

I, then, in ignorance and weakness,
Taking God's help, have attained to think
My heart does best to receive in meekness
This mode of worship, as most to His mind,
Where earthly aids being cast behind,
His All in All appears serene,
With the thinnest human veil between,
Letting the mystic Lamps, the Seven,
The many motions of His spirit,
Pass, as they list, to earth from Heaven.
For the preacher's merit or demerit,
It were to be wished the flaws were fewer
In the earthen vessel, holding treasure,
Which lies as safe in a golden ewer ;
But the main thing is, does it hold good measure ?
Heaven soon sets right all other matters !—
Ask, else, these ruins of humanity,
This flesh worn out to rags and tatters,
This soul at struggle with insanity,
Who thence take comfort, can I doubt,
Which an empire gained, were a loss without.
May it be mine ! And let us hope
That no worse blessing befall the Pope,
Turn'd sick at last of the day's buffoonery,
Of his posturings and his petticoatings,
Beside the Bourbon bully's gloatings
In the bloody orgies of drunk poltroonery !
Nor may the Professor forego its peace
At Göttingen, presently, when, in the dusk
Of his life, if his cough, as I fear, should increase,
Propheied of by that horrible husk ;
And when, thicker and thicker, the darkness fills
The world through his misty spectacles,
And he gropes for something more substantial
Than a fable, myth, or personification,
May Christ do for him, what no mere man shall,
And stand confessed as the God of salvation !
Meantime, in the still recurring fear
Lest myself, at unawares, be found,
While attacking the choice of my neighbours round,
Without my own made—I choose here !
The giving out of the hymn reclaims me ;
I have done !—And if any blames me,
Thinking that merely to touch in brevity
The topics I dwell on, were unlawful,—
Or, worse, that I trench, with undue levity,
On the bounds of the Holy and the awful,
I praise the heart, and pity the head of him,
And refer myself to THEE, instead of him ;

Who head and heart alike discernest,
 Looking below light speech we utter,
 When the frothy spume and frequent sputter
 Prove that the soul's depths boil in earnest!
 May the truth shine out, stand ever before us!
 I put up pencil and join chorus
 To Hepzibah Tune, without further apology,
 The last five verses of the third section
 Of the seventeenth hymn in Whitfield's Collection,
 To conclude with the doxology.

XLI

EASTER-DAY

1

How very hard it is to be
 A Christian! Hard for you and me,
 —Not the mere task of making real
 That duty up to its ideal,
 Effecting thus complete and whole,
 A purpose or the human soul—
 For that is always hard to do;
 But hard, I mean, for me and you
 To realise it, more or less,
 With even the moderate success
 Which commonly repays our strife
 To carry out the aims of life.
 "This aim is greater," you may say,
 "And so more arduous every way."
 —But the importance of the fruits
 Still proves to man, in all pursuits,
 Proportional encouragement.
 "Then, what if it be God's intent
 "That labour to this one result
 "Shall seem unduly difficult?"
 —Ah, that's a question in the dark—
 And the sole thing that I remark
 Upon the difficulty, this;
 We do not see it where it is,
 At the beginning of the race:
 As we proceed, it shifts its place,
 And where we looked for palms to fall,
 We find the tug's to come,—that's all.

2

At first you say, "The whole, or chief
 " Of difficulties, is Belief.
 " Could I believe once thoroughly,
 " The rest were simple. What? Am I
 " An idiot, do you think? A beast?
 " Prove to me only that the least
 " Command of God is God's indeed,
 " And what injunction shall I need
 " To pay obedience? Death so nigh
 " When time must end, eternity
 " Begin,—and cannot I compute?
 " Weigh loss and gain together? suit
 " My actions to the balance drawn,
 " And give my body to be sawn
 " Asunder, hacked in pieces, tied
 " To horses, stoned, burned, crucified,
 " Like any martyr of the list?
 " How gladly,—if I made acquist,
 " Through the brief minutes' fierce annoy,
 " Of God's eternity of joy."

3

—And certainly you name the point
 Whereon all turns: for could you joint
 This flexile finite life once tight
 Into the fixed and infinite,
 You, safe inside, would spurn what's out,
 With carelessness enough, no doubt—
 Would spurn mere life: but where time brings
 To their next stage your reasonings,
 Your eyes, late wide, begin to wink
 Nor see the path so well, I think.

4

You say, "Faith may be, one agrees,
 " A touchstone for God's purposes,
 " Even as ourselves conceive of them.
 " Could He acquit us or condemn
 " For holding what no hand can loose,
 " Rejecting when we can't but choose?
 " As well award the victor's wreath
 " To whosoever should take breath
 " Duly each minute while he lived—
 " Grant Heaven, because a man contrived
 " To see the sunlight every day
 " He walked forth on the public way.

" You must mix some uncertainty
 " With faith, if you would have faith *be*.
 " Why, what but faith, do we abhor
 " And idolize each other for—
 " —Faith in our evil, or our good,
 " Which is or is not understood
 " Aright by those we love or those
 " We hate, thence called our friends or foes?
 " Your mistress saw your spirit's grace,
 " When, turning from the ugly face,
 " I found belief in it too hard;
 " And both of us have our reward.
 " —Yet here a doubt peeps: well for us
 " Weak beings, to go using thus
 " A touchstone for our little ends,
 " And try with faith the foes and friends;
 " —But God, bethink you! I would fain
 " Conceive of the Creator's reign
 " As based upon exacter laws
 " Than creatures build by with applause.
 " In all God's acts—(as Plato cries
 " He doth)—He *should* geometrize.
 " Whence, I desiderate . . ."

5

I see!

You would grow smoothly as a tree,
 Soar heavenward, straightly up like fire—
 God bless you—there's your world entire
 Needing no faith, if you think fit;
 Go there, walk up and down in it!
 The whole creation travails, groans—
 Contrive your music from its moans,
 Without or let or hindrance, friend!
 That's an old story, and its end
 As old—you come back (be sincere)
 With every question you put here
 (Here where there once was, and is still,
 We think, a living oracle,
 Whose answers you stood carping at)
 This time flung back unanswered flat,—
 Besides, perhaps, as many more
 As those that drove you out before,
 Now added, where was little need!
 Questions impossible, indeed,
 To us who sate still, all and each
 Persuaded that our earth had speech
 Of God's, writ down, no matter if
 In cursive type or hieroglyph,—

Which one fact frees us from the yoke
Of guessing why He never spoke.
You come back in no better plight
Than when you left us,—am I right?

6

So the old process, I conclude,
Goes on, the reasoning's pursued
Further. You own, "'Tis well averred,

"A scientific faith's absurd,
"—Frustrates the very end 'twas meant
"To serve: so I would rest content
"With a mere probability,
"But, probable; the chance must lie
"Clear on one side,—lie all in rough,
"So long as there is just enough
"To pin my faith to, though it hap
"Only at points: from gap to gap
"One hangs up a huge curtain so,
"Grandly, nor seeks to have it go
"Foldless and flat along the wall:
"—What care I that some interval
"Of life less plainly might depend
"On God? I'd hang there to the end;
"And thus I should not find it hard
"To be a Christian and debarred
"From trailing on the earth, till furled
"Away by death!—Renounce the world?
"Were that a mighty hardship? Plan
"A pleasant life, and straight some man
"Beside you, with, if he thought fit,
"Abundant means to compass it,
"Shall turn deliberate aside
"To try and live as, if you tried
"You clearly might, yet most despise.
"One friend of mine wears out his eyes,
"Slighting the stupid joys of sense,
"In patient hope that, ten years hence,
"Somewhat completer he may see
"His list of *lepidopteræ*:
"While just the other who most laughs
"At him, above all epitaphs
"Aspires to have his tomb describe
"Himself as Sole among the tribe
"Of snuffbox-fanciers, who possessed
"A Grignon with the Regent's crest.
"So that, subduing as you want,
"Whatever stands predominant

" Among my earthly appetites
 " For tastes, and smells, and sounds, and sights,
 " I shall be doing that alone,
 " To gain a palm-branch and a throne,
 " Which fifty people undertake
 " To do, and gladly, for the sake
 " Of giving a Semitic guess,
 " Or playing pawns at blindfold chess."

7

Good! and the next thing is,—look round
 For evidence enough. 'Tis found,
 No doubt: as is your sort of mind,
 So is your sort of search—you'll find
 What you desire, and that's to be
 A Christian: what says History?
 How comforting a point it were
 To find some mummy-scrap declare
 There lived a Moses! Better still,
 Prove Jonah's whale translatable
 Into some quicksand of the seas,
 Isle, cavern, rock, or what you please,
 That Faith might clap her wings and crow
 From such an eminence! Or, no—
 The human heart's best; you prefer
 Making that prove the minister
 To truth; you probe its wants and needs
 And hopes and fears, then try what creeds
 Meet these most aptly,—resolute
 That Faith plucks such substantial fruit
 Wherever these two correspond,
 She little needs to look beyond,
 To puzzle out what Orpheus was,
 Or Dionysius Zagrias.
 You'll find sufficient, as I say,
 To satisfy you either way.
 You wanted to believe; your pains
 Are crowned—you do: and what remains?
 Renounce the world!—Ah, were it done
 By merely cutting one by one
 Your limbs off, with your wise head last,
 How easy were it!—how soon past,
 If once in the believing mood!
 Such is man's usual gratitude,
 Such thanks to God do we return,
 For not exacting that we spurn
 A single gift of life, forego
 One real gain,—only taste them so

With gravity and temperance,
 That those mild virtues may enhance
 Such pleasures, rather than abstract—
 Last spice of which, will be the fact
 Of love discerned in every gift;
 While, when the scene of life shall shift,
 And the gay heart be taught to ache,
 As sorrows and privations take
 The place of joy,—the thing that seems
 Mere misery, under human schemes,
 Becomes, regarded by the light
 Of Love, as very near, or quite
 As good a gift as joy before.
 So plain is it that all the more
 God's dispensation's merciful,
 More pettishly we try and cull
 Briars, thistles, from our private plot,
 To mar God's ground where thorns are not!

8

Do you say this, or I?—Oh, you!
 Then, what, my friend,—(so I pursue
 Our parley)—you indeed opine
 That the Eternal and Divine
 Did, eighteen centuries ago,
 In very truth . . . Enough! you know
 The all-stupendous tale,—that Birth,
 That Life, that Death! And all, the earth
 Shuddered at,—all, the heavens grew black
 Rather than see; all, Nature's rack
 And throe at dissolution's brink
 Attested,—it took place, you think,
 Only to give our joys a zest,
 And prove our sorrows for the best?
 We differ, then! Were I, still pale
 And heartstruck at the dreadful tale,
 Waiting to hear God's voice declare
 What horror followed for my share,
 As implicated in the deed,
 Apart from other sins,—concede
 That if He blacked out in a blot
 My brief life's pleasantness, 'twere not
 So very disproportionate!
 Or there might be another fate—
 I certainly could understand
 (If fancies were the thing in hand)
 How God might save, at that day's price,
 The impure in their impurities,

Leave formal licence and complete
 To choose the fair, and pick the sweet.
 But there be certain words, broad, plain,
 Uttered again and yet again,
 Hard to mistake, to overgloss—
 Announcing this world's gain for loss,
 And bidding us reject the same :
 The whole world lieth (they proclaim)
 In wickedness,—come out of it !—
 Turn a deaf ear, if you think fit,
 But I who thrill through every nerve
 At thought of what deaf ears deserve,—
 How do you counsel in the case ?

9

“ I'd take, by all means, in your place,
 “ The safe side, since it so appears :
 “ Deny myself, a few brief years,
 “ The natural pleasure, leave the fruit
 “ Or cut the plant up by the root.
 “ Remember what a martyr said
 “ On the rude tablet overhead—
 “ “ I was born sickly, poor and mean,
 “ “ A slave : no misery could screen
 “ “ The holders of the pearl of price
 “ “ From Cæsar's envy ; therefore twice
 “ “ I fought with beasts, and three times saw
 “ “ My children suffer by his law—
 “ “ At last my own release was earned :
 “ “ I was some time in being burned,
 “ “ But at the close a Hand came through
 “ “ The fire above my head, and drew
 “ “ My soul to Christ, whom now I see.
 “ “ Sergius, a brother, writes for me
 “ “ This testimony on the wall—
 “ “ For me, I have forgot it all.”
 “ You say right ; this were not so hard !
 “ And since one nowise is debarred
 “ From this, why not escape some sins
 “ By such a method ? ”

10

—Then begins
 To the old point, revulsion new—
 (For 'tis just this, I bring you to)
 If after all we should mistake,
 And so renounce life for the sake
 Of death and nothing else ? You hear
 Our friends we jeered at, send the jeer

Back to ourselves with good effect—
 ‘There *were* my beetles to collect!’
 ‘My box—a trifle, I confess,
 ‘But here I hold it, ne’ertheless!’
 Poor idiots, (let us pluck up heart
 And answer) we, the better part
 Have chosen, though ’twere only hope,—
 Nor envy moles like you that grope
 Amid your veritable muck,
 More than the grasshoppers would truck,
 For yours, their passionate life away,
 That spends itself in leaps all day
 To reach the sun, you want the eyes
 To see, as they the wings to rise
 And match the noble hearts of them!
 So, the contemner we contemn,—
 And, when doubt strikes us, so, we ward
 Its stroke off, caught upon our guard,
 —Not struck enough to overturn
 Our faith, but shake it—make us learn
 What I began with, and, I wis,
 End, having proved,—how hard it is
 To be a Christian!

11

“Proved, or not,
 “Howe’er you wis, small thanks, I wot,
 “You get of mine, for taking pains
 “To make it hard to me. Who gains
 “By that, I wonder? Here I live
 “In trusting ease; and do you drive
 “At causing me to lose what most
 “Yourself would mourn for when ’twas lost?”

12

But, do you see, my friend, that thus
 You leave St. Paul for Æschylus?—
 —Who made his Titan’s arch-device
 The giving men *blind hopes* to spice
 The meal of life with, else devoured
 In bitter haste, while lo! Death loured
 Before them at the platter’s edge!
 If faith should be, as we allege,
 Quite other than a condiment
 To heighten flavors with, or meant
 (Like that brave curry of his Grace)
 To take at need the victuals’ place?

If having dined you would digest
 Besides, and turning to your rest
 Should find instead . . .

13

Now, you shall see

And judge if a mere foppery
 Pricks on my speaking! I resolve
 To utter . . . yes, it shall devolve
 On you to hear as solemn, strange
 And dread a thing as in the range
 Of facts,—or fancies, if God will—
 E'er happened to our kind! I still
 Stand in the cloud, and while it wraps
 My face, ought not to speak, perhaps;
 Seeing that as I carry through
 My purpose, if my words in you
 Find veritable listeners,
 My story, reason's self avers
 Must needs be false—the happy chance!
 While, if each human countenance
 I meet in London streets all day,
 Be what I fear,—my warnings fray
 No one, and no one they convert,
 And no one helps me to assert
 How hard it is to really be
 A Christian, and in vacancy
 I pour this story!

14

I commence

By trying to inform you, whence
 It comes that every Easter-night
 As now, I sit up, watch, till light
 Shall break, those chimney-stacks and roofs
 Give, through my window-pane, grey proofs
 That Easter-day is breaking slow.
 On such a night, three years ago,
 It chanced that I had cause to cross
 The common, where the chapel was,
 Our friend spoke of, the other day—
 You've not forgotten, I dare say.
 I fell to musing of the time
 So close, the blessed matin-prime
 All hearts leap up at, in some guise—
 One could not well do otherwise.
 Insensibly my thoughts were bent
 Toward the main point; I overwent

Much the same ground of reasoning
 As you and I just now: one thing
 Remained, however—one that tasked
 My soul to answer; and I asked,
 Fairly and frankly, what might be
 That History, that Faith, to me—
 —Me there—not me, in some domain
 Built up and peopled by my brain,
 Weighing its merits as one weighs
 Mere theories for blame or praise,
 —The kingcraft of the Lucumons,
 Or Fourier's scheme, its pros and cons,—
 But as *my* faith, or none at all.
 'How were my case, now, should I fall
 'Dead here, this minute—do I lie
 'Faithful or faithless?'—Note that I
 Inclined thus ever!—little prone
 For instance, when I slept alone
 In childhood, to go calm to sleep
 And leave a closet where might keep
 His watch perdue some murderer
 Waiting till twelve o'clock to stir,
 As good, authentic legends tell
 He might—'But how improbable!
 'How little likely to deserve
 'The pains and trial to the nerve
 'Of thrusting head into the dark,'—
 Urged my old nurse, and bade me mark
 Besides, that, should the dreadful scout
 Really lie hid there, to leap out
 At first turn of the rusty key,
 It were small gain that she could see
 In being killed upon the floor
 And losing one night's sleep the more.
 I tell you, I would always burst
 The door ope, know my fate at first.—
 This time, indeed, the closet penned
 No such assassin: but a friend
 Rather, peeped out to guard me, fit
 For counsel, Common Sense, to-wit,
 Who said a good deal that might pass,—
 Heartening, impartial too, it was,
 Judge else: 'For, soberly now,—who
 'Should be a Christian if not you?'
 (Hear how he smoothed me down). 'One takes
 'A whole life, sees what course it makes
 'Mainly, and not by fits and starts—
 'In spite of stoppage which imparts
 'Fresh value to the general speed:

' A life, with none, would fly indeed :
 ' Your progressing is slower—right !
 ' We deal with progressing, not flight.
 ' Through baffling senses passionate,
 ' Fancies as restless,—with a freight
 ' Of knowledge cumbersome enough
 ' To sink your ship when waves grow rough,
 ' Not serve as ballast in the hold,
 ' I find, 'mid dangers manifold,
 ' The good bark answers to the helm
 ' Where Faith sits, easier to o'erwhelm
 ' Than some stout peasant's heavenly guide,
 ' Whose hard head could not, if it tried,
 ' Conceive a doubt, or understand
 ' How senses hornier than his hand
 ' Should 'tice the Christian off, his guard—
 ' More happy! But shall we award
 ' Less honour to the hull, which, dogged
 ' By storms, a mere wreck, waterlogged,
 ' Masts by the board, and bulwarks gone,
 ' And stanchions going, yet bears on,—
 ' Than to mere life-boats, built to save,
 ' And triumph o'er the breaking wave ?
 ' Make perfect your good ship as these,
 ' And what were her performances !'
 I added—' Would the ship reached home !
 ' I wish indeed " God's kingdom come—"'
 ' The day when I shall see appear
 ' His bidding, as my duty, clear
 ' From doubt! And it shall dawn, that day,
 ' Some future season; Easter may
 ' Prove, not impossibly, the time—
 ' Yes, that were striking—fates would chime
 ' So aptly! Easter-morn, to bring
 ' The Judgment!—deeper in the Spring
 ' Than now, however, when there's snow
 ' Capping the hills; for earth must show
 ' All signs of meaning to pursue
 ' Her tasks as she was wont to do—
 ' —The lark, as taken by surprise
 ' As we ourselves, shall recognise
 ' Sudden the end: for suddenly
 ' It comes—the dreadfulness must be
 ' In that—all warrants the belief—
 ' " At night it cometh like a thief."'
 ' I fancy why the trumpet blows;
 ' —Plainly, to wake one. From repose
 ' We shall start up, at last awake
 ' From life, that insane dream we take

' For waking now, because it seems.
 ' And as, when now we wake from dreams,
 ' We say, while we recall them, " Fool,
 ' " To let the chance slip, linger cool
 ' " When such adventure offered! Just
 ' " A bridge to cross, a dwarf to thrust
 ' " Aside, a wicked mage to stab—
 ' " And, lo ye, I had kissed Queen Mab,"—
 ' So shall we marvel why we grudged
 ' Our labours here, and idly judged
 ' Of Heaven, we might have gained, but lose!
 ' Lose? Talk of loss, and I refuse
 ' To plead at all! I speak no worse
 ' Nor better than my ancient nurse
 ' When she would tell me in my youth
 ' I well deserved that shapes uncouth
 ' Should fright and tease me in my sleep—
 ' Why did I not in memory keep
 ' Her precept for the evil's cure?
 ' " Pinch your own arm, boy, and be sure
 ' " You'll wake forthwith!"'

15

And as I said

This nonsense, throwing back my head
 With light complacent laugh, I found
 Suddenly all the midnight round
 One fire. The dome of Heaven had stood
 As made up of a multitude
 Of handbreadth cloudlets, one vast rack,
 Of ripples infinite and black,
 From sky to sky. Sudden there went,
 Like horror and astonishment,
 A fierce vindictive scribble of red
 Quick flame across, as if one said
 (The angry scribe of Judgment) ' There—
 ' Burn it!' And straight I was aware
 That the whole ribwork round, minute
 Cloud touching cloud beyond compute,
 Was tinted each with its own spot
 Of burning at the core, till clot
 Jammed against clot, and spilt its fire
 Over all heaven, which 'gan suspire
 As fanned to measure equable,—
 As when great conflagrations kill
 Night overhead, and rise and sink,
 Reflected. Now the fire would shrink
 And wither off the blasted face
 Of heaven, and I distinct could trace

The sharp black ridgy outlines left
 Unburned like network—then, each cleft
 The fire had been sucked back into,
 Regorged, and out it surging flew
 Furiously, and night writhed inflamed,
 Till, tolerating to be tamed
 No longer, certain rays world-wide
 Shot downwardly, on every side,
 Caught past escape; the earth was lit;
 As if a dragon's nostril split
 And all his famished ire o'erflowed;
 Then, as he winced at his Lord's goad,
 Back he inhaled: whereat I found
 The clouds into vast pillars bound,
 Based on the corners of the earth,
 Propping the skies at top: a dearth
 Of fire i' the violet intervals,
 Leaving exposed the utmost walls
 Of time, about to tumble in
 And end the world.

16

I felt begin

The Judgment-Day: to retrocede
 Was too late now.—' In very deed,
 (I uttered to myself) ' that Day!'
 The intuition burned away
 All darkness from my spirit too—
 There, stood I, found and fixed, I knew,
Choosing the world. The choice was made—
 And naked and disguiseless stayed,
 An unevadeable, the fact.
 My brain held ne'ertheless compact
 Its senses, nor my heart declined
 Its office—rather, both combined
 To help me in this juncture—I
 Lost not a second,—agony
 Gave boldness: there, my life had end
 And my choice with it—best defend,
 Applaud them! I resolved to say,
 ' So was I framed by Thee, this way
 ' I put to use Thy senses here!
 ' It was so beautiful, so near,
 ' Thy world,—what could I do but choose
 ' My part there? Nor did I refuse
 ' To look above the transient boon
 ' In time—but it was hard so soon
 ' As in a short life, to give up
 ' Such beauty: I had put the cup

' Undrained of half its fullness, by ;
 ' But, to renounce it utterly,
 ' —That was too hard ! Nor did the cry
 ' Which bade renounce it, touch my brain
 ' Authentically deep and plain
 ' Enough, to make my lips let go.
 ' But Thou, who knowest all, dost know
 ' Whether I was not, life's brief while,
 ' Endeavouring to reconcile
 ' Those lips—too tardily, alas !
 ' To letting the dear remnant pass,
 ' One day,—some drops of earthly good
 ' Untasted ! Is it for this mood,
 ' That Thou, whose earth delights so well,
 ' Has made its complement a Hell ?'

17

A final belch of fire like blood,
 Overbroke all, next, in one flood
 Of doom. Then fire was sky, and sky
 Was fire, and both, one extasy,
 Then ashes. But I heard no noise
 (Whatever was) because a voice
 Beside me spoke thus, " All is done,
 " Time end's, Eternity's begun,
 " And thou art judged for evermore ! "

18

I looked up ; all was as before ;
 Of that cloud-Tophet overhead,
 No trace was left : I saw instead
 The common round me, and the sky
 Above, stretched drear and emptily
 Of life : 'twas the last watch of night,
 Except what brings the morning quite,
 When the armed angel, conscience-clear
 His task nigh done, leans o'er his spear
 And gazes on the earth he guards,
 Safe one night more through all its wards,
 Till God relieve him at his post.
 ' A dream—a waking dream at most !'
 (I spoke out quick that I might shake
 The horrid nightmare off, and wake.)
 ' The world's gone, yet the world is here ?
 ' Are not all things as they appear ?
 ' Is Judgment past for me alone ?
 ' —And where had place the Great White Throne ?

' The rising of the Quick and Dead ?
 ' Where stood they, small and great ? Who read
 ' The sentence from the Opened Book ?'
 So, by degrees, the blood forsook
 My heart, and let it beat afresh :
 I knew I should break through the mesh
 Of horror, and breathe presently—
 When, lo, again, the voice by me !

19

I saw . . . Oh, brother, 'mid far sands
 The palm-tree-cinctured city stands,—
 Bright-white beneath, as Heaven, bright-blue,
 Above it, while the years pursue
 Their course, unable to abate
 Its paradisaal laugh at fate :
 One morn,—the Arab staggers blind
 O'er a new tract of death, calcined
 To ashes, silence, nothingness,—
 Striving, with dizzy wits, to guess
 Whence fell the blow : what if, 'twixt skies
 And prostrate earth, he should surprise
 The imaged Vapour, head to foot,
 Surveying, motionless and mute,
 Its work, ere, in a whirlwind rapt,
 It vanish up again ?—So hapt
 My chance. HE stood there. Like the smoke
 Pillared o'er Sodom, when day broke,—
 I saw Him. One magnific pall
 Mantled in massive fold and fall
 His Dread, and coiled in snaky swathes
 About His feet : night's black, that bathes
 All else, broke, grizzled with despair,
 Against the soul of blackness there.
 A gesture told the mood within—
 That wrapped right hand which based the chin,—
 That intense meditation fixed
 On His procedure,—pity mixed
 With the fulfilment of decree.
 Motionless, thus, He spoke to me,
 Who fell before His feet, a mass,
 No man now.

20

" All is come to pass.
 " Such shows are over for each soul
 " They had respect to. In the roll
 " Of Judgment which convinced mankind
 " Of sin, stood many, bold and blind,

"Terror must burn the truth into:
 "Their fate for them!—thou had'st to do
 "With absolute omnipotence,
 "Able its judgments to dispense
 "To the whole race, as every one
 "Were its sole object: that is done:
 "God is, thou art,—the rest is hurled
 "To nothingness for thee. This world,
 "This finite life, thou hast preferred,
 "In disbelief of God's own word,
 "To Heaven and to Infinity.
 "Here, the probation was for thee,
 "To show thy soul the earthly mixed
 "With Heavenly, it must choose betwixt.
 "The earthly joys lay palpable,—
 "A taint, in each, distinct as well;
 "The Heavenly flitted, faint and rare,
 "Above them, but as truly were
 "Taintless, so in their nature, best.
 "Thy choice was earth: thou didst attest
 "'Twas fitter spirit should subserve
 "The flesh, than flesh, refine to nerve
 "Beneath the spirit's play. Advance
 "No claim to their inheritance
 "Who chose the spirit's fugitive
 "Brief gleams, and thought, 'This were to live
 "'Indeed, if rays, completely pure
 "'From flesh that dulls them, should endure,—
 "'Not shoot in meteor-light athwart
 "'Our earth, to show how cold and swart
 "'It lies beneath their fire, but stand
 "'As stars should, destined to expand,
 "'Prove veritable worlds, our home!'
 "Thou said'st,—'Let Spirit star the dome
 "'Of sky, that flesh may miss no peak,
 "'No nook of earth,—I shall not seek
 "'Its service further!' Thou art shut
 "Out of the Heaven of Spirit; glut
 "Thy sense upon the world: 'tis thine
 "For ever—take it!"

21

'How? Is mine,
 'The world?' (I cried, while my soul broke
 Out in a transport.) 'Hast thou spoke
 'Plainly in that? Earth's exquisite
 'Treasures of wonder and delight,
 'For me?'

22

The austere voice returned,—
 “So soon made happy? Hadst thou learned
 “What God accounteth happiness,
 “Thou wouldst not find it hard to guess
 “What Hell may be His punishment
 “For those who doubt if God invent
 “Better than they. Let such men rest
 “Content with what they judged the best.
 “Let the Unjust usurp at will:
 “The Filthy shall be filthy still:
 “Miser, there waits the gold for thee!
 “Hater, indulge thine enmity!
 “And thou, whose heaven, self-ordained,
 “Was to enjoy earth unrestrained,
 “Do it! Take all the ancient show!
 “The woods shall wave, the rivers flow,
 “And men apparently pursue
 “Their works, as they were wont to do,
 “While living in probation yet:
 “I promise not thou shalt forget
 “The past, now gone to its account,
 “But leave thee with the old amount
 “Of faculties, nor less nor more,
 “Unvisited, as heretofore,
 “By God’s free spirit, that makes an end.
 “So, once more, take thy world; expend
 “Eternity upon its shows,—
 “Flung thee as freely as one rose
 “Out of a summer’s opulence,
 “Over the Eden-barrier whence
 “Thou art excluded. Knock in vain!”

23

I sate up. All was still again.
 I breathed free: to my heart, back fled
 The warmth. ‘But, all the world!’ (I said)
 I stooped and picked a leaf of fern,
 And recollected I might learn
 From books, how many myriad sorts
 Exist, if one may trust reports,
 Each as distinct and beautiful
 As this, the very first I cull.
 Think, from the first leaf to the last!
 Conceive, then, earth’s resources! Vast
 Exhaustless beauty, endless change
 Of wonder! and this foot shall range

Alps, Andes,—and this eye devour
The bee-bird and the aloe-flower?

24

And the voice, “Welcome so to rate
“The arras-folds that variegate
“The earth, God’s antechamber, well!
“The wise, who waited there, could tell
“By these, what royalties in store
“Lay one step past the entrance-door.
“For whom, was reckoned, not too much,
“This life’s munificence? For such
“As thou,—a race, whereof not one
“Was able, in a million,
“To feel that any marvel lay
“In objects round his feet all day;
“Nor one, in many millions more,
“Willing, if able, to explore
“The secreter, minuter charm!
“—Brave souls, a fern-leaf could disarm
“Of power to cope with God’s intent,—
“Or scared if the south firmament
“With north-fire did its wings refledge!
“All partial beauty was a pledge
“Of beauty in its plenitude:
“But since the pledge sufficed thy mood,
“Retain it—plenitude be theirs
“Who looked above!”

25

Though sharp despairs
Shot through me, I held up, bore on.
‘What is it though my trust is gone
‘From natural things? Henceforth my part
‘Be less with Nature than with Art!
‘For Art supplants, gives mainly worth
‘To Nature; ’tis man stamps the earth—
‘And I will seek his impress, seek
‘The statuary of the Greek,
‘Italy’s painting—there my choice
‘Shall fix!’

26

“Obtain it,” said the voice.
“The one form with its single act,
“Which sculptors laboured to abstract,
“The one face, painters tried to draw,
“With its one look, from throngs they saw!
“And that perfection in their soul,

" These only hinted at ? The whole,
 " They were but parts of ? What each laid
 " His claim to glory on ?—afraid
 " His fellow-men should give him rank
 " By the poor tentatives he shrank
 " Smitten at heart from, all the more,
 " That gazers pressed in to adore !
 " " Shall I be judged by only these ?"
 " If such his soul's capacities,
 " Even while he trod the earth,—think, now
 " What pomp in Buonarotti's brow,
 " With its new palace-brain where dwells
 " Superb the soul, unvexed by cells
 " That crumbled with the transient clay !
 " What visions will his right hand's sway
 " Still turn to form, as still they burst
 " Upon him ? How will he quench thirst,
 " Titanically infantine,
 " Laid at the breast of the Divine ?
 " Does it confound thee,—this first page
 " Emblazoning man's heritage ?—
 " Can this alone absorb thy sight,
 " As if they were not infinite,—
 " Like the omnipotence which tasks
 " Itself, to furnish all that asks
 " The soul it means to satiate ?
 " What was the world, the starry state
 " Of the broad skies,—what, all displays
 " Of power and beauty intermixed,
 " Which now thy soul is chained betwixt,—
 " What, else, than needful furniture
 " For life's first stage ? God's work, be sure,
 " No more spreads wasted, than falls scant :
 " He filled, did not exceed, man's want
 " Of beauty in this life. And pass
 " Life's line,—and what has earth to do,
 " Its utmost beauty's appanage,
 " With the requirements of next stage ?
 " Did God pronounce earth ' very good ' ?
 " Needs must it be, while understood
 " For man's preparatory state ;
 " Nothing to heighten nor abate :
 " But transfer the completeness here,
 " To serve a new state's use,—and drear
 " Deficiency gapes every side !
 " The good, tried once, were bad, retried.
 " See the enwrapping rocky niche,
 " Sufficient for the sleep, in which
 " The lizard breathes for ages safe :

“ Split the mould—and as this would chafe
 “ The creature’s new world-widened sense,
 “ One minute after you dispense
 “ The thousand sounds and sights that broke
 “ In, on him, at the chisel’s stroke,—
 “ So, in God’s eyes, the earth’s first stuff
 “ Was, neither more nor less, enough
 “ To house man’s soul, man’s need fulfil.
 “ You reckoned it immeasurable:
 “ So thinks the lizard of his vault!
 “ Could God be taken in default,
 “ Short of contrivances, by you,—
 “ Or reached, ere ready to pursue
 “ His progress through eternity?
 “ That chambered rock, the lizard’s world,
 “ Your easy mallet’s blow has hurled
 “ To nothingness for ever; so,
 “ Has God abolished at a blow
 “ This world, wherein His saints were pent,—
 “ Who, though, found grateful and content,
 “ With the provision there, as thou,
 “ Yet knew He would not disallow
 “ Their spirit’s hunger, felt as well,—
 “ Unsated,—not unsatable,
 “ As Paradise gives proof. Deride
 “ Their choice now, thou who sit’st outside!”

27

I cried in anguish, ‘ Mind, the mind,
 ‘ So miserably cast behind,
 — ‘ To gain what had been wisely lost!
 ‘ Oh, let me strive to make the most
 ‘ Of the poor stunted soul, I nipped
 ‘ Of budding wings, else well equipt
 ‘ For voyage from summer isle to isle!
 ‘ And though she needs must reconcile
 ‘ Ambition to the life on ground,
 ‘ Still, I can profit by late found—
 ‘ But precious knowledge. Mind is best—
 ‘ I will seize mind, forego the rest
 ‘ And try how far my tethered strength
 ‘ May crawl in this poor breadth and length.
 ‘ —Let me, since I can fly no more,
 ‘ At least spin dervish-like about
 ‘ (Till giddy rapture almost doubt
 ‘ I fly) through circling sciences,
 ‘ Philosophies and histories!
 ‘ Should the whirl slacken there, then Verse,
 ‘ Fining to music, shall asperse

' Fresh and fresh fire-dew, till I strain
 ' Intoxicate, half-break my chain!
 ' Not joyless, though more favoured feet
 ' Stand calm, where I want wings to beat
 ' The floor? At least earth's bond is broke!'

28

Then, (sickening even while I spoke)
 ' Let me alone! No answer, pray,
 ' To this! I know what Thou wilt say!
 ' All still is earth's,—to know, as much
 ' As feel its truths, which if we touch
 ' With sense or apprehend in soul,
 ' What matter? I have reached the goal—
 ' "Whereto does Knowledge serve!" will burn
 ' My eyes, too sure, at every turn!
 ' I cannot look back now, nor stake
 ' Bliss on the race, for running's sake.
 ' The goal's a ruin like the rest!'—
 —"And so much worse thy latter quest,
 (Added the voice) "that even on earth
 "Whenever, in man's soul, had birth
 "Those intuitions, grasps of guess,
 "That pull the more into the less,
 "Making the finite comprehend
 "Infinity, the bard would spend
 "Such praise alone, upon his craft,
 "As, when wind-lyres obey the waft,
 "Goes to the craftsman who arranged
 "The seven strings, changed them and rechanged—
 "Knowing it was the South that harped.
 "He felt his song, in singing, warped,
 "Distinguished his and God's part: whence
 "A world of spirit as of sense
 "Was plain to him, yet not too plain,
 "Which he could traverse, not remain
 "A guest in:—else were permanent
 "Heaven upon earth, its gleams were meant
 "To sting with hunger for the light,—
 "Made visible in verse, despite
 "The veiling weakness,—truth by means
 "Of fable, showing while it screens,—
 "Since highest truth, man e'er supplied,
 "Was ever fable on outside.
 "Such gleams made bright the earth an age;
 "Now, the whole sun's his heritage!
 "Take up thy world, it is allowed,
 "Thou who hast entered in the cloud!

29

Then I—' Behold my spirit bleeds,
 ' Catches no more at broken reeds,—
 ' But lilies flower those reeds above—
 ' I let the world go, and take love!
 ' Love survives in me, albeit those
 ' I loved are henceforth masks and shows,
 ' Not loving men and women: still
 ' I mind how love repaired all ill,
 ' Cured wrong, soothed grief, made earth amends
 ' With parents, brothers, children, friends!
 ' Some semblance of a woman yet
 ' With eyes to help me to forget,
 ' Shall live with me; and I will match
 ' Departed love with love, attach
 ' Its fragments to my whole, nor scorn
 ' The poorest of the grains of corn
 ' I save from shipwreck on this isle,
 ' Trusting its barrenness may smile
 ' With happy foodful green one day,
 ' More precious for the pains. I pray,
 ' For love, then, only!'

30

At the word,
 The Form, I looked to have been stirred
 With pity and approval, rose
 O'er me, as when the headsman throws
 Axe over shoulder to make end—
 I fell prone, letting Him expend
 His wrath, while, thus, the inflicting voice
 Smote me. "Is this thy final choice?
 "Love is the best? 'Tis somewhat late!
 "And all thou dost enumerate
 "Of power and beauty in the world,
 "The mightiness of love was curled
 "Inextricably round about.
 "Love lay within it and without,
 "To clasp thee,—but in vain! Thy soul
 "Still shrunk from Him who made the whole,
 "Still set deliberate aside
 "His love!—Now take love! Well betide
 "Thy tardy conscience! Haste to take
 "The show of love for the name's sake,
 "Remembering every moment Who
 "Beside creating thee unto
 "These ends, and these for thee, was said
 "To undergo death in thy stead

"In flesh like thine: so ran the tale.
 "What doubt in thee could countervail
 "Belief in it? Upon the ground
 "That in the story had been found
 "'Too much love? How could God love so?'
 "He who in all his works below
 "Adapted to the needs of man,
 "Made love the basis of the plan,—
 "Did love, as was demonstrated:
 "While man, who was so fit instead,
 "To hate, as every day gave proof,—
 "You thought man, for his kind's behoof,
 "Both could and would invent that scheme
 "Of perfect love—'twould well beseem
 "Cain's nature thou wast wont to praise,
 "Not tally with God's usual ways!"

31

And I cowered deprecatingly—
 'Thou Love of God! Or let me die,
 'Or grant what shall seem Heaven almost!
 'Let me not know that all is lost,
 'Though lost it be—leave me not tied
 'To this despair, this corpse-like bride!
 'Let that old life seem mine—no more—
 'With limitation as before,
 'With darkness, hunger, toil, distress:
 'Be all the earth a wilderness!
 'Only let me go on, go on,
 'Still hoping ever and anon
 'To reach one eve the Better Land!'

32

Then did the Form expand, expand—
 I knew him through the dread disguise,
 As the whole God within his eyes
 Embraced me.

33

When I lived again,
 The day was breaking,—the grey plain
 I rose from, silvered thick with dew.
 Was this a vision? False or true?
 Since then, three varied years are spent,
 And commonly my mind is bent
 To think it was a dream—be sure
 A mere dream and distemperature—
 The last day's watching: then the night,—
 The shock of that strange Northern Light

Set my head swimming, bred in me
A dream. And so I live, you see,
Go through the world, try, prove, reject,
Prefer, still struggling to effect
My warfare; happy that I can
Be crossed and thwarted as a man,
Not left in God's contempt apart,
With ghastly smooth life, dead at heart,
Tame in earth's paddock as her prize.
Thank God she still each method tries
To catch me, who may yet escape,
She knows, the fiend in angel's shape!
Thank God, no paradise stands barred
To entry, and I find it hard
To be a Christian, as I said!
Still every now and then my head
Raised glad, sinks mournful—all grows drear
Spite of the sunshine, while I fear
And think, 'How dreadful to be grudged
'No ease henceforth, as one that's judged,
'Condemned to earth for ever, shut
'From Heaven' . . .

But Easter-Day breaks! But
Christ rises! Mercy every way
Is infinite,—and who can say?

Set my head swimming; died in me
 A dream: And so I live, you see,
 Go through the world; try, prove, reject,
 Prefer, still struggling to effect
 My warfare; happy that I can
 Be crossed and thwarted as a man,
 Not left in God's contempt apart,
 With ghastly smooth life, dead at heart,
 Turn in earth's paddock as her prize,
 Thank God she still each method tries
 To catch me, who may yet escape,
 She knows, the herd in angel's shape,
 Thank God, no paradise stands parted
 To entry; and I had it hard
 To be a Christian, as I said,
 Still every now and then my head
 Raised glad, sinks mournful—all grows dear
 Spite of the sunshine, while I fear
 And think, 'How dreadful to be judged
 No ease hereafter, as one that's judged,
 Condemned to earth for ever, shut hung
 From Heaven as the last work for me,
 But for me: But Easter-Day breaks,
 Christ rises: Mercy everywhere
 Is infinite, and whom can say
 Is not a mortal thing,
 With darkness, darkness,
 Be all the earth a wilderness,
 Only let me go on, go on,
 Still hoping ever and anon
 To reach the better land of rest.

But

Then did the Form expand—
 I knew him through the dread disguise,
 As the whole God within his eyes
 Embraced me.

When I lived again,
 The day was breaking—the grey plain
 I rose from, silvered thick with dew.
 Was this a vision? False or true?
 Since then, three varied years are spent,
 And hither my mind is bent
 To think it was a dream—be sure
 A mere dream and distemperance—
 The last day's watching: then the night
 Light, and the strong, the strong, the strong

MEN AND WOMEN

LOVE AMONG THE RUINS

Where the quiet-coloured end of evening smiles
Miles and miles
On the solitary pastures where our sheep
Half-asleep
Tackle themselves the twilight, stray or stop

MEN AND WOMEN

1855

Was the site once of a city great and gay,
(So they say)
Of our country's very capital, its prince
Ages since,
Held his court in, gathered councils, wielding far
Peace or war.

Now—the country does not even boast a tree,
As you see,
To distinguish slopes of verdure, certain hills
From the hills
Intersect and give a name to, (else they run
Into one)

Where the domed and daring palace shot its spires
Up the sky
O'er the hundred-gated circuit of a wall
Bounding all,
Made of marble, men might march or not be prest,
Twelve abreast.

MEMOIRS AND WOMEN

1822

MEN AND WOMEN

XLII

LOVE AMONG THE RUINS

1

WHERE the quiet-coloured end of evening smiles
Miles and miles
On the solitary pastures where our sheep
Half-asleep
Tinkle homeward thro' the twilight, stray or stop
As they crop—

2

Was the site once of a city great and gay,
(So they say)
Of our country's very capital, its prince
Ages since,
Held his court in, gathered councils, wielding far
Peace or war.

3

Now—the country does not even boast a tree,
As you see,
To distinguish slopes of verdure, certain rills
From the hills
Intersect and give a name to, (else they run
Into one)

4

Where the domed and daring palace shot its spires
Up like fires
O'er the hundred-gated circuit of a wall
Bounding all,
Made of marble, men might march on nor be prest,
Twelve abreast.

5

And such plenty and perfection, see, of grass
 Never was !
 Such a carpet as, this summer-time, o'erspreads
 And embeds
 Every vestige of the city, guessed alone,
 Stock or stone—

6

Where a multitude of men breathed joy and woe
 Long ago ;
 Lust of glory pricked their hearts up, dread of shame
 Struck them tame ;
 And that glory and that shame alike, the gold
 Bought and sold.

7

Now,—the single little turret that remains
 On the plains,
 By the caper overrooted, by the gourd
 Overscored,
 While the patching houseleek's head of blossom winks
 Through the chinks—

8

Marks the basement whence a tower in ancient time
 Sprang sublime,
 And a burning ring all round, the chariots traced
 As they raced,
 And the monarch and his minions and his dames
 Viewed the games.

9

And I know, while thus the quiet-coloured eye
 Smiles to leave
 To their folding, all our many-tinkling fleece
 In such peace,
 And the slopes and rills in undistinguished grey
 Melt away—

10

That a girl with eager eyes and yellow hair
 Waits me there
 In the turret, whence the charioteers caught soul
 For the goal,
 When the king looked, where she looks now, breathless,
 dumb
 Till I come.

11

But he looked upon the city, every side,
 Far and wide,
 All the mountains topped with temples, all the glades'
 Colonnades,
 All the causeys, bridges, aqueducts,—and then,
 All the men!

12

When I do come, she will speak not, she will stand,
 Either hand
 On my shoulder, give her eyes the first embrace
 Of my face,
 Ere we rush, ere we extinguish sight and speech
 Each on each.

13

In one year they sent a million fighters forth
 South and north,
 And they built their gods a brazen pillar high
 As the sky,
 Yet reserved a thousand chariots in full force—
 Gold, of course.

14

Oh, heart! oh, blood that freezes, blood that burns!
 Earth's returns
 For whole centuries of folly, noise and sin!
 Shut them in,
 With their triumphs and their glories and the rest,
 Love is best!

XLIII

A LOVER'S QUARREL

1

Oh, what a dawn of day!
 How the March sun feels like May!
 All is blue again
 After last night's rain,
 And the south dries the hawthorn-spray.
 Only, my Love's away!
 I'd as lief that the blue were grey.

2

Runnels, which rillels swell,
 Must be dancing down the dell
 With a foamy head
 On the beryl bed,
 Paven smooth as a hermit's cell;
 Each with a tale to tell,
 Could my Love but attend as well.

3

Dearest, three months ago!
 When we lived blocked-up with snow,—
 When the wind would edge
 In and in his wedge,
 In, as far as the point could go—
 Not to our ingle, though,
 Where we loved each the other so!

4

Laughs with so little cause!
 We devised games out of straws.
 We would try and trace
 One another's face
 In the ash, as an artist draws;
 Free on each other's flaws,
 How we chattered like two church daws!

5

What's in the "Times"?—a scold
 At the emperor deep and cold;
 He has taken a bride
 To his gruesome side,
 That's as fair as himself is bold:
 There they sit ermine-stoled,
 And she powders her hair with gold.

6

Fancy the Pampas' sheen!
 Miles and miles of gold and green
 Where the sun-flowers blow
 In a solid glow,
 And to break now and then the screen—
 Black neck and eyeballs keen,
 Up a wild horse leaps between!

7

Try, will our table turn ?
Lay your hands there light, and yearn
Till the yearning slips
Thro' the finger tips
In a fire which a few discern,
And a very few feel burn,
And the rest, they may live and learn !

8

Then we would up and pace,
For a change, about the place,
Each with arm o'er neck.
'Tis our quarter-deck,
We are seamen in woeful case.
Help in the ocean-space !
Or, if no help, we'll embrace.

9

See, how she looks now, drest
In a sledging-cap and vest.
'Tis a huge fur cloak—
Like a reindeer's yoke
Falls the lappet along the breast :
Sleeves for her arms to rest,
Or to hang, as my Love likes best.

10

Teach me to flirt a fan
As the Spanish ladies can,
Or I tint your lip
With a burnt stick's tip
And you turn into such a man !
Just the two spots that span
Half the bill of the young male swan.

11

Dearest, three months ago
When the mesmeriser Snow
With his hand's first sweep
Put the earth to sleep,
'Twas a time when the heart could show
All—how was earth to know,
'Neath the mute hand's to-and-fro !

12

Dearest, three months ago
 When we loved each other so,
 Lived and loved the same
 Till an evening came
 When a shaft from the Devil's bow
 Pierced to our ingle-glow,
 And the friends were friend and foe !

13

Not from the heart beneath—
 'Twas a bubble born of breath,
 Neither sneer nor vaunt,
 Nor reproach nor taunt.
 See a word, how it severeth !
 Oh, power of life and death
 In the tongue, as the Preacher saith !

14

Woman, and will you cast
 For a word, quite off at last,
 Me, your own, your you,—
 Since, as Truth is true,
 I was you all the happy past—
 Me do you leave aghast
 With the memories we amassed ?

15

Love, if you knew the light
 That your soul casts in my sight,
 How I look to you
 For the pure and true,
 And the beauteous and the right,—
 Bear with a moment's spite
 When a mere mote threatens the white !

16

What of a hasty word ?
 Is the fleshly heart not stirred
 By a worm's pin-prick
 Where its roots are quick ?
 See the eye, by a fly's foot blurred—
 Ear, when a straw is heard
 Scratch the brain's coat of curd !

17

Foul be the world or fair,
More or less, how can I care ?
 'Tis the world the same
 For my praise or blame,
And endurance is easy there.
 Wrong in the one thing rare—
Oh, it is hard to bear !

18

Here's the spring back or close,
When the almond-blossom blows ;
 We shall have the word
 In that minor third
There is none but the cuckoo knows—
 Heaps of the guelder-rose !
I must bear with it, I suppose.

19

Could but November come,
Were the noisy birds struck dumb
 At the warning slash
 Of his driver's-lash—
I would laugh like the valiant Thumb
 Facing the castle glum
And the giant's fee-faw-fum !

20

Then, were the world well stript
Of the gear wherein equipped
 We can stand apart,
 Heart dispense with heart
In the sun, with the flowers unnipped,—
 Oh, the world's hangings ripped,
We were both in a bare-walled crypt !

21

Each in the crypt would cry
" But one freezes here ! and why ?
 When a heart as chill
 At my own would thrill
Back to life, and its fires out-fly ?
 Heart, shall we live or die ?
The rest, . . . settle it by and by ! "

22

So, she'd efface the score,
 And forgive me as before.
 Just at twelve o'clock
 I shall hear her knock
 In the worst of a storm's uproar—
 I shall pull her through the door—
 I shall have her for evermore!

XLIV

EVELYN HOPE

1

BEAUTIFUL Evelyn Hope is dead!
 Sit and watch by her side an hour.
 That is her book-shelf, this her bed;
 She plucked that piece of geranium-flower,
 Beginning to die too, in the glass.
 Little has yet been changed, I think—
 The shutters are shut, no light may pass
 Save two long rays thro' the hinge's chink.

2

Sixteen years old when she died!
 Perhaps she had scarcely heard my name—
 It was not her time to love: beside,
 Her life had many a hope and aim,
 Duties enough and little cares,
 And now was quiet, now astir—
 Till God's hand beckoned unawares,
 And the sweet white brow is all of her.

3

Is it too late then, Evelyn Hope?
 What, your soul was pure and true,
 The good stars met in your horoscope,
 Made you of spirit, fire and dew—
 And just because I was thrice as old,
 And our paths in the world diverged so wide,
 Each was nought to each, must I be told?
 We were fellow mortals, nought beside?

4

No, indeed! for God above
 Is great to grant, as mighty to make,
 And creates the love to reward the love,—
 I claim you still, for my own love's sake!
 Delayed it may be for more lives yet,
 Through worlds I shall traverse, not a few—
 Much is to learn and much to forget
 Ere the time be come for taking you.

5

But the time will come,—at last it will,
 When, Evelyn Hope, what meant, I shall say,
 In the lower earth, in the years long still,
 That body and soul so pure and gay?
 Why your hair was amber, I shall divine,
 And your mouth of your own geranium's red—
 And what you would do with me, in fine,
 In the new life come in the old one's stead.

6

I have lived, I shall say, so much since then,
 Given up myself so many times,
 Gained me the gains of various men,
 Ransacked the ages, spoiled the climes;
 Yet one thing, one, in my soul's full scope,
 Either I missed or itself missed me—
 And I want and find you, Evelyn Hope!
 What is the issue? let us see!

7

I loved you, Evelyn, all the while;
 My heart seemed full as it could hold—
 There was place and to spare for the frank young smile
 And the red young mouth and the hair's young gold.
 So, hush,—I will give you this leaf to keep—
 See, I shut it inside the sweet cold hand.
 There, that is our secret! go to sleep;
 You will wake, and remember, and understand.

XLV

UP AT A VILLA—DOWN IN THE CITY

(AS DISTINGUISHED BY AN ITALIAN PERSON OF QUALITY)

1

HAD I but plenty of money, money enough and to spare,
The house for me, no doubt, were a house in the city-
square.

Ah, such a life, such a life, as one leads at the window
there!

2

Something to see, by Bacchus, something to hear, at
least!

There, the whole day long, one's life is a perfect feast;
While up at a villa one lives, I maintain it, no more than
a beast.

3

Well now, look at our villa! stuck like the horn of a
bull

Just on a mountain's edge as bare as the creature's skull,
Save a mere shag of a bush with hardly a leaf to pull!
—I scratch my own, sometimes, to see if the hair's turned
wool.

4

But the city, oh the city—the square with the houses!
Why?

They are stone-faced, white as a curd, there's something
to take the eye!

Houses in four straight lines, not a single front awry!
You watch who crosses and gossips, who saunters, who
hurries by:

Green blinds, as a matter of course, to draw when the
sun gets high;

And the shops with fanciful signs which are painted
properly.

5

What of a villa? Though winter be over in March by
rights,

'Tis May perhaps ere the snow shall have withered well
off the heights:

You've the brown ploughed land before, where the oxen
 steam and wheeze,
 And the hills over-smoked behind by the faint grey olive
 trees

6

Is it better in May, I ask you? you've summer all at
 once;
 In a day he leaps complete with a few strong April suns!
 'Mid the sharp short emerald wheat, scarce risen three
 fingers well,
 The wild tulip, at end of its tube, blows out its great red
 bell,
 Like a thin clear bubble of blood, for the children to pick
 and sell.

7

Is it ever hot in the square? There's a fountain to spout
 and splash!
 In the shade it sings and springs; in the shine such foam-
 bows flash
 On the horses with curling fish-tails, that prance and
 paddle and pash
 Round the lady atop in the conch—fifty gazers do not
 abash,
 Though all that she wears is some weeds round her waist
 in a sort of sash!

8

All the year long at the villa, nothing's to see though you
 linger,
 Except yon cypress that points like Death's lean lifted
 forefinger.
 Some think fireflies pretty, when they mix in the corn and
 mingle,
 Or thrud the stinking hemp till the stalks of it seem a-tingle.
 Late August or early September, the stunning cicala is
 shrill,
 And the bees keep their tiresome whine round the resinous
 firs on the hill.
 Enough of the seasons,—I spare you the months of the
 fever and chill.

9

Ere opening your eyes in the city, the blessed church-bells
 begin:
 No sooner the bells leave off, than the diligence rattles in:
 You get the pick of the news, and it costs you never a pin.

By and by there's the travelling doctor gives pills, lets
 blood, draws teeth ;
 Or the Pulcinello-trumpet breaks up the market beneath.
 At the post-office such a scene-picture—the new play,
 piping hot !
 And a notice how, only this morning, three liberal thieves
 were shot.
 Above it, behold the archbishop's most fatherly of rebukes,
 And beneath, with his crown and his lion, some little new
 law of the Duke's !
 Or a sonnet with flowery marge, to the Reverend Don
 So-and-So
 Who is Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarca, Saint Jerome, and
 Cicero,
 “ And moreover,” (the sonnet goes rhyming,) “ the skirts
 of St. Paul has reached,
 Having preached us those six Lent-lectures more unctuous
 than ever he preached.”
 Noon strikes,—here sweeps the procession ! our Lady
 borne smiling and smart
 With a pink gauze gown all spangles, and seven swords
 stuck in her heart !
Bang-whang-whang, goes the drum, *tootle-te-tootle* the fife ;
 No keeping one's haunches still : it's the greatest pleasure
 in life.

10

But bless you, it's dear—it's dear ! fowls, wine, at double
 the rate.
 They have clapped a new tax upon salt, and what oil pays
 passing the gate
 It's a horror to think of. And so, the villa for me, not
 the city !
 Beggars can scarcely be choosers—but still—ah, the pity,
 the pity !
 Look, two and two go the priests, then the monks with
 cowls and sandals,
 And the penitents dressed in white shirts, a-holding the
 yellow candles.
 One, he carries a flag up straight, and another a cross with
 handles,
 And the Duke's guard brings up the rear, for the better
 prevention of scandals.
Bang-whang-whang, goes the drum, *tootle-te-tootle* the fife.
 Oh, a day in the city-square, there is no such pleasure in
 life !

XLVI

A WOMAN'S LAST WORD

1

LET'S contend no more, Love,
 Strive nor weep—
 All be as before, Love,
 —Only sleep!

2

What so wild as words are?
 —I and thou
 In debate, as birds are
 Hawk on bough!

3

See the creature stalking
 While we speak—
 Hush and hide the talking,
 Cheek on cheek!

4

What so false as truth is,
 False to thee?
 Where the serpent's tooth is,
 Shun the tree—

5

Where the apple reddens
 Never pry—
 Lest we lose our Edens,
 Eve and I!

6

Be a god and hold me
 With a charm—
 Be a man and fold me
 With thine arm!

7

Teach me, only teach, Love!
 As I ought
 I will speak thy speech, Love,
 Think thy thought—

8

Meet, if thou require it,
Both demands,
Laying flesh and spirit
In thy hands!

9

That shall be to-morrow
Not to-night:
I must bury sorrow
Out of sight.

10

—Must a little weep, Love,
(Foolish me!)
And so fall asleep, Love,
Loved by thee.

XLVII

FRA LIPPO LIPPI

I AM poor brother Lippo, by your leave!
You need not clap your torches to my face.
Zooks, what's to blame? you think you see a monk!
What, its past midnight, and you go the rounds,
And here you catch me at an alley's end
Where sportive ladies leave their doors ajar.
The Carmine's my cloister: hunt it up,
Do,—harry out, if you must show your zeal,
Whatever rat, there, haps on his wrong hole,
And nip each softling of a wee white mouse,
Weke, weke, that's crept to keep him company!
Aha, you know your betters? Then, you'll take
Your hand away that's fiddling on my throat,
And please to know me likewise. Who am I?
Why, one, sir, who is lodging with a friend
Three streets off—he's a certain . . . how d'ye call?
Master—a . . . Cosimo of the Medici,
In the house that caps the corner. Boh! you were best!
Remember and tell me, the day you're hanged,
How you affected such a gullet's-gripe!
But you, sir, it concerns you that your knaves
Pick up a manner nor discredit you.
Zooks, are we pilchards, that they sweep the streets
And count fair prize what comes into their net?

He's Judas to a tittle, that man is !
 Just such a face ! why, sir, you make amends.
 Lord, I'm not angry ! Bid your hangdogs go
 Drink out this quarter-florin to the health
 Of the munificent House that harbours me
 (And many more beside, lads ! more beside !)
 And all's come square again. I'd like his face—
 His, elbowing on his comrade in the door
 With the pike and lantern,—for the slave that holds
 John Baptist's head a-dangle by the hair
 With one hand ("Look you, now," as who should say)
 And his weapon in the other, yet unwiped !
 It's not your chance to have a bit of chalk,
 A wood-coal or the like ? or you should see !
 Yes, I'm the painter, since you style me so.
 What, brother Lippo's doings, up and down,
 You know them and they take you ? like enough !
 I saw the proper twinkle in your eye—
 'Tell you I liked your looks at very first.
 Let's sit and set things straight now, hip to haunch.
 Here's spring come, and the nights one makes up bands
 To roam the town and sing out carnival,
 And I've been three weeks shut within my mew,
 A-painting for the great man, saints and saints
 And saints again. I could not paint all night—
 Ouf ! I leaned out of window for fresh air,
 There came a hurry of feet and little feet,
 A sweep of lute-strings, laughs, and whiffs of song,—
Flower o' the broom,
Take away love, and our earth is a tomb
Flower o' the quince,
I let Lisa go, and what good's in life since ?
Flower o' the thyme—and so on. Round they went.
 Scarce had they turned the corner when a titter,
 Like the skipping of rabbits by moonlight,—three slim
 shapes—
 And a face that looked up . . . zooks, sir, flesh and blood,
 That's all I'm made of ! Into shreds it went,
 Curtain and counterpane and coverlet,
 All the bed furniture—a dozen knots,
 There was a ladder ! down I let myself,
 Hands and feet, scrambling somehow, and so dropped,
 And after them. I came up with the fun
 Hard by St. Laurence, hail fellow, well met,—
Flower o' the rose
If I've been merry, what matter who knows ?
 And so as I was stealing back again
 To get to bed and have a bit of sleep
 Ere I rise up to-morrow and go work

On Jerome knocking at his poor old breast
 With his great round stone to subdue the flesh,
 You snap me of the sudden. Ah, I see!
 Though your eye twinkles still, you shake your head—
 Mine's shaved,—a monk, you say—the sting's in that!
 If Master Cosimo announced himself,
 Mum's the word naturally; but a monk!
 Come, what am I a beast for? tell us, now!
 I was a baby when my mother died
 And father died and left me in the street.
 I starved there, God knows how, a year or two
 On fig-skins, melon-parings, rinds and shucks,
 Refuse and rubbish. One fine frosty day
 My stomach being empty as your hat,
 The wind doubled me up and down I went.
 Old Aunt Lapaccia trussed me with one hand,
 (Its fellow was a stinger as I knew)
 And so along the wall, over the bridge,
 By the straight cut to the convent. Six words, there,
 While I stood munching my first bread that month:
 "So, boy, you're minded," quoth the good fat father
 Wiping his own mouth, 'twas refection-time,—
 "To quit this very miserable world?
 Will you renounce" . . . The mouthful of bread? thought
 I;

By no means! Brief, they made a monk of me,
 I did renounce the world, its pride and greed,
 Palace, farm, villa, shop and banking-house,
 Trash, such as these poor devils of Medici
 Have given their hearts to—all at eight years old
 Well, sir, I found in time, you may be sure,
 'Twas not for nothing—the good bellyful,
 The warm serge and the rope that goes all round,
 And day-long blessed idleness beside!
 "Let's see what the urchin's fit for"—that came next.
 Not overmuch their way, I must confess.
 Such a to-do! they tried me with their books.
 Lord, they'd have taught me Latin in pure waste!
Flower o' the clove,
All the Latin I construe is, "amo" I love!
 But, mind you, when a boy starves in the streets
 Eight years together, as my fortune was,
 Watching folk's faces to know who will fling
 The bit of half-stripped grape-bunch he desires,
 And who will curse or kick him for his pains—
 Which gentleman processional and fine,
 Holding a candle to the Sacrament
 Will wink and let him lift a plate and catch
 The droppings of the wax to sell again,

Or holla for the Eight and have him whipped,—
 How say I?—nay, which dog bites, which lets drop
 His bone from the heap of offal in the street!
 —The soul and sense of him grow sharp alike,
 He learns the look of things, and none the less
 For admonitions from the hunger-pinch.
 I had a store o' such remarks, be sure,
 Which, after I found leisure, turned to use:
 I drew men's faces on my copy-books,
 Scrawled them within the antiphony's marge,
 Joined legs and arms to the long music-notes,
 Found nose and eyes and chin for A.s and B.s,
 And made a string of pictures of the world
 Betwixt the ins and outs of verb and noun,
 On the wall, the bench, the door. The monks looked
 black.

“Nay,” quoth the Prior, “turn him out, d'ye say?
 In no wise. Lose a crow and catch a lark.
 What if at last we get our man of parts,
 We Carmelites, like those Camaldolese
 And Preaching Friars, to do our church up fine
 And put the front on it that ought to be!”
 And hereupon they bade me daub away.
 Thank you! my head being crammed, their walls a blank,
 Never was such prompt disemburdening.
 First, every sort of monk, the black and white,
 I drew them, fat and lean: then, folks at church,
 From good old gossips waiting to confess
 Their cribs of barrel-droppings, candle-ends,—
 To the breathless fellow at the altar-foot,
 Fresh from his murder, safe and sitting there
 With the little children round him in a row
 Of admiration, half for his beard and half
 For that white anger of his victim's son
 Shaking a fist at him with one fierce arm,
 Signing himself with the other because of Christ
 (Whose sad face on the cross sees only this
 After the passion of a thousand years)
 Till some poor girl, her apron o'er her head
 Which the intense eyes looked through, came at eve
 On tip-toe, said a word, dropped in a loaf,
 Her pair of ear-rings and a bunch of flowers
 The brute took growling, prayed, and then was gone.
 I painted all, then cried “'tis ask and have—
 Choose, for more's ready!”—laid the ladder flat,
 And showed my covered bit of cloister-wall.
 The monks closed in a circle and praised loud
 Till checked, (taught what to see and not to see,
 Being simple bodies) “that's the very man!

Look at the boy who stoops to pat the dog!
 That woman's like the Prior's niece who comes
 To care about his asthma: it's the life!"
 But there my triumph's straw-fire flared and funk'd—
 Their betters took their turn to see and say:
 The Prior and the learned pulled a face
 And stopped all that in no time. "How? what's here?
 Quite from the mark of painting, bless us all!
 Faces, arms, legs and bodies like the true
 As much as pea and pea! it's devil's game!
 Your business is not to catch men with show,
 With homage to the perishable clay,
 But lift them over it, ignore it all,
 Make them forget there's such a thing as flesh.
 Your business is to paint the souls of men—
 Man's soul, and it's a fire, smoke . . . no it's not . . .
 It's vapour done up like a new-born babe—
 (In that shape when you die it leaves your mouth)
 It's . . . well, what matters talking, it's the soul!
 Give us no more of body than shows soul.
 Here's Giotto, with his Saint a-praising God!
 That sets you praising,—why not stop with him?
 Why put all thoughts of praise out of our heads
 With wonder at lines, colours, and what not?
 Paint the soul, never mind the legs and arms!
 Rub all out, try at it a second time.
 Oh, that white smallish female with the breasts,
 She's just my niece . . . Herodias, I would say,—
 Who went and danced and got men's heads cut off—
 Have it all out!" Now, is this sense, I ask?
 A fine way to paint soul, by painting body
 So ill, the eye can't stop there, must go further
 And can't fare worse! Thus, yellow does for white
 When what you put for yellow's simply black,
 And any sort of meaning looks intense
 When all beside itself means and looks nought.
 Why can't a painter lift each foot in turn,
 Left foot and right foot, go a double step,
 Make his flesh liker and his soul more like,
 Both in their order? Take the prettiest face,
 The Prior's niece . . . patron-saint—is it so pretty
 You can't discover if it means hope, fear,
 Sorrow or joy? won't beauty go with these?
 Suppose I've made her eyes all right and blue,
 Can't I take breath and try to add life's flash,
 And then add soul and heighten them threefold?
 Or say there's beauty with no soul at all—
 (I never saw it—put the case the same—)
 If you get simple beauty and nought else,

You get about the best thing God invents,—
 That's somewhat. And you'll find the soul you have
 missed,
 Within yourself when you return Him thanks!
 "Rub all out!" well, well, there's my life, in short,
 And so the thing has gone on ever since.
 I'm grown a man no doubt, I've broken bounds—
 You should not take a fellow eight years old
 And make him swear to never kiss the girls—
 I'm my own master, paint now as I please—
 Having a friend, you see, in the Corner-house!
 Lord, its fast holding by the rings in front—
 Those great rings serve more purposes than just
 To plant a flag in, or tie up a horse!
 And yet the old schooling sticks—the old grave eyes
 Are peeping o'er my shoulder as I work,
 The heads shake still—"It's Art's decline, my son!
 You're not of the true painters, great and old:
 Brother Angelico's the man, you'll find:
 Brother Lorenzo stands his single peer.—
 Fag on at flesh, you'll never make the third!"
Flower o' the pine,
You keep your mistr . . . manners, and I'll stick to mine!
 I'm not the third, then: bless us, they must know!
 Don't you think they're the likeliest to know,
 They, with their Latin? so I swallow my rage,
 Clench my teeth, suck my lips in tight, and paint
 To please them—sometimes do, and sometimes don't.
 For, doing most, there's pretty sure to come
 A turn—some warm eve finds me at my saints—
 A laugh, a cry, the business of the world—
(Flower o' the peach,
Death for us all, and his own life for each!)
 And my whole soul revolves, the cup runs o'er,
 The world and life's too big to pass for a dream,
 And I do these wild things in sheer despite,
 And play the fooleries you catch me at,
 In pure rage! the old mill-horse, out at grass
 After hard years, throws up his stiff heels so,
 Although the miller does not preach to him
 The only good of grass is to make chaff.
 What would men have? Do they like grass or no—
 May they or mayn't they? all I want's the thing
 Settled for ever one way: as it is,
 You tell too many lies and hurt yourself.
 You don't like what you only like too much,
 You do like what, if given you at your word,
 You find abundantly detestable.
 For me, I think I speak as I was taught—

I always see the Garden and God there
 A-making man's wife—and, my lesson learned,
 The value and significance of flesh,
 I can't unlearn ten minutes afterward.

You understand me : I'm a beast, I know.
 But see, now—why, I see as certainly
 As that the morning-star's about to shine,
 What will hap some day. We've a youngster here
 Come to our convent, studies what I do,
 Slouches and stares and lets no atom drop—
 His name is Guidi—he'll not mind the monks—
 They call him Hulking Tom, he lets them talk—
 He picks my practice up—he'll paint apace,
 I hope so—though I never live so long,
 I know what's sure to follow. You be judge !
 You speak no Latin more than I, belike—
 However, you're my man, you've seen the world
 —The beauty and the wonder and the power,
 The shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades,
 Changes, surprises,—and God made it all !
 —For what ? do you feel thankful, ay or no,
 For this fair town's face, yonder river's line,
 The mountain round it and the sky above,
 Much more the figures of man, woman, child,
 These are the frame to ? What's it all about ?
 To be passed o'er, despised ? or dwelt upon,
 Wondered at ? oh, this last of course, you say.
 But why not do as well as say,—paint these
 Just as they are, careless what comes of it ?
 God's works—paint any one, and count it crime
 To let a truth slip. Don't object, " His works
 Are here already—nature is complete :
 Suppose you reproduce her—(which you can't)
 There's no advantage ! you must beat her, then."
 For, don't you mark, we're made so that we love
 First when we see them painted, things we have passed
 Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see ;
 And so they are better, painted—better to us,
 Which is the same thing. Art was given for that—
 God uses us to help each other so,
 Lending our minds out. Have you noticed, now,
 Your cullion's hanging face ? A bit of chalk,
 And trust me but you should, though ! How much more,
 If I drew higher things with the same truth !
 That were to take the Prior's pulpit-place,
 Interpret God to all of you ! oh, oh,
 It makes me mad to see what men shall do
 And we in our graves ! This world's no blot for us,
 Nor blank—it means intensely, and means good :

To find its meaning is my meat and drink.
 "Ay, but you don't so instigate to prayer,"
 Strikes in the Prior! "when your meaning's plain
 It does not say to folks—remember matins—
 Or, mind you fast next Friday." Why, for this
 What need of art at all? A skull and bones,
 Two bits of stick nailed cross-wise, or, what's best,
 A bell to chime the hour with, does as well.
 I painted a St. Laurence six months since
 At Prato, splashed the fresco in fine style.
 "How looks my painting, now the scaffold's down?"
 I ask a brother: "Hugely," he returns—
 "Already not one phiz of your three slaves
 That turn the Deacon off his toasted side,
 But's scratched and prodded to our heart's content,
 The pious people have so eased their own
 When coming to say prayers there in a rage.
 We get on fast to see the bricks beneath.
 Expect another job this time next year,
 For pity and religion grow i' the crowd—
 Your painting serves its purpose!" Hang the fools!

—That is—you'll not mistake an idle word
 Spoke in a huff by a poor monk, God wot,
 Tasting the air this spicy night which turns
 The unaccustomed head like Chianti wine!
 Oh, the church knows! don't misreport me, now!
 It's natural a poor monk out of bounds
 Should have his apt word to excuse himself:
 And hearken how I plot to make amends.
 I have bethought me: I shall paint a piece
 . . . There's for you! Give me six months, then I go,
 see

Something in Sant' Ambrogio's . . . (bless the nuns!
 They want a cast of my office) I shall paint
 God in the midst, Madonna and her babe,
 Ringed by a bowery, flowery angel-brood,
 Lilies and vestments and white faces, sweet
 As puff on puff of grated orris-root
 When ladies crowd to church at midsummer.
 And then in the front, of course a saint or two—
 Saint John, because he saves the Florentines,
 Saint Ambrose, who puts down in black and white
 The convent's friends and gives them a long day,
 And Job, I must have him there past mistake,
 The man of Uz, (and Us without the z,
 Painters who need his patience). Well, all these
 Secured at their devotions, up shall come
 Out of a corner when you least expect,

As one by a dark stair into a great light,
 Music and talking, who but Lippo! I!—
 Mazed, motionless and moon-struck—I'm the man!
 Back I shrink—what is this I see and hear?
 I, caught up with my monk's things by mistake,
 My old serge gown and rope that goes all round,
 I, in this presence, this pure company!
 Where's a hole, where's a corner for escape?
 Then steps a sweet angelic slip of a thing
 Forward, puts out a soft palm—"Not so fast!"
 —Addresses the celestial presence, "nay—
 He made you and devised you, after all,
 Though he's none of you! Could Saint John there,
 draw—
 His camel-hair make up a painting-brush?
 We come to brother Lippo for all that,
Iste perfectit opus!" So, all smile—
 I shuffle sideways with my blushing face
 Under the cover of a hundred wings
 Thrown like a spread of kirtles when you're gay
 And play hot cockles, all the doors being shut,
 Till, wholly unexpected, in there pops
 The hothead husband! Thus, I scuttle off
 To some safe bench behind, not letting go
 The palm of her, the little lily thing
 That spoke the good word for me in the nick,
 Like the Prior's niece . . . Saint Lucy, I would say.
 And so all's saved for me, and for the church
 A pretty picture gained. Go, six months hence!
 Your hand, sir, and good-bye: no lights, no lights!
 The street's hushed, and I know my own way back—
 Don't fear me! There's the grey beginning. Zooks!

XLVIII

A TOCCATA OF GALUPPI'S

1

Oh, Galuppi, Baldassarò, this is very sad to find!
 I can hardly misconceive you; it would prove me deaf
 and blind;
 But although I give you credit, 'tis with such a heavy
 mind!

2

Here you come with your old music, and here's all the
good it brings.

What, they lived once thus at Venice, where the merchants
were the kings,

Where St. Mark's is, where the Doges used to wed the
sea with rings ?

3

Ay, because the sea's the street there ; and 'tis arched by
. . . what you call

. . . Shylock's bridge with houses on it, where they kept
the carnival !

I was never out of England—it's as if I saw it all !

4

Did young people take their pleasure when the sea was
warm in May ?

Balls and masks begun at midnight, burning ever to mid-
day,

When they made up fresh adventures for the morrow, do
you say ?

5

Was a lady such a lady, cheeks so round and lips so
red,—

On her neck the small face buoyant, like a bell-flower on
its bed,

O'er the breast's superb abundance where a man might
base his head ?

6

Well (and it was graceful of them) they'd break talk off
and afford

—She, to bite her mask's black velvet, he to finger on his
sword,

While you sat and played Toccatas, stately at the
clavichord ?

7

What ? Those lesser thirds so plaintive, sixths diminished,
sigh on sigh,

Told them something ? Those suspensions, those solutions
—“ Must we die ? ”

Those commiserating sevenths—“ Life might last ! we can
but try ! ”

8

“Were you happy?”—“Yes.”—“And are you still as happy?”—“Yes—And you?”
 —“Then more kisses”—“Did I stop them, when a million seemed so few?”
 Hark—the dominant’s persistence, till it must be answered to!

9

So an octave struck the answer. Oh, they praised you, I dare say!
 “Brave Galuppi! that was music! good alike at grave and gay!
 I can always leave off talking, when I hear a master play.”

10

Then they left you for their pleasure: till in due time,
 one by one,
 Some with lives that came to nothing, some with deeds as well undone,
 Death came tacitly and took them where they never see the sun.

11

But when I sit down to reason,—think to take my stand nor swerve
 Till I triumph o’er a secret wrung from nature’s close reserve,
 In you come with your cold music, till I creep thro’ every nerve,

12

Yes, you, like a ghostly cricket, creaking where a house was burned—
 “Dust and ashes, dead and done with, Venice spent what Venice earned!
 The soul, doubtless, is immortal—where a soul can be discerned.

13

“Yours for instance, you know physics, something of geology,
 Mathematics are your pastime; souls shall rise in their degree;
 Butterflies may dread extinction,—you’ll not die, it cannot be!

14

“ As for Venice and its people, merely born to bloom and drop,
 Here on earth they bore their fruitage, mirth and folly
 were the crop.
 What of soul was left, I wonder, when the kissing had to stop ?

15

“ Dust and ashes ! ” So you creak it, and I want the heart
 to scold.
 Dear dead women, with such hair, too—what’s become of
 all the gold
 Used to hang and brush their bosoms ? I feel chilly and
 grown old.

XLIX

BY THE FIRE-SIDE

1

How well I know what I mean to do
 When the long dark Autumn evenings come,
 And where, my soul, is thy pleasant hue ?
 With the music of all thy voices, dumb
 In life’s November too !

2

I shall be found by the fire, suppose,
 O’er a great wise book as beseemeth age,
 While the shutters flap as the cross-wind blows,
 And I turn the page, and I turn the page,
 Not verse now, only prose !

3

Till the young ones whisper, finger on lip,
 “ There he is at it, deep in Greek—
 Now or never, then, out we slip
 To cut from the hazels by the creek
 A mainmast for our ship.”

4

I shall be at it indeed, my friends !
 Greek puts already on either side
 Such a branch-work forth, as soon extends
 To a vista opening far and wide,
 And I pass out where it ends.

5

The outside-frame like your hazel-trees—
 But the inside-archway narrows fast,
 And a rarer sort succeeds to these,
 And we slope to Italy at last
 And youth, by green degrees.

6

I follow wherever I am led,
 Knowing so well the leader's hand—
 Oh, woman-country, wooed, not wed,
 Loved all the more by earth's male-lands,
 Laid to their hearts instead!

7

Look at the ruined chapel again
 Half way up in the Alpine gorge.
 Is that a tower, I point you plain,
 Or is it a mill or an iron forge
 Breaks solitude in vain?

8

A turn, and we stand in the heart of things;
 The woods are round us, heaped and dim;
 From slab to slab how it slips and springs,
 The thread of water single and slim,
 Thro' the ravage some torrent brings!

9

Does it feed the little lake below?
 That speck of white just on its marge
 Is Pella; see, in the evening glow
 How sharp the silver spear-heads charge
 When Alp meets Heaven in snow.

10

On our other side is the straight-up rock;
 And a path is kept 'twixt the gorge and it
 By boulder-stones where lichens mock
 The marks on a moth, and small ferns fit
 Their teeth to the polished block.

11

Oh, the sense of the yellow mountain flowers,
 And the thorny balls, each three in one,
 The chestnuts throw on our path in showers,
 For the drop of the woodland fruit's begun
 These early November hours—

12

That crimson the creeper's leaf across
 Like a splash of blood, intense, abrupt,
 O'er a shield, else gold from rim to boss,
 And lay it for show on the fairy-cupped
 Elf-needed mat of moss,

13

By the rose-flesh mushrooms, undivulged
 Last evening—nay, in to-day's first dew
 Yon sudden coral nipple bulged
 Where a freaked, fawn-coloured, flaky crew
 Of toad-stools peep indulged.

14

And yonder, at foot of the fronting ridge
 That takes the turn to a range beyond,
 Is the chapel reached by the one-arched bridge
 Where the water is stopped in a stagnant pond
 Danced over by the midge.

15

The chapel and bridge are of stone alike,
 Blackish grey and mostly wet;
 Cut hemp-stalks steep in the narrow dyke.
 See here again, how the lichens fret
 And the roots of the ivy strike!

16

Poor little place, where its one priest comes
 On a festa-day, if he comes at all,
 To the dozen folk from their scattered homes,
 Gathered within that precinct small
 By the dozen ways one roams

17

To drop from the charcoal-burners' huts,
 Or climb from the hemp-dressers' low shed,
 Leave the grange where the woodman stores his nuts,
 Or the wattled cote where the fowlers spread
 Their gear on the rock's bare juts.

18

It has some pretension too, this front,
 With its bit of fresco half-moon-wise
 Set over the porch, art's early wont—
 'Tis John in the Desert, I surmise,
 But has borne the weather's brunt—

19

Not from the fault of the builder, though,
 For a pent-house properly projects
 Where three carved beams make a certain show,
 Dating—good thought of our architect's—
 'Five, six, nine, he lets you know.

20

And all day long a bird sings there,
 And a stray sheep drinks at the pond at times :
 The place is silent and aware ;
 It has had its scenes, its joys and crimes,
 But that is its own affair.

21

My perfect wife, my Leonor,
 Oh, heart my own, oh, eyes, mine too,
 Whom else could I dare look backward for,
 With whom beside should I dare pursue
 The path grey heads abhor ?

22

For it leads to a crag's sheer edge with them ;
 Youth, flowery all the way, there stops—
 Not they ; age threatens and they contemn,
 Till they reach the gulf wherein youth drops,
 One inch from our life's safe hem !

23

With me, youth led—I will speak now,
 No longer watch you as you sit
 Reading by fire-light, that great brow
 And the spirit-small hand propping it
 Mutely—my heart knows how—

24

When, if I think but deep enough,
 You are wont to answer, prompt as rhyme ;
 And you, too, find without a rebuff
 The response your soul seeks many a time
 Piercing its fine flesh-stuff—

25

My own, confirm me ! If I tread
 This path back, is it not in pride
 To think how little I dreamed it led
 To an age so blest that by its side
 Youth seems the waste instead !

26

My own, see where the years conduct !
 At first, 'twas something our two souls
 Should mix as mists do : each is sucked
 Into each now ; on, the new stream rolls,
 Whatever rocks obstruct.

27

Think, when our one soul understands
 The great Word which makes all things new—
 When earth breaks up and Heaven expands—
 How will the change strike me and you
 In the House not made with hands ?

28

Oh, I must feel your brain prompt mine,
 Your heart anticipate my heart,
 You must be just before, in fine,
 See and make me see, for your part,
 New depths of the Divine !

29

But who could have expected this,
 When we two drew together first
 Just for the obvious human bliss,
 To satisfy life's daily thirst
 With a thing men seldom miss ?

30

Come back with me to the first of all,
 Let us lean and love it over again—
 Let us now forget and then recall,
 Break the rosary in a pearly rain,
 And gather what we let fall !

31

What did I say ?—that a small bird sings
 All day long, save when a brown pair
 Of hawks from the wood float with wide wings
 Strained to a bell : 'gainst the noon-day glare
 You count the streaks and rings.

32

But at afternoon or almost eve
 'Tis better ; then the silence grows
 To that degree, you half believe
 It must get rid of what it knows,
 Its bosom does so heave.

33

Hither we walked, then, side by side,
 Arm in arm and cheek to cheek,
 And still I questioned or replied,
 While my heart, convulsed to really speak,
 Lay choking in its pride.

34

Silent the crumbling bridge we cross,
 And pity and praise the chapel sweet,
 And care about the fresco's loss,
 And wish for our souls a like retreat,
 And wonder at the moss.

35

Stoop and kneel on the settle under—
 Look through the window's grated square :
 Nothing to see ! for fear of plunder,
 The cross is down and the altar bare,
 As if thieves don't fear thunder.

36

We stoop and look in through the grate,
 See the little porch and rustic door,
 Read duly the dead builder's date,
 Then cross the bridge we crossed before,
 Take the path again—but wait !

37

Oh moment, one and infinite !
 The water slips o'er stock and stone ;
 The west is tender, hardly bright.
 How grey at once is the evening grown—
 One star, the chrysolite !

38

We two stood there with never a third,
 But each by each, as each knew well.
 The sights we saw and the sounds we heard,
 The lights and the shades made up a spell
 Till the trouble grew and stirred.

39

Oh, the little more, and how much it is !
 And the little less, and what worlds away !
 How a sound shall quicken content to bliss,
 Or a breath suspend the blood's best play,
 And life be a proof of this !

40

Had she willed it, still had stood the screen
 So slight, so sure, 'twixt my love and her.
 I could fix her face with a guard between,
 And find her soul as when friends confer,
 Friends—lovers that might have been.

41

For my heart had a touch of the woodland time,
 Wanting to sleep now over its best.
 Shake the whole tree in the summer-prime,
 But bring to the last leaf no such test.
 "Hold the last fast!" says the rhyme.

42

For a chance to make your little much,
 To gain a lover and lose a friend,
 Venture the tree and a myriad such,
 When nothing you mar but the year can mend
 But a last leaf—fear to touch.

43

Yet should it unfasten itself and fall
 Eddying down till it find your face
 At some slight wind—(best chance of all!)
 Be your heart henceforth its dwelling-place
 You trembled to forestal!

44

Worth how well, those dark grey eyes,
 —That hair so dark and dear, how worth
 That a man should strive and agonise,
 And taste a very hell on earth
 For the hope of such a prize!

45

Oh, you might have turned and tried a man,
 Set him a space to weary and wear,
 And prove which suited more your plan,
 His best of hope or his worst despair,
 Yet end as he began.

46

But you spared me this, like the heart you are,
 And filled my empty heart at a word.
 If you join two lives, there is oft a scar,
 They are one and one, with a shadowy third;
 One near one is too far.