to none I had granted boon
Except to only thee!
For haply then I should love aright,
For then I should know if dark or bright
Were the face of my ladye.

THE ROMAUNT OF THE PAGE

XV

“Yet ill it suits my knightly tongue
To grudge that granted boon!
That heavy price from heart and life
I paid in silence down.
The hand that claimed it, cleared in fine
My father’s fame: I swear by mine,
That price was nobly won.

XVI

“Earl Walter was a brave old earl,—
He was my father’s friend;
And while I rode the lists at court
And little guessed the end,
My noble father in his shroud,
Against a slanderer lying loud,
He rose up to defend.

XVII

“Oh, calm, below the marble grey
My father’s dust was strown!
Oh, meek, above the marble grey
His image prayed alone!
The slanderer lied—the wretch was brave,—
For, looking up the minster-nave,
He saw my father’s knightly glaive
Was changed from steel to stone.

THE ROMAUNT OF THE PAGE

XVIII

“Earl Walter’s glaive was steel,
With a brave old hand to wear it,
And dashed the lie back in the mouth
Which lied against the godly truth
And against the knightly merit!
The slanderer, ’neath the avenger’s heel,
Struck up the dagger in appeal
From stealthy lie to brutal force—
And out upon the traitor’s corse
Was yielded the true spirit.

XIX

“I would mine hand had fought that fight
And justified my father!
I would mine heart had caught that wound
And slept beside him rather!
I think it were a better thing
Than murdered friend and marriage-ring
Forced on my life together.

XX

“Wail shook Earl Walter’s house;
His true wife shed no tear;
She lay upon her bed as mute
As the earl did on his bier:
Till—‘Ride, ride fast,’ she said at last,
‘And bring the avengèd’s son anear!
Ride fast, ride free, as a dart can flee,
For white of blee with waiting for me
Is the corse in the next chambère.’

THE ROMAUNT OF THE PAGE

XXI

“I came—I knelt beside her bed—
Her calm was worse than strife;
‘My husband, for thy father dear,
Gave freely when thou wert not here
His own and eke my life.
A boon! Of that sweet child we make
An orphan for thy father’s sake,
Make thou, for ours, a wife.’

XXII

“I said, ‘My steed neighs in the court,
My bark rocks on the brine,
And the warrior’s vow I am under now
To free the pilgrim’s shrine;
But fetch the ring and fetch the priest
And call that daughter of thine,
And rule she wide from my castle on Nyde
While I am in Palestine.’

XXIII

“In the dark chambère, if the bride was fair,
Ye wis, I could not see,
But the steed thrice neighed, and the priest
fast prayed,
And wedded fast were we.
Her mother smiled upon her bed
As at its side we knelt to wed,
And the bride rose from her knee
And kissed the smile of her mother dead,
Or ever she kissed me.

THE ROMANUNT OF THE PAGE

XXIV

“My page, my page, what grieves thee so,
That the tears run down thy face?”—

“Alas, alas! mine own sistèr

Was in thy lady’s case:

But *she* laid down the silks she wore

And followed him she wed before,

Disguised as his true servitor,

To the very battle-place.”

XXV

And wept the page, but laughed the knight,—

A careless laugh laughed he:

“Well done it were for thy sistèr,

But not for my ladye!

My love, so please you, shall requite

No woman, whether dark or bright,

Unwomaned if she be.”

XXVI

The page stopped weeping and smiled
cold—

“Your wisdom may declare

That womanhood is proved the best

By golden brooch and glossy vest

The mincing ladies wear;

Yet is it proved, and was of old,

Anear as well, I dare to hold,

By truth, or by despair.”

THE ROMAUNT OF THE PAGE

XXVII

He smiled no more, he wept no more,
But passionate he spake,—
“Oh, womanly she prayed in tent,
When none beside did wake!
Oh, womanly she paled in fight,
For one belovèd’s sake!—
And her little hand defiled with blood,
Her tender tears of womanhood
Most woman-pure did make!”

XXVIII

—“Well done it were for thy sistèr,
Thou tellest well her tale!
But for my lady, she shall pray
I’ the kirk of Nydesdale.
Not dread for me but love for me
Shall make my lady pale;
No casque shall hide her woman’s tear—
It shall have room to trickle clear
Behind her woman’s veil.”

XXIX

—“But what if she mistook thy mind
And followed thee to strife,
Then kneeling, did entreat thy love,
As Paynims ask for life?”
—“I would forgive, and evermore
Would love her as my servitor,
But little as my wife.

THE ROMAUNT OF THE PAGE

XXX

“Look up—there is a small bright cloud
Alone amid the skies!
So high, so pure, and so apart,
A woman’s honour lies.”
The page looked up—the cloud was sheen—
A sadder cloud did rush, I ween,
Betwixt it and his eyes:

XXXI

Then dimly dropped his eyes away
From welkin unto hill—
Ha! who rides there?—the page is ’ware,
Though the cry at his heart is still!
And the page seeth all and the knight
seeth none,
Though banner and spear do fleck the sun,
And the Saracens ride at will.

XXXII

He speaketh calm, he speaketh low,—
“Ride fast, my master, ride,
Or ere within the broadening dark
The narrow shadows hide.”
“Yea, fast, my page, I will do so,
And keep thou at my side.”

THE ROMAUNT OF THE PAGE

XXXIII

“Now nay, now nay, ride on thy way
Thy faithful page precede.
For I must loose on saddle-bow
My battle-casque that galls, I trow,
The shoulder of my steed;
And I must pray, as I did vow,
For one in bitter need.

XXXIV

“Ere night I shall be near to thee,—
Now ride, my master, ride!
Ere night, as parted spirits cleave
To mortals too beloved to leave,
I shall be at thy side.”
The knight smiled free at the fantasy,
And adown the dell did ride.

XXXV

Had the knight looked up to the page's
face,
No smile the word had won:
Had the knight looked up to the page's
face,
I ween he had never gone:
Had the knight looked back to the page's
geste,
I ween he had turned anon!

THE ROMAUNT OF THE PAGE

For dread was the woe in the face so young,
And wild was the silent geste that flung
Casque, sword to earth—as the boy down-
sprung,
And stood—alone, alone.

XXXVI

He clenched his hands as if to hold
His soul's great agony—
“Have I renounced my womanhood,
For wifehood unto *thee*,
And is this the last, last look of thine
That ever I shall see?

XXXVII

“Yet God thee save, and mayst thou have
A lady to thy mind,
More woman-proud and half as true
As one thou leav'st behind!
And God me take with HIM to dwell—
For HIM I cannot love too well,
As I have loved my kind.”

XXXVIII

SHE looketh up, in earth's despair,
The hopeful Heavens to seek.
That little cloud still floateth there,
Whereof her Loved did speak.
How bright the little cloud appears!
Her eyelids fall upon the tears,
And the tears down either cheek.

THE ROMAUNT OF THE PAGE

And the fifty tapers paling o'er it,
And the Lady Abbess stark before it,
And the weary nuns with hearts that faintly
Beat along their voices saintly—

Ingemisco, ingemisco!

Dirge for abbess laid in shroud,
Sweepeth o'er the shroudless dead,
Page or lady, as we said,
With the dewes upon her head,
All as sad if not as loud.

Ingemisco, ingemisco!

Is ever a lament begun
By any mourner under sun,
Which, ere it endeth, suits but *one*?

The Lay of
the Brown
Rosary



FIRST PART

“Onora, Onora,”—her mother is calling,
She sits at the lattice and hears the dew
 falling
Drop after drop from the sycamores laden
With dew as with blossom, and calls home
 the maiden,
 “Night cometh, Onora.”

She looks down the garden-walk caverned
 with trees,
To the limes at the end where the green
 arbour is—
“Some sweet thought or other may keep
 where it found her,
While forgot or unseen in the dreamlight
 around her
 Night cometh—Onora!”

LAY OF THE BROWN ROSARY

She looks up the forest whose alleys shoot
on

Like the mute minster-aisles when the
anthem is done,

And the choristers sitting with faces aslant
Feel the silence to consecrate more than
the chant—

“Onora, Onora!”

And forward she looketh across the brown
heath—

“Onora, art coming?”—what is it she seeth?
Nought, nought, but the grey border-stone
that is wist

To dilate and assume a wild shape in the
mist—

“My daughter!”—Then over

The casement she leaneth, and as she doth
so

She is 'ware of her little son playing below:
“Now where is Onora?”—He hung down
his head

And spake not, then answering blushed
scarlet-red,—

“At the tryst with her lover.”

LAY OF THE BROWN ROSARY

But his mother was wroth. In a sternness
 quoth she,
"As thou play'st at the ball, art thou play-
 ing with me?
When we know that her lover to battle is
 gone,
And the saints know above that she loveth
 but one
 And will ne'er wed another?"

Then the boy wept aloud. 'T was a fair
 sight yet sad
To see the tears run down the sweet
 blooms he had:
He stamped with his foot, said — "The
 saints know I lied
Because truth that is wicked is fittest to
 hide!
 Must I utter it, mother?"

In his vehement childhood he hurried within,
And knelt at her feet as in prayer against
 sin;
But a child at a prayer never sobbeth as
 he—
"Oh! she sits with the nun of the brown
 rosary,
 At nights in the ruin!

LAY OF THE BROWN ROSARY

“The old convent ruin the ivy rots off,
Where the owl hoots by day, and the toad
is sun-proof;
Where no singing-birds build, and the trees
gaunt and grey
As in stormy sea-coasts appear blasted one
way—
But is *this* the wind’s doing?

“A nun in the east wall was buried alive,
Who mocked at the priest when he called
her to shrive,—
And shrieked such a curse, as the stone
took her breath,
The old abbess fell backward and swooned
unto death
With an Ave half-spoken.

“I tried once to pass it, myself and my
hound,
Till, as fearing the lash, down he shivered
to ground.
A brave hound, my mother! a brave hound,
ye wot!
And the wolf thought the same with his
fangs at her throat
In the pass of the Brocken.

LAY OF THE BROWN ROSARY

“At dawn and at eve, mother, who sitteth
there,
With the brown rosary never used for a
prayer?
Stoop low, mother, low! If we went there
to see,
What an ugly great hole in that east wall
must be
At dawn and at even!

“Who meet there, my mother, at dawn
and at even?
Who meet by that wall, never looking to
heaven?
O sweetest my sister, what doeth with *thee*,
The ghost of a nun with a brown rosary
And a face turned from heaven?

“Saint Agnes o'erwatcheth my dreams,
and erewhile
I have felt through mine eyelids the
warmth of her smile;
But last night, as a sadness like pity came
o'er her,
She whispered—‘ Say *two* prayers at dawn
for Onora!
The Tempted is sinning’.”

LAY OF THE BROWN ROSARY

“Onora, Onora!” they heard her not
coming,
Not a step on the grass, not a voice through
the gloaming;
But her mother looked up, and she stood
on the floor
Fair and still as the moonlight that came
there before,
And a smile just beginning.

It touches her lips—but it dares not arise
To the height of the mystical sphere of
her eyes;
And the large musing eyes, neither joyous
nor sorry,
Sing on like the angels in separate glory,
Between clouds of amber.

For the hair droops in clouds amber-
coloured, till stirred
Into gold by the gesture that comes with
a word;
While—O soft!—her speaking is so inter-
wound
Of the dim and the sweet, 't is a twilight
of sound
And floats through the chamber.

LAY OF THE BROWN ROSARY

“Since thou shrivest my brother fair
mother,” said she,
“I count on thy priesthood for marrying
of me.
And I know by the hills that the battle is
done—
That my lover rides on, will be here with
the sun,
’Neath the eyes that behold thee.”

Her mother sat silent—too tender, I wis,
Of the smile her dead father smiled dying
to kiss.
But the boy started up pale with tears,
passion-wrought,—
“O wicked fair sister, the hills utter
nought!
If he cometh, who told thee?”

“I know by the hills,” she resumed calm
and clear,
“By the beauty upon them, that HE is
anear.
Did they ever look so since he bade me
adieu?
Oh, love in the waking, sweet brother, is
true
As Saint Agnes in sleeping.”

LAY OF THE BROWN ROSARY

Half-ashamed and half-softened the boy
did not speak,
And the blush met the lashes which fell
on his cheek:
She bowed down to kiss him—Dear saints,
did he see
Or feel on her bosom the BROWN ROSARY,
That he shrank away weeping?

SECOND PART

A bed.—ONORA *sleeping.* Angels, *but
not near.*

First Angel. Must we stand so far, and
she
So very fair?

Second Angel. As bodies be.

First Angel. And she so mild?

Second Angel. As spirits when
They meeken, not to God, but men.

First Angel. And she so young,—that I
who bring
Good dreams for saintly children,
might
Mistake that small soft face to-
night,

LAY OF THE BROWN ROSARY

And fetch her such a blessèd thing,
That at her waking she would weep
For childhood lost anew in sleep.
How hath she sinned?

Second Angel. In bartering love;
God's love—for man's.

First Angel. We may reprove
The world for this, not only her.
Let me approach to breathe away
This dust o' the heart with holy air.

Second Angel. Stand off! She sleeps,
and did not pray.

First Angel. Did none pray for her?

Second Angel. Ay, a child,—
Who never, praying, wept before:
While, in a mother undefiled
Prayer goeth on in sleep, as true
And pauseless as the pulses do.

First Angel. Then I approach.

Second Angel. It is not WILLED.

First Angel. One word: is she re-
deemed?

Second Angel. No more!
The place is filled. [*Angels vanish.*]

Evil Spirit in a Nun's garb by the bed.
Forbear that dream—forbear that dream!
too near to Heaven it leaned.

LAY OF THE BROWN ROSARY

Onora in sleep. Nay, leave me this—
but only this! 'tis but a dream, sweet
fiend!

Evil Spirit. It is a *thought*.

Onora in sleep. A sleeping
thought—most innocent of good.
It doth the Devil no harm, sweet fiend! it
cannot, if it would.
I say in it no holy hymn, I do no holy
work,
I scarcely hear the sabbath-bell that
chimeth from the kirk.

Evil Spirit. Forbear that dream—for-
bear that dream!

Onora in sleep. Nay, let me dream
at least.
That far-off bell, it may be took for viol at
a feast.
I only walk among the fields, beneath the
autumn-sun,
With my dead father, hand in hand, as I
have often done.

Evil Spirit. Forbear that dream—for-
bear that dream!

Onora in sleep. Nay, sweet fiend,
let me go.
I never more can walk with *him*, oh, never
more but so.

LAY OF THE BROWN ROSARY

For they have tied my father's feet beneath
the kirkyard stone,

Oh, deep and straight! oh, very straight!
they move at nights alone:

And then he calleth through my dreams,
he calleth tenderly,

“Come forth my daughter, my beloved,
and walk the fields with me!”

Evil Spirit. Forbear that dream, or else
disprove its pureness by a sign.

Onora in sleep. Speak on, thou shalt be
satisfied! my word shall answer thine.
I heard a bird which used to sing when
I a child was praying,
I see the poppies in the corn I used to
sport away in.—

What shall I do—tread down the dew, and
pull the blossoms blowing?

Or clap my wicked hands to fright the
finches from the rowan?

Evil Spirit. Thou shalt do something
harder still. Stand up where thou
dost stand
Among the fields of Dreamland with thy
father hand in hand,
And clear and slow, repeat the vow—de-
clare its cause and kind,
Which, not to break, in sleep or wake, thou
bearest on thy mind.

LAY OF THE BROWN ROSARY

Onora in sleep. I bear a vow of sinful
kind, a vow for mournful cause:
I vowed it deep, I vowed it strong—the
spirits laughed applause:
The spirits trailed along the pines low
laughter like a breeze,
While, high atween their swinging tops,
the stars appeared to freeze.

Evil Spirit. More calm and free,—speak
out to me, why such a vow was made.

Onora in sleep. Because that God de-
creed my death, and I shrank back
afraid.
Have patience, O dead father mine! I did
not fear to die;—
I wish I were a young dead child, and had
thy company!
I wish I lay beside thy feet, a buried
three-year child,
And wearing only a kiss of thine upon
my lips that smiled!
The linden-tree that covers thee might so
have shadowed twain,
For death itself I did not fear—'tis love
that makes the pain:
Love feareth death. I was no child—I was
betrothed that day;
I wore a troth-kiss on my lips I could not
give away.

LAY OF THE BROWN ROSARY

How could I bear to lie content and still
 beneath a stone,
And feel mine own betrothed go by—alas!
 no more mine own,—
Go leading by in wedding pomp some
 lovely lady brave,
With cheeks that blushed as red as rose,
 while mine were white in grave?
How could I bear to sit in Heaven, on
 e'er so high a throne,
And hear him say to her—to *her!* that
 else he loveth none?
Though e'er so high I sate above, though
 e'er so low he spake,
As clear as thunder I should hear the new
 oath he might take,
That hers, forsooth, were heavenly eyes—
 ah, me! while very dim
Some heavenly eyes (indeed of Heaven!)
 would darken down to *him*.

Evil Spirit. Who told thee thou wast
 called to death?

Onora in sleep. I sate all night be-
 side thee—
The grey owl on the ruined wall shut both
 his eyes to hide thee,
And ever he flapped his heavy wing all
 brokenly and weak,

LAY OF THE BROWN ROSARY

And the long grass waved against the
sky, around his gasping beak.

I sate beside thee all the night, while the
moonlight lay forlorn,

Strewn round us like a dead world's shroud,
in ghastly fragments torn.

And through the night, and through the
hush, and over the flapping wing,

We heard beside the Heavenly Gate the
angels murmuring:—

We heard them say, "Put day to day, and
count the days to seven,

"And God will draw Onora up the golden
stairs of heaven;

"And yet the Evil ones have leave that
purpose to defer,

"For if she has no need of HIM, He has
no need of her."—

Evil Spirit. Speak out to me, speak
bold and free.

Onora in sleep. And then I heard thee
say,—

"I count upon my rosary brown the hours
thou hast to stay!

"Yet God permits us Evil ones to put by
that decree,

"Since if thou hast no need of HIM, He
has no need of thee—

LAY OF THE BROWN ROSARY

“And if thou wilt forego the sight of
angels, verily

“Thy true love gazing on thy face shall
guess what angels be;

“Nor bride shall pass, save thee” . . .

Alas!—my father’s hand’s acold,

The meadows seem—

Evil Spirit. Forbear the dream,
or let the vow be told!

Onora in sleep. I vowed upon thy rosary
brown, this string of antique beads,
By charnel lichens overgrown, and dank
among the weeds,

This rosary brown, which is thine own,—
lost soul of buried nun,

Who, lost by vow, wouldst render now all
souls alike undone,—

I vowed upon thy rosary brown,—and, till
such vow should break,

A pledge always of living days, ’twas
hung around my neck—

I vowed to thee on rosary (dead father,
look not so!),

*I would not thank God in my weal, nor
seek God in my woe.*

Evil Spirit. And canst thou prove—

Onora in sleep. O love, my love!

I felt him near again!

LAY OF THE BROWN ROSARY

I saw his steed on mountain-head, I heard
it on the plain!

Was this no weal for me to feel?—Is
greater weal than this?

Yet when he came, I wept his name—and
the angels heard but *his*.

Evil Spirit. Well done, well done!

Onora in sleep. Ah me! the sun . . .
the dreamlight 'gins to pine,—

Ah me! how dread can look the Dead!—
Aroint thee, father mine!

She starteth from slumber, she sitteth up-
right,

And her breath comes in sobs while she
stares through the night.

There is nought. The great willow, her
lattice before,

Large-drawn in the moon, lieth calm on
the floor.

But her hands tremble fast as their pulses,
and, free

From the death-clasp, close over—the
BROWN ROSARY.

THIRD PART

'Tis a morn for a bridal; the merry bride-bell
Rings clear through the green-wood that
skirts the chapelle,

LAY OF THE BROWN ROSARY

And the priest at the altar awaiteth the
 bride,
And the sacristans slyly are jesting aside
 At the work shall be doing.

While down through the wood rides that
 fair company,
The youths with the courtship, the maids
 with the glee,
Till the chapel-cross opens to sight, and
 at once
All the maids sigh demurely and think for
 the nonce,
 “And so endeth a wooing!”

And the bride and the bridegroom are
 leading the way,
With his hand on her rein, and a word
 yet to say:
Her dropt eyelids suggest the soft answers
 beneath,
And the little quick smiles come and go
 with her breath,
 When she sigheth or speaketh.

And the tender bride-mother breaks off
 unaware
From an Ave, to think that her daughter
 is fair,

LAY OF THE BROWN ROSARY

Till in nearing the chapel and glancing
before

She seeth her little son stand at the door.
Is it play that he seeketh?

Is it play? when his eyes wander innocent-
wild

And sublimed with a sadness unfitting a
child?

He trembles not, weeps not—the passion
is done,

And calmly he kneels in their midst, with
the sun

On his head like a glory.

“O fair-featured maids, ye are many!” he
cried,—

“But, in fairness and vileness, who match-
eth the bride?

O brave-hearted youths, ye are many! but
whom,

For the courage and woe, can ye match
with the groom,

As ye see them before ye?”

Out spake the bride’s mother, “The vile-
ness is thine,

If thou shame thine own sister, a bride
at the shrine!”

LAY OF THE BROWN ROSARY

Out spake the bride's lover, "The vileness
be mine,
If he, shame mine own wife at the hearth
or the shrine,
And the charge be unprovèd.

"Bring the charge, prove the charge,
brother! speak it aloud.
Let thy father and hers, hear it deep in
his shroud!"—
—"O father, thou seest—for dead eyes can
see—
How she wears on her bosom *a brown
rosary,*
O my father beloved!"

Then outlaughed the bridegroom, and
outlaughed withal
Both maidens and youths, by the old
chapel-wall.
"So she weareth no love-gift, kind
brother," quoth he,
"She may wear an she listeth, a brown
rosary,
Like a pure-hearted lady."

LAY OF THE BROWN ROSARY

Then swept through the chapel the long
bridal train.

Though he spake to the bride she replied
not again:

On, as one in a dream, pale and stately
she went

Where the altar-lights burn o'er the great
sacrament,

Faint with daylight, but steady.

But her brother had passed in between
them and her,

And calmly knelt down on the high-altar
stair—

Of an infantine aspect so stern to the view
That the priest could not smile on the
child's eyes of blue

As he would for another.

He knelt like a child marble-sculptured
and white,

That seems kneeling to pray on the tomb
of a knight,

With a look taken up to each iris of stone
From the greatness and death where he
kneeleth, but none

From the face of a mother.

LAY OF THE BROWN ROSARY

“In your chapel, O priest, ye have wedded
and shriven

Fair wives for the hearth, and fair sinners
for Heaven!

But this fairest my sister, ye think now
to wed,

Bid her kneel where she standeth, and
shrive her instead.

O shrive her and wed not!”

In tears, the bride’s mother,—“Sir priest,
unto thee

Would he lie, as he lied to this fair company.”

In wrath, the bride’s lover,—“The lie shall
be clear!

Speak it out, boy! the saints in their niches
shall hear.

Be the charge proved or said not.”

Then serene in his childhood he lifted his
face,

And his voice sounded holy and fit for the
place.

“Look down from your niches, ye still
saints, and see

How she wears on her bosom *a brown
rosary!*

Is it used for the praying?”

LAY OF THE BROWN ROSARY

The youths looked aside—to laugh there
were a sin—

And the maidens' lips trembled from smiles
shut within.

Quoth the priest, "Thou art wild, pretty
boy! Blessed she

Who prefers at her bridal a brown rosary
To a worldly arraying!"

The bridegroom spake low and led on-
ward the bride,

And before the high altar they stood side
by side:

The rite-book is opened, the rite is begun,
They have knelt down together to rise up
as one.

Who laughed by the altar?

The maidens looked forward, the youths
looked around,

The bridegroom's eye flashed from his
prayer at the sound;

And each saw the bride, as if no bride she
were,

Gazing cold at the priest without gesture
of prayer,

As he read from the psalter.

LAY OF THE BROWN ROSARY

The priest never knew that she did sō,
but still
He felt a power on him too strong for
his will,
And whenever the Great Name was there
to be read,
His voice sank to silence—THAT could not
be said,
Or the air could not hold it.

“I have sinnèd,” quoth he, “I have
sinnèd, I wot”—
And the tears ran adown his old cheeks
at the thought.
They dropped fast on the book, but he
read on the same,
And aye was the silence where should be
the NAME,—
As the choristers told it.

The rite-book is closed, and the rite being
done
They who knelt down together, arise up
as one.
Fair riseth the bride—Oh, a fair bride is
she,—
But, for all (think the maidens) that brown
rosary,
No saint at her praying!

LAY OF THE BROWN ROSARY

What aileth the bridegroom? He glares
blank and wide—

Then suddenly turning he kisseth the
bride—

His lips stung her with cold; she glanced
upwardly mute:

“Mine own wife,” he said, and fell stark
at her foot

In the word he was saying.

They have lifted him up,—but his head
sinks away,

And his face showeth bleak in the sun-
shine and grey.

Leave him now where he lieth—for oh,
never more

Will he kneel at an altar or stand on a
floor!

Let his bride gaze upon him.

Long and still was her gaze, while they
chafèd him there

And breathed in the mouth whose last
life had kissed her,

But when they stood up—only *they!* with
a start

The shriek from her soul struck her pale
lips apart—

She has lived, and forgone him!

LAY OF THE BROWN ROSARY

And low on his body she droppeth adown—
“Didst call me thine own wife, beloved—
 thine own?
Then take thine own with thee! thy cold-
 ness is warm
To the world's cold without thee! Come,
 keep me from harm
 In a calm of thy teaching.”

She looked in his face earnest-long, as in
 sooth
There were hope of an answer,—and then
 kissed his mouth,
And with head on his bosom, wept, wept
 bitterly,—
“Now, O God, take pity—take pity on
 me!—
 God, hear my beseeching!”

She was 'ware of a shadow that crossed
 where she lay,
She was 'ware of a presence that withered
 the day—
Wild she sprang to her feet,—“I surren-
 der to *thee*
The broken vow's pledge,—the accursed
 rosary,—
 I am ready for dying!”

LAY OF THE BROWN ROSARY

She dashed it in scorn to the marble-paved
ground
Where it fell mute as snow, and a weird
music-sound
Crept up, like a chill, up the aisles long
and dim,—
As the fiends tried to mock at the choris-
ters' hymn
And moaned in the trying.

FOURTH PART

Onora looketh listlessly adown the garden
walk:
“I am weary, O my mother, of thy tender
talk.
I am weary of the trees a-waving to and
fro,
Of the steadfast skies above, the running
brooks below.
All things are the same but I,—only I
am dreary,
And, mother, of my dreariness behold me
very weary.

“Mother, brother, pull the flowers I
planted in the spring
And smiled to think I should smile more
upon their gathering.

LAY OF THE BROWN ROSARY

The bees will find out other flowers—oh,
pull them, dearest mine,
And carry them and carry me before Saint
Agnes' shrine."

—Whereat they pulled the summer flowers
she planted in the spring,
And her and them all mournfully to Agnes'
shrine did bring.

She looked up to the pictured saint and
gently shook her head—

"The picture is too calm for *me*—too calm
for *me*," she said:

"The little flowers we brought with us,
before it we may lay,

For those are used to look at heaven,—
but *I* must turn away,

Because no sinner under sun can dare or
bear to gaze

On God's or angel's holiness, except in
Jesu's face."

She spoke with passion after pause—

"And were it wisely done,

If we who cannot gaze above, should walk
the earth alone?

if we whose virtue is so weak, should
have a will so strong,

And stand blind on the rocks, to choose
the right path from the wrong?

LAY OF THE BROWN ROSARY

To choose perhaps a love-lit hearth, instead of love and Heaven,—
A single rose, for a rose-tree, which beareth seven times seven?
A rose that droppeth from the hand, that fadeth in the breast,—
Until, in grieving for the worst, we learn what is the best!”

Then breaking into tears,—“Dear God,” she cried, “and must we see
All blissful things depart from us, or ere we go to THEE?
We cannot guess Thee in the wood, or hear Thee in the wind?
Our cedars must fall round us, ere we see the light behind?
Ay sooth, we feel too strong in weal, to need Thee on that road,
But woe being come, the soul is dumb that crieth not on ‘God’.”

Her mother could not speak for tears; she ever musèd thus,
“*The bees will find out other flowers,—but what is left for us?*”
But her young brother stayed his sobs and knelt beside her knee,
—“Thou sweetest sister in the world, hast never a word for me?”

LAY OF THE BROWN ROSARY

She passed her hand across his face, she
pressed it on his cheek,
So tenderly, so tenderly—she needed not
to speak.

The wreath which lay on shrine that day,
at vespers bloomed no more.
The woman fair who placed it there, had
died an hour before.
Both perished mute, for lack of root, earth's
nourishment to reach.
O reader, breathe (the ballad saith) some
sweetness out of each!

Lady Geraldine's Courtship



A ROMANCE OF THE AGE

*A poet writes to his Friend. Place—A
Room in Wycombe Hall. Time—Late
in the evening.*

Dear my friend and fellow-student, I
would lean my spirit o'er you.
Down the purple of this chamber, tears
should scarcely run at will.
I am humbled who was humble. Friend,—
I bow my head before you.
You should lead me to my peasants,—but
their faces are too still.

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

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP

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

There are none of England's daughters
who can show a prouder presence.
Upon princely suitors' praying, she has
looked in her disdain.
She was sprung of English nobles, I was
born of English peasants;
What was *I* that I should love her—save
for competence to pain?

I was only a poor poet, made for singing
at her casement,
As the finches or the thrushes, while she
thought of other things.
Oh, she walked so high above me, she
appeared to my abasement,
In her lovely silken murmur, like an angel
clad in wings!

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP

Many vassals bow before her as her carriage sweeps their doorways;
She has blest their little children,—as a priest or queen were she.
Far too tender, or too cruel far, her smile upon the poor was,
For I thought it was the same smile which she used to smile on *me*.

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

Yet I could not choose out love her. I was born to poet-uses,
To love all things set above me, all of good and all of fair.
Nymphs of mountain, not of valley, we are wont to call the Muses;
And in nympholeptic climbing, poets pass from mount to star. ✓

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP

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

And they praised me in her presence;—
“Will your book appear this summer?”
Then returning to each other—“Yes, our
plans are for the moors.”
Then with whisper dropped behind me—
“There he is! the latest comer!”
Oh, she only likes his verses! what is
over, she endures.

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

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP

I grew scornfuller, grew colder, as I stood
up there among them,
Till as frost intense will burn you, the cold
scorning scorched my brow,—
When a sudden silver speaking, gravely
cadenced, over-rung them,
And a sudden silken stirring touched my
inner nature through.

I looked upward and beheld her. With a
calm and regnant spirit,
Slowly round she swept her eyelids, and
said clear before them all—
“Have you such superfluous honour, sir,
that able to confer it
You will come down, Mister Bertram, as
my guest to Wycombe Hall?”

Here she paused,—she had been paler at
the first word of her speaking,
But because a silence followed it, blushed
somewhat, as for shame,
Then, as scorning her own feeling, re-
sumed calmly—“I am seeking
More distinction than these gentlemen
think worthy of my claim.

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP

“Ne’ertheless, you see, I seek it—not because I am a woman,”

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

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

“I invite you, Mister Bertram, to no scene
for worldly speeches—

Sir, I scarce should dare—but only where
God asked the thrushes first—

And if *you* will sing beside them, in the
covert of my beeches,

I will thank you for the woodlands, . . . for
the human world, at worst.”

Then she smiled around right childly, then
she gazed around right queenly,

And I bowed—I could not answer; alternated
light and gloom—

While as one who quells the lions, with a
steady eye serenely,

She, with level fronting eyelids, passed out
stately from the room.

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP

Oh, the blessèd woods of Sussex, I can
hear them still around me,
With their leafy tide of greenery still
rippling up the wind.
Oh, the cursèd woods of Sussex! where
the hunter's arrow found me,
When a fair face and a tender voice had
made me mad and blind!

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

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

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP

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

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

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

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP

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

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

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

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP

Thus she drew me the first morning, out
 across into the garden,
And I walked among her noble friends
 and could not keep behind.
Spake she unto all and unto me—"Be-
 hold, I am the warden
Of the song-birds in these lindens, which
 are cages to their mind.

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

"The live air that waves the lilies waves
 the slender jet of water
Like a holy thought sent feebly up from
 soul of fasting saint.
Whereby lies a marble Silence, sleeping!
 (Lough the sculptor wrought her)
So asleep she is forgetting to say Hush!
 —a fancy quaint.

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP

“Mark how heavy white her eyelids! not
a dream between them lingers.
And the left hand's index droppeth from
the lips upon the cheek;
While the right hand,—with the symbol
rose held slack within the fingers,—
Has fallen backward in the basin—yet this
Silence will not speak!

“That the essential meaning growing may
exceed the special symbol,
Is the thought as I conceive it: it applies
more high and low.
Our true noblemen will often through
right nobleness grow humble,
And assert an inward honour by denying
outward show.”

“Nay, your Silence,” said I, “truly, holds
her symbol rose but slackly,
Yet *she holds it*—or would scarcely be a
Silence to our ken.
And your nobles wear their ermine on the
outside, or walk blackly
In the presence of the social law as mere
ignoble men.

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP

“Let the poets dream such dreaming!
 madam, in these British islands,
'Tis the substance that wanes ever, 'tis
 the symbol that exceeds.
Soon we shall have nought but symbol!
 and, for statues like this Silence,
Shall accept the rose's image—in another
 case, the weed's.”

“Not so quickly,” she retorted,—“I confess,
 where'er you go, you
Find for things, names—shows for actions,
 and pure gold for honour clear.
But when all is run to symbol in the
 Social, I will throw you
The world's book which now reads drily,
 and sit down with Silence here.”

Half in playfulness she spoke, I thought,
 and half in indignation;
Friends who listened, laughed her words
 off, while her lovers deemed her fair.
A fair woman, flushed with feeling, in her
 noble-lighted station
Near the statue's white reposing—and
 both bathed in sunny air!—

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP

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

'Tis a picture for remembrance. And
thus, morning after morning,
Did I follow as she drew me by the spirit
to her feet.
Why her greyhound followed also! dogs
—we both were dogs for scorning—
To be sent back when she pleased it and
her path lay through the wheat.

And thus, morning after morning, spite
of vows and spite of sorrow,
Did I follow at her drawing, while the
week-days passed along,
Just to feed the swans this noontide, or to
see the fawns to-morrow,
Or to teach the hill-side echo some sweet
Tuscan in a song.

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP

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

There, obedient to her praying, did I read
aloud the poems
Made to Tuscan flutes, or instruments
more various of our own ;
Read the pastoral parts of Spenser—or the
subtle interflowings
Found in Petrarch's sonnets—here 's the
book—the leaf is folded down!—

Or at times a modern volume,—Words-
worth's solemn-thoughted idyl,
Howitt's ballad-verse, or Tennyson's en-
chanted reverie,—
Or from Browning some "Pomegranate",
which, if cut deep down the middle,
Shows a heart within blood-tinctured, of a
veined humanity.

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP

Or at times I read there, hoarsely, some
new poem of my making.
Poets ever fail in reading their own verses
to their worth,—
For the echo in you breaks upon the words
which you are speaking,
And the chariot-wheels jar in the gate
through which you drive them forth.

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

Oh, to see or hear her singing! scarce I
know which is divinest—
For her looks sing too—she modulates her
gestures on the tune;
And her mouth stirs with the song, like
song; and when the notes are finest,
'Tis the eyes that shoot out vocal light
and seem to swell them on.

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP

Then we talked—oh, how we talked! her
voice, so cadenced in the talking,
Made another singing—of the soul! a
music without bars.

While the leafy sounds of woodlands, hum-
ming round where we were walking,
Brought interposition worthy-sweet,—as
skies about the stars.

And she spake such good thoughts natural,
as if she always thought them;
She had sympathies so rapid, open, free
as bird on branch,
Just as ready to fly east as west, which-
ever way besought them,
In the birchen-wood a chirrup, or a cock-
crow in the grange.

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

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP

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

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

And her custom was to praise me when
I said,—“The Age culls simples,
With a broad clown’s back turned broadly
to the glory of the stars.
We are gods by our own reck’ning, and
may well shut up the temples,
And wield on, amid the incense-steam,
the thunder of our cars.

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP

“For we throw out acclamations of self-
thanking, self-admiring,
With, at every mile run faster,—‘O the
wondrous wondrous age,’
Little thinking if we work our SOULS as
nobly as our iron,
Or if angels will commend us at the goal
of pilgrimage.

“Why, what *is* this patient entrance into
nature’s deep resources,
But the child’s most gradual learning to
walk upright without bane?
When we drive out, from the cloud of
steam, majestic white horses,
Are we greater than the first men who
led black ones by the mane?

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

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP

She was patient with my talking; and I
loved her, loved her certes,
As I loved all heavenly objects, with up-
lifted eyes and hands!
As I loved pure inspirations, loved the
graces, loved the virtues,
In a Love content with writing his own
name on desert sands.

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

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

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP

And this morning, as I sat alone within
the inner chamber,
With the great saloon beyond it, lost in
pleasant thought serene,
For I had been reading Camoens—that
poem you remember,
Which his lady's eyes are praised in, as
the sweetest ever seen.

And the book lay open, and my thought
flew from it, taking from it
A vibration and impulsion to an end be-
yond its own,
As the branch of a green osier, when a
child would overcome it,
Springs up freely from his claspings and
goes swinging in the sun.

As I mused I heard a murmur,—it grew
deep as it grew longer—
Speakers using earnest language—"Lady
Geraldine, you *would!*"
And I heard a voice that pleaded ever
on, in accents stronger
As a sense of reason gave it power to
make its rhetoric good.

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP

Well I knew that voice—it was an earl's,
 of soul that matched his station,
Soul completed into lordship—might and
 right read on his brow;
Very finely courteous—far too proud to
 doubt his domination
Of the common people, he atones for
 grandeur by a bow.

High straight forehead, nose of eagle, cold
 blue eyes, of less expression
Than resistance, coldly casting off the
 looks of other men,
As steel, arrows,—unelastic lips, which
 seem to taste possession,
And be cautious lest the common air
 should injure or distract.

For the rest, accomplished, upright,—ay,
 and standing by his order
With a bearing not ungraceful; fond of
 art and letters too;
Just a good man made a proud man,—
 as the sandy rocks that border
A wild coast, by circumstances, in a reg-
 nant ebb and flow.

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP

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

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

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

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP

What he said again, I know not. It is
likely that his trouble
Worked his pride up to the surface, for
she answered in slow scorn,
“And your lordship judges rightly. Whom
I marry, shall be noble,
Ay, and wealthy. I shall never blush to
think how he was born.”

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

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

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP

I was mad—inspired—say either! (anguish
worketh inspiration)
Was a man, or beast—perhaps so, for the
tiger roars, when speared;
And I walked on, step by step, along the
level of my passion—
Oh my soul! and passed the doorway to
her face, and never feared.

He had left her, peradventure, when my
footstep proved my coming—
But for *her*—she half arose, then sate—
grew scarlet and grew pale.
Oh, she trembled!—'t is so always with a
worldly man or woman
In the presence of true spirits—what else
can they do but quail?

Oh, she fluttered like a tame bird, in
among its forest-brothers
Far too strong for it; then drooping,
bowed her face upon her hands—
And I spake out wildly, fiercely, brutal
truths of her and others.
I, she planted in the desert, swathed her,
windlike, with my sands.

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP

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

"For myself I do not argue," said I,
"though I love you, madam,
But for better souls that nearer to the
height of yours have trod.
And this age shows, to my thinking, still
more infidels to Adam,
Than directly, by profession, simple infidels
to God.

"Yet, O God," I said, "O grave," I said,
"O mother's heart and bosom,
With whom first and last are equal, saint
and corpse and little child!
We are fools to your deductions, in these
figments of heart-closing.
We are traitors to your causes, in these
sympathies defiled.

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP

“Learn more reverence, madam, not for
rank or wealth—*that* needs no learning,
That comes quickly, quick as sin does,
ay, and culminates to sin;
But for Adam’s seed, MAN! Trust me, ’t is
a clay above your scorning,
With God’s image stamped upon it, and
God’s kindling breath within.

“What right have you, madam, gazing
in your palace mirror daily,
Getting so by heart your beauty which all
others must adore,
While you draw the golden ringlets down
your fingers, to vow gaily
You will wed no man that’s only good to
God, and nothing more?

“Why, what right have you, made fair by
that same God—the sweetest woman
Of all women He has fashioned—with
your lovely spirit-face,
Which would seem too near to vanish if
its smile were not so human,
And your voice of holy sweetness, turning
common words to grace,

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP

“What right *can* you have, God's other
works to scorn, despise, revile them
In the gross, as mere men, broadly—not
as *noble* men, forsooth,—
As mere Pariahs of the outer world, for-
bidden to assoil them
In the hope of living, dying, near that
sweetness of your mouth?

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

“As it is—your ermined pride, I swear,
shall feel this stain upon her,
That *I*, poor, weak, tost with passion,
scorned by me and you again,
Love you, madam—dare to love you—to
my grief and your dishonour,
To my endless desolation, and your im-
potent disdain!”

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP

More mad words like these—mere madness!
friend, I need not write them fuller,
For I hear my hot soul dropping on the
lines in showers of tears.
Oh, a woman! friend, a woman! why, a
beast had scarce been duller
Than roar bestial loud complaints against
the shining of the spheres.

But at last there came a pause. I stood
all vibrating with thunder
Which my soul had used. The silence
drew her face up like a call.
Could you guess what word she uttered?
She looked up, as if in wonder,
With tears beaded on her lashes, and
said "Bertram!" it was all.

If she had cursed me, and she might have—
or if even, with queenly bearing
Which at need is used by women, she
had risen up and said,
"Sir, you are my guest, and therefore I
have given you a full hearing,
Now, beseech you, choose a name exact-
ing somewhat less, instead,"

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP

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

So, struck backward and exhausted by
that inward flow of passion
Which had rushed on, sparing nothing,
into forms of abstract truth,
By a logic agonising through unseemly
demonstration,
And by youth's own anguish turning
grimly grey the hairs of youth,—

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

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP

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

So I fell, struck down before her! do you
blame me, friend, for weakness?
'Twas my strength of passion slew me!—
fell before her like a stone.
Fast the dreadful world rolled from me, or
its roaring wheels of blackness—
When the light came, I was lying in this
chamber, and alone.

Oh, of course, she charged her lacqueys
to bear out the sickly burden,
And to cast it from her scornful sight—
but not *beyond* the gate;
She is too kind to be cruel, and too
haughty not to pardon
Such a man as I—'twere something to
be level to her hate.

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP

But for me—you now are conscious why,
my friend, I write this letter,
How my life is read all backward, and
the charm of life undone.
I shall leave her house at dawn; I would
to-night, if I were better—
And I charge my soul to hold my body
strengthened for the sun.

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

Blame me not. I would not squander life
in grief—I am abstemious.
I but nurse my spirit's falcon, that its
wing may soar again.
There's no room for tears of weakness in
the blind eyes of a Phemius!
Into work the poet kneads them,—and he
does not die *till then*.

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP

Conclusion

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

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

“Eyes,” he said, “now throbbing through
me! are ye eyes that did undo me?
Shining eyes, like antique jewels set in
Parian statue-stone!
Underneath that calm white forehead, are
ye ever burning torrid
O'er the desolate sand-desert of my heart
and life undone?”

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP

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

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

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

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP

Said he—"Wake me by no gesture,—
 sound of breath, or stir of vesture!
Let the blessèd apparition melt not yet to
 its divine!
No approaching—hush, no breathing! or
 my heart must swoon to death in
The too utter life thou bringest—O thou
 dream of Geraldine!"

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

Said he—"I would dream so ever, like
 the flowing of that river,
Flowing ever in a shadow greenly onward
 to the sea!
So, thou vision of all sweetness—princely
 to a full completeness,—
Would my heart and life flow onward—
 deathward — through this dream of
 THEE!"

LADY GERAUDINE'S COURTSHIP

Ever, evermore the while in a slow silence
she kept smiling,
While the silver tears ran faster down the
blushing of her cheeks;
Then with both her hands enfolding both
of his, she softly told him,
“Bertram, if I say I love thee, . . . 'tis
the vision only speaks.”

Softened, quickened to adore her, on his
knee he fell before her—
And she whispered low in triumph, “It
shall be as I have sworn!
Very rich he is in virtues,—very noble—
noble, certes;
And I shall not blush in knowing that
men call him lowly born.”

Rhyme of the Duchess May

I

To the belfry, one by one, went the ringers
from the sun,

Toll slowly.

And the oldest ringer said, "Ours is music
for the dead,

When the rebecks are all done."

II

Six abeles i' the churchyard grow on the
north side in a row,

Toll slowly.

And the shadows of their tops rock across
the little slopes

Of the grassy graves below.

III

On the south side and the west, a small
river runs in haste,

Toll slowly.

And between the river flowing and the
fair green trees a-growing

Do the dead lie at their rest.

RHYME OF THE DUCHESS MARY

IV

On the east I sate that day, up against
a willow grey.

Toll slowly.

Through the rain of willow-branches, I
could see the low hill-ranges,
And the river on its way.

V

There I sate beneath the tree, and the
bell tolled solemnly,

Toll slowly.

While the trees' and river's voices flowed
between the solemn noises,—
Yet death seemed more loud to me.

VI

There, I read this ancient rhyme, while the
bell did all the time

Toll slowly.

And the solemn knell fell in with the tale
of life and sin,
Like a rhythmic fate sublime.

RHYME OF THE DUCHESS MAY

The Rhyme

I

Broad the forests stood (I read) on the
hills of Linteged—

Toll slowly.

And three hundred years had stood mute
adown each hoary wood,

Like a full heart having prayed.

II

And the little birds sang east, and the
little birds sang west,

Toll slowly.

And but little thought was theirs of the
silent antique years,

In the building of their nest.

III

Down the sun dropt large and red, on the
towers of Linteged,—

Toll slowly.

Lance and spear upon the height, bristling
strange in fiery light,

While the castle stood in shade.

RHYME OF THE DUCHESS MAY

IV

There the castle stood up black, with the
red sun at its back,—

Toll slowly.

Like a sullen smouldering pyre, with a top
that flickers fire

When the wind is on its track.

V

And five hundred archers tall did besiege
the castle wall,

Toll slowly.

And the castle, seethed in blood, fourteen
days and nights had stood,

And to-night was near its fall,

VI

Yet thereunto, blind to doom, three months
since, a bride did come,—

Toll slowly.

One who proudly trod the floors, and softly
whispered in the doors,

“May good angels bless our home.”

VII

Oh, a bride of queenly eyes, with a front
of constancies!

Toll slowly.

Oh, a bride of cordial mouth,—where the
untired smile of youth

Did light outward its own sighs.

RHYME OF THE DUCHESS MAY

VIII

'T was a Duke's fair orphan-girl, and her
uncle's ward, the Earl;

Toll slowly.

Who betrothed her twelve years old, for
the sake of dowry gold,

To his son Lord Leigh, the churl.

IX

But what time she had made good all her
years of womanhood,

Toll slowly.

Unto both those lords of Leigh, spake she
out right sovranly,

“My will runneth as my blood.

X

“And while this same blood makes red this
same right hand's veins,” she said,—

Toll slowly.

“'Tis my will as lady free, not to wed a
lord of Leigh,

But Sir Guy of Linteged.”

XI

The old Earl he smiled smooth, then he
sighed for wilful youth,—

Toll slowly.

“Good my niece, that hand withal looketh
somewhat soft and small

For so large a will, in sooth.”

RHYME OF THE DUCHESS MAY

XII

She, too, smiled by that same sign,—but
her smile was cold and fine,—

Toll slowly.

“Little hand clasps muckle gold, or it
were not worth the hold
Of thy son, good uncle mine!”

XIII

Then the young lord jerked his breath, and
swarc thickly in his teeth,

Toll slowly.

“He would wed his own betrothed, an she
loved him an she loathed,
Let the life come or the death.”

XIV

Up she rose with scornful eyes, as her
father's child might rise,—

Toll slowly.

“Thy hound's blood, my lord of Leigh,
stains thy knightly heel,” quoth she,
“And he moans not where he lies.”

XV

“But a woman's will dies hard, in the hall
or on the sward!”—

Toll slowly.

“By that grave, my lords, which made me
orphaned girl and dowered lady,
I deny you wife and ward.”

RHYME OF THE DUCHESS MARY

XVI

Unto each she bowed her head, and swept
past with lofty tread.

Toll slowly.

Ere the midnight-bell had ceased, in the
chapel had the priest

Blessed her, bride of Linteged.

XVII

Fast and fain the bridal train along the
night-storm rode amain.

Toll slowly.

Hard the steeds of lord and serf struck
their hoofs out on the turf,

In the pauses of the rain.

XVIII

Fast and fain the kinsmen's train along
the storm pursued amain—

Toll slowly.

Steed on steed-track, dashing off—thicken
ing, doubling, hoof on hoof,

In the pauses of the rain.

XIX

And the bridegroom led the flight on his
red-roan steed of might,

Toll slowly.

And the bride lay on his arm, still, as if
she feared no harm,

Smiling out into the night.

RHYME OF THE DUCHESS MAY

XX

“Dost thou fear?” he said at last.—“Nay,”
she answered him in haste,—

Toll slowly.

“Not such death as we could find—only
life with one behind—

Ride on fast as fear—ride fast!”

XXI

Up the mountain wheeled the steed—girth
to ground, and fetlocks spread,—

Toll slowly.

Headlong bounds, and rocking flanks,—
down he staggered, down the banks,

To the towers of Linteged.

XXII

High and low the serfs looked out, red the
flambeaus tossed about,—

Toll slowly.

In the courtyard rose the cry—“Live the
Duchess and Sir Guy!”

But she never heard them shout.

XXIII

On the steed she dropt her cheek, kissed
his mane and kissed his neck,—

Toll slowly.

“I had happier died by thee, than lived on
a Lady Leigh,”

Were the first words she did speak.

RHYME OF THE DUCHESS MAY

XXIV

But a three months' joyaunce lay 'twixt
that moment and to-day,

Toll slowly.

When five hundred archers tall stand beside
the castle wall,

To recapture Duchess May.

XXV

And the castle standeth black, with the red
sun at its back,—

Toll slowly.

And a fortnight's siege is done—and, ex-
cept the duchess, none

Can misdoubt the coming wrack.

XXVI

Then the captain, young Lord Leigh, with
his eyes so grey of blee,

Toll slowly.

And thin lips that scarcely sheath the cold
white gnashing of his teeth,

Gnashed in smiling, absently,

XXVII

Cried aloud, "So goes the day, bridegroom
fair of Duchess May!"—

Toll slowly.

"Look thy last upon that sun! if thou
seest to-morrow's one,

'T will be through a foot of clay.

RHYME OF THE DUCHESS MAY

XXVIII

“Ha, fair bride! dost hear no sound, save
that moaning of the hound?”—

Toll slowly.

“Thou and I have parted troth,—yet I
keep my vengeance-oath,
And the other may come round.

XXIX

“Ha! thy will is brave to dare, and thy
new love past compare”—

Toll slowly.

‘Yet thine old love’s faulchion brave is
as strong a thing to have,
As the will of lady fair.

XXX

“Peck on blindly, netted dove!—If a wife’s
name thee behove,”

Toll slowly.

“Thou shalt wear the same to-morrow,
ere the grave has hid the sorrow
Of thy last ill-mated love.

XXXI

“O’er his fixed and silent mouth, thou and
I will call back troth.”

Toll slowly.

“He shall altar be and priest,—and he
will not cry at least
‘I forbid you, I am loth!’

RHYME OF THE DUCHESS MAY

XXXII

“I will wring thy fingers pale in the
gauntlet of my mail.”

Toll slowly.

““Little hand and muckle gold’ close
shall lie within my hold,
As the sword did, to prevail.”

XXXIII

Oh, the little birds sang east, and the little
birds sang west,

Toll slowly.

Oh, and laughed the Duchess May, and
her soul did put away

All his boasting, for a jest.

XXXIV

In her chamber did she sit, laughing low
to think of it,—

Toll slowly.

“Tower is strong and will is free—thou
canst boast, my lord of Leigh,

But thou boastest little wit.”

XXXV

In her tire-glass gazèd she, and she blushed
right womanly.

Toll slowly.

She blushed half from her disdain—half,
her beauty was so plain,

—“Oath for oath, my lord of Leigh!”

RHYME OF THE DUCHESS MAY

XXXVI

Straight she called her maidens in—"Since
ye gave me blame, herein,"

Toll slowly.

"That a bridal such as mine should lack
gauds to make it fine,

Come and shrive me from that sin.

XXXVII

"It is three months gone to-day, since I
gave mine hand away."

Toll slowly.

"Bring the gold and bring the gem, we
will keep bride-state in them,

While we keep the foe at bay.

XXXVIII

"On your arms I loose mine hair!—comb
it smooth and crown it fair."

Toll slowly.

"I would look in purple pall from this
lattice down the wall,

And throw scorn to one that's there!"

XXXIX

Oh, the little birds sang east, and the little
birds sang west.

Toll slowly.

On the tower the castle's lord leant in
silence on his sword,

With an anguish in his breast.

RHYME OF THE DUCHESS MAY

XL

With a spirit-laden weight, did he lean
down passionate.

Toll slowly.

They have almost sapped the wall,—they
will enter therewithal,

With no knocking at the gate.

XLI

Then the sword he leant upon, shivered,
snapped upon the stone,—

Toll slowly.

“Sword,” he thought, with inward laugh,

“ill thou servest for a staff

When thy nobler use is done!

XLII

“Sword, thy nobler use is done!—tower is
lost, and shame begun!”—

Toll slowly.

“If we met them in the breach, hilt to
hilt or speech to speech,

We should die there, each for one.

XLIII

“If we met them at the wall, we should
singly, vainly fall,”—

Toll slowly.

“But if *I* die here alone,—then I die, who
am but one,

And die nobly for them all.

RHYME OF THE DUCHESS MAY

XLIV

“Five true friends lie for my sake in the
moat and in the brake,”—

Toll slowly.

“Thirteen warriors lie at rest, with a black
wound in the breast,

And not one of these will wake.

XLV

“So no more of this shall be!—heart-blood
weighs too heavily,”—

Toll slowly.

“And I could not sleep in grave, with the
faithful and the brave

Heaped around and over me.

XLVI

“Since young Clare a mother hath, and
young Ralph a plighted faith,”—

Toll slowly.

“Since my pale young sister’s cheeks blush
like rose when Ronald speaks,

Albeit never a word she saith—

XLVII

“These shall never die for me—life-blood
falls too heavily:”

Toll slowly.

“And if *I* die here apart,—o’er my dead
and silent heart

They shall pass out safe and free.

RHYME OF THE DUCHESS MARY

XLVIII

“When the foe hath heard it said—‘Death
holds Guy of Linteged,’”

Toll slowly.

“That new corse new peace shall bring,
and a blessed, blessed thing
Shall the stone be at its head.

XLIX

“Then my friends shall pass out free, and
shall bear my memory,”—

Toll slowly.

“Then my foes shall sleek their pride,
soothing fair my widowed bride
Whose sole sin was love of me.

L

“With their words all smooth and sweet,
They will front her and entreat,”

Toll slowly.

“And their purple pall will spread under-
neath her fainting head
While her tears drop over it.

LI

“She will weep her woman’s tears, she
will pray her woman’s prayers,”—

Toll slowly.

“But her heart is young in pain, and her
hopes will spring again
By the suntime of her years.

RHYME OF THE DUCHESS MAY

LII

“Ah, sweet May! ah, sweetest grief!—
once I vowed thee my belief,”

Toll slowly.

“That thy name expressed thy sweetness,—
May of poets, in completeness!
Now my May-day seemeth brief.”

LIII

All these silent thoughts did swim o'er his
eyes grown strange and dim,—

Toll slowly.

Till his true men in the place, wished they
stood there face to face
With the foe instead of him.

LIV

“One last oath, my friends that wear
faithful hearts to do and dare!”—

Toll slowly.

“Tower must fall, and bride be lost!—
swear me service worth the cost!”
—Bold they stood around to swear.

LV

“Each man clasp my hand and swear, by
the deed we failed in there,”

Toll slowly.

“Not for vengeance, not for right, will ye
strike one blow to-night!”
—Pale they stood around to swear.

RHYME OF THE DUCHESS MAY

LVI

“One last boon, young Ralph and Clare!
faithful hearts to do and dare!”—

Toll slowly.

“Bring that steed up from his stall, which
she kissed before you all!

Guide him up the turret-stair.

LVII

“Ye shall harness him aright, and lead
upward to this height.”

Toll slowly.

“Once in love and twice in war, hath he
borne me strong and far.

He shall bear me far to-night.”

LVIII

Then his men looked to and fro, when
they heard him speaking so.

Toll slowly.

—“’Las! the noble heart,” they thought,—
“he in sooth is grief-distraught.

Would, we stood here with the foe!”

LIX

But a fire flashed from his eye, ’twixt
their thought and their reply,—

Toll slowly.

“Have ye so much time to waste? We
who ride here, must ride fast,
As we wish our foes to fly.”

RHYME OF THE DUCHESS MAY

LX

They have fetched the steed with care, in
the harness he did wear,

Toll slowly.

Past the court, and through the doors,
across the rushes of the floors,

But they goad him up the stair.

LXI

Then from out her bower chambère, did
the Duchess May repair.

Toll slowly.

“Tell me now what is your need,” said
the lady, “of this steed,

That ye goad him up the stair?”

LXII

Calm she stood; unbodkined through, fell
her dark hair to her shoe,—

Toll slowly.

And the smile upon her face, ere she left
the tiring-glass,

Had not time enough to go.

LXIII

“Get thee back, sweet Duchess May!
hope is gone like yesterday,”—

Toll slowly.

“One half-hour completes the breach; and
thy lord grows wild of speech!

Get thee in, sweet lady, and pray.

RHYME OF THE DUCHESS MARY

LXIV

“In the east tower, high’st of all, loud
he cries for steed from stall.”

Toll slowly.

“He would ride as far, quoth he, as for
love and victory,
Though he rides the castle-wall.

LXV

“And we fetch the steed from stall, up
where never a hoof did fall.”—

Toll slowly.

Wifely prayer meets deathly need! may
the sweet Heavens hear thee plead
If he rides the castle-wall.”

LXVI

Low she dropt her head, and lower, till
her hair coiled on the floor,—

Toll slowly.

And tear after tear you heard fall distinct
as any word
Which you might be listening for.

LXVII

“Get thee in, thou soft ladye!—here, is
never a place for thee!”—

Toll slowly.

“Braid thine hair and clasp thy gown,
that thy beauty in its moan
May find grace with Leigh of Leigh.”

RHYME OF THE DUCHESS MAY

LXVIII

She stood up in bitter case, with a pale
yet steady face,

Toll slowly.

Like a statue thunderstruck, which, though
quivering, seems to look

Right against the thunder-place.

LXIX

And her foot trod in, with pride, her own
tears i' the stone beside.—

Toll slowly.

“Go to, faithful friends, go to!—judge no
more what ladies do,—

No, nor how their lords may ride!”

LXX

Then the good steed's rein she took, and
his neck did kiss and stroke:

Toll slowly.

Soft he neighed to answer her, and then
followed up the stair,

For the love of her sweet look.

LXXI

Oh, and steeply, steeply wound up the
narrow stair around!

Toll slowly.

Oh, and closely, closely speeding, step by
step beside her treading,

Did he follow, meek as hound.

RHYME OF THE DUCHESS MAY

LXXII

On the east tower, high'st of all,—there,
where never a hoof did fall,—

Toll slowly.

Out they swept, a vision steady,—noble
steed and lovely lady,

Calm as if in bower or stall.

LXXIII

Down she knelt at her lord's knee, and
she looked up silently,—

Toll slowly.

And he kissed her twice and thrice, for
that look within her eyes

Which he could not bear to see.

LXXIV

Quoth he, "Get thee from this strife,—and
the sweet saints bless thy life!"—

Toll slowly.

"In this hour, I stand in need of my
noble red-roan steed,

But no more of my noble wife."

LXXV

Quoth she, "Meekly have I done all thy
biddings under sun;"

Toll slowly.

"But by all my womanhood, which is
proved so, true and good,

I will never do this one.

RHYME OF THE DUCHESS MAY

LXXVI

“Now by womanhood’s degree, and by
wifehood’s verity,”

Toll slowly.

“In this hour if thou hast need of thy
noble red-roan steed,

Thou hast also need of *me*.

LXXVII

“By this golden ring ye see on this lifted
hand pardie,”

Toll slowly.

“If, this hour, on castle-wall, can be room
for steed from stall,

Shall be also room for *me*.

LXXVIII

“So the sweet saints with me be,” (did
she utter solemnly)

Toll slowly.

“If a man, this eventide, on this castle-
wall will ride,

He shall ride the same with *me*.”

LXXIX

Oh, he sprang up in the selle, and he
laughed out bitter-well,—

Toll slowly.

“Wouldst thou ride among the leaves, as
we used on other eves,

To hear chime a vesper-bell?”

RHYME OF THE DUCHESS MAY

LXXX

She clang closer to his knee—"Ay, beneath
the cypress-tree!"—

Toll slowly.

"Mock me not, for elsewhere than along
the greenwood fair,

Have I ridden fast with thee.

LXXXI

"Fast I rode with new-made vows, from
my angry kinsman's house."

Toll slowly.

"What, and would you men should reckon
that I dared more for love's sake

As a bride than as a spouse?

LXXXII

"What, and would you it should fall, as
a proverb, before all,"

Toll slowly.

"That a bride may keep your side while
through castle-gate you ride,

Yet eschew the castle-wall?"

LXXXIII

Ho! the breach yawns into ruin, and roars
up against her suing,

Toll slowly.

With the inarticulate din and the dreadful
falling in—

Shrieks of doing and undoing!

RHYME OF THE DUCHESS MAY

LXXXIV

Twice he wrung her hands in twain, but
the small hands closed again.

Toll slowly.

Back he reined the steed—back, back!
but she trailed along his track
With a frantic clasp and strain.

LXXXV

Evermore the foemen pour through the
crash of window and door,—

Toll slowly.

And the shouts of Leigh and Leigh, and
the shrieks of “kill!” and “flee!”
Strike up clear amid the roar.

LXXXVI

Thrice he wrung her hands in twain,—but
they closed and clung again,—

Toll slowly.

While she clung, as one, withstood, clasps
a Christ upon the rood,
In a spasm of deathly pain.

LXXXVII

She clung wild and she clung mute, with
her shuddering lips half-shut.

Toll slowly.

Her head fallen as half in swoond,—hair
and knee swept on the ground,
She clung wild to stirrup and foot.

RHYME OF THE DUCHESS MAY

LXXXVIII

Back he reined his steed back-thrown on
the slippery coping-stone.

Toll slowly.

Back the iron hoofs did grind on the battle-
ment behind

Whence a hundred feet went down.

LXXXIX

And his heel did press and goad on the
quivering flank bestrode,—

Toll slowly.

“Friends, and brothers, save my wife!—
Pardon, sweet, in change for life,—
But I ride alone to God.”

XC

Straight as if the Holy name had up-
breathed her like a flame,

Toll slowly.

She upsprang, she rose upright,—in his
selle she sate in sight,

By her love she overcame.

XCI

And her head was on his breast, where
she smiled as one at rest,—

Toll slowly.

“Ring,” she cried, “O vesper-bell, in the
beechwood’s old chapelle!

But the passing-bell rings best.”

RHYME OF THE DUCHESS MAY

XCII

They have caught out at the rein, which
Sir Guy threw loose—in vain,—

Toll slowly.

For the horse in stark despair, with his
front hoofs poised in air,

On the last verge rears amain.

XCIII

Now he hangs, he rocks between, and his
nostrils curdle in!—

Toll slowly.

Now he shivers head and hoof—and the
flakes of foam fall off,

And his face grows fierce and thin!

XCIV

And a look of human woe from his staring
eyes did go,

Toll slowly.

And a sharp cry uttered he, in a foretold
agony

Of the headlong death below,—

XCV

And, “Ring, ring, thou passing-bell,” still
she cried, “i’ the old chapelle!”—

Toll slowly.

RHYME OF THE DUCHESS MAY

Then back-toppling, crashing back—a
dead weight flung out to wrack,
Horse and riders overfell.

I

Oh, the little birds sang east, and the little
birds sang west,
Toll slowly.
And I read this ancient Rhyme, in the
churchyard, while the chime
Slowly tolled for one at rest.

II

The abeles moved in the sun, and the river
smooth did run,
Toll slowly.
And the ancient Rhyme rang strange, with
its passion and its change,
Here, where all done lay undone.

III

And beneath a willow tree I a little grave
did see,
Toll slowly.
Where was graved, — HERE UNDEFILED,
LIETH MAUD, A THREE-YEAR CHILD,
EIGHTEEN HUNDRED, FORTY-THREE.

RHYME OF THE DUCHESS MAY

IV

Then, O spirits, did I say, ye who rode
so fast that day,—

Toll slowly.

Did star-wheels and angel wings, with
their holy winnowings,

Keep beside you all the way?

V

Though in passion ye would dash, with a
blind and heavy crash,

Toll slowly.

Up against the thick-bossed shield of
God's judgment in the field,—

Though your heart and brain were
rash,—

VI

Now, your will is all unwilling—now, your
pulses are all stilled!

Toll slowly.

Now, ye lie as meek and mild (whereso
laid) as Maud the child,

Whose small grave was lately filled.

VII

Beating heart and burning brow, ye are
very patient now,

Toll slowly.

And the children might be bold to pluck
the kingcups from your mould

Ere a month had let them grow.

RHYME OF THE DUCHESS MAY

VIII

And you let the goldfinch sing in the alder
near in spring,

Toll slowly.

Let her build her nest and sit all the three
weeks out on it,

Murmuring not at anything.

IX

In your patience ye are strong; cold and
heat ye take not wrong.

Toll slowly.

When the trumpet of the angel blows
eternity's evangel,

Time will seem to you not long.

X

Oh, the little birds sang east, and the little
birds sang west,

Toll slowly.

And I said in underbreath,—All our life is
mixed with death,

And who knoweth which is best?

XI

Oh, the little birds sang east, and the little
birds sang west,

Toll slowly.

And I smiled to think God's greatness
flowed around our incompleteness,—

Round our restlessness, His rest.

The Cry of the Children

"Φεῦ, φεῦ, τί προσ-
δέρκεσθέ μ' ὄμμασιν,
τάκια"—*Μεῖδα*



I

Do ye hear the children weeping, O my
brothers,

Ere the sorrow comes with years?

They are leaning their young heads against
their mothers,

And *that* cannot stop their tears.

The young lambs are bleating in the
meadows,

The young birds are chirping in the
nest,

The young fawns are playing with the
shadows,

The young flowers are blowing toward
the west—

But the young, young children, O my
brothers,

They are weeping bitterly!

They are weeping in the playtime of the
others,

In the country of the free.

THE CRY OF THE CHILDREN

II

Do you question the young children in the
sorrow,

Why their tears are falling so?

The old man may weep for his to-morrow
Which is lost in Long Ago.

The old tree is leafless in the forest,

The old year is ending in the frost,

The old wound, if stricken, is the sorest,

The old hope is hardest to be lost.

But the young, young children, O my
brothers,

Do you ask them why they stand

Weeping sore before the bosoms of their
mothers,

In our happy Fatherland?

III

They look up with their pale and sunken
faces,

And their looks are sad to see,

For the man's hoary anguish draws and
presses

Down the cheeks of infancy.

"Your old earth," they say, "is very
dreary;

Our young feet," they say, "are very
weak!

Few paces have we taken, yet are weary—

Our grave-rest is very far to seek.

THE CRY OF THE CHILDREN

Ask the aged why they weep, and not the children;

For the outside earth is cold;

And we young ones stand without, in our bewildering,

And the graves are for the old.

IV

“True,” say the children, “it may happen
That we die before our time.

Little Alice died last year—her grave is shapen

Like a snowball, in the rime.

We looked into the pit prepared to take her.

Was no room for any work in the close clay!

From the sleep wherein she lieth none will wake her,

Crying, ‘Get up, little Alice! it is day’.

If you listen by that grave, in sun and shower,

With your ear down, little Alice never cries.

Could we see her face, be sure we should not know her,

For the smile has time for growing in her eyes.

THE CRY OF THE CHILDREN

And merry go her moments, lulled and
stilled in

The shroud by the kirk-chime!

It is good when it happens," say the
children,

"That we die before our time."

v

Alas, alas, the children! they are seeking
Death in life, as best to have.

They are binding up their hearts away
from breaking,

With a cerement from the grave.

Go out, children, from the mine and from
the city,

Sing out, children, as the little thrushes
do.

Pluck your handfuls of the meadow-cow-
slips pretty,

Laugh aloud, to feel your fingers let
them through!

But they answer, "Are your cowslips of
the meadows

Like our weeds anear the mine?

Leave us quiet in the dark of the coal-
shadows,

From your pleasures fair and fine!

THE CRY OF THE CHILDREN

VI

“For oh,” say the children, “we are
weary,

And we cannot run or leap.

If we cared for any meadows, it were
merely

To drop down in them and sleep.

Our knees tremble sorely in the stooping,

We fall upon our faces, trying to go;

And, underneath our heavy eyelids drooping,

The reddest flower would look as pale
as snow.

For, all day, we drag our burden tiring

Through the coal-dark, under-
ground;—

Or, all day, we drive the wheels of iron

In the factories, round and round.

VII

“For, all day, the wheels are droning,
turning,—

Their wind comes in our faces,—

Till our hearts turn, our heads with pulses
burning,

And the walls turn in their places.

Turns the sky in the high window blank
and reeling,

Turns the long light that drops adown
the wall,

THE CRY OF THE CHILDREN

Turn the black flies that crawl along the
ceiling,
All are turning, all the day, and we with
all.
And all day, the iron wheels are droning,
And sometimes we could pray,
'O ye wheels,' (breaking out in a mad
moaning)
'Stop! be silent for to-day!'"

VIII

Ay, be silent! Let them hear each other
breathing
For a moment, mouth to mouth!
Let them touch each other's hands, in a
fresh wreathing
Of their tender human youth!
Let them feel that this cold metallic motion
Is not all the life God fashions or re-
veals.
Let them prove their living souls against
the notion
That they live in you, or under you, O
wheels!—
Still, all day, the iron wheels go onward,
Grinding life down from its mark;
And the children's souls, which God is
calling sunward,
Spin on blindly in the dark.

THE CRY OF THE CHILDREN

IX

Now tell the poor young children, O my
brothers,

To look up to Him and pray;
So the blessèd One who blesseth all the others,
Will bless them another day.

They answer, "Who is God that He should
hear us,

While the rushing of the iron wheels is
stirred?

When we sob aloud, the human creatures
near us

Pass by, hearing not, or answer not a
word.

And *we* hear not (for the wheels in their
resounding)

Strangers speaking at the door.

Is it likely God, with angels singing round
Him,

Hears our weeping any more?

X

"Two words, indeed, of praying we re-
member,

And at midnight's hour of harm,
'Our Father', looking upward in the
chamber,

We say softly for a charm.¹

¹ A fact rendered pathetically historical by Mr. Horne's report of his Commission. The name of the poet of "Orion" and "Cosmo de' Medici" has, however, a change of associa-

THE CRY OF THE CHILDREN

We know no other words, except 'Our
Father',
And we think that, in some pause of
angels' song,
God may pluck them with the silence sweet
to gather,
And hold both within His right hand
which is strong.
'Our Father!' If He heard us, He would
surely
(For they call Him good and mild)
Answer, smiling down the steep world very
purely,
'Come and rest with me, my child'.

XI

"But, no!" say the children, weeping
faster,
"He is speechless as a stone.
And they tell us, of His image is the master
Who commands us to work on.
Go to!" say the children,—“up in Heaven,
Dark, wheel-like, turning clouds are all
we find.
Do not mock us; grief has made us un-
believing—
We look up for God, but tears have
made us blind.”

tions, and comes in time to remind me that we have some noble poetic heat of literature still,—however open to the reproach of being somewhat gelid in our humanity.—1844.

THE CRY OF THE CHILDREN

Do you hear the children weeping and dis-
proving,

O my brothers, what ye preach?
For God's possible is taught by His world's
loving,

And the children doubt of each.

XII

And well may the children weep before
you!

They are weary ere they run.

They have never seen the sunshine, nor
the glory,

Which is brighter than the sun.

They know the grief of man, without his
wisdom.

They sink in man's despair, without its
calm;

Are slaves, without the liberty in Christ-
dom,

Are martyrs, by the pang without the
palm,—

Are worn, as if with age, yet unretreivingly
The harvest of its memories cannot

reap,—

Are orphans of the earthly love and
heavenly.

Let them weep! let them weep!

THE CRY OF THE CHILDREN

XIII

They look up, with their pale and sunken
faces,
And their look is dread to see,
For they mind you of their angels in high
places,
With eyes turned on Deity!—
“How long,” they say, “how long, O
cruel nation,
Will you stand, to move the world, on
a child’s heart,—
Stifle down with a mailed heel its pal-
pitation,
And tread onward to your throne amid
the mart?
Our blood splashes upward, O gold-heaper,
And your purple shows your path!
But the child’s sob in the silence curses
deeper
Than the strong man in his wrath.”

**Crowned
and
Buried**



I

Napoleon!—years ago, and that great word
Compact of human breath in hate and
dread
And exultation, skied us overhead—
An atmosphere whose lightning was the
sword
Scathing the cedars of the world,—drawn
down
In burnings by the metal of a crown.

II

Napoleon! nations, while they cursed that
name,
Shook at their own curse; and while
others bore
Its sound, as of a trumpet, on before,
Brass-fronted legions justified its fame;
And dying men, on trampled battle-sods,
Near their last silence, uttered it for
God's.

CROWNED AND BURIED

III

Napoleon! sages, with high foreheads
drooped,
Did use it for a problem: children small
Leapt up to greet it, as at manhood's
call:
Priests blessed it from their altars over-
stooped
By meek-eyed Christs,—and widows with
a moan
Spake it, when questioned why they sate
alone.

IV

That name consumed the silence of the
snows
In Alpine keeping, holy and cloud-hid.
The mimic eagles dared what Nature's
did,
And over-rushed her mountainous repose
In search of eyries; and the Egyptian
river
Mingled the same word with its grand
“For ever”.

V

That name was shouted near the pyra-
midal
Nilotic tombs, whose mummied habitants,
Packed to humanity's significance,

CROWNED AND BURIED

Motioned it back with stillness! shouts as
idle
As hireling artists' work of myrrh and
spice
Which swathed last glories round the
Ptolemies.

VI

The world's face changed to hear it.
Kingly men
Came down in chidden babes' bewilder-
ment
From autocratic places, each content
With sprinkled ashes for anointing.—
Then
The people laughed, or wondered for the
nonce,
To see one throne a composite of thrones.

VII

Napoleon! even the torrid vastitude
Of India felt in throbbings of the air
That name which scattered by disastrous
blare
All Europe's bound-lines,—drawn afresh
in blood.
Napoleon — from the Russias, west to
Spain!
And Austria trembled—till ye heard her
chain.

CROWNED AND BURIED

VIII

And Germany was 'ware; and Italy
Oblivious of old fames—her laurel-locked,
High-ghosted Cæsars passing uninvoked—
Did crumble her own ruins with her knee,
To serve a newer.—Ay! but Frenchmen
 cast
A future from them nobler than her past.

IX

For, verily, though France augustly rose
With that raised NAME, and did assume
 by such
The purple of the world, none gave so
 much
As she, in purchase—to speak plain, in
 loss—
Whose hands, toward freedom stretched,
 dropped paralyzed
To wield a sword or fit an undersized

X

King's crown to a great man's head.
 And though along
Her Paris' streets, did float on frequent
 streams
Of triumph, pictured or emmarbled dreams
Dreamt right by genius in a world gone
 wrong,—

CROWNED AND BURIED

No dream, of all so won, was fair to see
As the lost vision of her liberty.

XI

Napoleon! 't was a high name lifted high!
It met at last God's thunder sent to clear
Our compassing and covering atmosphere
And open a clear sight beyond the sky
Of supreme empire; this of earth's was
done—
And kings crept out again to feel the
sun.

XII

The kings crept out—the peoples sate at
home,
And finding the long-invoked peace
(A pall embroidered with worn images
Of rights divine) too scant to cover doom
Such as they suffered,—cursed the corn
that grew
Rankly, to bitter bread, on Waterloo.

XIII

A deep gloom centred in the deep repose.
The nations stood up mute to count their
dead.
And *he* who owned the NAME which
vibrated
Through silence,—trusting to his noblest
foes

CROWNED AND BURIED

When earth was all too grey for chivalry,
Died of their mercies 'mid the desert sea.

XIV

O wild St. Helen! very still she kept him,
With a green willow for all pyramid,—
Which stirred a little if the low wind did,
A little more, if pilgrims overwept him,
Disparting the little boughs to see the
 clay
Which seemed to cover his for judgment-
 day.

XV

Nay, not so long!—France kept her old
 affection
As deeply as the sepulchre the corse,
Until, dilated by such love's remorse
To a new angel of the resurrection,
She cried, "Behold, thou England! I
 would have
The dead whereof thou wottest, from that
 grave."

XVI

And England answered in the courtesy
Which, ancient foes turned lovers, may
 befit,—
"Take back thy dead! and when thou
 buriest it,
Throw in all former strifes 'twixt thee
 and me."

CROWNED AND BURIED

Amen, mine England! 'tis a courteous
claim—
But ask a little room too . . . for thy
shame!

XVII

Because it was not well, it was not well,
Nor tuneful with thy lofty-chanted part
Among the Oceanides,—that Heart
To bind and bare and vex with vulture
fell.
I would, my noble England! men might
seek
All crimson stains upon thy breast—not
cheek!

XVIII

I would that hostile fleets had scarred
Torbay,
Instead of the lone ship which waited
moored
Until thy princely purpose was assured,
Then left a shadow, not to pass away—
Not for to-night's moon, nor to-morrow's
sun!
Green watching hills, ye witnessed what
was done!¹

¹ Written at Torquay.

CROWNED AND BURIED

XIX

But since it *was* done,—in sepulchral
dust
We fain would pay back something of
our debt
To France, if not to honour, and forget
How through much fear we falsified the
trust
Of a fallen foe and exile.—We return
Orestes to Electra . . . in his urn.

XX

A little urn—a little dust inside,
Which once outbalanced the large earth,
albeit
To-day a four-years child might carry it
Sleek-browed and smiling, “Let the
burden 'bide!”
Orestes to Electra!—O fair town
Of Paris, how the wild tears will run
down

XXI

And run back in the chariot-marks of
time,
When all the people shall come forth to
meet
The passive victor, death-still in the street
He rode through 'mid the shouting and
bell-chime

CROWNED AND BURIED

And martial music, under eagles which
Dyed their rapacious beaks at Austerlitz.

XXII

Napoleon! he hath come again—borne
home
Upon the popular ebbing heart,—a sea
Which gathers its own wrecks perpetually,
Majestically moaning. Give him room!—
Room for the dead in Paris! welcome
solemn
And grave - deep, 'neath the cannon-
moulded column!¹

XXIII

There, weapon spent and warrior spent
may rest
From roar of fields,—provided Jupiter
Dare trust Saturnus to lie down so near
His bolts!—and this he may. For, dis-
possessed
Of any godship lies the godlike arm—
The goat, Jove sucked, as likely to do
harm.

¹ It was the first intention to bury him under the column.

CROWNED AND BURIED

XXIV

And yet . . . Napoleon!—the recovered
name
Shakes the old casements of the world!
and we
Look out upon the passing pageantry,
Attesting that the Dead makes good his
claim
To a French grave,—another kingdom
won,
The last, of few spans—by Napoleon.

XXV

Blood fell like dew beneath his sunrise—
sooth;
But glittered dew-like in the covenanted
Meridian light. He was a despot—
granted!
But the *avros* of his autocratic mouth
Said yea i' the people's French; he
magnified
The image of the freedom he denied.

XXVI

And if they asked for rights, he made
reply
“Ye have my glory!”—and so, drawing
round them

CROWNED AND BURIED

His ample purple, glorified and bound
them
In an embrace that seemed identity.
He ruled them like a tyrant—true! but
none
Were ruled like slaves: each felt Napoleon.

XXVII

I do not praise this man: the man was
flawed
For Adam—much more, Christ!—his knee
unbent,
His hand unclean, his aspiration pent
Within a sword-sweep—pshaw!—but since
he had
The genius to be loved, why let him have
The justice to be honoured in his grave.

XXVIII

I think this nation's tears thus poured
together,
Better than shouts. I think this funeral
Grander than crownings, though a Pope
bless all.
I think this grave stronger than thrones.
But whether
The crowned Napoleon or the buried clay
Be worthier, I discern not. Angels may.

To Flush,
My Dog



I

Loving friend, the gift of one
Who her own true faith has run,
Through thy lower nature,¹
Be my benediction said
With my hand upon thy head,
Gentle fellow-creature!

II

Like a lady's ringlets brown,
Flow thy silken ears adown
Either side demurely
Of thy silver-suited breast,
Shining out from all the rest
Of thy body purely.

III

Darkly brown thy body is,
Till the sunshine striking this
Alchemise its dulness,

¹ This dog was the gift of my dear and admired friend, Miss Mitford, and belongs to the beautiful race she has rendered celebrated among English and American readers. The Flushes have their laurels as well as the Cæsars,—the chief difference (at least the very head and front of it) consisting, perhaps, in the bald head of the latter under the crown.—1844.

TO FLUSH, MY DOC

When the sleek curls manifold
Flash all over into gold,
With a burnished fulness.

IV

Underneath my stroking hand,
Startled eyes of hazel bland
Kindling, growing larger,
Up thou leapest with a spring,
Full of prank and curveting,
Leaping like a charger.

V

Leap! thy broad tail waves a light,
Leap! thy slender feet are bright,
Canopied in fringes.
Leap—those tasselled ears of thine
Flicker strangely, fair and fine,
Down their golden inches.

VI

Yet, my pretty, sportive friend,
Little is 't to such an end
That I praise thy rareness!
Other dogs may be thy peers
Haply in these drooping ears,
And this glossy fairness.

TO FLUSH, MY DOG

VII

But of *thee* it shall be said,
This dog watched beside a bed
Day and night unwearied,—
Watched within a curtained room,
Where no sunbeam brake the gloom
Round the sick and dreary.

VIII

Roses, gathered for a vase,
In that chamber died apace,
Beam and breeze resigning.
This dog only, waited on,
Knowing that when light is gone
Love remains for shining.

IX

Other dogs in thymy dew
Tracked the hares and followed through
Sunny moor or meadow.
This dog only, crept and crept
Next a languid cheek that slept,
Sharing in the shadow.

X

Other dogs of loyal cheer
Bounded at the whistle clear,
Up the woodside hieing.

TO FLUSH, MY DOG

This dog only, watched in reach
Of a faintly uttered speech,
Or a louder sighing.

XI

And if one or two quick tears
Dropped upon his glossy ears,
Or a sigh came double,—
Up he sprang in eager haste,
Fawning, fondling, breathing fast,
In a tender trouble.

XII

And this dog was satisfied
If a pale thin hand would glide
Down his dewlaps sloping,—
Which he pushed his nose within,
After,—platforming his chin
On the palm left open.

XIII

This dog, if a friendly voice
Call him now to blyther choice
Than such chamber-keeping,
“Come out!” praying from the door,—
Presseth backward as before,
Up against me leaping.

TO FLUSH, MY DOG

XIV

Therefore to this dog will I,
Tenderly not scornfully,
 Render praise and favour:
With my hand upon his head,
Is my benediction said
 Therefore, and for ever.

XV

And because he loves me so,
Better than his kind will do
 Often, man or woman,
Give I back more love again
Than dogs often take of men,
 Leaning from my Human.

XVI

Blessings on thee, dog of mine,
Pretty collars make thee fine,
 Sugared milk make fat thee!
Pleasures wag on in thy tail,
Hands of gentle motion fail
 Nevermore, to pat thee!

XVII

Downy pillow take thy head,
Silken coverlid bestead,
 Sunshine help thy sleeping!

TO FLUSH, MY DOG

No fly's buzzing wake thee up,
No man break thy purple cup,
Set for drinking deep in.

XVIII

Whiskered cats aointed flee,
Sturdy stoppers keep from thee
Cologne distillations;
Nuts lie in thy path for stones,
And thy feast-day macaroons
Turn to daily rations!

XIX

Mock I thee, in wishing weal?—
Tears are in my eyes to feel
Thou art made so straightly,
Blessing needs must straighten too,—
Little canst thou joy or do,
Thou who lovest *greatly*.

XX

Yet be blessèd to the height
Of all good and all delight
Pervious to thy nature;
Only *loved* beyond that line,
With a love that answers thine,
Loving fellow-creature!

The Cry of the Human



I

“There is no God”, the foolish saith,
But none, “There is no sorrow”.
And nature oft, the cry of faith
In bitter need will borrow:
Eyes, which the preacher could not school,
By wayside graves are raisèd,
And lips say, “God be pitiful”,
Who ne'er said, “God be praised”.
Be pitiful, O God

II

The tempest stretches from the steep
The shadow of its coming,
The beasts grow tame, and near us creep,
As help were in the human;
Yet, while the cloud-wheels roll and grind,
We spirits tremble under!—
The hills have echoes, but we find
No answer for the thunder.
Be pitiful, O God!

THE CRY OF THE HUMAN

III

The battle hurtles on the plains,
Earth feels new scythes upon her.
We reap our brothers for the wains,
And call the harvest . . . honour;
Draw face to face, front line to line,
One image all inherit,—
Then kill, curse on, by that same sign,
Clay, clay,—and spirit, spirit.
Be pitiful, O God!

IV

The plague runs festering through the
town,
And never a bell is tolling,
And corpses, jostled 'neath the moon,
Nod to the dead-cart's rolling.
The young child calleth for the cup,
The strong man brings it weeping;
The mother from her babe looks up,
And shrieks away its sleeping.
Be pitiful, O God!

V

The plague of gold strikes far and near,
And deep and strong it enters.
This purple chimar which we wear,
Makes madder than the centaur's:

THE CRY OF THE HUMAN

Our thoughts grow blank, our words
grow strange,
We cheer the pale gold-diggers—
Each soul is worth so much on 'Change,
And marked, like sheep, with figures.
Be pitiful, O God!

VI

The curse of gold upon the land
The lack of bread enforces.
The rail-cars snort from strand to strand,
Like more of Death's White Horses!
The rich preach "rights" and future days,
And hear no angel scoffing,—
The poor die mute—with starving gaze
On corn-ships in the offing.
Be pitiful, O God!

VII

We meet together at the feast,
To private mirth betake us;
We stare down in the winecup, lest
Some vacant chair should shake us.
We name delight, and pledge it round—
"It shall be ours to-morrow!"
God's seraphs, do your voices sound
As sad in naming sorrow?
Be pitiful, O God!

THE CRY OF THE HUMAN

VIII

We sit together, with the skies,
The steadfast skies, above us,
We look into each other's eyes,
“And how long will you love us?”—
The eyes grow dim with prophecy,
The voices, low and breathless,—
“Till death us part!”—O words, to be
Our *best*, for love the deathless!
Be pitiful, O God!

IX

We tremble by the harmless bed
Of one loved and departed.
Our tears drop on the lips that said
Last night, “Be stronger-hearted!”
O God,—to clasp those fingers close,
And yet to feel so lonely!—
To see a light upon such brows,
Which is the daylight only!
Be pitiful, O God!

X

The happy children come to us,
And look up in our faces.
They ask us—“Was it thus, and thus,
When we were in their places?”—

THE CRY OF THE HUMAN

We cannot speak;—we see anew
The hills we used to live in,
And feel our mother's smile press through
The kisses she is giving.
Be pitiful, O God

XI

We pray together at the kirk,
For mercy, mercy, solely.
Hands weary with the evil work,
We lift them to the Holy.
The corpse is calm below our knee,
Its spirit, bright before Thee—
Between them, worse than either, we—
Without the rest of glory!
Be pitiful, O God!

XII

We leave the communing of men,
The murmur of the passions,
And live alone, to live again
With endless generations.
Are we so brave?—The sea and sky
In silence lift their mirrors,
And, glassed therein, our spirits high
Recoil from their own terrors.
Be pitiful, O God!

THE CRY OF THE HUMAN

XIII

We sit on hills our childhood wist,
Woods, hamlets, streams, beholding:
The sun strikes through the farthest mist,
The city's spire to golden.
The city's golden spire it was,
When hope and health were strongest,
But now it is the churchyard grass
We look upon the longest.
Be pitiful, O God!

XIV

And soon all vision waxeth dull—
Men whisper, "He is dying":
We cry no more "Be pitiful!"
We have no strength for crying.
No strength, no need. Then, soul of
mine,
Look up and triumph rather—
Lo, in the depth of God's Divine,
The Son adjures the Father,
BE PITIFUL, O GOD!

**Bertha in
the Lane**



I

Put the broidery-frame away,
For my sewing is all done.
The last thread is used to-day,
And I need not join it on.
Though the clock stands at the noon
I am weary. I have sewn,
Sweet, for thee, a wedding-gown.

II

Sister, help me to the bed,
And stand near me, Dearest-sweet.
Do not shrink nor be afraid,
Blushing with a sudden heat!
No one standeth in the street?—
By God's love I go to meet,
Love I thee with love complete.

III

Lean thy face down! drop it in
These two hands, that I may hold
'Twixt their palms thy cheek and chin,
Stroking back the curls of gold.

BERTHA IN THE LANE

'Tis a fair, fair face, in sooth—
Larger eyes and redder mouth
Than mine were in my first youth.

IV

Thou art younger by seven years—
Ah!—so bashful at my gaze,
That the lashes, hung with tears,
Grow too heavy to upraise?
I would wound thee by no touch
Which thy shyness feels as such.
Dost thou mind me, Dear, so much?

V

Have I not been nigh a mother
To thy sweetness—tell me, Dear?
Have we not loved one another
Tenderly, from year to year,
Since our dying mother mild
Said with accents undefiled,
“Child, be mother to this child”!

VI

Mother, mother, up in heaven,
Stand up on the jasper sea,
And be witness I have given
All the gifts required of me,—
Hope that blessed me, bliss that crowned,
Love, that left me with a wound,
Life itself, that turneth round!

BERTHA IN THE LANE

VII

Mother, mother, thou art kind,
Thou art standing in the room,
In a molten glory shrined,
That rays off into the gloom!
But thy smile is bright and bleak
Like cold waves—I cannot speak,
I sob in it, and grow weak.

VIII

Ghostly mother, keep aloof
One hour longer from my soul—
For I still am thinking of
Earth's warm-beating joy and dole!
On my finger is a ring
Which I still see glittering,
When the night hides everything.

IX

Little sister, thou art pale!
Ah, I have a wandering brain—
But I lose that fever-bale,
And my thoughts grow calm again.
Lean down closer—closer still!
I have words thine ear to fill,—
And would kiss thee at my will.

BERTHA IN THE LANE

X

Dear, I heard thee in the spring,
Thee and Robert—through the trees,—
When we all went gathering
Boughs of May-bloom for the bees.
Do not start so! think instead
How the sunshine overhead
Seemed to trickle through the shade.

XI

What a day it was, that day!
Hills and vales did openly
Seem to heave and throb away
At the sight of the great sky.
And the Silence, as it stood
In the Glory's golden flood,
Audibly did bud—and bud.

XII

Through the winding hedgerows green,
How we wandered, I and you,—
With the bowery tops shut in,
And the gates that showed the view!
How we talked there! thrushes soft
Sang our praises out—or oft
Bleatings took them, from the croft

BERTHA IN THE LANE

XIII

Till the pleasure grown too strong
Left me muter evermore,
And, the winding road being long,
I walked out of sight, before,
And so, wrapt in musings fond,
Issued (past the wayside pond)
On the meadow-lands beyond.

XIV

I sate down beneath the beech
Which leans over to the lane,
And the far sound of your speech
Did not promise any pain;
And I blessed you full and free,
With a smile stooped tenderly
O'er the May-flowers on my knee.

XV

But the sound grew into word
As the speakers drew more near—
Sweet, forgive me that I heard
What you wished me not to hear.
Do not weep so—do not shake—
Oh,—I heard thee, Bertha, make
Good true answers for my sake.

BERTHA IN THE LANE

XVI

Yes, and HE too! let him stand
In thy thoughts, untouched by blame.
Could he help it, if my hand
He had claimed with hasty claim?
That was wrong perhaps—but then
Such things be—and will, again.
Women cannot judge for men.

XVII

Had he seen thee, when he swore
He would love but me alone?
Thou wert absent—sent before
To our kin in Sidmouth town.
When he saw thee who art best
Past compare, and loveliest,
He but judged thee as the rest.

XVIII

Could we blame him with grave words,
Thou and I, Dear, if we might?
Thy brown eyes have looks like birds,
Flying straightway to the light:
Mine are older.—Hush!—look out—
Up the street! Is none without?
How the poplar swings about.

BERTHA IN THE LANE

XIX

And that hour—beneath the beech,
When I listened in a dream,
And he said in his deep speech,
That he owed me all *esteem*,—
Each word swam in on my brain
With a dim, dilating pain,
Till it burst with that last strain.

XX

I fell flooded with a Dark,
In the silence of a swoon.
When I rose, still cold and stark,
There was night,—I saw the moon.
And the stars, each in its place,
And the May-blooms on the grass,
Seemed to wonder what I was.

XXI

And I walked as if apart
From myself, when I could stand—
And I pitied my own heart,
As if I held it in my hand,
Somewhat coldly,—with a sense
Of fulfilled benevolence,
And a “Poor thing” negligence.

BERTHA IN THE LANE

XXII

And I answered coldly too,
When you met me at the door;
And I only *heard* the dew
Dripping from me to the floor.
And the flowers I bade you see,
Were too withered for the bee,—
As my life, henceforth, for me.

XXIII

Do not weep so—Dear—heart-warm!
All was best as it befell.
If I say he did me harm,
I speak wild,—I am not well.
All his words were kind and good—
He esteemed me! Only, blood
Runs so faint in womanhood!

XXIV

Then I always was too grave,—
Liked the saddest ballad sung,—
With that look, besides, we have
In our faces, who die young.
I had died, Dear, all the same;
Life's long, joyous, jostling game
Is too loud for my meek shame.

BERTHA IN THE LANE

XXV

We are so unlike each other,
Thou and I, that none could guess
We were children of one mother,
But for mutual tenderness.
Thou art rose-lined from the cold,
And meant, verily, to hold
Life's pure pleasures manifold.

XXVI

I am pale as crocus grows
Close beside a rose-tree's root;
Whosoe'er would reach the rose,
Treads the crocus underfoot.
I, like May-bloom on thorn-tree—
Thou, like merry summer-bee!
Fit, that I be plucked for thee.

XXVII

Yet who plucks me?—no one mourns,
I have lived my season out,
And now die of my own thorns
Which I could not live without.
Sweet, be merry! How the light
Comes and goes! If it be night,
Keep the candles in my sight.

BERTHA IN THE LANE

XXVIII

Are there footsteps at the door?
Look out quickly. Yea, or nay?
Some one might be waiting for
Some last word that I might say.
Nay? So best!—so angels would
Stand off clear from deathly road,
Not to cross the sight of God.

XXIX

Colder grow my hands and feet.
When I wear the shroud I made,
Let the folds lie straight and neat,
And the rosemary be spread,
That if any friend should come,
(To see *thee*, Sweet!) all the room
May be lifted out of gloom.

XXX

And, dear Bertha, let me keep
On my hand this little ring,
Which at nights, when others sleep,
I can still see glittering.
Let me wear it out of sight,
In the grave,—where it will light
All the dark up, day and night.

ERTHA IN THE LANE

XXXI

On that grave, drop not a tear!
Else, though fathom-deep the place,
Through the woollen shroud I wear
I shall feel it on my face.
Rather smile there, blessèd one,
Thinking of me in the sun,
Or forget me—smiling on!

XXXII

Art thou near me? nearer? so!
Kiss me close upon the eyes,
That the earthly light may go
Sweetly, as it used to rise,
When I watched the morning-grey
Strike, betwixt the hills, the way
He was sure to come that day.

XXXIII

So,—no more vain words be said!—
The hosannas nearer roll.
Mother, smile now on thy Dead,
I am death-strong in my soul.
Mystic Dove alit on cross,
Guide the poor bird of the snows
Through the snow-wind above loss!

BERTHA IN THE LANE

XXXIV

Jesus, Victim, comprehending
Love's divine self-abnegation,
Cleanse my love in its self-spending,
And absorb the poor libation!
Wind my thread of life up higher,
Up through angels' hands of fire!—
I aspire while I expire.

Loved Once

I

I classed, appraising once,
Earth's lamentable sounds,—the welladay,
The jarring yea and nay,
The fall of kisses on unanswering clay,
The sobbed farewell, the welcome mourn-
fuller,—

But all did leaven the air
With a less bitter leaven of sure despair,
Than these words—"I loved ONCE".

II

And who saith, "I loved ONCE"?
Not angels,—whose clear eyes, love, love,
foresee,

Love, through eternity,
And by To Love do apprehend To Be.
Not God, called LOVE, His noble crown-
name casting

A light too broad for blasting—
The great God changing not from ever-
lasting,

Saith never, "I loved ONCE".

LOVED ONCE

III

Oh, never is "Loved ONCE"
Thy word, Thou Victim-Christ, misprized
friend!

Thy cross and curse may rend,
But having loved Thou lovest to the end.
This is man's saying—man's. Too weak
to move

One spherèd star above,
Man desecrates the eternal God-word Love
By his No More, and Once.

IV

How say ye, "We loved once",
Blasphemers? Is your earth not cold
enow,

Mourners, without that snow?
Ah, friends! and would ye wrong each
other so?

And could ye say of some whose love is
known,

Whose prayers have met your own,
Whose tears have fallen for you, whose
smiles have shone

So long,—“We loved them ONCE”?

LOVED ONCE

v

Could ye, "We loved her once",
Say calm of me, sweet friends, when out
of sight?

When hearts of better right
Stand in between me and your happy
light?

Or when, as flowers kept too long in the
shade,

Ye find my colours fade,
And all that is not love in me, decayed?
Such words—Ye loved me ONCE!

vi

Could ye, "We loved her once",
Say cold of me when further put away

In earth's sepulchral clay,—
When mute the lips which deprecate to-
day?

Not so! not then—least then. When life
is shriven,

And death's full joy is given,—
Of those who sit and love you up in
heaven,

Say not, "We loved them once".

LOVED ONCE

VII

Say never, ye loved ONCE.
God is too near above, the grave, beneath,
And all our moments breathe
Too quick in mysteries of life and death,
For such a word. The eternities avenge
Affections light of range.
There comes no change to justify that
change,
Whatever comes—Loved ONCE!

VIII

And yet that same word ONCE
Is humanly acceptive. Kings have said
Shaking a discrowned head,
“We ruled once”,—dotards, “We once
taught and led”.
Cripples once danced i’ the vines—and
bards approved,
Were once by scornings, moved:
But love strikes one hour —LOVE! those
never loved,
Who dream that they loved ONCE.

Catarina to Camoens;

DYING IN HIS ABSENCE
ABROAD AND REFERRING
TO THE FORM IN WHICH
HE RECORDED THE SWEET-
NESS OF HER EYES



I

On the door you will not enter,
I have gazed too long—adieu!
Hope withdraws her peradventure—
Death is near me,—and not *you*.
Come, O lover,
Close and cover
These poor eyes, you called, I ween,
“Sweetest eyes, were ever seen”.

II

When I heard you sing that burden
In my vernal days and bowers,
Other praises disregarding,
I but hearkened that of yours—
Only saying
In heart-playing,
“Blessed eyes mine eyes have been,
If the sweetest, HIS have seen!” .

CATARINA TO CAMOENS

III

But all changes. At this vesper,
Cold the sun shines down the door.
If you stood there, would you whisper
"Love, I love you", as before,—
Death pervading
Now, and shading
Eyes you sang of, that yestreen,
As the sweetest ever seen?

IV

Yes, I think, were you beside them,
Near the bed I die upon,—
Though their beauty you denied them,
As you stood there, looking down,
You would truly
Call them duly,
For the love's sake found therein,—
"Sweetest eyes, were ever seen".

V

And if *you* looked down upon them,
And if *they* looked up to *you*,
All the light which has foregone them
Would be gathered back anew.
They would truly
Be as duly
Love-transformed to beauty's sheen,—
"Sweetest eyes, were ever seen".

CATARINA TO CAMOENS

VI

But, ah me! you only see me,
In your thoughts of loving man,
Smiling soft perhaps and dreamy
Through the wavings of my fan,—
And unweeting
Go repeating,
In your reverie serene,
“Sweetest eyes, were ever seen”.

VII

While my spirit leans and reaches
From my body still and pale,
Fain to hear what tender speech is
In your love to help my bale—
O my poet,
Come and show it!
Come, of latest love, to glean
“Sweetest eyes, were ever seen”.

VIII

O my poet, O my prophet,
When you praised their sweetness so,
Did you think, in singing of it,
That it might be near to go?
Had you fancies
From their glances,
That the grave would quickly screen
“Sweetest eyes, were ever seen”?

CATARINA TO CAMOENS

IX

No reply! the fountain's warble
In the courtyard sounds alone.
As the water to the marble
So my heart falls with a moan
From love-sighing
To this dying.
Death forerunneth Love to win
"Sweetest eyes, were ever seen".

X

Will you come? When I'm departed
Where all sweetnesses are hid;
Where thy voice, my tender-hearted,
Will not lift up either lid.
Cry, O lover,
Love is over!
Cry beneath the cypress green—
"Sweetest eyes, were ever seen".

XI

When the angelus is ringing,
Near the convent will you walk,
And recall the choral singing
Which brought angels down our talk?
Spirit-shriven
I viewed Heaven,
Till you smiled—"Is earth unclean,
Sweetest eyes, were ever seen?"

CATARINA TO CAMOENS

XII

When beneath the palace-lattice,
You ride slow as you have done,
And you see a face there—that is
Not the old familiar one,—
Will you oftly
Murmur softly,
“Here, ye watched me morn and e’en,
Sweetest eyes, were ever seen!”

XIII

When the palace-ladies, sitting
Round your gittern, shall have said,
“Poet, sing those verses written
For the lady who is dead”,
Will you tremble,
Yet dissemble,—
Or sing hoarse, with tears between,
“Sweetest eyes, were ever seen”?

XIV

“Sweetest eyes!” how sweet in flowings,
The repeated cadence is!
Though you sang a hundred poems,
Still the best one would be this.
I can hear it
’Twixt my spirit
And the earth-noise intervene—
“Sweetest eyes, were ever seen!”

CATARINA TO CAMOENS

XV

But the priest waits for the praying,
And the choir are on their knees,
And the soul must pass away in
Strains more solemn high than these.

Miserere

For the weary!

Oh, no longer for Catrine,
“Sweetest eyes, were ever seen!”

XVI

Keep my riband, take and keep it,
(I have loosed it from my hair)¹
Feeling, while you overweep it,
Not alone in your despair,
Since with saintly
Watch unfaintly
Out of heaven shall o'er you lean
“Sweetest eyes, were ever seen”.

XVII

But—but *now*—yet unremoved
Up to heaven, they glisten fast.
You may cast away, Belovèd,
In your future all my past.
Such old phrases
May be praises
For some fairer bosom-queen—
“Sweetest eyes, were ever seen!”

¹ She left him the riband from her hair.

CATARINA TO CAMOENS

XVIII

Eyes of mine, what are ye doing?
Faithless, faithless,—praised amiss
If a tear be of your showing,
Dropt for any hope of HIS!
Death has boldness
Besides coldness,
If unworthy tears demean
“Sweetest eyes, were ever seen”.

XIX

I will look out to his future;
I will bless it till it shine.
Should he ever be a suitor
Unto sweeter eyes than mine,
Sunshine gild them,
Angels shield them,
Whatsoever eyes terrene
Be the sweetest HIS have seen!

A Portrait

“One name is
Elizabeth *Byn*
Jonson



I will paint her as I see her.
Ten times have the lilies blown,
Since she looked upon the sun.

And her face is lily-clear,
Lily-shape' and dropped in duty
To the law of its own beauty.

Oval cheeks encoloured faintly,
Which a trail of golden hair
Keeps from fading off to air:

And a forehead fair and saintly,
Which two blue eyes undershine,
Like meek prayers before a shrine.

Face and figure of a child,—
Though too calm, you think, and tender,
For the childhood you would lend her.

Yet child-simple, undefiled,
Frank, obedient,—waiting still
On the turnings of your will.

Moving light, as all young things,
As young birds, or early wheat,
When the wind blows over it.

A PORTRAIT

Only, free from flutterings
Of loud mirth that scorneth measure—
Taking love for her chief pleasure.

Choosing pleasures, for the rest,
Which come softly—just as she,
When she nestles at your knee.

Quiet talk she liketh best,
In a bower of gentle looks,—
Watering flowers, or reading books.

And her voice, it murmurs lowly,
As a silver stream may run,
Which yet feels, you feel, the sun.

And her smile, it seems half holy,
As if drawn from thoughts more far
Than our common jestings are.

And if any poet knew her,
He would sing of her with falls
Used in lovely madrigals.

And if any painter drew her,
He would paint her unaware
With a halo round the hair.

And if reader read the poem,
He would whisper—"You have done a
Consecrated little Una".

A PORTRAIT

And a dreamer (did you show him
That same picture) would exclaim,
“ ’Tis my angel, with a name!”

And a stranger, when he sees her
In the street even—smileth stilly,
Just as you would at a lily.

And all voices that address her,
Soften, sleecken every word,
As if speaking to a bird.

And all fancies yearn to cover
The hard earth whereon she passes,
With the thymy-scented grasses.

And all hearts do pray, “ God love her!”—
Ay, and always, in good sooth,
We may all be sure HE DOTH.

The Romance of the Swan's Nest

"So the dreams depart
So the fading phantoms flee
And the shapely reality
Now must get its part
—Westwood's *Beads from
a Kosary*



I

Little Ellie sits alone
'Mid the beeches of a meadow,
By a stream-side on the grass,
And the trees are showering down
Doubles of their leaves in shadow,
On her shining hair and face.

II

She has thrown her bonnet by,
And her feet she has been dipping
In the shallow water's flow.
Now she holds them nakedly
In her hands, all sleek and dripping,
While she rocketh to and fro.

III

Little Ellie sits alone,
And the smile she softly uses,
Fills the silence like a speech,

THE ROMANCE OF

While she thinks what shall be done,—
And the sweetest pleasure chooses
For her future within reach.

IV

Little Ellie in her smile
Chooses . . . “I will have a lover,
Riding on a steed of steeds!
He shall love me without guile,
And to *him* I will discover
The swan’s nest among the reeds.

V

‘And the steed shall be red-roan,
And the lover shall be noble,
With an eye that takes the breath.
And the lute he plays upon,
Shall strike ladies into trouble,
As his sword strikes men to death.

VI

“And the steed it shall be shod
All in silver, housed in azure,
And the mane shall swim the wind;
And the hoofs along the sod
Shall flash onward and keep measure,
Till the shepherds look behind.

THE SWAN'S NEST

VII

“ But my lover will not prize
All the glory that he rides in,
When he gazes in my face.
He will say, ‘ O Love, thine eyes
Build the shrine my soul abides in,
And I kneel here for thy grace’.

VIII

“ Then, ay, then—he shall kneel low,
With the red-roan steed anear him
Which shall seem to understand—
Till I answer, ‘ Rise and go!
For the world must love and fear him
Whom I gift with heart and hand’.

IX

“ Then he will arise so pale,
I shall feel my own lips tremble
With a *yes* I must not say,
Nathless maiden-brave, ‘ Farewell’,
I will utter, and dissemble—
‘ Light to-morrow with to-day’.

X

Then he'll ride among the hills
To the wide world past the river,
There to put away all wrong;
To make straight distorted wills,
And to empty the broad quiver
Which the wicked bear along.

THE ROMANCE OF

XI

“Three times shall a young foot-page
Swim the stream and climb the mountain
And kneel down beside my feet—
‘Lo, my master sends this gage,
Lady, for thy pity’s counting!
What wilt thou exchange for it?’

XII

“And the first time, I will send
A white rosebud for a guerdon,—
And the second time, a glove;
But the third time—I may bend
From my pride, and answer—‘Pardon,
If he comes to take my love’.

XIII

“Then the young foot-page will run—
Then my lover will ride faster,
Till he kneeleth at my knee:
‘I am a duke’s eldest son!
Thousand serfs do call me master,—
But, O Love, I love but *thee!*’

XIV

“He will kiss me on the mouth
Then, and lead me as a lover
Through the crowds that praise his
deeds:

THE SWAN'S NEST

And, when soul-tied by one troth,
Unto *him* I will discover
That swan's nest among the reeds."

XV

Little Ellie, with her smile
Not yet ended, rose up gaily,
Tied the bonnet, donned the shoe,
And went homeward, round a mile,
Just to see, as she did daily,
What more eggs were with the two.

XVI

Pushing through the elm-tree copse,
Winding up the stream, light-hearted,
Where the osier pathway leads—
Past the boughs she stoops—and stops.
Lo, the wild swan had deserted—
And a rat had gnawed the reeds.

XVII

Ellie went home sad and slow.
If she found the lover ever,
With his red-roan steed of steeds,
Sooth I know not! but I know
She could never show him—never,
That swan's nest among the reeds!

The Dead Pan

Excited by Schiller's "Götter Griechenlands", and partly founded on a well-known tradition mentioned in a treatise of Plutarch ("De Oraculorum Defectu"), according to which, at the hour of the Saviour's agony, a cry of "Great Pan is dead!" swept across the waves in the hearing of certain mariners—and the oracles ceased.

It is in all veneration to the memory of the deathless Schiller that I oppose a doctrine still more dishonouring to poetry than to Christianity.

As Mr. Kenyon's graceful and harmonious paraphrase of the German poem was the first occasion of the turning of my thoughts in this direction, I take advantage of the pretence to indulge my feelings (which overflow on other grounds) by inscribing my lyric to that dear friend and relative, with the earnestness of appreciating esteem as well as of affectionate gratitude.—1844.

I

Gods of Hellas, gods of Hellas,
Can you listen in your silence?
Can your mystic voices tell us
Where ye hide? In floating islands,
With a wind that evermore
Keeps you out of sight of shore?
Pan, Pan is dead.

THE DEAD PAN

II

In what revels are ye sunken,
In old Æthiopia?
Have the Pygmies made you drunken,
Bathing in mandragora
Your divine pale lips, that shiver
Like the lotus in the river?

Pan, Pan is dead.

III

Do ye sit there still in slumber,
In gigantic Alpine rows?
The black poppies out of number
Nodding, dripping from your brows
To the red lees of your wine,
And so kept alive and fine?

Pan, Pan is dead.

IV

Or lie crushed your stagnant corse
Where the silver spheres roll on,
Stung to life by centric forces
Thrown like rays out from the sun?—
While the smoke of your old altars
Is the shroud that round you welters?

Great Pan is dead.

THE DEAD PAN

V

“Gods of Hellas, gods of Hellas”,
Said the old Hellenic tongue!
Said the hero-oaths, as well as
Poets’ songs the sweetest sung!
Have ye grown deaf in a day?
Can ye speak not yea or nay—
Since Pan is dead?

VI

Do ye leave your rivers flowing
All alone, O Naiades,
While your drenchèd locks dry slow in
This cold feeble sun and breeze?—
Not a word the Naiads say,
Though the rivers run for aye.
For Pan is dead.

VII

From the gloaming of the oak-wood,
O ye Dryads, could ye flee?
At the rushing thunderstroke, would
No sob tremble through the tree?—
Not a word the Dryads say,
Though the forests wave for aye.
For Pan is dead.

THE DEAD PAN

VIII

Have ye left the mountain places,
Oreads wild, for other tryst?
Shall we see no sudden faces
Strike a glory through the mist?
Not a sound the silence thrills
Of the everlasting hills.

Pan, Pan is dead.

IX

O twelve gods of Plato's vision,
Crowned to starry wanderings,—
With your chariots in procession,
And your silver clash of wings!
Very pale ye seem to rise,
Ghosts of Grecian deities,—

Now Pan is dead!

X

Jove, that right hand is unloaded,
Whence the thunder did prevail,
While in idiocy of godhead
Thou art staring the stars pale!
And thine eagle, blind and old,
Roughs his feathers in the cold.

Pan, Pan is dead.

THE DEAD PAN

XI

Where, O Juno, is the glory
Of thy regal look and tread?
Will they lay, for evermore, thee,
On thy dim, straight, golden bed?
Will thy queendom all lie hid
Meekly under either lid?

Pan, Pan is dead.

XII

Ha, Apollo! floats his golden
Hair all mist-like where he stands,
While the Muses hang enfolding
Knee and foot with faint wild hands?
'Neath the clanging of thy bow,
Niobe looked lost as thou!

Pan, Pan is dead.

XIII

Shall the casque with its brown iron,
Pallas' broad blue eyes eclipse,
And no hero take inspiring
From the god-Greek of her lips?
'Neath her olive dost thou sit,
Mars the mighty, cursing it?

Pan, Pan is dead.

THE DEAD PAN

XIV

Bacchus, Bacchus! on the panther
He swoons,—bound with his own vines.
And his Mænads slowly saunter,
Head aside, among the pines,
While they murmur dreamingly,
“Evohe—ah—evohe—!”
Ah, Pan is dead!

XV

Neptune lies beside the trident,
Dull and senseless as a stone;
And old Pluto deaf and silent
Is cast out into the sun.
Ceres smileth stern thereat,
“We *all* now are desolate—
Now Pan is dead.”

XVI

Aphrodite! dead and driven
As thy native foam, thou art;
With the cestus long done heaving
On the white calm of thine heart!
Ai Adonis! at that shriek,
Not a tear runs down her cheek—
Pan, Pan is dead.

THE DEAD PAN

XVII

And the Loves, we used to know from
One another, huddled lie,
Frore as taken in a snow-storm,
Close beside her tenderly, —
As if each had weakly tried
Once to kiss her as he died.

Pan, Pan is dead.

XVIII

What, and Hermes? Time enthralleth
All thy cunning, Hermes, thus,—
And the ivy blindly crawleth
Round thy brave caduceus?
Hast thou no new message for us,
Full of thunder and Jove-glories?

Nay, Pan is dead.

XIX

Crownèd Cybele's great turret
Rocks and crumbles on her head.
Roar the lions of her chariot
Toward the wilderness, unfed.
Scornful children are not mute,—
"Mother, mother, walk afoot,
Since Pan is dead."

THE DEAD PAN

XX

In the fiery-hearted centre
Of the solemn universe,
Ancient Vesta,—who could enter
To consume thee with this curse?
Drop thy grey chin on thy knee,
O thou palsied Mystery!
For Pan is dead.

XXI

Gods, we vainly do adjure you,—
Ye return nor voice nor sign!
Not a votary could secure you
Even a grave for your Divine!
Not a grave, to show thereby,
Here these grey old gods do lie.
Pan, Pan is dead.

XXII

Even that Greece who took your wages,
Calls the obolus outworn.
And the hoarse, deep-throated ages
Laugh your godships unto scorn.
And the poets do disclaim you,
Or grow colder if they name you—
And Pan is dead.

THE DEAD PAN

XXIII

Gods bereavèd, gods belated,
With your purples rent asunder!
Gods discrowned and desecrated,
Disinherited of thunder!
Now, the goats may climb and crop
The soft grass on Ida's top—
Now, Pan is dead.

XXIV

Calm, of old, the bark went onward,
When a cry more loud than wind,
Rose up, deepened, and swept sunward,
From the pilèd Dark behind;
And the sun shrank and grew pale,
Breathed against by the great wail—
“Pan, Pan is dead”.

XXV

And the rowers from the benches
Fell,—each shuddering on his face—
While departing Influences
Struck a cold back through the place;
And the shadow of the ship
Reeled along the passive deep—
“Pan, Pan is dead”.

THE DEAD PAN

XXVI

And that dismal cry rose slowly
And sank slowly through the air,
Full of spirit's melancholy
And eternity's despair!
And they heard the words it said—
PAN IS DEAD—GREAT PAN IS DEAD—
PAN, PAN IS DEAD.

XXVII

'Twas the hour when One in Sion
Hung for love's sake on a cross;
When His brow was chill with dying,
And His soul was faint with loss;
When His priestly blood dropped down-
ward,
And His kingly eyes looked throne-
ward—
Then, Pan was dead.

XXVIII

By the love He stood alone in,
His sole Godhead rose complete,
And the false gods fell down moaning,
Each from off his golden seat;
All the false gods with a cry
Rendered up their deity—
Pan, Pan was dead.

THE DEAD PAN

XXIX

Wailing wide across the islands,
They rent, vest-like, their Divine!
And a darkness and a silence
Quenched the light of every shrine;
And Dodona's oak swang lonely
Henceforth, to the tempest only,
Pan, Pan was dead.

XXX

Pythia staggered,—feeling o'er her,
Her lost god's forsaking look.
Straight her eyeballs filmed with horror,
And her crispy fillets shook,
And her lips gasped through their foam,
For a word that did not come.
Pan, Pan was dead.

XXXI

O ye vain false gods of Hellas,
Ye are silent evermore!
And I dash down this old chalice,
Whence libations ran of yore.
See, the wine crawls in the dust
Wormlike—as your glories must,
Since Pan is dead.

THE DEAD PAN

XXXII

Get to dust, as common mortals,
By a common doom and track!
Let no Schiller from the portals
Of that Hades, call you back,
Or instruct us to weep all
At your antique funeral.
Pan, Pan is dead.

XXXIII

By your beauty, which confesses
Some chief Beauty conquering you,—
By our grand heroic guesses,
Through your falsehood, at the True,—
We will weep *not* . . .! earth shall roll
Heir to each god's aureole—
And Pan is dead.

XXXIV

Earth outgrows the mythic fancies
Sung beside her in her youth;
And those debonair romances
Sound but dull beside the truth.
Phœbus' chariot-course is run.
Look up, poets, to the sun!
Pan, Pan is dead.

THE DEAD PAN

XXXV

Christ hath sent us down the angels;
And the whole earth and the skies
Are illumed by altar-candles
Lit for blessèd mysteries;
And a Priest's hand through creation
Waveth calm and consecration—
And Pan is dead.

XXXVI

Truth is fair: should we forego it?
Can we sigh right for a wrong?
God Himself is the best Poet,
And the Real is His song.
Sing His truth out fair and full,
And secure His beautiful.
Let Pan be dead.

XXXVII

Truth is large. Our aspiration
Scarce embraces half we be.
Shame, to stand in His creation
And doubt truth's sufficiency!—
To think God's song unexcelling
The poor tales of our own telling—
When Pan is dead.

THE DEAD PAN

XXXVIII

What is true and just and honest,
What is lovely, what is pure—
All of praise that hath admonisht,
All of virtue, shall endure,—
These are themes for poets' uses,
Stirring nobler than the Muses,
Ere Pan was dead.

XXXIX

O brave poets, keep back nothing,
Nor mix falsehood with the whole.
Look up Godward; speak the truth in
Worthy song from earnest soul!
Hold, in high poetic duty,
Truest Truth the fairest Beauty.
Pan, Pan is dead.

Hector in the Garden



I

Nine years old! The first of any
Seem the happiest years that come.
Yet when *I* was nine, I said
No such word!—I thought instead
That the Greeks had used as many
In besieging Ilium.

II

Nine green years had scarcely brought me
To my childhood's haunted spring.
I had life, like flowers and bees
In betwixt the country trees,
And the sun the pleasure taught me
Which he teacheth every thing.

III

If the rain fell, there was sorrow,
Little head leant on the pane,
Little finger drawing down it
The long trailing drops upon it,

HECTOR IN THE GARDEN

And the "Rain, rain, come to-morrow",
Said for charm against the rain.

IV

Such a charm was right Canidian
Though you meet it with a jeer!
If I said it long enough,
Then the rain hummed dimly off,
And the thrush with his pure Lydian
Was left only to the ear;

V

And the sun and I together
Went a-rushing out of doors!
We, our tender spirits, drew
Over hill and dale in view,
Glimmering hither, glimmering thither,
In the footsteps of the showers.

VI

Underneath the chesnuts dripping,
Through the grasses wet and fair,
Straight I sought my garden-ground,
With the laurel on the mound,
And the pear-tree oversweeping
A side-shadow of green air.

HECTOR IN THE GARDEN

VII

In the garden lay supinely
A huge giant wrought of spade!
Arms and legs were stretched at length
In a passive giant strength,—
The fine meadow turf, cut finely,
Round them laid and interlaid.

VIII

Call him Hector, son of Priam!
Such his title and degree.
With my rake I smoothed his brow,
Both his cheeks I weeded through,
But a rhymer such as I am,
Scarce can sing his dignity.

IX

Eyes of gentianellas azure,
Staring, winking at the skies.
Nose of gillyflowers and box.
Scented grasses put for locks,
Which a little breeze, at pleasure,
Set a-waving round his eyes.

X

Brazen helm of daffodillies,
With a glitter toward the light.
Purple violets for the mouth,
Breathing perfumes west and south;

HECTOR IN THE GARDEN

And a sword of flashing lilies,
Holden ready for the fight.

XI

And a breastplate made of daisies,
Closely fitting, leaf on leaf.
Periwinkles interlaced
Drawn for belt about the waist ;
While the brown bees, humming praises,
Shot their arrows round the chief.

XII

And who knows, (I sometimes wondered,)
If the disembodied soul
Of old Hector, once of Troy,
Might not take a dreary joy
Here to enter—if it thundered,
Rolling up the thunder-roll?

XIII

Rolling this way from Troy-ruin,
In this body rude and rife
Just to enter, and take rest
'Neath the daisies of the breast—
They, with tender roots, renewing
His heroic heart to life?

HECTOR IN THE GARDEN

XIV

Who could know? I sometimes started
At a motion or a sound!
Did his mouth speak—naming Troy,
With an *οτοτοτοτοι*?
Did the pulse of the Strong-hearted
Make the daisies tremble round?

XV

It was hard to answer, often:
But the birds sang in the tree—
But the little birds sang bold
In the pear-tree green and old,
And my terror seemed to soften
Through the courage of their glee.

XVI

Oh, the birds, the tree, the ruddy
And white blossoms, sleek with rain!
Oh, my garden, rich with pansies!
Oh, my childhood's bright romances!
All revive, like Hector's body,
And I see them stir again!

XVII

And despite life's changes—chances,
And despite the deathbell's toll,
They press on me in full seeming!
Help, some angel! stay this dreaming

HECTOR IN THE GARDEN

As the birds sang in the branches,
Sing God's patience through my soul!

XVIII

That no dreamer, no neglecter
Of the present's work unsped,
I may wake up and be doing,
Life's heroic ends pursuing,
Though my past is dead as Hector,
And though Hector is twice dead.

**Flush or
Faunus**



You see this dog. It was but yesterday
I mused forgetful of his presence here
Till thought on thought drew downward
tear on tear,
When from the pillow, where wet-cheeked
I lay,
A head as hairy as Faunus, thrust its way
Right sudden against my face, — two
golden-clear
Great eyes astonished mine,—a drooping
ear
Did flap me on either cheek to dry the
spray!
I started first, as some Arcadian,
Amazed by goatly god in twilight grove;
But, as the bearded vision closelier ran
My tears off, I knew Flush, and rose
above
Surprise and sadness,—thanking the true
PAN,
Who, by low creatures, leads to heights
of love.

The Prospect

Methinks we do as fretful children do,
Leaning their faces on the window-pane
To sigh the glass dim with their own
 breath's stain,
And shut the sky and landscape from
 their view.

And thus, alas! since God the maker drew
A mystic separation 'twixt those twain,
The life beyond us, and our souls in pain,
We miss the prospect which we are called
 unto

By grief we are fools to use. Be still and
 strong,

O man, my brother! hold thy sobbing
 breath,

And keep thy soul's large window pure
 from wrong,—

That so, as life's appointment issueth,
Thy vision may be clear to watch along
The sunset consummation-lights of death.

A Child's Thought of God



They say that God lives very high.

But if you look above the pines
You cannot see our God; and why?

And if you dig down in the mines

You never see Him in the gold;
Though, from Him, all that 's glory shines

God is so good, He wears a fold

Of heaven and earth across His face—
Like secrets kept, for love, untold.

But still I feel that His embrace

Slides down by thrills, through all things
made,
Through sight and sound of every place.

As if my tender mother laid

On my shut lids, her kisses' pressure,
Half-waking me at night, and said

“Who kissed you through the dark
dear guesser?”

A Reed

I

I am no trumpet, but a reed:
No flattering breath shall from me lead
A silver sound, a hollow sound.
I will not ring, for priest or king,
One blast that in re-echoing
Would leave a bondsman faster bound.

II

I am no trumpet, but a reed,—
A broken reed, the wind indeed
Left flat upon a dismal shore;
Yet if a little maid, or child,
Should sigh within it, earnest-mild,
This reed will answer evermore.

III

I am no trumpet, but a reed.
Go, tell the fishers, as they spread
Their nets along the river's edge,
I will not tear their nets at all,
Nor pierce their hands, if they should fall;
Then let them leave me in the sedge.

A Child's Grave at Florence

A A F C

BORN, JULY, 1848

DIED, NOVEMBER, 1849



I

Of English blood, of Tuscan birth, . .
What country should we give her?
Instead of any on the earth,
The civic Heavens receive her.

II

And here, among the English tombs,
In Tuscan ground we lay her,
While the blue Tuscan sky endomes
Our English words of prayer.

III

A little child!—how long she lived,
By months, not years, is reckoned:
Born in one July, she survived
Alone to see a second.

A CHILD'S GRAVE

IV

Bright-featured, as the July sun
Her little face still played in,
And splendours, with her birth begun,
Had had no time for fading.

V

So, LILY, from those July hours,
No wonder we should call her;
She looked such kinship to the flowers,
Was but a little taller.

VI

A Tuscan Lily,—only white,
As Dante, in abhorrence
Of red corruption, wished aright
The lilies of his Florence.

VII

We could not wish her whiter,—her
Who perfumed with pure blossom
The house!—a lovely thing to wear
Upon a mother's bosom!

VIII

This July creature thought perhaps
Our speech not worth assuming;
She sate upon her parents' laps,
And mimicked the gnat's humming;

A CHILD'S GRAVE

IX

Said "Father", "Mother"—then, left off,
For tongues celestial, fitter.
Her hair had grown just long enough
To catch heaven's jasper-glitter.

X

Babes! Love could always hear and see
Behind the cloud that hid them.
"Let little children come to Me,
And do not thou forbid them."

XI

So, unforbidding, have we met,
And gently here have laid her,
Though winter is no time to get
The flowers that should o'erspread her.

XII

We should bring pansies quick with
spring,
Rose, violet, daffodilly,
And also, above everything,
White lilies for our Lily.

XIII

Nay, more than flowers, this grave
exacts,—
Glad, grateful attestations

A CHILD'S GRAVE

Of her sweet eyes and pretty acts,
With calm renunciations.

XIV

Her very mother with light feet
Should leave the place too earthy,
Saying, "The angels have thee, Sweet,
Because we are not worthy".

XV

But winter kills the orange-buds,
The gardens in the frost are,
And all the heart dissolves in floods,
Remembering we have lost her!

XVI

Poor earth, poor heart,—too weak, too
weak,
To miss the July shining!
Poor heart!—what bitter words we speak,
When God speaks of resigning!

XVII

Sustain this heart in us that faints,
Thou God, the self-existent!
We catch up wild at parting saints,
And feel Thy Heaven too distant.

A CHILD'S GRAVE

XVIII

The wind that swept them out of sin,
Has ruffled all our vesture.
On the shut door that let them in,
We beat with frantic gesture,—

XIX

To us, us also—open straight!
The outer life is chilly—
Are *we* too, like the earth, to wait
Till next year for our Lily?

XX

—Oh, my own baby on my knees,
My leaping, dimpled treasure,
At every word I write like these,
Clasped close, with stronger pressure!

XXI

Too well my own heart understands,—
At every word beats fuller—
My little feet, my little hands,
And hair of Lily's colour!

XXII

—But God gives patience, Love learns
strength,
And Faith remembers promise,

A CHILD'S GRAVE

And Hope itself can smile at length
On other hopes gone from us.

XXIII

Love, strong as Death, shall conquer
Death,
Through struggle, made more glorious.
This mother stills her sobbing breath,
Renouncing, yet victorious.

XXIV

Arms, empty of her child, she lifts,
With spirit unbereaven,—
“God will not all take back His gifts;
My Lily's mine in heaven!

XXV

“Still mine! maternal rights serene
Not given to another!
The crystal bars shine faint between
The souls of child and mother.

XXVI

“Meanwhile,” the mother cries, “content!
Our love was well divided.
Its sweetness following where she went,
Its anguish stayed where I did.

A CHILD'S GRAVE

XXVII

“Well done of God, to halve the lot,
And give her all the sweetness;
To us, the empty room and cot,—
To her, the Heaven's completeness.

XXVIII

“To us, this grave—to her, the rows
The mystic palm-trees spring in.
To us, the silence in the house,—
To her, the choral singing.

XXIX

“For her, to gladden in God's view,—
For us, to hope and bear on!—
Grow, Lily, in thy garden new,
Beside the Rose of Sharon.

XXX

“Grow fast in heaven, sweet Lily clipped,
In love more calm than this is,—
And may the angels dewy-lipped
Remind thee of our kisses!

XXXI

“While none shall tell thee of our tears,
These human tears now falling,
Till, after a few patient years,
One home shall take us all in.

A CHILD'S GRAVE

XXXII

“Child, father, mother—who, left out?
Not mother, and not father!—
And when, our dying couch about,
The natural mists shall gather,

XXXIII

“Some smiling angel close shall stand
In old Correggio's fashion,
And bear a LILY in his hand,
For death's ANNUNCIATION.”

Inclusions



I

Oh, wilt thou have my hand, Dear, to lie
along in thine?
As a little stone in a running stream, it
seems to lie and pine.
Now drop the poor pale hand, Dear, . . .
unfit to plight with thine.

II

Oh, wilt thou have my cheek, Dear, drawn
closer to thine own?
My cheek is white, my cheek is worn, by
many a tear run down.
Now leave a little space, Dear, . . . lest
it should wet thine own.

III

Oh, must thou have my soul, Dear, com-
mingled with thy soul?—
Red grows the cheek, and warm the hand,
. . . the part is in the whole!
Nor hands nor cheeks keep separate, when
soul is joined to soul.

Sonnets
from the
Portuguese



I

I thought once how Theocritus had sung
Of the sweet years, the dear and wished-
for years,

Who each one in a gracious hand appears
To bear a gift for mortals, old or young:
And, as I mused it in his antique tongue,
I saw, in gradual vision through my tears,
The sweet, sad years, the melancholy years,
Those of my own life, who by turns had
flung

A shadow across me. Straightway I was
'ware,

So weeping, how a mystic Shape did move
Behind me, and drew me backward by the
hair,

And a voice said in mastery while I strove, ...
"Guess now who holds thee?"—"Death",
I said. But, there,
The silver answer rang . . . "Not Death,
but Love".

SONNETS FROM

II

But only three in all God's universe
Have heard this word thou hast said,—
Himself, beside
Thee speaking, and me listening! and
replied
One of us . . . *that* was God, . . . and
laid the curse
So darkly on my eyelids, as to amerce
My sight from seeing thee,—that if I had
died,
The deathweights, placed there, would have
signified
Less absolute exclusion. “Nay” is worse
From God than from all others, O my
friend!
Men could not part us with their worldly jars,
Nor the seas change us, nor the tempests
bend;
Our hands would touch for all the moun-
tain-bars,—
And, heaven being rolled between us at
the end,
We should but vow the faster for the stars.

III

Unlike are we, unlike, O princely Heart!
Unlike our uses and our destinies.
Our ministering two angels look surprise
On one another, as they strike athwart

THE PORTUGUESE

Their wings in passing. Thou, bethink
thee, art
A guest for queens to social pageantries,
With gages from a hundred brighter eyes
Than tears even can make mine, to ply
thy part
Of chief musician. What hast *thou* to do
With looking from the lattice-lights at
me,
A poor, tired, wandering singer, . . . singing
through
The dark, and leaning up a cypress-tree?
The chrism is on thine head,—on mine,
the dew,—
And Death must dig the level where these
agree.

IV

Thou hast thy calling to some palace-floor,
Most gracious singer of high poems!
where
The dancers will break footing, from the
care
Of watching up thy pregnant lips for
more.
And dost thou lift this house's latch too
poor
For hand of thine? and canst thou think
and bear

SONNETS FROM

To let thy music drop here unaware
In folds of golden fulness at my door?
Look up and see the casement broken in
The bats and owlets builders in the roof
My cricket chirps against thy mandolin.
Hush, call no echo up in further proof
Of desolation! there's a voice within
That weeps . . . as thou must sing . . .
alone, aloof.

v

I lift my heavy heart up solemnly,
As once Electra her sepulchral urn,
And, looking in thine eyes, I overturn
The ashes at thy feet. Behold and see
What a great heap of grief lay hid in me
And how the red wild sparkles dimly burn
Through the ashen greyness. If thy foot
in scorn
Could tread them out to darkness utterly
It might be well perhaps. But if instead
Thou wait beside me for the wind to blow
The grey dust up, . . . those laurels on
thine head,
O my Belovèd, will not shield thee so,
That none of all the fires shall scorch and
shred
The hair beneath. Stand farther off then
go.

THE PORTUGUESE

VI

Go from me. Yet I feel that I shall stand
Henceforward in thy shadow. Nevermore
Alone upon the threshold of my door
Of individual life, I shall command
The uses of my soul, nor lift my hand
Serenely in the sunshine as before,
Without the sense of that which I fore-
bore, . . .

Thy touch upon the palm. The widest
land

Doom takes to part us, leaves thy heart
in mine

With pulses that beat double. What I do
And what I dream include thee, as the
wine

Must taste of its own grapes. And when
I sue

God for myself, He hears that name of
thine,

And sees within my eyes, the tears of two.

VII

The face of all the world is changed, I
think,

Since first I heard the footsteps of thy
soul

Move still, oh, still, beside me, as they
stole

Betwixt me and the dreadful outer brink

SONNETS FROM

Of obvious death, where I, who thought
to sink,
Was caught up into love, and taught the
whole
Of life in a new rhythm. The cup of
dole
God gave for baptism, I am fain to drink,
And praise its sweetness, Sweet, with thee
anear.
The names of country, heaven, are changed
away
For where thou art or shalt be, there or
here;
And this . . . this lute and song . . . loved
yesterday,
(The singing angels know) are only dear,
Because thy name moves right in what
they say.

VIII

What can I give thee back, O liberal
And princely giver, who hast brought the
gold
And purple of thine heart, unstained, un-
told,
And laid them on the outside of the wall
For such as I to take or leave withal,
In unexpected largesse? am I cold,
Ungrateful, that for these most manifold
High gifts, I render nothing back at all?

THE PORTUGUESE

Not so; not cold,—but very poor instead.
Ask God who knows. For frequent tears
have run

The colours from my life, and left so dead
And pale a stuff, it were not fitly done
To give the same as pillow to thy head.
Go farther! let it serve to trample on.

IX

Can it be right to give what I can give?
To let thee sit beneath the fall of tears
As salt as mine, and hear the sighing
years

Re-sighing on my lips renunciative
Through those infrequent smiles which fail
to live

For all thy adjurations? O my fears,
That this can scarce be right! We are
not peers,

So to be lovers; and I own, and grieve,
That givers of such gifts as mine are,
must

Be counted with the ungenerous. Out,
alas!

I will not soil thy purple with my dust,
Nor breathe my poison on thy Venice-
glass,

Nor give thee any love . . . which were un-
just.

Beloved, I only love thee! let it pass.

SONNETS FROM

X

Yet, love, mere love, is beautiful indeed
And worthy of acceptance. Fire is bright,
Let temple burn, or flax. An equal light
Leaps in the flame from cedar-plank or
weed.

And love is fire; and when I say at need
I love thee . . . mark! . . . I love thee! . . .
in thy sight

I stand transfigured, glorified aright,
With conscience of the new rays that pro-
ceed

Out of my face toward thine. There's
nothing low

In love, when love the lowest: meanest
creatures

Who love God, God accepts while loving
so.

And what I *feel*, across the inferior features
Of what I *am*, doth flash itself, and show
How that great work of Love enhances
Nature's.

XI

And therefore if to love can be desert,
I am not all unworthy. Cheeks as pale
As these you see, and trembling knees
that fail

To bear the burden of a heavy heart,—

THE PORTUGUESE

This weary minstrel-life that once was girt
To climb Aornus, and can scarce avail
To pipe now 'gainst the valley nightingale
A melancholy music,—why advert
To these things? O Belovèd, it is plain
I am not of thy worth nor for thy place!
And yet, because I love thee, I obtain
From that same love this vindicating
 grace,
To live on still in love, and yet in vain, . . .
To bless thee, yet renounce thee to thy
 face.

XII

Indeed this very love which is my boast,
And which, when rising up from breast
 to brow,
Doth crown me with a ruby large enow
To draw men's eyes and prove the inner
 cost, . . .
This love even, all my worth, to the utter-
 most,
I should not love withal, unless that thou
Hadst set me an example, shown me how,
When first thine earnest eyes with mine
 were crossed,
And love called love. And thus, I cannot
 speak
Of love even, as a good thing of my own.

SONNETS FROM

Thy soul hath snatched up mine all faint
and weak,
And placed it by thee on a golden throne,—
And that I love (O soul, we must be
meek!)
Is by thee only, whom I love alone.

XIII

And wilt thou have me fashion into speech
The love I bear thee, finding words enough,
And hold the torch out, while the winds
are rough,
Between our faces, to cast light on each?—
I drop it at thy feet. I cannot teach
My hand to hold my spirit so far off
From myself . . . me . . . that I should bring
thee proof
In words, of love hid in me out of reach.
Nay, let the silence of my womanhood
Commend my woman-love to thy belief,—
Seeing that I stand unwon, however wooed,
And rend the garment of my life, in brief,
By a most dauntless, voiceless fortitude,
Lest one touch of this heart convey its
grief.

XIV

If thou must love me, let it be for nought
Except for love's sake only. Do not say

THE PORTUGUESE

“ I love her for her smile . . . her look . . .
her way
Of speaking gently, . . . for a trick of thought
That falls in well with mine, and certes
brought
A sense of pleasant ease on such a day”—
For these things in themselves, Belovèd,
may
Be changed, or change for thee,—and
love, so wrought,
May be unwrought so. Neither love me
for
Thine own dear pity’s wiping my cheeks
dry,—
A creature might forget to weep, who
bore
Thy comfort long, and lose thy love
thereby!
But love me for love’s sake, that ever-
more
Thou mayst love on, through love’s eter-
nity.

xv

Accuse me not, beseech thee, that I wear
Too calm and sad a face in front of thine;
For we two look two ways, and cannot
shine
With the same sunlight on our brow and
hair.

SONNETS FROM

On me thou lookest, with no doubting
care,
As on a bee shut in a crystalline,—
Since sorrow hath shut me safe in love's
divine,
And to spread wing and fly in the outer
air
Were most impossible failure, if I strove
To fail so. But I look on thee . . . on
thee . . .
Beholding, besides love, the end of love,
Hearing oblivion beyond memory!
As one who sits and gazes from above,
Over the rivers to the bitter sea.

XVI

And yet, because thou overcomest so,
Because thou art more noble and like a
king,
Thou canst prevail against my fears and
fling
Thy purple round me, till my heart shall
grow
Too close against thine heart, henceforth
to know
How it shook when alone. Why, con-
quering
May prove as lordly and complete a thing
In lifting upward, as in crushing low!

THE PORTUGUESE

And as a vanquished soldier yields his
sword
To one who lifts him from the bloody
earth,—
Even so, Belovèd, I at last record,
Here ends my strife. If *thou* invite me forth,
I rise above abasement at the word.
Make thy love larger to enlarge my worth.

XVII

My poet, thou canst touch on all the notes
God set between His After and Before,
And strike up and strike off the general
roar
Of the rushing worlds, a melody that floats
In a serene air purely. Antidotes
Of medicated music, answering for
Mankind's forlornest uses, thou canst pour
From thence into their ears. God's will
devotes
Thine to such ends, and mine to wait on
thine.
How, Dearest, wilt thou have me for most
use?
A hope, to sing by gladly? . . . or a fine
Sad memory, with thy songs to interfuse?
A shade, in which to sing . . . of palm or
pine?
A grave, on which to rest from singing?
. . . Choose.

SONNETS FROM

XVIII

I never gave a lock of hair away
To a man, Dearest, except this to thee,
Which now upon my fingers thoughtfully
I ring out to the full brown length and
say
“Take it”. My day of youth went yester-
day;
My hair no longer bounds to my foot’s
glee,
Nor plant I it from rose or myrtle-tree,
As girls do, any more. It only may
Now shade on two pale cheeks, the mark
of tears,
Taught drooping from the head that hangs
aside
Through sorrow’s trick. I thought the
funeral-shears
Would take this first, but Love is justi-
fied,—
Take it thou, . . . finding pure, from all those
years,
The kiss my mother left here when she
died.

XIX

The soul’s Rialto hath its merchandise;
I barter curl for curl upon that mart,

THE PORTUGUESE

And from my poet's forehead to my heart,
Receive this lock which outweighs argosies,—

As purply black, as erst, to Pindar's eyes,
The dim purpleal tresses gloomed athwart
The nine white Muse-brows. For this
counterpart, . . .

Thy bay-crown's shade, Belovèd, I surmise,

Still lingers on thy curl, it is so black!
Thus, with a fillet of smooth-kissing
breath,

I tie the shadows safe from gliding back,
And lay the gift where nothing hindereth,
Here on my heart, as on thy brow, to lack
No natural heat till mine grows cold in
death.

XX

Belovèd, my Belovèd, when I think
That thou wast in the world a year ago,
What time I sate alone here in the snow
And saw no footprint, heard the silence
sink

No moment at thy voice, . . . but, link by link,
Went counting all my chains, as if that so
They never could fall off at any blow
Struck by thy possible hand . . . why, thus
I drink

SONNETS FROM

Of life's great cup of wonder! Wonderful,
Never to feel thee thrill the day or night
With personal act or speech,—nor ever
 cull
Some prescience of thee with the blossoms
 white
Thou sawest growing! Atheists are as
 dull,
Who cannot guess God's presence out of
 sight.

XXI

Say over again, and yet once over again,
That thou dost love me. Though the
 word repeated
Should seem "a cuckoo-song", as thou
 dost treat it,
Remember never to the hill or plain,
Valley and wood, without her cuckoo-
 strain,
Comes the fresh Spring in all her green
 completed.
Belovèd, I, amid the darkness greeted
By a doubtful spirit-voice, in that doubt's
 pain
Cry... "Speak once more... thou lovest!"
 Who can fear
Too many stars, though each in heaven
 shall roll—

THE PORTUGUESE

Too many flowers, though each shall
crown the year?

Say thou dost love me, love me, love me
—toll

The silver iterance!—only minding, Dear,
To love me also in silence, with thy soul.

XXII

When our two souls stand up erect and
strong,

Face to face, silent, drawing nigh and
nigher,

Until the lengthening wings break into
fire

At either curvèd point,—what bitter wrong
Can the earth do to us, that we should
not long

Be here contented? Think. In mounting
higher,

The angels would press on us, and aspire
To drop some golden orb of perfect song
Into our deep, dear silence. Let us stay
Rather on earth, Belovèd,—where the
unfit

Contrarious moods of men recoil away
And isolate pure spirits, and permit
A place to stand and love in for a day,
With darkness and the death-hour round-
ing it.

SONNETS FROM

XXIII

Is it indeed so? If I lay here dead,
Wouldst thou miss any life in losing mine?
And would the sun for thee more coldly
shine,
Because of grave-damps falling round my
head?
I marvelled, my Belovèd, when I read
Thy thought so in the letter. I am thine—
But . . . so much to thee? Can I pour
thy wine
While my hands tremble? Then my soul,
instead
Of dreams of death, resumes life's lower
range.
Then, love me, Love! look on me—breathe
on me!
As brighter ladies do not count it strange,
For love, to give up acres and degree,
I yield the grave for thy sake, and ex-
change
My near sweet view of Heaven, for earth
with thee!

XXIV

Let the world's sharpness like a clasping
knife
Shut in upon itself and do no harm

THE PORTUGUESE

In this close hand of Love, now soft and
warm,

And let us hear no sound of human strife
After the click of the shutting. Life to
life—

I lean upon thee, Dear, without alarm,
And feel as safe as guarded by a charm
Against the stab of worldlings, who if rife
Are weak to injure. Very whitely still
The lilies of our lives may reassure
Their blossoms from their roots, accessible
Alone to heavenly dews that drop not fewer;
Growing straight, out of man's reach, on
the hill.

God only, who made us rich, can make
us poor.

XXV

A heavy heart, Belovèd, have I borne
From year to year until I saw thy face,
And sorrow after sorrow took the place
Of all those natural joys as lightly worn
As the stringed pearls... each lifted in its
turn

By a beating heart at dance-time. Hopes
apace

Were changed to long despairs, till God's
own grace

Could scarcely lift above the world forlorn

SONNETS FROM

My heavy heart. Then *thou* didst bid me
bring
And let it drop adown thy calmly great
Deep being! Fast it sinketh, as a thing
Which its own nature doth precipitate,
While thine doth close above it, mediating
Betwixt the stars and the unaccomplished
fate.

XXVI

I lived with visions for my company,
Instead of men and women, years ago,
And found them gentle mates, nor thought
to know
A sweeter music than they played to me.
But soon their trailing purple was not free
Of this world's dust,—their lutes did silent
grow,
And I myself grew faint and blind below
Their vanishing eyes. Then THOU didst
come . . . to be,
Belovèd, what they seemed. Their shining
fronts,
Their songs, their splendours, (better, yet
the same,
As river-water hallowed into fonts)
Met in thee, and from out thee overcame
My soul with satisfaction of all wants—
Because God's gifts put man's best dreams
to shame.

THE PORTUGUESE

XXVII

My own Belovèd, who hast lifted me
From this drear flat of earth where I was
thrown,

And, in betwixt the languid ringlets, blown
A life-breath, till the forehead hopefully
Shines out again, as all the angels see,
Before thy saving kiss! My own, my own,
Who camest to me when the world was
gone,

And I who looked for only God, found *thee*!
I find thee; I am safe, and strong, and
glad.

As one who stands in dewless asphodel,
Looks backward on the tedious time he
had

In the upper life,—so I, with bosom-swell,
Make witness, here, between the good and
bad,

That Love, as strong as Death, retrieves
as well.

XXVIII

My letters! all dead paper, . . . mute and
white!—

And yet they seem alive and quivering
Against my tremulous hands which loose
the string

And let them drop down on my knee to-
night.

SONNETS FROM

This said, . . . he wished to have me in his
sight
Once, as a friend: this fixed a day in
spring
To come and touch my hand . . . a simple
thing,
Yet I wept for it!—this, . . . the paper's
light . . .
Said, *Dear, I love thee*; and I sank and
quailed
As if God's future thundered on my past.
This said, *I am thine*—and so its ink has
paled
With lying at my heart that beat too fast.
And this . . . O Love, thy words have ill
availed,
If, what this said, I dared repeat at
last!

XXIX

I think of thee!—my thoughts do twine
and bud
About thee, as wild vines, about a tree,
Put out broad leaves, and soon there's
nought to see
Except the straggling green which hides
the wood.
Yet, O my palm-tree, be it understood
I will not have my thoughts instead of
thee

THE PORTUGUESE

Who art dearer, better! rather instantly
Renew thy presence. As a strong tree
 should,
Rustle thy boughs and set thy trunk all
 bare,
And let these bands of greenery which in-
 sphere thee,
Drop heavily down, . . . burst, shattered,
 everywhere!
Because, in this deep joy to see and hear
 thee
And breathe within thy shadow a new air,
I do not think of thee—I am too near thee.

XXX

I see thine image through my tears to-
 night,
And yet to-day I saw thee smiling. How
Refer the cause?—Belovèd, is it thou
Or I? who makes me sad? The acolyte
Amid the chanted joy and thankful rite,
May so fall flat, with pale insensate brow,
On the altar-stair. I hear thy voice and
 vow
Perplexed, uncertain, since thou art out
 of sight,
As he, in his swooning ears, the choir's
 Amen.
Belovèd, dost thou love? or did I see all

SONNETS FROM

The glory as I dreamed, and fainted when
Too vehement light dilated my ideal,
For my soul's eyes? Will that light come
again,
As now these tears come . . . falling hot
and real?

XXXI

Thou comest! all is said without a word.
I sit beneath thy looks, as children do
In the noon-sun, with souls that tremble
through
Their happy eyelids from an unaverred
Yet prodigal inward joy. Behold, I erred
In that last doubt! and yet I cannot rue
The sin most, but the occasion . . . that we
two
Should for a moment stand unministered
By a mutual presence. Ah, keep near
and close,
Thou dovelike help! and, when my fears
would rise,
With thy broad heart serenely interpose.
Brood down with thy divine sufficiencies
These thoughts which tremble when bereft
of those,
Like callow birds left desert to the skies.

THE PORTUGUESE

XXXII

The first time that the sun rose on thine
oath
To love me, I looked forward to the moon
To slacken all those bonds which seemed
too soon
And quickly tied to make a lasting troth.
Quick-loving hearts, I thought, may
quickly loathe;
And, looking on myself, I seemed not one
For such man's love!—more like an out-
of-tune
Worn viol, a good singer would be wroth
To spoil his song with, and which, snatched
in haste,
Is laid down at the first ill-sounding note.
I did not wrong myself so, but I placed
A wrong on *thee*. For perfect strains may
float
'Neath master-hands, from instruments
defaced,—
And great souls, at one stroke, may do
and doat.

XXXIII

Yes, call me by my pet-name! let me hear
The name I used to run at, when a child,

SONNETS FROM

From innocent play, and leave the cow-
slips piled,
To glance up in some face that proved me
dear
With the look of its eyes. I miss the
clear
Fond voices, which, being drawn and re-
conciled
Into the music of Heaven's undefiled,
Call me no longer. Silence on the bier,
While I call God . . . call God!—So let thy
mouth
Be heir to those who are now exanimate.
Gather the north flowers to complete the
south,
And catch the early love up in the late.
Yes, call me by that name,—and I, in
truth,
With the same heart, will answer, and not
wait.

XXXIV

With the same heart, I said, I'll answer
thee
As those, when thou shalt call me by my
name—
Lo, the vain promise! is the same, the
same,
Perplexed and ruffled by life's strategy?

THE PORTUGUESE

When called before, I told how hastily
I dropped my flowers or brake off from a
game,
To run and answer with the smile that
came
At play last moment, and went on with
me
Through my obedience. When I answer
now,
I drop a grave thought,—break from soli-
tude;—
Yet still my heart goes to thee . . . ponder
how . . .
Not as to a single good, but all my good!
Lay thy hand on it, best one, and allow
That no child's foot could run fast as this
blood.

XXXV

If I leave all for thee, wilt thou exchange
And be all to me? Shall I never miss
Home-talk and blessing and the common
kiss
That comes to each in turn, nor count it
strange,
When I look up, to drop on a new range
Of walls and floors . . . another home than
this?

SONNETS FROM

Nay, wilt thou fill that place by me which is
Filled by dead eyes too tender, to know
change?
That's hardest. If to conquer love, has
tried,
To conquer grief, tries more . . . as all things
prove;
For grief indeed is love and grief beside.
Alas, I have grieved so I am hard to
love.
Yet love me—wilt thou? Open thine
heart wide,
And fold within, the wet wings of thy
dove.

XXXVI

When we met first and loved, I did not
build
Upon the event with marble. Could it
mean
To last, a love set pendulous between
Sorrow and sorrow? Nay, I rather
thrilled,
Distrusting every light that seemed to gild
The onward path, and feared to overlean
A finger even. And, though I have grown
serene
And strong since then, I think that God
has willed

THE PORTUGUESE

A still renewable fear . . . O love, O
troth . . .
Lest these enclasp'd hands should never
hold,
This mutual kiss drop down between us
both
As an unowned thing, once the lips being
cold.
And Love, be false! if *he*, to keep one oath,
Must lose one joy, by his life's star fore-
told.

XXXVII

Pardon, oh, pardon, that my soul should
make
Of all that strong divineness which I
know
For thine and thee, an image only so
Formed of the sand, and fit to shift and
break.
It is that distant years which did not
take
Thy sovrantry, recoiling with a blow,
Have forced my swimming brain to under-
go
Their doubt and dread, and blindly to for-
sake
Thy purity of likeness, and distort
Thy worthiest love to a worthless counter-
feit.

SONNETS FROM

As if a shipwrecked Pagan, safe in port,
His guardian sea-god to commemorate,
Should set a sculptured porpoise, gills a-
snort,
And vibrant tail, within the temple-gate.

XXXVIII

First time he kissed me, he but only
kissed
The fingers of this hand wherewith I
write;
And, ever since, it grew more clean and
white, . . .
Slow to world-greetings . . . quick with its
“Oh, list”,
When the angels speak. A ring of
amethyst
I could not wear here, plainer to my
sight,
Than that first kiss. The second passed
in height
The first, and sought the forehead, and
half missed,
Half falling on the hair. O beyond meed!
That was the chrism of love, which love’s
own crown,
With sanctifying sweetness, did precede.
The third upon my lips was folded down

THE PORTUGUESE

In perfect, purple state; since when, indeed,
I have been proud and said, "My love,
my own".

XXXIX

Because thou hast the power and own'st
the grace
To look through and behind this mask
of me,
(Against which years have beat thus
blanchingly
With their rains,) and behold my soul's
true face,
The dim and weary witness of life's
race!—
Because thou hast the faith and love to
see,
Through that same soul's distracting leth-
argy,
The patient angel waiting for a place
In the new Heavens!—because nor sin nor
woe,
Nor God's infliction, nor death's neigh-
bourhood,
Nor all which others viewing, turn to
go, . . .
Nor all which makes me tired of all, self-
viewed, . . .

SONNETS FROM

Nothing repels thee, . . . Dearest, teach
me so
To pour out gratitude, as thou dost,
good.

XL

Oh, yes! they love through all this world
of ours!
I will not gainsay love, called love for-
sooth.
I have heard love talked in my early youth,
And since, not so long back but that the
flowers
Then gathered, smell still. Mussulmans
and Giaours
Throw kerchiefs at a smile, and have no
ruth
For any weeping. Polypheme's white tooth
Slips on the nut, if, after frequent showers,
The shell is over-smooth,—and not so
much
Will turn the thing called love, aside to
hate,
Or else to oblivion. But thou art not
such
A lover, my Belovèd! thou canst wait
Through sorrow and sickness, to bring
souls to touch,
And think it soon when others cry "Too
late".

THE PORTUGUESE

XLI

I thank all who have loved me in their
 hearts,
With thanks and love from mine. Deep
 thanks to all
Who paused a little near the prison-wall,
To hear my music in its louder parts,
Ere they went onward, each one to the
 mart's
Or temple's occupation, beyond call.
But thou, who, in my voice's sink and fall,
When the sob took it, thy divinest Art's
Own instrument didst drop down at thy
 foot,
To harken what I said between my
 tears, . . .
Instruct me how to thank thee!—Oh, to
 shoot
My soul's full meaning into future years,
That *they* should lend it utterance, and
 salute
Love that endures, from Life that dis-
 appears!

XLII

“*My future will not copy fair my past*”—
I wrote that once; and thinking at my
 side

SONNETS FROM

My ministering life-angel justified
The word by his appealing look upcast
To the white throne of God, I turned at
last,
And there, instead, saw thee, not unallied
To angels in thy soul! Then I, long tried
By natural ills, received the comfort fast,
While budding, at thy sight, my pilgrim's
staff
Gave out green leaves with morning dews
impearled.
I seek no copy now of life's first half:
Leave here the pages with long musing
curled,
And write me new my future's epigraph,
New angel mine, unhopèd for in the
world!

XLIII

How do I love thee? Let me count the
ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and
height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of
sight
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.
I love thee to the level of everyday's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;

THE PORTUGUESE

I love thee purely, as they turn from
Praise.

I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's
faith.

I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints,—I love thee with the
breath,

Smiles, tears, of all my life!—and, if God
choose,

I shall but love thee better after death.

XLIV

Belovèd, thou hast brought me many
flowers

Plucked in the garden, all the summer
through

And winter, and it seemed as if they grew
In this close room, nor missed the sun
and showers.

So, in the like name of that love of ours,
Take back these thoughts which here un-
folded too,

And which on warm and cold days I with-
drew

From my heart's ground. Indeed, those
beds and bowers

Be overgrown with bitter weeds and rue,
And wait thy weeding; yet here's eglan-
tine,

SONNETS

Here's ivy!—take them, as I used to do
Thy flowers, and keep them where they
shall not pine.

Instruct thine eyes to keep their colours
true,

And tell thy soul, their roots are left in
mine.

